
UNIT 1 'UNDERSTANDING PROSE' : AN INTRODUCTION

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall give you a general introduction to **varieties of prose** as well as to different prose forms. If you read this unit carefully, you should be able to:

- distinguish between prose and poetry;
- define descriptive, narrative and expository prose;
- describe fictional prose forms such as the short story and novel and non-fictional prose such as the essay, letter, travelogue, biography and autobiography, diary and speeches.
- recognise various figures of speech.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

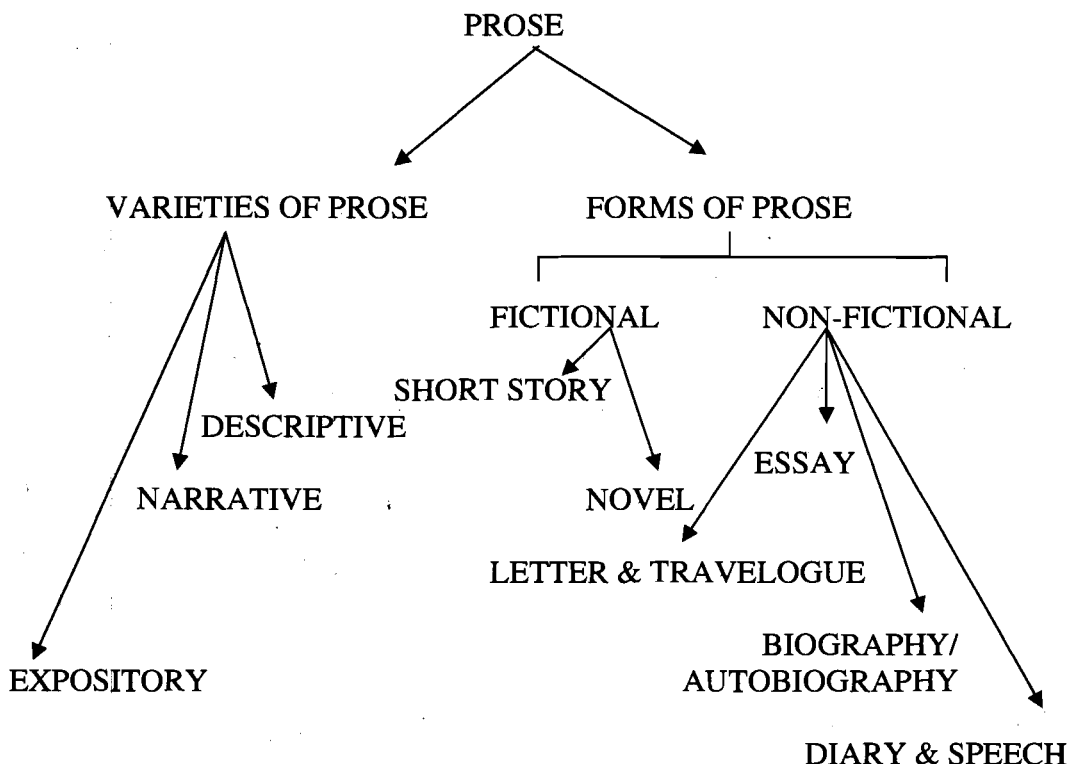
As you know, the present course is divided into two parts. The first deals with **varieties of prose** while the second concentrates on different **prose forms**. This unit aims to provide a general introduction to the varieties and forms of prose. We shall discuss descriptive prose at some length in the next three units in this block. A detailed study of each variety and form of prose will be provided in subsequent blocks. In short, the first unit of this block gives a general introduction to the whole course. Units 2-4 deal specifically with descriptive prose.

In this unit, we shall first examine the difference between prose and poetry.

This will be followed by a discussion of three varieties of prose. We shall then give you a brief introduction to the forms of prose that you will read in greater detail later in the course.

Figurative language is used extensively by most writers. We have defined some figures of speech so that you will be able to identify these in your critical appreciation of literary prose.

You may like to skim through the unit first and then tackle each section in detail. We would advise you to read each section carefully before attempting the exercises. These are fairly simple and you should complete them before looking at the answers given at the end.



1.2 PROSE AND POETRY

The word 'prose' is taken from the Latin '*prose*' which means 'direct' or 'straight'. Broadly speaking, prose is direct or straightforward writing. In poetry, which is generally written in verse, a lot of things may be left to the imagination of the reader.

In ordinary prose, the aim is to communicate one's thoughts and feelings. What is important then is (a) *what* one wants to say, and (b) *how* one chooses to say it. What is said is the **topic** or **subject** of the composition. How it is said is the **style** or **manner** in which the topic is expressed. The style, of course, greatly depends upon who we are writing for and what sort of personality we have. There are different topics and different styles. Whatever the number of topics, they all come under one or another variety of prose and each variety may have a distinct style of its own.

What then are the different varieties of prose? For purposes of analysis we have categorised them as (a) descriptive, (b) narrative and (c) expository. But these three are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes you find more than one variety in a piece of work. It depends on the skill and intention of the writer. For example, in a novel or short story, we are likely to find all these varieties of prose worked together in interesting and innovative combinations.

1.2.1 Difference between Prose and Poetry

A French poet and critic, Paul Valéry, compared prose to walking and poetry to dancing. We walk in order to go from one place to another. We do it for a particular purpose. When we walk for exercise, we do it for the improvement of our health. In other words, walking is utilitarian, that is, it is something that we do with a purpose in view. We are talking about ordinary prose and not literary prose. Ordinary prose is like walking. We use words to give information, to get something done, to make someone do what we want him/her to do, and so on. In ordinary prose, what is important is the message. But this is not the primary consideration in literary prose. What is important also is how language is used, how ideas and emotions are communicated and how the style suits the content.

When you go to see a dance, you are not interested in seeking information. When you see a good dance, you enjoy it. In other words, the objective is enjoyment and not mere information or instruction. When you like a particular dance, you go and see that dance over and over again because every time you see it, you get a new aesthetic experience. In the case of poetry and literary prose, you have what you call your favourite poem or passage. You read it several times and are not tired of it. If it is an ordinary prose passage, the moment you understand the meaning, you don't want to read it again. In literary prose as well as in poetry, it is not just the meaning that is important, but also the medium. It is often difficult to say what is more important, the form or the content. There is, however, an inseparability between the two, a togetherness. This is exactly the meaning of the Hindi term 'Sahitya'. 'Sahitya' literally means 'togetherness'. It is the togetherness of the sound and the sense, it is the togetherness of form and content. This is what is unique to great literature.

In dancing, every gesture is important for the position that it occupies in that particular dance. No one posture is more important or less important than another. Each gesture contributes to the total effect of the dance. In the same way, in a good poem or a piece of literary prose, every word is important for the position it occupies in it, and contributes to its total effect. Again, in a good dance, when the dance is on, you cannot distinguish the dancer from the dance. In any great poem or passage of literary prose, it will be difficult to separate the effect of the medium from the effect of the message. We *do* paraphrase a poem, but the paraphrase of a poem is not the poem. A prose piece can be paraphrased, summarised but not a poem. The meaning of the poem is the meaning that you experience every time you read the poem and you cannot say of any poem that you've exhausted it. The 'literariness' of a particular poem or prose piece lies partly in this quality. A literary piece usually has layers of meaning, for the writer works through suggestion, allusion, imagery and other such devices. The use of literary devices alone does not make a piece "literary". What is important is the way in which they contribute to the unity and thereby the final effect of the piece. Every time you

go to it, you get a new meaning, a new aesthetic delight. This is mainly because of the connotation of the words in poetry.

1.2.2 Denotation and Connotation

Words have a denotative and also a connotative meaning. Denotation is the literal meaning of a word. For example, when you say 'This is a stone', you are referring to an object which is a stone. It is a clear statement. There is no other meaning of this sentence. On the other hand, if we say 'she has a heart of stone' the meaning changes. What does it mean? It simply means that she is cruel or hard-hearted. In fact, it refers to all the qualities you associate with the stone. This is what we mean when we say that a word has several connotations. The word 'home' means a place where one lives with one's family. This is its primary meaning. But it suggests warmth, intimacy, family security, comfort, affection. A house is also a place where one lives. Does it have the same connotations of the word 'home'? No. Poetry is full of connotations and our appreciation of poetry stems a great deal from the connotations of words used in it. Now that we have discussed the difference between denotation and connotation let us discuss the different varieties of prose. But before doing so, it would be a good idea to work out a few exercises.

Check Your Progress I

- i) In about 3-4 sentences, enumerate some differences between prose and poetry in the space provided below.

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- ii) What do you understand by the denotation and connotation of words? Can you think of some examples?

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1.3 VARIETIES OF PROSE

Now that you have seen the general difference between poetry and prose, let us turn to the varieties of prose. Let us examine the nature and characteristics of descriptive, narrative and expository prose briefly. These varieties will be discussed in detail in subsequent units. Here we only aim to give you a general introduction.

1.3.1 Descriptive Prose

Descriptive writing describes things as they are or as they appear to be. It can be the description of a person or a landscape or an event. In descriptive

writing, we are able to see things as they are or were seen or heard or imagined by the describer. A good description translates the writer's observation into vivid details and creates an atmosphere of its own. Through his/her description, the author tries to recreate what she has seen or imagined. A fine description is a painting in words. Here is a description of Mr. Squeers in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39):

Mr. Squeers' appearance was not **prepossessing**. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental: being of a greenish grey, and in shape resembling the fan-light of a street door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and **puckered up**, which gave him a very **sinister** appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny, save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low **protruding** forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. He was about two or three and fifty, and a trifle below the middle size; he wore a white neckerchief with long ends, and a suit of **scholastic** black; but his coat sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable.

Glossary

prepossessing:	inspiring
puckered up:	full of folds and wrinkles
sinister:	wicked, evil
protruding:	jutting out, projecting
scholastic:	formal/ academic

This is a graphic description of the appearance of Mr. Squeers. The details are so sharp that we can easily visualize the person. We are told about his height, his eye, his face, hair, forehead and dress. A successful description, it enables us to picture the person vividly. It is also a very enjoyable passage. Did you notice the irony in 'He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two'? The *irony* and subtle humour continue throughout the passage so that the reader cannot help smiling to her/ himself. The eye is further likened to 'the fan-light of a street door'— a very interesting and unusual analogy. You must also have noticed how carefully Dickens chooses his words so that we can 'see' the hair that was 'very flat and shiny', 'hear' his 'harsh voice' and so on. These then are some of the devices that you will find used effectively in literary prose.

Here is another descriptive passage:

Ishtiaq Ali is a thin man of medium height. He looks older than his age -- he is about 50....Even after a long service, his salary remains meagre. An unlettered man, his family expanded in a big way -- he has nine children. (Pushp K. Jain, 'On the Ofttrodden Tracks', *The Times of India*, April 27, 1989).

Does this delight us in the same way that the previous passage did? Perhaps not. Although it certainly does give us some information about Ishtiaq Ali. Where is the difference? It is in the use of language. Here the language is purely functional with bald statements aimed at providing information rather than delight. In the earlier passage, it is a pleasure to read the sentences again and again savouring their suggestiveness.

As we have seen, successful description makes you visualize the scene or the person. Generally, description is not an independent form of writing, that is, a whole book will not consist of descriptions alone. It is often used as an aid to narrative or expository writing. Its main purpose is to describe a sense impression or a mood. We will discuss this in greater detail in the next three units of this block.

1.3.2 Narrative Prose

A narrative tells us what happens or happened. It deals mainly with events. In other words a narrative is a description of events. It may deal with external or internal events. By internal events, we mean the thoughts, feelings and emotions of individuals. Narrative writing tries to recreate an actual experience or an imaginary one in a way that we are able to experience it mentally. We lose ourselves in the characters and events of the narrative temporarily. Narratives can deal with the facts or fiction. Autobiographies, biographies, letters, travelogues, diaries and speeches are narratives of fact. The short story and novel come under the category of narrative fiction.

In a narrative, we are carried along the stream of action. When we narrate a story, we concentrate on the sequence of events. It is the action that grips the attention of the reader. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are examples of narrative writing. Narration is concerned with action and actors, it may make use of description but description is secondary. Action, characters and setting are the elements that are woven into a pattern to make the narrative interesting. Rudyard Kipling mentioned the ingredients of a narrative in the following verse:

I keep six honest-serving men
They taught me all I know:
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who

What happens? Why does it happen? When does it happen? How does it happen? Where does it happen and to whom does it happen? All these questions are answered satisfactorily in a narrative. What makes a narrative interesting is not just what is said but the way it is said. Look at this passage from Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* (1837). Here we shall read about the trial of the Artful Dodger when he is produced in court on charges of pick-pocketing.

It was indeed Mr Dawkins, who, shuffling into the office with the big coat sleeves tucked up as usual, his left hand in his pocket, and his hat in his right hand, preceded the jailer, with a rolling gait altogether indescribable, and, taking his place in the dock, requested in an audible voice to know what he was placed in that ere disgraceful situation for.

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said the jailer.

'I'm an Englishman, ain't I?' rejoined the Dodger; 'where are my privileges?'

'You'll get your privileges soon enough,' retorted the jailer, 'and pepper with 'em.'

'We'll see wot the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs has got to say to the beaks, if I don't', replied Mr Dawkins. 'Now then! Wot is this here business? I shall thank the madg'strates to dispose of this here little affair, and not to keep me while they read the paper for I've got an appointment with a genelman in the city, and as I'm a man of my word and very punctual in business matters, he'll go away if I ain't there to my time, and then pr'aps there won't be an action, for damage against as kept me away. Oh, no, certainly not!'

At this point the Dodger, with a show of being very particular with a view to proceedings to be had thereafter, desired the jailer to communicate 'the names of them two files as was on the bench', which so tickled the spectators, that they laughed almost as heartily as Master Bates could have done if he had heard the request.

'Silence there!' cried the jailer.

'What is this?' inquired one of the magistrates.

'A pick-pocketing case, your worship.'

'Has the boy ever been here before?'

'He ought to have been, a many times,' replied the jailer. 'He has been pretty well everywhere else. I know him well, your worship.'

'Oh! You know me, do you?' cried the Artful, making a note of the statement. 'Wery good. That's a case of deformation of character anyway.'

Here there was another laugh, and another cry of silence.

'Now then, where are the witnesses?' said the clerk.

'Ah! That's right,' added the Dodger. 'Where are they? I should like to see 'em.' This wish was immediately gratified, for a policeman stepped forward who had seen the prisoner attempt the pocket of an unknown gentleman in a crowd, and indeed take a handkerchief therefrom, which, being a very old one, he deliberately put back again, after trying it on his own countenance. For this reason, he took the Dodger into custody as soon as he could get near him, and the said Dodger being searched, had upon his person a silver snuff-box, with the owner's name engraved upon the lid. This gentleman had been discovered on reference to the Court Guide, and being then and there present, swore that the snuff-box was his, and that he had missed it on the previous day, the moment he had disengaged himself from the crowd before referred to. He had also remarked a young gentleman in the throng particularly active in making his way about, and that young gentleman was the prisoner before him.

'Have you anything to ask this witness, boy?' said the magistrate.

'I wouldn't abase myself by descending to hold no conversation with him,' replied the Dodger.

'Have you anything to say at all?'

'Do you hear his worship ask if you have anything to say?' inquired the jailer, nudging the silent Dodger with his elbow.

'I beg your pardon,' said the Dodger, looking up with an air of abstraction. 'Did you redress yourself to me, my man?'

'I never see such an out-and-out young wagabond, your worship,' observed the officer with a grin. 'Do you mean to say anything, you young shaver?'

'No,' replied the Dodger, 'not here, for this ain't the shop for justice; besides which, my attorney is a-breakfasting this morning with the Vice-President of the House of Commons; but I shall have something to say elsewhere, and so will he, and so will a very numerous and respectable circle of acquaintance as'll make them beaks wish they'd never been born, or that they'd got their footmen to hang 'em up to their own hat-pegs afore they let 'em come out this morning to try it on upon me. I'll –'

'There! He's fully committed!' interposed the clerk. 'Take him away.'

'Come on,' said the jailer.

'Oh, ah! I'll come on,' replied the Dodger, brushing his hat with the palm of his hand. 'Ah! (to the Bench), it's no use your looking frightened; I won't show you no mercy, not a ha'porth of it. *You'll* pay for this, my fine fellers. I wouldn't be you for something! I wouldn't go free, now, if you was to fall down on your knees and ask me. Here, carry me off to prison! Take me away!'

This is a hilarious passage that tells us about the Artful Dodger's defiant conduct at his trial ('I'm an Englishman: ain't I?...where are my priweleges?'). We respond at one level to the hilarious situation but at another we also wonder: what should the poor do against such oppressive judicial systems? ('This aint the shop of justice'). We also get a clear picture of the Artful Dodger: his 'coat-sleeves tucked up', his 'hand in his pocket' and his 'rolling gait' are described vividly at the outset. What then follows is a dialogue full of ironical, witty and quick rejoinders by this habitual offender. This is alternated with third person narration: "At this point the Dodger, with a show of being very particular with a view to proceedings to be had thereafter, desired the jailer to communicate 'the names of them two files as was on the bench'; which so tickled the spectators, that they laughed almost as heartily as Master Bates could have done if he had heard the request". In short, what we wish to point out is that narrative writing makes use of narration as well as description. In order to dramatize the situation, dialogues and conversations are introduced so that the writer is able to recreate the situation and communicate the experience.

1.3.3 Expository Prose

Expository writing deals in definition, explanation or interpretation. It includes writing on science, law, philosophy, technology, political science, history and literary criticism. Exposition is a form of logical presentation. Its primary object is to explain and clarify. It presents details concretely and exactly. Expository writing is writing that explains. But we are not interested in writing that merely explains. We are interested in expository writing that can be read as literature. The following is a piece of expository prose:

In the leg there are two bones, the *tibia* and *fibula*. The tibia or shin-bone is long and strong and bears the weight of the body. The fibula or splint bone is an equally long but much slenderer bone, and is attached to the tibia as a pin is to a brooch.

(Leonard Hill, *Manual of Human Physiology*)

This piece clearly defines the two bones, the tibia and the fibula. But can this be read as literature? Now let us look at another piece of expository prose.

Now mark another big difference between the natural slavery of man to Nature and the unnatural slavery of man to man. Nature is kind to her slaves. If she forces you to eat and drink, she makes eating and drinking so pleasant that when we can afford it we eat and drink too much. We must sleep or go mad: but then sleep is so pleasant that we have great difficulty in getting up in the morning. And firesides and families seem so pleasant to the young that they get married and join building societies to realize their dreams. Thus, instead of resenting our natural wants as slavery, we take the greatest pleasure in their satisfaction. We write sentimental songs in praise of them. A tramp can earn his supper by singing Home, Sweet Home.

The slavery of man to man is the very opposite of this. It is hateful to the body and to the spirit. Our poets do not praise it; they proclaim that no man is good enough to be another man's master. The latest of the great Jewish prophets, a gentleman named Marx, spent his life in proving that there is no extremity of selfish cruelty at which the slavery of man to man will stop if it be not stopped by law. You can see for yourself that it produces a state of continual civil war—called the class war-between the slaves and their masters, organized as Trade Unions on one side and Employers' Federations on the other.

(G.B. Shaw, 'Freedom'—one of a series of BBC Radio Talks-18 June, 1935 in *Modern Prose*, Michael Thorpe, pp 147-48)

There is a clear difference between the two passages. Shaw puts across his argument logically and convincingly. He first talks about the natural slavery of man to Nature by giving a series of examples. He then contrasts this with the unnatural slavery of man to man. By use of contrast, this argument is further strengthened. The result is that difficult concepts like freedom and slavery are readily understood. What is, however, remarkable is that his use of simple language, tongue-in-cheek manner and conversational style immediately strikes a sympathetic and receptive chord in the reader. These two passages must have given you some idea about the difference between literary and non-literary expository writing. The different varieties of expository writing will be discussed in greater detail in Block 3.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Read the following passages and name the dominant variety of prose that you find in each, descriptive, expository and narrative:
 - (a) Sambo of the bandy legs slammed the carriage-door on his young weeping mistress. He sprang up behind the carriage. 'Stop!' cried Miss Jemima, rushing to the gate with a parcel. 'It's some sandwiches, my dear', said she to Amelia.

'You may be hungry, you know; and Becky, Becky Sharp, here's a book for you that my sister — that is, I — Johnson's Dictionary, you know; you must not leave us without that. Good-bye. Drive on, coachman God bless you.'

And the kind creature retreated into the garden, overcome with emotions. But, lo! and just as the coach drove off, Miss Sharp put her pale face out of the window, and actually flung the book back into the garden.

W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847-48)

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- (b) Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible, -- or from one of our elder poets, -- in a paragraph of today's newspaper.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-72)

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- (c) The general mistake among us in Educating our Children is that in our Daughters we take care of their persons and neglect their minds, in our Sons, we are so intent upon adorning their minds, that we wholly neglect their bodies. It is from this that you shall see a young body celebrated and admired in all the Assemblies about Town; when her elder Brother is afraid to come into a Room. From this ill Management it arises that we frequently observe a Man's life is half spent before he is taken notice of, and a Woman in the prime of her years is out of fashion and neglected.

(You must have noticed that certain words are written in capitals. Steele often followed this convention for emphasising those particular words).

Richard Steele 'The Education of Girls'

The Spectator No. 66. R. Steele and J. Addison.

Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator (Penguin 1982.)

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1.4 FORMS OF PROSE

The division of prose into three kinds – descriptive, narrative and expository, is a rough one. You may find good description in narrative writing. When you explain, you may also describe and narrate to make your explanation

effective. The three divisions are not rigid. A good writer may use a little description here, a little narration there, and a bit of exposition in another place. A knowledge of the three varieties is useful in that you can appreciate how the writer makes use of one or more of them effectively. You would realize that they are very often used in combination and they rarely exist alone.

Having discussed the different kinds of writing, let us discuss briefly the different literary forms in prose. Some of the prose forms are the novel, short story, essay, letter, travelogue, biography and autobiography, diary and speeches. Let us look at each of these forms briefly now. They will be discussed in detail in subsequent blocks.

1.4.1 Short Story

A short story is not a novel in an abridged form. A short story is complete in itself. Therefore a short story writer must have great skill to achieve an impression of completeness in a few pages. The characters and incidents are sketched in a few effective strokes. A short story thus has intensity and a singleness of purpose. There is no single acceptable definition of a short story. All that we can say is that it is short, has a plot and character(s) and has a beginning, a middle and an end. According to one definition, a short story is 'a relatively short narrative which is designed to produce a single dominant effect and which contains the elements of drama'. The aim of a good short story is to make the reader feel, to make him/ her enter into the experience of the characters. You must have read short stories in magazines as well as in anthologies. For a more detailed discussion of the short story as a literary form, please turn to Block IV, Unit 12.

1.4.2 Novel

Like the short story, it is difficult to define a novel. When we talk about a novel, we usually mean a piece of fiction, written in prose and of a certain length. A novel is an individual vision of the novelist. It is a picture of life as viewed by the writer. It has a story which tells us what happened and a plot which tells us how it happened. E.M. Forster, an English novelist, said this of the difference between a story and a plot: 'The King died and the Queen died' is a story. 'The King died and then the Queen died of grief' is a plot. The difference is quite clear from this example, in the sense that there is a cause and effect situation.

The plot and characters in a good novel leave a lasting impression on the reader. A good novel gives us an insight into the world and ourselves; it is full of vitality and humanity and appeals to human sensibilities. The style varies from one novelist to another. Each novel bears the signature of the novelist. A good short story is like a small garden. A fine novel is like a forest. We will discuss the characteristics and types of novels in Block 5, Unit 17.

1.4.3 Essay, Letter, Travelogue

An **essay** is a piece of prose composition usually of moderate length. The word 'essay' derives from the French word *essai* or attempt. It "attempts" to throw some light on the subject under discussion.

There are two kinds of essays. One is informal or personal and the other is formal. You can say anything you like in an informal essay so long as it is

interesting and pleasing to the reader. It is written in a light style. Its purpose is to delight and entertain the reader. The style of the essay is generally familiar and conversational. The subjects can often be light such as in 'Apology for Idlers', 'On Tremendous Trifles', 'On Bores' and so on.

A formal essay is a serious one and it weighs, evaluates and judges. It discusses the merits and the demerits of the topic in question. The style is objective and serious. A good essay however, is balanced, thoughtful and not biased. The judgement is based on facts.

You will read three different essays in Block 6.

Letter

Another form of non-fictional prose is the letter. On a personal level, a letter is a spontaneous expression of one's self and on a social level, letters hold up a mirror to the age in which they are written. Letter writing came to be recognized as a literary form in England during the Renaissance when critics came in touch with the works of Seneca, Cicero and Guevara. A good public letter is a literary piece of work that explores an issue, idea, impression or interpretation. It has a focused point and has both informative value and aesthetic appeal.

Travelogue

What is a travelogue? It is a piece of writing about travel. It is written in a style that is both interesting and informative. The passion for knowledge and about other countries has always driven men to embark upon land travels and sea-voyages to distant lands, the accounts of which have been left by them for posterity. Hence the history of travelogues is as old as the history of man's travels. These accounts serve as important documents about the life, culture and history of the places they are written about.

1.4.4 Biography, Autobiography, Diary and Speeches

A **biography** is the story of the life of an individual. Our concern here is with biography as a piece of literature. A good biography usually tries to project an objective picture of the life of a particular person. It avoids the temptation either to praise too much or to be too severe and critical. In this kind of writing, the writer selects the salient features of a particular life and gives them a shape. It tries to make the reader share the hopes, the fears, the interests and aspirations of that person.

In an **autobiography**, the writer attempts to reveal selected experiences of his/her own life in retrospect. Here the picture presented is necessarily subjective. It presents the events and impressions of the past as recollected by the writer at the time s/he is writing the autobiography. It cannot be a complete account of one's life, as the future has still to be lived.

The autobiographies of Gandhiji and Nehru are good examples of this form of writing. In Block 7, you will read excerpts from famous biographies and autobiographies.

Diary

A diary belongs to the autobiographical genre of writing. It is a literary form in which the writer maintains a regularly kept record of his or her own life and thoughts. As a genre it has been practiced for over five hundred years. The diary is also a valuable historical document of an individual life and gives us written evidence of the historical, social and political circumstances of a particular period.

Speeches

A speech is a spoken communication or expression of thought in prose addressed to an audience. It presents the personal viewpoint of the speaker in a convincing manner, on a subject that is of universal importance. A good speech is not delivered with the aim to excite or rouse the audience. Rather it is made to inspire and persuade the hearers to think along the lines the speaker wishes them to. A power-packed speech is one that is charged with the sturdy conviction the speaker has in his/her beliefs.

Check Your Progress III

Fill in the blanks:

Our teacher told us that there are.....varieties of prose. Broadly, they can be categorised as....., and We are also told that there are various.....of prose. In school, I remember reading from an anthology of short..... The one I liked best, was the one about the diamond necklace. Recently, I have started reading..... This is another prose..... that I enjoy thoroughly even though some.....are rather long. I have also read..... though I must admit that I've written quite a few as part of composition at school and prefer reading short stories and novels. Reading about the lives of others is very interesting and I make it a point to borrow.....from the library. Some day I will write my..... Some other forms are....., and

1.5 FIGURES OF SPEECH

Let us now discuss some of the more commonly used figures of speech. This will help you identify them when you are analysing a particular passage. Is it enough to identify figures of speech? No. We must also be able to say why the writer has used them and to what effect.

Figures of Speech

Let us consider this scenario. Deeply in love, a young man tells his friend: 'My girlfriend is very beautiful'. Without going into the question of whether the young lady in question was indeed beautiful or not, let us consider the sentence. It is clearly a straightforward statement. On the other hand, Robert Burns (1759-96), a Scottish poet, says the same thing but in more poetic

words: 'My love is like a red red rose'. This is what we would call figurative use of language. In other words, the poet is making use of a figure of speech, a simile in this case, which we shall discuss a little later. First, let us be clear about what figurative language is. By comparing the above sentences, you must have got an idea about what a figure of speech is. The first statement gives us the literal meaning whereas in the second, words are used in a way that is different from their literal meaning.

Why do writers use figurative language? In order to draw attention to the language and to communicate the experience more effectively. For example, when we read 'My love is like a red red rose', the sentence evokes images of a beautiful red rose and a very young rosy-cheeked girl who is as beautiful as this exquisite flower. Do poets alone use figures of speech? No. Figures of speech are used in all types of writing: prose, poetry, drama. In fact, we too use figurative language in our daily conversation. When we say, 'He drinks like a fish' or 'It's raining cats and dogs', we are using figurative language.

We shall now briefly discuss some of the more common figures of speech: simile, metaphor; image; symbol; personification; metonymy; synecdoche; apostrophe; hyperbole; understatement; irony.

Simile

A simile is a comparison between different terms belonging to different classes for the purpose of describing one of them. The comparison is usually made by the use of connectives such as 'like' or 'as'. For example, when we say 'as sweet as honey' or 'white like snow', we are using similes. But if we say 'Ram is like Shyam', is this a simile? No. Because Ram and Shyam belong to the same class, i.e., male human beings.

Metaphor

Broadly speaking, a metaphor is also a comparison. But here there is no direct comparison as in a simile. Nor are any connectives such as 'like' and 'as' used. The writer uses an expression which describes one thing by stating another. For example, we can say 'The road snaked its way up the mountain'. Here the word 'snaked' is used metaphorically. The word snaked suggests a winding path. You must have noticed that there is no direct comparison between the snake and the course of the road. The comparison with the snake is indirect and implied.

Image

An image is a visual picture evoked by the use of either a word or phrase. Writers use imagery to make descriptive writing more effective; Does an image only refer to the visual? No, an image can also refer to the sense of taste, smell, touch and hearing. An image is usually written in the form of a simile or metaphor. For example:

There is a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies grow.

What a beautiful and vivid word-picture is evoked by these lines! Do you think this is a simile or metaphor? It is a metaphor, isn't it?

Symbol

An image is a description that enhances the significance of a literary work. A symbol is something that stands for something else. A dove is a symbol of peace. It is a concrete expression of an abstract concept such as peace. A literary symbol is not simply descriptive like an image. It usually has a range of meanings. In *Bleak House*, a novel by Charles Dickens, we have 'Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, fog down the river.....' Fog here is the symbol of confusion, obscurity and the endless delays caused by outdated legal practices.

Personification

This involves giving human characteristics, powers or feelings to objects or to abstract qualities. As in a metaphor, a comparison is implied. The purpose is to make the description more vivid and concrete. The writer speaks of something which is non-human as it were human. For example, 'The sun traced his footsteps across the sky' is a more poetic way of expressing the passing of a day. Joseph Conrad has personified the West Wind in *The Mirror of the Sea*, 'The West Wind reigns over the seas surrounding the coasts of these kingdoms....' Conrad then goes on to conceive of the West Wind as a despotic ruler with the capacity for doing good as well as evil.

Metonymy

Let us look at this sentence; 'I enjoy listening to Ravi Shankar'. What does this mean? Ravi Shankar is the name of a great musician and when we say 'I enjoy listening to Ravi Shankar', we mean that we enjoy listening to his music. Here the person's name is substituted for that of his music. In short, metonymy means 'change of name'.

Synecdoche

You may have heard the expression 'Doctor on wheels'. What does this mean? Wheels here stand for transport and the doctor in question certainly has this facility. Synecdoche then is a figure of speech in which we use a word referring only to a part of something instead of the whole ('wheels' instead of a vehicle).

Apostrophe

This is an address to a person or thing that is absent and not listening. As Charles Lamb says; 'Waters of Sir Hugh Middleton – what a spark you were like to have extinguished for ever!'

Hyperbole

A deliberate exaggeration for the sake of effect. For example, we often say 'I nearly died of laughing'. We often use hyperbolic expressions without realizing it. Here is another example from Thoreau: 'The blue bird carries the sky on his back'.

Understatement or Litotes

This is the opposite of hyperbole. Instead of exaggeration, the author expresses him/herself with restraint. The British are known for their habit of

understatement. If someone is looking extremely ill, the Englishman may just say 'You do look a bit under the weather!' Or for a person who died of a bullet shot 'He stopped a bullet last night, poor chap'.

Irony

This is one of the most important figures of speech in English. Irony is saying one thing while meaning another. In short irony occurs when a word or phrase has one surface meaning and another different meaning beneath this surface. The reader must be able to understand the hidden meaning. Charles Dickens describes Mr. Squeers in his novel *Nicholas Nickleby*: 'He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental....' Irony usually gives pleasure or relief and must not be confused with sarcasm which deliberately inflicts pain.

This list is by no means exhaustive. However, we hope it will be useful not only in analysing the prose passages in this course but will also help you with your reading of poetry and drama.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed:

- the general difference between poetry and prose;
- how words have denotations as well as connotations;
- how descriptive prose describes things as they are seen or imagined;
- narrative prose recreates an actual or imaginary experience or sequence of events;
- expository writing deals in definition, explanation or interpretation;
- the novel, short story, essay, letter, travelogue, biography, autobiography, diary and speeches as forms of prose;
- the different figures of speech used by writers to convey their feelings and thoughts more effectively.

1.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- i) If you haven't been able to answer this, you should read sub-section 1.2.1 once again and then it will be easy to attempt the question. Prose is direct or straightforward writing. Here the writer communicates his/ her thoughts or feelings as clearly and precisely as possible. On the other hand, poetry which is generally written in verse leaves a lot of things unsaid and to the imagination of the reader. Prose is like walking – that is, it is functional and provides information. Poetry on the other hand, is like dancing, and aims to delight. A prose piece can be paraphrased or summarized but not a poem. We can and do paraphrase a poem, but the paraphrase of a poem is not the poem. In prose, what is important is the message but in a poem what is

important is the experience conveyed rather than any meaning or information.

- (ii) Words, as we know, have a denotative as well as a connotative meaning. Denotation is the literal meaning of a word whereas the connotation is the meaning it has gained by association. For example a snake as we know is a reptile – but it is also very dangerous. So, if we call a human being a snake we mean that that person is dangerous. Similarly the word rose denotes a flower but because it is such a beautiful flower, if we call anyone a rose, we are referring to that person's beauty.

Check Your Progress II

- i) a) narrative prose
b) descriptive prose
c) expository prose

Check Your Progress III

three; descriptive; expository; narrative; forms; stories; novels; form; novels; essays; biographies; autobiography; letters; travelogues; diary; speeches.

UNIT 2 DESCRIPTIVE PROSE-1

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Passage from H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*
 - 2.2.1 Text
 - 2.2.2 Glossary
 - 2.2.3 Discussion
- 2.3 Passage from Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*
 - 2.3.1 Text
 - 2.3.2 Glossary
 - 2.3.3 Discussion
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Answers to Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall introduce you to different varieties of descriptive prose. We shall do this by outlining the characteristics of descriptive prose and then giving you two passages to read.

If you read this unit carefully and complete the given exercises, you will be able to:

- summarise the passages;
- analyse and appreciate their stylistic features;
- become more perceptive readers of other descriptive passages.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is not always easy to distinguish between descriptive and narrative prose. One way of making a distinction (as Herbert Read, for example, does) is to group them both together and to say that descriptive prose is "passive" and narrative "active". This means that descriptive prose is concerned mainly with seeing things as they are, recording the impressions received by our senses: what we see, hear, touch, smell and taste. Narrative deals with what actually happens, that is, with events. This may not be true in every case, and may very well be an over-simplification, as we shall see in the course of the lessons that follow.

But, all the same, this distinction can be useful up to a point. Essentially, describing people and places and objects and narrating what happened to them are two related and complementary activities; indeed very often writers do both in the course of the same sentence. However, description and narration need to be examined separately for the sake of training ourselves in looking at and recognising the different functions of language. Various kinds of methods

and techniques are employed by writers for describing and narrating. The real distinction between the two is one of focus; and focus can keep shifting from one to the other, according to the writer's purpose and design. If the writer's purpose is to introduce us to an important character in a story, the author can attempt this introduction in any one of these ways or by using a extract in combination of several techniques. Take, for example, the case of the Martian in our very first extract in this unit. H.G. Wells does not directly present the Martian to us. He does this through another character in the novel, who narrates the story as well as describes what the Martian looks like.

2.2 PASSAGE FROM H.G. WELLS' *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS*

Descriptive writing, as you will see, may be either purely fictional as in H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* or it may present factual details as in the passage from Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*. You will notice that the presentation techniques will differ in both cases. In your first passage, the Martian is not like any human being that anyone has seen before. The author, therefore, goes about this difficult task using many subtle tricks of the writer's craft. Describing and narrating might very well be considered two sides of the same coin. Both descriptive and narrative elements are found throughout this passage. In describing the Martian in *The War of the Worlds*, Wells has to make his description convincing, giving it the illusion of reality. The Martian who exists only in the writer's imagination must be presented to the reader in such a way as to make him/ her believe that the Martian is real. Let's see how the writer accomplishes this task.

H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* is a book of science fiction published in 1898 long before man had landed on the moon. The passage describes what happened after the Martians arrived inside a cylinder which landed on the earth with such great force that it made a large crater in the ground. The person who describes it returns to the site after a brief interval. In the mean time, a big crowd had collected around the crater. This extract has a few narrative elements but the main focus is on the writer's description of the Martian. Let us now take up this passage for discussion. The first thing to do is to read it carefully two or three times if necessary. Words and phrases that are unfamiliar or difficult should be looked up in a good dictionary. In the case of this passage, some of the words and phrases that are likely to be unfamiliar have been given in the glossary at the end of the passage.

There are several myths or stories about the Gorgon sisters and we can find a number of references and allusions to them in literature. They had live writhing snakes on their heads instead of hair and anyone who saw their faces directly, was instantly turned to stone. If you look up a classical dictionary, you will get to know all about the Gorgon sisters.

After you have made sense of all the strange and not so familiar words whose meanings you are not sure of, you should look up the references and allusions in the passage. In this case the references to the Gorgons is of crucial importance to the understanding of the passage, because it is intended to suggest something equally terrifying and deadly.

2.2.1 Text

I saw a young man, a shop assistant in Working I believe he was, standing on the cylinder and trying to scramble out of the hole again. The crowd had pushed him in.

The end of the cylinder was being screwed out from within. Nearly two feet of shining screw projected. Somebody blundered against me, and I narrowly missed being pitched on to the top of the screw. I turned, and as I did so the screw must have come out, and the lid of the cylinder fell upon the gravel with a ringing **concussion**. I stuck my elbow into the person behind me, and turned my head towards the thing again. For a moment that circular cavity seemed perfectly black. I had the sunset in my eyes.

I think everyone expected to see a man emerge – possibly something a little unlike us **terrestrial** men but in all essentials a man. I know I did. But, looking, I presently saw something stirring within the shadow—greyish **billowy** movements, one above another, and then two luminous discs like eyes. Then something resembling a little grey snake, about the thickness of a walking stick, coiled up out of the **writhing** middle, and **wriggled** in the air towards me – and then another.

A sudden chill came over me. There was a loud shriek from a woman behind: I half turned, keeping my eyes fixed upon the cylinder still, from which other **tentacles** were now projecting, and began pushing my way back from the edge of the pit. I saw astonishment giving place to horror on the faces of the people about me. I heard inarticulate exclamations on all sides. There was a general movement backward. I saw the shopman struggling still on the edge of the pit. I found myself alone, and saw the people on the other side of the pit running off, Stent among them. I looked again at the cylinder, and ungovernable terror gripped me. I stood **petrified** and staring.

A big greyish, rounded bulk, the size perhaps, of a bear, was rising slowly and painfully out of the cylinder. As it **bulged up** and caught the light, it glistened like wet leather. Two large dark-coloured eyes were regarding me steadfastly. It was rounded, and had, one might say, a face. There was a mouth under the eyes, the brim of which quivered and panted, and dropped saliva. The body **heaved** and **pulsated convulsively**. A **lank tentacular appendage** gripped the edge of the cylinder, another swayed in the air.

Those who have never seen a living Martian can scarcely imagine the strange horror of their appearance. The peculiar V-shaped mouth with its pointed upper lip, the absence of **brow ridges**, the absence of a chin beneath the **wedge-like** lower lip, the **incessant** quivering of this mouth, the Gorgon groups of tentacles, the tumultuous breathing of the lungs in a strange atmosphere, the evident heaviness and painfulness of movement, due to the greater gravitational energy of the earth – above all, the extraordinary intensity of the immense eyes – culminated in an effect akin to **nausea**. There was something **fungoid** in the oily brown skin, something in the clumsy deliberation of their tedious movements unspeakably terrible. Even at this first encounter, this first glimpse, I was overcome with disgust and dread.

Suddenly the monster vanished. It had toppled over the brim of the cylinder and fallen into the pit, with a thud like the fall of a great mass of leather. I

heard it give a peculiar thick cry, and forthwith another of these creatures appeared darkly in the deep shadow of the aperture.

At that my rigour of terror passed away. I turned and, running madly, made for the first group of trees, perhaps a hundred yards away; but I ran slantingly and stumbling, for I could not avert my face from these things.

There, among some young pine-trees and **furze-bushes**, I stopped, panting, and awaited further developments. The **common** round the sand-pits was dotted with people, standing, like myself, in a half-fascinated terror, staring at these creatures, or, rather, at the heaped gravel at the edge of the pit in which they lay. And then, with a renewed horror, I saw a round, black object bobbing up and down on the edge of the pit. It was the head of the shopman who had fallen in, but showing as a little black object against the hot western sky. Now he got his shoulder and knee up, and again he seemed to slip back until only his head was visible. Suddenly he vanished, and I could have fancied a faint shriek had reached me. I had a momentary impulse to go back and help him that my fears overruled.

2.2.2 Glossary

concussion:	violent blow, shock; sound caused by it.
Terrestrial:	of or related to the earth (rather than some other planet)
billowy movements:	swelling out like sails
writhing:	twisting the body (like a snake)
wriggled:	twisted from side to side
tentacles:	long snake-like boneless limbs without joints
petrified:	in a state of shock or fear, losing all power of thought or action; to become like a stone
bulged up:	swelled out (came out)
heaved:	rose and fell regularly
pulsated:	shook rhythmically
convulsively:	unnaturally and violently
lank:	hanging loosely and without strength
tentacular:	like tentacles (explained above)
appendage:	a thing hanging from something larger
brow ridges:	eyebrows that project (the Martian had no eyebrows)
wedge-like:	V-shaped
incessant:	never stopping
fungoid:	like fungus, a fast growing variety of plant growth generally considered a disease
nausea:	a feeling of sickness and desire to vomit
furze-bushes:	wild bushy plants with prickles and yellow flowers.
common:	area of grassy land.

2.2.3 Discussion

When we read the passage carefully we notice that the author employs several devices (or artifices, if you like) to avoid a direct description because the subject is so unfamiliar that the reader's credibility has to be built up step by step. So Wells does not describe the Martian directly, the way perhaps an ordinary man or woman or an event could have been described. The person who describes the Martian in the book keeps reminding us that he is part of the crowd, and comes back again and again to the reactions of the others with him. His own reactions, of course, are also recorded. If we pay particular

attention to the words, phrases and sentences in the passage we can see that the man takes his own time in coming to the actual description of the Martian. This delayed description heightens suspense and arouses our expectations.

At the end of the first paragraph, he reveals his inability to see things clearly: "For a moment that circular cavity seemed perfectly black. I had the sunset in my eyes." In the second paragraph, he gradually arouses the reader's curiosity, without really, satisfying it. "I think everyone expected to see a man emerge..... I know I did....." In the third paragraph, he describes his own reactions and those of the crowd. "A sudden chill came over me. There was a loud shriek from a woman behind.... I saw astonishment giving place to horror on the faces of the people about me.... and saw the people on the other side of the pit running off.... and ungovernable terror gripped me. I stood petrified and staring." It is only after all this that he attempts to say what the Martian looks like. In the fourth paragraph, the point of view shifts again. It is now assumed that all those present have become familiar with the sight of the Martian and their reactions are now commented upon.

Note the clever repeated use of the definite article. "*The* peculiar V-shaped mouth.....the absence of a chin, *the* incessant quivering of *the* mouth....." In fact all these have not been described before, only mentioned; but the reader is made to believe that these features are already familiar to the people who have by now become acquainted with the sight of the strange creature. It is necessary for a discerning reader to get behind the mass of words and sentences and paragraphs with which the literary artist constructs his elaborate verbal edifice, the product of his imagination.

From the discussion so far, we realise how important it is for us to consider the point of view of the describer and what he does or does not describe and to what extent we are to take what he says literally as 'the truth', or 'the actual reality'. Because, after all, the fictional world is the product of the writer's own creative imagination.

Check Your Progress I

The following questions relating to the passage will enable you to examine it more closely and to grasp the full significance of the description of the Martians. Give your answers in about 4-6 sentences.

- i) Which words in the passage indicate the attitude of the describer towards the Martian? Do you think the Martian had human feelings?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- ii) Do you think the describer was terrified? Is there any evidence in the passage to justify it?
.....
.....

.....

iii) What tells us that the Martjans were not very comfortable on the earth?
 List the words and phrases that convey this impression.

.....

iv) Did anyone among the spectators feel sympathetic towards the
 Martjans? Why were they reacting as they did?

.....

2.3 PASSAGE FROM ISAK DINESEN'S *OUT OF AFRICA*

We shall now look at a passage containing a description of African birds by Isak Dinesen, who lived in Africa for a long time. Her book *Out of Africa* has recently been made into an outstanding film.

Descriptive writing, whether it is imaginative or factual, faces the problem of selection as well as of presentation. Too much detail can be confusing or bewildering just as inadequate or haphazard choice of detail will result in disorganised and blurred presentation.

The passage is an excellent model for study and analysis from this point of view: it depends on objective facts (in the sense that we can see them and recognise them in reality). Although other writers might write very different descriptions about the same things, they cannot often distort reality beyond the bounds of credibility. Degrees of objectivity are of course bound to differ from writer to writer, depending on his/ her perceptions and purpose. Writing about African birds, the author makes deliberate choices, relating both to inclusion and exclusion, since exhaustiveness is neither possible nor necessary. In presenting them, the writer also decides consciously the order in which they are to be introduced, their distinguishing individual characteristics, and the nature of the emotions or attitudes that the writer wishes to project. Let us see what happens in this passage.

The passage is to be read two or three times slowly and deliberately. Difficult words and phrases should be underlined. The next thing is to bring out the

significance of the words and phrases in the context in which they occur in this passage with the help of a good dictionary/encyclopedia. You will find the glossary useful.

2.3.1 Text

Just at the beginning of the long rains, in the last week of March, or the first week of April, I have heard the nightingale in the woods of Africa. Not the full song: a few notes only -- the opening bars of the **concerto**, a rehearsal, suddenly stopped and again begun. It was as if, in the solitude of the dripping woods, someone was, in a tree, tuning a small 'cello. It was, however, the same melody, and the same abundance and sweetness, as were soon to fill the forests of Europe, from Sicily to Elsinore.

We had the black and white storks in Africa, the birds that build their nests upon the thatched village roofs of Northern Europe. They look less **imposing** in Africa than they do there, for here they had such tall and **ponderous** birds as the **Marabout** and the **Secretary Bird** to be compared to. The storks have got other habits in Africa than in Europe, where they live as in married couples and are symbols of domestic happiness. Here they are seen together in big **flights**, as in clubs. They are called locust-birds in Africa, and follow along when the locusts come upon the land, living on them. They fly over the plains, too, where there is a grass-fire on, circling just in front of the advancing line of small leaping flames, high up in the **scintillating** rainbow-coloured air, and the grey smoke, on watch for the mice and snakes that run from the fire. The storks have a gay time in Africa. But their real life is not here, and when the winds of spring bring back thoughts of mating and nesting, their hearts are turned towards the North, they remember old times and places and fly off, two and two, and are shortly after wading in the cold bogs of their birth-places.

Out on the plains, in the beginning of the rains, where the vast stretches of burnt grass begin to show fresh green sprouting, there are many hundred plovers. The plains always have a **maritime** air, the open horizon recalls the sea and the long sea-sands, the wandering wind is the same, the charred grass has a saline smell, and when the grass is long it runs in waves all over the land. When the white carnation flowers on the plains you remember the chopping white-specked waves all round you as you are **tacking** up the Sund. Out on the plains the plovers likewise take on the appearance of Sea-birds, and behave like Sea-birds on a beach, legging it, on the close grass, as fast as they can for a short time, and then rising before your horse with high shrill shrieks, so that the light sky is all alive with wings and birds' voices.

The Crested Cranes, which come on to the newly rolled and planted maize-land, to steal the maize out of the ground, make up for the robbery by being birds of good omen, announcing the rain; and also by dancing to us. When the tall birds are together in large numbers, it is a fine sight to see them spread their wings and dance. There is much style in the dance, and a little **affectation**, for why, when they can fly, do they jump up and down as if they were held on to the earth by magnetism? The whole ballet has a sacred look, like some ritual dance; perhaps the cranes are making an attempt to join Heaven and Earth like the winged angels walking up and down **Jacob's - Ladder**. With their delicate pale grey colouring, the little black velvet skull-cap and the fan-shaped crown, the cranes have all the air of light, spirited

frescoes. When, after the dance, they lift and go away, to keep up the scared tone of the show they give out, by the wings or the voice, a clear ringing note, as if a group of church bells had taken wing and were sailing off. You can hear them a long way away, even after the birds themselves have become invisible in the sky: a chime from the clouds.



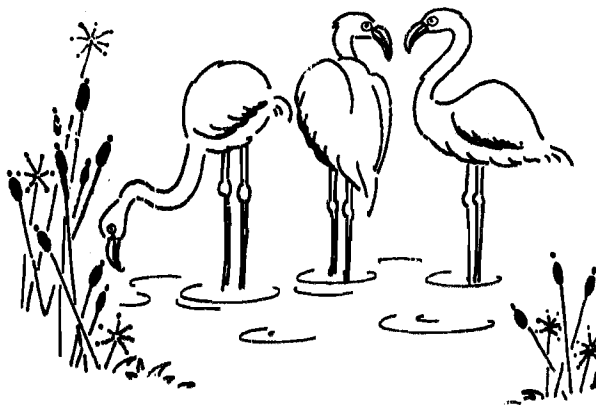
Hornbill

The Greater Hornbill was another visitor to the farm, and came there to eat the fruits of the Cape-Chestnut tree. They are very strange birds. It is an adventure or an experience to meet them, not altogether pleasant, for they look exceedingly knowing. One morning before sunrise I was woken up by a loud **jabbering** outside the house, and when I walked out on the terrace I saw forty-one Hornbills sitting in the trees on the lawn. There they looked less like birds than like some fantastic articles of finery set on the trees here and there by a child. Black they all were, with the sweet, noble black of Africa, deep darkness absorbed through an age, like old soot, that makes you feel that for elegance, vigour and vivacity, no colour rivals black. All the Hornbills were talking together in the merriest mood, but with choice **deportment**, like a party of inheritors after a funeral. The morning air was as clear as crystal, the sombre party was bathing in freshness and purity, and, behind the trees and the birds, the sun came up, a dull red ball. You wonder what sort of a day you are to get after such an early morning.

The Flamingoes are the most delicately coloured of all the African birds, pink and red like a flying twig of an Oleander bush. They have incredibly long legs and bizarre and **recherche** curves of their necks and bodies, as if from some exquisite traditional **prudery** they were making all attitudes and movements in life as difficult as possible.

I once travelled from Port Said to Marseilles in a French boat that had on board a consignment of a hundred and fifty Flamingoes, which were going to the *Jardin d' Acclimatation* in Marseilles. They were kept in large dirty cases with canvas sides, ten in each, standing up close to one another. The keeper, who was taking the birds over, told me that he was counting on losing twenty per cent of them on a trip. They were not made for that sort of life, in rough weather they lost their balance, their legs broke, and the other birds in the cage trampled on them. At night when the wind was high in the Mediterranean and the ship came down in the waves with a thump, at each wave I heard, in the dark, the Flamingoes shriek. Every morning, I saw the keeper taking out one

or two dead birds, and throwing them overboard. The noble wader of the Nile, the sister of the lotus, which floats over the landscape like a stray cloud of sunset, had become a slack cluster of pink and red feathers with a pair of long, thin sticks attached to it. The dead birds floated on the water for a short time, knocking up and down in the **wake** of the ship before they sank.



Flamingoes : The noble wader of the Nile, the sister of the lotus.....

2.3.2 Glossary

concerto:	a piece of music for one or more solo instruments and orchestra
□cello:	(full form—violincello) a large violin-type musical instrument
imposing:	large in size, powerful looking
ponderous:	large and heavy; hence slow and awkward; dull and solemn
Marabout:	a large African stork
Secretary Bird:	a large African bird, its crest resembles quill pens stuck over the ear, hence its name
flights:	group of birds flying together
scintillating:	sending out quick flashes of light or sparks, sparkling, hence brilliant
bog:	soft wet marshy area
maritime:	living or existing near the sea and therefore related to the sea
tacking:	changing the course of a sailing ship or boat
affectation:	not natural behaviour, but what appears put on
Jacob's Ladder:	(Biblical allusion): a ladder, seen by Jacob (son of Isaac) in a dream connecting earth and heaven.
frescoes:	painting on walls
jabbering:	quick unclear speech or noise; here, unpleasantly noisy
deportment:	manner of standing or walking
recherche (French):	too rare or strange
prudery:	over-sensitiveness, tendency to be easily shocked; excessive modesty
wake:	here a path or track of foam left by the moving ship

2.3.3 Discussion

The passage is full of delightful descriptions of some birds. The first paragraph is about the nightingale, the bird with rich and varied associations in Western literature. The black and white storks again are European birds. From time immemorial (until popular scientific knowledge destroyed the myth) they were engaged in the safe delivery of new born infants to every household (according to children's story books) and lived like 'married couples', and 'symbols of domestic happiness'. In Africa they have a gay time but 'their real life is not here' and they prefer 'the cold bogs of their birth-places' when summer comes. It is quite a change for them.

Next comes the plover, a land bird living near the sea in Europe and a sea-bird on the wide plains of Africa, a paradoxical existence. With their presence, 'the light sky is all alive with wings and birds' voices'.

The crested cranes described in the next paragraph are 'birds of good omen' announcing rain. They are like winged angels walking up and down Jacob's Ladder, attempting to join heaven and earth.

Note the sudden change in the author's attitude to the 'Greater Hornbill'; the diction signals a more critical and less endearing tone. If you contrast the words and metaphors used for them with those found in the previous paragraph this change will appear dramatic: 'strange', 'jabbering', 'exceedingly knowing', 'a party of inheritors after a funeral', indicate the author's attitude to them.

The last two paragraphs are devoted to the flamingoes. The passage ends on a sad note, lamenting human cruelty and indifference to these delicate birds and to nature in general. You will, no doubt agree that although only six birds out of hundreds of varieties are described here, there is a certain artful rounding-off of this topic; what is presented is beautiful and memorable, each bird has its individuality, every paragraph a self-contained theme and tone, the well-chosen figures of speech helping to bring out their unique features.

Some words have strong overtones or connotations in addition to what is often described as their simplest meaning found in a small dictionary. While words like 'table', 'chair', 'read', 'sit', 'stand', etc. have only their lexical meanings, or what is usually called denotation, words like 'ponderous', 'shrieks', 'affectation', 'jabbering', 'trample', 'sombre' have suggestions that tend to be unfavourable. Similarly words, like 'delicate', 'spirited', 'fantastic', 'noble' have favourable connotations.

Some words may also take on special meanings from the context, particularly when irony is intended, and so one has to watch out for such words. As students of literature we have to be constantly alert and ready for surprises. We have also to learn to use a good dictionary.

Check Your Progress II

Now read the passage carefully once more (in fact as many times as you think necessary) and do the following exercises:

i) What is the point of view of the author? Are the birds described from the point of view of an African or an outsider? Give your reasons.

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ii) What is the significance of the phrase 'from Sicily to Elsinore'?

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iii) What kind of bird is the plover? Where is it normally found in Europe? Why does the author think that plovers feel at home on the African plains? Bring out the points of comparison between the sea and the African plains.

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iv) "The wader of the Nile, the sister of the Lotus", what do these phrases refer to? Do the phrases refer to the same object or to different objects? Justify your view. If they refer to the same object, the two phrases are said to be in apposition to each other.

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v) Comment on the tone of the last paragraph. Do you think the writer is critical of the way the flamingoes are transported to France? Pick out words and phrases that indicate her attitude and determine the tone of the whole paragraph.

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- vi) Besides telling us about the appearance of African birds, what does the passage do? Pick out some of the metaphors and similes from the passage that you find striking. Justify your choice.

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2.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have:

- introduced you to different kinds of descriptive writing;
- shown you how words acquire different connotations in different contexts
- highlighted the writer's use of myths, legends, imagery and allusions to enrich descriptions;
- pointed out how the choice of point of view determines the overall artistic effect of the writing.

2.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- i) Ungovernable terror gripped me; I stood petrified and staring; the strange horror of their appearance; the Gorgon; groups of tentacles; an effect akin to nausea; something fungoid in the oily brown skin; clumsy deliberation of their tedious movements unspeakably terrible; overcome with disgust and dread; the monster.

Read the last paragraph carefully. You will note that the shopman has disappeared; he was pulled into the pit and the faint shriek that was heard caused terror and a strange feeling of dread. That the Martian had hardly any human characteristics or feelings can be easily seen from the extract.

- ii) Yes. Note the reactions of the onlookers, besides his own. Re-read the last paragraph, if you are not sure, and find out what happened to the shopman. The Martian is compared to a bear; the reference to the Gorgon (see 1.1.4) is also significant. There is nothing even remotely human about the Martians.
- iii) Look at the paragraph beginning 'Those who have never seen a living Martian.....' Carefully note expressions like 'the tumultuous breathing', 'evidence heaviness and painfulness of movement', 'clumsy deliberation of their tedious movements', which indicate that they were out of their element.

- iv) The answer is clearly No. Go back and read the passage again, if you are in doubt. You will see that the reactions of the crowd are described and these were not at all sympathetic. No one is inclined to go and help the Martians. Instead they are terrified by their very sight.

Check Your Progress II

- i) The very first paragraph makes this clear. The point of view is that of a European. There are several more clues in the passage. The birds are, in the eyes of the author, visitors in Africa, more or less like herself, except that visits are seasonal migrations.
- ii) Sicily is practically the southernmost point of Europe and Elsinore is one of the northernmost. In fact the whole of Europe is thus indicated.
- iii) The plover is a migratory bird found on European beaches. The comparison between the sea and the plains of Africa is suggested; the open horizon; the wandering wind; the salty smell of the burnt grass; the wavy movement of the long grass; the white carnation flowers. Also go back to 2.2.2.
- iv) They refer to the flamingoes. To the same object: the flamingoes; both the birds and the lotus are found in the Nile.
- v) There are two groups of words with strong favourable and unfavourable connotations contrasted. The author's disapproval is made very clear. Note the two sentences in the final paragraph.
- vi) The passage describes the kind of life that they live in Africa, what they do, what they eat, etc. Re-read the passage if necessary and pick out the comparisons relating to the song of the nightingale; the sea and the African plains; Jacob's ladder, the sound of church bells; inheritors after a funeral; etc.

UNIT 3 DESCRIPTIVE PROSE-2

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Passage from Sean O' Casey's *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well*
 - 3.2.1 Text
 - 3.2.2 Glossary
 - 3.2.3 Discussion
- 3.3 Passage from D.H. Lawrence's *Mornings in Mexico*
 - 3.3.1 Text
 - 3.3.2 Glossary
 - 3.3.3 Discussion
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Answers to Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit, you read two prose passage which are examples of descriptive writing. In this unit, you will further examine the nature of descriptive writing by reading two more passages. In these passages you will study the different devices used by the writers so that at the end of this unit you will be able to :

- analyse the stylistic features of descriptive writing;
- describe the effective use of simile and metaphor.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Descriptive writing on the whole, as we have been observing, tends to 'freeze' objects, places and people in space and time. Description is thus essentially frozen time held in suspense before it merges into the current of the narrative, the irreversible momentum of present time flowing into past time. 'Here is the moment, grasp it, hold it, concentrate on it, perceive its essence, make it part of your memory, before it vanishes for ever', the writer seems to be urging us. Descriptive writing which lacks this sense of immediacy, its sudden flash of illumination of intense revelation, whether it is of the nature of things or events, insight into the character of individuals, or whatever it is holding up for our examination, fails to capture our attention if it does not justify the 'freezing' of the moment.

3.2 PASSAGE FROM SEAN O'CASEY'S *INISHFALLEN, FARE THEE WELL*

Let us look at the following brief passage by Sean O'Casey, taken from his book *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (1949). Here he is describing a street full of decaying houses, an area in Dublin which had once known respectability,

happiness and prosperity, but had been reduced to squalor, abject poverty and utter misery. Now read the passage carefully a few times. Wherever necessary, use your dictionary, to find out the exact meanings of the words and phrases in the context in which they are used by the writer. The glossary at the end of the passage will be useful.

3.2.1 Text

There were the houses, too – a long, **lurching** row of discontented incurables, **smirched** with the age-long marks of **ague**, fevers, cancer, and consumption, the soured tears of little children, and the sighs of disappointed newly-married girls. The doors were scarred with time's spit and anger's hasty knocking; the pillars by their sides were shaky, their **stuccoed** bloom long since peeled away, and they looked like crutches keeping the trembling doors standing on their **palsied** feet. The gummy-eyed windows blinked dimly out, **lacquered** by a year's tired dust from the troubled street below. Dirt and disease were the big **sacraments** here – outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual disgrace. The people bought the cheapest things in food they could find in order to live, to work, to worship: the cheapest **spuds**, the cheapest tea, the cheapest meat, the cheapest fat; and waited for unsold bread to grow stale that they might buy that cheaper, too. Here they gathered up the fragments so that nothing would be lost. The streets were long **haggard** corridors of rottenness and ruin. What wonderful mind or memory could link this shrinking wretchedness with the **flaunting gorgeousness** of silk and satin; with bloom of rose and scent of **lavender**? A thousand years must have passed since the last lavender lady was carried out feet first from the last surviving one of them. Even the sun shudders now when she touches a roof, for she feels some evil has chilled the glow of her garment. The flower that here once bloomed is dead forever. No wallflower here has crept into a favoured cranny; sight and sign of the primrose were far away; no room here for a dance of daffodils; no swallow twittering under a shady eave; and it was sad to see an odd sparrow seeking a yellow grain from the mocking dust; not even a spiky-headed thistle, purple **mitred**, could find a corner here for a sturdy life. No Wordsworth here wandered about as lonely as a cloud.

3.2.2 Glossary

lurching:	sudden movement forward or sideways, as though without control like a drunken person
smirched:	blotted; disfigured by marks
ague:	fever that causes uncontrollable trembling, like malaria, for example
stuccoed:	plastered, ornamented with plaster designs
palsied:	affected by paralysis, or disease causing trembling of the limbs
lacquered:	covered as though with lacquer or polish
sacraments:	Christian ceremonies performed in the church
spuds:	potatoes
haggard:	tired, worn out, having lines and hollows around the eyes and cheeks
flaunting:	to exhibit or show off something in a proud and haughty way.
gorgeousness:	extremely beautiful appearance

- lavender:** pale purple flowers with strong smell used to give stored clothes a pleasant smell
- mitred:** tall pointed hat worn by bishops and archbishops on ceremonial occasions; having that appearance.

3.2.3 Discussion

As we have seen Sean O'Casey succeeds in humanizing the scene. Ostensibly, he describes the houses and the street, but they become the outward and visible forms of the human beings who inhabit them. The houses take on human attributes. There is a description of their appearance, the tragedies that befall them, of the disappointments, illnesses and disabilities of those they shelter. The adjectives used for the houses are in effect applicable to humans: children, newly-married girls, old men and women, indeed to everyone. The epithets are charged with powerful connotations; association with human disease, sufferings both mental and physical, the disabilities of old age, poverty and want. The street is always 'troubled', the doors have witnessed frustration, anger, death, disgrace of all kinds. Words like 'cheap' are repeated, emphasizing the conditions of extreme need and helplessness, accumulated over generations. Suffering and want have become a way of life rather than occasional unfortunate episodes, which can fall to everyone's lot. There is, of course, exaggeration in the claim (rhetorical term 'hyperbole') that the 'last lavender lady' died a thousand year ago, marking the passing of prosperity and graciousness from the street. Nature too seems to suffer the fate of the people and the house; flowers, birds, not even weeds thrive in the neighbourhood. The climax of this long catalogue of deprivations comes with the mention of Wordsworth, the poet of nature, with a direct reference to his well-known poem 'The Daffodils' (you will find the poem in 3.5). The daffodils and the wandering cloud are in sharp contrast to this dustbin of an urban culture. The use of alliteration and assonance and consonance underscores the emotional force of these words which have strong and extensive connotations.

This passage seems to illustrate fully what we were discussing earlier. In our first acquaintance with this part of Dublin, we see simultaneously its past prosperity, present poverty and disgrace, and its even more depressing future. On its spatial dimension is superimposed the time dimension; in a moment of illumination we see it liberated from the normal limitations of space and time. This is what good descriptive writing seems to accomplish.

Check Your Progress I

Now answer the following questions, which are intended to suggest the lines on which you should try to understand and appreciate this passage:

- i) Why does the author refer to 'the dance of daffodils', 'lonely as a cloud' and Wordsworth? Explain the literary allusion, and its significance in this context.

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- ii) Pick out words and phrases from the passage that can be equally applicable to human beings as well as the house described. What does the author accomplish by choosing these expressions?

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- iii) To what extent do you think the rhetorical device of personification is justified and effective in this passage?

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- iv) Which of these expressions in the passage do you think are powerfully charged with emotion? Give reasons for your choice.

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3.3 PASSAGE FROM D.H. LAWRENCE'S *MORNINGS IN MEXICO*

The next descriptive passage we shall take up for study is by D.H. Lawrence. It is about market day on the last Saturday before Christmas when countless Mexican Indians riding donkeys, travelling in ox carts and on foot converge on the covered market, bringing their supplies: wood and charcoal, farm produce, flowers to sell, barter or exchange.

With his eye for detail, Lawrence describes the flowers and trees, the landscape, the hills, the different tribes of Indians, their dress and styles of walking, the all-enveloping dust, and the merchandise.

This is the last Saturday before Christmas. The next year will be **momentous**, one feels. This year is nearly gone. Dawn was windy, shaking the leaves, and the rising sun shone under a gap of yellow cloud. But at once it touched the yellow flowers that rise above the **patio** wall, and the swaying, growing **magenta** of the **bougainvillea**, and the fierce red outbursts of the **poinsettia**. The poinsettia is very splendid, the flowers very big, and of a sure stainless red. They call them Noche Buenas, flowers of Christmas Eve. These tufts throw out their scarlet sharply, like red birds **ruffling** in the wind of dawn as if going to bathe, all their feathers alert. This for Christmas, instead of **holly-berries**. Christmas seems to need a red **herald**.

The **yucca** is tall, higher than the house. It is, too, in flower, hanging an arm's length of soft creamy bells, like a yard-long grape-cluster of foam. And the waxy bells break on their stems in the wind, fall noiselessly from the long creamy bunch, that hardly sways.

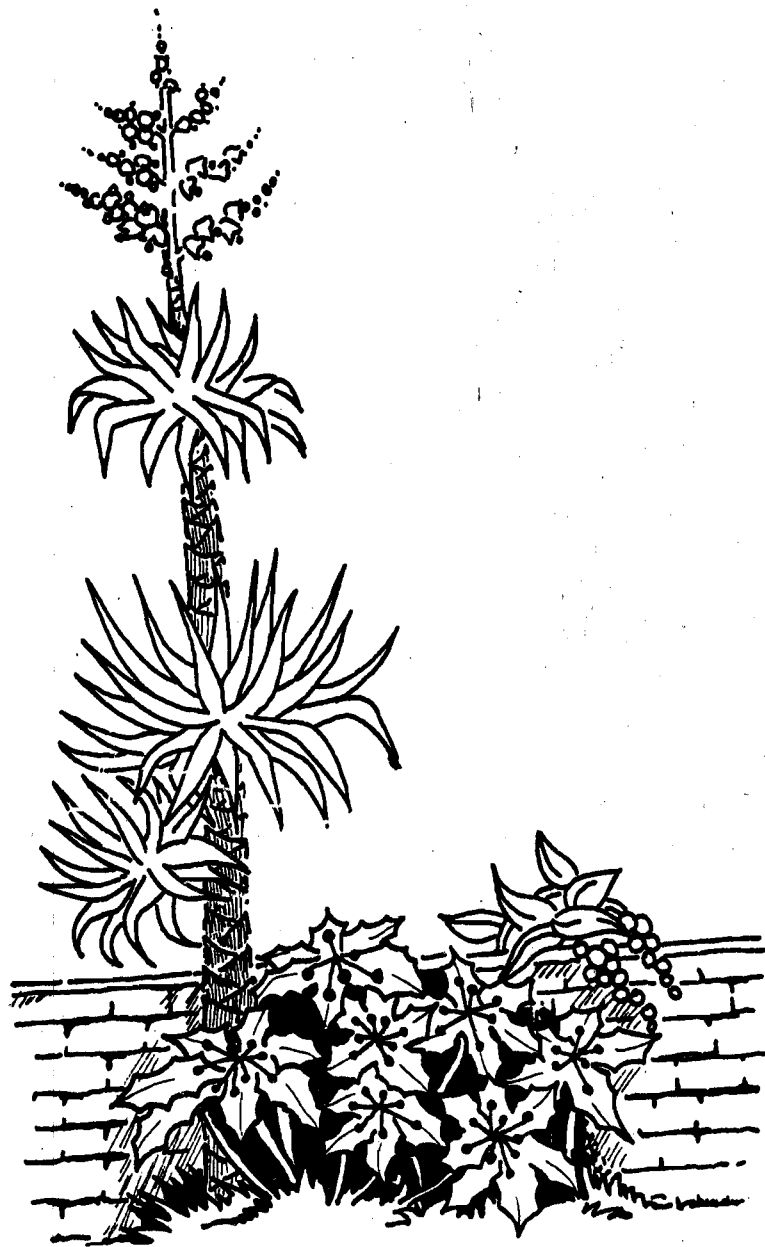
The coffee-berries are turning red. The **hibiscus** flowers, rose coloured, sway at the tips of the thin branches, in **rosettes** of soft red. In the second patio, there is a tall tree of the flimsy **acacia** sort. Above itself it puts up whitish fingers of flowers, naked in the blue sky. And in the wind these fingers of flowers in the blue sky, sway, sway with the reeling, roundward motion of tree-tips in a wind.

A restless morning, with clouds lower down, moving also with a larger roundward motion. Everything moving. Best to go out in motion too, the slow roundward motion like the hawks.

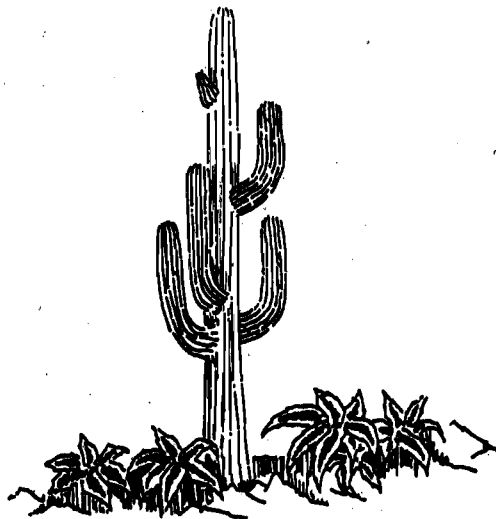
Everything seems slowly to circle and hover towards a central point, the clouds, the mountains round the valley, the dust that rises, the big, beautiful, white-barred hawks, *gabilanes*, and even the snow-white flakes of flowers upon the dim palo blanco tree. Even the **organ cactus**, rising in **stock-straight clumps**, and the **candelabrum** cactus, seems to be slowly wheeling and pivoting upon a centre, close upon it.

Strange that we should think in straight lines, when there are none, and talk of straight courses, when every course, sooner or later, is seen to be making the sweep round, swooping upon the centre. When space is curved, and the cosmos is sphere within sphere, and the way from any one point to any other point is round the bend of the inevitable, that turns as the tips of the broad wings of the hawk turn upwards, leaning upon the air like invisible half of the ellipse. If I have a way to go, it will be round the swoop of a bend **impinging centripetal** towards the centre. The straight course is hacked out in rounds, against the will of the world.

Yet the dust advances like a ghost along the road, down the valley plain. The dry turn of the valley-bed gleams like soft skin, sunlit and pinkish ochre spreading wide between the mountains that seem to emit their own darkness, a dark-blue vapor **translucent**, **sombering** them from the humped crests downwards. The many-**pleated**, noiseless mountains of Mexico.



The Yucca is tall.....



The Candelabrum cactus

And away from the footslope lie the white specks of Huayapa, among its lake of trees. It is Saturday, and the white dots of men are threading down the trail over the bare humps to the plain, following the dark twinkle-movement of asses, the dark nodding of the woman's head as she rides between the baskets. Saturday and market-day, and morning, so the white specks of men, like seagulls on plough-land, come ebbing like sparks from the palo blanco, over the fawn undulating of the valley slope.

They are dressed in snow-white cotton, and they lift their knees in the Indian trot, following the ass where the woman sits perched between the huge baskets, her child tight in the **rebozo**, at the brown breast. And girls in long, full, soiled cotton skirts running, trotting, ebbing along after the twinkle-movement of the ass. Down they come in families, in clusters, in solitary ones, threading with ebbing, running, barefoot movement noiseless towards the town, that blows the bubbles of its church-domes above the stagnant green of trees, away under the opposite fawn-skin hills.

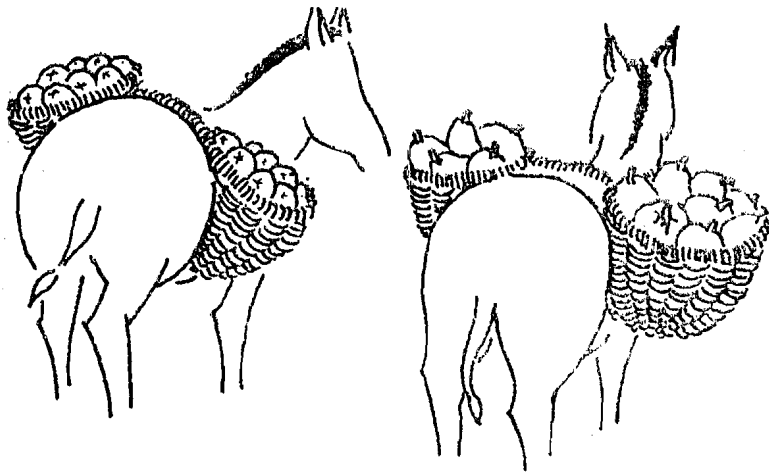
But down the valley middle comes the big road, almost straight. You will know it by the tall walking of the dust, that hastens also towards the town, overtaking, overpassing everybody. Overpassing all the dark little figures and the white specks that thread tinily, in a sort of underworld, to the town.

From the valley villagers and from the mountains the peasants and the Indians are coming in with supplies, the road is like a pilgrimage, with the dust in greatest haste, dashing for town. Dark-eared asses and running men, running women, running girls, running lads, twinkling donkeys ambling on fine little feet, under twin great baskets with tomatoes and gourds, twin great nets of bubble-shaped jars, twin bundles of neat-cut **faggots** of wood, neat as bunches of cigarettes, and twin net-sacks of charcoal. Donkeys, mules, on they come, great **pannier** baskets making a rhythm under the perched woman, great bundles bouncing against the sides of the slim-footed animals. A baby donkey trotting naked after its piled-up dam, a white, sandal-footed man following with the silent Indian haste, and a girl running again on light feet.

Onwards, on a strange current of haste, and slowly rowing among the foot-travel, the ox-wagons rolling solid wheels below the high net of the body. Slow oxen, with heads pressed down nosing to the earth, swaying, swaying their great horns as a snake sways itself, the shovel-shaped collar of solid wood pressing down on their necks like a scoop. On, on between the burnt-up turn and the solid, monumental green of the organ cactus. Past the rocks and the floating palo blanco flowers, past the **tousled** dust of the **mesquite** bushes.

While the dust once more, in a greater haste than anyone, comes tall and rapid down the road, overpowering and obscuring all the little people, as in a **cataclysm**.

They are mostly small people, of the Zapotech race: small men with lifted chests and quick, lifted knees, advancing with heavy energy in the midst of dust. And quiet, small round-headed women running barefoot, tightening their blue rebozos round their shoulders, so often with a baby in the fold. The white cotton clothes of the men so white that their faces are invisible places of darkness under their big hats. Clothed darkness, faces of night, quickly, silently, with inexhaustible energy advancing to the town.



great pannier baskets making a rhythm....

And many of the Serranos, the Indians from the hills, wearing their little conical black felt hats, seem capped with night, above the straight white shoulders. Some have come far, walking all yesterday in their little black hats and black-sheathed sandals. Tomorrow they will walk back. And their eyes will be just the same, black and bright and wild, in the dark faces. They have no goal, any more than the hawks in the air, and no course to run, any more than the clouds.

The market is a huge roofed-in place. Most extraordinary is the noise that comes out, as you pass along the adjacent street. It is a huge noise, yet you may never notice it. It sounds as if all the ghosts in the world were talking to one another, in ghost-voices, within the darkness of the market structure. It is a noise something like rain, or banana leaves in a wind. The market, full of Indians, dark-faced, silent-footed, hush-spoken, but pressing in countless numbers. The queer hissing murmurs of the Zapotech *idioma*, among the sound of Spanish, the quiet aside-voices of the Mixtecas.

3.3.2 Glossary

momentous:	of great importance
patio:	an inner roofless courtyard of a Spanish house
magenta:	dark purplish red colour
poinsettia:	a tropical plant with flower-like groups of large red leaves
bougainvillea:	a tropical climbing plant with bright flowers
ruffling:	making uneven movements like birds moving their feathers when bathing or preening
holly-berries:	red coloured berries of a short green tree with shiny green prickly leaves found in cold countries
herald:	a messenger or sign of something to come
yucca:	the state flower of Mexico, having pointed leaves and clusters of white waxy flowers
hibiscus:	tropical plant with large bright flowers
rosettes:	shaped like roses
acacia:	group of tropical trees which give gum

organ cactus:	a tree-like cactus found in Mexico
stock-straight:	straight stem or trunk
clump:	cluster of trees or plants growing close together
candelabrum:	an ornamental holder for several candles or lamps; resembling it
impinging:	having an effect upon
centripetal:	tending to move towards the centre
ochre:	yellow colour
translucent:	allowing light to pass through, without being transparent
sombering:	casting shadows
pleated:	with flattened narrow folds, usually in cloth
rebozo:	a long shawl or scarf of fine material worn by Mexican women over the head and shoulders
faggots:	a bunch of small sticks for burning
pannier:	pairs of baskets carried by a horse or donkey
tousled:	made untidy, disarranged
mesquite:	a tree or shrub bearing green bean-like pods, found in Mexico
cataclysm:	sudden and violent event like an earthquake or a flood.

3.3.3 Discussion

The first thing that strikes us about this passage is the active nature of the verbs found in it. Everything seems to be doing something, and not just passively 'being'. The year is 'nearly gone', the dawn 'windy shaking the leaves,' the 'rising sun... touched the yellow flowers that rose above the patio wall'. The 'tufts throw out their scarlet sharply', the 'waxy bells break on their stems in the wind, fall noiselessly', the hibiscus flowers 'sway', the tall tree 'puts up whitish fingers of flowers'. Everything seems to be in motion, caught in the act of doing something, not merely existing. The same active feeling of participation is imparted to the clouds, the mountains, the dust, the hawks, even the cactus, the vegetation 'slowly wheeling and pivoting upon a centre, close upon it'. The mountains 'seem to emit their own darkness'.

Throughout the passage the dust is an active participant: 'it advances like a ghost', 'down the valley middle comes the road..... you will know it by the tall walking of the dust, that hastens also towards the town, overtaking, passing everybody'. Further in paragraph 11, 'the road is like a pilgrimage, with the dust in greatest haste dashing for town'. In paragraph 13, 'the dust once more in a greater haste than anyone, comes tall and rapid down the road, overpowering and obscuring all the little people, as in a cataclysm.'

While the passage opens on a rather quiet and tranquil note, the suggestion of considerable activity is gradually built up through the smaller paragraphs. Then the idea of convergence of movement which is centripetal and circular rather than in the form of straight lines, or perpendicular, is developed. Following this, we have the description of the Mexicans hurrying to the market place from the hills and plains of the surrounding country, involving trekking for one or even two days. The picturesque effects are achieved through the use of striking metaphors: 'while dots of men are threading down the trail over the bare humps to the plain', 'twinkle-movement of asses', 'white specks of men, sea-gulls on plough-land, come ebbing like sparks'... There are also pairs and triplets of words and phrases, repetition of sentence structure with variation, minute concrete details building up the picture of

great crowds of people getting together, ostensibly to buy and sell but in reality to meet one another, to co-mingle, to satisfy their urge for human companionship.

Comparisons, as in similes and metaphors, which are usually discussed under figures of speech, can be used both conventionally and with considerable insight and originality. They are encountered extensively in descriptive writing. While similes are explicit and often sustained comparisons, metaphors are concise and sharp, not always extended and sustained. Take the following examples: 'the dust advances like a ghost along the road'; 'the white specks of men, like sea-gulls on plough-land'; 'they have no goal any more than clouds'. In all these the comparison of point of similarity is clearly and deliberately stated, often elaborated, depending on the writer and his intention. However, in the case of metaphors the points of similarity are often intuitively seen in flashes, implied rather than explicitly stated. Consider the following examples from 3.2.1; 'the gummy-eyed windows blinked dimly out'. Here the comparison between the eyes of the very old and ill, looking out through their sticky eyelids and the dusty dirty windows of the old and decaying houses are fused into a metaphor, a direct and simultaneous identification of two similar objects or processes. In the same passage, 'haggard corridors of rottenness and ruin', contains a fusion of tired worn-out people and the streets that were rotten and lay in ruins. The description of the town 'that blows the bubbles of its church-domes above the stagnant green of trees', is a compressed simile, achieved with great economy of words. It is important to develop sensitivity to metaphor in the study of literature, particularly descriptive writing, whether it is poetry or prose.

There are various schemes of repetition that are frequently and effectively employed, particularly in descriptive writing to convey strong emotional overtones. Sometimes it may just be repetition of the same word, for example, 'the cheapest spuds, the cheapest tea, the cheapest meat, the cheapest fat'; 'sway, sway'; sometimes words with similar meanings or sounds are repeated like 'running, trotting, ebbing along'; or 'running men, running women, running girls, running lads' (repetition with variation, emphasizing running). Schemes of repetition can also include balance and parallelism or antithesis as in 'shrinking wretchedness with the flaunting gorgeousness of silk and satin', 'the bloom of rose and scent of lavender'. With these balanced phrases go alliteration (use of two or more words, near to each other, beginning with the same letter 'alone, alone all, all alone') and assonance (words having similar vowel sounds), and consonance (words having similar consonant sounds), reinforcing sense with sound. There are numerous and intricate patterns of repetition frames. Some of these we shall identify and analyse as we go along.

Check Your Progress II

i) What is the first thing that struck you when you read the passage?

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ii) Give some examples of similes and metaphors from the passage you have just read

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iii) What is the function of repetition when effectively employed?

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iv) Who are the Zapotecs and the Serranos? Describe them in 2-3 sentences.

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

In the two passages that we examined in some detail, we found a number of stylistic features:

- a) personification which invests objects and events with human significance;
- b) metaphors and similes capture the essential similarity or relationship between very dissimilar objects.
- c) the use of schemes of repetition, and literary devices such as assonance and alliteration are effective in creating emotional responses and heightening certain stylistic effects.

3.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

i) This is a direct reference to the well-known poem by Wordsworth 'The Daffodils'. It is a very popular poem and its likely you have studied it some time. If not, it is worth a reading. It contrasts strikingly with the lack of freedom and beauty in the street described here. This comparison is intended to drive home this point.

THE DAFFODILS

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Besides the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle in the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company;
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought;

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon the inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

- ii) If the answer is not clear to you, you should go back to 3.2.1 and re-read the whole passage, particularly the earlier part. This point has been discussed in 3.2.3. Try and summarise it in your own words.
- iii) See sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.3. The understanding of this point is central to the whole discussion.
- iv) The point is that everything in this street is doomed: not only the old and the dying, but also the young people and the children. Even birds and plants are not exempted. This is what moves readers most powerfully. The expressions are carefully selected to reinforce this impression. Go back to 3.2.1 if necessary.

Check Your Progress II

- i) The first thing one notices is that everything seems to be in motion, in the act of doing something. This is achieved by the extensive use of active verbs. For examples, turn to the text and the first paragraph of **3.3.3 Discussion**.
- ii) Similes and metaphors are used extensively in descriptive writing, as we discussed in Unit 1, section 1.5. If you need help to pick out examples of similes and metaphors, turn to paras 2 and 3 of **3.3.3 Discussion**.
- iii) Repetition is effectively employed to convey strong feelings and to emphasise a particular point. Refer to the last para of **3.3.3 Discussion**.

- iv) The Zapotecs and the Serranos are the Indians who came to the markets. The Zapotec men are small and dark and wear big hats while the women are usually barefoot and recognizable by their blue rebozos. The Serranos, who came from the hills, wear little conical black felt hats and black sandals.

UNIT 4 DESCRIPTIVE PROSE-3

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Passage from Mulk Raj Anand's *The Village*
 - 4.2.1 Text
 - 4.2.2 Glossary
 - 4.2.3 Discussion
- 4.3 Passage from *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens.
 - 4.3.1 Text
 - 4.3.2 Glossary
 - 4.3.3 Discussion
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Answers to Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will examine two more passages of descriptive writing in some detail. After reading this unit carefully and completing the exercise, you will be able to :

- recognize the literary characteristics and stylistic feature of a prose piece;
- explain the role of style in presenting the content effectively.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Descriptive writing, as we have seen, is one of the varieties of prose. We have also seen that even within descriptive writing we can find writings of different kinds. In the earlier two units, you have seen the way that historians, travellers and anthropologists use prose for descriptive writing. While the content is important, it is style and presentation which separates literary prose from the non-literary and functional variety. It is for this reason that it is important to look at the literary aspects a little more closely by analyzing the stylistic features.

In this unit, you will read two passages of descriptive writing. The first passage is a description taken from Mulk Raj Anand's *The Village*.

The second passage is from the novel *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. There are marked contrasts in the two passages. Both the passages are dramatic in nature. But while the first vividly describes a dramatic episode, the second dramatically builds up the atmosphere of the period.

4.2 PASSAGE FROM MULK RAJ ANAND'S *THE VILLAGE*

This passage is an extract from Mulk Raj Anand's novel *The Village*. This is a striking description of an unusual and bizarre event which takes place in a village. Snake bites are frequent occurrences in villages but local customs vary in their treatment. Often magic and exorcism are part of the treatment of snake-bites, in addition to various kinds of medication. But it is generally believed that the poison that has entered the body needs to be treated by other means besides medication, and the process is aided by faith cures and spiritual powers of a hallucinatory and dramatic kind. Some others perform these rites secretly with meditation and prayer in strict solitude.

4.2.1 Text

'There is the palanquin, there is our boy,' the peasants chorused. A tense silence prevailed during which the father of the lad, who had been brought, rushed to see if there was still life in the boy's body.

Harnam Singh was going to run out to fetch Chandi, but he had hardly risen before she rushed in, fuming and frothing, her eyes glinting like burning coals, her nostrils **dilating** wide like a breathless mare.

'They torture me and torment me, these eaters of their masters, Mahantji,' she said. 'Look, they have bruised my legs and arms. Why are they after my life? Why can't they tease their mothers, their sisters! May they die!'

'There is no talk!' There is no talk!' consoled the Mahant. 'They are rogues! You should keep quiet and not take any notice of what they say. Now where is Hafiz, the drummer? You wait and rest till he comes.'

Chandi sat wearily for the moment, and closed her eyes as if she were going to sleep.

'He is in the hall, I think,' said Harnam Singh, and he shouted, 'Ohe!, Hafizia, come in, ohe!, come in.'

Hafiz, the bearded old hereditary musician, came, bearing his drum. He still led concert-parties to peasants' homes on the occasion of marriages and births, and, as a menial, he had waited to be called to Mahant's sacred presence. He raised his hand to his head, saying, 'Salaam, Mahantji, father-mother.'

Lalu had heard that Chandi, the witch woman, was supposed to be possessed by the spirit of the king of snakes. She could cure anyone who had been bitten, with the help and blessing of the Mahant.

He had now finished grinding the liquid, and was draining the mixture into cups for the company to drink. But just then Hafiz struck up the drum and Chandi, who had sat still and intent, brooding heavily, began to shiver like someone possessed of a fever.

That was how she began to go into her **trance**, and though he had often seen her do it in his childhood, he left the pestle and mortar and watched, fascinated.

Even as he turned, the shivering gave place to a hissing, hard-breathing, shaking movement, at a faster tempo. And, as he contemplated the faces of the **congregation** in the **eerie** tenseness of the monastery courtyard, and saw the bitten body lie as dead in the stillness, the hissing, hard-breathing, shaking movement became the wriggling of a snake when it gives chase. The music of the drum had mounted to a rhythm which seemed to seep into Lalu's blood, and he felt embarrassed even as he lent himself to it.

But Chandi was almost going mad as, with a majestic sweep of her loose black hair, streaked with white, a smile on her lips that lit the haggard, sunken-cheeked ugliness of her face into an ecstasy, she began to revolve her head while she blew forth sharp whiffs of breath, like a cobra when it dances. Round and round the head went, round and round, till, while Lalu felt tickled to laugh, the blood of Chandi's face seemed to merge into an illusory circle of fire. And while she moved her head thus furiously she began to crawl on all fours, still revolving her head, still blowing and puffing short gasps of breath, spitting the profuse froth that was gathering on the corners of her mouth, and describing circles round the palanquin.

From shivering she passed to shaking, from shaking to wriggling and crawling in circles. Then she began to jump and **caper**, with short steps more like a monkey than a snake, and her head revolved with the violence of a whirlwind as she blew her breath in spurts of anger, and cast her spittle about the air as if she were spreading her venom against the world with a malevolent wrath. Her face struck the earth sometimes, and she seemed to lose control of her head completely, so that it struck against the edge of the palanquin and bled. But on and on she went, in a ceaseless, dangerous movement, the curves of a snake dance that was as fascinating in its mixture of human and reptile gestures as it was frighteningly terrible to behold. And time and space seemed to swirl in this mad dance to which the continuous thunder of the drum added a mighty **abandon**. Life seemed to lose its meaning and its reality on the shimmering waves of the steady stares that waited, half full of doubt, half full of hope, for the miracle to be performed.

The tension grew to a strange and **uncanny** height as Chandi, wrapt in the ecstasy of her movement, tired and violent, lifted by the swirling tides of her furious activity, became completely involved in her own warmth and seemed to forget the purpose for which she had summoned the spirit of the king of snakes. She drifted almost to the edge of the kitchen, which, to her as an outcast from society, was forbidden territory.

But then she changed her direction suddenly as if, even in her trance, she remembered her birth. And she danced to the foot of a banyan tree which stood overshadowing the courtyard in a corner, and blew into the holes at its roots to **propitiate** the snake gods who were supposed to live there. Then, absorbed in the shaking splendour of her dance, she whirled across to the palanquin where the bitten body of the peasant boy lay. And she began to blow at the various parts of it, drifting away after a brief spell as if to intensify her movement. And the father of the boy whispered: 'Wah Guru, Hey, Wah

Guru!' as if each movement of suspense, while his son still lay **dormant**, was like the load of centuries on his tight-stretched heart.

At this stage, the Mahant got up and, going towards Chandi, made as if to breathe a divine secret into the snake spirit's ear. And the musician shouted short little cries of encouragement as he hastened the tempo of his thumps on the drum.

Chandi followed the Mahant, spitting and snarling as a snake to its charmer, and moved towards the body. She circled round, while the holy man explored the pale olive skin of the boy for the spot where it had been bitten. But he couldn't find it.

The father of the boy, unable to bear the suspense any longer, rose eagerly and came forward and laid his fingers on his son's left ankle.

Upon this the Mahant led the snake spirit up to the ankle of the boy and breathed again into Chandi's ears.

The possessed woman sat, her head revolving, sweeping the dust with her hair, with a playful movement which rapidly assumed the utmost ferocity. Then, falling upon the boy's ankle, she blew upon the wound again and again spitting and spattering, and rubbed the sweep of her hair on it.

The Mahant bent down when she had repeated this for several seconds, and breathed something else into her ear.

Then he motioned to the palanquin bearers to take the body and lay it on the terrace and signed to the musician to stop beating the drum.

Chandi's head revolved frantically for a while, as it had done when she had blown at the ankle. Then, as if the fuel to the fire of her movement was exhausted now that the music had stopped, she slackened. Her shaking became a wriggle, and then her wriggle relaxed into a quivering and the quivering into a shiver, till at the end she sat still, brooding and intent, her lean, ugly face dropping from the flushed warmth to a **surly**, lined hardness, 'Give her some chapattis, oh Sitalgar,' the Mahant ordered, 'and some lentil,' and he went back to his seat.

The boy's body on the terrace turned and heaved and his eyes opened with a start. His father fell upon him with cries and pressed his limbs, turning the while to the Mahant and uttering short cries of gratitude, 'You are blessed! Blessed is the Wah Guru! Blessed are you, oh you of the line of the saints of Nandpur'

The audience, which had missed many heartbeats, whispered, 'Wah Guru! Wah Guru!'

The bells in the temple were tinkling for evening worship and everyone felt a sense of relief after the orgy of the miracle.

4.2.2 Glossary

dilating: becoming wider or more open
hereditary: passed down from father to son

trance:	sleep-like state when one appears to be unaware of the things around
tempo:	the rate of pattern of movement, work or activity; speed at which music is played
congregation:	a group of people gathered (often for worship)
eerie:	causing fear, because strange
caper:	to jump about in a funny way
abandon:	the state when one's feelings and action are uncontrolled
uncanny:	mysterious; not natural or usual
propitiate:	to win favour by offerings or rituals, to attempt to please
dormant:	inactive, or as if asleep
surly:	seeming angry; habitually bad-mannered

4.2.3 Discussion

The scene that is described here is of the ritual performed by a 'witch', a woman who mimics a snake in an elaborately symbolic dance performed to the accompaniment of music and wild rhythmic movements. In the course of this performance, which to the woman is almost a routine demonstration of her occult and unconscious powers, she is transformed from a wretched and pathetic old woman into a powerful agent of life-giving, or at least life-restoring, mysterious divine forces. Scepticism and faith, superstition and religious ecstasy mingle with hope and despair in a dramatically shifting scenario of an old woman-beggar becoming a sorceress-enchanter and agent of divine providence, at the climax of which the poison seems to have been drained out of the body of the boy restoring him to life, refreshed as though after a long sleep. This dramatic episode is vividly described by Mulk Raj Anand. You will have noticed that there is only a thin dividing line between narrative and descriptive prose in this passage. This will be discussed at length in the next block.

The scene is described through the eyes of Lalu, a young boy, the hero of the novel. He was engaged in making a drink, into which he was grinding some hemp for the Mahant and others present, when the boy who was bitten was brought in a palanquin by his father with the help of other villagers. But each time the miracle was performed by the old woman, Chandi, under the direction of the Mahant, there was great suspense and fear that it might not after all work. The old woman, who has been tormented by the urchins in the neighbourhood, was in a foul mood, but fortunately was immediately available along with the drummer. So without any delay the ceremony of propitiating the king of snakes was started. Before long she went into a trance and danced the snake dance, imitating the movements of a cobra, infuriated and ready to strike. She went through the various stages of its angry arousal and the vicious fatal strike of its poisonous fangs. After the propitiation of the king cobra, she symbolically enacted the process of taking back the poison from the spot in the left ankle of the boy where he was bitten, thus repeating the entire cycle, happily bringing back the boy from the jaws of death and restoring him to his desperate father, to the relief of the entire crowd which was holding its collective breath in agonised suspense. Chandi, the witch-beggar woman, once again became a pathetic old woman to be rewarded by a few chapattis and some lentils. But in her trance she had performed a life-restoring miracle.

- i) Describe the stages through which Mulk Raj Anand transforms the old beggar woman into an instrument of divine providence.

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4.3 PASSAGE FROM *BLEAK HOUSE* BY CHARLES DICKENS

Let us now take up the next passage, which is from *Bleak House* (1852-53), a novel by Charles Dickens. This passage from the opening chapter of the novel sets its whole tone and mood and strikes the keynote of its theme. Fog is a symbol of the confusion and obscurity created by the endless complexities and the twisted and winding nature of legal proceedings. Litigation, especially, for equity, for fair play, for redressal of the law’s own confusions and ambiguities, has a way of dragging on interminably, not only for a lifetime but often for generations together. In the meantime untold miseries are inflicted on innocent and unsuspecting children, adults and old people who had become destitute solely because of “law’s delays”.

4.3.1 Text

London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. **Implacable** November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a **Megalosaurus**, forty feet long or so, **waddling** like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the

death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very **blinkers**. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street corners, where tens of thousand of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points **tenaciously** to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green **aits** and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the **cabooses** of **collier-brigs**, fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the **rigging** of great ships; fog dropping on the **gunwales** of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little **□prentice** boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time – as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation; Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and **floundering** condition which this High Court of Chancery, most **pestilent** and **hoary** sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.

On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here – as here he is – with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains, addressed by a large advocate with great whiskers, a little voice, and an **interminable** brief, and outwardly directing his contemplation to the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog. On such an afternoon, some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be – as here they are – mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their **goat-hair and horse-hair warded heads** against walls of words, and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon, the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be – as are they not? – ranged in a line, in a long **matted well** (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it), between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, reference to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them. Well may

the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained glass windows lose their colour, and admit no light of day into the place; well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlish aspect, and the by drawl **languidly** echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it, and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank! This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its **blighted** lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give – who does not often give – the warning, “Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!”

4.3.2 Glossary

implacable:	which cannot be satisfied, or whose demands cannot be reduced
megalosaurus:	a gigantic carnivorous dinosaur (megalo means huge)
waddling:	a heavy awkward way of walking, like that of a duck
blinkers:	a pair of flat pieces of leather fixed over a horse's eyes
tenaciously:	holding firmly
ait:	a small island, especially in the River Thames above London
caboose:	a ship's kitchen
collier brig:	a ship for carrying coal
rigging:	all the ropes and sails of a sailing ship
gunwale:	the upper edge of the sides of a small ship or boat
prentice:	short form of apprentice
floundering:	struggling, losing control, almost sinking
pestilent:	having an evil influence
hoary:	grey with age, or having white hair in old age
interminable:	(seemingly) endless
precedent:	a former action or case used as an example or rule for the present or future action
goat-hair and horse-hair	
warded heads:	British lawyers usually wore wigs made of these
matted well:	the courtroom floor covered with coconut matting.
languidly:	lacking strength or will
blighted:	having a destructive effect

4.3.3 Discussion

The opening passage sets the scene. It begins with a one word sentence: “London” The second sentence is longer, but we note at once that it has no finite verb, the third is shorter, but again verbless. In sentence after sentence we have the same **elliptical syntax** (**ellipsis** is a rhetorical device, involving the omission of words and phrases, often easily supplied contextually) building up an atmosphere of gloom, ill-temper, irritation and repetitive and unproductive activity. Dogs, horses as well as people splashed in mud are struggling for a foot-hold in the all-pervading fog, wallowing in the slippery

street, as though the earth was just recovering after the biblical floods. In such a strange world, where everything seems to have turned black, in mourning for the death of the sun (again a figure of speech), meeting a **Megalosaurus** would have caused no surprise.

In the second paragraph the word fog occurs for the first time and is repeated over and over again; the verbless sentences (the main verb elided) describe the fog expanding in all directions, all over London, outside London, in Essex and Kent, on the land, the river and the sky. It penetrates into the closed cabins of ships of every size and variety, into the 'eyes and the throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners', into the pipe the angry ship's captain was smoking. People on bridges thought 'they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds'. The fog becomes a symbol of complete insulation from the world of real people, suggesting the true nature of the Court of Chancery, living in its own world, isolated from humanity, hanging 'in the misty clouds'. And this is the setting for the 'Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery'.

The street lamps were lit earlier than usual, but they failed to dispel the gloom. The thickest of fogs and the deepest mud and mire could not match the confusion and ineffectualness of the Court. Note particularly the use of superlatives. Then follows the contrast between the comfort, warmth and luxury in which the Court functions routinely day after day with its meaninglessness and utter indifference to human suffering. Justice is delayed from generation to generation and abject misery and helplessness are inflicted on the orphans, the old, the weak and the derelict. The syntax (the arrangement of words, phrases and clauses), the sentence structure and the tense used emphasize the unvarying routine and pointlessly interminable procedures, 'the groping knee-deep in technicalities', 'the slippery precedents', the wigged and gowned lawyers fighting their mock battles 'making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might'. The repetitions with variations of certain structures serve to emphasize the futility and the ridiculous nature of their petty wranglings, carried on from generation to generation. Over this sterile activity presides each succeeding Lord Chancellor, concentrating, like the lawyers' 'on the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog'. Reality in the form of day-light never penetrates into the courtroom through the stained glass windows.

The repeated structures 'on such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here – as here he is' and 'well may the court be dim....' both emotionally and logically build up to the climax 'where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it, and like the people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog', feeling suspended and drifting like a balloon, are all 'stuck in a fog-bank'. It is not difficult to see how at this point all the descriptive strands are tied up, reinforcing the central theme of the futility of whatever goes on inside the Chancery. Instead of dispensing justice, the Chancery delays it, causing untold misery to generations of people.

Check Your Progress II

Now read the passage carefully as many times as you consider necessary and then try to understand the exact meanings and suggestions of the words and phrases you find difficult in the contexts in which they are used in the passage. The glossary at the end of the passage is meant to help you.

- i) What kind of atmosphere does the frequent use of the word 'fog' evoke?

- ii) Mark True/False after reading the following statements
- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| a) | The passage opens in spring | True/False |
| b) | The weather is bright | True/False |
| c) | It is night time | True/False |
| d) | The Court of Chancery is an unpopular place | True/False |
- iii) Explain the following
- a) hard by

- b) in the heart of

- c) monied might

- iv) How many times is the word afternoon repeated in the final paragraph? What purpose, do you think, is served by this repetition?

4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have analysed two fictional passages of prose. The first is a dramatic description of an episode while the second conveys both the genuine feel of the period described. We have:

- examined some of the distinctive stylistic features in the passage such as evocative diction, imagery and syntax, miming of action and repetition.
- seen how style plays a decisive role in presenting content.

4.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- i) Stage 1: Chandi is bullied by the neighbourhood urchins
- Stage 2 : Suddenly, with the arrival of the palanquin she becomes the object of everyone's attention

Stage 3: When she starts dancing, a gradual change takes place in the ceremony. The transformation is complete.

Check Your Progress II

- i) You may read the passage again, keeping in mind the fact that writers use natural background and seasons in order to trace some correspondence between outer events and inner states of mind.
- ii) a) False
b) False
c) False
d) True
- iii) a) nearby
b) in the midst of
c) power that stems from great wealth
- iv) Three times. Repetition serves the following purposes
- moves from the particular to the general
 - gives it an effect of timelessness
 - conveys a strong impression of the repetitive and pointless activity that goes on endlessly in the Court of Chancery.

UNIT 5 NARRATIVE PROSE-1

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Passage from Alan Moorehead's *The Blue Nile*
 - 5.2.1 Text
 - 5.2.2 Glossary
 - 5.2.3 Discussion
- 5.3 Passage from Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake*
 - 5.3.1 Text
 - 5.3.2 Glossary
 - 5.3.3 Discussion
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Answers to Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall introduce you to narrative prose. We have already given you a brief introduction to narrative prose in the first unit of the previous block. If you read these lessons carefully and complete the given exercises, you will be able to:

- Describe the nature and functions of narrative prose;
- Distinguish between narratives in history and in travelogue;
- Analyse different varieties of narrative prose.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Unlike descriptive writing, which mainly concentrates on the scene, the presentation of objects, events, and situations, narrative shifts the focus to what happens next, or what follows. In short, a narrative presents a sequence of events. In fact there is no 'story' without a narrative. Description calls for a certain kind of sustained effort, as we saw earlier. It calls for the ability to capture the very essence of the arrested moment, to render it powerfully and evocatively, to recreate an incident or scene in all its vividness and immediacy. Narration, on the other hand, can take several forms. It can be slow or rapid in tempo, exciting and colourful, or matter-of-fact and solidly truthful, prejudiced, distorted or heightened to impress or mislead. Narration can be purely objective as in most scientific and technical writing. It can also come alive in the hands of highly imaginative scientists, scholars and historians. Historians have also narrated historical events, as though the past had been brought back to life for the special benefit of their readers. Creative writers as well as scientists and scholars and those who tell their own life stories—everyone has to choose the appropriate narrative to suit their purposes.

For our purposes here, we shall examine some specimens of narrative prose analyzing their prominent features, as we did earlier (in Block 1) with descriptive passages. We have selected two passages for you : one from Alan Moorehead's *The Blue Nile* and the other from a travelogue *From Heaven Lake* by Vikram Seth. You will find two kinds of narrative here, the one employed in writing history and the other in writing a travelogue.

5.2 PASSAGE FROM ALAN MOOREHEAD'S *THE BLUE NILE*

The first passage that we shall examine is a historical narrative of the famous Battle of the Pyramids which Napoleon Bonaparte won so decisively against the Mamelukes in Egypt in 1798. Alan Moorehead considers it 'the last great cavalry charge of the Middle Ages', as over six thousand horsemen were engaged in the battle. That a battle in the last decade of the eighteenth century should have been described in these terms indicates the tremendous changes that had taken place in the art of warfare. The French were a truly professional army, unlike the Mamelukes who still valued the old-fashioned virtues of individual valour and personal accomplishments and lived like a martial race. The French soldiers were paid only small salaries. However, the lure of loot and plunder was what attracted them to the army. In Europe, warfare had become very professional, highly mobile, cold-blooded and mechanically efficient, particularly after the improved fire power that European armies had acquired as a result of industrialisation at the close of the eighteenth century. The Mamelukes still carried on the glorious traditions of medieval chivalry and individual courage and daring were held up as the noble art of war. They were no match for the cold and merciless fighting tactics of the French.

The French organised themselves in the form of highly mobile and self-contained squares, not so easily open to direct assault. When one set of soldiers fired their muskets, the others had already re-loaded and were ready to take their turn, so that a continuous stream of artillery fire was kept up. The Mamelukes attacked in huge formations of several hundreds and thousands and charged down on the finest breeds of Arab horses, with their swords drawn. It was an awesome sight, and the Mamelukes were the finest soldiers imaginable, but their rash courage was the cause of their total defeat and destruction, as the narrative graphically indicates. The French waited calmly until they were within fifty paces to fire their guns, bringing down the Mamelukes. Similarly, the Mameluke artillery, which was not mobile, managed to fire only one round before the French were upon them and routed them in hand-to-hand combat, seizing all their guns. Napoleon so planned the battle that he was able to separate the cavalry from their fire power and the infantry from the rest so that when the battle was lost the Mamelukes and their infantry had no escape route. They preferred to drown in the Nile rather than be killed by the bullets of the French. No wonder Denon is quoted as saying 'it was no longer a battle it was a massacre'. Murad the Mameluke leader 'appears to have realized that the battle; was lost almost before it had begun'.

All this does not mean that Napoleon Bonaparte did not richly deserve the credit for his genius; he was unquestionably one of the great generals the

world had ever known. But what made his success against the Mamelukes so swift, total and also inevitable was the medieval nature of war as practised in the East. Industrialised Europe had all the modern weapons ready for use against nations which lived in the Middle Ages largely in their self-sufficient villages; professionalism and intensive training in fighting and marching were still unknown. In the East large armies were assembled in the moments of crisis and were equally quickly disbanded.

The strength of numbers served as a bargaining point, actual fighting was often avoided, and when it was inevitable it was confused and luck played a major role in these battles. The Europeans were fighting on foreign soil, they had to be full-time soldiers and could not afford to lose. Fortunately for them, even though they were poorly paid and had to cope with the hot desert climate and limited rations and disease, there was always the hope of loot and the right to a share in the spoils. If the generals got more than their share of glory and power, the common soldier was more than amply rewarded by the spoils of war, as the French discovered in their short-lived encounter with the Mamelukes, who had brought all their wealth and their fabulous personal possessions to the battlefield.

With this background you should be able to read the passage and analyse it on your own. Perhaps the characters need introduction. As can be guessed from the passage, Desaix, Reynier and Dugua were Napoleon's deputies; Murad was the chief of the Mamelukes who actually ruled Egypt in the name of the Ottoman Emperor. Ibrahim was a powerful Mameluke leader. The places mentioned in the narrative are those around Cairo. Now read on and you will be in a position to appreciate the force and clarity of the narrative; the extraordinary vividness and rapidity of the events that led to the total route of the Mamelukes; how Napoleon became the conqueror of Cairo with the loss of only about two hundred soldiers after the encounter, with the enemy numbering nearly twenty thousand. The author is in complete control of his facts and succeeds in recreating the excitement and significance of the historical occasion.

5.2.1 Text

The French in Egypt

Bonaparte during these eventful days steadily continued his advance up the river. 'Melancholy and sadness', he records, 'reigned in the army'. But still he pushed his murmuring soldiers on, and ate his own plate of lentils in the midst of their **bivouacs** at night. The men talked for hours round the camp fires, arguing that they were being got rid of by the Directory in Paris—otherwise what was the reason for this senseless march? But at least they did not have to fight; there had been no sign of the enemy since Jibbrish, and a detachment crossing to the east bank found the country there equally deserted.

On July 19, they reached Umm Dinar, close to the junction with the Damietta branch of the river. Here they were barely twenty miles from Cairo—every man with a **spy-glass** turned it upon the distant outline of the pyramids—and Bonaparte, hearing at last from spies that the Mameluke army was waiting for him on the west bank outside Cairo, ordered a day's rest. On July 20 a twelve-hour forced march was begun before dawn, and the army **bivouacked** that night within a mile or two of Embaba. At 1 a.m. on July 21 the camp was

already astir, and in the dawn light the soldiers saw the Mamelukes for the first time since Jibbrish: a thousand of them drawn up silently in line across the desert. Bonaparte went forward on horseback and surveyed the position through his glass. He saw beyond the enemy outposts the great camp at Embaba, and judged that there were about twenty thousand enemy infantry there, with perhaps some forty guns in crude entrenchments. The chief interest in these guns for Bonaparte was that they were river-boat guns without wheels or carriages, and therefore immobile. To the west of the camp the bulk of the Mameluke cavalry appeared to be drawn up astride the road to the pyramids at Gizeh and he judged them to number between 9,000 and 10,000. It was now 10 a.m. and the sun was rising to its full power.

There are many strange aspects about the Battle of the Pyramids; it took place, for example, nowhere near the pyramids—they were eight or nine miles away—and by the same process of romantic association most people remember this day because of Bonaparte's famous exhortation to his troops. 'Soldats! Du haut de ces monuments, quarante siecles vous regardent.' Another version runs, 'Allez, et pensez que du haut de ces monuments 40 siecles vous observent.' These troops were probably much too busy to pay any attention to it. The battle itself and its drastic aftermath provide many other anomalies. Yet perhaps the really significant factor in the whole affair is that Bonaparte, in these outlandish circumstances, and still a young man of 29, should have divined in one instant, and apparently with absolute conviction, precisely what he had to do. Never was a battle more clearly planned. He sees the fixed guns in the enemy camp and decides at once to keep them *hors de combat* for the time being by remaining outside their range while he tackles the Mameluke cavalry in the open desert. If the enemy infantry choose to come to the aid of the cavalry by **sallying** out of their camp, then so much the better, they will have to fight without the aid of their artillery. If, however, the infantry decide to remain where they are, it seems not unlikely that he will defeat the Mameluke cavalry with his own mobile guns and the concentrated fire of his **squares**; and then it will be time enough to turn on the enemy camp. A French detachment placed behind the camp and **astride** the Gizeh road will prevent the **remnants** of the Mameluke cavalry from coming to the assistance of their infantry and indeed the infantry themselves will have no place to which to retreat except into the Nile.

There seems to be no reason to doubt Bonaparte's word that this, in fact, was the way he designed the battle, since these dispositions were those which he actually carried out: at all stages of the action the Mamelukes reacted, not to their own plan (which was presumably to draw the French on to assault the camp while they charged in upon them from the flanks) but to Bonaparte's plan.

So now Desaix was sent off to meet the Mamelukes on the right flank, and it was a long business, a matter of three hours, before all was ready, his infantry marching in squares, with the artillery in between, the baggage to the centre, his scouts at the front. Murad appears to have been confused at first about what was happening; at all events it was not until 2 p.m., when the sun was at its fiercest and a strong wind blowing from the north, that he realized that his

* Soldiers! Forty centuries are looking down at you from the top of these monuments.

+ Come, think of the fact that forty centuries are observing you from the top of these monuments.

cavalry was about to be cut off from his infantry. Then at last he gave the order to charge.

At least six thousand horsemen were involved in this movement, and it is probably true to say that it was the last great cavalry charge of the Middle Ages. The contemporary attempts to describe it both in words and in drawings are not very satisfactory; they leave one with a confused picture of the Moslem **pennants** flying over the horses' heads, of the Mamelukes in their enormous turbans and fluttering robes, each man leaning forward with a sabre in his right hand, of the foot-attendants running beside them and of scores of camels laden with **panniers** of ammunition and weapons following on behind. But all this vanishes in a moment of clouds of dust and smoke, and the noise of the charge—the thousands of hoofs beating on the sand, the shouts, the drums and bugles—becomes lost in the general uproar of cannon. Few eye-witnesses ever really see a battle or comprehend what is happening while it is being fought, and this battle was more tumultuous than most, quicker in action, more savage in character and more concentrated in time; it was, indeed, one long crisis, while it lasted.

Desaix had just reached a sparse grove of palm trees when the charge began, and he had barely time to settle his soldiers into their action stations before the Mamelukes were upon them. They waited until the leading horsemen were within fifty paces. Then they fired. Denon speaks of the enemy riding right up to the mouths of the cannon before they fell or turned aside. Those who wheeled round the squares, seeking to make a breach in the sides and rear, were soon caught in the crossfire of Reynier's division that was coming up behind Desaix; and when they turned to charge again, their frightened animals were **buffeted** back and forth from one square to another. Murad, who had put himself in the **van** of the first assault, escaped with a slight wound in his cheek, and he appears to have realized that the battle was lost almost before it had begun. He gathered together the remnants of his men and retired towards the pyramids. Desaix's cavalry following up behind soon got themselves behind the enemy camp at Embaba and took up a position close to the river bank.

Meanwhile Dugua's division, with Bonaparte in one of the squares, was advancing on the camp itself. They turned aside a cavalry charge, and seeing the way clear before them rushed straight upon the enemy guns which, up to this point had taken no part in the battle. Nor were the gunners able to contribute much even at this desperate moment. They fired once, but before they could reload and fire again the French were on top of them, and a hand-to-hand struggle began among the **entrenchments** and the baggage of the camp. Murad attempted to come to the assistance of his infantry from the rear, but he found himself blocked by Desaix's division; and now in fact the bulk of the Mameluke army and its thousands of camp followers were surrounded. "From this moment," Denon says, "it was no longer a battle; it was a massacre."

Ibrahim, waiting with his reserves and a huge crowd of townspeople on the east bank, was appalled to see Embaba go up in flames, and presently out of the pall of the sandstorm raised by the north wind, thousands of figures, Mamelukes as well as infantry, came running to the river. There were no boats, but apparently these men preferred death by drowning to the bullets of the French, and so they flung themselves into the choppy water, even rode their horses into it, and were soon swept away by the current. This was a great

reassurance to the sailors in the French **flotilla** further down the river. All day they had been struggling against the current, hoping to take part in the action, but at the time of the Mameluke's first charge they were still miles away. They heard in the distance a tremendous **cannonade** and presently this grew fainter—a sign that the enemy were in retreat. But the wind dropped and the noise of the battle grew stronger than before and seemed much closer, almost as if it was Bonaparte who was falling back. In some alarm the sailors listened as the firing continued to increase, but now the bodies of the dead enemy began to float down towards them, at first in twos and threes and then in dozens—the Mamelukes in their gorgeous robes like great tropical flowers on the surface of the water—and they knew that the battle was won. It had been decided in a little more than an hour.

Back on the battlefield and around the camp at Embaba the French soldiers found that they had reached their **eldorado** at last. The Mamelukes had gone into action carrying their wealth with them. Some had as many as 300 or 400 gold **louis** in their saddlebags, and their equipment—the inlaid swords and daggers, the silk scarves and the jewelled turbans—were worth a fortune to men who earned only a few **sous** a day. There was no shortage of this loot; three, perhaps four, thousand Mamelukes and their men had been either killed or drowned, and few of the French failed to get a share; barely two hundred of their own number had fallen. In the camp itself all forty pieces of cannon were recovered intact, together with some eight hundred camels and baggage animals, large stores of food and many cases of silver and other treasure. It was a measure of the ferocity of the fighting and of the bravery of the Mamelukes that only 1,000 prisoners were taken.

5.2.2 Glossary

bivouac:	temporary encampment for the night without tents.
spy-glass:	small telescope.
bivouacked:	halted temporarily for the night without tents.
sallying:	in a military sense, go out to attack, a sudden move.
square:	body of infantry drawn up in rectangular form.
remnants:	the few that remained.
pennants:	long narrow flag, military ensign of lancer regiments.
panniers:	baskets, usually in pairs, carried by animals.
buffeted:	beaten back.
van:	foremost division of the army on the march; front of army in line of battle.
entrenchment:	surrounded by trenches, army securing its position.
flotilla:	a group of small ships.
hors de combat:	out of the battle.
cannonade:	continuous gunfire; bombardment.
eldorado:	a fictitious city or country abounding in gold.
louis:	French gold coin (many French Kings were called Louis).
sou:	French coin of low value.

5.2.3 Discussion

The narrative is structured from a central point of view, alternating its focus between the French and the Mamelukes. It seeks to be objective and also

maintains critical detachment from the previous historians and the available records relating to the Battle of the Pyramids. Moorehead is not swept off his feet by the romantic halo often associated with Napoleon, nor is he willing to believe the myths surrounding the battle. Because of the tight control he exercises over the narrative, he is able to give his readers a clear and comprehensive picture of the battle, the blow by blow account of the moves and counter-moves of the French on the one hand and the Mamelukes on the other. The historian cannot abdicate his commanding intelligence or suspend judgement on the events that he takes on himself to survey. He has to equip himself with a philosophy and train himself to sift and weigh evidence and evaluate the opinions of his fellow historians in order to arrive at his own assessment of persons and events. While his philosophy determines the broad sweep of history that he sees developing and evolving in a certain direction, his critical ability endows him with the necessary balance that will make him a fair and incisive chronicler.

One of the noteworthy stylistic features of historical narratives is the frequent switching of tenses, from the past to what is generally called the historic present. Note for example, in paragraph 3, after the sentence "never was a battle so clearly planned" we have a sudden switch into the historic present "He sees the fixed guns in the enemy camp and decides ... " which continues till the end of the paragraph. In the next paragraph the narrative again switches back to the past tense. Again Moorehead shifts into the present tense when in the sixth paragraph he reviews the available records and opinions relating to the battle and makes certain observations; at the end, he refers back to the battle in the past tense: "It was, indeed, one long crisis, while it lasted."

Check Your Progress I

- i) Attempt to describe the Battle of the Pyramids from the point of view of the Mamelukes. (About 150 words)

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- ii) Pick out some of the striking images from the passage.

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5.3 PASSAGE FROM VIKRAM SETH'S *FROM HEAVEN LAKE*

The next passage we shall look at is from a travelogue written by Vikram Seth entitled *From Heaven Lake*, based on an extraordinarily adventurous journey from China through Tibet and Nepal to New Delhi. It was a hazardous journey no foreigner could have accomplished, least of all an Indian student at a Chinese university, except for a series of fortunate coincidences. With the help of a highly ambiguous travel permit, which was capable of being interpreted in several ways, he was ultimately able to visit his parents, despite the many obstacles he faced on the way. When we examine this chapter from his travel book, we notice that he sees and records what he sees with the keen eye and sensibility of a poet and an accomplished literary craftsman.

5.3.1 Text

The Chaidam Basin



Grassless, treeless, birdless stone and pebble and rock.....

By afternoon we descend into a pastel-coloured basin, also treeless, and with wide horizons; blues of sky and lake and distant ranges, purples and browns of the soil, white clouds, every colour is light, pastel, delicate. A wind is blowing, so it's cool. In winter this place must be desolately cold. I take a few photographs : grassless, treeless, birdless stone and pebble and rock.

We cross the basin, rise gently for a while, and as we reach the point of maximum elevation, see in front of us a breathtaking sight : a vast slope, as far as the eye can see, as if the world itself sloped, a **declivity** that stretches for perhaps a hundred miles ahead of us; and this plain has ridges rising from its floor, but they are low, short ridges, and well-spaced, so that you can see the plain continue beyond them. The ridges are of pink and slate and purple rock, with cloud-shadows falling on some of them—and the earth to the right is beige and ochre and fawn. On the tops of the north-facing peaks there is a touch of snow. A little later, snow and cloud are joined by a different white, that of stretches of salt undissolved on this arid plain. Then comes a feast of geological transformations : nude dunes, unconnected by sand, completely isolated one from another, then black hills, oily and stony, slowly becoming wrinkled and clay-like; later, lakes of a distant blue, with a band of sparse vegetation in front, and a red strip of soil nearest us, like the uninvented tricolour of an artist's republic. A sole gold mountain glows in the late light; camels graze on a green plain; the combed raked clouds are yellowed with sunset; and finally there is darkness, and a salt lake, and the distant lights of Germu.

The road so far is fairly good, except where it is undergoing repair; there temporary and muddy diversions cause us to jolt and slither. The first section of the road was metalled, and there is a plan to metal the entire Liuyuan-Lhasa route. (The present dirt-road has to be flattened every year after the rainy season.) From time to time we came across the People's Liberation Army engaged in road construction on a good scale, with the help of some machinery but mainly spades. These troops work here for half the year. When the winter winds freeze the land they return to Germu or Xining or Lanzhou, making the region even more isolated than before.

For Sui, the scenery of this unpopulated **terrain** is only occasionally captivating, as when under some transitory slant of light an unusual gold touches the evening hills. The dunes and plains, the plate basin of the Chaidam, all the permanent features of the landscape, are fixtures along a route he has travelled every month for years. He is inured to their beauty; his pleasures along the road are mainly social; talk, food where good food can be obtained, **haggling** in the market, visiting friends. There is no radio in his truck, and when he isn't talking he is smoking. He looks his thirty-five years. His face is somewhat full, though he has features sharp for a Han Chinese. His black hair, **unkempt** despite the comb he often uses, is pushed back from his forehead whenever it obstructs his vision. His teeth, like his fingers, are nicotine-stained. His eyes are wonderfully alert and friendly, except that when he is busy with various errands and preparations, they cloud over with an abstraction almost impossible to pierce until the job is completed.

He has an intuitive practicality. His truck has grown so much a part of him that the occasional repairs he makes are carried out almost unconsciously, as if he were scratching his arm. The truck could be rattling along with fifteen loud

mechanical noises merging in **counter-point** : Sui is unconcerned. A sixteenth, seemingly harmless, joins them : he is instantly alert, pulls the truck over, jumps out of the cabin and prods about the engine, unscrewing caps, checking for oil and water, plugging leaks, joining wires. When he gets back into the cabin and starts up again, the sixteenth noise has disappeared.

This hand rests lightly on the wheel while he drives. When he breaks a chain of cigarettes and needs to light up once more, he passes the cigarette to whoever is sitting next to him. Since the windows of the truck let in a swift current of air at the top and the sides—the rubber strips have disappeared in places—the operation of lighting a match in the moving truck is not easy, and I usually pass it on to Gyanseng. Sui drives, for the most part, gently; this contrasts with the violence of his gear changes. On mountainous stretches he steers with a sensitive adeptness that is enjoyable to watch.

He and Gyanseng get along well. They do not speak much. Gyanseng is a little sick of road travel. Sometimes when we are in a transport yard overnight, Sui tells him to sleep in the truck to guard it. Gyanseng grumbles about the cold and discomfort but complies : it is vital the driver gets a good night's rest. When I try to insist on taking over on alternate nights I am over-ruled. In matters relating to the truck, the driver is dictator.

Unlike almost all Han Chinese I have met (including many educated at university), Sui is not Han-chauvinist. He neither looks down on nor up to the Tibetans. He is not interested in their culture; despite the fact that he has lived in Lhasa for fifteen years he speaks almost no Tibetan. Yet he has a way of treating people as individuals rather than as representatives of types, that precludes any sense of cultural superiority. His friends and acquaintances along the route are Han and Tibetan, though naturally the Tibetans are restricted to those who can speak Chinese. Unlike some of his fellow drivers and army buddies he has not once indicated any dislike of Lhasa or of Tibet or of Tibetans. For him it is not 'New Zealand' but home.

He reads omnivorously: newspapers when he can get them, Ziao San's comic books, novels, short stories in magazines, instruction booklets. 'Poetry', he tells me, 'is pointless. I can never understand what poets are trying to get at—or why they bother to say things the way they do.' He describes his school life during the Cultural Revolution. 'We never studied, never did anything. I was interested in books, but any reading I did, I did without guidance. My sister's a doctor—you'll meet her at Germu—but that sort of thing is completely closed off to me. I am too old now for higher studies. Besides, I don't have the qualifications.'

'Do you regret it?' I ask.

'Yes, sometimes of course. But what's the point? Even if I didn't accept the way things are, what could I do? And this is not a bad life anyway. I'm lucky as such things go. The one problem with the job is that I'm rarely with my family.'

Together with this resignation comes a certain **savvy**, a street-smartness that enables Sui to find his way about the system, to utilise its flexibilities, to withdraw when effort is useless, to know when and how to bargain, whom to

speak with when in trouble, how to get a concession here, a few litres of petrol (when necessary) there. When my luggage fell off the truck he did not spend time thinking about the best course of action; when we realised someone had absconded with it, he looked ahead sufficiently far to ask the identifying witness to come with us to Liuyuan. When, past midnight, we arrived in Dunhuang, he combined argument and pleasantry to get us a room in a yard that we had been told was full. Wherever we are, he looks out for gifts or good bargains for himself and for his friends. He is a generous man. In a sense the hard-bitten side of his nature inspires as much confidence as patent good heartedness.

The landscape is so spectacular that I seem hardly to have noticed our more mundane activities today. We have stopped for oil and water and diesel several times, but haven't eaten anything except lunch at a truck depot (bean-curd, and rice, and a kind of squid-like thing I couldn't identify). I felt like eating some grapes but the egg had got squashed into them in transit. From time to time we stop at a checkpost or fuel station where one or two families have lived in isolation from the rest of humanity for perhaps twenty years.

This Chaidam Basin must be among the loneliest parts of the world. Sui invariably asks the old men who are stationed at such places what they would like him to bring for them the next time he is going through. He sells them a watermelon or two at cost price, or gives them some present he has brought along—a book perhaps, or a pair of shoes. They are always very pleased to see him. Cigarettes are offered all around; Sui must smoke a couple of packs of Da Qian Men a day. We are making good distance today, for the first time. By the time we're at the salt lake, Sui needs another rest, and sleeps for half an hour at the house of one of his endless wayside acquaintances. Before moving on, we fill a few gunny bags with rock salt we shovel out of the surface of the lake; all of us get down to digging and hauling the stuff. A segment of railway track approaches Germu from the east, and we dig for salt beside it. It must be an eerie sight by the light of the moon.

The night is so clear that the sky looks stuffed with stars, busier than I can remember ever having seen it. Gyanseng, who has been quiet all day, starts singing in Tibetan. Xiao San's headache is better and his temper is worse. I continue talking to Sui, who is in a meditative mood.

Sui thinks that young people nowadays are disturbed and selfish, and blames it on the viciousness of the Cultural Revolution, during which they were encouraged to turn against their parents and teachers and everyone in authority, and instead to follow the (prevailing) message of Mao. All decency died during that time, he says, and half the cultural heritage of China—books, temples, works of art—was destroyed. People now care only for themselves. And as for their skills, even their literacy—no-one really studied anything in school, that is, if they went to school at all. All day they had to recite and discuss the quotations of the Chairman as if that was the totality of all knowledge. You should've seen the *People's Daily* during those days, he says—red headlines across the front page: 'We will endlessly adore the red sun in our lives, Chairman Mao—and who can blame the kids for being influenced by such ever-present propaganda?'

'Was there nothing good in the Cultural Revolution at all?' I ask, 'Some people mention that the only time they got to travel, to see their country, was

when they were Red Guards. And they say it cut down on the worst abuses of bureaucracy.'

'Well, I suppose that's true, though I'm not too sure about the bureaucracy.' He does not speak for a while, then goes on. 'Some good things came out of it, as they do out of every disaster. I learned a lot of things about life, and about how people behave: about how far, for instance, you could count on even your best friends to stick by you in times of trouble. Sometimes people wanted to but they didn't dare help. They feared for themselves and for their families'.

Very late, at one o'clock at night, we arrive in Germu. The people at the desk at the Transport Yard are surly; in particular the gatekeeper, who is arrogant and suspicious in the extreme. I am given a bureaucratic run-around when I am so sleepy that I can hardly talk. Finally we are given a room, and the manager appears, apologising in the name of international friendship. It is hardly his fault, and he has been woken up as well. I am asleep within minutes.

At 3.15 comes a knock on the door. I wake up, but ignore it until it becomes too insistent to ignore. 'Who is it?' I ask. 'Police.' Comes the reply. I get out of bed and open the door. A police officer in white uniform and cap looks in at us severely. (By this time Sui too has woken up.) 'Why didn't you open up when I first knocked?' he asks. 'We were asleep,' I say. 'Is anything the matter?'

'Kindly come to the office with me.'

'Can't we do this tomorrow?' I ask plaintively.

'I am afraid not. There are some questions we need to ask you.'

I pull on a sweater and a pair of warm socks, and trying to conquer my sleepiness and conceal my agitation I follow the officer across the yard. In the office the gatekeeper looks at me with the contentment of a spider observing a struggling fly.

'Sit here,' says the officer, indicating a bench opposite a table. I do as I am told.

He looks at the register. 'What is your name?' 'Your Chinese name?'

'Xie Binlang. And yours?' I ask conversationally.

He ignores this. 'What is your unit?'

'Nanjing University.'

'Oh. And do they know you are here in Germu?'

'I very much doubt it.'

'Are you here to do research?'

'No. I am here to . . .'

'Let me ask the questions. You are not here to do research. Are you here for any other special purpose?'

'Special purpose? What do you mean?'

'I mean . . . on a study trip, something your university has sanctioned?'

'No, I'm just travelling.'

5.3.2 Glossary

declivity :	a downward slope
terrain :	a stretch of land
haggling :	arguing over something, specially to fix a price
unkempt :	here it means untidy hair
counter-point:	the musical practice of combining two or more tunes to be played together.
savvy:	practical knowledge and ability.

5.3.3 Discussion

The passage focuses on the vast expanses of the Chaidam Basin, which, according to the writer, 'must be among the loneliest parts of the world.' What is striking about this passage is the accurate and concrete details that Vikram Seth presents about this practically forbidden part of the world. Besides, there is the very sympathetically and insightfully sketched character of Sui, the driver of the truck, who became a dependable friend, and saw him through numerous difficult situations and tight corners. Sui's nature is partly revealed in action and the conversations the writer had with him, and also partly through direct statements and comments made by the writer on his appearance, habits, friends, his expertise as a driver, and his quick, easy and frank dealings with acquaintances on the regular route his truck took him. Sui is no ordinary truck driver. He is a thinking, self-reliant, and extremely competent and knowledgeable person. While his sister was a doctor, he was fairly satisfied with his job as a truck driver although this work took him away from his family more often than he would have liked.

Let us in particular, look at the diction of the passage. In the first paragraph, one of the suffixes that recurs is 'less': treeless (twice), grassless, birdless. The words 'isolated', 'barren', 'desolate', 'lonely', are repeated in paragraph after paragraph emphasising the remoteness of the area and the extreme sparseness of the population. At the end of paragraph twelve we are told that in places 'one or two families have lived in isolation from the rest of humanity for perhaps twenty years', which sums up practically all that can be said about the near complete isolation of this region.

The next thing that we notice is the well-knit paragraphs. Each paragraph deals with a well-defined idea, theme, or incident. Almost every paragraph ends with an emphatic statement that acts as a punch-line, summing up what has been said earlier. The beginning of the next paragraph similarly marks a logical and clear development. Take, for example, paragraphs five and six which deal with Sui's practical nature and his skill as a driver. After the short

opening sentence of each paragraph we are given concrete details about his 'intuitive practicality' seen in operation. He knew by instinct, as it were, what noises were trivial and could therefore be safely ignored, and what were serious enough to need immediate attention, and he promptly carried out those essential repairs with commendable competence. Similarly, in the next paragraph Sui's expertise as a driver is dealt with in a forthright and convincing manner. Paragraph seven too is organised in an equally effective fashion.

The structure of sentences reveals considerable variety, balance, and rhythm. The author varies his sentences : they differ in length from very short ones to long, intricate ones with parenthetical and objectival and adverbial clauses, which add to, modify and qualify what is being said. Take, for example, paragraph four... 'as when under some transitory slant of light an unusual gold touches the evening hills.' 'There is no radio in his truck, and when he isn't talking, he is smoking.' 'His face is somewhat full, though he has features sharp for a Han Chinese. His black hair, unkempt despite the comb he often uses is pushed back from his forehead whenever it obstructs his vision.' The rhythm indicates the easy, conversational flow of an alert and sympathetic observer of men and things, which makes the writing singularly attractive. A careful reader will hardly fail to note the sensitive use of words and phrases : words tend to occur in groups of two or three, mostly well balanced; e.g. paragraph one. '... every colour is light, pastel, delicate; grassless, treeless, birdless...' paragraph two. '... beige, ochre and fawn; and finally there is darkness, and a salt lake, and the distant lights of Germu'. You can pick out any number of such examples from the passage.

Also note the way the author uses punctuation : parentheses (brackets), commas, semicolons, colons, dashes and full stops. The poet's eye for sound and colour is also in evidence : 'A sole gold mountain glows in the late light; camels graze on a green plain; the combed raked clouds are yellowed with sunset'. The sound patterns enhance the rhythmic effects of the measured, infinitely varied flow of sentences. To avoid the ever present danger of an overzealous lesson writer exhausting everything that can be said on style and preventing the readers from making their own original contributions (which in fact is the primary objective of these lessons) we shall bring the discussion of this passage by Vikram Seth to a close.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) How does Seth recreate the isolated nature of the Chaidam basin? What devices does he use to build up this atmosphere?

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5.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that:

- there are several modes of narrations;
- historical narrative is somewhat different from narrative prose in a travelogue;
- unless history is presented in a strikingly and eminently readable narrative form, it does not qualify to be treated as literature, however scholarly and reliable it might be as history;
- what distinguishes the descriptive narrative from mere descriptive prose is the sequence of events that marks the descriptions;
- the effective use of imagery, diction and punctuation enhance the effectiveness of the narration.

5.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- 1) If you have any difficulty, read the text again.
- 2) For example in Para 9 — Mamelukes are described in 'their gorgeous robes like great tropical flowers'.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Seth builds up the atmosphere by the use of the following devices:
 - i) use of time–progressive unfolding
 - ii) emphasises a negative feature; establishes the exact features of the place
 - iii) detailed description, details are selected with great care
 - iv) informal style
 - v) recurring use of words like isolate, lonely etc.

UNIT 6 NARRATIVE PROSE-2

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Passage from Hemingway's 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber'
 - 6.2.1 Text
 - 6.2.2 Glossary
 - 6.2.3 Discussion
- 6.3 Passage from Wole Soyinka's *Ake*
 - 6.3.1 Text
 - 6.3.2 Glossary
 - 6.3.3 Discussion
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Answers to Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall examine the various kinds of narrative methods employed by writers to suit different purposes. We shall also look at the significance of the point of view in the narrative. It is important not only to follow the narration but also to see the shifts, if any, in the point of view and the implications of such changes for telling the story.

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- identify different kinds of narrative methods;
- appreciate the significance of the point of view in narration;
- explain the difference between a multiple point of view and an autobiographical point of view in narration.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you shall read two more passages of narrative prose. The first is an excerpt from Ernest Hemingway's short story 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.' The second passage is from Wole Soyinka's autobiography *Ake*. You will notice how these two writers employ different methods of narration.

You will find that the writer, for his own reasons, chooses to present the narrative either directly from the point of view of the narrator who may or may not be identifiable as a character created for the purpose of that particular universe of fiction. Some characters may earn a right to present their point of view, while other characters are hardly given a chance to present theirs. This happens in the case of characters who are often minor and are not developed 'in the round' as it were. In some types of narrative, as in an autobiography, the

central character and the point of view are hardly ever matters of choice. We shall look at both types in this unit.

We hope you will enjoy reading the passages. Do attempt the exercises that follow each section.

6.2 PASSAGE FROM HEMINGWAY'S 'THE SHORT HAPPY LIFE OF FRANCIS MACOMBER'

You shall now read an excerpt from a short story 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber' by Ernest Hemingway, a well-known American writer. Set in Africa, it describes a typical safari (hunting expedition) for visiting big-game hunters. Wilson is the professional hunter who has organised the safari for the benefit of Macomber and his wife, Margot.

Now read the passage slowly and carefully three or four times and try to understand the words and phrases in the context in which they occur. The glossary at the end of the passage will help you with some of the difficult words.

6.2.1 Text

Wilson stood up and puffing on his pipe strolled away, speaking a few words in Swahili to one of the gun-bearers who was standing waiting for him. Macomber and his wife sat on at the table. He was staring at his coffee cup.

"If you make a scene I'll leave you, darling," Margot said quietly.

"No, you won't."

"You can try it and see."

"No," she said. "I won't leave you and you'll behave yourself."

"Behave myself? That's a way to talk. Behave myself."

"Yes. Behave yourself."

"Why don't you try behaving?"

"I've tried it so long. So very long."

"I hate that red-faced swine," Macomber said. "I loathe the sight of him."

"He's really very nice."

"Oh, shut up," Macomber almost shouted. Just then the car came up and stopped in front of the dining tent and the driver and the two gun-bearers got out. Wilson walked over and looked at the husband and wife sitting there at the table.

"Going shooting?" he asked.

"Yes," said Macomber, standing up. "Yes."

"Better bring a woolly. It will be cool in the car." Wilson said.

"I'll get my leather jacket." Margot said.

"The boy has it," Wilson told her. He climbed into the front with the driver and Francis Macomber and his wife sat, not speaking, in the back seat.

Hope the silly beggar doesn't take a notion to blow the back of my head off, Wilson thought to himself. Women *are* a nuisance on safari.

The car was grinding down to cross the river at a pebbly ford in the gray daylight and then climbed, angling up the steep bank, where Wilson had ordered a way shovelled out the day before so they could reach the parklike wooded rolling country on the far side.

It was a good morning, Wilson thought. There was heavy dew and as the wheels went through the grass and low bushes he could smell the odour of the crushed fronds. It was an odour like **verbena** and he liked this early morning smell of the dew, the crushed **bracken** and the look of the tree trunks showing black through the early morning mist, as the car made its way through the untracked, parklike country. He had put the two in the back seat out of his mind now and was thinking about buffalo. The buffalo that he was after stayed in the daytime in a thick swamp where it was impossible to get a shot, but in the night they fed out into an open stretch of country and if he could come between them and their swamp with the car, Macomber would have a good chance at them in the open. He did not want to hunt buff with Macomber in thick cover. He did not want to hunt buff or anything else with Macomber at all, but he was a professional hunter and he had hunted with some rare ones in his time. If they got buff today there would only be rhino to come and the poor man would have gone through his dangerous game and things might pick up. He'd have nothing more to do with the woman and Macomber would get over that too. He must have gone through plenty of that before by the look of things. Poor beggar. He must have a way of getting over it. Well, it was the poor sod's own bloody fault.



He, Robert Wilson, carried a double size cot on safari to accommodate any **windfalls** he might receive. He had hunted for a certain clientele, the international, fast, sporting set, where the women did not feel they were getting their money's worth unless they had shared that cot with the white hunter. He despised them when he was away from them although he liked some of them well enough at the time, but he made his living by them: and their standards were his standards as long as they were hiring him.

They were his standards in all except the shooting. He had his own standards about the killing and they could live up to them or get some one else to hunt them. He knew, too, that they all respected him for this. This Macomber was an odd one though. Damned if he wasn't. Now the wife. Well, the wife. Yes, the wife, hm, the wife. Well, he'd dropped all that. He looked around at them. Macomber sat grim and furious. Margot smiled at him. She looked younger today, more innocent and fresher and not so professionally beautiful. What's in her heart God knows, Wilson thought. She hadn't talked much last night. At that it was a pleasure to see her.

The motor car climbed up a slight rise and went on through the trees and then out into a grassy **prairie**-like opening and kept in the shelter of the tress along the edge, the driver going slowly and Wilson looking carefully out across the prairie and all along its far side. He stopped the car and studied the opening with his field glass. Then he motioned to the driver to go on and the car moved slowly along, the driver avoiding **wart-hog** holes and driving around the mud castles ants had built. Then, looking across the opening. Wilson suddenly turned and said.

"By God, there they are!"

And looking where he pointed, while the car jumped forward and Wilson spoke in rapid Swahili to the driver, Macomber saw three huge, black animals looking almost cylindrical in their long heaviness, like big black tank cars, moving at a gallop across the far edge of the open prairie. They moved at a stiff-necked, stiff-bodied gallop and he could see the upswept wide black horns on their heads as they galloped heads out; the heads not moving.

"They're three old bulls," Wilson said. "We'll cut them off before they get to the swamp."

The car was going a wild forty-five miles an hour across the open and as Macomber watched, the buffalo got bigger and bigger until he could see the gray hairless, **scabby** look of one huge bull and how his neck was a part of his shoulders and the shiny black of his horns as he galloped a little behind the others that were strung out in that steady plunging gait; and then the car swaying as though it had just jumped a road, they drew up close and he could see the plunging hugeness of the bull, and the dust in his sparsely haired hide, the wide boss of horn and his outstretched, wide-nostrilled muzzle, and he was raising his rifle when Wilson shouted, "Not from the car, you fool!" and he had no fear, only hatred of Wilson, while the brakes clamped on and the car skidded, plowing sideways to an almost stop and Wilson was out on one side and he on the other, stumbling as his feet hit the still speeding-by earth, and then he was shooting at the bull as he moved away, hearing the bullets **whunk** into him, emptying his rifle at him as he moved steadily away, finally remembering to get his shots forward into the shoulder, and as he fumbled to

reload, he saw the bull was down. Down on his knees, his big head tossing, and seeing the other two still galloping he shot at the leader and hit him. He shot again and missed and he heard the **carawonging** roar as Wilson shot and saw the leading bull slide forward onto his nose.

“Get that other,” Wilson said. “Now you're shooting!”

But the other bull was moving steadily at the same gallop and he missed, throwing a spout of dirt, and Wilson missed and the dust rose in a cloud and Wilson shouted, “Come on. He's too far!” and grabbed his arm and they were in the car again. Macomber and Wilson hanging on the sides and rocketing swayingly over the uneven ground, drawing up on the steady, plunging, heavy-necked, straight-moving gallop of the bull.

They were behind him and Macomber was filling his rifle, dropping shells onto the ground, jamming it, clearing the jam, then they were almost up with the bull when Wilson yelled “Stop,” and the car skidded so that it almost swung over and Macomber fell forward onto his feet, slammed his bolt forward and fired as far forward as he could aim into the galloping, rounded black back, aimed and shot again, then again, and the bullets, all of them hitting, the roar deafening him, and he could see the bull stagger. Macomber shot again, aiming carefully, and down he came, onto his knees.

“All right,” Wilson said. “Nice work. That's the three.”

Macomber felt a drunken elation.

“How many times did you shoot?” he asked.

“Just three,” Wilson said. “You killed the first bull. The biggest one. I helped you finish the other two. Afraid they might have got into cover. You had them killed. I was just mopping up a little. You shot damn well.”

“Let's go to the car,” said Macomber. “I want a drink.”

“Got to finish off that buff first,” Wilson told him. The buffalo was on his knees and he jerked his head furiously and bellowed in pig-eyed, roaring rage as they came toward him.

“Watch he doesn't get up,” Wilson said. Then “Get a little broadside and take him in the neck just behind the ear.”

Macomber aimed carefully at the centre of the huge, jerking, rage-driven neck and shot. At the shot the head dropped forward.

“That does it,” said Wilson. “Got the spine. They're hell of a looking thing, aren't they?”

“Let's get the drink,” said Macomber. In his life he had never felt so good.

In the car Macomber's wife sat very white faced. “You were marvellous, darling,” she said to Macomber. “What a ride.”

6.2.2 Glossary

verbena:	certain plants which bear clusters of fragrant flowers
bracken:	a cluster or mass of ferns
poor sod:	foolish fellow, to be pitied
windfall:	an unexpected gain or good fortune
prairie:	a tract of grassland, meadow
wart-hog:	African wild pig
scabby:	crust formed on the skin
whunk, carawonging:	onomatopoeic words. Onomatopoeia is use of language in which the actual sound of the word suggests their meaning.

6.2.3 Discussion

The extract begins at the point the husband and wife quarrel bitterly over Margot's act of unfaithfulness. She had quietly slipped into Wilson's large bed the previous night, and Macomber had obviously got wind of it; but Margot turns the tables on him by insisting that he should ignore the incident otherwise she would leave him. Macomber succumbs sheepishly realising that she was the stronger of the two.

This part of the narrative is apparently from the author's/the assumed central observer's point of view. Then the point of view shifts to Wilson. One of the things to be noted about this narrative is that some of the events are presented in the form of dialogues or conversations between the characters, while others are reported. Some of the thoughts and reactions of the characters, mainly Wilson's and Macomber's, are also reported from the authorial angle without comments or any kind of involvement.

However, Wilson's point of view is more extensively and intimately presented, while Macomber's private thoughts are only indicated in passing, Macomber's humiliation at the hands of Margot is hardly reflected in the narrative. It is through Wilson's reported thoughts that we learn about Macomber's unenviable plight.

Wilson is, as a professional hunter, extremely competent in dealing with the safari; he had planned every move, provided for every contingency. The lives of his hosts were secure in his hands and he was prepared for any crisis that might develop. He also took his pleasures as they came, without any serious moral scruples. But he respected the rules of the game, and earned the admiration of his clients, while giving them complete satisfaction by his expert knowledge of animals and of the hazards that had to be faced. Wilson was able to locate the best game, prepared the ground well, and made those who hired him feel that they had their money's worth.

The hunt is narrated partly in the form of dialogues, and partly by recreating the exhilaration of participating in the action that followed. The narrative is made dramatic with the help of some of the cinematographic effects like close-up and recording the rapid breathless succession of events. The narrative manages to capture the immediacy of the events that quickly follow each other, as though flashed on the screen. The steady gallop of the bulls; the

swaying motion of the speeding car on an uneven terrain, the perceptions and reactions of Macomber as they gradually drew up close to the buffaloes, the rude directions of Wilson not to shoot from the car, Macomber's own sharply rising anger and hatred towards Wilson, the sudden braking of the car and his feet hitting the 'still speeding-by earth' are all vividly conveyed by the narrative in a memorable fashion. In the skilled hands of Hemingway the syntax recreates the illusion of the wild energy and frantic movements of the chase and the shooting down of the fierce bulls. This part of the action is narrated from the point of view of Macomber.

The style of the passage calls for special attention. The normal logical order of the syntax is deliberately dislocated in such a way as to present the events in psychologically and physically completed units, rather than in the form of separate sentences. Macomber's attention shifts from the speeding of the car to the physical details of the galloping bulls as they draw closer, until the leading bull was within the range of the rifle. The hairy body, 'the sparsely haired hide' and 'the wide boss of horn' were clearly visible, and the laboured breathing of the bull was indicated by the 'outstretched, wide-nostrilled muzzle' as the bull vainly attempted to escape from the speeding car and the determined pursuers. The first part of the action was complete only with the fall of the first bull. The last bull was chased and shot down in much less time, but the whole process again is narrated in a similar fashion of a completed unit of action rather than in the form of logically constructed, grammatically complete sentences. Also there are unusual expressions such as 'long heaviness', 'plunging hugeness of the bull,' 'still speeding-by earth', 'straight-moving gallop'.

Check Your Progress 1

Answer the following questions in about fifty words each.

- i) While the points of view of Macomber and Wilson are presented, we are not able to see things from the point of view of Margot. What is Hemingway trying to do?

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- ii) Are the points of view of Wilson and Macomber presented ironically? Which one is more important from the point of view of the narrative?

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6.3 PASSAGE FROM WOLE SOYINKA'S AKE

The passage we shall now examine is taken from Wole Soyinka's autobiography, *Ake'*, which covers the first ten years of his life, spent in a small town of the same name as the title of the book, in Nigeria. The little Wole was four and a half years old when the incident that is narrated here took place. His father was the headmaster of a school. Wole was quite a curious and adventurous little boy: he once followed a police band all the way from Aki to Ibara, a distance of several miles, a difficult journey for someone of his age. He was completely absorbed in the procession and the music, in the company of the boys who joined it at various points on the way, without realising that they kept dropping off while others joined the procession. Wole was the only one still left with the band when it arrived in Ibara. The episode begins at the concluding stage of this long march, just before the parade was dismissed by the British police officer.

Now read the passage two or three times carefully and try to understand the words and phrases in the context in which they occur. The glossary at the end of the passage will help you with some of the difficult words. The Kutis are the family of Daodu Kuti, principal of the Grammar School.



6.3.1 Text

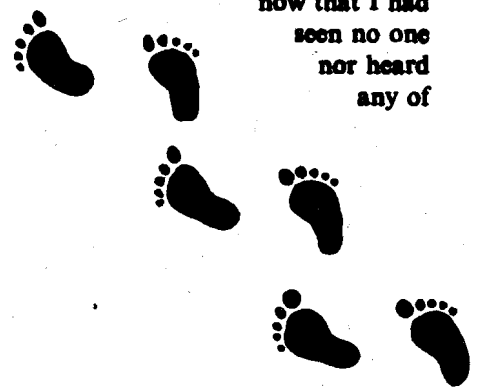
I felt rather uplifted as I marched away from the Grammar School. I was going there, that was settled.

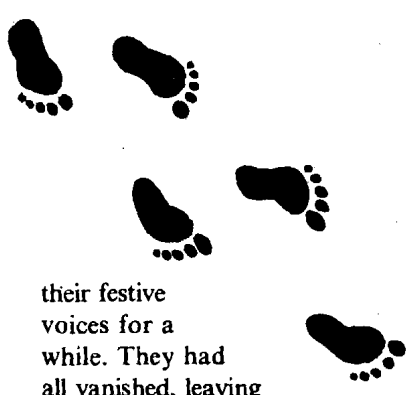
But I also discovered that I liked the Kutis. Schooling under Daodu promised to be an adventure. This light-headed feeling helped me up the road towards Ibara which was so steep that my legs, for the first time, gave a hint of tiring. I had begun to think that I would have to sit down beside the road and rest when we came to yet another compound with neat rows of houses, small hut-like houses which were however built with concrete and roofed with iron sheets. The Sergeant at the top of the column barked out an order and the band wheeled into the compound and entered. They marched straight towards the longest of these buildings, on to the grounds in front of it and re-grouped themselves to different orders from the Sergeant. They were still in two lines, but now they stood shoulder to shoulder and marked time on one spot. I kept the same distance from them as I was when they began to line the grounds, indeed, I had slowed down when they entered the compound so that I was not really far from the gate. An order was given, the music stopped with a final drum-roll and a violent clash of cymbals. The air was very still.



And then I made a discovery. I was alone. The ragged, motley group of children who had followed, clowning, mimicking, even calling out orders had fallen off one by one.

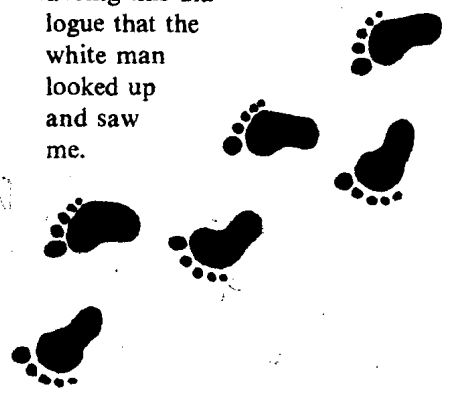
It occurred to me now that I had seen no one nor heard any of





their festive voices for a while. They had all vanished, leaving no one but me. And then I made another discovery. In a matter of fact way, I realized that I did not know where I was.

The Sergeant spun round on his heels barked out some sentences in a very strange language to somebody hidden within the building. That person now came out, smartly uniformed. The first thing that struck me about him was that he was albino. Then the next moment I realized that he was not an albino at all but a white man. Also that, unlike the marching policemen, he wore shoes. He was dressed simply in khaki, so I knew that he was also a policeman. His appearance however bore very little resemblance to that of the band. He stood on the steps of his office while the Sergeant called out yet another order which made the lines stiffen up. Another was called and they appeared to relax. The Sergeant then continued in the same language within which I succeeded in catching a few English words and name-places. He appeared to be 'reporting' something, the 'Oba's palace' was involved in it, and it all ended with 'all correct' and 'further orders'. The white man spoke a few words. The Sergeant gave two more barks and the parade broke up and went their different ways, all except the Sergeant. He stayed with the white officer and they spoke some more; it was during this dialogue that the white man looked up and saw me.




I was tired, I was sure of that now. The thought of running away at once when the man looked up, saw me, pointed and said something to the Sergeant therefore remained just a thought. I had no idea in which direction to run. The Sergeant also looked up, turned and began to march towards me. I probably would have run then, tiredness and all, but the white officer restrained him and came forward himself, the Sergeant following close. Instinctively I backed one step towards the gate, but the man smiled, held out both hands in a gesture I did not quite understand, and approached. When he had come quite close, he bent down and, using the most unlikely accent I had ever heard asked,

“Kini o fe nibi yen?”*

I knew the words were supposed to be in my own language but they made no sense to me, so I looked at the Sergeant helplessly and said.

“I don't understand. What is he saying?”

The officer's eyes opened wide. “Oh, you speak English.”

I nodded.

“Good. That is venhrry clenver. I was asking, what do you want? What can I doon for you?”

“I want to go home.”

He exchanged looks with the Sergeant. “Well, that seems vum-vum-vum. And where is home?”

I could not understand why he should choose to speak through his nose. It made it difficult to understand him all the time but by straining hard, I could make sense of his questions. I told him that I lived in Ake.

“It has a big church.” I added, “just outside our walls.”

“Ah-ah, near the church. Tell me, Whaznname?” I guessed that he was asking what my name was, so I told him. “My name is Wole.”

“Wonlay. Good. And your father's name?”

“My father's name is Headmaster.”

“What?”

“My father's name is Headmaster. Sometimes his name is Essay.”

For some reason this amused him immensely, which I found offensive. There was no reason why my father's names should be the cause for such laughter. But the Sergeant had reacted differently. His eyes nearly popped out of his head. I noticed then that he was very different from the grown-ups whom I had seen around. He had long marks on his face, quite different from the usual

* literally: what do you want there?

kind we encountered in Ake. And when he spoke, his voice sounded like that of the Hausa traders who brought wares to our house for bartering with old clothes and strange assortments of items. It was a strange procedure, one which made little sense to me. They spread their wares in front of the house and I had to be **prised off** them. There were brass figures, horses, camels, trays, bowls, ornaments. Human figures spun on a podium, balanced by weights at the end of curved light metal rods. We spun them round and round, yet they never fell off their narrow perch. The smell of fresh leather filled the house as **pouffes**, handbags, slippers and worked **scabbards** were unpacked. There were bottles encased in leather, with leather stoppers, amulets on leather thongs, scrolls, glass beads, bottles of scent with exotic names—I never forgot, from the first moment I read it on the label—Bint el Sudan, with its picture of a turbaned warrior by a kneeling camel. A veiled maiden offered him a bowl of fruits. They looked unlike anything in the Orchard and Essay said they were called dates. I did not believe him: dates were the figures which appeared on a calendar on the wall, so I took it as one of his jokes.

Once or twice my father tried to offer money but the trader proved difficult. “No, I can like to take changey-changey.” Out came old shirts, trousers, discarded jackets with holes under the armpit, yet Changey-changey—as we now called him—actually received these **clothing derelicts** in return for his genuine “morocco” leather. “Look am master, a no be lie. Look, genuine morocco leather.” E fit you big man like you must have leather brief-case for carry file. “Ebe genuine. Put am one more shirt. Or torosa.”

Their voices were so similar that they could only be brothers. I was even more convinced of it when I heard him say, “If na headmaster of Ake be in father, I sabbe the place. But what, im doing here?”

They both turned to me. I had no answer to the question. Then the white man asked. “Are you lost?”

“I followed the band.” I replied.

The officer nodded sagely, as if everything had fallen in place. He turned to the Sergeant and asked him to get his bicycle. The man saluted and went off. Something continued to puzzle the officer however. He put his hand on my shoulder and guided me towards the office.

“How old are you?”

“I am four years and a half.”

He let out a loud “What!”, stopped, and looked at me again. “Are you sure?” I nodded. He looked at me more closely, said, “Yes, of course. Of course. And you walked from Ake? Where did you start from?”

“At the cenotaph. There were other children, but they left me.”

We reached his office and he lifted me on to a chair. “Are you thirsty?” already producing a bottle of orange squash. There was a jar of water on the table and he mixed me a drink in a glass. I drank it to the last drop.

“Do you want another glass?” He did not wait for a reply before mixing another and handing it to me. It followed its predecessor just as rapidly. I began to feel better. I looked round the office for the first time, stretched my legs and took an interest in the papers on the table. I recognized a journal on it which came every week to my father. I looked at the man with greater interest.

“You are reading my father’s paper”.

He looked startled. “Which one?”

“That one. In Leisure Hours.”

“Really! You say it’s your father’s paper?”

“Yes. He has a new one every week.”

He opened it rapidly, looking for something on its pages. “You mean he is the editor?”

I could not understand him. I repeated, “He has it every week.”

And then the man grinned and nodded. “I see, I see.”

I was feeling drowsy. The Sergeant arrived with his bicycle. Half-awake, I felt myself lifted on to the cross-bar and the bumpy ride began. I barely sensed the arrival back home, hands lifting me up, passing me to other arms. My head appeared to weigh a ton when I tried to come awake and respond to the babble of voices I heard around me. I felt the immense expanse of the bed in mother's bedroom coming up to meet me, the room easily recognized by the smell of *ori** and camphor. Then I dropped into oblivion.

I woke up in a hazy semi-darkness. A short while later, I realized where I was. I also felt a huge pit in my stomach and climbed down from the bed, heading for the kitchen to see what hour of meal it was. When I opened the door, a wave of human voices engulfed me. The entire front room was crowded with grown-ups and they all seemed to be speaking with excitement. So I turned and walked towards the sound. As I came through the parlour I pushed open the curtain in the intervening door and suddenly everything went silent. A hundred pairs of eyes were turned on me, and I wondered what the matter was. In the silence I spoke out the only thing on my mind:

“I am hungry.”

Mouths opened wide. Then the silence was broken by the bookseller’s wife. She struck her palms together in a gesture of amazement and exclaimed. “E-ch! Omo nla! Did you hear him? He is hungry.”

A babble of voices ensued, mostly echoing the bookseller’s wife. I could not understand that there should be such excitement over the fact of my hunger. It looked like evening in any case, and I had not eaten all day. Then I heard my father’s voice cutting in, and he appeared to be smiling.

* shea-butter

“Well, it seems only natural that he should be hungry. Wouldn't you be, after a walk from Ake to Ibara?”

6.3.2 Glossary

prised off:	taken off with difficulty, with force
pouffes:	a large firm cushion used as a low seat
scabbard:	a case for a sword or dagger
clothing derelicts:	cast-off clothes

6.3.3 Discussion

The narrative is autobiographical and therefore has only a single point of view. This, of course, does not prevent the same person, the author, from having more than one point of view, as a child for example, and later as an adult, when he is in a better position to look back and see things and events in a different perspective. The episode, however, is told consistently through the eyes of the protagonist. There are no knowing winks and wise asides from the adult author and this is probably why the authenticity of the narrative is so well-preserved. Everything is narrated from a simple, consistent point of view, which is that of a boy about four years old. The humour, the drama and the kindly dramatic irony are genuine and carefully controlled, without the narrative lapsing into sentiment or vague generalities. Wole was, if anything, precocious and knowledgeable beyond his years, but the basic innocence of childhood was very much present in all his thinking, actions and reactions.

Wole happened to hear the band playing outside his home and slipped out of the gate and joined the procession without anyone noticing him. The band consisted of policemen who were on a routine march from Ake to Ibara. The music so appealed to Wole that he hardly realised that he was being carried away by it, with frequent stops at various street corners. Wole got his first opportunity to see the outside world with shops displaying wares of every kind, the markets with their strangely attractive and bewildering merchandise, and the endless groups of curious and excited children who accompanied the procession for some distance and fell off as it moved forward. It attracted large crowds, but it was never the same crowd that was with the band all along, which little Wole failed to notice until it was too late. This was the first occasion that he was allowed outside, unescorted. The passage begins at the point the band finally arrives in Ibara, leaving Wole totally exhausted, and with the realisation that he was hopelessly lost.

Luckily for Wole, events took an unexpected turn. The British Officer felt concerned to see the child looking tired and lost. Although in the beginning he was a little frightened, Wole's self-possession did not desert him. His confidence and his knowledge of English greatly impressed the officer, who, realising what had happened, gave him some orange squash and had him sent back home safely on the Sergeant's bicycle.

Fortunately the Sergeant who belonged to the Hausa tribe, remembered the headmaster and his household in Ake where he himself probably lived with his brother, who was a petty trader. Wole recalled how fascinated he was by the leather goods and brassware that the Hausa traders brought to his house and bartered in exchange for old clothes, refusing to accept money. This part of the narrative is set further back in time, as a narrative within a narrative.

Some of the humour in the passage is provided by Wole's own innocence. His father, addressed HM or Headmaster by practically everyone, was also known by his initials, S.A., which Wole interpreted to mean Essay, which he thought was particularly appropriate because of his father's formal manner and fastidious ways and cultivated handwriting. Wole claimed that the journal that he saw on the officer's table was his father's. Similarly, he was quite dogmatic that 'dates' could only mean the dates in a calendar, and he believed that his father was joking when he called a variety of fruit "dates". At the conclusion of the adventure, the entire household wondered how Wole had managed to walk the entire distance from Ake to Ibara. It was an extraordinary achievement, but Wole saw it in terms of how hungry he was and was mainly interested in what he was being given to eat. The narrative is full of such instances which are related in a matter-of-fact way. This makes for the delightful humorous effects that we experienced, as we read the passage.

Check Your Progress II

- i) How does the writer suggest that the four-year old boy was able to walk the distance that would normally have been considered impossible for such a young child, without clearly stating it in Wole's own words? The small child has walked an incredible distance. How then is this suggested in the narrative?

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6.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have seen how :

- the narrative is handled from different points of view;
- syntax captures the rapidity and breathless excitement of pursuit;
- in autobiography the point of view of the narrative is that of the protagonist but the authenticity of the experience is preserved by maintaining a strict artistic detachment.

6.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- i) You will notice that Margot's role is very minor and is largely passive as far as the story is concerned. She has a role only in relation to Macomber and Wilson.

- ii) Wilson is a more professional and experienced hunter, while Macomber is obviously an amateur. However, the actual hunt is described and the excitement of the hunt is captured by presenting it through the eyes of Macomber.

Check Your Progress II

- i) The writer makes no direct statement about the child's having walked an incredible distance. This is conveyed by the reactions of the elders and especially that of his father. If you turn to the end of the passage, you will notice expressions such as 'a hundred pairs of eyes', and 'mouths opened wide'. It is the use of such expressions that conveys the impression indirectly.

UNIT 7 NARRATIVE PROSE-3

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Passage from A.K. Ramanujan's *A Folk Tale*
 - 7.2.1 Text
 - 7.2.2 Discussion
- 7.3 Passage from Golding's *The Inheritors*
 - 7.3.1 Text
 - 7.3.2 Explanation
- 7.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.5 Answers to Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will read two more interesting selections of narrative prose. After reading this unit carefully, you will be able to:

- identify unusual and very individual styles of narration;
- explain how the point of view determines the manner of narration;
- list the features of a type of narrative that performs a dual function.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit presents two samples of individualised narrative. As we shall see, the shape and stylistic features of the narrative might be representative of an individual as well as a whole culture or way of life. The narrative's point of view determines not only the content of the narration but also the manner. In other words, the artistic design may make the narrative style in some respects unique and complex, making it more challenging and demanding than a straightforward objective kind of reporting. Such narratives are a feature of contemporary literature and it is important that readers develop the sensitivity to be able to respond to such artistic challenges.

7.2 PASSAGE FROM A. K. RAMANUJAN'S FOLK TALE "IN SEARCH OF A DREAM"

This first specimen is a folktale originally told in Santhali language. Santhals are tribals who inhabit remote regions of Jharkhand and Bengal and who till recently did not have a script or a written literature. Most folk tales, no matter which part of the world they are from, belong to a primarily oral culture. Santhali is perhaps one of the few languages in which you can still find a living, extant oral style of story telling being narrated or sung. A. K.

Ramanujan as a poet, translator and scholar was deeply interested in indigenous forms of literature and as an anthropologist had a vast repertoire of folk tales collected from all over India. These, whether found in written form or as parts of a practising living culture, have been translated and documented his collection of folk-tales and subject of much critical discussion in his essays on the subject. The features and narrative characteristics of oral storytelling are vastly different from a literary rendering. This is because the context of oral stories is not mediated through the page. A novel or a story in its written form can be read in the luxury of solitary association, earmarked, pondered over, reread or gone back to. But live storytelling is both narration and performance with a keen live audience absorbing all relevant elements of the story which would be lost if the audience is not alert enough. Read the following story imaginatively, entering not just the fictive world of the story but the absent world of the performance of this story in a Santhali tribal village, to understand the true context of the story.

7.2.1 The Text

A raja had no children by his first wife. So he married a second wife, who bore him two sons, and they were all very happy that the raja now had two heirs. But as it often happens, after the two sons had been born, the elder queen also gave birth to a son. This led to endless quarrels, for the younger queen had counted on her sons succeeding to the kingdom, but now feared that the raja might prefer the son of his elder queen. She used all her wiles to persuade him to send away the elder queen and her son. The raja listened to her, gave the first wife a separate estate and house, and sent her away.

One night the raja had a dream, the meaning of which he could not understand. He dreamed that he saw a golden leopard and a golden snake and a golden monkey dancing together. The raja could not rest till he had found out the meaning of the dream, so he sent for his younger wife and her two sons and consulted them. They could give him no explanation, but the younger son said that he had a feeling that his half-brother, the son of the elder queen, could interpret the dream. So that son was sent for, and when he heard the story of the dream, he said, "This is the interpretation: The three golden animals represent the three brothers, for we are like gold to you. God has sent you this dream so that we may not fight hereafter. We cannot all three succeed to the kingdom, and we shall surely fight if one is chosen as the heir. The dream means to say that whichever of us can find a golden leopard, a golden snake, and a golden monkey and make them dance together before the people, he shall be your principal son and shall be your heir." The raja was pleased with this interpretation and told his three sons that he would give the kingdom to the one who could find the three animals by the same day of the coming year.

The sons of the younger queen went away and thought about it, and decided it was useless for them even to try to find those dream animals. Even if they got a goldsmith to make the animals, they would never be able to make them dance.

But the son of the elder queen went to his mother and told her all that had happened, and she told him not to lose heart and he would find the animals. If he went to a *gosain*, a Vaishnava ascetic who lived in the jungle, he would find out what to do.

So the raja's son set out, and after traveling for some days found himself in a dense jungle when it was nightfall. Wandering about, he at last saw a fire burning in the distance. So he went to it, sat down by it, and began to smoke. Now, the *gosain* was sleeping nearby. The smell of the smoke woke him up, and he rose and asked who was there.

"Uncle, it's me, your nephew."

"Really, is it you, my nephew? Where have you come from so late at night?"

"From home, Uncle."

"What made you remember me now? You have never visited me before. I'm afraid something has happened."

"Oh, really nothing terrible. I've come to you because my mother tells me that you can help me find the golden leopard and the golden snake and the golden monkey."

At this the *gosain* promised to help the raja's son to find the animals, and then put a cooking pot on the fire to boil. In it he put only three grains of rice, but when it was cooked they found that they had enough for two meals. When they had eaten, the *gosain* said, "Nephew, I cannot really tell you what you have to do. But farther on in the jungle lives my younger brother. Go to him and he will tell you."

So the next morning the raja's son set out, and in two days reached the second *gosain* and told him what he wanted. This *gosain* listened to his story and also put a cooking pot on to boil, and in it he threw just two grains of rice. When it was cooked, there was enough for both of them. After the meal, the *gosain* said that he could not tell him where the animals could be found, but that his younger brother would know. So the next morning the raja's son continued his journey, and in two days he came to the third *gosain* and there he learned what was to be done. This *gosain* also put a pot on to boil, but in the pot he put only one grain of rice. Yet, when he cooked, it was enough for a meal for both of them.

In the morning, the *gosain* told the raja's son to go to a blacksmith and have a shield made of twelve *mounds* of iron, with an edge so sharp that a leaf falling on it would cut in two. So he went to the blacksmith and had the shield made, and took it to the *gosain*. The *gosain* said that first they must test it, and set it edgewise under a tree and told the raja's son to climb the tree and shake some leaves down. The raja's son climbed the tree and shook the branches, and not a leaf fell. Then the *gosain* climbed the tree and gave the tree the gentlest of shakes, and the leaves fell in showers and every leaf that touched the edge of the shield was cut into two. The *gosain* was satisfied that the shield was made exactly as he wanted it.

Then the *gosain* told the raja's son that farther on in the jungle he would find a pair of snakes living in a bamboo house, and that they had a daughter whom they never allowed to come out of the house. He must fix the sharp shield in the doorway of the house and hide himself in a tree. When the snakes come out, they would be cut into pieces. Then he should go to the daughter, and she would show him where to find the golden animals. So the raja's son set out and at about noon came to the house of the snakes, he set the shield in the doorway as the *gosain* had told him. That evening when the snakes tried to come out of their house, they were cut to pieces. A little later, when the daughter peeped out to see what had happened to her parents, the prince saw

her. She was not a snake, but a very beautiful woman. He quickly went to her, and began to talk, and it did not take long for them to fall in love. He consoled her, and the snake maiden soon forgot her sorrow over her parents' death. She and the raja's son lived together in the bamboo house for many days.

The snake maiden had strictly forbidden him to go anywhere to the west or south of the house. But one day the raja's son disobeyed her and wandered away to the west. After going a short distance, he saw golden leopards dancing, and as soon as he set eyes on them, he himself was changed into a golden leopard and began to dance with them. The snake maiden soon knew what had happened, and she led him back and restored him back to his own shape.

A few days later, the raja's son went towards the south, and there he found golden snakes dancing at the edge of a tank. As soon as he saw them, he was changed into a golden snake and joined the dance. Again the snake maiden fetched him and restored him to his own shape. But again the raja's son went out, this time to the southwest, and there he saw the golden monkeys dancing together under a banyan tree. When he laid eyes on them, he too became a golden monkey. Again the snake maiden brought him back and restored him to human shape.

After this the raja's son said that it was time for him to go back home. The snake maiden asked him why he had come there at all, and he told her all about the raja's dream. Now that he had found the golden animals, he could go home.

"What about me?" cried the snake maiden. "Kill me first. You have killed my parents and I cannot live here alone."

"No, I will not kill you. I'll take you home with me," said the raja's son, which delighted the snake maiden. Then the raja's son asked how he could take the golden animals with him. So far he had only seen them. The snake maiden said that if he faithfully promised never to desert her nor take another wife, she would produce the animals for him when the time came. So he swore he would never leave her, and they set out for his home.

When they reached the place where the third *gosain* lived, the raja's son said he had promised to visit him on his way home and show him the golden animals. Now he did not know what to do because he did not have the animals with him. Then the snake maiden tied three knots in his upper cloth and told him to untie them when the *gosain* asked to see the animals. So the raja's son went to see the *gosain*, and the *gosain* asked whether he had brought the golden leopard and snake and monkey.

"I'm not sure," answered the raja's son, "but I've something tied up in my cloth." But when he untied the three knots, he found in them a clod of earth, a potsherd, and a piece of charcoal. He threw them away in disgust, and went back to the maiden and asked her why she had put such worthless rubbish in his cloth.

"You had no faith," said she. "If you had believed, the animals would not have turned into the clod and the potsherd and the charcoal."

So they moved on till they came to the second *gosain*, who also asked to see the golden animals. This time, the raja's son set his mind hard to believe, and when he untied the knots, there appeared a golden leopard, a golden snake, and a golden monkey. Then they went and showed the animals to the third *gosain*, and finally went to his mother's house.

When the appointed day came, the raja's son sent word to his father to have a number of booths and shelters erected on a large field, and to have a covered way made from his mother's house to the field. Then he would show the dancing animals. So the raja gave the necessary orders, and on the day fixed for the event people gathered to see the fun. Then the raja's son brought the three animals to the field, and his wife hid herself in the covered way and caused the animals to dance. The people stayed watching all day till evening and reluctantly went home. That night all the booths and shelters turned into houses of gold. When he saw this, the raja left his younger wife and her children and went to live with his first wife.

And the raja's son married the snake maiden, inherited the kingdom, and ruled it justly and happily.

7.2.2 Discussion

The story above follows a very predictable and yet incredible storyline like many other fairy or folk tales that you may have read. A virtuous heir has his rightful position usurped by elements that disturb the balance of justice in the kingdom but only temporarily so. An opportunity arises that gives the rightful heir a chance to win back the position due to him by unquestionable laws of natural inheritance. He does that displaying ingenuity, discrimination, tact and even cunning when necessary, all qualities that are required in an heir incumbent. The story weaves in it not only elements that address social and ethical anxieties about having the rightful Prince rule the throne, it also has elements of a classic quest romance culminating in the hero's marriage to a faithful maiden who also becomes a prime accessory in leading him to the final destination in his trial. It has supernatural elements and those that belong to liminal, subjective levels of human experience like dreams, death, mourning, animal transmogrification, magic etc. But let us leave the thematic elements of the story and look at the structural elements. How is the story different from those that are written and read in a fully literate culture, in terms of narrative aspects like plot progression, characterization etc.?

Well, the very first thing to realize is the fact that oral cultures are fundamentally different from written literature, because in oral cultures there are no permanent texts. There are only stories which are told in various situations, to different audiences according to the varying memory of the speaker who partly remembers and partly improvises the story. The various structural elements of such a tale are directed towards ready recollection and immediate effect. This accounts for the formulaic elements of the tale which function as the grooves on which the story moves steadily with sudden spurts of innovation thrown in to keep interest alive. Characters and situations are portrayed in broad, readily identifiable strokes for the pattern of continuity to be maintained, which is to say that unlike a novel where a character is more effectively rendered in the detail that makes them unique, in a tale it is the representative qualities or the typicality of the character that are important.

There is no physical description of any character, but we are to assume that the prince was tall and handsome as princes are supposed to be. The dialogue is unimpeded by any function of revealing the character, and characters are unambiguously flat. For example if you were asked to come up with a character portrayal of the snake-maiden in the story (the character perhaps most difficult to understand owing to her non-human, mysterious qualities) you wouldn't find much in the story to substantiate whatever your views are.

Folk tales also have patterns of repetition which again aid both the speaker and the listener as tools to remember the tale by. In the above story you must have noticed how each event takes place thrice before the expected result is arrived at. The successive stages of the prince's journey on his quest are punctuated by meeting a *gosain*, a Vaisnavite holy man, at each step. There are mysterious, inexplicable patterns of intensification and reduction at each step. The power of producing a hearty meal with lessening number of grains of rice suggests the escalating spiritual wisdom of each successive *gosain*. It functions narratively to suggest that the prince is moving deeper into the forest and closer towards the end of his quest. It also suggests the increasingly difficult obstacles set to him in his trial, each one more difficult than the preceding. Similarly while living with the snake maiden, the prince transmogrifies thrice into each of the golden animals that he has to produce as an end result of his test, and additionally pass the final test of faith to succeed. The effect is incantatory and participative. One can easily imagine the empathy that such a narrative device can accomplish with the gradual heightening of suspense. Such stylistic devices encourage a collective, participatory response rather than individual, critical responses, which solidify the sense of a community by re-asserting through the story some of the common values that the community cherishes. Therefore we understand that the dynamics operating through narrative construction are quite different in a folk tale than in more complex, literate forms of storytelling.

Check Your Progress I

- i) Identify the narrative devices in the above story that you will not expect to find in a realistic novel.

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- ii) What kind of audience reaction do such devices accomplish? How do you think these stories function in their original social context?

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The next passage we shall take up for close study is an extract from William Golding's novel *The Inheritors*. *The Inheritors* is a 'difficult' novel in the sense that it attempts to capture the mental as well as the physical life of our primitive ancestor, the Neanderthal man, who was the immediate predecessor of *homo sapiens* from whom present-day humanity is descended. Golding recreates the history of 'the people' who were doomed to extinction by the very fact that the 'new people' were more intelligent and civilised; they wore clothes made of skin, navigated the rivers and the sea using boats, hunted and ate flesh, unlike 'the people' who considered it 'wicked' to kill and mostly lived on berries and fruit and vegetable matter and only occasionally ate meat that was left after a kill by 'cats'. The 'new people' manufactured and drank liquor, offered human sacrifice and were ruthless and savage in their ways. In the words of H.G. Well (who Golding quotes) "We know very little of the appearances of the Neanderthal man, but this... seems to suggest an extreme hairiness, an ugliness, or a repulsive strangeness in his appearance over and above his low forehead, his beetle brows, his ape neck, and his inferior stature...." Straightforward description of our earliest ancestors might not have been beyond the ability of most writers of fiction, but Golding is not content with that. Instead, he undertakes the challenging task of trying to enter the primitive consciousness and to see the world as 'the people' then saw it, when mankind was still in the process of evolution, when man was just one of the creatures, the hunted rather than the hunter, struggling to survive against odds, and not as today, when man has set out to master the secrets of not only the earth but the entire cosmos. Attempting a narrative of this primitive kind raises numerous problems of communication with the reader. There is the difficulty of imaginatively presenting reality that 'primitive man saw differently from the way we would see it now. Besides presenting the unfamiliar, there is the added difficulty of narrating the seemingly obvious and simple processes and events which seem obscure but become clearer through re-reading.

Therefore, in some places it is difficult to understand both the content and the manner of the narrative because of their lack of ready correspondence with our settled ways of perception and the natural mode of the narrative structure. Language embodies much of man's collective experience and power of reasoning and observation.

Let us now turn to the extract. Lok and Fa are the only two survivors of 'the people', the rest of whom have either died or been killed or captured by the 'new people' who had moved up the river in their boats. They had camped near the river bank in a clearing that had a dead tree thickly covered with ivy. Fa and Lok had taken shelter in the tree before the 'new people' had arrived on the scene. They were hoping to recapture the two children, Liku and the baby. Liku and the 'new one' had earlier been adopted by the 'new people' after killing the grown-ups. Liku was actually sacrificed in a ceremony that took place while Lok and Fa were hiding in the tree, but Fa had managed to prevent Lok from seeing it, and so he did not know that Liku was no longer alive. Note the way 'the people' perceive actions and events. They think of things as being generally unrelated, independent objects and they have no sense of cause and effect, for example, 'her hands left him.... He heard her

breathing pass by him....' Also Neanderthal man was much closer to the ape and the animal kingdom in so far as his sense of smell was very acute. The 'new people' had lost most of it while they had acquired new skills like better vision, an upright bearing and greater height and they were much slimmer and fairer. They had also learnt to use the bow and arrow and stone implements and to make crude pots for storing and drinking, while 'the people' still went to the river for water and brought it in their cupped hands, for others. You will, therefore, need a few notes to help you along with the passage. Now start reading.

7.3.1 Text

Lok turned to Fa and whispered.

"Now?"

She came close. There was in her voice the same urgency and command as when she had bidden him obey her on the terrace.

"I shall take the new one and jump the thorns. When I have gone, follow."

Lok thought but **no picture would come.**

"Liku——"

Her hands tightened on his body.

"Fa says 'do this!'"

He moved quickly so that the ivy leaves brushed each other harshly.

"But Liku——"

"I have many pictures in my head."

Her hands left him. He lay in the treetop and all the pictures of the day began to spin once more. He heard her breathing pass by him and sink into the ivy that rustled again so that he looked quickly into the clearing, but no one stirred. He could just make out the old man's feet sticking out of the **hollow log** and the holes of deep black where the branch caves were. **The fire floated, dull red for the most part, but with a brighter heart where blue flames wandered over the wood.** Tuami came out of the cave, stood by the fire, looking down at it. Fa was already half out of the ivy and clinging to the thick branches in the river side of the tree. Tuami took a branch and began to rake the hot ashes together so that they sparkled and sent up a puff of smoke and **winking points.** The **crumpled woman** crept out and took the branch from him and for a moment or two they stood swaying and talking. Tuami went away into a cave and the moment after Lok heard a crash as he fell among dry leaves. He waited for the woman to go; but first she dug earth round the fire until there was nothing but a black **hummock** with a glowing mouth at the top. She carried a sod to the fire and dumped it on the mouth so that the grass flared and crackled while a wave of light shook out over the clearing. She stood, quivering at the end of her long shadow, the light faltered

and went out. He half heard, half sensed her as she went feeling towards the cave, fell on hands and knees and crawled inside.

His night-sight came back to him. The clearing was very still again and he heard the noise of Fa's skin scraping against the old bark of the trees as she let herself down. An immediacy of danger came to him; the knowledge that they were about to cheat these strange people and all their inscrutable works, the awful knowledge of Fa creeping towards them caught him by the throat so that he could not breathe and his **heart began to shake him**. He gripped the rotten wood and cowered behind the ivy with his eyes shut, seeking without knowing for those hours when **the dead tree was relatively safe**. The scent of Fa rose up to him from the fireward side of the tree and he **shared a picture with her of a cave with a great bear standing at the mouth of it**. The scent ceased to rise, the picture disappeared and he knew that she had become eyes and ears and nose crawling noiselessly towards the cave by the fire.

His heart slowed a little and his breathing so that he could look again at the clearing. The moon soared from the edge of a thick cloud and poured a grey blue light over the forest. He could see Fa, flattened by the light, clutched down to the ground and not more than twice her length from the dark mound of the fire. The cloud was succeeded by another and the clearing was full of darkness. **Over by the thorns that blocked the entry to the trail** he heard the guard choke and struggle to his feet. There came **the sound of vomiting** and then a long moan. **Feelings mixed themselves in Lok**. He had a half-thought that the new people might choose suddenly to be as they were: to stand up, talk and be wary or infinitely knowing and secure in their strength. With this was mixed a **picture of Fa not daring to run first across the log by the terrace**; and this feeling of warmth and urgent desire to be with her was part of it. He moved in the ivy cup, parted the leaves towards the river and felt for the branches on the trunk. He let himself down quickly before the feelings had time to change and make an obedient Lok of him; he stood in the long grass at the foot of the dead tree. Now the thought of Liku possessed him and he crept past the tree and tried to see which cave contained her. Fa was moving towards the cave on the right of the fire. Lok moved to the left, he sank on all fours and crept towards the cave that had grown beyond the logs and the pile of unsorted bundles. **The hollow logs were lying where the people had left them as though they too had drunk of the honey drink** and the old man's feet still struck out of the nearer one. **Lok cowered under the height of the log and sniffed cautiously at the foot above him**. It had no toes or rather—now he was able to get so close to it—it was covered in hide like the peoples' waists and it smelt strongly of cow and sweat. Lok lifted his eyes above his nose and looked over the edge of the log. The old man was lying full length in it, his mouth open, and he was snoring through his **thin, pointed nose**. The hair prickled on Lok's body and he ducked down as though the old man's eyes had been open. He cowered in the torn earth and grass by the log, and now that his nose was adjusted to the old man, it discounted him, for there were many other bits of information coming to it. The logs, for example, were connected with the sea. The white on their sides was sea-white, bitter and evocative of beaches and the ceaseless progression of the waves. There was the smell of **pine-tree gum, of a peculiarly thick and fiery sort of mud** that his nose could identify as different but not name. There were the smells of many men and women and children and, finally, most obscurely but none the

less powerfully, there was the smell compounded of many that had sunk beneath the threshold of separate identification into the one smell of extreme age.

Lok stilled his flesh and the pricking of his hair and crawled along by the log until he came to where the **round stones** had been left a little way from the hot but lightless fire. They maintained their own atmosphere, a smell so powerful that his mind could see it like a glow or a cloud round the holes in the top. The smell was like the new people, **it repelled and attracted**, it daunted and enticed, it was like the fat woman and at the same time like **the terror of the stag and the old man**. Lok was reminded of the stag so strongly that he cowered again; but he could not remember where the stag had gone nor where it came from except that it approached the clearing from behind the dead tree. He turned then, looked up and saw the dead tree with its ivy, vast, shock-headed and impending from the clouds like a cave-bear. He crawled quickly to the hut on the left. The guard over by the thorns groaned again.

Lok smelt his way along the leaning branches at the back of the cave and found a man and a man and another man. There was no smell of Liku unless a sort of generalized smell in his nostrils so faint as to be nothing but an awareness might be connected with her. Wherever he cast over the ground the awareness persisted and would not be tracked down to a source. He grew bold. He gave up his random and fruitless casting and made for the open side of the cave. First the people had set up two sticks and laid one other long stick across the top. Then they had leaned innumerable branches against the long stick so that they formed a leafy overhang in between the fire and the thorns where the guard was. The cut ends of the branches had been forced into the earth in a curving line. Lok crawled to the end of the line and put his head round it cautiously. The noise of breathing and snoring that came from the shapes inside was irregular and loud. Someone was asleep not an arm's length from his face. The someone grunted, belched, turned and an arm fell over so that the open palm of the hand brushed Lok's face. He jerked back, quivering, then leant forward and smelt the hand. It was pale, glistening slightly, helpless and innocent as **Mal's hand**. But it was **narrower and longer and of a different colour in its fungoid whiteness**.

There was a narrow space between the arm and the place where the ends of the branches slanted into the earth. The picture of Liku so maddeningly present and so hidden drove him forward. He did not know what this feeling required him to do but knew that he must do something. He began to draw his body forward slowly into the narrow space **like a snake sliding into a hole**. He felt breath on his face and froze. There was a face not a hand's length from his own. He could feel the tickle of the fantastic hair, could see the long, useless cliff of bony skull that prolonged the head above the eyebrows. He could see the dull gleam of an eye beneath a lid that was not tightly shut, see the **irregular wolf's teeth**, feel now the honey-sour breath on his cheek. **Inside—Lok shared a picture of terror with Fa but outside—Lok was coldly brave and still as ice.**

7.3.2 Explanations

The extract narrates events that occurred late in the night after the 'new people' had retired.

Para One:

no picture would come — Lok and Fa visualised actions and events in 'pictures'. Lok was unable to understand why Fa had decided not to rescue Liku as planned earlier; she is reluctant to tell him that Liku was no longer alive; hence the misunderstanding that follows.

Para Two:

The **hollow log** is a boat. Tuami was one of the 'new people'.

the fire floated... where blue flames wandered over the wood—note the unusual mode of seeing the fire.

winking points—sparks

crumpled woman—in comparison, the 'new people' appear famished and thin to 'the people'.

hummock—raised ground (round the fire)

his heart began to shake him—Lok sees hands, feet and other limbs as acting independently.

the dead tree was relatively safe—once it was day light they could be easily seen and captured by the 'new people'.

shared the pictures with her of a cave with a great bear—the feeling of ultimate terror, which keeps haunting Lok and Fa. Note that this 'picture' keeps recurring.

Para Four:

over by the thorn that blocked the entry to the trail—the 'new people' had created an enclosure by placing thorny branches for greater security and posted guards for the night.

the sound of vomiting—they brewed a strong drink with fermented honey; the guard had obviously had too much to drink.

feelings mixed themselves in Lok—Note the way actions and emotions are perceived. We would normally say: 'Lok had mixed feeling'.

picture of Fa not daring to run first across the log by the terrace—Fa had suddenly realized that she was bolder and more capable than Lok and that she had to lead. However, Lok remembered an earlier occasion when Fa was afraid to cross the river near the terrace where a single log was placed across it. He was naturally anxious for her and felt fiercely protective.

make an obedient Lok of him—Fa had clearly instructed him to follow her **after** she had rescued the 'new' one'. But Lok could not bear the thought of leaving Liku behind. Liku was Lok's daughter by another woman, who had

been killed earlier by the 'new people'. Lok was unaware that Liku had been sacrificed by them during the ritual Fa and he had witnessed; but Fa was reluctant to let him see it or tell him about it. It was this that led to the rash actions of Lok which caused the final tragedy.

the hollow logs were lying...as though they too had drunk of the honey drink—the basic difference between animate and inanimate things was not always clear to Lok and his people, who often confused them. Note locutions like 'blue flames wandered over the wood'; "the ivy leaves brushed each other harshly" etc., suggesting independent volition, not to be mistaken for mere stylistic variation.

Lok...sniffed cautiously at the foot above him—the old man was the head of the 'new people', the tribal leader, the sorcerer, the wise man. It is indeed remarkable how much Lok learns through his keen sense of smell. The 'new people' are more 'civilized' in that they wore animal skins and shoes, unlike 'the people' who only covered their waists with hide. But Lok was guileless and generous by instinct. In para three Lok was deeply troubled by his conscience when Fa was intent on cheating them.

thin pointed nose—unlike them, Lok had no bridge to his nose. The 'new people' were closer to modern man, Homo sapiens. But their noses were much less efficient than Lok's. There is a clear thread of irony running through the passage.

pine-tree gum, of a peculiarly thick and fiery sort of mud—used to make the boats water-proof; the **fiery sort of mud** he had no name for was pitch.

Para Five:

round stones—actually pots containing the fermented honey; Lok and his people were not even able to conceive of pots.

it repelled and attracted—Lok was initially excited by the arrival of the 'new people' and wanted to befriend them. But they were hostile and vicious and determined to destroy 'the people'. Lok had watched Tuami making love to a fair, fat and sexy woman while on the tree and seen the 'new people' drink and perform magic and quarrel among themselves. The 'new people' were evil and sinners in contrast to 'the people' who were innocent and child-like. Lok was both fascinated and disgusted by what he saw and learnt about them. Indeed we could see the whole thing as a parable: the lure of sex, drink, black magic and human sacrifice to which man's ambivalent nature makes him a predestined victim.

The terror of the stag and the old man—The stag's head was used to perform some magical rituals to propitiate mysterious powers before going on a hunt. The old man, as head of the tribe, exercised his tyranny over the rest with the help of every device, including magic and threats and physical violence. Lok was naturally terrified of these. He was confused by the head of the stag, mistaking it for the real one, when it was worn by a man during the ritual.

Para Six:

Mal's hand—the hand of the leader of 'the people' who had died recently.

narrower and longer and of a different colour in the fungoid whiteness—the contrasts between 'the people' and the 'new people' are brought out in several ways. Also see the next para. Lok was intrigued by the shape of their skull, particularly of the brow which was high and raised while Neanderthal man resembled the ape. The body was not covered by reddish hair all over, like his own.

Para Seven:

like a snake sliding into a hole—a specially appropriate comparison.

the irregular wolf's teeth—one more point of contrast between the peoples. The evolution of the powerful canine teeth probably indicated the trend away from a vegetarian diet towards a more aggressively carnivorous one.

Inside—Lok shared a picture of terror with Fa but outside—Lok was coldly brave and still as ice—Note the mode of perception and how Lok had to struggle with each 'picture' or idea before he could find appropriate expression for it. Even simple feelings, actions and objects presented major linguistic challenges to primitive man. At least this is what the narrative succeeds in bringing home to us.

The foregoing analysis and the brief explanatory notes would have helped you to make sense of the narrative, which might otherwise have struck you as baffling, if not needlessly complex and obscure. However, Golding, you will agree, has given us a remarkable insight into the way our ancestors, lost in the mists of time and conjecture, must have gone about making sense of the mysteries of the universe. We are also told of how language came into being. Yet language is not static, it does not always satisfy the need for the precise shade of meaning that is sought to be conveyed by a demanding writer, who strains after newer and newer modes of expressing himself or herself. Whether this kind of eternal quest of original expression is necessary or not is a matter of opinion. But once you respect the creative urge, there is no escape from wrestling with language the way Ramanujan or Golding have tried to do in the extracts we have just examined.

Check Your Progress II

- i) In what ways does the narrative about the life of the people bring out the primitive nature of the thoughts and actions of our remote ancestors?

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ii) How far do you think languages and civilisation are inter-related? Pick out specific examples from the passage.

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7.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have analysed the type of narrative that is performing a dual function; giving us a taste of the way a particular character or a representative figure of a certain culture or period explores the nature of reality, given the individual handicap or gift or mental bias or disability which the protagonist is endowed with. Besides performing the normal function of narratives, the double-barrelled structure of such narratives delivers simultaneously the message as well as the highly individualised mode or style of the discourse in which the narrative is structured. From the two extracts we get not only the 'story' but we also experience, first hand as it were, the authentic mental bias of the narrator, his or her mental twist or set or characteristic turn of phrase or vision, call it what you will, which may well be unique.

The design of such a discourse imposes a certain deliberately chosen set of expectations or parameters or limitations on both the writer and the reader. In order to successfully negotiate the meaning of this discourse and also to derive the special intellectual rewards of having solved a challenging 'puzzle' by working extra hard for it, we have to keep our compact with the writer, although we willingly take on what might appear to be a gratuitous burden. But then every reader elects to get into such a pact with the writer. These two specimens of discourse are representative of the complexities and 'difficulties' of individualised and stylistically 'marked' narrative which are frequently encountered in modern fiction. Once you learn to tackle such extracts you will be able to successfully cope with such built-in challenges that you are bound to come across in contemporary literature.

7.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- i) The narrative devices used in the story are quite formulaic in nature. These include:
- Thematic elements of the story like the story of a lawful heir trying to prove his legitimacy to the throne and undertaking a journey to solve a dream puzzle etc.
 - Patterns of continuity in the story by suppressing detail and ambiguity.

- Patterns of repetition to heighten the emotive impact and to encourage audience participation.
- ii) The audience remembers the storyline more vividly because it broadly runs along some established levels of expectation and customary story-telling conventions. Yet at the same time there is involvement with elements of danger and suspense in the story. This allows for principles around which the society is organized to be re-iterated and re-learned through the medium of the story. Social hierarchies are re-established and anxieties about lawlessness put to rest with the happy ending.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Your answer should take into account the fact that there is no logical sequence in the narrative nor can we find a cause and effect sequence. Coordinated actions are also seen as pictures.
- ii) 'Her hands left him'
'the fire floated, dull blue flames wandered over the wood'
'the crumpled woman crept out'
'His heart began to shake him'
'He shared a picture with her'
All these examples do suggest that language and civilisation are interrelated.

UNIT 8 EXPOSITORY PROSE-1

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Passage from Richard Wright's *Twelve Million Black Voices*
 - 8.2.1 Text
 - 8.2.2 Glossary
 - 8.2.3 Discussion
 - 8.2.4 Style
- 8.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.4 Answers to Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall introduce you to expository prose using Richard Wright's essay "Twelve Million Black Voices" as an illustration. After completing the Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the techniques of exposition such as the use of examples, reason and analysis.
- outline the role of descriptive and narrative features, and
- explain the significance of figurative language in expository prose.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'exposition' refers to an act of explaining something or making it clear. The aim of the writer in the expository writing is not primarily to narrate or describe; it is mainly to explain something – facts, ideas or beliefs. The writer does this by resorting to various techniques of exposition such as:

- explanation of a process,
- use of examples,
- reasons in support of a statement,
- comparison and contrast,
- classification,
- restatement,
- definition,
- analogy,
- cause and effect,
- analysis.

In the units on expository prose we shall illustrate the various techniques of analyzing expository prose. Though Blocks 1 and 2 have dealt with descriptive and narrative varieties of prose, the real distinction among the different varieties is one of focus. In descriptive prose the focus is on describing things as they are or as they appear to be. Narrative writing tries to

recreate an actual or imaginary experience in a way that we are also able to experience it mentally. In short, it is a description of events. In expository writing, the focus is on explaining. The writer often combines features of description and narration while explaining. However, expository prose needs to be looked at as a separate variety for the sake of our being able to recognize its distinctiveness in terms of purpose, design and functions of language. We shall also discuss features which lend literary merit to the passages under discussion.

8.2 PASSAGE FROM RICHARD WRIGHT'S *TWELVE MILLION BLACK VOICES*

The extract we present for discussion is a selection from Richard Wright's *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941), subtitled *A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*. Richard Wright (1908-1960) has the distinction of being the first Afro-American to achieve international fame. His writings include the novels *Native Son* (1940), *The Outsider* (1953) and *Savage Holiday* (1954) and his autobiography, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (1945). The second volume of his autobiography, *American Hunger*, which dealt with his membership of and disillusionment with the American Communist Party, was published posthumously in 1977.

The passage you are going to study is a good example of the organization and style of expository prose. The writer uses a particular tone, selects incidents or details as examples, orders his material, even chooses particular words and phrases to explain the miseries of Blacks in America.

We would like you to first read the passage rapidly to get a general overview. Then you should read it again, carefully and at a slower pace to get the main points. You should also consult the glossary for the meanings of unfamiliar words, besides trying to guess the meanings of words and phrases from the context in which they occur. After you have read and understood the passage, go through the discussion. You must answer the in-text questions which are aimed at making you reflect and refer back to the passage. The in-text questions have also been provided with answers in the discussion for you to check your answers there and then. Finally at the end of the discussion you must complete the exercises. Your answers should then be checked with the answers given by us at the end of the unit.

8.2.1 Text

The word 'Negro', the term by which, orally or in print, we black folk in the United States are usually designated, is not really a name at all nor a description, but a psychological island whose objective form is the most unanimous fiat in all American history; a fiat buttressed by popular and national tradition, and written down in many state and city statutes; a fiat which artificially and arbitrarily defines, regulates, and limits in scope of meaning the vital contours of our lives, and the lives of our children and our children's children.

This island, within whose confines we live, is anchored in the feelings of millions of people, and is situated in the midst of the sea of white faces we meet each day; and, by and large, as three hundred years of time has borne our nation into the twentieth century, its rocky boundaries have remained unyielding to the waves of our hope that dash against it.

The steep **cliffs** of this island are manifest, on the whole, in the conduct of whites towards us hour by hour, a conduct which tells us that we possess no rights commanding respect, that we have no claim to pursue happiness in our own fashion, that our progress toward civilization constitutes an insult, that our behaviour must be kept firmly within an orbit branded as inferior, that we must be compelled to labour at the behest of others, that as a group we are owned by the whites and that manliness on our part warrants instant reprisal.

Three hundred years are a long time for millions of folk like us to be held in such subjection, so long a time that perhaps scores of years will have to pass before we shall be able to express what this slavery has done to us, for our personalities are still numb from its long shocks; and, as the numbness leaves our souls, we shall yet have to feel and give utterance to the full pain we shall inherit.

More than one-half of us black folk in the United States are tillers of the soil, and three-fourths of those of us who till the soil are sharecroppers and day labourers.

The land we till is beautiful, red and black and brown clay, with fresh and hungry smells, with pine trees and palm trees, with rolling hills and **swampy** delta – an unbelievably fertile land, bounded on the north by the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, on the south by the Gulf of Mexico, on the west by the Mississippi River, and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean.

Our southern springs are filled with quiet noises and scenes of growth. Apple buds laugh into blossom. **Honeysuckles** creep up the sides of houses. Sunflowers nod in the hot fields. From mossy tree to mossy tree – oak, elm, willow, aspen, sycamore, dogwood, cedar, walnut, ash, and hickory – bright green leaves jut from a million branches to form an awning that tries to shield and shade the earth. Blue and pink kites of small boys sail in the windy air.

In summer the magnolia trees fill the countryside with sweet scent for long miles. Days are slumberous, and the skies are high and thronged with clouds that ride fast. At midday the sun blazes and bleaches the soil. Butterflies flit through the heat; wasps sing their sharp, straight lines; birds fluff and flounce, piping in querulous joy. Nights are covered with canopies, sometimes blue and sometimes black, canopies that sag low with ripe and nervous stars. The throaty boast of frogs momentarily drowns out the call and counter-call of crickets.

In autumn the land is afire with colour. Red and brown leaves lift and flutter dryly, becoming entangled in the stiff grass and cornstalks. Cotton is picked and **ginned**, cane is crushed and its juice is simmered down into molasses; **yams** are grubbed out of the clay; hogs are slaughtered and cured in lingering smoke; corn is husked and ground into meal. At twilight the sky is full of wild geese winging ever southward, and bats jerk through the air. At night the winds blow free.

In winter the forests resound with the bite of steel axes eating into tall trees as men gather wood for the leaden days of cold. The guns of hunters snap and crack. Long days of rain come, and our swollen creeks rush to join a hundred rivers that wash across the land and make great harbours where they feed the gulf or the sea. Occasionally the rivers leap their banks and leave new thick layers of silt to enrich the earth, and then the look of the land is garish, bleak, suffused with a **first day stillness**, strangeness and awe.

But whether in spring or summer or autumn or winter, time slips past us remorselessly, and it is hard to tell of the iron that lies beneath the surface of our quiet, dull days.

To paint the picture of how we live on the tobacco, cane, rice, and cotton plantations is to complete with mighty artists: the movies, the radio, the newspapers, the magazines, and even the Church. They have painted one picture: charming, idyllic, romantic; but we live another: full of the fear of the Lords of the Land, bowing and grinning when we meet white faces, toiling from sun to sun, living in unpainted wooden shacks that sit casually and insecurely upon the red clay.

In the main we are different from other folk in that, when an impulse moves us, when we are caught in the throes of inspiration, when we are moved to better our lot, we do not ask ourselves: "Can we do it?" but: "Will they let us do it?" Before we black folk can move, we must first look into the white man's mind to see what is there, to see what he is thinking, and the white man's mind is a mind that is always changing.

In general there are three classes of men above us: the Lords of the Land – operators of the plantations; the Bosses of the Buildings – the owners of industry; and the vast numbers of poor white workers – our immediate competitors in the daily struggle for bread. The Lords of the Land hold sway over the plantations and over us; the Bosses of the Buildings lend money and issue orders to the Lords of the Land. The Bosses of the Buildings feed upon the Lords of the Land, and the Lords of the Land feed upon the 5,000,000 landless poor whites and upon us, throwing to the poor whites the scant solace of filching from us 4,000,000 landless blacks what the poor whites themselves are cheated of in this elaborate game.

Back of this tangled process is a long history. When the **Emancipation Proclamation** was signed, there were some 4,000,000 of us black folk stranded and bewildered upon the land which we had tilled under compulsion for two and a half centuries. Sundered suddenly from the only relationship with Western civilization we had been allowed to form since our captivity, our personalities blighted by two hundred and fifty years of servitude, and eager to hold our wives and husbands and children together in family units, some of us turned back to the same Lords of the Land who had held us as slaves and begged for work, resorted to their advice; and there began for us a new kind of bondage: **sharecropping**.

Glad to be free, some of us drifted and gave way to every vagary of impulse that swept through us, being held in the line of life only by the necessity to work and eat. Confined for centuries to the life of the cotton field, many of us possessed no feelings of family, home, community, race, church, or progress.

We could scarcely believe that we were free, and our restlessness and incessant mobility were our naïve way of testing that freedom. Just as a kitten stretches and yawns after a long sleep, so thousands of us tramped from place to place for the sheer sake of moving, looking, wondering, landless upon the land. Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia, and West Virginia became the home states of us freed blacks.

In 1890 many white people predicted that we black folk would perish in a competitive world; but in spite of this we left the land and kept afloat, wandering from Natchez to New Orleans, from Mobile to Montgomery, from Macon to Jacksonville, from Birmingham to Chattanooga, from Nashville to Louisville, from Memphis to Little Rock – labouring in the sawmills, in the **turpentine camps**, on the road jobs; working for men who did not care if we lived or died, but who did not want their business enterprises to suffer for lack of labour. During the first decade of the twentieth century more than one and three-quarter millions of us abandoned the plantations upon which we had been born; more than a million of us roamed the states of the South and the remainder of us drifted north.

Our women fared easier than we men during the early days of freedom; on the whole their relationship to the world was more stable than ours. Their authority was supreme in most of our families inasmuch as many of them had worked in the 'Big Houses' of the Lords of the Land and had learned manners, had been taught to cook, sew, and nurse. During slave days they did not always belong to us, for the Lords of the Land often took them for their pleasure. When a gang of us was sold from one plantation to another, our wives would sometimes be kept by the Lords of the Land and we men would have to mate with whatever slave girl we chanced upon. Because of their enforced intimacy with the Lords of the Land, many of our women, after they were too old to work, were allowed to remain in the slave cabins to tend generations of black children. They enjoyed a status denied us men, being called 'Mammy', and through the years they became symbols of motherhood, retaining in their withered bodies the burden of our folk wisdom, reigning as arbiters in our domestic affairs until we men were freed and had moved to cities where cash-paying jobs enabled us to become the heads of our own families.

The economic and political power of the South is not held in our hands; we do not own banks, iron and steel mills, railroads, office buildings, ships, wharves, or power plants. There are some few of us who operate small grocery stores, barber shops, **rooming houses**, burial societies, and undertaking establishments. But none of us owns any of the basic industries that shape the course of the South, such as mining, **lumber**, textiles, oil, transportation, or electric power. So, in the early spring, when the rains have ceased and the ground is ready for plowing, we present ourselves to the Lords of the Land and ask to make a crop. We sign a contract – usually our contracts are oral – which allows us to keep one-half of the harvest after all debts are paid. If we have worked upon these plantations before, we are legally bound to plant, tend, and harvest another crop. If we should escape to the city to avoid paying our mounting debts, white policemen track us down and ship us back to the plantation.

The Lords of the Land assign us ten or fifteen acres of soil already bled of its fertility through generations of abuse. They advance us one mule, one plow, seed, tools, fertilizer, clothing, and **sorghum** molasses. If we have been lucky the year before may be we have saved a few dollars to tide us through the **fall** months, but spring finds us begging an 'advance credit' from the Lords of the Land.

8.2.2 Glossary

fiat:	an order or decree, it means 'let it be done'.
statutes:	written laws of a legislative body.
cliffs:	steep rugged side of rocks on a coast.
swampy:	spongy land filled with water.
honeysuckle:	a climbing plant with sweet smelling yellow, pink, or white flowers in the shape of long narrow tubes.
ginned:	to separate cotton from its seeds by use of a machine called a gin.
yam:	a variety of sweet potato.
a first day stillness:	as quiet as if it were the first day of creation.
Emancipation Proclamation:	the Emancipation Proclamation was an order by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863 during the American Civil War, which freed most of the slaves in the United States.
sharecropping:	a tenancy system by which the tenant pays a part of his crop as rent.
turpentine camps:	Labour camps for producing turpentine oil from trees. This oil is used for cleaning and for making a strong smelling, colourless liquid thinner for paint.
rooming houses:	a building where rooms are rented, usually unfurnished.
lumber:	trade in wood.
sorgham:	a cereal plant known as Indian millet, a variety of jowar.
fall:	autumn is called fall in the U.S.A.

8.2.3 Discussion

The extract from Richard Wright's book *Twelve Million Black Voices* is an account of the life of blacks in America. It tells us about

- i. the occupation available to blacks (paragraphs 5, 15 and 19),
- ii. the conduct of whites towards blacks (paragraphs 3, 4 and 13),
- iii. social status of blacks (paragraphs 3, 12 and 14),
- iv. historical account of events (paragraphs 15, 16 and 17), and
- v. lives of black women (paragraph 18).

Richard Wright uses several techniques to tell us about the miseries of the blacks. One way is substantiation by quoting figures. Refer to para 5 where black occupations are mentioned. What is the proportion of the black population involved in the cultivation of land? (You may use the space provided below for writing your answer)

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When the writer states that one half of the black population is involved in tilling the soil he is elaborating the central thesis that black men lived a life of misery; the jobs available to them were limited. In para 14, Wright classifies the population of America into three categories – Landlords, Industrialists and Workers. He mentions that the landless blacks were 4,000,000 and in para 15 he repeats ‘4,000,000 of us black folk’.

In para 5 the author states that the tillers are also sharecroppers, sharecropping (if you consult the glossary) is an agreement between the landowner and the tiller according to which the tiller gives part of the harvest as rent to the landowner. While enumerating the reasons why sharecropping favoured the whites, Wright resorts to first person narrative. His tone by which we mean the writer’s attitude: angry, melancholy, cheerful, is controlled. He gives objective facts such as: the contracts were oral. Secondly the blacks were legally bound to plant, tend and harvest the land they had tilled before and in case they ran away to avoid paying the debts, white policemen tracked them down and sent them back to the place of work. Finally, the lands given to them for raising crops had lost all fertility due to repeated use. Also the tools given for ploughing proved inadequate. As a result they were left with no choice but to borrow money from the landlords and this had to be repaid in the form of crops.

He makes precise, convincing statements. The inhuman treatment of blacks comes out more prominently through the rational and quiet manner of the sentences proceeding one after another, with no outraged comment. The intention is to make us think about the poor blacks. Are they treated better than animals? If we look for clues, we find that statements such as ‘We present ourselves’ are ironic in tone. (para 19) The tone, without being aggressive, suggests that all is not well as ‘white policemen track us down and ship us back to the plantations’.

In order to describe the conduct of whites towards blacks, refer to paragraphs 3, 4 and 13. There were arbitrary official orders or flats and laws against the negroes. The parameters of black existence are defined in para 3. Write in your own words, how blacks were expected to behave.

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Have you included the following strictures imposed on the blacks?

- i. Should not claim respectful behaviour from Whites.
- ii. Should not seek happiness in any form.
- iii. Should not seek to progress in a civilized manner.
- iv. Should work for others.
- v. Should accept that they are owned by Whites.

Wright further tells us the extent of the damage slavery had done to the blacks by stating: 'our personalities are still numb from its long shocks.' To be numb is to be powerless to feel or act. Slavery had reduced their power to react even in the wake of injustice and gross inequality.

Paragraphs 15, 16 and 17 are an account of events that shaped the lives of Afro-Americans in the United States. These events provide continuity and cohesion to the text. One is the Emancipation Proclamation by which all slaves in the Southern States at war with the Union were declared free. Some of the consequences of the Emancipation measures were:

- i. some of them became sharecroppers;
- ii. others moved aimlessly to taste the newly-given freedom;
- iii. there were some who had no feelings for the community or home, and hence felt no sense of belonging to any one place;
- iv. some picked up odd jobs in saw mills, turpentine camps and roadsides;
- v. more than a million roamed in the South, the rest moved towards the North to give up working on plantations;

In these events we see a mature mind recreating and interpreting the lived and felt experiences of the blacks. The social reality of Afro-American life in spite of the historical events remained unchanged. It is counterpointed with the black sense of an ampler world. The events unfold a hidden meaning: there is danger in keeping illusions. The undercurrents of the writer's intentions lie beneath the smooth quiet movement of the narrative.

Now refer to para 18. In what ways did black women live a better life than their male counterparts?

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The author has restated black misery by citing the examples of black women. They were respected in their families as they had learnt to cook, sew and rear children by working in the houses of the whites. As they had been used for sexual pleasures by white men, they were allowed to stay in the servant chambers as a compensation even after they had grown old. As the whites were favourably inclined towards black women, and black men being slaves were not earning black women exercised complete authority in family matters.

8.2.4 Style

We shall now examine the style of writing and the devices the author has used to convey his meaning effectively.

The title 'Twelve Million Black Voices' is not a simple account of the life of blacks in America. The word 'black' seen **figuratively** also expresses despair, a gloomy, dismal, sullen state of mind on account of unrelieved suffering. There are words, phrases and sentences that illustrate the significance of the title. The harsh attitude of white men is like **rocky boundaries and steep cliffs**. Blacks cannot express their feelings, emotions and thoughts for **'our personalities are still numb** from shocks of slavery'. In a land of plenty and beauty, **'time slips past us remorselessly, and it is hard to tell of the iron that lies beneath the surface of our quiet, dull days'**. They live in **'unpainted wooden shacks that sit casually and insecurely upon the red clay.'** The harsh lives are summed up in the words 'black voices'.

Read paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 where the author uses **metaphorical expression** when he says that the term Negro is like an island. Bring out the significance of the metaphor and how it illustrates the author's point of view.

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The metaphor 'island' is able to explain an abstract concept in the author's mind which is stated at the beginning of the passage where the term negro is defined in an unusual manner. It is a 'psychological island'. What is meant is that the black is isolated like an island in the middle of the sea of white faces. Just as the sea exercises control over the conditions existing on the island, white men exercise control over the blacks. The image of an island is an extended one. The unrelenting harsh attitude of the whites is compared to the rocky boundaries of the island. The hopes and aspirations of negroes are like waves that dash against the rocks producing no effect.

Read paragraphs 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. There is the description of landscape and seasons. The description acts as a scenic backdrop providing a contrast between the bounty of nature on the one hand and the cruelty reigning supreme in human hearts.

How has the fertility of the land been suggested?

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The red, black and brown clay are types of soil conducive to vegetation. The fresh and hungry smells can come only from healthy, exuberant trees. Palm trees and pine trees and swampy delta exist where rainfall is heavy and the land is fertile.

The author brings out the beauty of landscape and seasons with the help of word pictures. Can you list some of them below (you could refer to paragraphs 6, 7 and 8).

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You must also have listed the following: the panoramic view of red and black and brown clay, rolling hills and swampy delta, apple buds laughing into blossom, honey-suckles creeping up the sides of houses, sunflowers nodding in the hot fields, bright leaves jutting from a million branches to form an awning that tries to shield and shade the earth. Nights are covered with canopies, sometimes blue and sometimes black canopies that sag low with ripe and nervous stars. The author has described the scene in such vivid detail that one can almost 'see' the stars and 'smell' the honeysuckle. But is the author's aim simply to communicate these sensations? As we know, the author's aim is to communicate the experience of the Blacks in America and by describing the plenty and prosperity of American soil, he only serves to highlight the exploited condition of the blacks.

The use of literary devices serves to enrich the prose style of an author.

Alliteration is a literary device which is the repetition of consonantal sounds in stressed syllables in a sequence of words. Give examples of alliteration from paragraph 8.

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You must have observed the following:

Sweet scent: blazes and bleaches, sharp, straight, fluff and flounce; covered with canopies; call and counter-call of crickets.

Refer to para 9. There is use of such **verbal phrases** as suggest vigorous activity:

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cane is **crushed**; juice is **simmered** down into molasses; yams are **grubbed** out of the clay; hogs are **slaughtered** and **cured** in lingering smoke; and corn is **husked** and **ground** into meal.

In para 16 we find an example of the use of a **simile**. Explain in your own words.

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The restlessness and movement of negroes as a consequence of reconstructive measures is compared to the yawning and stretching of a kitten after a long sleep. Earlier we learnt that their personalities were numb under the shock of slavery. Till the time they were set free, they were, as if, sleeping like a kitten in a state of inertia and happy to stretch and yawn when woken up, oblivious of any demand of exacting action on them.

8.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed a passage of expository prose from the point of view of techniques of development and features of style. In the course of the discussion we have also studied the descriptive and narrative features of writing which act as tools of exposition. We have also seen the use of figurative language such as metaphor and simile which improve expression and convey the author's meaning in a more effective and forceful style.

Check Your Progress 1

1. A definition explains and clarifies the meaning of a word, phrase or concept. Do you find the term negro defined in an unusual manner? What literary devices does the writer use to support the extended definition?

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2. Pick up a few words and phrases from the passage which reveal the stiff, unrelenting and harsh attitude of Whites towards Blacks.

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3. What reasons does the author give to support the statement that black women fared better than black men in the early days of freedom?

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8.4 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. The term negro is designated as a psychological island in the minds of both whites and blacks, (note the unusual analogy). The island is a metaphorical expression and the metaphor is an extended one. The negro is isolated like an island in the sea of white faces. Just as the sea exercises control over the island, white men exercise control over the blacks. The unrelenting harsh attitude of the whites is compared to the rocky boundaries of the island. The hopes and aspirations of negroes are like waves that dash against the rocks, producing no effect.

2. **Rocky** boundaries; **steep cliffs** of the island, personalities are still **numb** from its long shocks, time slips past us **remorselessly**, and it is hard to tell of the **iron** that lies beneath the surface of our **quiet, dull** days.

3.
 - i. Negro women commanded respect in their families as they had learnt manners, to cook, sew and nurse by virtue of working in the big houses owned by whites.
 - ii. Whites had a soft attitude towards them as they were used by white men for sexual pleasure. As such they were allowed to stay in servant cabins well past their youth, and looked after generations of children.
 - iii. As they became symbols of motherhood and the repositories of folk wisdom, the black women exercised more authority in domestic matters. The black men had no source of income, and could become real heads of their families only after they started earning money after emancipation.

UNIT 9 EXPOSITORY PROSE-2

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Passage from Edmund Leach's 'Men and Learning'
 - 9.2.1 Text
 - 9.2.2 Glossary
 - 9.2.3 Discussion
 - 9.2.4 Style
- 9.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.4 Answers to Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous Unit, you read a prose passage which is an example of how a writer combines descriptive and narrative features in expository writing. In this unit an examination of Leach's lecture 'Men and Learning' will illustrate:

- the use of argument to persuade while explaining, and
- the use of synthesis to put together ideas into a conceptual framework.

After completing the unit you will understand how the writer organizes his ideas skillfully, determining the order of presenting his argument and finally building it up to a logical and convincing conclusion.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall focus on a slightly different aspect of expository writing. In the previous unit, we analysed how a writer uses both description and narration in explaining and presenting his views. We also discussed how examples are used to make an argument more convincing and how figurative language is used to make the communication more effective. Logical sequencing of ideas in an expository composition relates to the arrangement of ideas in a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome. In the following discussion on Professor Leach's lecture 'Men and Learning' we shall examine Leach's unorthodox views on education to bring out the role of logic and reasoning in the organization of expository writing. We shall also examine the role of synthesis in determining the dominant theme.

9.2 PASSAGE FROM EDMUND LEACH'S 'MEN AND LEARNING'

'Men and Learning' by Professor Edmund Leach (b. 1910), forms part of a series of lectures broadcast over the British Broadcasting Corporation (or BBC as it is popularly known). These lectures were later published under the title A

Runaway World. The present extract is an example of expository prose when it expounds personal views. The unorthodox ideas are logically drawn to their conclusion. He specifically examines the role of education in our times. He maintains that the present system of education, which is based on competition, cannot help to meet the demands of social and technological change. The authorial tone of a decisive point of view takes precedence over other considerations and the undercurrents of argument, logic and reasoning persist throughout the passage.

Professor Edmund Leach has done field research in anthropology (study of the evolution of man and human societies and customs) in Formosa, Kurdistan, Burma, Borneo and Sri Lanka. His publications include *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1986), *Social Anthropology* (1982).

9.2.1 Text

Education is not something primarily associated with technical college or university; it takes place mainly in the home. Its really fundamental component is the habit of communication established in extreme infancy, within the first year of life before the child begins to talk at all. Here, at the very beginning, when the mother first starts to convert her animal baby into a human being, the sole purpose of education is to link things together, to establish communication, to make the child conscious that it is part of the family group. The separation of **identity** comes much later. But when it comes we British go over to the opposite extreme and carry self-identification much too far.

The fact that people in other countries do things quite differently need not mean that we are wrong, but the difference here is striking. In the less sophisticated corners of the world, the kind of isolated loneliness which we consider normal – the emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual self separated from all others – is never cultivated at all. The child is born into a community which consists of whole classes of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins and so on. In almost any situation there are half a dozen or so individuals who can act as stand-ins for any other. Moreover this is not just a temporary phase of early childhood; most people spend their whole lives surrounded and supported by kinsfolk.

In such circumstances the normal mode of self-expression is to say ‘We do this’, not ‘I do this’.

Let me pursue this point: it is a very striking fact that almost everywhere outside the centres of Western Capitalism the normal emphasis of education is on group identity rather than individual identity...

Now our society provides a great variety of institutions into which the individual may merge his identity – family, school, sports club, trade union, church, firm, political party – there are literally dozens of contexts in which the lonely individual can sink his *I* into a collective *we* and gain greater confidence by doing so, yet paradoxically a great deal of our explicit educational effort, both at school and at home, is aimed in exactly the opposite direction.

The overt values of English formal schooling are that the individual should be self-reliant and show initiative. From the age of ten upwards the whole system becomes viciously competitive. The aim is to discover and cultivate the powers of latent leadership in the few with total disregard for the emotional suffering that this imposes on the many. In Britain this objective is common both to the private school system, which is **rigged** so as to preserve the vested interests of the wealthy, and to the State school system, which pretends to offer 'equal opportunity for all'. In practice, the State system is devoted to the needs of a **meritocracy** in which all the rewards go to the most able.

In private sector and public sector alike, every attempt to introduce a touch of socialist justice – the principle 'from each according to his capacity: to each according to his needs' – is resisted up to the hilt. We are told that we must segregate the clever just as we must segregate the criminal Many people take it for granted that the 'best' schools are those which cater for the children of the very rich. But if you can't afford to send your son to **Eton** then the next best thing is cut-throat competition – to the death.

This is a sad business. Even if it were true, which it isn't, that success at school and university guaranteed success in adult life, the **rat race** is conducted at a terrible cost. Over the past fifty years we in England have partly replaced the old system of **class stratification** based on hereditary wealth by a new class system based on achieved status. Simultaneously our educational system has developed into an entirely ruthless machine for the elimination of the unworthy. Suicide and mental breakdown are now so common in the student population that they are almost taken for granted.

Let's try to get this straight. We instil competitive value into our children from entirely dishonest motives. Few of us have any deep concern about whether our offspring become civilized human beings; we are only worried about social class. We are **hag-ridden** by the fear and envy **endemic** to a society which combines class stratification with the possibility of **social mobility**. Those who are high up in the existing order are driven to compete by fear and contempt for those below; those lower down are driven by envy of those above. Schooling is a means to an end: the child must better himself, or consolidate an established position. Only a tiny minority thinks of education as a means by which individuals are given human interests and values so that they can fit together into the total jigsaw of society; for most of us education is an instrument of war, a weapon by which the individual beats down his competitors and defends himself against adversity. I assure you, I do not exaggerate.

It seems probable that everyone, including those who are now most successful, would feel much more comfortable in a less competitive world, and if we are looking towards the future this should be one of our long-term objectives. It won't be easy to achieve but this much is quite plain: in order to arrive at a system in which less value is placed on the relative merit of individuals we shall need to make quite basic changes to the overall structure of formal school education. If we are to produce adults who are inspired by an ethic of cooperation rather than an ethic of fratricide then we must start out by devising a school system in which passing competitive examinations and proving that Tom is much cleverer than Harry ceases to be part of the exercise.

Oh, I know this is very **Utopian**. A **General Certificate of Education at A level** is worth the money, and even more so a university degree.... This is why parents and children alike **hurl themselves into the fray** with such ferocity. If you take away **the carrot of financial reward**, standards really will fall all along the line. But this is only because the children and the parents and the schoolmasters and the university **dons** are all so totally confused.

The confusion starts out with a clash of basic assumptions. The schoolmasters and the **dons** tend to believe that innate intelligence is a quality which varies very greatly from one individual to another but that you can't do much about it except measure it. That being so, school education is not much concerned with 'developing the intelligence'; it simply stuffs the wretched pupil full of facts, and measures the result by an examination. Parents, on the other hand, start out with the sentimental idea that the intellectual potential of all children is basically the same. In that case the only way to get your beloved child out in front is either to cheat by sending him to a privileged school, or to chastise and bully him so that he passes examinations which the other fellow fails.

Both sides are right up to a point; and both sides are entirely wrong. Intelligence is a very complicated affair involving a mixture of all sorts of mental capacities and psychological attitudes – powers of perception, memory, vocabulary, logical facility, curiosity, scepticism, persistence, the ability to make unexpected associations and goodness knows what else. The underlying mental faculties are inborn, the product of the individual's genetic constitution. No amount of education or parental devotion will ever turn a dull boy into a genius. On the other hand, the way in which we use and develop our potential skills will be determined by things that happen to us *after* we are born. The trouble here is that many of the really critical events seem to occur very early on, perhaps even in the first few weeks of life or even in the course of the birth **trauma** itself, and I don't think that there is the slightest evidence that at this very early age a child is at an advantage if it happens to have a mother who is especially prosperous, or intelligent, or ambitious. Just how far the intellectual potential of a child can still be modified even after it reaches school age is a **moot** point; certainly the margin of flexibility is not very great. On the other hand, it is absolutely clear that by the time children do get to school they already have abilities of very different kinds. Also it is plain that any attempt to 'measure' intelligence by examination will simply measure certain sorts of ability and ignore the rest. But the **open-ended** non-measurable kind of ability may be just what we are looking for. I want to stress this....

The people who are going to be able to cope with our rapidly changing future are those who are temperamentally unorthodox – the curious, the **sceptical**, the ones who **don't care a fig** for established opinion....

Now if all this is true the implications for education should be fairly obvious. We should be looking for people with divergent unorthodox kinds of intelligence, not conformist orthodox types. But since all methods of selection by competitive examination can only be based on established orthodoxies, we must try to get rid of competitive examinations altogether. The aim must be to maximize variation. We need to give all children equal opportunity to learn how to learn, but after that they should be encouraged to follow their own

special interests instead of the textbook conventions of **examination syndicates**.

Fine words, but what a hope! The academic machine is supposed to be searching for genius but, with things set up as they are now, it can only recognize those who are both very clever and very obedient. It turns out excellent bureaucrats but rejects or perhaps never notices those genuinely imaginative characters who refuse to **toe the line**.

Higher education is necessarily selective. It isn't everyone who can benefit from life in a university; but clearly those who do go to a university should include the innovators who are going to lead us forward into our bewildering future. To see what sort of people these are, we might consider who they have been in the past. Who are the people who really stand out over the past few centuries as having completely altered our Western view of where man stands in relation to the universe? **Newton, Darwin, Marx, Freud, Picasso** – there are only a dozen or so world shakers in this class. And if we ask: 'Are these the sort of people who are likely to flourish and gain approval in our present educational garden?' the answer in most cases must be an unqualified 'No'...

So to go right back to my original question: Yes, more and better education could help us to cope with the problems of an expanding technology, but only if we take a more enlightened view about what we mean by 'better' education. Education ought to be concerned with training people to exercise their imaginations creatively, instead of which it is too often little more than a selection device for picking out the clever conformists.

It wouldn't matter so much if education diplomas simply give a list of the courses in which the owner has shown reasonable proficiency; what is outrageous is that an entirely anonymous examination machine should have the arrogance to grade its victims as 'adequate', 'good', and 'excellent', without any personal knowledge and indeed without any evidence at all except a few written scripts compiled in a great hurry under highly artificial conditions. Let's face it, school and university examinations in their present form do not test ability or personality or knowledge, they simply test a capacity for passing examinations, an aptitude which is of rather **marginal utility** in ordinary adult life.....

In the context of my general theme, there are two main points I am getting at here. The first is the straightforward one that our competitive examination system of selection simply fails to pick out the kind of people who can cope most effectively with problems of social and technological change; the second is that the emphasis which our system places on individual achievement is entirely misdirected.

Much of our adult state of fear is linked up with the feeling that I, an individual, have to cope single-handed with a hostile world, the details of which have become far too complicated for me to understand. This feeling of isolation is in part a by-product of the way we have been educated and the stress that is put on passing examinations. The more 'successful' your education, the more likely you are to feel alone, because the process of segregation has been more complete....at every stage you proved how much

cleverer you are than all those other fellows, until in the end you stand quite alone and afraid.

It ought to be possible to manage things in a different way so that we go forward into the future together, collaborating as a team instead of looking around for every possible opportunity to **knife each other in the back**.

Don't blame the schoolmasters for the kind of education you received; they crammed you with facts instead of teaching you how to enjoy the pleasures of civilization because the **ethos** of a competitive society compels them to behave in this way. If society insists that individuals be segregated out into categories – first class, second class, third class, upper, middle, lower – then the system will always have to waste an enormous amount of time and energy allocating individuals to the right slots and marking them up with the proper labels, but so far as education is concerned the whole operation is utterly irrelevant. Those of you who have, like me, been right **through the mill** know very well that this is so. It is up to us to get the system changed....

9.2.2 Glossary

identity:	the qualities, belief and ideas which make one feel different from everyone else or a group.
rigged:	arranged dishonestly for a selfish advantage.
meritocracy:	group of persons selected according to merit in competition.
Eton:	one of the most prestigious public-schools in England.
the rate race:	fiercely competitive struggle to maintain one's position in work or life.
class stratification:	arrangement or division of people into sections, one above the other, according to their social positions.
hag-ridden:	continually worried by something, having nightmares.
endemic:	regularly found only in a particular nation, region, locality or group.
social mobility:	changing of social status by movement from one social class to another.
Utopian:	ideal, but unpractical. Utopia is an imaginary country which has a perfect social and political system, described in Sir Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i> (published in 1516).
A General Certificate of Education at A level:	General Certification of Education at Advanced Level, an examination in Britain taken about two years after the General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level and before entering a university, at the age of eighteen. We could broadly say that it is somewhat equal to our 10+2 examination.
hurl themselves into the fray:	throw themselves into the battle.
the carrot of financial reward:	the promised advantage of wealth.
dons:	here, university teachers. The term 'don' is generally used for fellows and tutors at Oxford and Cambridge.
trauma:	experience or shock which has a lasting and damaging psychological effect.
moot:	debatable; undecided.

open-ended:	without any predetermined limit.
don't care a fig:	to not care at all.
examination syndicates:	University committees, councils, or bodies set up for the purpose of conducting examinations.
toe the line:	conform to the general policy.
Newton:	Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), English physicist and mathematician. He formulated the law of gravitation. His <i>Principles of Natural Philosophy</i> (1687) is one of the most important single works in the history of modern science.
Darwin:	Charles Darwin (1809-82), English naturalist. His theory of evolution, set out in <i>On the the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection</i> (1859) and <i>The Descent of Man</i> (1871), stated that through the ages, all living things developed from a few simple forms and only those forms of life survived which were best suited to a given environment. This theory undermined the biblical belief that man was the supreme product of God's design, and it revolutionized human knowledge.
Marx:	Karl Marx (1818-83), revolutionary, economist, sociologist and founder of modern communist theory, was born in Germany and died in London. His works include <i>Das Kapital</i> and <i>the Communist Manifesto</i> (1848), in which he advocated the abolition of private property. He believed in the principle: "From everyone according to his faculties, to everyone according to his needs." His theories had far-reaching effects, intellectually and politically.
Freud:	Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Austrian physician and the founder of psychoanalysis. He is author of the <i>Interpretations of Dreams</i> and <i>Civilisation and its Discontents</i> .
Picasso:	Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), was born in Spain and died in France. He is one of the greatest and most influential painters of the twentieth century.
marginal utility:	of very little use.
knife each other in the back:	try to defeat each other by unfair means.
ethos:	the characteristic and distinguishing habits, attitudes and beliefs of any group.
through the mill:	undergo intensive training or labour.

9.2.3 Discussion

Leach's views on education can briefly be stated as:

- a. shortcomings of English formal school education (para 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 20 and 21),
- b. measures to improve education (paragraphs 10, 15, 17, 18 and 22),
- c. views on intelligence (paragraphs 13, 14, and 15), and
- d. relationship between education and society.

The author's observation is that formal education in Britain aims at promoting individual identity which encourages competitiveness. He builds up his argument by talking of a paradoxical situation. What is it? (Answer in the space provided below by referring to para 1)

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It is clear that Leach believes that during infancy and pre-school age a child is helped by its mother in establishing communication and familiarity with people around him. But formal school reverses this process by encouraging the child to prove himself better than others by being unique and different from them. As such a child fails to identify himself with people. The paradox thus lies in the reversal of the educational process as a child turns from his mother to formal education in school.

The main argument in the passage is that individual isolation and alienation result from competitiveness. The negative role of competitive examinations is logically debated in paras 8, 9, 12 and 21. Can you sum up Leach's views?

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If you have studied the text carefully you will find that:

- i. a child who does well in examinations alone is considered self-reliant and equipped with latent powers of leadership. This causes psychological hardships for those who lag behind, often driving them to suicide.
- ii. both the public and private schools separate the students on the basis of wealth and merit. The clever are separated from the ordinary as though they were criminals to be separated from the rest of society.
- iii. heredity and wealth are no longer important factors in determining position in society. One achieves status by one's efforts and abilities.
- iv. the system leaves behind the mediocre by a process of selection leaving fewer and fewer people to move up the educational ladder.

Throughout the essay Edmund Leach reflects a point of view which is summed up in the statement that the system of education is viciously competitive. His tone is sometimes mocking and sarcastic: 'We are told that we must segregate the clever just as we must segregate the criminal'. The passage is full of humane considerations: 'We need to give all children equal opportunity to learn how to learn'.

Now refer to paras 4, 9 and 11. Whom does Leach hold responsible for such a situation?

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Don't you think Leach holds parents, guardians and society as a whole responsible for such a situation? Those who are in an advantageous position are worried about losing it; those who are lower down the social scale are envious of those above and also wish to rise and succeed. Such negative attitudes are fostered by the fiercely competitive examination system, among other causes mentioned above. Having thus discussed the negative role of education in character development and moral evolution, he offers suggestions to improve the present day educational system. Refer to paras 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22 and 23 and list the measures he proposes.

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Have you listed the following?

- i. A system should be devised where the relative merit of individuals is not the sole criterion for evaluating success.
- ii. Competitiveness should be replaced by a system of coordination and cooperation.
- iii. Intelligence should not be measured by examinations.
- iv. Efforts should be made to maximize variations of abilities.

- v. Individual interests among children should be promoted, instead of making them learn from text books.
- vi. Education should be oriented to cope with the problems arising out of social and technological changes.

You will agree that these ideas are as relevant in our own context as they were when Leach delivered changes.

The skillful writer, keenly aware of the various relationships among the ideas about which he is going to write, must establish the order in which he is going to deal with the ideas. Logic in Leach's case determines the order. He has first dealt with the premise that the formal education system instils competitiveness. Having dealt with this premise he draws his own conclusions. Moving from less important material to more important material or from easier to more difficult material or from less controversial to more controversial are commonly used as a means of ordering material. We see that a properly formulated guiding purpose plays a major role in determining the order of ideas.

About intelligence and methods of measuring intelligence, Leach takes into account the two views put forth by teachers and parents on the subject and then makes his own synthesis. For this refer to paras 12 and 13. Leach's contention is that teachers believe that intelligence varies from person to person and that a teacher can measure intelligence by filling the student's mind with a lot of information and testing his ability to reproduce it through examinations.

Parents on the contrary, feel that all children have the same intellectual potential. However, to promote a child to do well in life, he should be sent to a privileged school; or else the child must be pressurized into doing well in examinations.

Leach's handling of divergent views on intelligence shows how a skillfull writer illustrates that a subordinate element can be adequately treated, its significance and relationship to the main line of argument made clear and yet its subordinate position maintained. The mark of maturity is being aware that few opinions can be held without giving credit to the validity of an opposing opinion.

Having understood these two extreme views on intelligence, now reproduce Leach's views on intelligence.

Does he not say that heredity is a significant factor in determining intelligence?. Education or parental devotion cannot improve intelligence. Even the development of potential skills is determined by experiences soon after birth. The faculties which constitute intelligence are: powers of perception, memory, vocabulary, logical facility, curiosity, scepticism, persistence, the ability to make unexpected associations and so on.

What is the key role of education in relation to society as suggested by Leach?

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We find Leach categorically stating that education should be a means making human-beings adaptable and human so that they live comfortably in different situations and contribute to the well-being of society. Therefore, competitiveness should be replaced by a system of coordination and cooperation. To be able to do so, conventional competitive examinations should be abolished and variations in intelligence catered to.

Now refer to paras 14, 15, 17 and 18. What method does the author use to state that education should let people with unorthodox views flourish?

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He cites the examples of revolutionary thinkers and scientists – men like Newton and Karl Marx who brought about significant changes in the thinking and ideas of people by contributing new ideas to available knowledge. If they had restricted their thinking to old scientific ideas and outdated political theories, they could not have contributed significantly to scientific advancement and the growth of human thought.

The main object of education is to help in the process of living. How according to Leach, can education help in this direction?

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In para 8 he states that education should enable men to cope with the problems of social and technological changes. To do this, education must concern itself

with training people to exercise their intellectual faculties creatively and for constructive purposes, to enable men to live in harmony in society.

9.2.4 Style

As we know, the text we have just read was broadcast over the radio. As such the style is suitably oratorical and public. The British insistence on 'self-identification' is gradually introduced by taking into account the 'isolated loneliness' – the hallmark of British upbringing and its consequences. This attitude of the British is compared and contrasted with that of the Orient. Having, thus, built on the premise that English formal schooling is 'viciously competitive', he proves by force of argument, logical sequencing of ideas, reasoning and analysis the dangers of such an education. Leach transacts with the reader in a way that the reader's responses are guided carefully over the various aspects of the argument.

Look at the tone itself which is sometimes fervent: **"Let's try to get this straight. We instill competitive values into our children from entirely dishonest motives". "Oh, I know this is very Utopian";** mocking and sarcastic: **'We are told that we must segregate the clever just as we must segregate the criminal.....', 'If you can't afford to send your son to Eton then the next best thing is cut-throat competition – to the death'.** At its best, the tone of his writing is ironical: **'The aim is to discover and cultivate the powers of latent leadership in the few with total disregard for the emotional suffering that this imposes on the many;'** **'It ought to be possible to manage things in a different way so that we go forward into the future together, collaborating as a team instead of looking around for every possible opportunity to knife each other in the back'.**

There are a few allusions to literature: **'this is very Utopian',** to *Das Kapital* **"from each according to his capacity; to each according to his needs."**

To support his argument that great men are temperamentally unorthodox, – he gives examples of great men like Newton, Darwin, Marx, Freud and Picasso.

Leach is most metaphorical when most earnest. He does not use metaphors as a substitute for thought or as ornamentation. His thoughts are expressed as metaphors: 'carrot of financial reward', social 'jigsaw of society', 'hag-ridden', etc.

His choice of words is also governed by his concern to study men in relation to society. The use of words and phrases point out the social behaviour pattern: class stratification, social mobility, jigsaw of society, ethic of fratricide, divergent unorthodox kinds of intelligence, conformist orthodox, etc. These words are used in key positions as they help Leach to advance his argument.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Though the purpose of expository writing is primarily to explain ideas, facts or beliefs, a writer often uses argument to persuade the reader to accept the writer's point of view as correct. What arguments does the author give to prove the negative role of competitive examinations? (You may refer to paragraphs 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12).

2. About intelligence and methods of measuring intelligence, Leach first discusses the two views put forth by teachers and parents and then makes his own synthesis. Sum up the two views and the author's comment by referring to paras 12 and 13.
3. Does the author lend support to his arguments by citing examples of revolutionary thinkers and scientists? In what context does he quote them?

9.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed a passage of expository prose from the point of view of skilful organization of ideas, the use of argument to persuade while explaining and drawing to a logical and convincing conclusion. We have also seen features of literary style.

9.4 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

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 - i. A child who does well in examinations is alone considered self reliant and equipped with latent powers of leadership. This causes psychological hardships for those who lag behind, often driving them to suicide.
 - ii. Both the public and private schools separate the students on the basis of wealth and merit. The clever are separated from the ordinary as though they are criminals to be separated from the rest of society.
 - iii. Examinations are not a true test of intelligence, competitive examinations only test the students' ability to do well in examinations.
 - iv. It promotes a system of segregation; the more successful you are in passing examination, leaving others behind, the more alone and afraid you become.
2. About intelligence and methods of measuring intelligence, Leach takes into account the two views put forth by teachers and parents. Teachers believe the intelligence varies from person to person and a teacher can measure intelligence by filling the student's mind with a lot of information and testing his ability to reproduce it through examination. Parents, on the other hand, feel that children have the same intellectual potential. However, for a child to fare well in life, he should be sent to a privileged school, or else the child must be pressurized to do well in examinations. Leach's own views are that intelligence is largely inborn. It is a complex affair involving mental and psychological qualities. The faculties which constitute intelligence are: powers of perception, memory, vocabulary, logical facility, curiosity, scepticism, persistence, the ability to make unexpected associations and so on.

3. He cites the examples of revolutionary thinkers and scientists – men like Newton, Darwin, Freud, Marx and Picasso— who brought significant changes in the thinking and ideas of people by contributing new ideas to available knowledge. If they had restricted their thinking to old scientific ideas and outdated political theories, they could not have contributed significantly to scientific advancement and the growth of human thought.

UNIT 10 EXPOSITORY PROSE – 3

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Passage from Rabindranath Tagore’s “The Artist”
 - 10.2.1 Text
 - 10.2.2 Glossary
 - 10.2.3 Discussion
 - 10.2.4 Style
- 10.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.4 Answers to Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will study the various kinds of rhetorical strategies employed in an expository piece, especially one that is prominently philosophical and contemplative in nature, like Rabindranath Tagore’s “The Artist”.

After reading this passage you will be able to:

- understand how an argument is structured around a central thesis
- understand the importance of orderly development of coherent logic to an expository piece
- understand the importance of the inner consistency of the argument
- identify the various rhetorical and textual strategies employed by the author to make his own line of reasoning about the topic more assertive and convincing.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will try and understand one of the key stylistic aspects of a good expository piece. Expository texts could include essays, speeches, journals, government documents, newspaper and magazine articles, book reviews, tutorial assignments, instructions among other things. While each type of text shares certain characteristics with the others, they each make their own demands on the reader through the unique use of structure, devices, features, and conventions. Students need to know how to read each type as they encounter it if they are to read them successfully.

Unlike previous units, the essay below is purely reflective and abstract in nature which is to mean that substantiating its argument through laid down, verifiable facts is not going to be possible for the author. This renders his purpose of convincing you about the significance of art and the artist in society far more difficult than usual. He has to resort to creating abstract categories useful to his own thesis and to explain intangible yet relevant

relationships between these categories. Therefore, through this unit you will learn a very important requirement of a good expository passage, namely the coherence and inner consistency of argument.

10.2 PASSAGE FROM RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S "THE ARTIST"

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) also known by his sobriquet Gurudev, a poet, playwright, painter, novelist, musician and educator, was a key figure of the Bengali cultural Renaissance. His main works include *Geetanjali*, *Gora*, *Ghare-Bhaire*, and various short stories, novels, poems and plays. His vast repertoire of the stylised *rabindrasangeet* has given at least two nations, Bangladesh and India, their national anthems. The passage below is one amongst a series of lectures and articles that he wrote on the topic of Art. He was also a talented painter.

10.2.1 Text

The fundamental desire of life is the desire to exist. It claims from us a vast amount of training and experience about the necessities of livelihood. Yet it does not cost me much to confess that the food that I have taken, the dress that I wear, the house where I have my lodging, represent a stupendous knowledge, practice and organisation which I helplessly lack; for I find that I am not altogether despised for such ignorance and inefficiency. Those who read me seem fairly satisfied that I am nothing better than a poet or perhaps a philosopher – which latter reputation I do not claim and dare not hold through the precarious help of misinformation.

It is quite evident in spite of my deficiency that in human society I represent a vocation, which though superfluous has yet been held worthy of commendation. In fact, I am encouraged in my rhythmic futility by being offered moral and material incentives for its cultivation. If a foolish blackbird did not know how to seek its food, to build its nest, or to avoid its enemies, but specialized in singing, its fellow creatures, urged by their own science of genetics, would dutifully allow it to starve and perish. That I am not treated in a similar fashion is the evidence of an immense difference between the animal existence and the civilization of man. His great distinction dwells in the indefinite margin of life in him which affords a boundless background for his dreams and convictions. And it is in this realm of freedom that he realizes his divine dignity, his great human truth, and is pleased when I as a poet sing victory to him, to man the self-revealer, who goes on exploring ages of creation to find himself in perfection.

Reality, in all its manifestations, reveals itself in the emotional and the imaginative background of our mind. We know it, not because we can think about it, but because we directly feel it. And therefore, even if rejected by the logical mind, it is not banished by the consciousness. As an incident it may be beneficial or injurious, but as a revelation its value lies in the fact it offers us an experience through emotion or imagination; we feel ourselves in a special field of realisation. This feeling itself is delightful when it is not accompanied by any great physical or moral risks; we love to feel even fear or sorrow if it is detached from all practical consequences. This is the reason of our enjoyment

of tragic dramas, in which the feeling of pain rouses our consciousness to a white heat of intensity.

The reality of my own self is immediate and indubitable to me. Whatever effects me in a like manner is real for myself, and it inevitably attracts and occupies my attention for its own sake, blends itself with my personality, making it richer and larger and causing it delight. My friend may not be beautiful, useful, rich or great, but he is real for me; in him I feel my own extension and my joy.

The consciousness of the real within me seeks for its own corroboration the touch of the real outside me. When it fails, the self in me is depressed. When our surroundings are monotonous and insignificant, having no emotional reaction upon our mind, we become vague to ourselves. For we are like pictures, whose reality is helped by the background if it is sympathetic. The punishment we suffer in solitary confinement consists in the obstruction to the relationship between the world of reality and the real in ourselves, causing the latter to become indistinct in a haze of inactive imagination: our person is blurred, we miss the companionship of our own being through the diminution of ourselves. The world of our knowledge is enlarged for us through the extension of our information; the world of our personality grows in its area with a large and deeper experience of our personal self in our own universe through sympathy and imagination. In the dim twilight of insensitiveness a large part of our world remains to us like a procession of nomadic shadows. According to the stages of our consciousness we have more or less been able to identify ourselves with this world, if not as a whole, at least in fragments; and our enjoyment dwells in that wherein we feel ourselves thus united. In art we express the delight of this unity by which this world is realized as humanly significant to us. I have my physical, chemical and biological self; my knowledge of it extends through the extension of my knowledge of the physical, chemical and biological world. I have my personal self, which has its communication with our feelings, sentiments and imaginations, which lends itself to be coloured by our desires and shaped by our imageries.

Science urges us to occupy by our minds the immensity of the knowable world; our spiritual teacher enjoins us to comprehend by our soul the infinite spirit which is in the depth of the moving and changing facts of the world; the urging of our artistic nature is to realize the manifestation of personality in the world of appearance, the reality of existence which is in harmony with the real within us. Where this harmony is not deeply felt, there we are aliens and feel perpetually homesick. For man by nature is an artist; he never receives passively and accurately in his mind a physical representation of things around him. There goes on a continual adaptation, a translation of facts into human imagery, through constant touches sentiments and imagination. The animal has the geography of its place; man has his country, the geography of his personal self. The vision of it is not merely physical; it has its artistic unity, it is perpetual creation. In his country, his consciousness being unobstructed, man extends his relationship, which is of his own creative personality. In order to live efficiently man must know facts and their laws. In order to be happy he must establish harmonious relationship with all things with which he has dealings. Our creation is the modification of relationship.

The great men who appear in our history remain in our mind not as a **static** fact but as a living historical image. The **sublime** suggestion of their lives becomes blended into a noble consistency in legends made living in the life of ages. Those men with whom we live constantly modify in our minds, making them more real to us than they would be in a bare presentation. Men's ideal of womanhood and women's ideal of manliness are created by the imagination through mental grouping of qualities and conducts according to our hopes and desires, and men and women consciously and unconsciously move towards its attainment. In fact, they reach a degree of reality for each other according to their success in adapting these respective ideals to their own nature. To say that these ideals are imaginary and therefore not true is wrong in man's case. His true life is in his own creation, which represents the infinity of man. He is naturally indifferent to things that merely exist; they must have some ideal value for him, and then only his consciousness fully recognizes them as real. Men are never true in their isolated self, and their imagination is the faculty that brings before their mind the vision of their own greater being.

We can make truth ours by actively modulating its inter-relations. This is the work of art; for reality is not based in the substance of things but in the principle of relationship. Truth is the infinite pursued by metaphysics; fact is the infinite pursued by science, while reality is the definition of the infinite which relates truth to the person. Reality is human; it is what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express. When we are intensely aware of it, we are aware of ourselves and that gives us delight. We live in it, we always widen its limits. Our arts and literature represent this creative activity which is fundamental in man.

But the mysterious fact about it is that though the individuals are separately seeking their expression, their success is never individualistic in character. Men must find and feel and represent in all their creative works man the eternal, the creator. Their civilization is a continual discovery of the **transcendental** humanity. In whatever it fails it shows the failure of the artist, which is the failure in expression; and that civilization perishes in which the individual thwarts the revelation of the universal. For reality is the truth of man, who belongs to all times, and any individualistic madness of men against man cannot thrive for long.

Man is eager that his feeling for what is real to him must never die; it must find an **imperishable** form. The consciousness of this self of mine is so intensely evident to me that it assumes the character of immortality. I cannot imagine that it ever has been or can be non-existent. In a similar manner all things that are real to me are for myself eternal, and therefore worthy of a language that has a permanent meaning. We know individuals who have the habit of inscribing their names on the walls of some majestic monument of architecture. It is a pathetic way of associating their own names with some works of art which belongs to all times and to all men. Our hunger for reputation comes from our desire to make objectivity real that which is inwardly real to us. He who is inarticulate is insignificant, like a dark star that cannot prove itself. He ever waits for the artist to give him his fullest worth, not for anything specially excellent in him but for the wonderful fact that he is what he certainly is, that he carries in him the eternal mystery of being.

A Chinese friend of mine while travelling with me in the streets of Peking suddenly exclaimed with **vehement** enthusiasm: "Look here is a donkey!"

Surely it was an utterly ordinary donkey, like an indisputable truism, needing no special introduction from him. I was amused but it made me think. The animal is generally classified as having certain qualities that are not recommendable and then hurriedly dismissed. It was obscured to me by an envelopment of commonplace associations; I was lazily certain that I knew it and therefore I hardly saw it. But my friend, who possessed the artistic mind of China, did not treat it with a cheap knowledge but could see it afresh and recognize it as real. When I say real I mean that it did not stay at the outskirts of his consciousness tied to a narrow definition, but it easily blended in his imagination, produced a vision, a special harmony of lines, colors and life and movement, and became intimately his own. The admission of a donkey in a drawing-room is violently opposed; yet there is no prohibition against it finding a place in a picture which may be admiringly displayed on the drawing-room wall.

The only evidence of truth in art exists when it compels us to say, "I see." A donkey we may pass by in nature, but a donkey in art we must acknowledge even if it be a creature that disreputably ignores all its natural history responsibility, even if it resembles a mushroom in its head and a palm-leaf in its tail.

In the **Upanishad** it is said in a **parable** that there are two birds sitting on the same bough, one of which feeds and the other looks on. This is an image of the mutual relationship of the infinite being and the finite self. The delight of the bird which looks on is great, for it is a pure and free delight. There are both of these words in man himself, the objective one with its business of life, the subjective one with its disinterested joy of vision.

A child comes to me and commands me to tell her a story. I tell her of a tiger which is disgusted with the black stripes on its body and comes to my frightened servant demanding a piece of soap. The story gives my little audience immense pleasure, the pleasure of a vision, and her mind cries out, "It is here, for I see!" She knows a tiger in the book of natural history, but she can see the tiger in the story of mine.

I am sure that even this child of five knows that it is an impossible tiger that is out on its untigerly quest of an absurd soap. The delightfulness of the tiger for her is not in its beauty, its usefulness, or its probability; but in the undoubted fact that she can see it in her mind with a greater clearness of vision than she can see the walls around her- the walls that brutally shout their evidence of certainty which is merely circumstantial. The tiger in the story is inevitable, it has the character of a complete image, which offers its **testimonial** of truth in itself. The listener's own mind is the eyewitness whose direct experience could not be contradicted. A tiger must be like every other tiger in order that it may have its place in a book of science; there it must be a commonplace tiger to be at all tolerated. But in the story it is uncommon, it can never be reduplicated. We know a thing because it belongs to a class; we see a thing because it belongs to itself. The tiger of the story completely detached itself from all others of its kind and easily assumed a distinct individuality in the heart of the listener. The child could vividly see it, because by the help of the imagination it became her own tiger, one with herself, and this union of the subject and object gives us joy. Is it because there is no separation between them in truth, the separation being the *maya*, which is creation?

There come in our history occasions when the consciousness of a large multitude becomes suddenly illumined with the recognition of a reality which rises far above the dull obviousness of daily happenings. The world becomes vivid; we see, we feel it with all our soul. Such an occasion there was when the voice of Buddha reached distant shores against physical and moral impediments... then our life and our world found their profound meaning of reality in their relation to the central person who offered us emancipation of love. Men, in order to make this great experience ever memorable, determined to do the impossible; they made rocks to speak, stones to sing, caves to remember; their cry of joy and hope took immortal forms along the hills and the deserts, across barren solitudes and populous cities. A gigantic creative endeavour built up its triumph in stupendous carvings, defying obstacles that were overwhelming. Such heroic activity over the greater part of the Eastern continents clearly answers the question: "What is Art?" It is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the real.

Once there came a time, centuries ago in Bengal, when the divine love drama that made its eternal playground in human soul was vividly revealed by a personality radiating its intimate realization of God. The mind of the whole people was stirred by a vision of the world as an instrument, through which sounded an invitation to the meeting of bliss. The ineffable mystery of God's love call, taking shape in the endless panorama of colours and forms, inspired activity in music that overflowed the restrictions of classical conventionalism. Our *kirtan* music of Bengal came to its being like a star flung up by a burning whirlpool of emotion in the heart of the whole people, and their consciousness was aflame with a sense of reality that must be adequately acknowledged.

The question may be asked as to what place music occupies in my theory that art is for evoking in our mind the deep sense of reality in its richest aspect. Music is the most abstract of all arts, as mathematics is in the region of science. In fact these two have a deep relationship with each other. Mathematics is the logic of numbers and dimensions. It is therefore employed as the basis of our scientific knowledge. When taken out of its concrete associations and reduced to symbols, it reveals its grand structural majesty, the inevitableness of its own perfect concord. Yet there is not merely a logic but also a magic of mathematics which works at the world of appearance, producing harmony- the cadence of inter-relationship. This rhythm of harmony has been extracted from its usual concrete context, and exhibited through the medium of sound. And thus the pure essence of expressiveness in existence, is offered in music. Expressiveness finds its least resistance in sound, having freedom unencumbered by the burden of facts and thoughts. This gives us power to arouse in us an intimate feeling of reality. In the pictorial, plastic or literary arts, the object and our feelings with regard to it are closely associated, like the rose and its perfumes. In music, the feeling distilled in sound becomes itself in an independent object. It assumes a tune-form which is definite, but a meaning which is undefinable, and yet which grips our mind with a sense of absolute truth.

It is the magic of mathematics, the rhythm which is in the heart of all creation, which moves in the atom and, in its different measures, fashions gold and lead, the rose and the thorn, the sun and the planets. These are the dance steps of numbers in the arena of time and space, which weave the *maya*, the patterns of appearance, the incessant flow of change, that ever is and is not. It is the

rhythm which churns up images from the vague and makes tangible what is elusive. This is *maya*, this is the art of creation, and art in literature, which is the magic of rhythm.

And must we stop here? What we know as intellectual truth, is that also not a rhythm of the relationship of facts, that weaves the pattern of theory, and produces a sense of convincingness to a person who somehow feels sure that he knows the truth? We believe any fact to be true because of a harmony, a rhythm in reason, the process of which is analyzable by the logic of mathematics, but not its result in me, just as we can count the notes but cannot account for the *maya* of creation, whose one important, indispensable factor in this self-conscious personality that I represent.

And the Other? I believe it is also a self-conscious personality, which has its eternal harmony with mine.

10.2.2 Glossary

precarious:	depending upon chance, shaky or uncertain.
superfluous:	surplus to requirements, unnecessary.
rhythmic futility:	here it means activities that are useless inspite of being artistic.
incentive:	that which encourage you to do something, inducement.
indubitable:	without any doubt, unquestionable.
corroboration:	proof, verification of your own experience or belief.
diminution:	decrease or reduction.
nomadic:	wandering, unstable, of no fixed address.
imagery:	images in general or collective, mental pictures used to convey a mood or a specific meaning.
static:	inactive or motionless, here signifying death of imagination.
sublime:	of the highest and loftiest nature, awe-inspiring, uplifting.
transcendental:	that which surpasses or goes beyond the limit of what is given and apparent.
imperishable:	undying, eternal.
vehement:	very strong and vigorous, done with great passion and zeal.
Upanishad:	ancient Sanskrit philosophical doctrine, collection of texts about the nature of being, the Absolute etc.
parable:	a story or a fable told to convey a message or moral lesson.
testimonial:	a written document offering proof or evidence, alternatively it can also be a shrine to respect or in the memory of someone or something.
emancipation:	release or social upliftment from bondage or oppression.
kirtan:	a style of devotional offering involving collective music or dance by the devotees especially associated with the medieval Vaishnavite saint from Bengal, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu .
concord:	in harmony or agreement with something.

- cadence:** a unit of tone or rhythm modulation in music and poetry.
- incessant:** never ending, constantly.
- maya:** commonly understood as the transient and illusory aspect of life, illusion; here used in its esoteric form to mean the fabric and nature of creation.

10.2.3 Discussion

Tagore’s ideas on the value of art can be broadly summarised as:

- i) Art is a uniquely human response to the mystery of creation.
- ii) The creative impulse exceeds the logic of existence and material usefulness.
- iii) An artist enriches life by responding to the call of reality and in fundamentally sharing in the divine process of creation.
- iv) Art represents the inter-relatedness of human existence.

Tagore is a philosopher inspite of the polite disclaimer that he makes in the first paragraph. But his philosophical insights on art are based on the views and ideas that he was forced to confront as a poet and an artist himself. What seems to be the drift of his argument in the first two paragraphs?

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In these two paragraphs, Tagore uses his own example to argue that unlike birds and animals, humans give respect and recognition to art. He uses specific techniques to draw the reader into the relevance of the whole debate. He uses these techniques quite effortlessly so that they appear to be a seamless part of his argument. What are these techniques?

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Tagore uses the autobiographical ‘I’ which helps build a direct relationship with the reader and draws a sympathetic response from them. At the same time it is also a generic ‘I’ since the assertion made applies not just specifically to Tagore but to any artist in general. Thereafter he goes on to draw a traditional analogy between an artist and a singing bird, perhaps a nightingale. But he uses it not to depict similarities but to contrast the difference between animal and human existence. The status accorded to a poet in human community gives Tagore the confidence to make his first statement about art and the aesthetic compulsion. How does Tagore describe this human compulsion in the following paragraphs? Art occurs first in the realm of imagination. What, according to Tagore, are the qualities of imaginative experience?

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Human beings have the capacity to go beyond the limitedness of their day-to-day experience in the world of imagination and realise the reality of their beings more fully there. Art is an expression of this totality of existence that a person may experience through imagination. Since this experience is one which is beyond the self, it does not follow self-interest nor is it driven strictly by personal motivation. Tagore emphasises both the delight of self-validation and the joy of sharing that are a part of this process. The delight is in participating in the world of feelings even if the feelings are not altogether pleasant. Tagore argues that the impulse towards artistic expression arises from a need to re-establish more harmoniously and fully the relationship felt between the self and reality. It's in fact when the artist is able to verify this connection through his own composition that reality becomes more real for us. We are able to recognize our own feelings and experiences in those that are represented in art. In spite of the intense nature of these feelings the experiences don't put us personally at any great risk and yet we enjoy participating in them. Art also serves a *heuristic* purpose that is to say that one of its key impulses is our urge to explore phenomena and culminate in some realisation about them. Even when this occurs in the world of imagination it fulfils our innate curiosity about other people's experiences.

So what is this special kind of knowledge that art gives us? As you must have already realised Tagore's is a very philosophical contemplation and by the very nature of the subject matter it is quite abstract. The argument is very much in the realm of ideas without much factual information or social or scientific data to support it. Therefore it becomes imperative to proceed logically with a carefully unfolding rationale guiding the argument. Tagore is able to raise profound questions and provide credible answers only because of this logical procedure underlying his own thought. He is not in the business of making extreme assertions without the support of rigorous argument and verification. In the following paragraphs he resorts to a strategy useful to anyone writing an expository piece which is that of classification and categorising different aspects of the debate. What are these broad categories that he uses to answer the questions about artistic knowledge?

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The categories are those of science, spirituality and art.

Science provides us with information about the phenomenal world and thus responds to intellectual stimuli. Spirituality is a metaphysical response to knowing the absolute and eternal truth. Art therefore seems to perform a very special function which is to represent the ever shifting aspects of human experience.

Tagore believes the artistic process to be a quality innate to human beings. In that he does not valorise the poet as a special individual occupying privilege position vis-à-vis reality but perhaps one who is unfettered by the mundane matters of existence and one who has a more pronounced and developed sense of artistic unity. He also rejects in passing the *tabula rasa* theory of the human mind, grounded as it is, in European empiricism, which says that a mind is a

blank slate taking in passive impressions. He instead argue that man's nature is essentially creative and transforming.

Argument regarding knowledge and reality being built into three distinct categories, art being the most personal, human category in these. According to Tagore, Art is the medium that is best suited to represent general feelings and sentiments and to realise universally accepted truths. Thus it would be correct to say that Tagore's idea of art is *humanistic*.

When one presents a thesis one must also convince a wide range of readership of not only applicability of the thesis but the way in which the supposition can be deduced through the use of some credible examples. Examples are an excellent way to support your own speculations. What are the examples that Tagore use to substantiate his argument? Where are these taken from?

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Tagore substantiates with the help of examples drawn both from personal life and scriptural sources. Personal anecdotes add a narrative angle to even the most dryly intellectual of hypothesis. They can be persuasive and also very entertaining. He follows his amusing anecdote about his Chinese friend and the donkey with perhaps the most logical inferences. The sheer joy that animates his story of the little girl who can see the tiger in her 'mind's eye' is equally powerful in convincing one of the awe inspiring qualities of even the most far-fetched stories.

The example of the two birds has the weight of scriptural authority behind it. . Tagore borrows heavily from ancient Hindu metaphysical debates about the nature of reality and how it is apprehended. The entire relationship between self and reality in Tagore's article is seeped in ancient Upanishadic theories of existence and cognition. It comes as no surprise then that the argument reaches a more esoteric level of talking in terms of *maya* and 'the self-conscious personality'.

Tagore then goes on to elucidate art not just as individual expression but as collective enterprise. He mentions two historical examples of the organisation of artistic inspiration in collective, social terms. What are these? What inference does he draw from these examples?

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The examples are taken from the cultural efflorescence that followed in the wake of such divinely inspired personalities such as Gautam The Buddha and the medieval *bhakti* saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Not only do these examples impress upon us the widespread social change that such divine inspiration can bestow, but also the many artistic forms which benefit from such spontaneously creative individuals.

The latter example takes Tagore to another subject close to his heart, music. Not only was Tagore an accomplished pianist and musician, he also

contributed avidly to modern Bengali music through his repertoire of original songs and compositions. Being both abstract and immediately real at the same time, music for Tagore exemplifies the ability of art to communicate the intangibles of human experience in its purest form. In its weaving together of rhythm, melody, tone and mood, Tagore finds music not just resembling life but almost symbolic of the act of creation.

10.2.4 Style

Tagore uses a fairly wide variety of styles and literary-linguistic registers given the subject matter. As established earlier, the subject is very philosophical in nature and touches upon topics ranging from psychological and social relevance of art to questions of knowledge, reality and various modes of apprehending reality etc.

Tagore begins on an autobiographical note which is very cleverly juxtaposed with the very general observations about art related topics such as the uselessness of art to questions of physical existence. In spite of the formality of tone quite necessary for such a passage, Tagore develops a rapport with the reader through the use of self-berating humour. It also additionally gives a very self-reflexive, contemplative tone to the passage and one feels as if the writer is turning around his own life and work in his mind.

In the second paragraph, he uses an analogy between the artist and a singing bird which has been used in many a conventional poem and parable. But he develops the comparison to show that a bird utterly devoted to singing might die of hunger but a poet such as himself will be provided for by a society appreciative of the value of his art. Comparison therefore becomes a useful logical tool to establish an important point about the human pursuit of art. So quite early in the essay we realise that there are advanced conceptual tools which are being used to develop the central point in an orderly, coherent fashion.

But one must not forget that Tagore is a poet at heart and his intense lyricism frequently punctuates the logical progression of his ideas. For example, towards the end of the second paragraph when he is expected to make a mere statement based on what he has surmised from the preceding poet-bird comparison, what we instead get is a free flow of effect oriented poetic rhetoric. The effect is so extraordinary that it makes you *feel* as if the writer himself has been freed of logical encumbrances and hurled himself into the world of imagination. The use of the hyperbole suggests sudden intensification following the opening out of imaginative vistas and a freedom that an artist experiences when moving untrammelled in this world of imagination.

Immediately Tagore launches into the language of feeling. He has to talk about human feelings and the relationship that art mediates between a harsh external reality and the internal need to revive the soul with fuller emotions. Noteworthy is the precise and well controlled articulation of emotional processes belonging to the sphere of feeling. These, whether it is joy at the sense of fulfilment or mental torpor at the sense of loss, are being not just described but *theorised* in the context of the relationship between self and reality. Therefore the general thrust of ideas is still towards conceptualising

and not merely describing the highs and lows of human feelings. This leads us to the conclusion that expository prose belongs not just to the field of scientific or analytical investigation but can be equally applied to matters related to feelings and emotion. What it provides in either case is a sophisticated tool of analysis, through comparison, contrast, classification, persuasive reasoning and strength of argument.

Similarly we find that when Tagore has to prove the general validity of the point he has been trying to make, he illustrates it with the use of a few examples. These are passages within the essay where the style is more heterogeneous since it stylistically employs various types of prose registers. Tagore becomes immediately *anecdotal* and true to the style of anybody recounting an incident from their personal life, the sentences become shorter, much less formal and more descriptive. But instead of making it into a long-winded, rambling story he keeps these diversions short so that he can move back to the point about art easily and deftly.

Tagore ends the essay with a series of rhetorical questions. In fact in the last paragraph, three out of the four sentences are projected as argument clinching rhetorical questions. These questions are not real queries but utterances that serve to highlight the main message about art and human personality with a greater force of conviction.

10.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed Tagore's views on art and the creative process, and the general features of the expository style of writing, observing in particular the specific techniques employed by Tagore to further his rationale. These specific features include formality of diction and syntax, classification and categorisation, use of supporting examples etc.

Check your Progress

- 1) What stylistic features suitable to an expository piece does Tagore incorporate in his essay 'The Artist'?

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2) What according to Tagore is the difference between the animal and the human world?

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3) What are Tagore’s views on the importance of art?

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10.4 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

1) Tagore employs a whole range of features in the service of his argument that art is an extension of man’s natural faculty to communicate with external reality. These include:

Use of formal, measured syntax that allows the ideas to proceed logically from one thought to the next. Thoughts are assembled through the use of orderly, coherent paragraph structure and ideas which are causally related to each other. A deliberately slow exposition of a question that is contemplative in nature.

Though much of the essay is concerned with the subjective world of feelings and sensation, it compensates by sticking to the basic essay structure which is thesis, key problems, development of thesis, examples leading on to the conclusion.

Various kinds of knowledge are categorised into the different disciplines like science, spirituality etc. to make us realise the distinct kind of knowledge that art can provide.

Use of examples. The anecdotal tone used not only makes the style more casual and informal but also familiarises the philosophical issue

as belonging not only to artists or the Upanishadic doctrines but also to the common everyday world of the marketplace, something that even a child can experience. It helps in broadening the scope of the issue. The repetitive use of rhetorical sentences adds to the gravity and the intensity of the conclusion.

- 2) Both human and animals are similar in their aspect of creating beautiful things. Yet it is only human beings who can appreciate this beauty in all its forms. This aesthetic impulse or the appreciation of beauty is what distinguishes man from bird and beast.
Human beings are able to transcend questions of physical existence. Human beings are able to transcend questions of usefulness and appreciate something quite as useless as art. This is because of the human faculty of realizing the importance of reality in the emotional, imaginative background of the mind.
- 3) Art helps man transcend his mundane day-to-day existence and realise the nature of reality in its wholeness.
Art helps man realise the harmony that exists between him and the external phenomenal world. It brings out the unique character of the thing that it represents even if that be something so common and absurd as a donkey.
Above all, art is the most natural response of man to the call of reality. It is an expression of truth known through inspired minds. It is capable of generating mass movements.
Art is able to capture the mystery of human creation.

UNIT 11 EXPOSITORY PROSE-4

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Essay by E.M. Forster 'Notes on the English Character'
 - 11.2.1 Text
 - 11.2.2 Glossary
 - 11.2.3 Discussion
 - 11.2.4 Style
- 11.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.4 Answers to Exercises

11.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall study another essay entitled 'Notes on the English Character' by E.M. Forster.

After completing the unit you will be familiar with:

- the antithetical method of developing expository prose,
- the use of comparison and contrast in explaining a point,
- narrative support to illustrate an argument,
- features of a semi-formal style of writing and
- the role of metaphor in explaining abstract concepts.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit on expository prose that we have studied so far we have been discussing how ideas are organized in a proper sequence, what are the techniques of developing an argument and the features of style. In this unit, we shall introduce you to yet another technique of developing expository prose, namely **antithesis**. When we talk of antithesis we mean that contrasting ideas can be put together in such a manner so as to produce an effect of balance. Antithesis helps the writer to give equal weightage to both sides of an argument so that the reader/audience can make an intelligent choice and come to a logical conclusion.

In the passage that follows, you will discover that the writer pays due attention to features of good exposition while elaborating the two view points on Englishmen. His plan is as follows:

- i. Introduction
- ii. Statement of the case
- iii. Proof in support of the case
- iv. Conclusion.

11.2 ESSAY BY E.M. FORSTER 'NOTES ON THE ENGLISH CHARACTER'

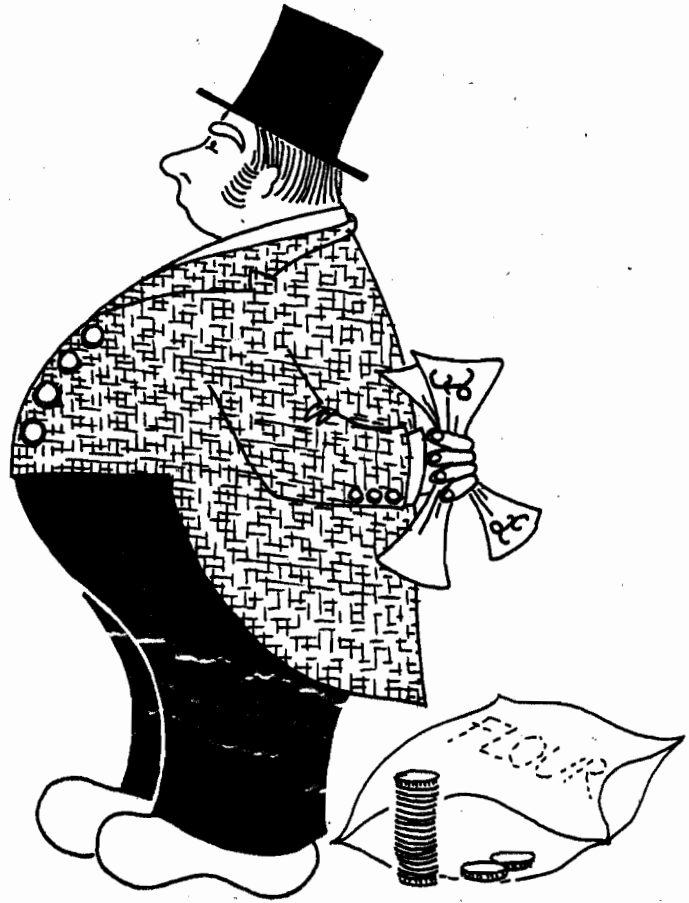
E.M. Forster (1879-1979) wrote only five novels, but is ranked among the best writers of the first half of the twentieth century. *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924) both deal delicately with relationships, the former between individuals, and the latter between races. Forster is known for attacking the insularity, shallowness and smugness of the English middle-class. In this essay he analyses the 'underdeveloped' emotional nature of Englishmen and shows that they are not as unfeeling as they appear to be. They are misunderstood because they measure out their emotional responses prudently. We have selected this passage to show how skilful Forster is in expressing his sensitive perceptions. Also when the style of writing is semi-formal, the vocabulary expresses a certain tone which relates to the writer's attitude towards the subject. The discussion that follows will examine some of these issues.

11.2.1 Text

I had better **let the cat out of the bag** at once and record my opinion that the character of the English is essentially middle class. There is a sound historical reason for this, for, since the end of the eighteenth century, the **middle classes** have been the dominant force in our community. They gained wealth by the **Industrial Revolution**, political power by the **Reform Bill of 1832**; they are connected with the rise and organization of the British Empire; they are responsible for the literature of the nineteenth century. Solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency, lack of imagination, hypocrisy. These qualities characterize the middle classes in every country, but in England they are national characteristics also, because only in England have the middle classes been in power for one hundred and fifty years. Napoleon, in his rude way, called us 'a nation of shopkeepers'. We prefer to call ourselves 'a great commercial nation' – it sounds more dignified – but the two phrases amount to the same. Of course there are other classes; there is an aristocracy, there are the poor. But it is on the middle classes that the eye of the critic rests—just as it rests on the poor in Russia and the aristocracy in Japan. Russia is symbolized by the peasant or the factory worker; Japan by the **samurai**; the national figure of England is Mr. John Bull with his top hat, his comfortable clothes, his substantial stomach, and his substantial balance at the bank. **St. George** may caper on banners and in the speeches of politicians, but it is **John Bull** who delivers the goods. Even Saint George – if **Gibbon** is correct – wore a top hat once; he was an army contractor and supplied indifferent bacon. It all amounts to the same in the end.

Just as the heart of England is the middle classes, so the heart of the middle classes is the public-school system. This extraordinary institution is local. It does not even exist all over the British Isles. It is unknown in Ireland, almost unknown in Scotland (countries excluded from my survey), and though it may inspire other great institutions – **Aligarh**, for example, and some of the schools in the United States – it remains unique, because it was created by the **Anglo-Saxon** middle classes, and can flourish only where they flourish. How perfectly it expresses their character – far better, for instance, than does the university, into which social and spiritual complexities have already entered.

With its boarding-houses, its compulsory games, its system of **prefects** and **fagging**, its insistence on good form and on **esprit de corps**, it produces a type whose weight is out of all proportion to its numbers.



John Bull with his top hat, his comfortable clothes, his substantial stomach...

On leaving his school, the boy either sets to work at once – goes into the army or into business, or emigrates – or else proceeds to the university, and after three or four years enters some other profession – becomes a barrister, doctor, civil servant, schoolmaster, or journalist. (If through some mishap he does not become a manual worker or an artist). In all these careers his education, or the absence of it, influences him. Its memories influence him also. Many men look back on their school days as the happiest of their lives. They remember with regret that golden time when life, though hard, was not yet complex; when they all worked together and played together and thought together, so far as they thought at all; when they were taught that school is the world in miniature, and believed that no one can love his country who does not love his school. And they prolong that time as best as they can by joining their Old Boys' Society; indeed some of them remain Old Boys and nothing else for the rest of their lives. They attribute all good to the school. They quote the remark that **'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton'**. It is nothing to them that the remark is inapplicable historically and was never made by the Duke of Wellington, and that the Duke of Wellington was an Irishman. They go on quoting it because it expresses their sentiments; they feel that if the Duke of Wellington didn't make it he ought to have, and if he wasn't an Englishman he ought to have been. And they go forth into a world

that is not entirely composed of public-school men or even of Anglo-Saxons, but of men who are as various as the sand of the sea; into a world of whose richness and subtlety they have no conception. They go forth into it with well developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts. An undeveloped heart – not a cold one. The difference is important, and on it my next note will be based.

For it is not that the Englishman can't feel – it is that he is afraid to feel. He has been taught at his public-school that feeling is bad form. He must not express great joy or sorrow, or even open his mouth too wide when he talks – his pipe might fall out if he did. He must **bottle up his emotions**, or let them out only on a very special occasion.

Once upon a time (this is an anecdote) I went for a week's holiday on the Continent with an Indian friend. We both enjoyed ourselves and were sorry when the week was over, but on parting our behaviour was absolutely different. He was plunged in despair. He felt that because the holiday was over all happiness was over until the world ended. He could not express his sorrow too much. But in me the Englishman came out strong. I reflected that we should meet again in a month or two, and could write in the interval if we had anything to say; and under these circumstances I could not see what there was to make a fuss about. It wasn't as if we were parting forever or dying. 'Buck up', I said, 'do buck up.' He refused to buck up, and I left him plunged in gloom.

The conclusion of the anecdote is even more instructive. For when we met the next month our conversation threw a good deal of light on the English character. I began by scolding my friend. I told him that he had been wrong to feel and display so much emotion upon so slight an occasion; that it was inappropriate. The word 'inappropriate' roused him to fury. 'What?' he cried. 'Do you measure out your emotions as if they were potatoes?' I did not like the simile of the potatoes, but after a moment's reflection I said, 'Yes, I do; and what's more, I think I ought to. A small occasion demands a little emotion, just as a large occasion demands a great one. I would like my emotions to be appropriate. This may be measuring them like potatoes, but it is better than slopping them about like water from a pail, which is what you did.' He did not like the simile of the pail. 'If those are your opinions, they part us forever,' he cried, and left the room. Returning immediately, he added: 'No – but your whole attitude toward emotion is wrong. Emotion has nothing to do with appropriateness. It matters only that it shall be sincere. I happened to feel deeply. I showed it. It doesn't matter whether I ought to have felt deeply or not'.

This remark impressed me very much. Yet I could not agree with it, and said that I valued emotion as much as he did, but used it differently; if I poured it out on small occasions I was afraid of having none left for the great ones, and of being bankrupt at the crisis of life. Note the word 'bankrupt'. I spoke as a member of a prudent middle class nation, always anxious to meet my liabilities. But my friend spoke as an **Oriental**, and the Oriental has behind him a tradition, not of middle class prudence, but of kindly munificence and splendour. He feels his resources are endless, just as John Bull feels his are finite. As regards material resources, the Oriental is clearly unwise. Money isn't endless. If we spend or give away all the money we have, we haven't any more, and must take the consequences, which are frequently unpleasant. But,

as regards the resources of the spirit, he may be right. The emotions may be endless. The more we express them, the more we may have to express.

True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away,

says Shelley. Shelley, at all events, believes that the wealth of spirit is endless; that we may express it copiously, passionately, and always; and that we can never feel sorrow or joy too acutely.

In the above anecdote, I have figured as a typical Englishman. I will now descend from that dizzy and somewhat unfamiliar height, and return to my business of note taking. A note on the SLOWNESS of the English character. The Englishman appears to be cold and unemotional because he is really slow. When an event happens, he may understand it quickly enough with his mind, but he takes quite a while to feel it. Once upon a time a coach, containing some Englishmen and some Frenchmen, was driving over the Alps. The horses ran away, and as they were dashing across a bridge the coach caught on the stonework, tottered, and nearly fell into the ravine below. The Frenchmen were frantic with terror: they screamed and gesticulated and flung themselves about, as Frenchmen would. The Englishmen sat quite calm. An hour later the coach drew up at an inn to change horses, and by that time the situations were exactly reversed. The Frenchmen had forgotten all about the danger, and were chattering gaily; the Englishmen had just begun to feel it, and one had a nervous breakdown and was obliged to go to bed. We have here a clear physical difference between the two races – a difference that goes deep into character. The Frenchmen responded at once; the Englishmen responded in time. They were slow and they were also practical. Their instinct forbade them to throw themselves about in the coach, because it was more likely to tip over if they did. They had this extraordinary appreciation of FACT that we shall notice again and again. When a disaster comes, the English instinct is to do what can be done first, and to postpone the feeling as long as possible. Hence they are splendid at emergencies. No doubt they are brave – no one will deny that – but bravery is partly an affair of the nerves, and the English nervous system is well equipped for meeting a physical emergency. It acts promptly and feels slowly. Such a combination is fruitful, and anyone who possesses it has gone a long way toward being brave. And when the action is over, then the Englishman can feel.

There is one more consideration – a most important one. If the English nature is cold, how is it that it has produced a great literature and a literature that is particularly great in poetry? Judged by its prose, English literature would not stand in the first rank. It is its poetry that raises it to the level of Greek, Persian, or French. And yet the English are supposed to be so unpoetical. How is this? The nation that produced the **Elizabethan drama** and the **Lake Poets** cannot be a cold, unpoetical nation. We can't get fire out of ice. Since literature always rests upon national character, there must be in the English nature hidden springs of fire to produce the fire we see. The warm sympathy, the romance, the imagination, that we look for in Englishmen whom we meet, and too often vainly look for, must exist in the nation as a whole, or we could not have this outburst of national song. An undeveloped heart – not a cold one.

The trouble is that the English nature is not at all easy to understand. People talk of the mysterious East but the West also is mysterious. It has depths that do not reveal themselves at the first gaze. We know what the sea looks like from a distance; it is of one colour, and level, and obviously cannot contain such creatures as fish. But if we look into the sea over the edge of a boat, we see a dozen colours, and depth below depth, and fish swimming in them. That sea is the English character – apparently imperturbable and even. The depths and the colours are the **English romanticism** and the English sensitiveness – we do not expect to find such things, but they exist. And – to continue my metaphor – the fish are the English emotions, which are always trying to get up to the surface, but don't quite know how. For the most part we see them moving far below, distorted and obscure. Now and then they succeed and we exclaim, 'Why, the Englishman has emotions! He actually can feel!' And occasionally we see that beautiful creature the flying fish, which rises out of the water altogether into the air and the sunlight. English literature is a flying fish. It is a sample of the life that goes on day after day beneath the surface; it is a proof that beauty and emotion exist in the salt, inhospitable sea.

11.2.2 Glossary

- let the cat out of the bag:** reveal the hidden truth, the essence of the matter.
- middle class:** a class of people in society who are not working-class or upper class. Middle class comprises business people, managers, doctors, lawyers, and teachers. They share common social characteristics and values.
- Industrial Revolution:** the mechanization of industry which took place in England in the late 18th and early 19th century. This led to the rise of a new wealthy class called the Industrial class. This affected the social set-up in England.
- Reform Bill of 1832:** after the Industrial Revolution, the Reform Bill was passed in 1832 by the British Parliament which provided for proportionate representation in the House of Commons. It extended the franchise (right of voting) to the middle class.
- samurai:** Warrior class under the feudal system of Japan.
- St. George and Mr Bull:** figures symbolic of certain aspects of Englishmen – St. George symbolizes chivalry, that is, defending the weak against the oppressor; John Bull stands for the aggressive and confident Englishman who built the Empire and, in the later part of the nineteenth century, enjoyed the commercial domination of the world. These figures are often depicted in political cartoons.
- Gibbon:** Edward Gibben (1737-1794) eminent English historian, author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.
- Aligarh:** Aligarh Muslim University established by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in 1877 in Aligarh, on the pattern of Oxford and Cambridge.

Anglo-Saxon:	member of the mixed race which developed after the Germanic tribes of Angles and Saxons settled in England in the 5 th and 6 th centuries, now used for persons of English descent wherever found.
prefect:	senior pupil with authority to maintain discipline
fagging:	the practice in public-schools of senior pupils making juniors work for them.
esprit de corps:	French phrase, meaning regard for the honour of the organization one belongs to.
the battle of Waterloo:	the battle in which the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon and changed the course of European history.
bottle up emotions:	not to express emotions for a long time.
Oriental:	the Orient refers to the East and an Oriental is a person who comes from the part of the world that includes India, China and Japan.
Elizabethan drama:	drama that flourished in Britain in Queen Elizabeth's reign, in the second half of the 16 th century. The important dramatists of this age were Shakespeare (1564-1616), Marlowe (1564-93) and Ben Jonson (1572-1637).
English romanticism:	a literary, artistic and philosophical movement originating at the end of the 18 th century but flourishing in the 19 th century characterized by an emphasis on the imagination and emotions and the exaltation of the common and primitive man, an appreciation of external nature, an interest in the remote, or the supernatural, a preference for melancholy.
the Lake Poets:	the early nineteenth century poets Wordsworth (1770-1850), Coleridge (1772-1834) and Southey (1774-1843) so called because they lived in and used the English Lake district as the setting for their nature poetry.
mysterious East:	a popular belief in the West that the East holds mysteries.
solidity:	the quality of being solid, firm or hard.
caution:	to be on one's guard, to pay careful attention to the probable effects of a step that one may take.
integrity:	the quality of possessing sound moral principles; uprightness, honesty and sincerity.
hypocrisy:	to pretend to be what one is not.

11.2.3 Discussion

Forster's observations on the character of Englishmen can be broadly stated as:

- i. statements in support of essentially middle class characteristics of Englishmen (paras 1,2,3),
- ii. concept of an undeveloped heart (para 3),

iii. comments on the undeveloped emotional nature of Englishmen (paras 9 and 10).

Forster begins with the premise that Englishmen are essentially middle class in character. Read paragraph 1. What events have helped middle classes to be powerful in Britain?

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Have you also listed the following: the Industrial Revolution, Reform Bill of 1832 and the literature of the nineteenth century – Forster calls middle class characteristics national traits. What are they?

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We hope you have included these traits in your response: solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency, lack of imagination and hypocrisy.

We find Forster’s essay a closely reasoned and eloquent argument on a subject of vital importance to every Englishman. Part of its power comes from its organization and the emphasis given to elaborating the argument.

Now refer to paragraph 2. Forster thinks that the English public-school system is responsible for developing middle class characteristics and values in Englishmen. In what ways is the English public-school system unique? What is its chief drawback? (For the last question please turn to lines 8-9 of para 2).

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It is characterized by its boarding-houses, compulsory games, system of prefects and fagging, insistence on good form and *esprit de corps*. Its chief drawback is that it produces people, who are small in number; because the majority of people are not so fortunate as to be taught at public-schools, but who exercise tremendous influence on others because of the positions they come to occupy in society. Forster does not leave anything vague. He gives specific features of the public school system that can be termed unique. Concreteness is a necessary ingredient in exact, accurate, and efficient communication. Forster is constantly aware of abstractions that need to be made concrete, of general statements that have to be substantiated by specific examples.

In the next paragraph Forster talks of the euphoria, a feeling of great happiness and elation that the Englishmen experience when they recall the time spent in school. Why do Englishmen consider school days the golden time of their lives?

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We hope you have included the following points in your answer.

- i. Life is hard but not complicated while at school,
- ii. Pupils learn to live in harmony.
- iii. School is considered a miniature world and one who loves school must love the world.

Thereafter, in paragraph 3, there is a **pun** on the word 'old'. A pun is a use of words that have more than one meaning. 'Old' here refers to students who have left school after completing study. But in another sense 'old' could mean conservative, reactionary or traditional-minded or those who find it difficult to accept new ideas.

Forster is satirical when he talks of old Boys' Society's beliefs. **Satire** is a literary weapon directed against persons or institutions that the author believes should be corrected. The writer often describes a completely different situation, but makes indirect parallels and references to the things we know so that we realize what it is that the writer is criticizing. Satire is humorous and witty. A writer of satire aims at correcting an undesirable situation or human folly.

Now refer to para 3. What is the misconception in the minds of old boys that Forster talks about?

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Anything good in life should be attributed to the education one gets in the public-school. Read further and write in a sentence on how this misconception is illustrated.

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The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.

How does Forster prove the falsity of the oft-quoted remark?

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The comment was not made by the Duke of Wellington and the Duke of Wellington was an Irishman and not an Englishman.

Refer again to para 3. Are the products of public-schools well-equipped when they go out into the wide world?

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No, because the school they have studied in is not a replica of the outside world, where they have to meet people who are as varied as the sand particles of the sea. Their rigid training at school comes in the way of their amicably adjusting in a highly complex world. They are people with sound bodies, sound knowledge but undeveloped hearts.

Now refer to the paragraph where the concept of the undeveloped heart is given. How would you distinguish between a 'cold heart' and an 'undeveloped heart'? Why is an Englishman's heart undeveloped?

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A cold heart relates to a person who cannot feel. But a person who puts a restraint on his feelings is the one who has an 'undeveloped heart'. An Englishman's heart is undeveloped because he does not express his emotions, or at best expresses them only on very special occasions.

We have several methods of developing expository writing. The narrative element can act as a stimulant for further discussion and explication of the subject. The two **anecdotes** mentioned in paragraphs 5, 6, and 8 act as signposts to Forster's antithesis that Englishmen appear cold and unemotional but are not so.

The first anecdote in para 5 describes Forster's continental holiday with his Indian friend, at the end of which Forster behaved sensibly. He hoped to meet his friend soon, and said that they could write to each other in the interval, if they had anything to say. But the Indian friend became emotional and dejected at the time of parting. The later part of the anecdote explicates Forster's views on emotions. Whereas Forster believed that emotions should be used sparingly and on appropriate occasions, his Indian friend thought that what is important is not the occasion for emotion but the sincerity of it.

Forster is candid in his statements about his own behaviour. His inability to express his feelings to his friend relates to his training at his public-school that one should exercise restraint in feeling great joy or sorrow.

Comparison and contrast act as tools of exposition. Comparison has the following uses:

- a. to explain related ideas to illustrate a point;
- b. to convince in an argument that one element is superior, more important, or more useful than the other.

In para 7 we have comparison of attitudes. (Comparison by aspects could be more effective and more specific than comparison of the whole units.) Forster compares the Western man's and the Oriental's attitudes towards materials. The middle class Englishman is wise in spending money whereas the Oriental is generous. The Englishman thinks his resources are limited, so he should not

spend lavishly just as the Oriental feels that his resources are unlimited so that he can afford to spend lavishly. Also the Oriental feels emotions are endless, to be expressed endlessly, the Englishman's views on emotions are conditioned by his prudent middleclass outlook.

In para 8 Forster relates another anecdote to prove the *slowness* of the English character.

Describe the anecdote in your own words.

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Once a coach carrying some Englishmen and Frenchmen to the Alps, nearly fell into a deep ravine. The Frenchmen screamed and gesticulated as they were terror-stricken, but the Englishmen sat calmly. An hour after this incident, when they were safely sitting in an inn, the French chatted gaily, having forgotten the incident, whereas the English were found to be grave, one of them even suffered a nervous breakdown because they had just begun to feel the seriousness of the situation they had been in.

With the help of this anecdote Forster suggests the need to take into account the situation when in crisis. If one can act rationally and not be sentimental in a crisis one is well-equipped to meet the challenges of life.

The concluding part of this passage, where Forster comments on the unemotional nature of Englishmen, works as an **antithesis** to his earlier observations where he had seemingly upheld the generally accepted views on the English character. He seems to correct some of the misconceived notions about English character by argument. Read para 9. What is the most significant argument that Forster makes to prove that the English are not cold?

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He points to the greatness of English poetry. A nation that can produce one of the greatest literatures in the world, and in particular Elizabethan drama and the poetry of the Lake Poets, cannot be cold and unemotional. The imagination that creates literature can thrive only where emotions, imagination, romance, etc. are valued.

Lastly, Forster makes use of **metaphors** which cut short the abstractions of learned language and appeal to our experience and senses. As you are aware, a

metaphor is a figure of speech in which we use a name or a descriptive term or phrase for an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. A metaphor suggests a comparison between two things not usually thought of as similar. Let us see the comparisons in para 10. English character is compared to a sea. The depths and colours visible in a sea are English romanticism and the English sensitivity. The fishes under the tranquil sea water are the emotions that do not easily surface. The flying fish are symbolic of the emotional richness and literary creativity of the English.

Thus the explanatory metaphors, Forster's image-making devices, explain the hidden emotional nature of Englishmen.

11.2.4 Style

Forster uses the first person pronoun to talk in a relaxed, chatty, conversational informal manner. The informal style is a suitable vehicle for communicating the whimsical view Forster holds with regard to English character. The style becomes conversational with his use of proverbs such as 'let the cat out of the bag', 'get fire out of ice,' and suggestive such as 'bottle up emotions', 'weight out of proportion to its numbers'. There are words such as 'buck up', 'make a fuss about' and striking similes such as 'measuring emotions like potatoes', 'slopping them about like water from the pail', 'as various as the sand of the sea', etc.

He uses words in new connotations such as 'bankruptcy of emotions', 'anxious to meet my liabilities', 'dizzy and somehow unfamiliar height'.

We also observe role shifting – he says the English nervous system is well equipped for meeting a physical emergency. It acts promptly and feels slowly. Such a combination, he reiterates, is fruitful, and one who possesses it is considered brave. This shift of attitude is evident in the arguments he makes such as 'If the English nature is cold, how is it that it has produced a great literature and a literature that is particularly great in poetry?'

Compare and contrast his attitude in the first half of the passage with that of the later half. In the earlier part he accepts the generally held views about English character: insularity, shallowness and smugness. He even extends reasons for such views. He accounts for the dominant role played by the middle classes, he attacks the English public school system for the kind of unrealistic education it gives.

The first shift of stance comes in paragraph 4 when he says 'for it is not that the Englishman can't feel – it is that he is afraid to feel'. The rest of the essay is a discussion on the unfeeling nature of Englishmen.

We have seen the use of metaphors and similes earlier. The language is suggestive and skilfully used to suit his change in tone and the antithetical position he assumes in the course of discussion.

11.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed

- Forster's views on the character of Englishmen,
- methods of developing expository composition such as antithesis, comparison and contrast,

- narrative support in illustrating argument,
- features of a semi-formal style and the role of metaphors in explaining abstract concepts.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Pick out examples from the passage that highlight a semi-formal style of writing. Does this style skilfully persuade the reader to appreciate the author's point of view? (150 words)

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2. What literary devices does Forster use to prove that Englishmen are not unemotional? Does the language appear to our senses and experience? (100 words)

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3. From the two anecdotes we get not only an account of the events but first hand experience of the author's mental bias. Comment. (150 words)

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11.4 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

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 - i. Forster's use of first person pronouns such as *us* and *we*, reflective pronoun such as *ourselves*.
 - ii. use of proverbs such as *let the cat out of the bag*, *get fire out of ice*.
 - iii. use of quotations such as 'a nation of shopkeepers,' 'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton'.
 - iv. Striking similes such as 'measuring emotions like potatoes', 'slopping them about like water from the pail', 'as various as the sand of the sea'.

The informal style is suitable for communicating whimsical views that Forster holds with regard to English character.

2. Forster uses metaphors which appeal to our experience and senses and explain the author's assertion that Englishmen are not unemotional. English character is compared to a sea. The depths and colours visible in a sea are English romanticism and English sensitivity. The fishes in the tranquil sea are the emotions that do not easily surface. The flying fish are the flights of English literature.

Thus the unusual metaphors explain the hidden depth and emotional nature of Englishmen.

3. Write in your own words the author's account of the Continental holiday with his Indian friend. The anecdote explicates Forster's views that one should exercise restraint in feeling excessive joy or sorrow. Thereafter, describe the second anecdote in your own words. Forster believes that Englishmen are known for acting well in time. If one can act prudently in a crisis and not indulge in sentimentality one is well equipped to meet the challenges of life. The second anecdote defends the author's views on the English character.

UNIT 12 INTRODUCTION TO THE SHORT STORY

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Characteristics of a Short Story
 - 12.2.1 What is a Short Story?
 - 12.2.2 How 'Short' is a Short Story?
 - 12.2.3 What is a Short Story about?
 - 12.2.4 What is it that Matters in a Short Story?
- 12.3 The Short Story and the Novel
- 12.4 The Rise and Development of the Short Story
 - 12.4.1 The Rise of the Short Story
 - 12.4.2 The Development of the Short Story
- 12.5 Some Hints on Reading a Short Story
 - 12.5.1 Plot
 - 12.5.2 Characters
 - 12.5.3 Time and Place
 - 12.5.4 Style
 - 12.5.5 The Techniques of Story-Telling.
- 12.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.7 Suggested Reading
- 12.8 Answers to Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

You will read four short stories in this Block. But before we begin to read them, let us look at the characteristics of the short story briefly, in this Unit. This will provide us with general guidelines on how to read a short story analytically. If you read this Unit carefully, you should be able to:

- explain what a short story is;
- outline the rise and development of the short story as a literary form;
- distinguish between a short story and a novel;
- analyze the elements of the short story.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

As you know in this course we shall study different forms of prose such as the short story, novel, essay, biography, autobiography, letters, travelogue and speeches. In this Block, we shall read four short stories. But before we do that, we shall give you an introduction to the short story as a literary form. What is a short story? When was it first written? When we read a short story, what must we look for in order to decide whether it has artistic merit or not? These are some of the questions we shall address in this Unit.

Moreover, we shall discuss the main features of a short story. This will give you some idea about how to read a short story analytically. We must, however, point out that literary appreciation does not proceed like a mathematical exercise. We cannot acquire a set of critical formulae and apply these to each and every story that we come across. Such guidelines can only be of partial help. It is only by extensive reading and close analysis of a large number of short stories that we find we are getting better with practice.

We hope that you will not only read the stories in your course but also read other stories from anthologies and magazines. We suggest that you complete the given exercises before looking at the answers provided at the end of the Unit.

12.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF A SHORT STORY

You must have noticed that most discussions of literature concentrate on the novel, drama and poetry. The short story is often regarded as a sort of poor relation, not worth serious consideration. Katherine Mansfield a famous short story writer was once asked:

‘What do you do in life’?

‘I am a writer’.

‘Do you write dramas?’

‘No’. It sounded as if she were sorry she did not.

‘Do you write tragedies, novels, romance?’ I persisted, because she looked as if she could write these. ‘No’, she said, and with still deeper distress; ‘only short stories; just short stories’.

Later on she told me she felt so wretched at that moment she would have given anything if she could have answered at least one ‘yes’ to the ‘big’ things. (Quoted in Anthony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (1980, p. 381).

It is clear that Mansfield is apologetic about writing short stories. On the other hand, there is another practitioner of the art, Edgar Allan Poe, who believes that the short story is superior to the novel. It is not necessary to agree with either of these opinions. Let us begin with the notion that the short story is equal to any other literary genre be it poetry, drama or the novel.

12.2.1 What Is a Short Story?

We can all recognize a short story when we see one. But when it comes to defining a short story, there are problems. There are so many different kinds of short stories, that no single definition would cover all. So, at best, we can only attempt to define a short story in the most general terms.

A short story is a piece of prose fiction complete in itself and of a moderate length. This definition excludes all stories written in verse. For example, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, written in the closing years of the fourteenth century, can be seen as an interesting collection of stories, but as they are written in verse they cannot be taken as examples of the short story.

Moreover, a short story is different from a tale or fable because it is not just a story but a complex and developed literary form that can be traced only to the early nineteenth century. A **tale** is primarily an oral form. The oral tradition of story telling still exists in the villages of India where generations of children, sitting round the fire of a winter evening, still listen in awe to stories of fairies, gods and demons.

A **fable** is a short tale which usually conveys a moral. The characters in a fable are usually animals talking like human beings. Perhaps you are familiar with the tales of *Panchatantra* which is a collection of fables. Short stories are also different from parables. A **parable** is a story which presents a moral. The contemporary short story also has a meaning, a point to be made, but it is not a parable because that meaning in itself is not important. A short story is also different from an **anecdote**. An anecdote relates an interesting happening or a series of happenings or events. A short story may also present these events. But the difference lies in the fact that in a short story these happenings or events are not important in themselves but are a manifestation of the true nature and significance of a character or situation.

12.2.2 How 'Short' is a Short Story?

It is difficult to establish the average length of a short story. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), an American short story writer, says that it requires 'from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal'. Let us look at this prize-winning short story:

I was on the train from London to Edinburgh.
There was this man, seated across from me.
'Do you believe in ghosts?' he said,
'No', I said,
He disappeared.

Do you think this is a short story? It seems more like an anecdote. You will find that most stories are anecdotal but as we know, in a short story the events are not, in general important in themselves but usually highlight a character/characters or situation. The point that has to be stressed here is that we can either find very short short stories or rather long ones like those of Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) which can be called *novellas*. A novellas is somewhere between a short story and the novel in length. Whatever the length, it should generally be possible to complete a short story at one sitting, as Poe has suggested.

12.2.3 What is a Short Story About?

A short story has an unlimited range of possible themes just like any other literary genre. A short story may be about a particular scene, a series of connected incidents, a moral issue, an aspect of life, a phase of character or an interesting experience. In sum, a short story can be about anything.

The modern short story may not even have a story, but it is certainly fictional. A short story illuminates some aspects of life or characters. A well-written short story must convey the impression of completeness. In some stories there is no clear cut ending or resolution of the crisis; yet the effect is one of organic unity. What do we mean by organic unity? It is not just a unity of a

beginning, a middle and an end. The unity lies in the way the writer has given shape to a mass of details. As we know, a writer is faced with a range of possible ways in which to write the story. S/he must select the relevant details as it is not possible to narrate everything. The writer then works these selected details into a complete organic whole. What do we mean by 'organic whole'? For example, if we cut an arm off a body, the body is no longer an organic whole but is mutilated. Just as it is not possible to remove a single limb without mutilating the body, similarly in a well-constructed short story, it should not be possible to remove a single detail.

12.2.4 What is it that Matters in a Short Story?

Is it the writer's preoccupation with form? Or does the greatness of a story depend on the extent to which it has depicted the range of human experience? Is a short story great because of the writer's technique? Or does a short story have literary merit because of its originality of theme and style? Or is it because a certain kind of story is in fashion? Or does a story matter because it has the power to move us? A short story defies exact definition. However, an effective short story must arouse and hold the reader's interest and must convey a sense of completeness, in a style that suits the content. All these elements then contribute to the final effect that the story may have.

Check your Progress I

Read the following questions and write your answers in the space provided. In case you have some doubts, you may go back to the previous section. Please try to write the answers in your own words.

i) Define the characteristics of a short story.

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ii) What is the difference between?

a) a short story and a tale.

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b) a short story and an anecdote.

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c) a short story and a parable.

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iii) How short is a short story?

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iv) What in your opinion are the elements that make a short story effective?

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12.3 THE SHORT STORY AND THE NOVEL

Let us now examine the similarities and differences between the short story and the novel. The novel and the short story are both written in prose, both are fictional and make use of varieties of prose such as narrative and descriptive. But it is in scope that they differ. A novel is wide-ranging and long, the short story is brief and deals with a limited subject. A short story is not a novel in a condensed form. You cannot summarize a novel and call it a short story.

In the novel, you will notice, the interest is spread over a larger area. In a short story, you will find a narrower focus, but a greater concentration of interest. For instance in a novel there are many characters whereas in a short story you have only a very few characters or in some, only one. A novelist has the time and space to make his/her characters unfold and develop gradually, but the short story writer must create and reveal the characters in a few suggestive strokes.

In a novel, there is usually a main plot and several sub-plots. But in a short story you will find only one plot with one main aim. Each word used helps in furthering the aim of the story. A novel may extend over several years but a short story usually covers a more limited time span. In a novel, the narrator may indulge in meditative remarks, digressions and detailed descriptions, but the short story writer achieves his/her effects by brevity. A short story may dispense with the narrator completely and achieve his/her effects by presenting events as they occur. S/he makes use of suggestion rather than explanation. These then are some of the ways in which the short story differs

from the novel. It also makes us appreciate the fact that the art of story-writing is not as simple as it may appear. It demands great mastery of technique so that an effect of brevity, unity, concentration and intensity is achieved.

We have already mentioned that the short story as a literary form only came to be written in the early nineteenth century. Let us then survey its rise and development.

12.4 THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY

Stories have always held a great fascination for us and you may remember many stories told to you as young children. Interest in stories is as old as human history. Even before the art of writing was known, early human beings must have narrated tales of the day's hunting or stories of gods and demons to one another. These were probably transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the next. The oldest recorded example is probably the Egyptian tale of *The Two Brothers* dating from 3200 B.C. The *Jataka* (a collection of stories of Buddha's earlier incarnations) and *Panchatantra* tales (Sanskrit tales that are designed to impart worldly wisdom and are about animals) are India's contribution to the world of stories and have continued to interest people through the ages. These along with the fables of Aesop (Greek fables with animals as characters and having a moral), stories in the Bible and the tales from the *Arabian Nights* are all precursors or forerunners of the short story.

12.4.1 The Rise of the Short Story

The short story as a literary form began to be written in the early nineteenth century. However, it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the term 'short story' was used. The rise of the short story can be attributed to:

- a) the rise of the reading public; more and more people were beginning to read fiction in the nineteenth century;
- b) the increase in the number of periodicals which could publish fiction;
- c) widespread literacy; education was now more widely accessible;
- d) hurry and pace of modern life.

The first three factors also contributed to the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. The novels written in those days were rather lengthy. In fact, in the nineteenth century, the three-decker novel was a popular phenomenon. A single novel usually came in three volumes. These days people do not have the time to read such long stories. Short stories, on the other hand, can be read while traveling or relaxing and do not require a substantial investment of time.

12.4.2 The Development of the Short Story

The short story developed in the hands of writers many of whom were also novelists. But as you will notice, the techniques of the novelist and the short story writer are to some extent similar as well as different. This may sound a

bit confusing at this stage, but it will get clearer as you read the section on the short story and the novel. This will become clear after you have read this Block as well as Block 5 on the novel.

Let us now tell you about some well-known story writers, who were masters of this art. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is an American novelist and short story writer. Another famous nineteenth century American short story writer is Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). Both have written about the unusual and the terrible. Their stories are full of horror and the supernatural. Poe's story 'The Masque of the Red Death' is worth reading.

Guy de Maupassant (1850-93), a French writer is considered one of the masters of the short story. He wrote about the private joys and sorrows of individuals rather than about momentous events. Because of his acute observation, Maupassant portrayed the world as he saw it, describing it in clear and simple prose. His stories move swiftly and logically giving only the essential details of character and situation. His stories end with a sting in the tail or an ironic twist that takes the reader by surprise. Consider, for example, the ending of his famous story 'The Necklace'. A pretty and vain young wife of a clerk aspires to a higher social status on account of her extraordinary beauty. She borrows a diamond necklace from a rich friend to wear at the Minister's ball. She is a tremendous success as even the minister notices her. But the fabulous evening carries the seeds of tragedy, for she loses the necklace. What then follows is a ten-year period of drudgery and deprivation to buy a necklace to replace the lost one. When she finally reveals this to her friend, from whom she had borrowed the necklace, the friend remarks: 'But mine was fake!' This then is the sting-in-the-tail, a technique that Anton Chekov (1860-1904), the Russian master of the story also adopted.

Chekov's stories probe the tragic element of the trivial things in life. 'The Kiss' is the story of a shy young man who during the course of a dinner-party ventures into a dark room. Here he is kissed by a young lady who had probably mistaken him for her lover. The young man builds up an absurd romantic dream around this incident which only shatters when he finally realizes that the kiss was not meant for him. Chekov explores the pathos of the situation. You will be reading a story by Chekov in this Block.

There have been great English short story writers starting with R.L. Stevenson (1850-1894). His stories feature evil action and moral corruption. Hardy's (1840-1928) *Wessex Tales* carry a sense of tragedy that pervades all Hardy's work. Henry James (1843-1946) and Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) were interested not so much in brevity as in form. The conventional short story has a beginning, a middle and an end. Recent stories are more open-ended, in the sense that there is no clear beginning, middle and end, as you will discover when you read the stories prescribed for you.

What about Indian short story writers? The short story as a literary form is popular in all the Indian languages and many of these short stories are translated into English. In fact the Sahitya Akademi encourages the translation of regional literatures into English and vice versa. Penguin also publishes translated short stories and if you come across *Deliverance and Other Stories* by Premchand and translated by David Ruben, you will find the collection most interesting. We have selected a short story by Dina Mehta for you. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Anita Desai and Kamala

Das are some of the famous Indian short story writers in English. That the short story is alive in India is quite clear from the fact that serials like 'Ek Kahani' are popular on TV.

The short story has developed in so many directions that it is impossible to list all the varieties within it. There are the short stories that one can find in popular periodicals and 'literary' short stories that are found in anthologies. When we buy a magazine which has short stories in it to read on a railway journey, we often find these stories racy and full of interesting incidents. We read them purely for enjoyment. On the other hand, when we read a 'literary' short story we often find that along with enjoyment, it also contributes to our understanding of life and human nature. This distinction is similar to the difference between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow'—categories that we find applied to separate the 'popular' from what is considered great.

12.5 SOME HINTS ON READING A SHORT STORY

Whenever we read a piece of literature, whether it is a poem, a novel or a play, we respond to it in many ways. One of the responses may be that we either like it or we don't. In any case, we should be able to say why we liked it or why it did not appeal to us.

Different persons like different kinds of stories and for different reasons. One may like a story because it immediately engages our attention. But does that alone constitute the merit of a story? When we read a story, no doubt, the development of the plot arrests our immediate attention. But along with this we also notice the way language is used, the particular style, the use of images, irony and symbolism. How effectively are time and place used? Are the descriptions vivid, relevant or redundant? What point of view does the author adopt? What is the theme and what are the effects that the author wishes to achieve? These are some of the questions that we must keep in mind while reading a story.

12.5.1 Plot

Every story has a plot. It is the sequence of events or incidents of which a story is composed. These events or incidents are inter-related as one thing happens because of another. A well-constructed plot would have conflict either between individuals, groups, the individual and forces such as nature, society, etc. It would also have elements of surprise and mystery. But above all the plot must have unity—each event must grow logically out of the previous one.

12.5.2 Characters

All stories have characters. The main character is called the protagonist. How does the author present character? S/he either tells us about the character or shows him/her interacting with other characters in the story or reacting to different situations. This gives us an idea about what the character is like. How do we know if the presentation of character is successful? When the author is able to create a life-like character, we know that s/he has achieved

his/her aim. It should seem as if the fictional character is someone whom we could meet in real life. In detective stories or stories where the action is dominant, characters are not significant.

As we know, in real life there are no perfectly good or purely evil characters but persons with complex virtues and vices. Similarly, fictional characters must have a range of different traits. And when we are writing a character sketch we should not repeat what a person has done but what a person is. In short, we have to pick out the traits in his/her characters and just give a summary of the story.

12.5.3 Time and Place

Each story is set in a particular time and place. The author can either tell the story in a chronological sequence or may start at the end and keep going back and forth in time. Place is equally important and you should try to identify the details that form part of the setting of the story. The next point is to try and discover how the author has tried to use setting in order to heighten the effect of the story. For example, in horror stories, the setting is usually a dark ancient castle or a bleak graveyard. Thus setting contributes to the *atmosphere or mood* of the story. But setting is not important in all stories. In some character may be important, in other situation. When we are reading a story, we must keep this aspect in mind.

12.5.4 Style

Each author has his/her own style. For example, it is possible to say that Mulk Raj Anand has a certain distinct style of writing but even then we must be aware that each author uses a different style in different works. When we try to analyze an author's style, we should try and determine whether his/her selection of words (diction) is precise and clear and whether the ideas or actions are conveyed vividly and powerfully. We have discussed the various literary devices and techniques used by various authors to enrich their style in Blocks 1,2, and 3 of this course.

12.5.5 The Techniques of Story-Telling

R.L. Stevenson (1850-94) has described three ways of writing a story. The writer can either begin with a plot and fit characters into it, or s/he can begin with a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it. Further an author may try to create a particular atmosphere by getting his characters and action to realize it. In earlier stories, the story-teller's personality would intrude into the narrative. In the modern short story, the author may not wish to make his/her presence felt but tries to convey the impression that the reader is witnessing or overhearing the story. The writer can make him/herself totally unobtrusive by recording the dialogue and actions objectively. In a first-person narrative, the author disappears completely and the reader enters directly into the experiences of the character/s. The author may make use of the omniscient point of view or take recourse to selective omniscience whereby we experience events from the point of view of what one or two characters see and hear. Some of the techniques of the novelist (as you will see in the next Block) are also the techniques of the short storywriter. But the story is working within the limitations of space and form therefore his/her task is all the more difficult. In a short story the author must:

**Forms of Prose:
Short Story**

- a) convey the impression of spontaneity;
- b) avoid intellectual comments and digressions;
- c) know when enough has been said;
- d) avoid too many explanations.

In short, as a story has limited form the writer must work by suggestion rather than by long-drawn explanations. Different elements like character, style, point of view, setting cannot be analyzed in isolation, but must be seen as part of the larger whole. What is important is how far these elements contribute to the final effect of the story.

Each story would necessarily have a different effect on different people. It is for this reason that there can be many interpretations of a particular story. What we wish to stress here is that your response to a story is as valid as that of anyone else. And as you read the stories in your course, we hope that you will not only enjoy them but will also read them analytically.

Check Your Progress II

Read the following story and answer the questions given below.

A SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE
Premchand
(Translated into English by David Rubin)

The servant of the nation said, 'there is only one way to redeem the country and that is to treat the low as brothers, the outcastes as equals. In the world we are all brothers; no one is high, no one is low'.
The world cheered. 'How sublime a vision, how compassionate a heart!'
His beautiful daughter Indira heard and was plunged into a sea of care.
The servant of the people embraced a young man of low caste.
The world said, 'He is an angel, an apostle, the pilot of the ship of state!'
Indira watched and her eyes began to glow.
The servant of the people brought the young man of low caste inside the temple into the presence of God and said, 'Our God is in poverty, in misfortune and in degradation'.
The world said, 'How pure in heart he is! How wise!'
Indira looked and smiled.
Indira went to the servant of the people and said, 'Respected father, I wish to marry Mohan'.
The servant of the people looked at her with loving eyes and asked, 'Who is Mohan?'
Indira said joyously, 'Mohan is the honest, brave and good young man you embraced and brought into the temple'.
The servant of the people looked at her with the eyes of doom and turned away.

- i) What do you learn about the character of "a servant of the people"?
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ii) Is the title of the story ironical? If so, elaborate.

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iii) Comment briefly on Premchand's technique in this story.

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12.6 LET US SUM UP

Let us now recapitulate what we discussed in this Unit, We have looked at:

- the main characteristics of the short story;
- the difference between a short story and a tale, fable, parable, anecdote, novella and novel;
- the rise and development of the short story as a literary form;
- the aspects to look for when reading a short story .

Why do we read short stories? No, not for getting through examinations. Not purely for enjoyment, but also because they deepen our awareness of life. By illuminating some aspect of human life or behaviour, a short story presents an insight into the nature and conditions of our existence. You will read the

stories that we have selected for you in the next four Units. We hope you will find it an interesting and rewarding experience.

12.7 SUGGESTED READING

If you would like to read more about the short story as a literary form, you may like to look at the following books:

Walter Allen, *The Short Story*, London: Oxford University Press, 1981.

John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen*, Brighton, Harvester, 1988; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

If you are interested in reading some short stories by Indian authors, you might look at the anthology: Mulk Raj Anand and S. Balurao (eds.) *Panorama*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1986.

12.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- i) Even though it is difficult to define a short story exactly, it is (a) a piece of prose fiction, (b) complete in itself, (c) of moderate length.

A short story as a literary form only dates back to the early nineteenth century. It is different from a tale, an anecdote and a parable.

- ii) (a) A tale is generally an oral form of story-telling and has a long history. A short story on the other hand, is a developed literary form that can be traced only to the nineteenth century.
(b) An anecdote relates an event or a series of events. Even a short story may relate an event or a series of events but in a short story the events are not important in themselves. The focus is mainly on the character/s and situation.
(c) A parable is a story with a moral. It is the meaning that is important. A short story has meaning, but here that is not the central point.
- iii) & (iv) Refer to Section 12.2.2 and 12.2.4.

Check Your Progress II

- i) The servant of the people seems noble indeed. Not only does he declare that all men are equal but he also embraces a young man of low caste. The public cheers as he leads this young man into the temple. The importance of this action becomes clear when we realize that when Premchand was writing, untouchability was widely prevalent in society and persons of low caste were denied entry into temples. The public adulation seems justified. It is only when Indira his own daughter expresses her desire to marry Mohan, the young man

- of low caste, that the real character of the “servant of the people” is exposed.
- ii) The title of the story is ironical. The man is only masquerading as a servant of the people. The story effectively exposes the hypocrisy and double standards of politicians who fool the public by such fake acts of virtue.
 - iii) When discussing the technique, you can take into account the following points:
 - (a) how Premchand works by suggestion rather than detail;
 - (b) the omniscient narrator who ‘shows’ the actions of the “servant of the people” on the one hand and the effect on the public on the other.
 - (c) The final sting-in-the-tail or surprise ending.

UNIT 13 'MOTHER' BY JUDAH WATEN

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Judah Waten
- 13.3 Mother
 - 13.3.1 Text
 - 13.3.2 Glossary
- 13.4 Discussion
- 13.5 Characters
 - 13.5.1 Mother
 - 13.5.2 Father
 - 13.5.3 Son
- 13.6 Background
- 13.7 Prose Style
- 13.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.9 Answers to Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to introduce you to Judah Waten and one of his famous short stories— 'Mother'. A short background of the relevance of Australian writing is also provided. A detailed analysis of the plot and characters of this story will also be undertaken.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, there has been a tremendous growth of interest in literature and cultures apart from those of Britain and America which had till recently dominated the literary scene. Even in India there has been an enthusiastic upsurge of interest in these literatures, and they are being given added importance in English departments across the country. Australian literature is now being seen as an interesting subject of literary studies, with special relevance to us Indians for various reasons. The shared colonial experience led to many similarities as well as differences between the experiences of the two countries and these have found their way into the literatures of both countries. Here it must be pointed out that even though there was a history of colonialism in both the countries—there were differences in this shared colonial experience. Australia was a settler colony where the main aim of the British colonizers was to create a new British colony for their deported convicts. The British in India, however, saw trade and commerce as their main reason for being here. In spite of these differences there are many reasons why a knowledge about Australia is relevant to us as Indians.

When we study literature from Australia, not only do we develop a social, political, historical and cultural awareness of the country, but we are also able to explore connections between Australia and India. When we speak of Australian literature we include literature written by people of British or European origin who settled there during the early eighteenth century. We also include writings by the original inhabitants of the land—the Aborigines as well as the diasporic people—i.e. the new immigrants to Australia. Therefore, since there are so many varied groups writing in the country, the themes too are varied in nature. The early settlers wrote about their desire to deal with the new land and native people. The Aborigines wrote about the traumatic invasions by the British. And the later groups of immigrants had their own issues to project in their writing. It is to this group that Judah Waten belongs and his story 'Mother' amply reflects his diasporic nature.

13.2 JUDAH WATEN

Judah Leon Waten (1911-1985), short story writer, novelist and essayist, was born in Odessa (then part of the Russian empire) to a Jewish Russian Family. His parents migrated to Australia in 1914. So he can be called a Russian born Jewish Australian writer. He was educated at Perth, and later at University High School, Melbourne when his family moved to Melbourne in 1926. His father worked as a draper, and later as a traveling salesman. Judah Waten learnt English as a young child, and wrote in English, but he was very conscious of his Yiddish linguistic and literary heritage, and translated the work of Yiddish writer like Pinchas Goldhar (1901-1947) and Herz Bergner (1907-1970) into English. Waten lived in Melbourne for the rest of his life. He joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1926 while still at school, and remained loyal to communism and the U.S.S.R. till the end of his life. He received the Patrick White Award (posthumously) for his contribution to Australian Literature. He has written a number of short stories and seven novels, which include *The Unbending* (1954), *Time of Conflict* (1961), *Distant Land* (1964), *Season of Youth* (1966) and *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* (1982).

In the 1940's Goldhar encouraged Waten to write about his childhood; his fictionalized reminiscences appeared as short stories, collected in the book, *Alien Son* (1952). This was the first work about the life of non-British immigrants in Australia; it evoked a sympathetic response because Australian society was changing, with the influx of a large number of Jewish immigrants after the 1930's following the rise of Hitler. Waten writes about diasporic existence, particularly the difficulties (and simple pleasures) experienced by non-English speaking migrants in Australian society. Differences in culture, food and family are emphasized, as are particular displacement difficulties experienced by older, non-English speaking immigrants, particularly women who look after their families and the home. His tales are based on his own experiences – we learn about how he was treated by other children, about life in his impoverished family, with his somewhat eccentric, traveling-salesman father. 'Mother' represents an immigrant mother's complex experience as envisaged by her male child. It captures the tensions that go with migration even in seemingly new havens.

Let us read the text of the story now.

13.3 'MOTHER'

13.3.1 Text

When I was a small boy I was often **morbidly conscious** of Mother's intent, searching eyes fixed on me. She would gaze for minutes on end without speaking one word. I was always **disconcerted** and would guiltily look down at the ground, anxiously turning over in my mind my day's activities.

But very early I knew her thoughts were far away from my **petty doings**; she was concerned with them only in so far as they gave her further reason to justify her hostility to the life around us. She was preoccupied with my sister and me; she was for ever concerned with our future in this new land in which she would always feel a stranger.

I gave her little comfort, for though we had been in the country for only a short while I had assumed many of the ways of those around me. I had become estranged from her. Or so it seemed to Mother, and it grieved her.

When I first knew her she had no intimate friend, nor do I think she felt the need of one with whom she could discuss her innermost thoughts and hopes. With me, though I knew she loved me very deeply, she was never on such near terms of friendship as sometimes exist between a mother and son. She **emanated** a kind of certainty in herself, in her view of life, that no opposition or human difficulty could **shrivel** or destroy. "Be strong before people, only weep before God," she would say and she lived up to that precept even with Father.

In our little community in the city, **acquaintances** spoke **derisively** of Mother's refusal to settle down as others had done, of what they called her propensity of **highfalutin** day-dreams and of the severity and unreasonableness of her opinions.

Yet her manner with people was always gentle. She spoke softly, she was measured in gesture, and frequently it seemed she was functioning automatically, her mind far away from her body. There was a grave beauty in her still, sad face, her searching, dark-brown eyes and black hair. She was thin and stooped in carriage as though a weight always lay on her shoulders.

From my earliest memory of Mother it somehow seemed quite natural to think of her as apart and other-worldly and different, not of everyday things as Father was. In those days he was a young-looking man who did not hesitate to make friends with children as soon as they were able to talk to him and laugh at his stories. Mother was older than he was. She must have been a woman of nearly forty, but she seemed even older. She changed little for a long time, showing no traces of growing older at all until, towards the end of her life, she suddenly became an old lady.

I was always curious about Mother's age. She never had birthdays like other people, nor did anyone else in our family. No candles were ever lit or cakes baked or presents given in our house. To my friends in the street who boasted

of their birthday parties I self-consciously repeated my Mother's words, that such celebrations were only a foolish and eccentric form of self-worship.

"Nothing but deception," she would say. "As though life can be chopped into neat twelve-month parcels! It's deeds, not years, that matter."

Although I often repeated her words and even prided myself on not having birthdays I could not restrain myself from once asking Mother when she was born.

"I was born. I'm alive as you can see, so what more do you want to know?" she replied, so sharply that I never asked her about her age again.

In so many other ways Mother was different. Whereas all the rest of the women I knew in the neighbouring houses and in other parts of the city took pride in their housewifely abilities, their odds and ends of new furniture, the neat appearance of their homes, Mother regarded all those things as of little importance. Our house always looked as if we had just moved in or were about to move out. An **impermanent** and impatient spirit dwelt within our walls; Father called it living on one leg like a bird.

Wherever we lived there were some cases partly unpacked, rolls of linoleum stood in a corner, only some of the windows had curtains. There were never sufficient wardrobes, so that clothes hung on hooks behind doors. And all the time Mother's things accumulated. She never parted with anything, no matter how old it was. A shabby green plush coat **bequeathed** to her by her own mother hung on a nail in her bedroom. Untidy heaps of **tattered** books, newspapers, and journals from the old country mouldered in corners of the house, while under her bed in tin trunks she kept her dearest possessions. In those trunks there were bundles of old letters, two heavily underlined books on nursing, an old Hebrew Bible, three silver spoons given her by aunt with whom she had once lived, a diploma on yellow parchment, and her collection of favourite books.

From one or other of her trunks she would frequently pick a book and read to my sister and me. She would read in a wistful voice poems and stories of Jewish liberators from Moses until the present day, of the heroes of the 1905 Revolution and pieces by Tolstoy and Gorki and Sholom Aleichem. Never did she stop to inquire whether we understood what she was reading; she said we should understand later if not now.

I liked to hear Mother read, but always she seemed to choose a time for reading that clashed with something or other I was doing in the street or in a nearby **paddock**. I would be playing with the boys in the street, kicking a football or spinning a top or flying a kite, when Mother would unexpectedly appear and without even casting a glance at my companions she would ask me to come into the house, saying she wanted to read to me and my sister. Sometimes I was overcome with humiliation and I would stand listlessly with burning cheeks until she repeated her words. She never **reproached** me for my disobedience nor did she ever utter a **reproof** to the boys who taunted me as, **crestfallen**, I followed her into the house.

Why Mother was as she was only came to me many years later. Then I was even able to guess when she was born.

She was the last child of a frail and overworked mother and a **bleakly** pious father who **hawked** reels of cotton and other odds and ends in the villages surrounding a town in Russia. My grandfather looked with great disapproval on his offspring, who were all girls, and he was hardly aware of my mother at all. She was left well alone by her older sisters, who with feverish impatience were waiting for their parents to make the required arrangements for their marriages.

During those early days Mother rarely looked out into the streets, for since the great **pogroms** few Jewish children were ever to be seen abroad. From the iron grille of the basement she saw the soles of the shoes of the passers-by and not very much more. She had never seen a tree, a flower, or a bird.

But when Mother was about fifteen her parents died and she went to live with a widowed aunt and her large family in a far-away village. Her aunt kept an inn and Mother was tucked away with her cousins in a remote part of the building, away from the **prying** eyes of the customers in the **taprooms**. Every evening her aunt would gaze at her with startled eyes as if surprised to find her among the family.

“What am I going to do with you?” she would say. “I’ve got daughters of my own. If only your dear father of blessed name had left you just a tiny dowry it would have been such a help. Ah well! If you have no hand you can’t make a fist.”

At that time Mother could neither read nor write. And as she had never had any childhood playmates or friends of any kind she hardly knew what to talk about with her cousins. She spent the days cheerlessly pottering about the kitchen or sitting for hours, her eyes fixed on the dark wall in front of her.

Some visitor to the house, observing the small, lonely girl, took pity on her and decided to give her an education. Mother was given lessons every few days and after a while she acquired a **smattering** of **Yiddish** and Russian, a little arithmetic, and a great fund of Russian and Jewish stories.

New worlds gradually opened before Mother. She was seized with a passion for **primers**, grammars, arithmetic and story books, and soon the idea entered her head that the way out of her present dreary life lay through these books. There was another world, full of warmth and interesting things, and in it there was surely a place for her. She became obsessed with the thought that it wanted only some decisive step on her part to go beyond her aunt’s house into the life she dreamed about.

Somewhere she read of a Jewish hospital which had just opened in a distant city and one winter’s night she told her aunt she wanted to go to relatives who lived there. They would help her to find work in the hospital.

“You are mad!” exclaimed her aunt. “**Forsake** a home for a wild fancy! Who could have put such a notion into your head? Besides, a girl of eighteen can’t travel alone at this time of the year.”

It was from that moment that Mother’s age became something to be **manipulated** as it suited her. She said to her aunt that she was not eighteen,

but twenty-two. She was getting up in years and she could not continue to impose on her aunt's kindness.

"How can you be twenty-two?" her aunt replied greatly puzzled.

A long pause ensued while she tried to reckon up Mother's years. She was born in the month Tammuz according to the Jewish calendar, which corresponded to the old style Russian calendar month of June, but in what year? She could remember being told of Mother's birth, but nothing outstanding had happened then to enable her to place the year. With all her nieces and nephews, some dead and many alive, scattered all over the vastness of the country only a genius could keep track of all their birthdays. Perhaps the girl was twenty-two, and if that were so her chance of getting a husband in the village was pretty remote; twenty-two was far too old. The thought entered her head that if she allowed Mother to go to their kinsmen in the city she would be relieved of the responsibility of finding a dowry for her, and so reluctantly she agreed.

But it was not until the spring that she finally consented to let her niece go. As the railway station was several miles from the village Mother was escorted there on foot by her aunt and cousins. With all her possessions, including photographs of her parents and a tattered Russian primer tied in a great bundle, Mother went forth into the vast world.

In the hospital she didn't find that for which she hungered; it seemed still as far away as in the village. She had dreamed of the new life where all would be noble, where men and women would dedicate their lives to bringing about a richer and happier life, just as she had read.

But she was put to scrubbing floors and washing linen every day from morning till night until she dropped exhausted into her bed in the attic. No one looked at her, no one spoke to her but to give her orders. Her one day off in the month she spent with her relatives who gave her some cast-off clothes and shoes and provided her with the books on nursing she so urgently needed. She was more than ever convinced that her deliverance would come through books and she set about swallowing their contents with renewed zest.

As soon as she had passed all the examinations and acquired the treasured diploma she joined a medical mission that was about to proceed without a moment's delay to a distant region where a cholera epidemic raged. And then for several years she remained with the same group, moving from district to district, wherever disease flourished.

Whenever Mother looked back over her life it was those years that shone out. Then she was with people who were filled with an **ardour** for mankind and it seemed to her they lived happily and freely, giving and taking friendship in an atmosphere pulsating with warmth and hope.

All this had come to an end in 1905 when the medical mission was dissolved and several of Mother's colleagues were killed in the uprising. Then with a heavy heart and little choice she had returned to nursing in the city, but this time in private houses attending on well-to-do ladies.

It was at the home of one of her patients that she met Father. What an odd couple they must have been! She was **taciturn**, choosing her words carefully, talking mainly of her ideas and little about herself. Father bared his heart with guileless abandon. He rarely had secrets and there was no division in his mind between intimate and general matters; he could talk as freely of his feelings for Mother or of a quarrel with his father as he could of a **vaudeville** show or the superiority of one game of cards as against another.

Father said of himself he was like an open hand at solo and all men were his brothers. For a story, a joke, or an apt remark he would forsake his father and mother, as the saying goes. Old tales, new ones invented for the occasion, jokes rolled off his tongue in a never-ending procession.

Every trifle, every incident was material for a story and he haunted music-halls and circuses, for he liked nothing better than comedians and clowns, actors and **buskers**.

He brought something bubbly and **frivolous** into Mother's life and for a while she forgot her stern precepts. In those days Father's clothes were smart and gay; he wore bright straw hats and loud socks and fancy, buttoned-up boots. Although she had always regarded any interest in clothes as foolish and a sign of an empty and frivolous nature Mother then felt proud of his fashionable appearance. He took her to his favourite resorts, to music-halls and to tea-houses where he and his cronies idled away hours, boastfully recounting stories of successes in business or merely swapping jokes. They danced nights away, though Mother was almost **stupefied** by the band, the bright lights, and looked with distaste on the extravagant clothes of the dancers who **bobbed** and **cavorted**.

All this was in the early days of their marriage. But soon Mother was filled with misgivings. Father's world, the world of commerce and speculation, of the buying and selling of goods neither seen nor touched, was repugnant and frightening to her. It lacked stability, it was devoid of ideals, it was fraught with ruin. Father was a trader in air, as the saying went.

Mother's anxiety grew as she observed more closely his mode of life. He worked in fits and starts. If he made enough in one hour to last him a week or a month his business was at an end and he went off in search of friends and pleasure. He would return to business only when his money had just about run out. He was concerned only with one day at a time; about tomorrow he would say clicking his fingers, his blue eyes focused mellowly on space, "We'll see."

But always he had plans for making great fortunes. They never came to anything but frequently they produced unexpected results. It so happened that on a number of occasions someone Father trusted acted on the plans he had talked about so freely before he even had time to leave the tea-house. Then there were fiery scenes with his faithless friends. But Father's rage passed away quickly and he would often laugh and make jokes over the table about it the very same day. He imagined everyone else forgot as quickly as he did and he was always astonished to discover that his words uttered hastily in anger had made him enemies.

"How should I know that people have such long memories for hate? I've only a cat's memory," he would explain innocently.

"If you spit upwards, you're bound to get it back in the face!" Mother irritably upbraided him.

Gradually Mother reached the conclusion that only migration to another country would bring about any real change in their life, and with all her persistence she began to urge him to take the decisive step. She considered America, France, Palestine, and finally decided on Australia. One reason for the choice was the presence there of distant relatives who would undoubtedly help them to find their feet in that far-away continent. Besides, she was sure that Australia was so different from any other country that Father was bound to acquire a new and more solid way of earning a living there.

For a long time Father paid no heed to her agitation and refused to make any move.

"Why have you picked on Australia and not Tibet, for example?" he asked ironically, "there isn't much difference between the two lands. Both are on the other side of the moon."

The idea of leaving his native land seemed so fantastic to him that he refused to regard it seriously. He answered Mother with jokes and tales of travellers who disappeared in balloons. He had no curiosity to explore distant countries, he hardly ever ventured beyond the three or four familiar streets of his city. And why should his wife be so anxious for him to find a new way of earning a living? He had never given one moment's thought to his mode of life and he could not imagine any reason for doing so. It suited him like his gay straw hats and smart suits.

Yet in the end he did what Mother wanted him to do, though even on the journey he was tortured by doubts and he positively shouted words of indecision. But he was no sooner in Australia than he put away all thoughts of his homeland and he began to regard the new country as his permanent home. It was not so different from what he had known before. Within a few days he had met some fellow merchants and, retiring to a café, they talked about business in the new land. There were fortunes to be made here, Father very quickly concluded. There was, of course, the question of a new language but that was no great obstacle to business. You could buy and sell—it was a good land, Father said.

It was different with Mother. Before she was one day off the ship she wanted to go back.

The impressions she gained on that first day remained with her all her life. It seemed to her there was an irritatingly superior air about the people she met, the customs officials, the cab men, the agent of the new house. Their faces expressed something ironical and sympathetic, something friendly and at the same time **condescending**. She imagined everyone on the wharf, in the street, looked at her in the same way and she never forgave them for treating her as if she were in need of their good-natured tolerance.

Nor was she any better disposed to her relatives and the small delegation of Jews who met her at the ship. They had all been in Australia for many years

and they were anxious to impress newcomers with their knowledge of the country and its customs. They spoke in a **hectoring** manner. This was a free country, they said it was cultured, one used a knife and fork and not one's hands. Everyone could read and write and no one shouted at you. There were no oppressors here as in the old country.

Mother thought she understood their talk; she was quick and observant where Father was sometimes extremely guileless. While they talked Father listened with a good-natured smile and it is to be supposed he was thinking of a good story he could tell his new acquaintances. But Mother fixed them with a firm, relentless gaze and, suddenly interrupting their injunctions, said in the softest of voice, "If there are no oppressors here, as you say, why do you frisk about like house dogs? Whom do you have to please?"

Mother never lost this hostile and ironical attitude to the new land. She would have nothing of the country; she would not even attempt to learn the language. And she only began to look with a kind of interest at the world round her when my sister and I were old enough to go to school. Then all her old feeling for books and learning was re-awakened. She handled our primers and readers as if they were sacred texts.

She set great aims for us. We were to shine in medicine, in literature, in music; our special sphere depended on her fancy at a particular time. In one of these ways we could serve humanity best, and whenever she read to us the stories of Tolstoy and Gorki she would tell us again and again of her days with the medical mission. No matter how much schooling we should get we needed ideals, and what better ideals were there than those that had guided her in the days of the medical mission? They would save us from the soulless influences of this barren land.

Father wondered why she spend so much time reading and telling us stories of her best years and occasionally he would take my side when I protested against Mother taking us away from our games.

"They're only children," he said. "Have pity on them. If you stuff their little heads, God alone knows how they will finish up." Then, pointing to us, he added, "I'll be satisfied if he is a good carpenter; and if she's a good dressmaker that will do, too."

"At least," Mother replied, "you have the good sense not to suggest they go in for business. Life has taught you something at last."

"Can I help it that I am in business?" he suddenly shouted angrily. "I know it's a pity my father didn't teach me to be a professor."

But he calmed down quickly, unable to stand for long Mother's steady gaze and compressed lips.

It **exasperated** us that Father should give in so easily so that we could never rely on him to take our side for long. Although he argued with Mother about us he secretly agreed with her. And outside the house he boasted about her, taking a peculiar pride in her culture and attainments, and repeating her words just as my sister and I did.

Mother was very concerned about how she could give us a musical education. It was out of the question that we both be taught an instrument, since Father's business was at a low ebb and he hardly knew where he would find enough money to pay the rent, so she took us to a friend's house to listen to gramophone records. They were of the old-fashioned, cylindrical kind made by Edison and they sounded far away and thin like the voice of a **ventriloquist** mimicking far off musical instruments. But my sister and I marvelled at them. We should have been willing to sit over the long, narrow hall for days, but Mother decided that it would only do us harm to listen to military marches and the stupid songs of the music-hall.

It was then that we began to pay visits to musical emporiums. We went after school and during the holidays in the mornings. There were times when Father waited long for his lunch or evening meal, but he made no protest. He supposed Mother knew what she was doing in those shops and he told his friends of the effort Mother was making to acquaint us with music.

Our first visits to the shops were in the nature of **reconnoitering sorties**. In such emporium Mother looked the attendants up and down while we thumbed the books on the counters, stared at the enlarged photographs of illustrious composers, and studied the various catalogues of gramophone records. We went from shop to shop until we just about knew all there was to know about the records and sheet music and books in stock.

Then we started all over again from the first shop and this time we came to hear the records.

I was Mother's interpreter and I would ask one of the salesmen to play us a record she had chosen from one of the catalogues. Then I would ask him to play another. It might have been a piece for violin by Tchaikovsky or Beethoven or an **aria** sung by Caruso or Chaliapin. This would continue until Mother observed the gentleman in charge of the gramophone losing his patience and we would take our leave.

With each visit Mother became bold and several times she asked to have whole symphonies and concertos played to us. We sat for nearly an hour cooped up in a tiny room with the salesman restlessly shuffling his feet, yawning and not knowing what to expect next. Mother pretended he hardly existed and, making herself comfortable in the cane chair, with a determined, intent expression she gazed straight ahead at the whirling disc.

We were soon known to everyone at the shops. Eyes lit up as we walked in, Mother looking neither this way nor that with two children walking in file through the passageway towards the record department. I was very conscious of the humorous glances and the discreet sniggers that followed us and I would sometimes catch hold of Mother's hand and plead with her to leave the shop. But she paid no heed and we continued to our destination. The more often we came the more uncomfortably self-conscious I became and I dreaded the laughing faces round me.

Soon we became something more than a joke. The smiles turned to **scowls** and the shop attendants refused to play us any more records. The first time

this happened the salesman mumbled something and left us standing outside the door of the music-room.

Mother was not easily **thwarted** and without a trace of a smile she said we should talk to the manager. I was filled with a sense of shame and humiliation and with downcast eyes I sidled towards the entrance of the shop.

Mother caught up with me and, laying her hand upon my arm, she said. "What are you afraid of? Your mother won't disgrace you, believe me." Looking at me in her searching way she went on, "Think carefully. Who is right—are they or are we? Why shouldn't they play for us? Does it cost them anything? By which other way can we ever hope to hear something good? Just because we are poor must we cease our striving?"

She continued to talk in this way until I went back with her. The three of us walked into the manager's office and I translated Mother's words.

The manager was stern, though I imagine he must have had some difficulty in keeping his serious **demeanour**.

"But do you ever intend to buy any records?" he said after I had spoken.

"If I were a rich woman would you ask me that question?" Mother replied and I repeated her words in a halting voice.

"Speak up to him," she **nudged** me while I could feel my face fill with hot blood.

The manager repeated his first question and Mother, impatient at my hesitant tone, plunged into a long speech on our right to music and culture and in fact the rights of all men, speaking her own tongue as though the manager understood every word. It was in vain; he merely shook his head.

We were barred from shop after shop, and in each case Mother made a stand, arguing at length until the man in charge flatly told us not to come back until we could afford to buy records.

We met with **rebuffs** in other places as well.

Once as we wandered through the university, my sister and I sauntering behind while Mother opened doors, listening to lectures for brief moments, we unexpectedly found ourselves in a large room where white-coated young men and women sat on high stools in front of arrays of tubes, beakers and jars.

Mother's eyes lit up brightly and she murmured something about knowledge and science. We stood close to her and gazed round in astonishment; neither her words nor what we saw conveyed anything to us. She wanted to go round the room but a gentleman wearing a black gown came up and asked us if we were looking for someone. He was a distinguished looking person with a florid face and a fine grey mane.

Repeating Mother's words I said, "We are not looking for anyone; we are simply admiring this room of knowledge."

The gentleman's face wrinkled pleasantly. With a tiny smile playing over his lips he said regretfully that we could not stay, since only students were permitted in the room.

As I interpreted his words Mother's expression changed. Her sallow face was almost red. For ten full seconds she looked the gentleman in the eyes. Then she said rapidly to me, "Ask him why he speaks with such a condescending smile on his face."

I said, "My mother asks why you talk with such a superior smile on your face?"

He coughed, shifted his feet restlessly and his face set severely. Then he glared at his watch and without another word walked away with dignified steps.

When we came out into the street a spring day was in its full beauty. Mother sighed to herself and after a moment's silence said, "That fine professor thinks he is a liberal-minded man, but behind his smile he despises people such as us. You will have to struggle here just as hard as I had to back home. For all the fine talk it is like all other countries. But where are the people with ideals like those back home, who aspire to something better?"

She repeated these words frequently, even when I was a boy of thirteen and I knew so much more about the new country that was my home. Then I could argue with her.

I said to her that Benny who lived in our street was always reading books and papers and hurrying to meetings. Benny was not much older than I was and he had many friends whom he met in the park on Sunday. They all belonged to this country and they were interested in all the things Mother talked about.

"Benny is an exception," she said with an impatient shrug of her shoulders, "and his friends are only a tiny handful." Then she added, "And what about you? You and your companions only worship bats and balls as **heathens** do stone idols. Why, in the old country boys of your age took part in the fight to deliver mankind from oppression! They gave everything, their strength and health, even their lives, for that glorious ideal."

"That's what Benny wants to do," I said, pleased to be able to answer Mother.

"But it's so different here. Even your Benny will be swallowed up in the smug, smooth atmosphere. You wait and see."

She spoke **obstinately**. It seemed impossible to change her. Her vision was too much obscured by passionate dreams of the past for her to see any hope in the present, in the new land.

But as an afterthought she added, "Perhaps it is different for those like you and Benny. But for me I can never find my way into this life here."

She turned away, her narrow back stooped, her gleaming black hair curled into a bun on her short, thin neck, her shoes equally down at heel on each side.

13.3.2 Glossary

morbidly conscious:	aware with a feeling of melancholy and depression.
disconcerted:	disturbed, upset.
petty doings:	small acts of little importance.
emanated:	give out (breath or an odour).
shrivel:	decrease in size, range or extent, dry up.
acquaintance:	a person less intimate than a friend, someone you know slightly.
derisively:	in a scornful and mocking manner.
highfalutin:	absurdly pompous or pretentious.
impermanent:	not permanent.
bequeath:	leave or give by will after one's death.
tattered:	worn to shreds.
paddock:	in Australia, an empty field or plot of land.
reproach:	scold, find fault with.
reproof:	censure severely or angrily, blame.
crestfallen:	sad and disappointed.
bleakly:	dreary, cheerless.
hawk:	sell or offer for sale from place to place.
pogroms:	organized massacre of an ethnic group. (especially Jews in Russia).
prying:	offensive inquisitiveness.
taprooms:	a room where alcoholic drinks especially beer, are served over a counter.
smattering:	a slight or superficial understanding of a subject.
Yiddish:	A dialect of German including words from Hebrew and other modern languages, spoken by Jews from central and east European countries; written in the Hebrew script.

primer:	an introductory text book.
forsake:	give up.
manipulate:	influence or control shrewdly or deviously.
ardour:	feeling of great warmth, enthusiasm.
taciturn:	habitually reserved and uncommunicative.
vaudeville:	variety entertainment with singing, dancing and comedy in it.
busker:	street performer.
frivolous:	not serious in content or behavior.
stupefied:	as if struck dumb with astonishment and surprise.
bobbed:	moved up and down repeatedly.
cavorted:	pranced around.
condescending:	behave in a patronizing manner.
hectoring:	bullying, intimidating.
exasperated:	greatly annoyed; irritated.
ventriloquist:	a person who can speak without moving the lips, creating the illusion that the sound is coming from somewhere else.
reconnoitring:	exploring to gain information.
sorties:	a military action in which besieged troops burst forth from their position.
aria:	an elaborate song for solo voice in an opera.
scowls:	a facial expression of dislike or displeasure, a severe frown.
thwart:	hinder or prevent (efforts, plans, or desires).
demeanor:	(behavioral attributes) the way a person behaves towards other people.
nudged:	pushed against gently.
rebuffs:	rejection.
heathen:	a person who does not believe in religion.
obstinately:	in a stubborn manner.

13.4 DISCUSSION

Waten's stories of his Russian-Jewish family have been critically acclaimed for their lucidity, depth of feeling, and fine sense of comedy. 'Mother', is a much anthologized story. It was included in the *Oxford Book of Australian Short Stories* edited by Michael Wilding (OUP, South Melbourne, 1994) and also in *Contemporary Australian Short Stories* edited by Santosh K. Sareen (Affiliated East-West Press, New Delhi, 2001). It is about the life of an orphan girl, who is addressed as "mother". It is narrated in the first person by her son. The story is about the narrator's mother, whose name and date of birth is not clear. Her life is filled with challenges which she overcomes bravely. These challenges also bring a tremendous change in her attitude towards life; she suffers from a sense of insecurity. Her marriage does not help much, as her husband is a happy-go-lucky sort of person, who "worked in fits and starts. . . . He would return to business only when his money had just about run out." He does not believe in saving for the future, and cannot provide the security and warmth which she constantly craves.

The short story 'Mother' is a fictional account of Judah Waten's own life. It shows how his mother worked hard for a better life, trying to fill their home with literature and music. Many of the Jewish immigrants in Australia and America left their homes in Europe because of persecution by the Nazis; the situation in Waten's short story is different, they have migrated in search of better economic opportunities (like the vast number of immigrants from India and the third world in the second half of the twentieth century). Of course, anti-Semitism also plays a role in the pathetic condition of the mother in her childhood:

During those early days Mother rarely looked out into the streets, for since the great pogroms few children were ever to be seen abroad. From the iron grille of the basement she saw the soles of the shoes of the passers-by and not very much more. She had never seen a tree, a flower, or a bird.

She faces discrimination as a girl child, because of the pernicious dowry system then prevalent in Russia: her father "looked with great disapproval on his offspring, who were all girls", while her widowed aunt says, "If only your dear father of blessed memory had left you just a tiny dowry it would have been such a help". The story gives us an idea of the society of the time, not through direct statements but by implication: we realize that no importance was given to the education of girls, at the age of fifteen the narrator's mother was still illiterate. She learns to read only because a visitor takes pity on her; but she is filled with a passion for knowledge, and is "convinced that her deliverance would come through books". She is "put to scrubbing floors and washing linen every day from morning till night until she dropped exhausted into her bed in the attic", but she persists with her studies and acquires a nurse's diploma.

Disappointed in her husband, her life revolves around her son and daughter, to whom she always wants to give the best. Unfortunately, most of her dreams come to naught as she realizes that even in the new land where she had hoped to make a new beginning, life is just as tough for the underprivileged as

anywhere else. But she is determined that her son (the narrator) and her daughter should shine, "in medicine, in literature, in music". As Mother very feelingly says "Just because we are poor must we cease our striving?" Her efforts to secure some sort of decent education and culture for her children are doomed to failure because of lack of funds. This scenario succeeds in defeating her early optimism and at the end of the story the mother is a dejected, disheartened and demotivated soul who says ". . . I can never find my way into this life here". The only ray of hope is that her children may be able to fit in and not be swallowed up in "the smug, smooth atmosphere" of the new country. The story portrays the anxieties and tensions which the new immigrants had to undergo while settling on the new land. Their dreams and aspirations were very often thwarted by the early settlers and they could not make a place for themselves in the new land as they had hoped to do.

However, it was slightly easier for their children to adjust to their new surroundings and put down roots in the new place—since they were young and thus more pliable. That is why the narrator finds it easier to call the new country "my home" and does not face many adjustment problems like his mother does.

13.5 CHARACTERS

13.5.1 Mother

The protagonist of the story is addressed throughout as mother. She has a sad face, dark brown eyes and black hair. She has a thin physique and stoops a little. Although she is gentle and soft spoken, her gestures are "measured" and at times she "functions automatically, her mind far away from her body". As the story reveals, she has had a neglected childhood. As is reflected in "...from the iron grille of the basement she saw the soles of the shoes of the passers-by and not very much more. She had never seen a tree, a flower, or a bird." Orphaned at the young age of fifteen, she had lived with her aunt who, "tucked her away from the prying eyes of the customers in the taprooms. Every evening her aunt would gaze at her with startled eyes as if surprised to find her among the family." For the first time Mother finds a way to end her "present dreary life" through books; which opens "another world filled with warmth and interesting things, and in it there was surely a place for her". Mother educates herself, which gives her courage to pursue a job in a hospital, and also finds a husband. Her married life has its own share of grief and sorrow. Her husband is all that she is not. After the initial romance is over, she fails to understand his attitude towards life, work, and family. This forces her to take the decision to migrate to Australia where she always remains consciously an outsider. Her desire to give the best to her son and daughter and her possessive love towards them, reflects the complexities that life offers.

13.5.2 Father

He is the father of the narrator of the story. He is an extrovert by nature and good looking as well. He is fashionable and wears smart and colourful clothes. "He wore bright straw hats and loud socks and fancy, buttoned-up boots". He is friendly and "bared his heart with guileless abandon. He rarely had any secrets and there was no division in his mind between intimate and general matters". He tries to bring some happiness into Mother's life by taking her "to

his favorite resorts, to music halls, and to tea-houses ...they danced nights away". However, this does not gain Mother's appreciation for too long. After the initial blissful years of marriage, his "world of commerce and speculation ...is repugnant and frightening to her." Their attitude towards life is opposite. While Mother is a person of ideals he is carefree; so much so that he often returns to work after he has exhausted his money though he does harbour plans of making a fortune. It is this attitude that makes her desire migration to another country hoping that that would bring stability in their lives.

13.5.3 Son

He is the narrator of the story, and so he does not talk much about himself. But we learn a lot about his character from his interaction with his mother. The child is conscious of his growing estrangement from his mother, because he quickly adjusts to the new land, while she hangs on to her old memories, "Before she was one day off the ship she wanted to go back." The child is very conscious of the fact that his mother is very different from other women; while others take pride in their "housewifely abilities", their house is always in a mess. But the child respects her love of literature, "I liked to hear Mother read." But she often creates embarrassing situations for him – he would be busy playing with other boys of his age, and she would call him in "saying she wanted to read to me and my sister." The children resent the way she takes them away from their games. The narrator turns to his father for support; he argues with the mother, asking why she spends so much time reading to the children. But his father does not take their side for long. The son also blushes at the way the mother makes them listen to music, by asking the salesman in the music shop to play gramophone records. The boy tries to reassure his mother by telling her about Benny, "who lived in our street and was always reading books and papers." But she refuses to concede the possibility of art and culture in the new land. He can argue with her successfully only when he is thirteen years old.

Thus the author delineates both the characters, through description, dialogue, and incident.

13.6 BACKGROUND

Background or setting is an important element in a short story. It creates the mood as well as the psychological and physical affects appropriate to the theme of the story. The physical atmosphere describes the attitude of Mother:

"Our house always looked as if we had just moved in or were about to move out. An impermanent and impatient spirit dwelt within our walls;..."

This is reflected upon further:

"whenever we lived there were some cases partly unpacked, rolls of linoleum stood in a corner, only some of the windows had curtains. There were never sufficient wardrobes, so that clothes hung on hooks behind doors."

When they migrate to Australia, Mother's description is on similar lines. To her "there was an irritated superior air about the people ..., the customs officials, the cab men, the agent of the new house. Their face expressed something ironical and sympathetic, something friendly and at the same time condescending..."

13.7 PROSE STYLE

Though his work is based on his own experiences in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century, there is a timeless, universal quality about Waten's writing. His narrative has a vivid, bittersweet quality – though there is a touch of humour, pathos is never far away. Consider the scene in the stores, for instance; there is a comic quality to the way the mother goes to store after music store, and listens to the music, though she has no intention of buying anything, because she does not have the money to do so. Without any comment by the author, the irony of the situation is obvious – music stores are ready to play gramophone records only for customers who plan to buy them, and these are the very people who can take the records home and listen to music. The reactions of the store managers are described very vividly:

The manager was stern, though I imagine he must have had some difficulty in keeping his serious demeanour.

"But do you ever intend to buy any records?"

The manager repeated his first question and Mother, impatient at my hesitant tone, plunged into a long speech on our right to music and culture and in fact the rights of all men, speaking her own tongue as though the manager understood every word.

One of the most important qualities of Judah Waten's prose style is its suggestiveness. In the passage quoted above, he never comments on the unfairness of society's treatment of the poor, this is implied by Waten's description of the way the storekeepers rudely rebuff them. Many examples can be found of this quality. A good example is the last line of the story, which indicates the hopelessness and poverty of the mother: "She turned away, her narrow back stooped, her gleaming black hair curled into a bun on her short, thin neck, her shoes equally down at heel on each side."

Waten has impressive descriptive powers. Through small details, he creates a word picture of the scene. Consider the description of the house:

Wherever we lived there were some cases partly unpacked, rolls of linoleum stood in a corner, only some of the windows had curtains. There were never sufficient wardrobes, so that clothes hung on hooks behind doors. And all the time Mother's things accumulated. She never parted with anything, no matter how old it was. A shabby green plush coat bequeathed to her by her own mother hung on a nail in her bedroom. . . . In those trunks there were bundles of old letters, two heavily underlined books on nursing, an old Hebrew Bible, three silver spoons given her by the aunt with whom she had once lived, a diploma on yellow parchment, and her collection of favourite books.

Such descriptions not only recreate the scene, they also tell us about the character of Mother, and her sense of values – she is not a brainless house-proud housewife, she values literature.

Another characteristic of Waten’s prose style in this short story is the use of dialogue. He presents incidents in a dramatic way:

“If I were a rich woman would you ask me that question?” Mother replied and I repeated her words in a halting voice.

“Speak up to him,” she nudged me while I could feel my face fill with hot blood.

Waten makes good use of adjectives – “halting” voice, the boy blushing as his face fills with “hot” blood. He also supplies necessary details – the Mother refuses to learn English, and waits for the son to translate, and nudges him when he feels shy; later, she gets so emotional that she does not wait for the child to translate, she starts “speaking her own tongue as though the manager understood every word”.

Waten’s prose is lucid, he does not use complex structures or difficult vocabulary. His powers of description and suggestion are impressive.

Exercise 1

- a) Write about Judah Waten’s prose style as reflected in ‘Mother’.
- b) Write a brief sketch of the character of Mother. (100 words).
- c) Justify the comment, “Be strong before people, only weep before God”

13.8 LET US SUM UP

In “Mother” Waten tells the story of a mother who bears with dignity a number of hardships throughout her life. She had her fixed notions and principles in life, and refuses to compromise with them. The story at one level is about the individual mother; on the other about relationships. Through description, dialogue and incidents, these relationships come alive.

13.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

- a) Judah Waten’s prose style is lucid, and effectively recreates the background and the characters. He does not comment directly — he shows us the poverty of the mother by referring to her down at heel shoes. Instead of reporting events, he adopts the dramatic device of presenting dialogues which are in keeping with the characters— the father’s speeches are humorous, while the mother’s are full of philosophy and ideals.
- b) The Mother has had a tough childhood; found no solace even in marriage; the new land too did nothing to contain her hardships. But she remained a striver throughout and left no stone unturned to provide

for her children. In spite of material poverty she sees to it that her children are exposed to music and literature.

'Mother' by Judah Waten

- c) These words show the resilience and strength of the Mother who has always had to fight for her share. She believes that if you show your weakness to people, they would take advantage of you. This comment reveals her character — she is an introvert, who will not reach out to others for help.

UNIT 14 'MISERY' BY ANTON CHEKHOV

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 'Misery'
 - 14.2.1 Text
 - 14.2.2 Glossary
- 14.3 Discussion
- 14.4 Style
- 14.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.6 Answers to Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the story and this Unit carefully, you should be able to

- look at the story in terms of human misery
- understand the meaning of the title 'Misery'
- appreciate the simple narrative prose style of Anton Chekhov

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov is a well-known Russian short story writer and playwright. He was born on January 29, 1860 and died at the early age of 44. He was a doctor by profession and a writer by temperament and aptitude. He once said, "Medicine is my wife and literature is my mistress." He began by writing short humorous stories for journals, and light one-act comedies. Among the greatest of his mature short stories are "Ward No. Six" (1899), "Gooseberries" (1898) and "The Lady with the Little Dog" (1899). Plays like *Uncle Vanya* (1900), *Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) are



considered classics of world drama. He wrote sympathetically about characters of all classes, the bored upper classes as well as the deprived poor. His work is known for its unique combination of comedy, tragedy and pathos. Chekhov has enjoyed great popularity in England. English translations of his works started appearing as early as 1903, and influenced leading playwrights and fiction writers.

Chekhov is considered the most important influence on the development of the modern short story. His stories dispensed with plot; he concentrated on what is happening in the minds of his characters, their "stream of consciousness", rather than external incidents. He was an early practitioner of the "stream of consciousness" technique used by novelists like Henry James, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In Chekhov, plot is subordinate to character. Because the short story as a form is too short for the development of character, Chekhov's stories focus on a particular mood. This new way of writing a story at times poses difficulties to the reader. Chekhov defended his open-ended stories saying "the role of an artist is to ask questions and not to answer them".

The story 'Misery', first published in 1886, does not pose any difficulty as it deals with an experience that touches all of us at some point in our lifetime. Let us now read the story, in an English translation by Ralph E. Matlaw.

14.2 'MISERY'

14.2.1 Text

"To whom shall I tell my grief?"

The twilight of evening. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs, shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the **sledge-driver**, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular **snowdrift** fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off. . . His little mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a **halfpenny gingerbread horse**. She is probably **lost in thought**. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the familiar gray landscapes, and cast into this **slough**, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing uproar and hurrying people, is bound to think.

It is a long time since Iona and his **nag** have **budged**. They came out of the **yard** before dinnertime and not a single fare yet. But now the shades of evening are falling on the town. The pale light of the street lamps changes to a vivid color, and the bustle of the street grows noisier.

"Sledge to Vyborskaya!" Iona hears. "Sledge!"

Iona starts, and through his snow-plastered eyelashes sees an officer in a military overcoat with a hood over his head.

"To Vyborskaya," repeats the officer. "Are you asleep? To Vyborskaya!"

In token of assent Iona gives a tug at the reins which sends cakes of snow flying from the horse's back and shoulders. The officer gets into the sledge. The sledge-driver clicks to the horse, cranes his neck like a swan, rises in his

seat, and more from habit than necessity **brandishes** his whip. The mare cranes her neck, too, crooks her stick-like legs, and hesitatingly sets off

"Where are you shoving, you devil?" Iona immediately hears shouts from the dark mass shifting to and fro before him. "Where the devil are you going? Keep to the r-right!"

"You don't know how to drive! Keep to the right," says the officer angrily.

A coachman driving a carriage swears at him; a **pedestrian** crossing the road and brushing the horse's nose with his shoulder looks at him angrily and shakes the snow off his sleeve. Iona **fidgets** on the box as though he were sitting on thorns, jerks his elbows, and turns his eyes about like one **possessed** as though he did not know where he was or why he was there.

"What rascals they all are!" says the officer **jocosely**. "They are simply doing their best to run up against you or fall under the horse's feet. They must be doing it on purpose."

Iona looks at his fare and moves his lips. . . . Apparently he means to say something, but nothing comes but a **sniff**.

"What?" enquires the officer.

Iona gives a wry smile, and straining his throat, brings out **huskily**: "My son . . . er . . . my son died this week, sir."

"H'm! What did he die of?"

Iona turns his whole body round to his fare, and says:

"Who can tell! It must have been from fever. . . . He lay three days in the hospital and then he died. . . . God's will."

"Turn around, you devil!" comes out of the darkness. "Have you gone cracked, you old dog? Look where you are going!"

"Drive on! drive on! . . ." says the officer. "We shan't get there till tomorrow going on like this. Hurry up!"

The sledge-driver cranes his neck again, rises in his seat, and with heavy grace swings his whip. Several times he looks round at the officer, but the latter keeps his eyes shut and is apparently disinclined to listen. Putting his fare down at Vyborgskaya, Iona stops by a restaurant, and again sits **huddled** up on the box. . . . Again the wet snow paints him and his horse white. One hour passes, and then another. . . .

Three young men, two tall and thin, one short and hunchbacked, come up, railing at each other and loudly stamping on the pavement with their **goloshes**.

"Cabby, to the Police Bridge!" the hunchback cries in a cracked voice. "The three of us, . . . twenty **kopecks!**"

Iona tugs at the reins and clicks to his horse. Twenty kopecks is not a fair price, but he has no thoughts for that. Whether it is a **rouble** or whether it is five kopecks does not matter to him now so long as he has a fare. . . . The three young men, shoving each other and using bad language, go up to the sledge, and all three try to sit down at once. The question remains to be settled: Which are to sit down and which one is to stand? After a long **altercation**, ill-temper, and abuse, they come to the conclusion that the **hunchback** must stand because he is the shortest.

"Well, drive on," says the hunchback in his cracked voice, settling himself and breathing down Iona's neck. "**Cut along!** What a cap you've got, my friend! You wouldn't find a worse one in all Petersburg. . . ."

"He-he! . . . he-he! . . ." laughs Iona. "It's nothing to boast of!"

"Well, then, nothing to boast of, drive on! Are you going to drive like this all the way? Eh? Shall I give you one in the neck?"

"My head aches," says one of the tall ones. "At the Dukmasovs' yesterday Vaska and I drank four bottles of brandy between us."

"I can't make out why you talk such stuff," says the other tall one angrily.

"You lie like a brute."

"Strike me dead, it's the truth! . . ."

"It's about as true as that a louse coughs."

"He-he!" grins Iona. "Me-er-ry gentlemen!"

"Tfoo! the devil take you!" cries the hunchback indignantly. "Will you get on, you old plague, or won't you? Is that the way to drive? Give her one with the whip. Hang it all, give it her well."

Iona feels behind his back the jolting person and quivering voice of the hunchback. He hears abuse addressed to him, he sees people, and the feeling of loneliness begins little by little to be less heavy on his heart. The hunchback swears at him, till he chokes over some elaborately **whimsical** string of **epithets** and is overpowered by his cough. His tall companions begin talking of a certain Nadyezhda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them. Waiting till there is a brief pause, he looks round once more and says:

"This week . . . er. . . my. . . er. . . son died!"

"We shall all die, . . ." says the hunchback with a sigh, wiping his lips after coughing. "Come, drive on! drive on! My friends, I simply cannot stand crawling like this! When will he get us there?"

"Well, you give him a little encouragement . . . one in the neck!"

"Do you hear, you old plague? I'll make you smart. If one **stands on ceremony** with fellows like you one may as well walk. Do you hear, you old dragon? Or don't you **care a hang** what we say?"

And Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck.

"He-he! . . ." he laughs. "Merry gentlemen . . . God give you health!"

"Cabman, are you married?" asks one of the tall ones.

"I? He he! Me-er-ry gentlemen. The only wife for me now is the damp earth. . . He-ho-ho!. . . The grave that is! . . . Here my son's dead and I am alive. . . It's a strange thing, death has come in at the wrong door. . . Instead of coming for me it went for my son. . ."

And Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at that point the hunchback gives a faint sigh and announces that, thank God! they have arrived at last. After taking his twenty kopecks, Iona gazes for a long while after the **revellers**, who disappear into a dark entry. Again he is alone and again there is silence for him. . . The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona's eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds **flit by heedless** of him and his misery. . . His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight. .

Iona sees a house-porter with a parcel and makes up his mind to address him.

"What time will it be, friend?" he asks. .

"Going on for ten. . . Why have you stopped here? Drive on!"

Iona drives a few paces away, bends himself double, and gives himself up to his misery. He feels it is no good to appeal to people. But before five minutes have passed he draws himself up, shakes his head as though he feels a sharp pain, and tugs at the reins. . . He can bear it no longer.

"Back to the yard!" he thinks. "To the yard!"

And his little mare, as though she knew his thoughts, falls to **trotting**. An hour and a half later Iona is sitting by a big dirty stove. On the stove, on the floor,

and on the benches are people snoring. The air is full of smells and stuffiness. Iona looks at the sleeping figures, scratches himself, and regrets that he has come home so early. . . .

"I have not earned enough to pay for the oats, even," he thinks. "That's why I am so miserable. A man who knows how to do his work, . . . who has had enough to eat, and whose horse has had enough to eat, is always at ease. . . ."

In one of the corners a young cabman gets up, clears his throat sleepily, and makes for the water-bucket.

"Want a drink?" Iona asks him.

"Seems so."

"May it do you good. . . . But my son is dead, mate. . . . Do you hear? This week in the hospital. . . . It's a queer business. . . ."

Iona looks to see the effect produced by his words, but he sees nothing. The young man has covered his head over and is already asleep. The old man sighs and scratches himself. . . . Just as the young man had been thirsty for water, he thirsts for speech. His son will soon have been dead a week, and he has not really talked to anybody yet He wants to talk of it properly, with **deliberation**. . . . He wants to tell how his son was taken ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died. . . . He wants to describe the funeral, and how he went to the hospital to get his son's clothes. He still has his daughter Anisya in the country. . . . And he wants to talk about her too. . . . Yes, he has plenty to talk about now. His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament. . . . It would be even better to talk to women. Though they are silly creatures, they **blubber** at the first word.

"Let's go out and have a look at the mare," Iona thinks. "There is always time for sleep. . . . You'll have sleep enough, no fear. . . ."

He puts on his coat and goes into the stables where his mare is standing. He thinks about oats, about hay, about the weather. . . . He cannot think about his son when he is alone. . . . To talk about him with someone is possible, but to think of him and picture him is insufferable anguish. . . .

"Are you munching?" Iona asks his mare, seeing her shining eyes. "There, munch away, munch away. . . . Since we have not earned enough for oats, we will eat hay. . . . Yes, . . . I have grown too old to drive. . . . My son ought to be driving, not I. . . . He was a real cabman. . . . He ought to have lived. . . ."

Iona is silent for a while, and then he goes on:

"That's how it is, old girl. . . . Kuzma Ionitch is gone. . . . He said good-by to me. . . . He went and died for no reason. . . . Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt. . . . And all at once that same little colt went and died. . . . You'd be sorry, wouldn't you? . . ."

The little mare munches, listens, and breathes on her master's hands. Iona is carried away and tells her all about it.

14.2.2 Glossary

sledge: a long vehicle pulled by horses or mares for traveling over ice and snow

snowdrift: a deep pile of snow blown together by the wind

half penny gingerbread horse: a sweet cake flavoured with ginger made in the shape of a mare and priced at half a penny.

lost in thought: absorbed in thought

slough:	a very soft wet area of land
nag:	horse, especially one which is old or ill
budged:	moved
yard:	an area outside a building
brandish:	to wave in order to threaten
pedestrian:	a person walking in the street
fidget:	to make constant small restless movements, unable to remain still or quiet
possessed:	as if taken over by madness or an evil spirit
jocosely:	humorously, playfully
sniff:	a sound of sniffing
huskily:	sounding rough as if throat is dry, hoarse
huddled:	curled one's body into a small space
goloshes:	rubber coverings worn over shoes in wet weather
kopecks:	a unit of money in Russia; one-hundredth of a rouble
rouble:	chief currency in Russia
hunchback:	a person with a hump on his back
altercation:	a noisy argument
cut along:	go on
whimsical:	unusual or rather playful
epithets:	adjectives or phrases to describe a character or an important quality
stand on ceremony:	behave formally
care a hang:	not care at all
revellers:	merry making persons, especially after alcoholic drinks
flit by:	pass by

heedless:	without paying attention
trotting:	moving at a steady pace
deliberation:	careful consideration
blubber:	cry noisily

14.3 DISCUSSION

This is a story of a father's grief over the death of his son. The grief is within him and he desperately wants to speak about it to lighten his burdensome misery. But no one is ready to listen to him. The story describes the old man's urge to share his grief with others, his despair at not being able to find a compassionate audience and his final effort to disgorge his misery by talking to his mare, his one and only companion. (disgorge: pour out)

The old man in grief is a sledge driver. He is the protagonist of the story. The other characters who appear briefly during the course of the story are riders on his sledge who have neither the time nor the inclination to listen to him. They live in a world of their own and cannot sympathetically relate to the old man in grief.

The story 'Misery' has a sub title 'To Whom Shall I Tell My Grief?' While the grief is over the loss of his son, his misery is not finding an outlet to unburden his grief.

After reading the story, note how many times the word 'misery' appears in it. You will discover that it appears towards the latter half of the story five times and on a sixth occasion it is used as an adjective 'miserable'.

Can you see the significance of this word in the context of the title of the story?

In this one word 'misery' the title accurately summarizes the mood the story carries. It tells us about the self-centred, unresponsive and feelingless nature of human beings in this world. The title 'Misery' portrays the overwhelming grief of Iona Potapov, the old sledge-driver over the loss of his son and his futile attempts to share it with fellow travellers in his sledge.

The first part of the story describes the old man's grief and his repeated efforts to catch the attention of the sledge riders and his failure to make them listen to his tale of woe. The resulting emotion goes beyond grief and becomes misery. Hence the title word 'misery' appears in the latter part of the story.

Misery means a great suffering of the mind or body. Here the suffering is not physical but felt within the heart. There can be no cure for emotional distress unless it is let out and shared with others. The old man has to keep his emotions within, as there are no listeners to lend an ear. He has been rendered alone by the death of his son, but his loneliness increases when he finds no

one with whom he can share his agony. He is severely alone and therefore is miserable.

'Misery' by Anton Chekhov

Let us see how the story begins.

It is evening. Chekhov describes realistically the shades of darkness all around, heightened by the white snow. We hear a lot of movement of people, but in the darkness no one is visible. Iona Potapov is an old man bent double with age and grief. He sits white like a ghost and his mare stays still and motionless. All around them is the constant motion of people who are not seen but whose voices are heard. The writer is able to focus on the loneliness of Iona, the sledge driver. He is surrounded by people and yet remains all alone in his grief. The darkness around him is a measure of the darkness within him. He is like a ghost in white (as he is covered by the snowflakes) for he experiences a death-in-life existence.

The first passenger is an army officer. He is in a hurry to reach his destination. He is a contrast to Iona in every respect. Iona is old and weary, the officer is young and full of life. Iona is lost in grief, the officer jokes in a light-hearted mood. Iona desperately seeks the officer's attention, the officer sits with his eyes shut and his ears closed "disinclined to listen". Chekhov using the stream-of-consciousness technique presents the continuous flow of grief in Iona without resorting to graphic description.

The second group of passengers on the sledge is a bunch of three revellers, young, rumbustious (making merry in a noisy way) with not a care of the world. They behave as though they are drunk. One of them is a hunchback. Despite his physical deformity, he feels superior to the old man who is weighed down with grief. All of them have no sympathy for the old man who tries to tell them of his son's death. The old man is gentle and kind to his mare; he does not whip his mare to speed up. In contrast the revellers ride roughshod over his feelings. Iona is happy to see them merry, but they have no eyes to discern the old man's sorrow. An officer or a party goer, their attitude to the old father in grief is the same. Neither can empathise with Iona's sadness.

The old man is left alone. Let us see how the writer describes his situation:

Again he is alone and again there is silence for him. . . . The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more *cruelly than ever*. *With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona's eyes stray* restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery. . . . His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight.

His misery is immense. It can swamp the whole world and yet its immensity is not seen. It is within him and no one can even fathom the depths of its intensity. Iona longs for people to whom he can unburden himself. When the revellers are in his sledge, he is comforted with the thought that he has

company to share his grief with. To that extent his grief is eased. But when he is back alone in his sledge watching crowds moving to and fro, he realizes that a crowd is no company. "Iona drives a few paces away, bends himself double, and gives himself up to his misery."

One more attempt to speak to a young cabman proves futile. He is alone but he still has his mare. He unburdens his heart to the passive mare. For the first time, he mentions his son's name Kuzma Ionitch. He is gone. He has preceded him to the grave. He asks the mare how she would feel if she had a colt and the colt died. "You'd be sorry. Won't you?" The mare does not answer. It breathes on his hand. But in that unspoken moment the animal's tender and unprotesting looks comfort the old man. He feels that he has touched a sympathetic chord in his mare — the only possession he has still with him. He pours his heart out to her. He has found an outlet for his grief.

Is the mare really listening? Is she compassionate and understanding? Or is the last part of the story just the old man's fancy? The ending is deliberately left inconclusive. But the story drives home the point that humans are basically insensitive to other's pain and lack any involvement and sharing in the grief of fellowmen.

14.4 STYLE

The story you have read is written in a straightforward narrative style. What strikes the reader is its quality of simplicity. Chekhov has an eye for detail and he is a photographic and cinematographic realist. It is as though he has a camera that accurately portrays a piece of life. Chekhov once said that "Art tells the truth" and Tolstoy said "Art tells the truth because it expresses the highest feelings of man." Chekhov's seemingly simple story affirms the truth about human behaviour.

'Misery' is a good example of Chekhov's typical theme and narrative structure. It does not focus on everyday reality, but centres on the psychological aftermath of an event that breaks up everyday routine and leaves the central character helpless. The rhythm of the sledge driver Iona's life is broken by the news of his son's death. He feels the need to communicate his feelings of loss to his fares. The story is not about an event, it is rather about the lack of one. It is the objectification of grief and its incommunicable nature, through the presentation of deliberate details.

Chekhov's prose is lucid, with a simple vocabulary (the translator has attempted to follow this style). He uses metaphorical language to recreate the scene – consider the description of the sledge-driver, "all white like a ghost". This simile is apt for the snow, it also indicates the listlessness of Iona, overpowered by grief.

Reading his story in prose is like reading a poem as the style is compressed, imaginative and almost lyrical displaying strong emotions and feelings. A Russian critic, Andrei Voznesensky writing about Chekhov says that he is "a master of understatement, of concealed meaning, of twilight scenes and of prose as compressed as poetry ...".

Exercise 1

'Misery' by Anton Chekhov

- i) Relate the sub title 'To Whom Shall I Tell My Grief?' to the main title of the story 'Misery'
- ii) Who is more sympathetic — the officer or the revellers or the young cabman? And why?
- iii) Why does Iona pour out his history to the mare?

14.5 LET US SUM UP

The story 'Misery' by Anton Chekhov deals with human insensitivity to other people's grief. It captures the agony of an old man who has been recently bereaved following the death of his son and his need to speak about his grief and unburden himself. The indifferent and unsympathetic world has no time to respond to his misery.

The story gives an authentic portrayal of human nature that remains unaffected by the sorrows of the world so long as they do not impinge on it at a personal level.

14.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise 1

- i. Refer to section 14.4.2
- ii. The officer at least asks him the question as to how his son died. The revellers have nothing to ask him. The only question they put to him is to mock at him as to whether he was married. Refer to 14.4.2 to elaborate
- iii. Refer to the last section in 14.4.2. Give your own interpretation as to whether talking to the mare shows Iona to be fanciful or truthful. Does he find the tenderness and affection seen in the mare's eyes comforting in contrast to the unresponsive indifference of fellow men?

UNIT 15 'THE OTHER WOMAN' BY DINA MEHTA

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 'The Other Woman'
 - 15.2.1 Text
 - 15.2.2 Glossary
- 15.3 Discussion
- 15.4 Characters
 - 15.4.1 Maganlal
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 - 15.4.3 Sunil
- 15.5 Background
- 15.6 Prose Style
- 15.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.8 Answers to Exercises

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to:

- outline the plot of 'The Other Woman'
- draw character sketches
- describe the atmosphere
- point out the main features of the prose style

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Dina Mehta lives in Mumbai, India. She was fiction editor with *the Illustrated Weekly of India* from 1976 to 1982. She has published two books of short stories, *The Other Woman and Other Stories* (1981) and *Miss Menon Did Not Believe in Magic and Other Stories* (1994). Her stories have also appeared in *Cosmopolitan* (USA), *the London Magazine*, *Homes and Gardens* (UK), and have been translated into German, French, and Japanese. She has written prize-winning plays like *Brides are Not For Burning*, which won first prize in the BBC International Playwriting Competition (1979), *The Myth Makers*, *Tiger Tiger*, *Getting Away with Murder* and *A Sister Like You*. She has also distinguished herself as a playwright for radio and television. Dina Mehta has published two novels, *And Some Take a Lover* (1992) and *Mila in Love* (2003).

We shall now read and discuss the story called 'The Other Woman,' published in *The Other Woman and Other Stories* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1981). This story is full of funny descriptions and if you read the story

carefully, you shall both enjoy the humour and engage with the social commentary on our contemporary society.

'The Other Woman'
by Dina Mehta

15.2 'THE OTHER WOMAN'

15.2.1 Text

Maganlal was thirty-six years old, a little fat, a little bald, and because of his **insomnia** he had learnt to fear the dark. Some time after midnight he was in the habit of walking bare-foot from room to room, switching on all the lights till the dark retreated outside the window, a **thwarted, grimacing** shape, trying to press its way in.

At thirty-nine minutes past twelve on this Wednesday night (or early Thursday morning, for he was **punctilious** about these things), Maganlal entered his study and switched on his reading lamp. His flat was fully ablaze, except for the bedroom which was like a dim cave with Vimla asleep on his bed in the heart of it. How could she snore so rhythmically when she was the cause, both immediate and remote, of his torment? There had been tears again at bedtime, accusations, and a slamming of the bathroom door. He had tried to reason with her, it had been a most earnest **monologue** delivered in three parts, from outside the locked door, stationed behind her dressing-table stool (how inviting was the slender nape of her neck!) and hovering anxiously over her lace pillow. His words had revealed a truly **edifying** elevation of thought, he had been aglow with the power they wielded to dispel all base suspicions from her mind—when she had astonished him by falling asleep in the middle of a sentence. How could someone who looked like a **Madonna** be so perverse?

Hitching up his silk pyjamas, Maganlal seated himself at his desk, turned the key of the top right-hand drawer, and with **fastidious** care placed a hand-written manuscript before him. Would he be able to work? He sighed. Three years ago he had been a happy, industrious man. Three years ago, a bachelor full of romantic errors, he had thought of a wife as a fragile hand serving food on a gleaming **thali**, a voice calling to his children and questions framed with **deferential** air, as music and fragrance, and a warm ecstatic yielding in the nights. He frowned. He was caught, instead, in a thunderstorm and **buffeted** without respite: for she was now all **blare and rattle**, flashes and torrential fury.

Perhaps he should have heeded the **malicious** whispers at the time of the wedding as the first faint rumblings of a gathering storm. People of ill-will had been pleased to circulate the story that he never would have won his bride but for her prodigal brother who, within a year of his father's death, had impoverished the family. But Maganlal was not a man to listen to gossip: and whether sudden penury was the reason, or Vimla had by her own, deliberate, intelligent choice decided to devote the rest of her life to a brilliant writer, it was not for him to say. The fact remained, however, that when she married him he had six film scripts to his credit which even now, from the vantage point of a new perspective, he could not think was a mean contribution to the Hindi movie industry.

Maganlal slid further into his swivel chair, settling his ample, ghee-fed middle more comfortably within its depths. Truth was his God, so he had been quite outspoken about the fact that all his six scripts were, in one way or another, imitations of Hollywood movies. But in this modern age, who could assert with any authority that the East is East and West is West? One only had to look around, and what did one find? An **amalgam** of different cultures. A synthesis of contrary trends and values. A **Yehudi Menuhin** making music with a Ravi Shanker. **Mia Farrow** at the feet of **Mahesh Maharishi**. No wonder then that his scripts had reached out to embrace a little bit of everything: Songs with their popular blend of ragas and **jazz**—even the Beatles had come to India to attempt some such thing. Dances which were a cross between Kuchipudi and the shake. Exciting **melodrama**. Tickling humour. Long shots of his noble cultural heritage like the Taj Mahal and Khajuraho, close-ups of his chaste suffering Indian womanhood and sexy westernized vamps inclined to top-heavy contours and topless costumes—but were they really so different from the ancient Ajanta beauties? Further, he had skillfully disguised the Hollywood James Bond as the Indian Jit Bharati with sideburns and forelock; and the role of the bouncing, irresistible counterspy had been played in six successive movies by the film find of the decade, Nikhil Fernandes, who had the kind of face men are tempted to punch in the nose, but which wrings sighs and caresses from women.

For a moment Maganlal's face, with its sleepy, Buddha-like passivity, looked **wistful**. He had long suspected that even Vimla thrilled to Nikhil's athletic charms, though she flared up unaccountably if he so much as hinted at it—and even though he would not have reproached her for it. For who can dictate to the heart? When Vimla had married him he had hoped for—what? That he would grow tall and spare and arrogant like Nikhil, even learn that sensual way of uncovering his teeth? That he would sprout a **cowlick** on his thinning head? We are all allowed a little fantasy. But it was not boastful to say that Nikhil had been a nonentity till *his* script had made him the idol of the Indian screen. Yes, his stories had been hot box-office material, even if his **wastrel** of a brother-in-law **sneered** at them. As for being a writer, he had overheard Sunil say to Vimla, the man is condemned to impotence. Of his prowess in other areas I am not competent to—. Here Maganlal had cleared his throat. It was his way of reminding people that he was there. The pair had not looked guilty. Vimla had not blushed and Sunil had bestowed on him from afar his amused and superior grin. It was possible, of course, that they had been talking about somebody else.

With determination Maganlal removed the gold top of his fountain pen. It did not matter if his **nerves were frayed**, if for the last four nights he had not slept at all. He hunched over his manuscript..... and thought of his many good friends who were forever urging him to forget his scribbling and take a greater interest in the family jewellery business. It was, after all, his bread and butter. It accounted for this ownership flat in the **nouveau riche** neighbourhood, with its highly advertised view (*that* was a fraud because a new building was going up in front of his nose), the modern décor, the Chor Bazaar antiques, the servants, the two cars and the membership in two clubs. (His father, who still had a razor-sharp business brain, was content to reside in three overflowing rooms with his two younger brothers and their families in the congested part of the city.) The income from the shop also met the whims of his wife who had a lively appreciation of things beautiful, becoming and expensive. But his

heart was in his writing, even if it was a profession with little honour and recompense in his country. His first screenplay had minted money for the producer, the distributors, the stars and other celluloid satellites. It had also fetched him the miserable sum of Rs 101, the odd rupee being benevolently thrown in to wish him luck. But he had derived from this maiden venture a satisfaction so keen that one had to possess the authentic temperament of an artist to really appreciate it. And Vimla, alas, had never understood this.

One night, in the Mercedes on their way home from the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the last movie of the series, *Jai, Jai, Jit*, they had quite an argument. Vimla had a degree in English Literature from Bombay University, and after pronouncing him profoundly ignorant and lamentably uncultured (thank God the chauffeur did not understand such excellent English) she had called Jit some interesting names, among them: a great prize ox, a **phallic** symbol, a nauseating **paragon**, an **indefatigable** imbecile.

Her **vehemence** shook him, but Maganlal had been very patient. "Even if he is all you have said, whatever it means, consider this Vimla: how to do without Jit Bharati? How to kill the hen that lays the golden eggs? How to slaughter the bull that has sired so numerous a **progeny**—which if not of flawless pedigree are of a lucrative strain, you are having to admit?"

"What have the scripts you've written over the years earned for you? Why don't you spend more time in your father's jewellery shop?"

This stabbed him, but he attempted a feeble laugh. "Can an artist live by bread alone?"

The remark set her off in a new direction. If he *must* write, why didn't he avoid the pretentious and the superficial, why didn't he move away from the **clichés**? Why did he take no interest in the aesthetics of the cinema? He ought to read *Cahiers du Cinema*, he ought to read *Sight and Sound*, she was saying as they stopped for a red signal and the blank light of a street lamp fell on her mobile little mouth. He ought to study the work of Eisenstein and Renoir, the cinematographic technique of Ingmar Bergman, she was saying as the signal changed and they moved ahead. And she had talked most knowledgeably of out-of-focus photography, of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and the New Wave Films, of Tapas Sen's wizardry with lights, reverse printing, jump-cutting and whatnot before the car drew to a stop in front of their slim white perpendicular building, somnolent in the moonlight. And as they climbed the six synthetic marble steps to the archway before the row of elevators, she was urging him to ponder over Samuel Beckett's only venture in films, which had no dialogue in it, and the only sound one heard was "Sssh!"

He stared at her, aghast. "Are you meaning to say," he had sputtered, "that I should submit a script with only "Ssshes" written all over it? What are you talking?" His blood pressure was dangerously up as he banged shut the elevator doors. With difficulty he contained himself during their ascent up the first fifteen floors, then burst out, "It is your brother who has set you up to mock at my work!"

She had not deigned to answer him immediately. He **abhorred** violence, but he wrenched open the doors as the elevator stopped on the seventeenth floor

and crashed them shut behind him. It was after the servant had ushered them in, in response to his imperious finger on the doorbell that she had said, misty-eyed, "I haven't seen Sunil in months, and you know it!" And she had sailed past with an injured air and made straight for the bedroom.

If his brother-in-law had been just a ne'er-do-well, Maganlal would not have found it difficult to bear on his patient brow a certain amount of reflected **odium**. After all, every family has someone who does not make good. But it seemed that Sunil had a streak of brilliance in him which had been discovered by his early teachers, who had loudly **bruted** their faith in his ultimate success in life. Unfortunately, Sunil had dropped out of college in the second year because he maintained that the serious pursuit of an academic degree was somewhat foolish in the context of contemporary realities, and not conducive to the growth of one's originality and talents. He also recognized that he was suffering from hypersensibility, and ordered himself a year or two of rest. It was during this period of elected idleness that his father died, and after devouring his **patrimony** and plunging the family into debt, Sunil had disappeared. At the time of Vimla's wedding, he surfaced again, virtually in rags. But his attitude to Maganlal, even when he came to borrow money, was cocksure and faintly derisive. He had about him an unpleasant aura of self-confidence, a kind of relaxed insolence. His patronage, entwined with subtle amusement, had so confused Maganlal that he had parted with a considerable amount of cash: which had only confirmed Sunil in his opinion that his sister was about to marry a **bourgeois** simpleton. But as someone had to do something about salvaging the family fortunes, he could not very well object to the match.

Maganlal could have forgiven his brother-in-law his snobbery, were it not for Vimla's **inexplicable** attitude towards him. He was still the outcast prince, the tragic hero, the oracle in exile. From time to time she sold remnants of her girlhood jewellery and begged Sunil to accept the money as her poor contribution towards his support. And each time Sunil, who loved himself with tenderness, wondered what all the fuss was about, and accepted her sacrifice with the best grace in the world. He did not believe in money. He believed in enriching his sensibilities, refining his critical faculties, in "finding himself". Who could tell, perhaps he would end up as a revolutionary, a professional lover of mankind. As an unemployed youth he could join the Naxalites. Or end his life in an ashram at Rishikesh. In the meanwhile he lived by his wits, a profession which afforded him a very slight margin of security.

But if Sunil's future was thus still undecided, Maganlal had no doubts at all about his own. Following Vimla with firm step into the bedroom, and seated beside her on the bed where she had collapsed in a moist, untidy heap without so much as removing her evening's finery, he had told her at length and in no uncertain terms that he meant to continue his literary endeavours. He was committed to Jit, he insisted in a voice tremulous with emotion as he ripped off his jacket and tie and shoes—he was never really comfortable in Western clothes—and *he wore the pants in the family*, he shouted at her, before he proceeded to remove them.

But the mischief was done. The seed of discontent was sown that very night, and a sudden and profound trouble entered Maganlal's heart. He could not

sleep. In the days that followed he found to his despair that he could not write, either, and the bluff, weary tolerance with which he had endured the bumptious Jit for so many years, now seemed to him a mask of corruption.

After a prolonged period of sleeplessness and self-doubt, Maganlal tore up all his old notes and drafts, and began to work on a new screenplay, but what he wrote about now was his secret. He had never been happier. He was gloriously involved in his work, and spurred on in his efforts by the thought of the pride that would glow in Vimla's eyes when the scenario was completed. It would be his gift to her, a love-offering. How right she had been not to accept the mediocre in him! He wrote late into the night at the desk allotted to him at the film studio, but while he had once endlessly discussed Jit's high-jinks and escapades with a bored and stony-eyed Vimla, he could not now bear to speak about his work to anyone. He hugged the secret to himself, with a warm and increasingly beautiful sense of possession. It was a kind of wall, a fortress behind which he could retreat at will. His other tasks he performed perfunctorily and detachedly, all the while nursing this wonderful secret. On his friends he bestowed a passing look, a merely tolerant eye. And when he came to bed at preposterously late hours, he did not try to woo his wife with timid whispers or tentative touches in the dark, but fell asleep in strange solitary contentment, bearing the burden of an elaborate mystery.

At first Vimla did not appear to notice the change in him. Later on when she did, he thought her immediate feeling was one of relief that she need not endure his gaucheries in bed. For really he had no gift for the job (hadn't he been an amateur at everything, up to this point?) and she had been no help at all, she gave him no cues, so that lying beside her in bed he had suffered dreadfully from attacks of stage-fright. Even after three years nothing was taken for granted between them, all was precarious and agonized. His docility offended her as much as his fumbling importunities. He knew he tried too hard to please, and when at last she responded he was rather frightened by the miracle of it all. But suddenly he was liberated, and none of it was important any more.

He was totally unprepared, therefore, when the whole situation exploded with dramatic force one night, and his shocked denials, his explanations, his pleas availed him nothing: she suspected another woman. A tramp. A witch. A bitch. An actress, no doubt. He was bemused, seduced, enslaved by her, he spent riotous hours in her arms. In desperation he confessed his secret, and even brought home his precious manuscript from the studio, as evidence of his fidelity, but she pushed it away angrily. His abstracted looks told her he was miles away in unlawful memories of the woman who had usurped her place. His inertia in bed told her he was engaged in a disreputable **liaison**, and she was beside herself at such duplicity.

Night after night she demanded the name of her rival, and because she could not get it out of him, she was haunted by the thought that she was making poor use of her youth and beauty. And she who had been indifferent to his desire, was now bent on rousing it, and her behaviour was not such as he would have commonly associated with demureness.

She turned to the gods in her extremity. When it was clear to her that her husband was absolutely consumed by the flame of his passion, she abstained from food every Tuesday and Saturday, to **coerce** her chosen deities to act in

her favour. She also distributed alms freely to the beggars outside the Babulnath Temple on Mondays. When all this did not have the desired result, she grew bitter and **vindictive**, and with a wealth of details told him what she would do to the other woman if she ever got her hands on her: sewing her up in a sack and casting her into the sea (the fate of ancient queens and concubines suspected of infidelity) was one of her more humane methods of elimination....

The strain of the feud began to tell on him, he could neither sleep nor work, but still she would not desist. She was voluble with reproaches for his faithlessness, and silent only with hostility. If he held his tongue she felt the **subterfuge** in his silences. If he argued with her, she heard the guilt in his long-winded peroration before it lulled her to sleep. His wakefulness, she felt, was well-merited, and if she slept deeply sometimes it was only because she had nothing on her conscience to make her toss.

Maganlal looked up from his manuscript, bleary-eyed. Not a line had been written but, mercifully, the dawn was creeping in. No true light was yet discernible at the window, it was the barest suggestion of morning, murky as a shallow pond, with no hint of sunrise. But it was enough.

He put down his pen and with fastidious care replaced the manuscript in the top right-hand drawer and turned the key. His chair creaked as he rose and switched off the reading lamp.

He walked from room to room, turning off all the lights. Then he went into his bedroom and switched off the dim night-light shaped like a tulip growing on the wall. Vimla was not awake yet. He laid himself down cautiously on his side of the bed.

He must have dozed off a little, for when he opened his eyes again there was more light in the room, and Vimla was no longer sleeping beside him. He lay there, wondering what time it was. From the front room he heard a murmur of voices. Who was Vimla talking to, so early in the morning?

Hitching up his pyjamas, Maganlal stood at the door of his living-room. Facing him, astride one of the leggy dining suite chairs turned back-to-front, and riding it as if it were a horse, sat Sunil, his unshaven chin supported on fists resting on the delicate rosewood frame. Maganlal cleared his throat and Sunil looked up. "Ah, there he is!" His expression grew extremely sardonic, and he winked at himself in the gilt-edged mirror on the opposite wall. "Talk of the devil!"

At the exclamation Vimla, who was sitting on a **pouffe** at his side rose stiffly to her feet and made to leave the room.

"Where do you think you are going, *didi*?".. called out Sunil.

"Back to my room," said Vimla haughtily, though there were signs of recent tears on her face. "I have no wish to speak to him." And she slipped past Maganlal, careful not to touch him, as if to avoid contagion.

"Well well," said Sunil to Maganlal, "sit down," he waved one hand, "anywhere you like," as if he owned the place.

For a moment Maganlal hesitated, then sat down on the divan covered with new peacock-blue tapestry, and crossed his legs. "You have something to say to me," he said. He looked very dignified, like a bronze idol on a silk pedestal.

Across the room Sunil scratched at his stubble with a dirty nail and stared at him as if he were an oddity of considerable scientific interest. "I simply would not have believed it," he said at last. "I never would have thought you had it in you."

Maganlal folded his hands over his rounded stomach. "I do not know what you are talking about."

Sunil got up abruptly from the chair and began to pace the room. It was obvious that he was prepared to enjoy himself. "You have made my sister very unhappy," he began.

"She has no cause to be unhappy," said Maganlal.

"You have not only deceived her," Sunil went on, "but you have also deceived me."

"I'm not aware of how—"

"Don't interrupt," snapped Sunil and took a deliberate turn round the room. "I had thought of you as a dullish chap, Maganlal. A nullity. As the useful appendage of a vibrant, intelligent woman." Here he paused dramatically before Maganlal. "I had looked upon your life with my sister as the tame chronicle of an estimable marriage. And all the while you were carrying on with another woman!" A peculiar note had crept into his voice, half ironic, half enthusiastic. It told Maganlal that by the mere fact of betraying his wife he had stolen a march over her; that by engaging in sinfulness he had adequately **bested** her. "Is she the first?" Sunil was demanding. "Is she the last? Who would have thought you capable of such uproarious seductions!"

"There is no other woman!" shouted Maganlal, outraged.

Sunil folded his arms across his chest. "No doubt you already see your passion in Technicolour."

"You are quite mistaken—"

"Your conduct has always been so exemplary, irreproachable, that this is an unheard-of audacity. Can't you see that you are miscast in this role?"

"Will you please believe me—"

Sunil held up his hand for silence. "What should happen to you, Maganlal," he said in measured tones, "is that you should be tied to a stake with fire under your feet. And over fire, copper, tulsī and Ganga water you should be made to take an oath. What oath?" He stared at Maganlal with patrician distaste.

“That you will never again, on the pain of death, raise your eyes above the feet of any woman other than your wife.”

For a wild moment Maganlal’s world turned red as something was ignited within him. He leapt up, and with a ringing back-handed slap—which took him by surprise as much as Sunil — he wiped off the insolence on the thin clever face poised above his. And before his brother-in-law could summon his breath or his wits, Maganlal found himself insisting in a crazy, **stentorian** voice (which he had difficulty in recognizing as his own) that come what may, he would never give up this woman who was dearer to him than his life.

“Do your worst!” he shouted with a **swashbuckling** valour worthy of Jit himself. “I will not be parted from her! She is my soul! The fire of my loins! Many floods cannot quench it!” He was word perfect. “And I will bring all this crashing down on my head—” he gestured violently, and with a flourish that almost bowled him over, succeeded in sending the heavy bronze figure of Nataraja flying across the room— “before I allow anyone to take her away from me—”

With a piteous cry and a swish of her batik raw-silk housecoat Vimla came running out of the bedroom and flung herself at his feet. “No,” she cried, “no no, I cannot bear this, I cannot, you will not cast me aside for this woman, I’m your wife...your *wife*!” And she clung to his feet, weeping with abandon and unconsciously impersonating the heroine of his fifth script.

Above her Maganlal, not a little flustered that his life had changed gears and was swerving at an alarming angle from its predicted course, almost bent over to help her up when he met Sunil’s gaze across the room.

‘Out!’ said Maganlal to his hapless relative, pointing to the door with **totalitarian ire**. After the **purge** he cleared his throat nervously, and fixed his eye on the woman at his feet.

15.2.2 Glossary

insomnia:	difficulty in sleeping.
thwarted:	frustrated.
grimacing:	to make an expression of pain, strong dislike, etc. in which the face twists in an ugly way.
punctilious:	behave correctly, very precise.
monologue:	a long speech by one person.
edifying:	improving your mind or intellect.
Madonna:	Mary, the mother of Christ.
fastidious:	giving too much attention to small details and wanting everything to be correct and perfect.

thali:	large plate used for eating food.
deferential:	to show respect and regard for someone.
buffeted:	shocked, knocked about.
blare and rattle:	to make an unpleasantly loud noise, and sound similar to a series of quickly repeated knocks.
malicious:	to cause harm to others with evil intentions.
amalgam:	a mixture or a combination of parts that create a complete whole.
Yehudi Menuhin:	Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) was a world famous Jewish American violinist and conductor, who took interest in yoga and Indian music.
Mia Farrow:	Hollywood actress (born 1945) who travelled to India in 1968 to learn Transcendental Meditation.
Mahesh Maharishi:	Maharishi 'Mahesh Yogi (born 1917) is the founder of the Transcendental Meditation programme, which attracted a large number of foreign disciples including the Beatles to his ashram at Rishikesh.
jazz:	a type of modern music with a rhythm in which the strong notes are usually not on the beat and which is usually improvised i.e. invented as it is played. It is of Afro-American origin.
melodrama:	a story, play or film in which the characters show stronger emotions than real people usually do.
wistful:	sad and thinking about something that is impossible.
cowlick:	a projecting lock of hair.
wastrel:	a wasteful or good for nothing person.
sneered:	to talk about or look at someone or something in an unkind way that shows you do not respect or approve of them.
his nerves were frayed:	he was feeling anxious or upset.

nouveau riche:	people from a low social class who have recently become very rich and like to show their wealth publicly by spending a lot of money.
Jai, Jai, Jit:	Victory of Jit.
phallic:	symbolic of, shaped like, or related to the penis.
paragon:	a person or thing that is perfect.
indefatigable:	one who is always determined and energetic in attempting to achieve something and never willing to admit defeat.
imbecile:	a person who behaves in a stupid way, mentally deficient.
vehemence:	forcefulness or passion.
progeny:	children.
clichés:	a comment that is very often made and is therefore not original and not interesting.
abhorred:	hated; disliked.
odium:	hate and strong disapproval.
bruited:	spread reports about.
patrimony:	possessions inherited from one's father.
bourgeois:	rich middle class.
inexplicable:	unable to be explained or understood.
liaison:	a sexual relationship, especially between two people not married to each other.
coerce:	to persuade someone forcefully to do something which they are unwilling to do.
vindictive:	to intentionally hurt someone.
subterfuge:	tricky or deceitful way to get what you want.
pouffe:	a large firm cushion used as a low seat.
bested:	defeated, outwitted.
peroration:	last part of a speech or summarization.
stentorian:	loud and powerful.

swashbuckling:	behaving in a brave and exciting way, especially like a fighter in the past.
hapless:	unlucky and usually unhappy.
totalitarian:	a political system in which those in power have complete control and do not allow people to oppose them.
ire:	anger.
purge:	removal of unwanted members from an organization.

15.3 DISCUSSION

'The Other Woman' was published in the collection of short stories named after it, *The Other Woman, and Other Stories* (1981). It is both a humorous and a highly ironical account of the domestic strife between the protagonist, Maganlal and his wife. The story is a comment on shallow sophistication and a superficial understanding of the "aesthetic" that is completely divorced from the actual and the mundane reality of our lives.

Maganlal is a married man of thirty-six, who suffers from insomnia or the inability to sleep and is afraid of the dark. It is night and he has switched on all the lights in the house except for the room where his wife, Vimla is fast asleep. He sits at his reading desk to work on his manuscript but his thoughts are on his wife who accused him of something serious and then fell asleep in the middle of his explanations. This strain of humour is interspersed with the most serious moments throughout the story.

We are told that he had married three years ago and marriage to Vimla had shattered his fanciful image of a docile wife. Also, at the time of the marriage, people had suggested that he had won the hand of Vimla only due to his wealth as Vimla's brother had squandered away his dead father's money leaving the family destitute. Maganlal, however, had not paid attention to these stories at that time because he was proud of his success as a scriptwriter for six super-hit Hindi movies and considered himself a brilliant writer.

Maganlal admits that his scripts are copies of Hollywood movies to which he has added the right mix of all the popular ingredients like comedy, fusion music and dance, romance, and action but this does not, to his mind, take away anything from his brilliance. He is proud of his creation, the character of Jit Bharati played by the actor Nikhil Fernandes, who has become a superstar because of his scripts. In fact, he is conscious of a secret wish to possess Nikhil's good looks which, he suspects, are appreciated by Vimla too despite her strong denials. Vimla's brother, however, makes fun of him and his writing.

We are brought back to the fact that Maganlal is thinking about all this sitting at his desk with his manuscript. He tries once again to concentrate on his work

but his mind drifts away into other thoughts. The story is continued by relating Maganlal's thoughts as he sits there.

Maganlal's friends often urge him to give more time to his family jewellery business than to his writing and it is here that we come to know that the source of Maganlal's riches is the jewellery business and not his successful scripts. However, Maganlal finds satisfaction and pleasure in his writing and the success of the movies even though all the profits are minted by others.

It is on this subject that he and Vimla have a heated argument. Vimla, with her degree in English literature, expresses her opinion that her husband's stories lack aesthetic depth. Notice that Vimla does not ask Maganlal to write something original or different but to follow people like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Samuel Beckett who are admired for their artistic endeavours in film-making. This points to the fact that Vimla's conditioning, part of which derives from her education and part from her brother, has led her to respect and admire a particular kind of art and disdain another. Maganlal does not understand much of Vimla's critique of his work but is very upset that his own wife should look down upon the writing he is so proud of. He gives vent to his frustration by asserting that he is the master of the house ("wore the pants in the family") and would do as he pleased. However, he is no longer able to write about Jit because Vimla's criticism brings his own dissatisfaction with the "bumptious" or conceited character to the surface. This is how he first loses his sleep.

After many days of restlessness following this incident, Maganlal decides to write a new kind of story, one which Vimla would be proud of. He begins devoting all his time to this script and works late at night on it. Moreover, unlike his previous work which he discussed with Vimla, he keeps this script secret from everyone.

The story now takes a most humorous and ironical twist when we are informed that Vimla mistakenly attributes Maganlal's changed behaviour to the assumption that he is having an affair with another woman. To add to the irony, Maganlal's confusion at this sudden charge convinces Vimla of his guilt and all his explanations fall on deaf ears. The subsequent days are spent with Vimla trying to make Maganlal 'confess' the name of this imagined other woman and her methods for doing so involve everything from seduction to prayers. It is at this point that we realise that the night where this story opens has followed just one such day of bickering between the husband and the wife.

The story now brings us back to the present with Maganlal still sitting at his desk without having written anything. But dawn is approaching and a tired Maganlal returns to his bedroom to sleep for a few hours. He is woken up by the sound of voices from the living room. It is Sunil, Vimla's arrogant good-for-nothing brother, who claims to disdain money in favour of 'higher' things in life but often borrows it from his brother-in-law. Vimla leaves the two men alone to talk. After making a rude joke of the fact that he had not thought a dull man like Maganlal capable of having an affair with any woman, Sunil pompously demands that Maganlal take an oath of never cheating on his wife again.

Incapable of swallowing such offensive behaviour, Maganlal slaps Sunil and shouts that he would never leave the other woman come what may. **Of course, the other woman does not exist**, but Maganlal wants to make it clear that he would not be dictated to by a wastrel like Sunil. Hearing this, Vimla comes running from the bedroom and pleads with Maganlal, crying at his feet. Taken aback, Maganlal is about to help up his wife when he realizes that he must not give any opportunity of retaliation to Sunil. He orders Sunil to leave the house, and then turns his attention to Vimla.

15.4 CHARACTERS

In the present story, the characters do not simply stand for individuals but also represent 'types.' This means that the author has used her characters to represent people of a certain social background and they reflect the peculiarities of our contemporary society.

15.4.1 Maganlal

Maganlal is a rich man who has inherited the family jewellery business. However, his heart lies in writing scripts for Hindi movies and he derives immense satisfaction from the success of the movies made from his scripts. So against the advice of his friends, who keep asking him to stop writing and concentrate more on the jewellery business as that is the source of his income and affluence, Maganlal continues to devote most of his time to writing. It is easy to understand for the reader why this is so. The feeling of achievement that writing provides to Maganlal cannot come from making money alone. However, the scripts that he writes are copies of the plots of Hollywood movies although he does not see anything wrong in this. He believes that he is bringing the East and the West closer by doing so and that his works are worthy pieces of art.

Maganlal has been married for three years but the husband and wife have differences on several issues. Maganlal is a mild man who has a fanciful image of what a wife should be like until he gets married to Vimla. He had thought that a wife would be a docile partner who would minister to his needs and bring up his children but Vimla is an educated, intelligent woman who expresses her opinions and demands her due. Maganlal is somewhat in awe of his beautiful wife and wishes to please her. So when Vimla expresses her utter disdain for the character Jit Bharati, the stereotypical hero he has created for the screen, he decides to write something of which his wife would be proud.

Maganlal's physical description is also quite important in sketching his character. He has given Jit Bharati all those physical charms that he lacks himself. Fat and balding, he is aware that he does not fit the standards of a good looking man set by our society. He wishes to compensate for this lack of good looks through the brilliance of his writing.

We can see that Maganlal's ideas have been influenced more by watching commercial Hindi cinema than by reading books. This explains his image of a wife and the kind of stories that he writes. But he is essentially a simple straightforward man who is much closer to understanding his social reality than Vimla. He recognizes the significance of money as well as of art and

cannot think of art as something that is completely divorced from all monetary considerations even though it is not he who mints the profits of his writing but the producers, directors and actors. His decision to write something different after the argument with Vimla shows that he wishes to be respected by his wife and also that he genuinely wants to improve as an artist, however limited his understanding of the subject might be.

The climax of the story is reached when, in a state of extreme anger, Maganlal falsely “confesses” that he has a relationship with another woman and then refuses to be parted from her at any cost. Why does Maganlal say such a thing? He wishes to assert that he will not be ordered about by the insolent Sunil and that he will do as he pleases. He realizes that “...by the mere fact of betraying his wife he had stolen a march over her...” in Sunil’s eyes. He uses this fact to get rid of Sunil by making a false confession.

In short, Maganlal represents those people of the rich urban business class who wish to make a contribution to art and culture in order to join the group of the educated elite. He is a mild straightforward man who loves his wife and wishes to be loved in turn by her. He is not satisfied by making money alone through the jewellery business and chooses to write in order to feel that he has achieved something in life. His idea of art is one that is successful and popular. By the end of the story he realizes that despite all her high-fangled ideas and a modern literary education, his wife is not very different from the kind of women he writes about.

15.4.2 Vimla

Vimla is a young, beautiful and intelligent woman who has a degree in English Literature from Bombay University. While people suggest that she has married Maganlal simply because he is a rich man, it is quite clear in the story that Vimla has a warm regard for her husband, yet also enjoys the glamour and the comfort of the life that her husband provides. However, her notions of art and aesthetics have been nurtured by a western literary education and her brother Sunil from whom she has high hopes of achieving something great. She is unable to reflect on her own ground reality and is unable to realize that all Sunil’s claims of talent are self-centered and false. While she is right in pointing out that Maganlal’s stories revolve around hackneyed clichés, her own understanding of art is completely detached from reality. We must remember however, that she does not criticize Maganlal to win a point over him but because she wishes the best for him.

When her husband starts spending his time secretly in writing a new kind of script, her insecurity comes to the surface. She cannot think of any other explanation except the most hackneyed one – that her husband must be cheating on her. This suspicion consumes her day by day and all Maganlal’s explanations only add to her conviction that there is some other woman. Her vanity suffers a blow; she feels that “...she is making poor use of her youth and beauty.” Her suspicions reach a climax when Maganlal shouts out in anger at Sunil that he will not be parted from the (imaginary) other woman. She, who has spent the preceding days demanding the name of her rival and threatening her husband with wild descriptions of what she would do to this other woman, now breaks down into tears at the feet of Maganlal pleading with him not to desert her for someone else. In doing so, she behaves exactly like those clichéd heroines Maganlal writes about. The author expertly

demonstrates that Vimla's reality is much closer to Maganlal's popular fictional world than to the elite literary fictional world which she so admires.

Vimla represents those people of the privileged educated middle-class who take pride in their high aesthetic tastes and modern outlook but in doing so, refuse to accept their real fears and needs in everyday life.

15.4.3 Sunil

Sunil is an irresponsible, self-centered man who is in love with himself. He squanders away all his family's money within a year of his father's death and then conveniently disappears till he hears of his sister's impending marriage to Maganlal. However, what makes Sunil unbearable is his arrogance. He is completely convinced about his own brilliance and looks down upon others. He is neither grateful for Maganlal's generosity nor for his sister's little sacrifices of her girlhood jewellery to support him financially. He drops out of college on the pretext that a college degree is "...not conducive to the growth of one's originality and talents" and declares that he does not "believe in money." Sunil's role in the story is that of a catalyst in making Maganlal lose his temper, which in turn paves the way for a resolution of the ongoing conflict between Maganlal and Vimla.

Sunil typifies hypocritical people who proclaim their own greatness to the world but live the life of parasites, subsisting on the mercy of others.

Check Your Progress I

Q 1 Answer the following questions in not more than 75 words each:

- i) What is the source of Maganlal's income? Why does Maganlal write scripts for Hindi movies?
- ii) Describe the argument between Maganlal and Vimla on their way home from the Silver Jubilee celebrations of *Jai, Jai, Jit*. Why does Vimla criticise Maganlal's stories?
- iii) What makes Maganlal say that he has a relationship with another woman and that he will not be parted from her?

Q 2 Match the items in column A with their closest meanings in column B.

A	B
1) punctilious	copies
2) perverse	nasty
3) industrious	scornful
4) malicious	stubbornly adopting the wrong behaviour
5) derisive	imitating
6) abstracted	hard-working
7) impersonating	taken over
8) usurped	vague or absentminded
9) imitations	precise

15.5 BACKGROUND

The present story is set in a rich flat in contemporary urban Mumbai. This physical atmosphere sets the mood appropriate for the theme of the story and we are able to smile at the physical description of Maganlal even when he is

worried and unable to sleep: “Maganlal slid further into his swivel chair, settling his ample, ghee-fed middle more comfortably within its depths.” The only other physical setting in the story is of the car in which the husband and wife have their argument over Maganlal’s writing. It is a chauffeur-driven Mercedes, and this again underlines affluence.

Within the flat, the action of the story takes place in the bedroom where Vimla falls asleep in the middle of Maganlal’s explanations, in Maganlal’s study where he sits thinking about the past, and in the living room where the climax of the story is played out. Notice the few phrases interspersed in the action like:

- (a) “dressing-table stool,” “lace pillow” and “night-light shaped like a tulip growing on the wall” to describe the bedroom,
- (b) “swivel chair” and “gold top of his fountain-pen” in the study, and
- (c) “gilt-edged mirror,” “leggy dining suite chairs,” “divan covered with new peacock-blue tapestry” and “heavy bronze figure of Nataraja” in the living room.

All these phrases help to build a clear picture of the flat in our minds and bring attention to the expensive furnishing and the opulence.

15.6 PROSE STYLE

Dina Mehta’s prose style in ‘The Other Woman’ is marked by its humour and irony. Irony refers to a situation which is the exact opposite of what it is supposed to be. One example to understand the notion of irony is the case of a blind man leading a person with normal eyesight during a power-cut at night. We usually expect people with normal eyesight to help the blind in finding their way but in the above case, there is no light to see by because of a power-cut and it is the blind man, accustomed to walking in the dark, who leads the way. Irony is a powerful device and may be used in many ways – it may be used to give a serious message (like the above example may be used to give the message that we should give due respect and equal rights to the blind) or it may be used for producing humour or commenting on our little follies.

The first ironical incident is the falling asleep of Vimla when Maganlal is offering his explanation, which according to him displays a “...truly edifying elevation of thought.” Next is the fact that Maganlal does not find anything wrong in imitating Hollywood movies but thinks of his stories as simply a “synthesis of contrary trends and values.” Then, Maganlal starts spending his time secretly in order to write a manuscript to please Vimla and instead this leads to Vimla’s suspicions of a liaison with another woman. Again, it is ironical that it is the imagined infidelity which makes Sunil think that Maganlal has scored a point over his sister. Finally, the most ironical of all is the effect of Maganlal’s false confession on both Sunil and Vimla. In fact, the very title of the story, ‘The Other Woman’ is quite ironical because usually a story is titled after the main character or situation but here, the other woman does not even exist.

Another important feature of the prose style is the use of parentheses or round brackets to give little pieces of facts and thoughts in between descriptions of another place or incident. For example,

...(how inviting was the slender nape of her neck!)

(His father, who still had a razor-sharp business brain, was content to reside in three overflowing rooms with his two younger brothers and their families in a congested part of the city.)

...(thank God the chauffeur did not understand such excellent English)...

Also notice that the story is not told in a linear fashion. We come to know of the cause of the tension between the couple through Maganlal's reminiscences while he is sitting at his desk. There is an ample use of adjectives that allows for powerful descriptions. You can see this in phrases like "earnest monologue," "fastidious care," "fragile hand," "prodigal brother," "Exciting melodrama," "Tickling humour," "nouveau riche neighbourhood," "highly advertised view," "indefatigable imbecile," "disreputable liaison," "swashbuckling valour," "totalitarian ire," and so on.

There is playful use of language to produce humour. For example:

"He was committed to Jit, he insisted in a voice tremulous with emotion as he ripped off his jacket and tie and shoes—he was never really comfortable in Western clothes—and *he wore the pants in the family*, he shouted at her, before he proceeded to remove them."

Here, we see the use of the device called "juxtaposition" which means that two contrasting things are placed together. Maganlal is here countering Vimla's criticism of Jit, but this is described in the same sentence as his taking off the formal clothes that he had worn to the Silver Jubilee celebrations. Further, the phrase "wearing the pants in the family" means that he is the master in the house but he then takes off the literal pants that he is wearing. Thus, the juxtaposition of the proverbial and the literal creates the effect of humour and displays Dina Mehta's expert use of language.

Check Your Progress II

- i) What makes Vimla suspect Maganlal of having a liaison with another woman? Describe the irony of the situation. Can you give other examples of irony from this story?
- ii) Write in about 100 words, about Dina Mehta's prose style as reflected in 'The Other Woman.'

15.7 LET US SUM UP

At the surface level, this is a funny story which revolves around the misplaced suspicions of a wife about her husband's infidelity. However, at a deeper level it comments on the notions of art and money and the way in which the relationship between the two is perceived in our contemporary society.

15.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- Q 1 (i) The source of Maganlal's income is the family jewellery business. He finds pleasure and satisfaction in writing scripts for movies.
- (ii) Vimla thinks his stories lack aesthetic depth.
- (iii) Sunil's offensive behaviour and unjustified accusations of an affair with another woman make Maganlal so angry that he agrees to the accusations.

Q 2

A	B
1) punctilious	precise
2) perverse	stubbornly adopting the wrong behaviour
3) industrious	hard-working
4) malicious	nasty
5) derisive	scornful
6) abstracted	vague or absentminded
7) impersonating	imitating
8) usurped	taken over
9) imitations	copies

Check Your Progress II

- (i) Maganlal secretly starts writing a script in order to please his wife, but this action rebounds on him as Vimla suspects him of having an affair. For more examples of irony see 15.6.
- (ii) Refer to 15.6.

UNIT 16 'THE LEGACY' BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 'The Legacy'
 - 16.2.1 Text
 - 16.2.2 Glossary
- 16.3 Discussion
- 16.4 Characters
 - 16.4.1 Gilbert Clandon
- 16.5 Style and Technique
- 16.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.7 Answers to Exercises

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit carefully, you should be able to:

- delineate the plot;
- describe the background;
- draw character sketches;
- describe the main features of Virginia Woolf's style and technique.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most talented and innovative novelists in English literature, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was born Virginia Stephen in London. Her father was the eminent critic Leslie Stephen, and though Woolf received little in the way of formal education, her mind was shaped by her avid reading from her father's extensive book collection and from conversations with his friends,



many of whom were prominent writers of the era. After her father's death in 1904, Woolf moved with her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, to a house in the Bloomsbury district of London and became a member of the "Bloomsbury Group," which had many of England's finest young artists and intellectuals – the economist John Maynard Keynes, the biographer Lytton Strachey, the art critics and painters Roger Fry and Clive Bell, the novelist E.M. Forster, among others. She married fellow Bloomsburian, Leonard Woolf, socialist, thinker and writer in 1912. Leonard and Virginia Woolf set up the Hogarth Press in 1917.

Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915) explored the tensions experienced by women who want marriage and a career. Woolf's major works such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931) rejected the boundaries of traditional narrative form. She sought to develop a "stream of consciousness" narrative, that could capture the essence of the sensibility, the experience itself in terms of time, memory, and consciousness. She is considered one of the founders of the Modernist movement.

Besides making her mark as a novelist of great renown, Woolf's spirit of creative adventure led her to explore and experiment with the short story genre, in stories like 'A Haunted House,' 'Monday or Tuesday,' 'Kew Gardens,' 'The Mark on the Wall,' 'The New Dress,' 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass,' 'The Legacy,' etc. Woolf used her short fiction as a 'testing ground' for her novels; the stories reveal the evolution of Woolf's experimental methods and the origin of some of the major themes in her novels.

Woolf has also written a large number of essays and book reviews collected in books like *Modern Fiction* (1919), *The Common Reader* (1925), *The Common Reader* second series (1932) and *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942). The majority of Woolf's essays are devoted to literary matters. Her social and political concerns revolved chiefly around the rights of women and women writers. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own" if she is to write fiction of any merit.

Despite the material comforts enjoyed by her family, Woolf's childhood was a traumatic one. She suffered sexual abuse by her half brothers after the death of her mother in 1895. She had to contend with frequent bouts of depression throughout her life. Sensing the onset of another breakdown, on 28 March, 1941 Woolf drowned herself. Before committing suicide she had left the following poignant note behind for her husband Leonard Woolf:

Dearest, I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time.

In October 1940, Virginia Woolf wrote the story called 'The Legacy' about a widower (a right-wing politician) who discovers from reading his wife's diaries that she had fallen in love with a radical working man and committed suicide.

16.2.1 Text

'For Sissy Miller.' Gilbert Clandon, taking up the pearl brooch that lay among a litter of rings and brooches on a little table in his wife's drawing-room, read the inscription: 'For Sissy Miller, with my love.'

It was like Angela to have remembered even Sissy Miller, her secretary. Yet how strange it was, Gilbert Clandon thought once more, that she had left everything in such order—a little gift of some sort for every one of her friends. It was as if she had foreseen her death. Yet she had been in perfect health when she left the house that morning, six weeks ago; when she stepped off the **kerb** in **Piccadilly** and the car had killed her.

He was waiting for Sissy Miller. He had asked her to come; he owed her, he felt, after all the years she had been with them, this token of consideration. Yes, he went on, as he sat there waiting, it was strange that Angela had left everything in such order. Every friend had been left some little token of her affection. Every ring, every necklace, every little Chinese box—she had a passion for little boxes—had a name on it. And each had some memory for him. This he had given her; this—the enamel dolphin with the ruby eyes—she had **pounced upon** one day in a back street in Venice. He could remember her little cry of delight. To him, of course, she had left nothing in particular, unless it were her diary. Fifteen little volumes, bound in green leather, stood behind him on her writing table. Ever since they were married, she had kept a diary. Some of their very few—he could not call them quarrels, say tiffs—had been about that diary. When he came in and found her writing, she always shut it or put her hand over it. "No, no, no," he could hear her say, "After I'm dead—perhaps." So she had left it him, as her legacy. It was the only thing they had not shared when she was alive. But he had always taken it for granted that she would outlive him. If only she had stopped one moment, and had thought what she was doing, she would be alive now. But she had stepped straight off the kerb; the driver of the car had said at the **inquest**. She had given him no chance to pull up....Here the sound of voices in the hall interrupted him.

"Miss Miller, Sir," said the maid.

She came in. He had never seen her alone in his life, nor, of course, in tears. She was terribly distressed, and no wonder. Angela had been much more to her than an employer. She had been a friend. To himself, he thought, as he pushed a chair for her and asked her to sit down, she was scarcely distinguishable from any other woman of her kind. There were thousands of Sissy Millers—drab little women in black, carrying attache cases. But Angela, with her genius for sympathy, had discovered all sorts of qualities in Sissy Miller. She was **the soul of discretion**; so silent; so trustworthy, one could tell her anything, and so on.

Miss Miller could not speak at first. She sat there dabbing her eyes with her pocket handkerchief. Then she made an effort.

"Pardon me, Mr. Clandon," she said.

He murmured. Of course he understood. It was only natural. He could guess what his wife had meant to her.

"I've been so happy here," she said, looking round. Her eyes rested on the writing table behind him. It was here they had worked—she and Angela. For Angela had her share of the duties that fall to the lot of the wife of a prominent politician. She had been the greatest help to him in his career. He had often seen her and Sissy sitting at that table—Sissy at the typewriter, taking down letters from her dictation. No doubt Miss Miller was thinking of that, too. Now all he had to do was to give her the brooch his wife had left her. A rather **incongruous** gift it seemed. It might have been better to have left her a sum of money, or even the typewriter. But there it was—"For Sissy Miller, with my love." And, taking the brooch, he gave it her with the little speech that he had prepared. He knew, he said, that she would value it. His wife had often worn it....And she replied, as she took it almost as if she too had prepared a speech, that it would always be a treasured possession....She had, he supposed, other clothes upon which a pearl brooch would not look quite so incongruous. She was wearing the little black coat and skirt that seemed the uniform of her profession. Then he remembered—she was in mourning, of course. She, too, had had her tragedy—a brother, to whom she was devoted, had died only a week or two before Angela. In some accident was it? He could not remember—only Angela telling him. Angela, with her genius for sympathy, had been terribly upset. Meanwhile Sissy Miller had risen. She was putting on her gloves. Evidently she felt that she ought not to **intrude**. But he could not let her go without saying something about her future. What were her plans? Was there any way in which he could help her?

She was gazing at the table, where she had sat at her typewriter, where the diary lay. And, lost in her memories of Angela, she did not at once answer his suggestion that he should help her. She seemed for a moment not to understand. So he repeated:

"What are your plans, Miss Miller?"

"My plans? Oh, that's all right, Mr. Clandon," she exclaimed. "Please don't bother yourself about me."

He took her to mean that she was in no need of financial assistance. It would be better, he realized, to make any suggestion of that kind in a letter. All he could do now was to say as he pressed her hand, "Remember, Miss Miller, if there's any way in which I can help you, it will be a pleasure...." Then he opened the door. For a moment, on the **threshold**, as if a sudden thought had struck her, she stopped.

"Mr. Clandon," she said, looking straight at him for the first time, and for the first time he was struck by the expression, sympathetic yet searching, in her eyes. "If at any time," she continued, "there's anything I can do to help you, remember, I shall feel it, for your wife's sake, a pleasure . . ."

With that she was gone. Her words and the look that went with them were unexpected. It was almost as if she believed, or hoped, that he would have need of her. A curious, perhaps a fantastic idea occurred to him as he returned to his chair. Could it be, that during all those years when he had scarcely

noticed her, she, as the novelists say, had entertained a passion for him? He caught his own reflection in the glass as he passed. He was over fifty; but he could not help admitting that he was still, as the looking-glass showed him, a very distinguished-looking man.

"Poor Sissy Miller!" he said, half laughing. How he would have liked to share that joke with his wife! He turned instinctively to her diary. "Gilbert," he read, opening it at random, "looked so wonderful. . . ." It was as if she had answered his question. Of course, she seemed to say, you're very attractive to women. Of course Sissy Miller felt that too. He read on. "How proud I am to be his wife!" And he had always been very proud to be her husband. How often, when they dined out somewhere, he had looked at her across the table and said to himself, She is the loveliest woman here! He read on. That first year he had been standing for Parliament. They had toured his constituency. "When Gilbert sat down the applause was terrific. The whole audience rose and sang: "For he's a jolly good fellow." I was quite overcome." He remembered that, too. She had been sitting on the platform beside him. He could still see the glance she cast at him, and how she had tears in her eyes. And then? He turned the pages. They had gone to Venice. He recalled that happy holiday after the election. "We had ices at Florians." He smiled—she was still such a child; she loved ices. "Gilbert gave me a most interesting account of the history of Venice. He told me that the **Doges**. . ." she had written it all out in her schoolgirl hand. One of the delights of travelling with Angela had been that she was so eager to learn. She was so terribly ignorant, she used to say, as if that were not one of her charms. And then—he opened the next volume—they had come back to London. "I was so anxious to make a good impression. I wore my wedding dress." He could see her now sitting next to old Sir Edward; and **making a conquest** of that formidable old man, his chief. He read on rapidly, filling in scene after scene from her scrappy fragments. "Dined at the House of Commons....To an evening party at the Lovegroves. Did I realize my responsibility, Lady L. asked me, as Gilbert's wife?" Then, as the years passed—he took another volume from the writing table—he had become more and more absorbed in his work. And she, of course, was more often alone....It had been a great grief to her, apparently, that they had had no children. "How I wish," one entry read, "that Gilbert had a son!" Oddly enough he had never much regretted that himself. Life had been so full, so rich as it was. That year he had been given a minor post in the government. A minor post only, but her comment was: "I am quite certain now that he will be Prime Minister!" Well, if things had gone differently, it might have been so. He paused here to **speculate** upon what might have been. Politics was a gamble, he reflected; but the game wasn't over yet. Not at fifty. He cast his eyes rapidly over more pages, full of the little trifles, the insignificant, happy, daily trifles that had made up her life.

He took up another volume and opened it at random. "What a coward I am! I let the chance slip again. But it seemed selfish to bother him with my own affairs, when he has so much to think about. And we so seldom have an evening alone." What was the meaning of that? Oh, here was the explanation—it referred to her work in the **East End**. "I plucked up courage and talked to Gilbert at last. He was so kind, so good. He made no objection." He remembered that conversation. She had told him that she felt so idle, so useless. She wished to have some work of her own. She wanted to do something—she had blushed so prettily, he remembered, as she said it, sitting in that very chair—to help others. He had **bantered** her a little. Hadn't she

enough to do looking after him, after her home? Still, if it amused her, of course he had no objection. What was it? Some district? Some committee? Only she must promise not to make herself ill. So it seemed that every Wednesday she went to **Whitechapel**. He remembered how he hated the clothes she wore on those occasions. But she had taken it very seriously, it seemed. The diary was full of references like this: "Saw Mrs. Jones. . . . She has ten children. . . . Husband lost his arm in an accident. . . . Did my best to find a job for Lily." He skipped on. His own name occurred less frequently. His interest slackened. Some of the entries conveyed nothing to him. For example: "Had a heated argument about socialism with B. M." Who was B. M.? He could not fill in the initials; some woman, he supposed, that she had met on one of her committees. "B. M. made a violent attack upon the upper classes....I walked back after the meeting with B. M. and tried to convince him. But he is so narrow-minded." So B. M. was a man—no doubt one of those "intellectuals," as they call themselves, who are so violent, as Angela said, and so narrowminded. She had invited him to come and see her apparently. "B. M. came to dinner. He shook hands with Minnie!" That note of exclamation gave another twist to his mental picture. B. M., it seemed, wasn't used to parlourmaids; he had shaken hands with Minnie. Presumably he was one of those tame working men who air their views in ladies' drawing-rooms. Gilbert knew the type, and had no liking for this particular specimen, whoever B. M. might be. Here he was again. "Went with B. M. to the Tower of London. . . . He said revolution is bound to come. . . . He said we live in a Fool's Paradise." That was just the kind of thing B. M. would say—Gilbert could hear him. He could also see him quite distinctly—a **stubby** little man, with a rough beard, red tie, dressed as they always did in tweeds, who had never done an honest day's work in his life. Surely Angela had the sense to see through him? He read on. "B. M. said some very disagreeable things about —" The name was carefully scratched out. "I told him I would not listen to any more abuse of—" Again the name was **obliterated**. Could it have been his own name? Was that why Angela covered the page so quickly when he came in? The thought added to his growing dislike of B. M. He had had the **impertinence** to discuss him in this very room. Why had Angela never told him? It was very unlike her to conceal anything; she had been the **soul of candour**. He turned the pages, picking out every reference to B. M. "B. M. told me the story of his childhood. His mother **went out charring** . . . When I think of it, I can hardly bear to go on living in such luxury. . . . Three guineas for one hat!" If only she had discussed the matter with him, instead of puzzling her poor little head about questions that were much too difficult for her to understand! He had lent her books. *Karl Marx. The Coming Revolution*. The initials B.M., B. M., B. M., recurred repeatedly. But why never the full name? There was an informality, an intimacy in the use of initials that was very unlike Angela. Had she called him B. M. to his face? He read on. "B. M. came unexpectedly after dinner. Luckily, I was alone." That was only a year ago. "Luckily"—why luckily?—"I was alone." Where had he been that night? He checked the date in his engagement book. It had been the night of the **Mansion House** dinner. And B. M. and Angela had spent the evening alone! He tried to recall that evening. Was she waiting up for him when he came back? Had the room looked just as usual? Were there glasses on the table? Were the chairs drawn close together? He could remember nothing—nothing whatever, nothing except his own speech at the Mansion House dinner. It became more and more **inexplicable** to him—the whole situation; his wife receiving an unknown man alone. Perhaps the next volume

would explain. Hastily he reached for the last of the diaries—the one she had left unfinished when she died. There, on the very first page, was that cursed fellow again. “Dined alone with B. M. . . . He became very agitated. He said it was time we understood each other. . . . I tried to make him listen. But he would not. He threatened that if I did not . . .” the rest of the page was **scored over**. She had written “**Egypt. Egypt. Egypt,**” over the whole page. He could not make out a single word; but there could be only one interpretation: the scoundrel had asked her to become his mistress. Alone in his room! The blood rushed to Gilbert Clandon’s face. He turned the pages rapidly. What had been her answer? Initials had ceased. It was simply “he” now. “He came again. I told him I could not come to any decision. . . . I **implored** him to leave me.” He had forced himself upon her in this very house. But why hadn’t she told him? How could she have hesitated for an instant? Then: “I wrote him a letter.” Then pages were left blank. Then there was this: “No answer to my letter.” Then more blank pages; and then this: “He has done what he threatened.” After that—what came after that? He turned page after page. All were blank. But there, on the very day before her death, was this entry: “Have I the courage to do it too?” That was the end.

Gilbert Clandon let the book slide to the floor. He could see her in front of him. She was standing on the kerb in Piccadilly. Her eyes stared; her fists were clenched. Here came the car. . . .

He could not bear it. He must know the truth. He strode to the telephone.

“Miss Miller!” There was silence. Then he heard someone moving in the room.

“Sissy Miller speaking”—her voice at last answered him.

“Who,” he thundered, “is B. M.?”

He could hear the cheap clock ticking on her mantelpiece; then a long drawn sigh. Then at last she said:

“He was my brother.”

He *was* her brother; her brother who had killed himself. “Is there,” he heard Sissy Miller asking, ‘anything that I can explain?’

“Nothing!” he cried. “Nothing!”

He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him.

16.2.2 Glossary

legacy: something left to someone in a will.

kerb: stone edging to a raised path or pavement.

Piccadilly: Piccadilly is located in the City of Westminster, the commercial centre of London.

pounced upon:	moved suddenly to seize.
inquest:	official enquiry to learn facts concerning a death which may not be due to natural causes.
the soul of discretion:	a person endowed with the ability to keep a secret, a very tactful dependable person.
incongruous:	out of place.
intrude:	come into a place or situation where one is unwelcome or uninvited.
threshold:	a strip of wood or stone on the floor of the entrance; this has to be crossed to enter a room or house.
the Doges:	the chief magistrate of Venice from about 697 AD to the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1796 was known as the Doge.
making a conquest:	winning the affection.
speculate:	form a theory without firm evidence.
East End:	The East End has always been one of the poorest areas of London.
bantered:	made friendly teasing remarks.
Whitechapel:	a district of the East End, adjacent to the City of London, synonymous in the Victorian and Edwardian periods with the miseries of poverty, overcrowding, pollution etc.
stubby:	short and fat.
obliterated:	erased or covered completely.
impertinence:	rude behaviour
soul of candour:	a person who is open and honest.
went out charring:	worked as a charwomen in a number of houses; a charwoman is a servant who cleans houses, offices etc.
Karl Marx:	Karl (Heinrich) Marx (1818-83), German revolutionary and founder of Communism. In his <i>Communist Manifesto</i> , Marx attacked the state as the instrument of oppression; religion and culture as the ideologies of the capitalist

class, and predicted the overthrow of the capitalist system.

'The Legacy' by Virginia Woolf

'The Coming Revolution': *The Coming Revolution in England* (1884) is a 32-page document by Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921), a famous Socialist of his day.

Mansion House: the Mansion House is the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London.

inexplicable: which cannot be explained.

scored over: deleted words by drawing a line through it; cut out.

'Egypt. Egypt. Egypt,': possibly an allusion to the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, as described in "Exodus" 1-14 of the old Testament of the *Bible*. Angela feels trapped between her fidelity to her husband and her love for Sissy Miller's brother. "Egypt" could also be a reference to Anthony's dying words in Shakespeare's play *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Act 4), "I am dying, Egypt, dying". Cleopatra responds, "Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is/ No better than a sty?" Cleopatra commits suicide, not wanting to live in a world bereft of Mark Anthony; Angela too commits suicide following the death of "B.M."

implored: requested earnestly.

16.3 DISCUSSION

The story begins with Gilbert Clandon taking up the pearl brooch left behind by his recently dead wife, Angela Clandon, for her secretary with the inscription: "For Sissy Miller, with my love." Angela had left for every one of her friends a little token of her affection. For her husband, Gilbert, Angela had "left nothing in particular, unless it were her diary." He could see fifteen little volumes, neatly bound in green leather, lying in wait on her writing table as her legacy to him. He had often seen her busy with the diary but whenever he came into the room she would shut it or put her hand over it. Gilbert reflects that "it was the only thing they had not shared when she was alive." Gilbert Clandon initially misreads his wife's death as an accident for, his wife left the house in perfect health six weeks ago and was killed by a car off the kerb in Piccadilly.

When Sissy Miller arrives at Gilbert's behest, he finds her terribly distressed. For Sissy Miller, Angela had been much more to her than an employer. She was in a kind of double mourning for she had also lost a brother who had died only a week or two before Angela. After giving Sissy Miller the pearl brooch, Gilbert tells her: "Remember, Miss Miller, if there's any way in which I can

help you, it will be a pleasure....” Before leaving, Sissy Miller also assures him: “Mr. Clandon,” “If at any time there’s anything I can do to help you, remember, I shall feel it, for your wife’s sake, a pleasure . . .”

After Sissy Miller departs, Gilbert wonders whether Sissy may have had some feelings for him. He looks at himself in the mirror and pauses to admire, seeing himself as “a very distinguished-looking man.” He decides to read the diary, wishing he could tell his wife that he thought that Sissy Miller had a “passion” for him. In the first few entries, she describes how handsome Gilbert is, and how proud she is to be his wife. He thinks of how proud he was to be her husband, but only because he thought he was with the prettiest woman there. Perhaps he just wanted to show her off. Initially Gilbert leafs through the pages of Angela’s diary looking almost entirely for reflections of himself. But gradually he is intrigued to find frequent references to someone called “B.M.” As he learns from fragments in the diary of an apparent affair between her and this mysterious “B.M.,” he begins to discover that he actually did not know his wife not at all.

In the story, Gilbert comes to find out more about his wife within the pages of her diary than he ever did during the years he was married to her. Blinded by his own self-interests he is never able to find out how Angela’s desire to work outside of the home turns into a forbidden relationship with a man who is not her husband. Since Gilbert is all too absorbed in his own affairs, Angela begins to feel ignored by him and speaks less of him in her diary. Instead, the initials “B.M.” continually show-up. At first he thinks B.M. is a woman, and then realizes he is a man. Later he learns that she is having serious conversations with this person B.M., and a little further down on the page is a name that’s scratched out, B.M. said some very disagreeable things about xxxx and then the name is scratched out, and she says “I would not listen to any more abuse about XXXX.” And the name is scratched out. Gilbert thinks, “Hmmm, maybe they’re talking about me.” So whatever it was, she scratched it out, so he can’t know for sure. Later it says “B.M. came unexpectedly to dinner, luckily I was alone,” so now jealousy starts to occur as Gilbert is wondering why she was with this man.

Gilbert is trying to remember what things were like, if he had seen anything that was inappropriate. Later B.M. tells her “it was time we understood each other.” Angela writes, “I tried to make him listen but he would not. He threatened that if I did not...” and the rest of the page is scored over. She writes “he came again. I told him not to come. I implored him to leave me, I wrote him a letter, no answer and then he has done as he threatened, have I the courage to do it too?” And so what we understand is that whoever this B.M. was – he had killed himself. Gilbert telephones Sissy Miller, and he finds out B.M. was her brother who had killed himself. And at last he understands that his wife didn’t die in an accident, that the person that she loved or obviously wanted to be with had killed himself and she said, “Have I the courage to do it too.”

The realization finally dawns on him that Angela’s death is not an accident but that she had committed suicide in response to the death of her lover, B.M., leaving her husband to discover the truth from her diary: “He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him.”

The story demonstrates how Gilbert and Angela Clandon represent the epitome of disguise by existing within a relationship under the illusion of love and also that love is often not enough to sustain a relationship between two people. You may have seen from your reading of the story and the brief biographical sketch how the story reflects Virginia Woolf's own concerns regarding the institution of marriage and her own sense of a hidden life, of important moments just beneath the surface of what can be seen and heard. The diaries of Angela Clandon provide a glimpse into her inner life and reveal the complexities of her own concerns as a woman trapped in a marriage wherein she is expected to simply enact the role her rather indifferent husband expects her to perform. Angela's predicament is indicative of Woolf's own sense of entrapment in a rigid social structure that made it difficult for women to break free of their ties.

16.4 CHARACTERS

Successful character portrayal, like effective plot organization, is an important element in a short story. It is partly the result of creative instinct and partly the result of a skilful application of principles derived from the works of many authors. The writer must begin with a clear idea of the character and the role of that character in the intended effect of narration. Characters in a story are individualized by their motives as well as their external or internal characteristics.

In terms of character delineation, Woolf succeeds in combining the descriptions of external physical appearance of major characters in the story with their inner traits like moods, feelings or ideas so that the reader can identify the characters as individuals. As you may have noticed, each one of the characters who appears in 'The Legacy' is unique in some way. In the following subsection we shall discuss the character of Gilbert Clandon. Based on our discussion, you should write character sketches of Sissy Miller and B.M.

16.4.1 Gilbert Clandon

Gilbert Clandon's journey from illusion to reality is one of the interesting features of the story. His posthumous enlightenment from the reading of his wife's diaries brings him face to face with the realities of a relationship that he had taken for granted. Angela had died six weeks before when the story starts, and he notices that she had left a little gift of some sort for everyone of her friends. It appears to him "as if she had foreseen her death" in an accident. He is surprised that "To him, of course, she had left nothing in particular unless it were her diaries, fifteen little volumes." He remembers that she never let him read them while she was alive, and she would tell him that perhaps after she died he would perhaps be able to read them. Sissy Miller comes by, and he wants to give her the present that Angela had left her, and he wants to find out if she needs any help. Presuming that she may need financial help because she's now unemployed, he asks her, "Is there anything I can do for you?" He is surprised when she offers him help instead by stating: "If there is anything I can do for YOU, remember I shall feel it for your wife's sake a pleasure."

He interprets her offer of help as an expression of her passion for him. And so we start getting the idea of Gilbert's character that he thinks only of himself, assumes that she would say these things because she loved him. Sissy Miller, to him is "scarcely distinguishable from any other woman of her kind. There were thousands of Sissy Millers—drab little women in black carrying attache cases." And he wonders at his wife's genius for sympathy, that made her see all sorts of qualities in Sissy Miller. Gilbert is all admiration for his own self: "He was over fifty; but he could not help admitting that he was still, as the looking-glass showed him, a very distinguished-looking man."

We get a better insight into Gilbert's character when he begins revealing his impressions of Angela as he leafs through the pages of the diaries. He just feels that she was very beautiful and that she was just fine the way she was and he never realizes how she wanted to do more with her life. Reflecting on the years of their married life, he remembers how, as the years went by, he was more absorbed with his work, and she was left more alone. He realizes while reading these diaries that she had wanted children, and he really didn't regret not having children, but it's almost as if he never really knew her. When she asked him if she can have some work of her own where she could help others, his response was: "Hadn't she enough to do looking after him, after her home? Still, if it amused her, of course he had no objection. What was it? Some district? Some committee? Only she must promise not to make herself ill." He doesn't seem to have much respect for her mind or for her as a person. He just wants her to take care of him and the house and be his wife, and he doesn't have any other hopes, dreams or ambitions for her. She has many hopes, dreams and ambitions for him, but he does not reciprocate. Engrossed in his own career and eventful life, he fails to see how lonely her life has been without a child. All he could visualize were the "little trifles, the insignificant, happy, daily trifles that had made up her life."

He considered his wife to be a simple woman with out much intelligence. He obviously thought his wife too unintelligent for conversation; he read in her diary about her discussions with "B.M." and thought to himself, "If only she had discussed the matter with him, instead of puzzling her poor little head about questions that were much too difficult for her to understand!" Initially, he is intrigued by the appearance of B.M. in the diary entries: "Who was B. M.? He could not fill in the initials; some woman, he supposed, that she had met on one of her committees." He was a self-centred man, unable to focus his attention on anyone but himself. As his name appeared less and less in the diary, he became less interested. Thus, he immediately thinks of how something affects him when something bad happens. Gilbert becomes upset when he realizes that Angela has committed suicide. He is upset not because he realizes that he should have spent more time with his wife, but because his wife had an affair with her lover B.M. His illusions are finally shattered as reality dawns upon him: "She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him."

Check Your Progress I

1. Discuss what Angela's legacy reveals about her character and her emotional needs. What motivated her to do as she did?

2. In one of the entries in the last of her diaries Angela had written 'Egypt. Egypt. Egypt,' over the whole page. Explain the possible allusion to 'Egypt'.
3. Discuss how Gilbert Clandon's reflections foreshadow the real circumstances surrounding Angela's death. Does he fully understand the implications of her diary?

16.5 STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

"Examine for a moment," wrote Virginia Woolf in *The Common Reader*, "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel... Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." Woolf's method, as observed by Eudora Welty, "was to take moments and split them into a myriad of sensations, finding, or searching for all their several and separate components just as a scientist might split and examine an atom." Woolf does not believe in chronological narrative — beginning at the beginning and proceeding on the basis of historical time. She presents all events, from different times, which enter the character's consciousness.

'The Legacy' is a story about a widower who discovers from reading his wife's diaries that she had fallen in love with a radical working man and committed suicide. But you may have noticed that it is also a story that illustrates one of Woolf's underlying beliefs about fiction--that it should not present reality as absolute and neatly packageable, but rather as it is subjectively experienced by individuals.

The strength of the story lies in Woolf's narrative ability to create interest from the very beginning and sustain it till the last line. There is the element of foreshadowing resulting out of Gilbert's imagination which evokes in the reader the curiosity to know what happens next. Look at the two passages given below:

Yet how strange it was, Gilbert Clandon thought once more, that she had left everything in such order—a little gift of some sort for every one of her friends. It was as if she had foreseen her death. Yet she had been in perfect health when she left the house that morning, six weeks ago; when she stepped off the kerb in Piccadilly and the car had killed her.

But he had always taken it for granted that she would outlive him. If only she had stopped one moment, and had thought what she was doing, she would be alive now. But she had stepped straight off the kerb, the driver of the car had said at the inquest. She had given him no chance to pull up...

Gilbert wonders how his wife Angela had the premonition of her approaching death for he believes that her death was a result of an accident. Not until he reads the entries in the last diary does he realize how she had meticulously planned her end. When he meets Sissy Miller he wonders: "Could it be, that during all those years when he had scarcely noticed her, she, as the novelists say, had entertained a passion for him?" Again, when the name of B.M.

appears in the diary, he finds it convenient to presume what is suitable for him: "Had a heated argument about socialism with B. M. Who was B. M.? He could not fill in the initials; some woman, he supposed, that she had met on one of her committees." Mixing light and shade like a skilful painter, Woolf makes Gilbert alternate between imagination and reality to comprehend the truth.

After Gilbert's brief meeting with Sissy Miller the action revolves around the diary entries and we get to see a probing revelation of the life of Angela, both through the perception of Gilbert and through her own sensitive observations about her own inner life, and her relationships with her husband and her lover B.M. The triangular relationship is fully examined, directly and indirectly, and the story ends ironically with Gilbert's awareness of a reality that he had hitherto missed. You will find it interesting to note how, at the end of the story, Woolf captures Gilbert's final moment of agony as the truth dawns on him: "He could hear the cheap clock ticking on her mantelpiece; then a long drawn sigh...He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him."

Woolf was a proponent of the "stream of consciousness technique." She succeeds in revealing the inner lives of her characters through Gilbert Clandon's state of mind when he reads the diary.

16.6 LET US SUM UP

This short story deals with the life and aspiration of Angela Clandon who yearns for a life of happy togetherness with her beloved B.M.. Trapped within the fetters of a conventional marriage, Angela realizes how societal norms of propriety forbid her from deserting her husband Gilbert for her lover. Virginia Woolf wrote this story in 1940 but it significantly anticipates the primary concerns of the real women's movement by presenting women as intelligent, rational creatures who had the ability and desire to make their own way in the world.

16.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

1. Please refer to sections 16.3
2. The allusion may be to the great star-crossed lovers from Egypt, Anthony and Cleopatra. Anthony dies and Cleopatra can't live without him and so also ends up dying. She kills herself to be with him otherwise she would have been dragged back to Rome, and subjected to insult. Angela here would be left with a life with Gilbert, with a man who didn't understand her and didn't even know who she was. B.M. really gave her an entirely different outlook, treated her as if she were a thinking, strong individual who could make her own decisions. So she decides to join him after death. Or the allusion may be Biblical, to the slavery that the Jews suffered in Egypt till Moses led them to freedom in the Promised Land.
3. Please refer to the text and sections 16.3 and 16.5

UNIT 17 GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

Structure

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- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 What is a Novel?
- 17.3 Aspects of the Novel.
 - 17.3.1 Theme
 - 17.3.2 Plot
 - 17.3.3 Characterization
 - 17.3.4 Point of View
 - 17.3.5 Place and Time
 - 17.3.6 Narration or Dramatization
 - 17.3.7 Style
- 17.4 Types of Novels
 - 17.4.1 Picaresque Novels
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 - 17.4.3 Epistolary Novel
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- 17.5 The Rise of the Indian Novel in English
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 - 17.5.3 Women's Writing
- 17.6 Shashi Deshpande
 - 17.6.1 Shashi Deshpande as a Novelist
- 17.7 Glossary
- 17.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.9 Suggested Reading
- 17.10 Answers to Exercises

17.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to introduce you to the genre of the novel and trace its aspects. We also aim to familiarize you with the rise of the Indian novel in English. After studying this unit carefully and completing the exercises, you will be able to :

- outline the development of the novel and its types
- recognize its different aspects
- know the history of the Indian novel in English, and
- trace its development.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Block, we intend to introduce you to the genre of the novel, with special reference to Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*, prescribed in your course.

This is an introductory Unit of the Block and we must lead you step by step. We shall tell you briefly about the novel, its forms and aspects and provide you the background of the Indian novel in English. The next four units of this Block will prepare you to analyse Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* after a thorough discussion of the topics related to it.

Studying a novel is different from reading a novel. When we read we are interested in the story; we are curious to know "what happens next" and some times we even jump to the end. Once we finish, our interest in the work ends and we pick up another book. So we can say that the novel has entertainment value. Not so when we "study" the novel. Of course, we still like to know "what happens next", but we also think about what the author is saying and why; how are the men and women in the novel behaving; are they life-like; what does the author want to convey; and how is he/she doing that? These questions lead us to read carefully and think deeply. Very soon we are able to combine entertainment with literary analysis and the joy of reading a good work becomes a source of knowledge also.

As we proceed with this unit, we give you suggestions, ask questions to check your progress and provide answers wherever required. In this way, the block opens up before you a new vista of a literary text. We suggest that as you read you make notes, mark important paragraphs and select important stages in the story. These will come handy at the time of revision.

So, here we go! Let us start with the first thing first and ask, "What is a novel"?

17.2 WHAT IS A NOVEL?

The novel is a "story", a long, long story but, then it is not a sequence of stories; it dramatizes life but it is not drama; it is written in prose form but it is not prose. So how do we define a novel?

A novel can be defined in broad terms as a piece of prose fiction, which dramatizes life with the help of characters and situations. It presents some aspect of human experiences and creates real-life atmosphere that is often gripping. The test of a great novel lies in its universal appeal.

Let us now examine this definition:

1. A novel is written in prose form, but novelists often handle the prose so delicately that the language acquires lyrical beauty. That is the reason why many novels are called "poetic".

Though the bulk of this literature is written traditionally in prose, this is not binding and there can be exceptions. Let us remember, Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* is written in verse.

2. A novel is prose "fiction", that means it is an imaginary story. Even though it is imaginary or fictitious, it is life-like.

3. A novel "dramatizes" life. This means the details, the situations and the characters are like real-life people. They act, react, struggle, suffer and triumph as we do in life. A novel is great or successful when it engrosses the reader and inspires him to identify with it. The author achieves this by giving a coherent and sincere picture of life, human relationships and human strengths and weaknesses.
4. We may say that a novel is a "long" story but it is difficult to determine its length. The accepted length is usually more than 50,000 words. Anything shorter than that is called a "novella". Again, a novel may run into a thousand or so pages and some may be in several volumes. But, these are exceptions.

Before we proceed further, we must also know that the novel is an extended narrative and distinct from the short story. The **short story** is more concentrated and does not have much scope to develop characters and situations, but a novel has this scope because of its length. A "**novelle**" or a "**novella**" is a narrative between the short story and the novel in length.

In most European literature the word "roman" is used for the novel. "**Roman**" means "romance." The earlier narratives were associated with the romantic adventures of the heroes and the heroines. The novel now has achieved a wider scope and is no longer a "romance", though the term "roman" stays on. The English name "novel" is derived from the Italian "novella" meaning "a little new thing".

Let us now ask ourselves two questions: Why do we read novels? Does the novel have any relevance to our lived reality? Does it perform any function in our life?

Primarily we read novels for entertainment and also to learn about life. Novels provide us insight into the different aspects of human existence, human psyche, social and familial relationships and the philosophy of life. We share the author's experiences and learn from them.

To answer the second question, we turn to the fact that a novel is an artistic creation of life. Art cannot be didactic, that is, it does not purport to teach directly. It is for us to learn from it, to derive our lesson. The novel will lose its charm if it becomes a sermon. It helps us indirectly by extending our consciousness and making us aware of the immense possibilities of life.

So, let us conclude this part with a few quotations:

The novel at its most interesting is a process of inhale-exhale, a life-giving inspiration, a prose poem which releases the body and soul, even a new visionary glimpse of the miracle of life itself.

— Mulk Raj Anand

The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationship

— D.H. Lawrence

A novel in an impression, not an argument.

— Thomas Hardy

What is a novel but a peculiar and as yet unheard of event?

— Goethe

Fiction—if it at all aspires to be art—appeals to temperament. And, it must be, like paintings, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments.

— Joseph Conrad

Check your progress 1

Here are a few questions meant not to test you, but to help you check your understanding of the lesson. Try and answer these in your own words in the space provided:

1. What is a novel? Define it briefly.
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2. How would you differentiate between the short story, the novel, and the novella?
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3. Does the novel have any function?
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17.3 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL

Now that we have defined the novel, let us consider its aspects. We know that the novel is a story about some event or person set in a particular place and time, advanced by the narrative mode. That means the novel must be having some important elements to keep the interest of the readers alive and, to make the story appealing and real. What are they? How can we find them? What is their significance?

Let us, first of all make it clear that an author writes his novel/story intuitively. For him or her, aspects as such are not important. As readers and scholars, we find the aspects important to analyse a work. Secondly, aspects are ingrained in a work and we can discuss them but we cannot divide a novel according to

them; that will be like cutting it into pieces. We must look at a work as a whole to enjoy it.

If we have to enjoy a work as a whole, then why should we separate its various components? This we do for the purpose of analysis. If we like a novel, we appreciate it either for its theme or characters or maybe its' narrative technique. That's why, it is necessary for us to familiarize ourselves with: theme, plot, characterization, point of view, place and time, narrative technique, style and structure.

17.3.1 Theme

The theme is the central idea of a novel. Every novel is based on a theme or themes. The theme is an argument or an issue on which the story revolves. It is not plot, nor is it the story. A novelist does not, however, say, "this is my theme and I am going to write a story." Instead, an idea comes to the mind, it germinates like a seed, and a story with plot and characters is woven around it.

17.3.2 Plot

Plot is the framework of the story. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. It advances with the help of characters, events and actions. A novel may have a plot and sub-plot. But these two do not run separately. At some point, they are inter-linked with the main theme. Let us take an example from drama. In Shakespeare's *King Lear* the main plot is about King Lear and his three daughters' behaviour and the sub-plot is about the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons' attitude towards their father. At the thematic level, they are joined because in both, the theme of filial love and filial ingratitude is at work. Now, let us take an example from the novel *The Binding Vine*. The main plot is about Urmi's grief at the death of her little daughter but the sub-plots are about Mira and Kalpana and these are linked by the themes of human relationships and death.

Thus, we see that the plot in a narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered towards achieving an artistic effect. Since actions are performed by a character or characters, plot and character are interdependent. Let us remember, plot is not the summary of a work. When we summarize a work, we give the story in a sequence but in a plot, the story is arranged and re-arranged according to the mode of the narrative.

17.3.3 Characterization

Let us first understand that characters are the persons in a novel or a story who are given some moral or dispositional qualities by the writer, which they reveal through their actions. How these persons act, react, learn from their life-situations and how they change, constitutes the art of characterization. If a character moves us and remains in our memory, we say that the characterization is powerful. Oliver Twist in Charles Dicken's novel *Oliver Twist*, or Hardy's Tess in *Tess of the D'urbervilles* are memorable characters. A character grows slowly with the story and as we read on we start understanding him or her. We even become one with them and participate at an emotional level with the ups and downs of their fortunes. Herein lies the success of the art of characterization.

In *Aspects of the Novel* E.M. Forster gives us the new terms **flat** and **round** characters. A flat character is built round a "single idea or quality" and is not much individualized, whereas a round character is complex in temperament and grows like a real-life person. In characterization, a novelist may use the method of "telling", or "showing". In "telling" the author describes the character and evaluates his/her action. This is called authorial intrusion. In "showing", the author only presents the character and lets him/her reveal his/her motives by actions, reactions, and dialogue.

17.3.4 Point Of View

This means the way a story is told. It is the perspective through which the author presents his/her characters, controls their action and the events. There are many different ways of narrating the story. A character may tell his tale in the first person. This is called **first person narration**. We must keep in mind here that he/she is the fictional persona through whom the story is told. It is not the author who is speaking; he/she is believed to be speaking. The first person narrator recounts his experiences placing himself as "I". He is the main witness to the events of his life. On the other hand, the **third person narrator** provides an omniscient point of view. He knows everything that is to take place in the story and he is the agent who describes and controls actions, motives and thoughts.

The third person point of view can be **omniscient** or **limited**. In omniscient point of view, the narrator knows everything; in limited point of view, the author tells the story in the third person but limits himself to what is experienced or felt by a single character.

17.3.5 Place And Time

A story cannot be written in a vacuum. It originates and moves within a cultural context. The characters, events, motivations, in fact, the entire action of the plot are controlled by the socio-cultural matrix of the place and time. The author cannot go out of the environment he/she has created. Let us take, for example, Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. The characters are Indian but the place they live in is England. The atmosphere is of the English society, but the reactions of the Indian characters are typically Indian. The author here cannot detach herself from place and time, otherwise the story will lack soul. Use of place determines the setting and use of time determines the way the events are structured.

Let us first think of the place. A novelist need not specifically mention the name of the place but the setting, the background and such other details provide ample clues to a generalized idea of place. In Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine*, the city or town is not described but it is mentioned twice. R.K. Narayan's Malgudi has likeness to Mysore, in many ways. In some novels, the author uses place to give cultural base to the story; in some novels it acquires far-reaching significance; in some others it creates atmosphere, and in still others place has its own character. In Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*, the city is the protagonist, in R.K. Narayan's Malgudi novels, the tradition and culture is influenced through place. In the Gothic novels, place is used to create the atmosphere of horror.

Time means two things: **clock-time** and **psychological time**. Clock-time is a measure to determine time in terms of duration—hours, days, weeks and years. Psychological time has no relation to clock-time; it is experienced by the individual and is subjective. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the novelists preferred to set the story within a chronologically determined time. For example, the novel started with the childhood or the girlhood/boyhood of a character and ended at some particular stage in her/his life. The time-sense was simple. But, with the emergence of the stream-of-consciousness novel, the novelists started using psychological time. Psychological time shifts constantly from the past to the present and to the future. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, time shifts so rapidly that it is difficult to determine the sequence of events. In *The Binding Vine* also the time cannot be fixed. Novelists who make use of the psychological time to narrate their story take the help of techniques such as flashback, dreams and fantasies.

17.3.6 Narration or Dramatization

To narrate the story means to tell the story in the traditional manner of story telling. To dramatize means to let the story unfold with actions, and dialogues, as in a drama. In simple words, it means, “telling” and “showing”. The “telling” mode usually has long narrative passages and a moralizing or didactic tone. Readers do not appreciate this much because their interest lies in knowing “what is happening next”. “Showing”, thus, is more popular than telling. As such, most novelists are now adopting a blend of both—showing and telling.

17.3.7 Style

A popular saying is “style is the man”. It means, each writer has his/her own style. What do we mean by style and how do we analyse the style of a particular author? Style means the manner in which the author tells his/her story in terms of language and expression. Thus, style is determined by diction, or choice of words, sentence structure, syntax and the use of figurative language. The characters, situations and events are revealed through the use of language. An author has to be careful in his/her choice of language because it must suit the character. For example, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Kamala Markandaya sometimes gives high sounding philosophical language to Rukmani, the simple, semi-literate farmer woman, which critics find unrealistic. The problem of style is more acute for the Indian writer in English. While depicting the rural people, the workers and the farmers, they have to use Indian expressions to give the characters a realistic touch. This sometimes changes the English expression to particularly “native” expression. Mulk Raj Anand used it freely and he called it “pigeon” English.

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions in your own words:

1. What do you understand by plot?

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2. Discuss briefly the different methods of narrating a story.
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3. What is the difference between clock-time and psychological time? Name any one Indian novelist who uses psychological time in his/her novel.
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4. Name an Indian novel in which a place/city is the protagonist.
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17.4 TYPES OF NOVELS

We now know what is a novel and also its various aspects. Let us understand that the novel has many forms or types. The novel in England from which we trace the beginning of the Indian novel has many types. We shall get to these in brief because we might require this knowledge at some stage in our discussion

17.4.1 Picaresque Novel

The word “Picaresque” is derived from the Spanish word *picaro*, which means “a rogue”. The Picaresque novel presents the story of the adventures of some man or woman who keeps on moving from place to place. Since the novel records the different episodes in his or her journey, the plot remains loose and episodic. Some good examples of the early Picaresque novel are: *Don Quixote* by a Spanish writer Cervantes, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe, and *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding.

17.4.2 Gothic Novel

The term Gothic came from the word *Goths* used for a Germanic tribe. The Gothic novel is a type of fiction, which has supernatural elements like ghosts, haunted houses etc. It evokes fear, suspense and uncertainty. The setting is medieval. This novel became popular with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story* (1765), and Mrs. Ann Radcliff’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Elements of the Gothic novel can be found in modern fiction and horror films.

17.4.3 Epistolary Novel

“Epistle” means a letter. In the Epistolary novel the story advances through the exchange of letters between the main character and other people. This type

became particularly popular in the 18th century with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747), and Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778).

17.4.4 Psychological Novel

The Psychological novel, as the name suggests, has an interest in the innermost motives and desires of a character. In it, the individual is important and the events in his or her life are seen through his/her feelings, reactions and experiences. The stream-of-consciousness technique is best suited to this type. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and many of the twentieth century novels are psychological novels. In Indian writing in English, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, and Shashi Deshpande probe into the psyche of the characters

17.4.5 Historical Novel

The Historical novel takes its setting and some of its characters and events from history. Sir Walter Scott brought this type into prominence with his *Ivanhoe* (1819). In Indian English fiction Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind* (1972), and Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* (1976) are good examples of fiction based on Indian history. But, the historical novel need not be set wholly in a particular period. A historical event of great magnitude can be taken up to show its aftermath as in *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie.

17.4.6 Regional Novel

The Regional novel is set in a particular geographical region and deals with the life and society of that particular area. A regional novelist usually sets his novel in a specific area like Thomas Hardy's 'Wessex' (a fictional name given by him to the south-west area of England) or R.K. Narayan's Malgudi (an imaginary town in South India).

17.4.7 Other Forms

We have discussed some of the common types of novels. There are many more types and subtypes that have emerged with time like the diasporic novel, feminist novel, existential or metaphysical novel. Besides, we have various literary movements and theories that have given rise to different forms like Post-modernism, Post-colonialism, naturalism, realism and so on. Let us be clear, however, that a work of fiction has many influences working within or without. A writer does not write keeping in mind any theory or "ism". We, the readers, critics and scholars, group the works according to some particular trend or setting, such as the literature written by the authors belonging to India but being written in English is **Indian English Literature**. Moreover, we cannot put a novel in any one frame and brand it as a psychological novel or Meta-fiction or a feminist novel. A work of art transcends all limits and can be interpreted from various angles. Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* has been studied by scholars as a feminist novel, as a sociological novel, as a psychological novel and so on. Such interpretations give us a broad base and show the strength of the writer's art.

Check Your Progress 3

1. What do you understand by the Gothic novel? Outline some of its major elements.

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2. Write a brief note on the Epistolary Novel.

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3. Match the words/terms given under 'A' with 'B'

A	B
(i) Virginia Woolf	(a) R.K. Narayan
(ii) Picaresque novel	(b) Stream-of-Consciousness Technique
(iii) Ann Radcliffe	(c) Historical novel
(iv) Malgudi	(d) <i>Don Quixote</i>
(v) <i>The Devil's Wind</i>	(e) <i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i>

17.5 THE RISE OF THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

By Indian English Writing, we mean that body of literature which is written by Indians in English. It could be in the form of poetry, prose, fiction or drama. English is not our mother tongue and we are not native speakers of English, yet when in the early decades of the nineteenth century, English was introduced as the medium of instruction in our educational system, Indians were able to read Western literature that was available in English. They found the language and the literature versatile and some intellectuals took to conveying their social and religious thoughts in this language. The writings of people like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and others started pouring in and gave rise to a body of prose literature having great socio-cultural relevance. Soon poets like Romesh Chandra Dutt, Toru Dutt and many others took to writing poetry in English. But this literature was highly influenced by the style and content of English literature. When Sarojini Naidu wrote poetry while in England and showed it to Sir Edmund Gosse, he advised her to write about her own culture/country so that the outsiders would also come to know of India.

When Indians started using the English language creatively there were critics who felt that since English was not our native tongue, this writing did "not belong to the soil." But, scholars like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and C.D. Narasimhaiah spotted great potential in it. Iyengar's books *Indo-Anglian Literature*, (1943) and *The Indian Contribution to English Literature*, (1945) gave credibility to Indian writing in English. His *Indian Writing in English* (1962) was the first comprehensive history of this literature. C.D. Narasimhaiah categorically stated in his *The Swan and the Eagle* (1969),

“Indian writing in English is to me primarily part of the literature of India.” According to him so long as the “operative sensibility” is Indian, the writing is Indian writing.

Another important question was to give some name to this writing. In the early decades it was called “Anglo-Indian” writing, to cover all writing in English about India, whether by Indians or Europeans. This umbrella term did not fit well to the Indian setting. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s book *Indo-Anglian Literature* gave it a distinct name and the literature written in English by Indians came to be known as Indo-Anglian Literature. Later, it was called Indian Writing in English and now the popular term is Indian English Literature. The Sahitya Akademi, which has published histories of Hindi Literature, Malayalam Literature etc., has a *History of Indian English Literature* (1980) written by M.K. Naik.

17.5.1 The Beginning

India has a long tradition of story telling. The *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, *Jatakas*, *Vetala Panchavinshati* and *Katha-Sarit-Sagara* are perennial sources of stories. The style and technique of narration is also unique in that these stories are linked together by the frame-narrator, with one story leading on to the other and holding the interest of the reader/listener. But, though these stories in oral form reigned long and supreme, they cannot fall in the category of the ‘novel’.

Similarly, dramas, epics, lyrics and poetry have existed here since centuries. We know of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti; we are aware of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; and we have enjoyed the lilting Sanskrit lyrics, and the regional language poetry. All this forms the rich corpus of our literature. However, the novel in India came in at a much later stage. In fact, it emerged only after the introduction of English in the Indian educational pattern. Inspired by the English novel, Indians too, experimented with this genre in the regional languages. Some of these Indian novels were translated into English but later some authors took to writing originally in English.

The novel came into existence in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indians started writing fiction in the Indian regional languages as well as in English. Members of the Dutt family (who published their poetry in *The Dutt Family Album*, 1870) are credited with writing the earliest Indian English fiction: Kylas Chunder Dutt’s “A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945” was published in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* in 1835, while Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s “The Republic of Orissa: A Page from the Annals of the 20th Century” was published in 1845. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s first novel, *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864), is the first full length Indian novel in English. He then took up writing in his mother tongue, and all his other novels are written in Bangla. Other early novels written in English include Lal Behari Day’s *Govinda Samanta*; or, *The History of a Bengal Raiyat* (1874) and Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s *The Young Zemindar* (1883). Toru Dutt, better known as a poet, can be considered the first woman novelist – her unfinished novel, *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden* was published after her death as a serial in *Bengal Magazine* in 1879. Other early women novelists include Krupabai Saththianadhan (1862-94), who authored two novels, *Kamala* (1894) and *Saguna* (1895), and Shevantibai M. Nikambe (*Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife*, 1895). A. Madhaviah was a bilingual writer, credited with pioneering the novel in Tamil; *Thillai Govindan* (1903),

the first of the four novels he wrote in English, has an autobiographical touch. Mirza Moorad Ali Beg's *Lalun, the Beragan, or, The Battle of Panipat* (1884), Joginder Singh's *Nur Jehan* (1909) and Madhaviah's *Clarinda* (1915) are historical novels, while S. M. Mitra's *Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest* (1909) and S.K. Ghosh's *The Prince of Destiny* (1909), focus on the theme of east-west encounter.

17.5.2 The Novel in the 20th Century

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the number of those writing in English increased rapidly. The children's writer Dhan Gopal Mukerji's only novel for adults, *My Brother's Face* (1924), is the first expression in fiction of the quest for identity, a theme that has concerned many later Indian novelists. K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller and Kandan the Patriot* were published in 1927 and 1932 respectively. Slowly, the Indian English novel started taking root. However, it was only after the emergence of the Big Three that the Indian novel drew the attention of critics and scholars. The big three were –Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* published in 1935 and *Coolie*, published in 1936 were acclaimed for portraying the searing reality of the life of the downtrodden and the deprived sections of society. Anand came to be known as a committed writer. Raja Rao's inclination was towards Indian metaphysics and the philosophical strain became the hallmark of his novels. R.K. Narayan created the now famous Malgudi as a setting for his novels, which he gave us consistently from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *The World of Nagaraj* (1990). He was loved for his ironic vision of life. It is, indeed, not possible to think of the Indian English novel without these three novelists who can be called the principal "trail blazing Indian novelists in English".

The development of the Indian novel in English was initially weak and hesitant. It was not technically strong, nor innovative. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee "Traces of both, the prescribed novels and the Victorian pulp can be found in a curious amalgam in the early novels in the Indian languages." H.M. Williams, another critic felt that the history of the Indian English novel was a "development from poetry to prose and from romantic idealization to various kinds of realism and symbolism." In the 1920's up till the 1940's India was witness to a turbulent period in her history. The novelists found different themes for their stories like the freedom struggle, Gandhian ideology and its impact on society, need for social reforms, eradication of social evils, India's modern destiny, the Partition, the emergence of the new urban India, the problems of rural India and so on. When we look at the novel from this angle, we find rich material having socio-cultural relevance.

By the late 1950's and early 1960's the second-generation writers came up. Writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh and Bhabani Bhattacharya gave new direction to fiction. They started dealing with new subjects. Nayantara Sahgal took up the political theme, while Malgonkar gave a historical perspective. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai ushered in the era of psychological fiction. By the 1980's the novel had matured sufficiently in themes, use of language, style and technique. Now we have writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati

Roy, Vikram Seth, Shashi Deshpande and many others who have earned name and fame.

17.5.3 Women's Writing

Before we study Shashi Deshpande, let us give some thought to women's writing in English. We shall concentrate only on the novelists. Though, as we said earlier, many women wrote fiction in the late 19th century, it was with Kamala Markandaya that women's writing came into the limelight. Critics hailed her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* published in 1954, as an "Epic of the Indian Village." Markandaya was a social-realist and she depicted the realities of life in south India. Nayantara Sahgal gave political themes and Ruth Jhabvala looked at India from the angle of a Westerner. Then came Anita Desai whose works probed the psychological problems of women characters. Rama Mehta, Shobha De, Gita Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many others have written powerful fiction. Rama Mehta wrote only one book *Inside the Haveli*. Gita Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri live in the USA and are diasporic writers. Arundhati Roy is called a "One-book wonder" because she has not written any novel after *The God of Small Things* which won the Booker Prize in 1997. Shobha De's bestselling but superficial novels depict the richer section of the modern Indian metropolis. Shashi Deshpande writes about the educated urban middle-class woman in search of her identity.

Let us make it clear here that women writers usually object to being slotted under "women's writing". They feel that they should be considered mainstream writers. Another point that needs clarification, is that all women are not feminist writers. They write about women's issues because being women they understand the problems of women which they project in their works. Shashi Deshpande also says in her interviews that she does not see herself as a "feminist". Writing is spontaneous and should not be segregated on a male-female basis.

17.6 SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938, and grew-up in Dharwar (Karnataka). For some years she was in Mumbai (Bombay) and now lives in Bangalore with her doctor husband and sons. Her father Adya Rangachar, better known as Sriranga was a famous Kannada writer and Sanskrit scholar. From him Shashi Deshpande acquired her love for reading and writing. She got her degrees in Economics, Law and English literature, and a diploma in Journalism. A Ph.D in English (from the University of Mysore) followed. Her writing career began quite late. According to her, she did not consider writing as a career since she was busy looking after her family. In her interview with Vanamala Vishwanath she recounts how her career as a full-fledged writer was launched. It started in England where her husband was a Commonwealth scholar for one year. "I thought it would be a pity if I forgot all our experiences there. So I started writing them down and gave them to my father. My father gave them to *Deccan Herald*, and they published it." Later when she was working for the *Onlooker*, she wrote a short story, which was published and was highly appreciated by the readers. Encouraged by this success, Shashi Deshpande took to writing stories. She says, "and then I wrote on and on as though I was crazed." She put together her stories and at the

The Novel: *The Binding Vine*

behest of her father got them published. Her first collection of stories entitled *The Legacy* came out in 1978. After this, many collections were published. Her first novel was actually *Roots and Shadows*, which she completed in 1978 but it was published in 1983. Prior to that *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published in 1980 and so it is often called her first novel. In 1982 *If I Die Today* came out. It is a crime novella. It was followed by three collections of short stories, *It was the Nightingale*, *It was Dark* and *The Miracle*, all published in 1986. Shashi Deshpande shot to fame with *That Long Silence* (1988) for which she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993. *Come up and Be Dead* is a crime novel set in a girls' school and is like Agatha Christie's detective fiction. *The Binding Vine* appeared in 1993, *A Matter of Time* in 1996, *Small Remedies* in 2000 and her latest *Moving On* in 2003. Deshpande has frankly discussed her views on the art and craft of fiction in her essays, interviews and lectures. She is a prolific writer and highly respected by readers.



Shashi Deshpande

17.6.1 Shashi Deshpande as a Novelist

Shashi Deshpande started writing when she was almost in her forties. Her short novels *If I Die Today* and *Come up and Be Dead* are crime novels and can be called fiction for teenagers. But, these two are not her representative works. She is a serious writer. She selects her themes carefully, weaves her plot around them and creates convincing characters. All her novels have women protagonists. The male characters stand on the periphery though they are significant for the story. Generally, she creates a family atmosphere to show her characters' conflicts, anger and frustrations. A time comes when they seem to be too unhappy to cope with life. And then somehow, they understand the deeper meaning of existence, they learn from life's experiences, and finally they reconcile. This reconciliation gives optimism to her novels. Her characters do not break away from the family, they maintain family ties and feel secure. As readers we also realize how important it is to

live in a relationship. One cannot just break these ties that bind us to life. Shashi Deshpande portrays people from the educated, middle class of modern urban areas. The novels are set in big towns. Sometimes the town is mentioned; sometimes it is left to our imagination. Her works probe the innermost workings of the human psyche; they also provide commentary on the changing social norms and show the meaning of life.

Deshpande writes about the region and the regional culture she knows the best. Her characters belong to Maharashtrian middle-class Brahmin culture and some belong to the Kannada culture as in *A Matter of Time*. Without commenting on the strength and weakness of any particular value-system, Deshpande lays it thread-bare before us. It is for us, as readers, to see how the individual man or woman suffers, falls and stands again, despite the problems.

Check Your Progress 4

Answer the following:

1. Who first used the name Indo-Anglian writing for Indian writing in English? What was the title of the book?
.....
.....
.....
.....
2. Give the full name of Toru Dutt's novel.
.....
.....
3. Give the names of the two novels written by Krupabai Sathianadhan.
.....
.....
.....
4. Who were the Big Three? Write one line each on their specific style.
.....
.....
.....
5. Give the names of some of the contemporary Indian English women novelists.
.....
.....
6. What is the name of the first novel written by Kamala Markandaya? How do critics rate it?
.....
.....
7. Name the novelist and the novel that won the Booker Prize in 1997.
.....
.....

17.7 GLOSSARY

- diasporic Novel:** it gets its name from the Greek word “diaspora” meaning to scatter. Diasporic novel is the fiction written by Immigrant Indians i.e. those settled abroad. Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Gita Mehta are diasporic novelists.
- feminism:** started as a socio-economic movement. It demanded legal and political rights for women. Later, many demands came to be attached to it and it became a general term to denote the movement for women’s equality, legal rights, right to body and such questions that were important for women.
- feminist Novel:** a work of fiction, which concentrates on women’s issues and works within the theoretical framework of feminist literary theory. All novels written by women cannot be called feminist.
- Malgudi:** an imaginary town, somewhere in South India. R.K. Narayan’s novels are set in Malgudi. Critics say, in many ways it resembles the city of Mysore.
- didactic:** instructive, designed to impart information, advice, or some doctrine of morality. Most literary works of the Middle Ages have a strong didactic element, but in later writings this was discarded. Novelists in particular do not approve of didacticism in fictional works.
- third-person narrative:** a mode of story-telling in which the narrator is not the “I” of the story, but a third person, standing ‘outside’ the events. Third-person narrators are often omniscient or all knowing about the events of the story. This is the most common form of story telling.
- first-person narrative:** a mode of story telling in which the narrator appears as the “I” recollecting his or her own part in the events related, either as a witness or as an important participant in the events.

17.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at:

- the definition of the novel
- the novel as a piece of prose fiction
- types of novels—Picaresque, Gothic, Historical etc.

- the aspects of the novel which we require while analyzing a novel. These are: plot, characterization, theme, point of view, place and time, narration, style.
- the rise of the Indian novel in English, also some novels written by women.
- Shashi Deshpande's place in Indian English literature.

17.9 SUGGESTED READING

After going through the unit you may like to know more about the novel as a genre or you may like to read some works. Here are a few that you may find interesting.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Permanent Block, 2003

Attia Hossain. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, London Chatto and Windus, 1961.

C. D. Narasimhaiah. *The Swan and the Eagle*. Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969.

E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Edward Arnold, 1945.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985; rpt. 1995.

Manohar Malgonkar. *Devil's Wind*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1985.

Meenakshi Mukherjee. *Twice Born Fiction*. 2nd Edn. New Delhi: Pencraft International 2001.

M. K. Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

M. K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan. *Indian English Literature: 1980-2000, A Survey*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001.

Mulk Raj Anand. *Apology for Heroism*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1946; rpt. 1886.

R.K. Narayan. *The Guide*. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1960.

Sisir Chatterjee. *Problems in Modern English Fiction*, Calcutta: Bookland, 1965.

17.10 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. A novel is a prose fiction, which dramatizes life situations with the help of characters and events.

2. The short story is more concentrated and compact and it does not have much scope to develop characters and situations. A novel, on the other hand, is an extended narrative, and has scope to develop characters and situations. A novella is a narrative between the short story and the novel in length.
3. Novels have entertainment value and also provide insight into some aspects of human nature. We like to read them for these aspects.

Check Your Progress 2

1. You can look up 17.3.2 discussing Plot. This section is exhaustive and you can base your answer on the points given there.
2. A story can be told in first person narration or in third person narration. The first person narrator tells the story as 'I'. This 'I' is not the author. He/she is a distinct character and is called the "Persona". The third person narrator can be "reliable" or "unreliable".
3. Clock-time is a measure of time in terms of duration—hours, days, weeks months, years. Psychological time is not measured by its duration but by individual experience. It is subjective. Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy use psychological time.
4. It is *Delhi* by Khushwant Singh.

Check Your Progress 3

1. The Gothic novel takes its name from Goths, a Germanic tribe. This style of novel has supernatural elements in it, with ghosts and haunted houses and spirits. They evoke fear and horror.
2. Epistolary novel derives its name from "epistle" meaning a letter. This type of novel is written in the form of letters. The story advances through the exchange of letters between the main character and the others. This type became popular with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.
3. Key (i)=b; (ii)=d; (iii)=e; (iv)=a; (v)=c

Check Your Progress 4

1. K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger used the term Indo-Anglian novel in his book *Indo-Anglian Literature* (1943).
2. *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden*.
3. *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1895); *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895).
4. The Big three---
(i) Mulk Raj Anand = Socialist-Marxist/committed writer
(ii) R.K. Narayan = Ironic vision
(iii) Raja Rao = Metaphysical approach
5. Contemporary women writers are:
Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair.
6. *Nectar in a Sieve*. Its protagonist is Rukmani, a peasant woman. The novel is hailed as an "Epic of Indian Village Life".
7. Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things*.

UNIT 18 *THE BINDING VINE* – PLOT

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Observations about the Novel
- 18.3 The Story in Brief
 - 18.3.1 The Story
 - 18.3.2 Let Us Revise
- 18.4 Detailed Summary
 - 18.4.1 Part One
 - 18.4.2 Part Two
 - 18.4.3 Part Three
 - 18.4.4 Part Four
- 18.5 Plot
- 18.6 Glossary
- 18.7 What the Critics Say
- 18.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.9 Answers to Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall introduce you to Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine*. After you have read the unit carefully you will be able to:

- understand the story and sequence of the novel and
- outline the plot of the novel.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we discussed the genre of the novel, the rise of the novel in India and the various aspects of the novel. This was to acquaint you with the genre in its totality. We have seen that the novel has some important elements that we require to know if we wish to analyze it. One of these elements is plot. In this unit our aim is to concentrate on Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and to get to know the novel in its minute details.

Let us remember that this novel is generally grouped under women's fiction. We shall see later how Deshpande reacts to being so slotted.

Let us now take up our discussion.

18.2 OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE NOVEL

The Binding Vine was published in 1993. It is Shashi Deshpande's sixth novel if we take into consideration the two short novels—*If I Die Today* and *Come up and Be Dead*—that are generally categorized as crime/detective fiction. *The Binding Vine* has a broad base in that it merges three stories into one to achieve an integrated pattern; but the setting is restricted to the limited space of women's experience. The author seems to ask a significant question,

“Should women break their silence?” If yes, then “how?” “Who will take the lead?” Some courageous person must come forward to articulate. This responsibility is given to the writer. The writer transcends the personal to achieve the general. In the process of writing, the individual brings forth a “new creation” separate from the creator. The creator and the created are two distinct entities. That is what the epigraph to the novel says, “What was the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here?” This line from Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* signifies that creativity is beyond time and place. The writing process involves exclusion of certain experiences and elevation of others according to the author’s subjectivity. The writer’s word has the power to suppress some experiences, communicate others and reveal the hidden selves.

This novel is a multi-dimensional narrative about family bonds, human relationships, women’s right to their body and the need to speak out to set right the wrong. Despite its grim environ of pain and loss you will find in the story an undercurrent of love, understanding and hope.

Shall we now give some thought to the beginning and ending of the novel? The first sentence is, “We all of us grow up with an idea of ourselves, an image rather, and spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to it.” This sentence has psychological relevance. Psychologists say that when we try to live as our image, not as our real self, we face an identity crisis and alienation. Who, in this novel, is living as an image? The narrator, Urmi. In the next line she asserts that she is trying to get over that image and be herself. The middle shows how she passes through turbulence. By the end of the novel, she gets over her grief. “Is this it, ‘the spring of life’ Mira was looking for?” When we read the paragraph preceding this, we realize that Urmi is talking about the small acts of love, understanding and human relationships that make survival possible. We all look for some sustaining force to keep us going because life may have its futility and living may be absurd, yet we all want to cling to life.

This brings us to the title of the novel—*The Binding Vine*. The vine of love, affection and fellow feelings binds us all to each other. A vine is delicate but it has the tendency to spread its tendril and hold fast to its support. Likewise, the nameless delicate moments of intimacy and understanding bind us fast. Despite pain and anguish that make existence a struggle, there is the “spring of life” emerging at intervals to help us overcome our sense of loss. We can look on life anew, with hope.

The full impact of the title will be clear to you when we discuss the theme in our next unit. Before that, let us read the story.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Discuss in brief the title of the novel.
.....
.....
.....
.....
2. Broadly, how many stories are merged in the plot of *The Binding Vine*?
.....
.....
.....

3. What is an epigraph? From where has the author taken the epigraph to this novel?
.....
.....
.....
4. Fill in the blank: *The Binding Vine* was published in ----- It is the ----- novel of Shashi Deshpande

18.3 THE STORY IN BRIEF

The Binding Vine, as we remarked in the previous unit, is a stream-of-consciousness novel with the action moving back and forth. It does not follow a sequence of events. The story takes shape slowly and sometimes the reader fails to link who's who. The novel is difficult to understand in one reading precisely because our mind takes time to assimilate the various facts, events and their relation to characters. This brief summary given below will help you to understand the story.

18.3.1 The Story

The protagonist of *The Binding Vine* is Urmila, called Urmī in the novel. She is grieving over the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu and it is from here that the story picks up momentum. Urmī's husband Kishore is in the Merchant Navy. He remains on the ship for many months and is, therefore, absent from the novel. Urmī is a lecturer and she lives with her little son Kartik and her mother, in Bombay. When the novel opens, Urmī is in conversation with Vanaa. Vanaa is her childhood friend and also her sister-in-law (Kishore's sister). Urmī is in a bad mood. She feels irritated when Vanaa talks of a small incident of their girlhood days when Urmī was learning cycling in Ranidurg. One day she had fallen off the bicycle and hurt her knees. At this Urmī asks her angrily, "what are you trying to say Vanaa? Why don't you say it straight off"? (p. 8). Actually, Vanaa is trying to shift her mind from her grief but Urmī is in no mood to be soothed by such remarks. Urmī refuses to let go of her pain. She tells Vanaa that when she fell off the cycle, it was a small hurt compared to the agony of losing her daughter. She has lost her child and she cannot forget it. "This pain is all that's left to me of Anu. Without it, there will be nothing left to me of her; I will lose her entirely" (p. 9).

At the mention of her girlhood days in Ranidurg, Urmī is reminded of her grandmother Baiajji. Urmī was fond of her grandmother. Her childhood with Baiajji and Aju (grandfather) was a happy one but she was always puzzled as to why her parents had sent her away while Amrut her brother stayed with them. She bore a kind of grudge against her mother, Inni. It is only towards the end of the novel that Inni recounts the incident. Long back, when Urmī was a child, Inni had gone out leaving her in the care of Divakar, a trusted servant. Urmī's father had come home early that day and seeing that the girl was left with a male servant, had got angry. After that he decided to send Urmī to his mother. He made his decision without even consulting his wife—Inni, Urmī's mother. At this point Urmī understands the sinister power of male dominance that rendered her mother a helpless victim. Urmī now realizes how her mother must have suffered the pain of separation and how bravely she bore it over the years without complaining. She feels sorry for her mother. But

this realization comes only towards the end and before that we have to go through many more incidents and get to know many characters.

We are now introduced to Akka, Urmi's mother-in-law. One day Akka brings out an old trunk. It contains some yellowing papers, diaries and notes. Akka tells her that these papers belong to Mira and Urmi gets interested in reading them to see what they contain. Actually, Mira is Kishore's real mother, i.e., Urmi's mother-in-law. She had died when Kishore was just one day old and Kishore's father was married to Akka so that the infant Kishore could get a mother. Thus, Akka is Urmi's step-mother-in-law. Urmi realizes that Akka was brought as a bride only to be a mother to Kishore. Urmi can now re-cast Akka's loveless married life, and feels sorry for her.

From the letters and diaries, Urmi understands the pain of yet one more woman—Mira. Urmi reads the papers assiduously and re-creates Mira's life, her aspirations, failures, fears and desires. Mira's problem is the obsessive love of her husband. He loves her for himself, not for her sake. For him gratification of his desire is of prime significance. He never pauses to think of her wish or will. Mira frankly records her intimate feelings in her diaries. Her poems are also confessional. She wants love, not lust. Love means understanding the other and caring for his or her needs; lust is selfish and it looks for personal satisfaction. Mira is afraid of her husband's lustful love. Looking at the situation from a social angle, Mira's fear and anger has no relevance, as her husband's demand is perfectly legitimate within the canons of marriage. Despite her despair, Mira feels happy when she is with child. As an expectant mother, she starts loving life. Unfortunately, she dies in childbirth.

Urmi joins duty after her leave expires and gets busy in her daily routine. One day, she learns of a rape-case when she goes to the hospital to meet Vanaa who is a medical social worker. The rape victim is Kalpana. Here Deshpande gives us one more story. Kalpana is a young vivacious girl from a lower class background. She is Shakutai's daughter. Shakutai has one more daughter Sandhya and a son. Her husband does not stay with them so it is Shakutai who is the breadwinner. She has a sister, Sulochana (Sulu). Sulu is childless and is afraid that her husband, Prabhakar, may marry another woman and shunt her out of his house. Her husband is enamoured of Kalpana and is keen to marry her. Both Shakutai and Sulu approve of this proposal. Sulu likes it because if Kalpana comes as the co-wife, Sulu will not be driven out. After all, Sulu is Kalpana's aunt (Mavshi). Shakutai likes the idea because she thinks Prabhakar is a good man and since he loves Kalpana, he will keep her happy. Kalpana, however, has her own aspirations. She likes a young man whom she wants to marry, and rejects Prabhakar's offer.

While Kalpana lies in the hospital, the outside world moves around her. Shakutai does not want the case to be reported to the police. She is afraid that it will spoil their name and nobody would marry Sandhya her second daughter; the police officer wants to project it as an accident case because rape cases are complicated. From the various discussions it is clear that nobody wants to accept it as a rape case. Priti, Inni, Vanaa all offer only lip-sympathy. They tell Urmi to keep away from this mess. Shakutai blames her for crossing the limits of a woman's life and attracting attention by her modern ways of dressing up.

Despite all odds, Urmi gives out Kalpana's story to a journalist friend, and it is published. Shakutai gets social attention. Questions are raised in the Assembly

and the hospital authorities are instructed to let Kalpana remain in the hospital. Thus, Urmi breaks the silence and manages to get justice for the suffering family. The police has to investigate the case, and when Sulu realizes that her husband Prabhakar is the culprit, she comments suicide. In the course of the events she understands how the tender vine of human understanding, empathy and sympathy binds us all. Life goes on despite its ups and downs. The novel ends on a note of optimism as Urmi broods over 'the spring of life' we all look for.

Check Your Progress 2

1. What is the relationship between Urmi, Mira and Akka?
.....
.....
.....
2. Why was Urmi sent to Ranidurg and who took the decision to send her? Who stayed at Ranidurg?
.....
.....
.....
3. Here are two sections A and B. Find out the correct answer by matching A with B:

A	B
1) Vanaa	(a) Baiajji
2) Urmi's grandmother	(b) Kalpana's mother
3) Yamini/Inni	(c) Urmi's friend and sister-in-law
4) Shakuntala/Shakutai	(d) Urmi's mother

18.3.2 Let Us Revise

After reading the summary given above, we now know that:

- The Binding Vine* is the story of Urmi and her grief over the death of her infant daughter
- The story has two other linked stories: of Mira and her fears, and Kalpana and her rape.
- Within this canvas there are small inset stories of human pain, fears failures and agony. These are of Inni, Akka, Shakutai and Sulu.
- The ending shows Urmi's coming to terms with life, her vindication that the urge to survive is the basic urge in all beings and that life is to be lived as it comes.

18.4 DETAILED SUMMARY

Now that we know the brief outline of the story, let us understand the chapter-wise movement of the novel so that we are able to discuss the plot in our next section.

The Binding Vine is divided into four parts of almost equal length. The past and the present so overlap in each part that it is not possible to ascertain whose

story is told in a particular section. Roughly, part one focuses on Urmi's grief, part two is partly about Kalpana and partly about Mira, part three reverts again to Urmi, and part four offers some sort of respite as slowly the knots are unraveled. In each part, paragraph spacing indicates the change of time and characters.

18.4.1 Part One

Part One of *The Binding Vine* starts with a four-line verse from Mira's poetry and focuses primarily on Urmi's grief and her discovery of Mira's writings. Urmi has lost her one-year-old daughter Anusha and is inconsolable. Nothing can cheer her or divert her attention from her daughter. She is flippant, angry, irritated and even hysterical. This state of mind is revealed not only through Urmi's assessment of her situation but also through her words, actions and reactions.

The novel opens with Vanaa trying to soothe Urmi's ruffled nerves. She reminds Urmi of the time when she (Urmi) was learning cycling in Ranidurg and fell off her bike and got hurt. To this Urmi's rejoinder is "Once? I must have fallen at least a dozen times." Vanaa feels hurt at Urmi's deliberate attempts to belittle her but she continues the conversation. Urmi is sharp enough to know that Vanaa is trying to evoke Urmi's childhood memory of her heroic attempts to get over pain and suffering and to tell her indirectly that after all, she has been a brave girl and now she should live up to that "image". As Urmi tells us in the first few lines, she wants to break this "image" of being a heroic woman, she would rather be an ordinary woman and be able to express her feelings, than a superhuman figure forced to repress her grief.

Vanaa's remarks not only irritate Urmi, they make her petulant. She digs up old things, blames Vanaa for what she must have said during their girlhood days and indulges in self-pity. This is, indeed, unlike Urmi who has always been self-willed, strong and different from other girls. At this point we learn that during her childhood Urmi had deliberately rejected the expensive and beautiful dresses her mother got for her and preferred to wear the ill-fitted ones stitched for her by her Baiajji. (We wonder at Urmi's obstinacy and wish to know why she was staying with her grandparents and why not with her parents).

Reference to Baiajji takes Urmi back in time. She remembers her days at Ranidurg in the palatial house of her grandparents; the happy days of girlhood abandon when life was smooth and Baiajji and Aju's love gave meaning to living. There were small pleasures like occasionally cleaning and airing the big house, sharing the joke about the "darbar hall", the everyday excitement when the train passed by, eating raw tamarind despite Baiajji's warning and rushing to Vanaa's house in the neighborhood to play. All these pleasures vanished slowly with time. Baiajji died and then Aju and Urmi's world changed.

But, the most painful is the change brought in by Anu's death. Death leaves emptiness and a silence that is impenetrable. Urmi is so much under nervous tension that she bangs her head against the wall and gets hurt. Amrut (her brother) and Inni (her mother) are worried over her state of mind but when they show concern, Urmi reacts sharply; making it clear that she does not like

to be fussed over. Harish (Vanaa's husband) examines her and finds her asthmatic. He offers to intimate Kishore but Urmi stops him. She assures them that she would recover in a couple of days and when Amrut comes to ask her if he could now leave for Delhi, Urmi tells him categorically, "I'm trying to get back to normal... I know I have to go on living" (p. 22). With this resolution coming from Urmi, Amrut feels a little confident about his sister. The brother and the sister slide back in time and remember Baiajji, her decoctions as a "miracle" cure for all childhood ailments and the taste of those decoctions. Amrut asks her why she was arguing with Inni in the morning and from their exchanges it is clear, once again, that Urmi is often impatient with their mother. Their conversation veers back to Papa's death and how Inni was shattered. They tell each other that time is a great healer and Urmi will get over the pain.

The monsoons set in and Bombay has torrential rains. Vanaa, her two daughters (Mandira and Pallavi), Urmi and Kartik and Inni watch a movie when Priti, their relative and friend comes. They all discuss the movie, remember how Urmi's Papa was often impatient with the children when they watched the "rubbish", as he used to call films. Vanaa reveals how, as a child, she was fascinated by the Urmi-Amrut duo (sister and brother), and their sophisticated parents.

In a flashback, Urmi recollects how Akka had once brought Mira's trunk containing her diaries, poems, papers and old photographs. They all had got inquisitive about this far-off figure—Mira. Mira was Kishore's mother. As Akka sings one of Mira's poems, the atmosphere is charged with enthusiasm. That night after the children go to bed, Akka narrates Mira's story and in the course of her narration reveals her wounds as an unloved wife who was brought only to "give" a mother to infant Kishore. Urmi gets involved in reading Mira's verses and her diaries and she re-creates her long-dead mother-in-law as a plain looking girl with aspirations to do something in life. Mira had not been happy in her marriage because her husband's love was a "trap", it did not give her individual freedom but suffocated her by over-riding passion. Part One ends with Urmi reminiscing about an incident of their childhood and commenting on the nature of truth.

18.4.2 Part Two

This part takes up the story of Kalpana and opens with a hospital scene where the girl is lying in an unconscious state. The epigraph to this Part, from Mira's poem, focuses on women's innate fear of man—the male—and we surmise that despite all the talks of equality and emancipation, a woman is vulnerable. Kalpana's mother is hysterical as she pleads with the doctors not to report the matter as a rape-case. Urmi's heart goes out to the wailing mother and sensing that the woman is alone, she offers to escort her home in a taxi. This is how Urmi comes to know more about Shakutai, a peon in a girls' school. She lives in a *chawl* along with her children—Kalpana, Sandhya and Prakash (son); her husband has deserted her for another woman and Shakutai has no male support except Prabhakar, her younger sister's husband.

Despite her mother's displeasure and Vanaa's sane advice, Urmi gets involved in Kalpana's case. She often visits Shakutai, talks to Dr. Bhaskar Jain about Kalpana and elicits important facts from the police officer. She realizes how each one reacts to the question of rape—Shakutai is afraid of social stigma and wants to believe that it was not rape; the police officer is

unwilling to register it as a rape case because such cases become complicated and harrowing for them; Dr. Bhaskar admits on the basis of medical examination that the girl was raped.

Urmī gets to know many things about Kalpana from Shakutai. Kalpana was a good-looking child, and Sulu her aunt (Shakutai's sister) was attached to her. When Kalpana was growing up, Sulu offered to take her to her house to look after her and educate her. The offer was good from Shakutai's angle also. She wanted her children to get an education and settle in life. But after a while, Kalpana had come back and had refused to go to Sulu Mavshi. Shakutai had cursed the obstinate girl, without even looking into the cause of her refusal. Here we get an idea that there could have been something wrong at Sulu's place.

Kalpana was smart and fond of dressing up well. She worked in a shop and often decked herself with nail polish and lipstick. Shakutai felt that she invited male glances and called for trouble. According to her, a girl must know fear, must stay within the social limits and must not aspire to fly high, and according to her Kalpana was punished because she broke all these rules. Urmī refuses to agree with these views.

18.4.3 Part Three

Part Three moves between Mira and Kalpana and has inset stories of Papa, Amrut, Shakutai and Dr. Bhaskar. The epigraph is about the perennial aspect of Nature. The weather changes but the pattern of rain and flowing waters and billowing clouds remains unchanged year after year. Mira had seen changes. She was now an expectant mother. We learn about Mira's relations with her mother, whose self-effacing character Mira does not like. She does not want to be like her, and does not approve of her mother's advice to her to "submit" and follow the rules. Instead Mira rebels in her own ways, within her own limits—she says 'no' to her husband, she rejects her new name Nirmala after marriage, and she often reveals her discontent. For women of her time, Mira's demands have no meaning. According to them, she is "mad". The only thing that gave her joy was her approaching motherhood. Unfortunately, Mira died in childbirth, leaving her son Kishore and her writings.

The writer shows us how women harbour dreams and how the realities of life make them wither away. One day Shakutai comes to Urmī's house and as Urmī gets busy in making tea, Shakutai tells her the story of her marriage, her journey from the village to Bombay and her life with her husband, who was a good-for-nothing fellow and never gave Shakutai a home. They shared a room with his cousin where she gave birth to her children, cooked, worked at a shop and in fact did everything to run the household. She was over-worked and it was only when Sulu came to stay that she got some help. As a young bride, Shakutai had two dreams—to have a gas connection for cooking and to get a *mangalsutra* in gold. The dreams were never realized—since her husband left her for another woman, she discarded the idea of having a gold *mangalsutra*, and she could never afford to get a cooking gas connection on her salary.

In this part, we are told more about Baiajji, Papa and Amrut. Amrut stays in Delhi and loves a Tamilian girl named Radha. We learn from their conversation that his mother (Inni) is likely to object to the marriage, as she

wants a Maharashtrian daughter-in-law (pp130-131). Urmi remembers how she fell in love with Vanaa's brother Kishore when he quietly helped her at Aju's demise by suicide. Part Three ends with Urmi remembering Mira's verse about her approaching motherhood.

18.4.4 Part Four

Part Four has a verse with an optimistic tinge. Whatever the troubles of life and assaults of existence, we are all attached to life. Mira had reconciled with life but life was snatched away by death. Kalpana loved life, but she is struggling between life and death. Despite all this, life must go on. The novel ends with this optimistic view.

Urmi gives the facts about the rape case to Malcolm, a journalist and it is published. The publicity given to the case comes both as a curse and a blessing. Blessing, because it generates public opinion; and curse, because Sulu commits suicide when she realizes that her husband Prabhakar has committed the crime. Urmi feels deeply sorry for Shakutai; she can empathise with her but cannot do anything further.

While Urmi is passing through these problems, she talks freely to Dr. Bhaskar, seeking in him a good listener. Somehow, Dr. Bhaskar imagines that Urmi is unhappy in her marriage and he indirectly proposes to her. Urmi is shocked at his boldness. Kishore is remote and reticent by nature but he is a loving husband and a doting father. Urmi realizes that she loves Kishore, despite her disillusionment with him and his long absences.

Another burden is lifted off Urmi's heart when Inni tells her that it was not Inni but her father who sent Urmi to Ranidurg. Urmi understands the pain of her mother and empathizes with her. Urmi realizes the paradoxes of life—Baiajji was tender and loving but could wield power and be cruel; Inni was sophisticated but submissive; Papa loved Inni but was harsh in his decisions; Urmi liked Dr. Bhaskar's warm companionship, but she loved Kishore. Life with all its vagaries and troubles has its tender moments that make it worth living, worth clinging to. It is the "spring of life" we all search for, always.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Fill in the blanks:
 - (a) The novel is divided into ----- parts
 - (b) The author uses ----- time in this novel.
 - (c) Kartik was ----- son.
 - (d) Inni's full name was -----.
 - (e) In the novel, the present is set in ----- and the past in ----- (name the places)

2. Write a note on Urmi's strained relations with her mother.
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Why does Shakutai blame Kalpana for bringing trouble on her? Do you agree with Shakutai?
.....
.....

4. Write a brief note on Urmi-Amrut relationship.

.....
.....
.....
.....

18.5 PLOT

The plot of *The Binding Vine* is intricate. It has three strands running parallel. These are the stories of three women, different in age and time: Kalpana, who is unconscious; Mira, who is dead and Urmi, who discovers life's meaning through the stories of Kalpana and Mira. Shashi Deshpande has herself observed that "the biggest problem was weaving them [the stories] together, bringing out what is common to all the three" (R.S Pathak, p. 250).

When an author plans a plot, he/she plans the characters' journey. In the present novel, the journey starts with Urmi and along her journey many people join her, the two most important of them being Mira and Kalpana.

The main plot revolves round Urmi and her grief at Anu's death. The stories of Mira and Kalpana are the two sub-plots that join the main plot. The total effect is of a unified story—the story of women's lives, their fears, problems and aspirations.

A reader asks several questions at different stages in the story. These are—should a woman have aspirations? What happens if she has? Should women remain silent or should they speak out? What happens if they speak out? Shashi Deshpande does not provide us ready-made answers to the questions. She wants us to discover these. Her work as an author is to lead us into the intricate, labyrinthine lives of the three main characters, and through their interaction with other characters, she helps us to seek answers.

Both Mira and Kalpana have demands, dreams and aspirations. Society, however, does not honour these. Mira has secret dreams to be a poet like Venu; she aspires to write and she does write, but she cannot make them public. The irony is that while Venu becomes a renowned poet, Mira's poems are hidden in a trunk. By implication we can say, that Mira's aspirations are not important and her protest is of no avail. Her voice is muted by the social norms. Her demand to assert her individuality is not recognized. Now let us have a look at Kalpana's case. Kalpana aspires to her individual freedom—to dress well, to earn, and to marry a person of her choice. This freedom is crushed before it takes shape. If anyone aspires to cross the laid down boundaries, she is supposed to be mad (like Mira) or bad (like Kalpana). These two subplots have strong feminist ideas. Shashi Deshpande shows the patriarchal hold but she also shows the changes in society. Mira tries to speak through her poetry, Kalpana openly rebels. They have choices they could not exercise. That is, however, not the end. Urmi, Vanaa and others have many choices open to them. Here the plot shows social progress.

As we have already noted in Unit 17, the plot in a narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are rendered toward achieving some particular emotional and artistic effects. M.A. Abrams points out in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, that the above definition "is deceptively simple, because the actions (including verbal as well as physical actions) are performed by particular characters in a work, and are the means by which they exhibit their moral and dispositional qualities" (p. 127).

Let us now discuss the actions performed by Urmi and others. By her verbal attacks on Vanaa and Inni, Urmi reveals her state of mind. She is angry and irritated. The reason is her inability to bear her grief. During this period she engages herself in reading Mira's writings. She finds them interesting because they reveal the innermost secrets of a woman's life. Urmi finds clues to re-create her mother-in-law as a woman aspiring for self-identity and in the process, Urmi comes across a co-traveller—Kalpana -- the young rape victim. She discovers similarity in the two cases: Kalpana was raped by her relative, Mira by her husband. During the period of her visits to the hospital and to Shakutai's home, Urmi meets other sufferers whose pain and grief is as real as her own. Shakutai is a grieving mother like Urmi. She is the most unfortunate woman in the novel. She has troubles piling over her—Kalpana's uncertain condition, Sulu's suicide, social stigma, and anxiety about her other children, Sandhya and Prakash.

Slowly, as actions, reactions and incidents get attached to the main plot of Urmi's grief, the picture assumes many dimensions. Shashi Deshpande provides us with a broad canvas to study the lives of various women. In the course of our reading, we realize that the lives of the characters, both men and women, have acquired meaning. Mira rises up from the dead. She is not a far-off figure but a human being who resented being possessed. She wanted her freedom to grow as an individual. Kalpana is no longer the girl with dubious behaviour; she is a young girl who has dreams. Urmi is not the grief-stricken mother, or an angry woman; she is a sympathetic and helpful person.

The plot of *The Binding Vine* does not follow the traditional pattern of unity of time and action. Since it is a stream of consciousness novel the action moves back and forth with the past and the present overlapping. That does not mean, however, that the novel is a hotch-potch in time. It is set in the India of the 1980's. Urmi, Vanaa, Harish, Kishore, Inni, Dr. Bhaskar are all denizens of the Indian urban middleclass, while Shakutai and her family are from the lower class. Mira, Baiajji and others belong to the time past. In order to bring them close to us the author uses memory. The time-shift is managed through the interweaving of the subplots. The two subplots—one of Mira and the other of Kalpana—are intricately woven with the main plot of Urmi. Urmi and Mira are related but they are separated by death. Urmi and Kalpana are strangers but they are united by human concerns. In the Mira-Urmi case, Mira's writings provide the bridge; in the Kalpana-Urmi relations, Shakutai becomes the link. Although the plot does not have a traditional beginning, middle and an end, the overall effect is of a unified whole. The opening is grim, the to-and-fro movement of the middle is sometimes happy, sometimes sad, but the end is optimistic.

In the end, the protagonist (Urmi) learns the secret of life. She gets over her grief and takes charge of her life. Life has small, happy moments of affection, sympathy and understanding. These moments make it worth living. The denouement, thus, leads to the recognition that there is the "spring of life" we

are constantly looking for. The meaning of the two lines from Mira's verse becomes clear to Urmi, and as she develops as an individual, the novel achieves its goal. It becomes a vindication novel, teaching us about life.

The plot of *The Binding Vine* has progression; it is not a static plot. With memory, flashbacks, pre-conscious and subconscious reflexes, it advances convincingly and reaches its climax. The overall impact is of a satisfactory journey of the main character. It lends satisfaction to the reader also. Here, we note two points—first, despite her grim verses, Mira opts for life's "spring"; second, the author leaves Kalpana's subplot open to possibilities. Urmi's acceptance of life and her reconciliation give strength to her as well as to the plot.

Check Your Progress 4

1. What do you understand by the term 'subplot'? Write a note on the two subplots in *The Binding Vine*.
.....
.....
.....
.....
2. How does the author manage the unity of time and action?
.....
.....
.....
3. How would you rate the ending of the novel (i.e. pessimistic, optimistic, sad, grim)? Justify your answer.
.....
.....
.....
4. Fill in the blanks:
 - (i) The main plot revolves round -----
 - (ii) The poet who impressed Mira was -----
 - (iii) Both ---- and ----- have aspirations.
 - (iv) At the end of the novel Urmi understands the real meaning of the line 'the ----- of-----.'
 - (v) The plot of *The Binding Vine* has ----- strands running side by side.

18.6 GLOSSARY

epigraph: this term comes from the Greek word *epigraphe*, meaning to write on or upon. (*epi* = upon, *graphein* = to write). In literature an epigraph is a brief paragraph or a verse at the beginning of a book or a chapter. In a way, it becomes the motto of the work, and is an indication of the theme.

- denouement:** this is a French word meaning 'to untie' or 'unknot'. In a work of literature, it is the unravelling of the plot when towards the end many issues or events become clear; it is usually a final scene or chapter in which mysteries, confusions, and doubts are clarified.
- climax:** the point when the plot reaches its peak. The expectations of the readers increase, suspense mounts and the story stops at the highest point; from here starts the downward motion, or anti-climax.
- subplot:** a second story, complete and interesting in its own right, introduced into the main story. It is so skillfully managed that it becomes an integral part of the plot; it broadens our perspective on the main plot; it also enhances the overall effect.
- protagonist:** the main character in a novel or drama. He/she is the hero/heroine on whom our interest is centred. Originally, in ancient Greek theatre, the protagonist was the principal actor in a drama.

18.7 WHAT THE CRITICS SAY?

- (1) Despite imaginative flashes and the role played by memory in her novels, Deshpande is, at her heart, a realist. She presents a plausible story of authentic characters and not shadowy abstractions... Hers is the India of the eighties.... For her portrayal of the predicament of middle-class educated Indian women, their inner conflict and quest for identity, the author has been called a 'feminist'.
R.S. Pathak, p. 18
- (2) Shashi Deshpande ... defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. She has steadfastly resisted the temptation of creating strong glorified female heroes, and has presented the Indian woman as facing the very real dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention.
Mukta Atrey, and Viney Kirpa . p.14
- (3) Words never come to her to express a radical break and declaration of self and independence. Rather she uses her art to express the subterranean life of silence lying under the skin, a life that is equally eloquent and vibrant like the life lived on the surface.
-Kalidas Misra in Chanchala Naik ed.
Writing Difference, p. 73.
- (4) The actual task of physical living takes place in the present, but our actions and dreams are shaped by the human ability to work sequentially, to have memories of the past and to dream about the future..... Deshpande's novels begin at midpoint, the protagonists or narrators are adults... They also mark a still point in time where individuals are trying to take stock of their lives and are involved in some measures in an observer-status....
Jasbir Jain (pp. 123-124)

18.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit has given you:

- An introduction to *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande's sixth novel. Its epigraph focuses on the creator and creativity.
- We also gave some thought to the beginning and the ending of the novel to prepare you to see their significance for the plot.
- After a brief and chronologically ordered summary, we gave you the detailed story so that you would know the sequence, which is otherwise not clear.
- The part-wise summary tells the story as the novelist tells it, but the sequence has been rearranged for clarity.
- In the section dealing with the plot we have discussed the plot and subplots, the time-sequence, the setting, actions of the characters and the final optimistic ending.

18.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. *The Binding Vine* focuses on human relationships and their strength to bind us together. The title points out how in the novel, and by implication in life, we are bound by the bonds of love, affection, understanding and empathy. 'Vine' is a creeper, it is delicate but it has two qualities: it spreads fast, and second, its tendrils bind themselves together and then attach to the main support, may be another tree or stick. In life, we are bound by blood relations (like mother-child, father-child), family relations (husband-wife, mother-in-law—daughter-in-law etc.), and human relations (as in the case of Urmi-Shakutai). All these are ties and we cannot shrug them off.
2. Three stories are merged in the plot of *The Binding Vine*. These are: Urmi's story of her grief, memory and the act of living; Mira's story revealed through her verses; and Kalpana's story.
3. An epigraph is a short verse or some quotation given in the beginning of a novel (or any literary work). It sets the tone of the work and acts like its motto. The epigraph to this novel is taken from Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*.
4. Fill in the blanks:

The Binding Vine was published in 1993. It is the **sixth** novel of Shashi Deshpande.

Check your Progress 2

1. Both Mira and Akka are Urmi's mothers-in-law. Mira is Kishore's mother who died when Kishore was born. Akka is his step-mother.
2. Urmi's father thought that Urmi's mother, his wife Yamini, was not fit to look after the girl-child. He was angry with Yamini for going out leaving the child with Diwakar, a male servant. So, he decided to send

Urmi to Ranidurg to his parents—Urmi's Baiajji and Aju. He took the decision without consulting his wife.

The Binding Vine by
Shashi Deshpande:
Plot

3. 1=c, 2=a, 3=d, 4=b.

Check Your Progress 3

1. (a) four parts; (b) psychological; (c) Urmi and Kishore's son; (d) Yamini; (e) Bombay, Ranidurg.
2. Urmi was unhappy because she was sent to Ranidurg while her brother stayed with the parents. She imagined that her mother did not care for her, that was why she sent her away. She bore a secret grudge against her mother and always showed scant respect for her. She was often flippant with Inni and even discourteous. She understood her mother's helplessness after Inni told her why Urmi was sent away.
3. Kalpana was fond of dressing up stylishly, using lips-stick and painting her nails. This was not done in their society. Shakutai thought that because of her style she was unduly attracting attention. She warned Kalpana but the girl did not pay any heed. After the rape, Shakutai blames it on Kalpana's waywardness. We do not agree with Shakutai. In fact, Prabhakar raped her to punish her for her rejection of his offer. Shakutai failed to see Prabhakar's real character. Moreover, we agree with Urmi that Kalpana had every right to be an individual, and live life as she wanted to.
4. Amrut and Urmi are brother-sister. Urmi is his elder sister. Amrut is tender and understanding and stands by Urmi during her grief. Urmi is often impatient with him but Amrut, waves it off by his sense of humour. Amrut and Urmi have tender feelings for each other. They share pleasant childhood memories and exchange some interesting incidents. These exchanges are important for the plot because they reveal the past and provide us valuable insights into it.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1 & 2. These points are discussed elaborately in the section dealing with Plot. You will find sufficient material to answer these questions
3. The ending is optimistic. Urmi gets over her grief. She appears much more normal now as she takes charge of her daily life. She understands how the small incidents in our day-to-day life keep us bound to it. These are the affections, love, sympathy and understanding that are the 'spring of life'. She exonerates Inni as she understands Inni's helplessness; she values Vanaa's concern for her; she becomes aware of Kartik's needs; she thinks positively of Kishore and his quiet strength and Shakutai's affectionate touch. Life acquires a meaning as Urmi accepts it on its own terms.
4. (i) Urmi; (ii) Venu; (iii) Mira and Kalpana; (iv) 'Spring' of 'life'; (v) Three.

UNIT 19 THEMES

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Themes
 - 19.2.1 Feminism
 - 19.2.2 Love and Marriage
 - 19.2.3 Human Relationships
- 19.3 Glossary
- 19.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.5 Answers to Exercises.

19.0 OBJECTIVES

If you read this unit carefully, you would be able to:

- discuss the various themes present in the novel
- analyze how the thematic structure gives many dimensions to the story

19.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we read the story of *The Binding Vine* in chronological order and studied the plot construction. We have understood by now that no work can be written in a vacuum. Every novelist lives in a society; is conditioned by the social norms of that society; sees its strengths and weaknesses; and out of the observations, the novelist builds up the theme. The personal becomes impersonal as the thematic structure starts building up and in its final shape the novel achieves many dimensions as various themes combine into a unified work. Virginia Woolf once observed, “If there is one gift more essential to a novelist than another it is the power of combination—the single vision.”

In this unit we have to see how the various themes are woven together by Shashi Deshpande. But prior to that we shall look back for a while to repeat what we observed in Unit 17.5.1, i.e. “Theme”. Theme is the central idea of a novel; it is an argument or an issue around which the story revolves. A theme may have different strands but ultimately all these strands join like the tributaries joining the river and the river joining the ocean.

19.2 THEMES

The Binding Vine has several themes that can be broadly separated for discussion: the themes of human relationships, women’s bonding, death and fear. The theme of death and agony runs as a current all through the novel; the theme of marriage gives rise to women’s issues and pushes the novel towards a feminist discussion; the theme of human relationships works on the social as

well as metaphysical levels and makes the reader brood over man-woman relationships; and finally the theme of women's bonding gives a psychological purview to the novel.

19.2.1 Feminism

Before we find out the feminist theme in *The Binding Vine*, let us give some thought to feminism in general.

What is feminism? Feminism can be simply defined as a socio-economic political movement started in the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It demanded right to property, right to vote and legal rights. Later, women demanded equality and raised many more issues concerning women's status in the family and society. Of late, many feminists are voicing their concern for women's marginalization, and abuse of the female body.

When we study *The Binding Vine* in the light of these issues we discover that Shashi Deshpande very subtly shows women's submission, their lack of voice, the society's attitude to their suffering and the abuse of women's body, through the various women characters. But, she also shows the changes in social perception. For example, Urmi certainly has more choices than her predecessors like Mira, Akka or Inni. Here we pause for a while and ask, "Is Shashi Deshpande a Feminist Writer?"

Shashi Deshpande does not call herself a feminist writer. But she feels strongly for women and exposes the social norms that are detrimental to women's development. In this sense, she is a feminist. In an interview she says, "I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world, which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species" (R.S. Pathak, ed. *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, p. 254). She recognizes the "inherent potential" within all human beings and gets irritated to see how society discriminates against women, advocates Sati, considers it a loss when a girl is born and a gain when a boy is born. All these points pertain to the women question and some of these are taken up in this novel.

Patriarchal Power

In *The Binding Vine* men are absent except Dr. Bhaskar and Kalpana's father. Kalpana's father comes and goes like a shadow and Dr. Bhaskar has a minor role to play. Despite these facts, men are powerfully depicted. The three main women characters, around whom this novel revolves, suffer indirectly because of their men. Other women like Akka, Inni, Shakutai and Sulu suffer directly. Thus, Shashi Deshpande creates a world in which men exert their influence and women have no voice. If they break their silence, they suffer like Kalpana. However, Urmi's brother Amrut is presented in a favourable light.

Should Women Speak?

We can answer this question with the help of Kalpana's rape case. Kalpana has a dream—she wants to marry the boy of her choice. She rejects Prabhakar, her Sulu Mavshi's husband. She is, however, raped and silenced for ever. Only a person like Urmi can speak out for her. Her speaking out may not help Kalpana directly but it generates public opinion and creates awareness. When Kalpana's rape case appears in the media, there are demonstrations, questions

in the Assembly and publicity is given to the suffering family. This proves to be both good and bad—good because the hospital authorities are instructed not to shift Kalpana to any other hospital, and also because chances are that Kalpana may get justice indirectly if the culprit is punished; it is bad because this exposure brings the family into the lime-light. When the case is reopened, Sulu realizes the truth about her husband Prabhakar and commits suicide.

Urmi is the representative of the new woman and becomes the mouthpiece for the suffering women. She gives them their voice. She takes up a hard stand for Kalpana with her own family when they advise her to keep away, she argues with Dr. Bhaskar and the police officer, and most of all she convinces Shakutai to let the case come on record. Obviously, Shakutai understands her society better than Urmi does and is apprehensive that the community may castigate them. She is right in one sense. The stigma will harm Sandhya's future. Deshpande very subtly shows how the social values work. In a case like this the blame always falls on the woman. Nobody mentions Prabhakar. We do not even know his whereabouts. The focus is on Kalpana. Shakutai blames her for dressing up too gaudily and attracting male attention, Sulu thinks she should have agreed to marry Prabhakar. The police officer and all the others consider her frivolous and some even hint that she could be a "professional". Only Urmi stands by her.

In Urmi's psyche, the cases of Mira and Kalpana overlap and become one. In both, the question of woman's right to her body is of prime significance. Mira's diary and poems show her emotions. She does not have a voice but she manages to record her intimate feelings in her verses. Thus, her need to express her emotions is satisfied. Her poems have strong feminist ideas and Urmi wants to get these verses published. Her point is that women like Mira had a voice but they never got a chance to express themselves. "They never had a chance. It's not fair, it's not fair at all. And we can't go on pushing it—what happened to them—under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgrace" (p.174). Urmi may be right theoretically but practically, she cannot get past the social question. She has to consider many aspects if she is to think of giving publicity to Mira's poems: Vanaa is against it because it concerns her father, Kishore would be hurt because it pertains to his father and mother.

Through Mira and Kalpana, the author takes up another significant issue, i.e. woman's right to her own body. In patriarchy, man the male, considers himself the owner of a woman's body. Mira's husband exerts his full right on her, stifling her right to say "no". She has to submit to him against her wishes. Even the older women like her mother and other relatives advise her to quietly follow her man:

Don't tread paths barred to you
Obey, never utter a 'no';
Submit and your life will be
a paradise, she said and blessed me (p. 83).

This advice is not acceptable to Mira. She resists it and when her demand is not recognized, she suffers. She is miserable despite all comforts. Mira and Kalpana are not fortunate enough to get the right to their body but Urmi manages to get it to some extent.

Urmi shows the courage to walk out of her bedroom on her nuptial night to show Kishore, her husband, that their life together will not be a trap. It will give them both the freedom required to be individuals. Shashi Deshpande shows social changes very subtly through Urmi’s urges. Kishore is reserved by temperament; he does not express himself much and is a distant figure both physically and socially. Urmi has some happy moments with him, she loves him also but she craves for a kind of togetherness, which she finds in Dr. Bhaskar’s company. When Dr. Bhaskar obliquely hints at his love for Urmi, Urmi undergoes strange conflicting feelings—she cannot be unfaithful to Kishore; but somewhere deep within her, she enjoys Dr. Bhaskar’s attention.

Feminists want a woman to have the right to her body. It signifies that man should not own her. She must have a voice to decide her own course of life—and she should decide whether to have children or not. Theoretically, this may sound good but again socially, this is not permissible. Deshpande agrees that women must demand respect for their body but there are many social and psychological issues. For example, Mira resents her husband, but she feels elated at her approaching motherhood. For a woman, motherhood is fulfilling. When Mira conceives and feels the “stirring of life” within her, she forgets all her bitterness. Similarly, Urmi as a mother is possessive about Kartik and she grieves endlessly for Anu. The bestial assault on Kalpana and the insensitivity of Mira’s husband lead us to see another thematic pattern—love and marriage—running all through the novel. Our next section deals with it.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Define Feminism.

2. Would you say the novel has a feminist theme?

19.2.2 The Theme of Love and Marriage

Marriage is the oldest institution of human society. On it have hinged social discipline and a sense of security. But of late, this institution has come under scrutiny. Particularly in literature, the writers are questioning it. Shashi Deshpande does not repudiate it. She upholds it and at the same time she shows us its weak spots. There are several married couples whose lives come under her examination. Urmi-Kishore, Vanaa-Harish, Mira-Akka and their husband, Inni and Urmi’s Papa, Shakutai and her husband and Sulu-Prabhakar. These marriages are not described in the novel but there are many probing questions and revelatory remarks to show how satisfying or dissatisfying they are or were.

Let us take Mira, first. Mira was married to a young man who loved her immensely. She was eighteen then, when the proposal came from the “boy’s” side, and the family was jubilant because it was immensely elevating for the

family honour; and nobody could think of rejecting it. It was not even thought necessary to take Mira's opinion. From the social angle, Mira was fortunate to go into a good middle-class family and have a loving husband. For Mira, however, her husband's obsessive love was a torture. She could never accept him. She in fact, feared his advances. What could be called love, was obsession and when love becomes too demanding, it loses its value. Shashi Deshpande subscribes to the view that love should be a source of happiness and strength in our life. Love has the power to offset the distress we encounter during our struggle for existence. When love becomes oppressive and too demanding, it turns sadistic. Here, sadistic does not mean perverted, it means with the tendency to find conscious or unconscious gratification in enslaving a partner. Mira's husband was not a bad man; he was compulsive. His love was a trap. It did not give her sufficient space of her own, a will of her own, and the freedom to say 'no'. This was what Mira resented. She remained an unhappy wife, despite all comforts.

Akka was his second wife. She was educated and was a teacher. She was twenty-two when the proposal to marry the widower (Mira's husband) came and the family accepted it without a second thought because from the social standard of her time Akka was past marriageable age. Akka soon realized that she was brought into the family not as a "bride" but as a "mother". As a wife Akka remained unfulfilled. She gave birth to Vanna but she never received love from her husband. Vanna too felt that her father did not love her. In her conversation with Urmi, she discloses her feelings.

What these two women were looking for was love. Unfortunately, neither got it. Mira received an obsessive love, bordering on lust. She was scared of it; Akka got a husband who was distant from her. She got a daughter from him but love eluded her. Mira shows her scars through her writings; Akka shows her wounds when she bursts out weeping in front of Urmi and Vanaa. The grief of being a rejected wife kept on rankling in her heart for decades. Though Akka was stoic and she had borne life's assaults with courage, the hurt of being an unloved wife always remained with her.

Urmi and Kishore seemed to make a good couple. Kishore gave her enough individual freedom, never questioned her and when he was around, he was tender to her. Their love relation was not a trap; it was egalitarian. Kishore was so quiet by disposition that he sometimes appeared remote. As Urmi says, "Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach" (p. 141)). Urmi knows it is Kishore's basic nature and she accepts it. She too loves him, though she is not submissive. Their marriage is normal but there is an undercurrent which could not be explained. Urmi resents his coldness and feels attracted towards the warmth and closeness, which Dr. Bhaskar exudes. That does not, however, mean that she is unfaithful to Kishore.

The marriages of Inni and Papa (Urmi's father) and Vanaa and Harish are based on the traditional concept of submissive wives and dominating husbands. Vanna is a caring wife and Harish is a loving husband but there is no sense of equality between them. Urmi does not like Vanaa's attitude and wants her to assert herself. Even Inni, Urmi's mother, never asserted herself. Papa was dominating. It was always his will that prevailed. It was Papa's decision to send Urmi to Baiajji and Aju at Ranidurg. It hurt Inni though she

could never raise her voice to stop him from sending Urmi away. Despite this, both of them had an innate tenderness. Urmi realizes this when she sees the last look in Papa's eyes before he dies and Inni's distraught state after his death.

These descriptions pertain to middle-class families. In the lower strata of society love and marriage have yet another connotation. Shakutai and Sulu do not know what is a husband's love because it is his lust they encounter. Shakutai's husband leaves her with three children to stay with another woman. Sulu's husband Prabhakar has evil intentions and in his proposal to marry Kalpana, it is his lust not love. Marriage as such is meaningless for women like Shakutai, Sulu and Kalpana but a man's presence is important as security. Urmi is right in her assessment when she tells Dr. Bhaskar that for women like Shakutai marriage has only one meaning "you are safe from other men" (p. 88).

Shashi Deshpande raises several questions regarding marriages—whether arranged or love. After reading Mira's diary, Urmi ponders, "What is it like with a man you don't know?" (p. 63). Even her marriage, which is a love marriage, leads her to admit that she does not know Kishore sufficiently "I have lived with the hope that some day I will (reach him). Each relationship, always imperfect, survives on hope" (p. 141).

This leads us to explore another theme—the theme of human relationship.

19.2.3 The Theme of Human Relationships

Shashi Deshpande's novels generally centre on family relationships. In one of her interviews she has said:

Human relationship is what a writer is involved with. Person to person and person to society relationships—these are the two primary concerns of a creative writer and, to me the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation is with interpersonal relationships and human condition. (R.S. Pathak, p. 17).

In *The Binding Vine* human relationships are explored with all possible pros and cons—husband-wife, mother-daughter, male-female, mother-child, woman-woman bonding and human bonding. Thus, the central theme of the novel is the "binding vine" of relationships that ties us together. We cannot shrug it off because it is love that is the binding vine. As Mira says in one of her poems:

Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
but how escape this cord
this binding vine of love? (p. 137)

Urmi broods, "I feel I have found the word which will help me to solve the rest of the crossword". A few sentences later she tell Amrut that women do not want to be dominated. No human being likes to be dominated. We all want love. "The most important need is to love. From the moment of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor" (p. 137).

Relationships, according to Deshpande should not be a trap. They must give sufficient freedom to the other to grow as an individual.

Urmi realizes how all relationships bind us at the human level. Urmi has no relation, so to say, with Shakutai and her family, but on the human level she feels one with them all. Their concern becomes her concern; their grief becomes hers. She helps them as much as she can. Shakutai also reposes full faith in Urmi. When Urmi is around, Shakutai feels secure. She even seeks Urmi's advice and trusts her opinion. The unfortunate woman has no support system in her hour of need. Her husband comes, sheds tears and goes away; Sulu offers no consolation; and Prabhakar on whom Shakutai depends, has turned out to be a villain. It is Urmi who stands as her anchor; she becomes a bridge between Shakutai and the doctors, Shakutai and Vanaa, Shakutai and the media.

Human relationships mean building bridges between situations and across people. The man-woman relationship is based on the bridge of understanding and common well being. There is an undercurrent of love and affection that gives meaning to it. When love becomes selfishly blind, the bond loosens and misery follows. The author explores the relationship between Mira and her husband. Mira was looking for love; all she got was its compulsive version. Akka and her husband also could not build up a sound and healthy relationship because her husband could not move beyond his deceased wife's memory. The children are sufferers in both these cases—Kishore is undemonstrative and remote and Vanna is insecure. But fortunately, they do not fail to establish healthy relationships in life—Vanaa and Harish are happy, Urmi and Kishore are also happy.

The mother-daughter relationship is also very fragile in this novel. Urmi and Inni are always arguing. Urmi is sharp-tongued and flippant with her mother. When her mother shows concern for her health, Urmi often gets irritated. Their conversation is never normal, it is always sharp. Urmi harbours a secret grudge against her mother for sending her away to Ranidurg. Urmi's perception clears when her mother tells her how her father took the decision single-handedly without ever asking Inni. Urmi now feels sorry for her mother. She realizes how dominating her father was.

The mother-daughter relationship is seen in all its tender aspects in the Urmi-Anu relationship. Urmi is like a tree and her infant daughter is like a creeper around her. Her daughter is her world. Her passing away leaves Urmi empty. Shashi Deshpande explores the mother-daughter relations at yet another level when she describes the Shakutai-Kalpana relationship. The daughter is not very respectful towards her mother. She rejects her mother's advice and follows her own whims in dressing up, going out and in her decision to marry the boy of her choice. Her mother regrets all this after the rape incident. She also regrets not having understood Prabhakar's motives. There is, however, no chance now to set right the wrong. The mother-daughter relationship flounders on the rock of misunderstanding. Similarly, Mira does not abide by her mother's rules set for a daughter. She fails to identify with her self-effacing and weak mother.

A very strong sense of woman-woman bonding is shown in the novel. Urmi feels a kind of bond between herself, Mira and Kalpana. Mira is dead and gone. But in her diaries and poems Urmi reads a message for all women. Urmi also empathises with Kalpana and Shakutai. She is tender and understanding

towards them. Her heart goes out to Shakutai and she becomes one with her to fight against injustice.

The ending of the novel sums up Urmi’s understanding of the strong bonds of relationship that tie us at a human level: the act of living may be futile but we all struggle to survive because we live in a web of relationships.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Why was Mira unhappy inspite of the fact that her husband loved her and she had all the comforts?

2. Write a brief note on the theme of love in the novel.

3. Discuss the concept of human relationships on the basis of your understanding of the Shakutai-Urmi relationship.

19.3 GLOSSARY

- chronological order:** literally, the sequence or order of time. In a fictional work, it means arranging the events as per order of time, like telling first things first.
- theme:** the central idea or the central point of a novel. It is an argument or an issue around which the story revolves.
- feminism:** feminism started as a socio-economic-political movement in the 18th and 19th century in the West. It took up women’s issues, fought for their rights, and demanded the right to vote and right to property. In literature it manifested itself in many forms. One of them is exposing women’s lives, their subordinate status, their suffering and their efforts to speak out. These days many feminists are searching for a women’s tradition in literature.
- strand:** literally, a thread or a wire. In this novel it means the threads of three different stories running parallel.

19.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have studied the themes in *The Binding Vine*. Now you can:

- define the term theme and know how different themes are incorporated by an author into a unified story.

- appreciate the different themes in the novel.
- appreciate Shashi Deshpande's use of different themes to give multiple dimensions to her novel.
- know how the author has successfully interlinked the themes to form a unified whole.

19.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. The definition is provided in the Glossary.
2. Shashi Deshpande raises some important issues concerning women, their suffering, their subordinate status and their inability to speak out. She does not blame men, nor does she claim that women are good and men are bad. Indeed she shows the reality of women's life. Urmi's father was tender to Inni but the major family decisions were his. Inni was tongue-tied and could never voice her feelings. Both Akka and Mira had no say in the matter of their desire. Akka could never get her husband's love, and Mira got a surfeit of it, which she did not want. Kalpana was raped because she had the courage to say 'no' to a man's proposal. Shakutai suffers because her husband is a worthless fellow; her daughter is nearly dead, she has to bear social stigma and her sister commits suicide. Looking at these women against the backdrop of Urmi's ideas, the author takes up the question of choice, freedom to have a right to their bodies and the necessity to make themselves heard.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Mira was unhappy because she was married against her wish. Her husband had an obsessive love for her. His love could be called lust because he was interested only in her body. Mira had revulsion for the sexual act and she dreaded her husband's nightly attacks. He did not pay heed to her when she said 'no'. Mira felt trapped and she was unhappy.
2. This has been elaborately discussed in the relevant portion.
3. Shakutai and Urmi meet by chance. Urmi's sister-in-law Vanaa is a social worker in the hospital, and she requests Urmi to take Shakutai home after the unconscious Kalpana is admitted in hospital. Urmi's heart goes out to the suffering mother of Kalpana. Urmi can understand Shakutai's pain as a mother because Urmi has experienced that agony recently. Urmi helps Shakutai and Shakutai reposes her faith in Urmi. She feels secure when Urmi is near her. They are not related, nor were they acquainted with each other before the meeting, but they develop a bond of affection, understanding and sympathy at a human level.

UNIT 20 CHARACTERIZATION

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Shashi Deshpande's Art of Characterization
- 20.3 Characters
 - 20.3.1 Urmi
 - 20.3.2 Kishore
 - 20.3.3 Mira
 - 20.3.4 Shakutai
 - 20.3.5 Kalpana
- 20.4 What the Critics Say
- 20.5 Glossary
- 20.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.7 Answers to Exercises

20.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to characterization and when you read it carefully, you will be able to

- know Shashi Deshpande's art of characterization
- write character sketches on your own.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we discussed the themes of the novel from various angles. In doing so we saw the peculiarities of some characters such as Vanaa's submissiveness, Urmi's self-assertion, Shakutai's helplessness and Kalpana's self-directed behaviour. We ask, "Are these the main traits of their character?" "How does their behavior affect them?" "Why do we rate a particular character from a particular angle?" These and many such questions can be answered when we study the characters closely. In this unit we shall give you some guidelines about how the characters come alive and what makes us understand them as human beings. The art of a novelist lies in creating living characters out of a fictional situation. If we can identify with the character or feel happy with or sorry for him or her, the novelist can be called successful in portraying characters.

20.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION

Shashi Deshpande portrays characters from the urban middle class of modern India. Her focus is on women and the men come alive through her female characters. The overall effect is like real human beings interacting with us.

Before we study her art let us give some thought to the significance of characterization in a novel.

No work of fiction is written in a vacuum. It is set in a particular social environment and takes shape with the help of characters and situations. We understand the mind of the characters through their words and actions. The motives and the inward turns of the mind tell us more about the character than actions themselves. A successful novelist intimately acquaints us with his or her characters' movement, speech, thought and actions so that they become real humans. Virginia Woolf states that all novels deal with characters and that the aim of the novel is to express a character, not to preach any doctrine through it. Characters reveal themselves through words. The portrayal also depends on the period of time and country they are set in. The "temperament" of the writer also influences the depiction.

Shashi Deshpande creates life-like characters. We cannot claim that she creates unforgettable, superhuman female heroes. No. Her characters are ordinary women who face life's vagaries, get irritated, depressed and yet at a point of time they reconcile with life. The final reconciliation achieved after understanding life, gives them strength. As R.S. Pathak observes, "Deshpande's women characters have a strength of their own, and in spite of challenges and hostilities, remain uncrushed" (Pathak, p. 16). We can see Urmi's strength when she says, "I am not going to break" (*The Binding Vine*, p. 19) and towards the end Urmi appears strong; she is not the wailing, grieving Urmi whom we meet in the beginning of the novel. Deshpande does not idealize her protagonist. She presents women from everyday life. In an interview given to Stanley Carratho, published in *The Sunday Observer*, Shashi Deshpande remarked, "My characters are all human beings one sees in the world around. No supermen" (11 Feb. 1990). In another interview she said, "My characters take their own ways. I have heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are" (*Literature Alive*, December 1987).

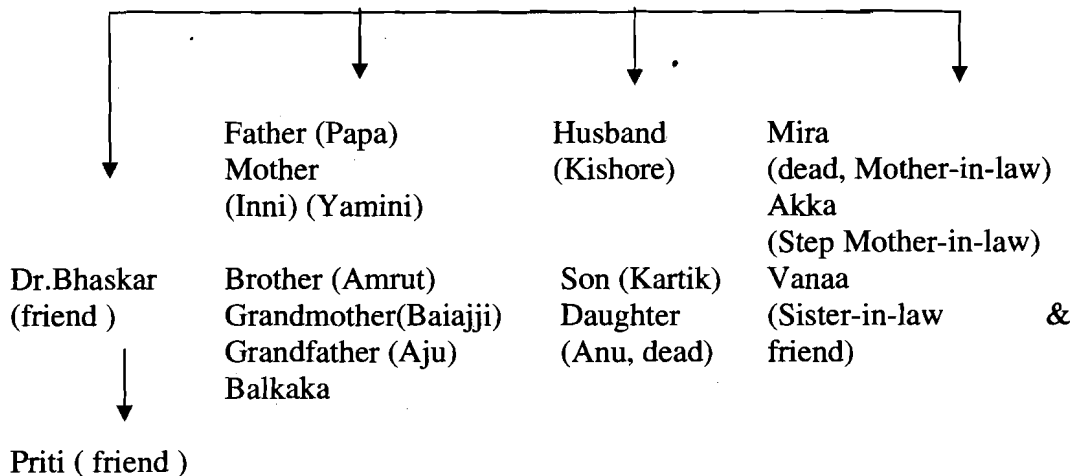
Shashi Deshpande's art lies in her method of "showing" the characters. Since she adopts the techniques of flashback and the stream of consciousness, we see the characters through the consciousness of the protagonist. She leaves her readers free to make their own assessment and to judge the main characters as per their actions, words and interactions with others. For example, Urmi is flippant, sharp-tongued and aggressive. How can we say this? First, the opening conversation with Vanaa provides us the clue. She is so impatient and abrupt that Vanaa is intimidated. But, won't you agree that Urmi is sympathetic? Yes, we do! How do we discover this? By her attitude towards Shakutai. Dr. Bhaskar's remark show us that Urmi is a "dark, sharp-tongued, married woman" (p. 161). Thus, we are able to sum up Urmi's appearance, her relationships, her psychology, social status and her optimism through Deshpande's art of "showing". Other characters also come alive through Urmi, Shakutai and Vanaa.

The narrator is Urmi and she tells the story using the first person narration "I". She is the protagonist and Shashi Deshpande gives her the freedom to speak out her mind and to grow. The grief-stricken and distraught Urmi whom we meet in the opening pages of the novel, gains strength towards the end and achieves an optimistic vision of life. This is her mental growth. The other

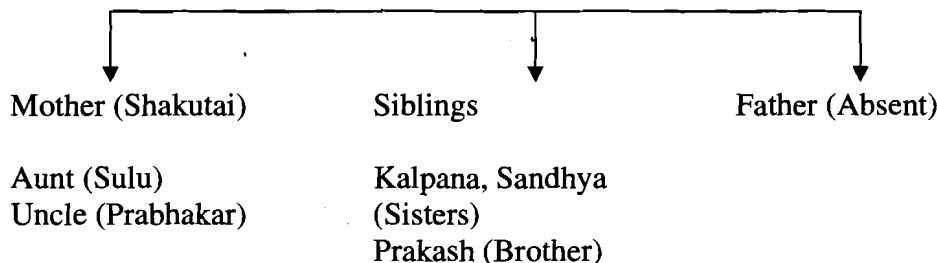
characters suffer and have no chance to grow, though they are not wooden. They advance the thematic structure of the novel.

The Binding Vine has a large number of characters who come, make their presence felt and go away. Since the novel is told through Urmi's consciousness, we shall see who they are in relation to her.

URMI



KALPANA'S FAMILY



Men are absent in Shashi Deshpande's novels. Where they are present, they have a negligible role to play. But, the men are not ineffective. They influence the thematic structure through the patriarchal system. They come alive when the women in their lives brood over their power. For example, in *The Binding Vine*, Kishore's father becomes a palpable presence through Mira's diaries and poems as well as through Vanaa's occasional remarks. We do not know his name but we know that he had a compulsive personality, he loved his first wife, Mira, obsessively; neglected his second wife, Akka; he was reserved towards his daughter Vanaa; but lived for his son Kishore. Another male character, Kishore is in the Merchant Navy, and on board a ship. He appears remote, though loving and understanding. Deshpande's deft touches create the men characters as real human beings, but she admits her inability to bring forth "rounded" male characters.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Write a brief note on Shashi Deshpande's art of characterization.

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2. Discuss in brief “showing” and “telling” methods of characterization. Which method does Shashi Deshpande follow?
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.....
.....
.....
3. How do men seem to exert their influence in this novel?
.....
.....
4. Fill in the blanks:
 - (i) Shashi Deshpande portrays characters from the urban Indian ----- (working class/middle class).
 - (ii) The art of a novelist lies in creating ----- characters out of fictional situations (wooden/living).
 - (iii) When a character reveals himself/herself it is called ----- (telling/showing).
 - (iv) Virginia Woolf says that the aim of a novel should be to ----- a character not to preach any doctrine through it. (express/create)
 - (v) -----’s remarks show Urmi’s physical characteristics (Amrut/Dr. Bhaskar).

20.3 CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

We shall now discuss the main characters in the novel. As we have already seen, there are more than a dozen characters who contribute to the plot. They all are important in one way or the other, but only a few are the real motivating factors. So, we shall discuss these: Urmi, Kishore, Mira, Akka, Shakutai and Kalpana.

20.3.1 Urmi

Urmi holds a pivotal position in the novel. The plot takes shape and comes alive through her consciousness and the reader has no choice but to judge others as Urmi wants them to be judged. From her interaction with others and from her thoughts we get a fairly accurate picture.

Urmi is an urban, educated middle class woman of modern India. She is a lecturer. She appears to be active and smart. In physical appearance, she is dark, as Dr. Bhaskar points out. She is plain looking, wears glasses and blouses that don’t match with her sarees, which shows that she is not very particular about her appearance. As a mother, Urmi is tender and has an all-engulfing love for her children. She looks after Kartik well and the boy seems to have no complaints as Vanaa’s daughter Mandira has. Urmi is completely shattered by her daughter’s death. When the novel opens we meet an angry, brooding and impatient Urmi. She is sensitive and keeps on thinking of her daughter. In fact, she does not want to forget the pain. “This pain is all that’s

left to me of Anu, without it, there will be nothing left to me of her; I will lose her entirely” (p. 9). Urmi knows that with time her grief and the associated pain will go, it will be a thing of the past. At present, her wound is too raw to be forgotten and her daughter’s memory haunts her all the time. The memory that “haunts me most often is that of her angry face when I tried to wean her” (p. 21). Urmi is so shaken by her daughter’s death that even simple, everyday questions irritate her. For example, when Shakutai asks “how many children do you have?” or when Dr. Bhaskar makes a normal query, she feels suffocated.

Urmi is sensitive from another angle also. Though she is grief-stricken, she does not want sympathy. It hurts her when Vanaa tries to make light conversation to take her out of her grief. Urmi understands Vanaa’s motives but instead of appreciating them she blurts out, “Well, what are you trying to say? ... Why don’t you say it straight off, Vanaa? I know what you’re trying to tell me” (p. 25). This is because Urmi is independent by nature. She is strong-willed and she does not like people’s sympathy. She would rather face her grief alone, stoically, than to present the “poor Urmi” image.

This does not mean that Urmi is insensitive and unsympathetic. She empathises with Shakutai. She is the only one to stand by Shakutai and her family when others keep away from them. She spends a lot of time with Shakutai, listens to her problems, helps her and visits her so often that her mother objects to her getting involved in this case. Urmi does not care for public opinion. As long as she is fighting for a just cause, it does not matter what people say. Contrary to her outward hardness, Urmi is tender and emotional. She has sympathy for the suffering women—Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu. She even identifies with them. Shakutai’s wailing reminds her of Mira’s cry of despair: “How clear it comes to me across the years, her cry of rage and anguish, ‘why does this have to happen to me?’ Shakutai asked me. Why? My own question comes back to me—why?” (p. 67). This shows her vulnerability. Urmi’s nervous tension becomes clear to us when she recounts her nightmares:

I am running along the sea. There’s someone else with me.... I can hear the footsteps, I can hear the heavy breathing, but I cannot see whoever it is I have to keep running Now it is becoming difficult; the sand, soft and squishy under my feet, keeps dragging me down .. I can’t go on ... I can’t go on ... (p16).

There are four more nightmares that express her trauma and reveal her shattered state of mind. But Urmi keeps these nightmares to herself and does not share them with others. She would rather show her image as a strong woman than show her scars to others to get their sympathy.

Urmi is free, frank and without inhibitions. She has firm ideas about giving independence to others and she wants her own independence preserved. On the night of their marriage, when Kishore sings the line from a popular Hindi movie, which translates into, “we are trapped,” she walks out of their bedroom. She means to tell him that their love would never be a trap. Urmi values love, not lust; she likes equality, not women’s submissiveness and men’s domination. It pains her to find that such claims are not honoured by society. At a personal level, however, she does what she wants. She is friendly with Dr. Bhaskar Jain. Vanaa, Inni and others object to her growing interest in him but she considers him just a friend, an equal and asserts that there could be

nothing objectionable in their friendship. Bhaskar enables her to talk about her innermost feelings about the loss of Anu, about her Baiajji and her girlhood in Ranidurg. She looks at him as an ideal “companion”. Society, however, is evaluative. Urmi knows this, her mother’s “uneasiness is palpable”, she says, “She doesn’t like my going out with Bhaskar, nor does Vanaa. ‘Do you expect me to live like a cloistered nun just because I’m married?’ I asked Vanaa irritably” (p. 115). This shows Urmi’s self-confidence and speaks of her deep love for Kishore, which remains unshaken despite her momentary disillusionment.

Urmi has clear ideas about women’s rights. She does not flaunt her feminism but she asserts that Kalpana’s case should be made public; she gives the details to the press; and she also wants to publish Mira’s poems so that women get heard. Though theoretically she is right, socially such a resolution is not viable.

She believes that women suffer because they do not express themselves. Expressing one’s resentment can be oral, through the media, or through writing. Urmi is determined to publish Mira’s poems but the author does not reveal whether Urmi is successful in her attempt or not. When one lives in a society and a family, one has to be considerate and Urmi cannot be inconsiderate to Kishore and Vanaa. This shows her social and familial relationships.

With her brother, Amrut, she has a tender relationship. They exchange pleasantries, argue, reminiscence over their past and enjoy each other’s company. Of the two, Urmi is dominating, being the elder sister and Amrut good-naturedly accepts her attitude. Urmi’s relations with her mother Inni are strained and she is often disrespectful to her. There is no malice, only anger in Urmi’s heart, that her mother had deliberately sent her to Ranidurg so as to be free from the responsibility of a girl-child. This misunderstanding clears towards the end when Urmi learns the actual facts. She feels sorry for Inni who could never utter a word against Papa’s decision. Urmi’s relations with Vanaa are tender and the two understand each other despite Urmi’s high-handedness in dealing with Vanaa. Urmi and Akka (daughter-in-law and mother-in-law) have no problems; rather, Urmi is tender towards her. Thus Urmi, though sharp-tongued, is successful in maintaining relationships.

By the end of the novel, Urmi emerges as a strong character. She has come out of her grief, she can face life, and looking at the brighter side of life she resolves to get on with the daily business of living because despite the threat of death, life has to be lived.

20.3.2 Kishore

Kishore is Urmi’s husband. He is Mira’s son and Vanaa’s half-brother. He is a remote figure, very reticent, taciturn and not given to expressing much. But he is sentimental at the core of his heart. Urmi sees him shedding tears silently at night after Anu’s death. As a husband he is supportive. Somehow, his presence is strength-giving and Urmi feels secure when he is around. But being in the Merchant Navy, Kishore is absent from the novel, and cannot provide much companionship to his wife who often craves for him.

From Urmi's account of him, we learn that Kishore is open-minded. He is earning a lot but he does not mind his wife working. Urmi does not need money but she is fiercely independent and spends only what she earns, and not what Kishore sends her. Kishore is aware of this trait but he does not interfere in her way of life, nor does he try to influence any of her decisions. This is the reason why Urmi considers herself "fortunate" – having choices and the freedom to exercise those choices.

Kishore is of a quiet nature. He had been Urmi's neighbour at Ranidurg. Even as a young man, his approach to Urmi was respectful and considerate. The two families were close, i.e. Kishore's family comprising Vanaa (his sister), Akka (her mother) and their father; and Urmi's grandparents (Baiajji and Aju). Urmi being Vanaa's friend was often in their home but Kishore never became unduly friendly to her. Urmi remembers two incidents from their childhood: one, when Kishore was in Ranidurg during his vacation and he drove Vanaa and Urmi in Aju's car; and second, during Aju's demise. Kishore's presence of mind and helpfulness impressed Urmi so much that she fell in love with him, inspite of his taciturn nature. Kishore proves to be an ideal husband and Urmi is happy with him except that sometimes she resents his unapproachable attitude. She regrets, "Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach" (p. 141). She craves for "companionship", which Kishore cannot give her. But Kishore is a loving and understanding husband and a dotting father. Thus, despite his absence throughout the novel, Kishore emerges with a life-like presence.

20.3.3 Mira

Mira is Kishore's mother and Urmi's mother-in-law, who died in childbirth leaving her one-day old child. Her character comes out wholly through her diaries, poems and other writings and Urmi's comments on them. Mira comes alive through this technique as an educated young woman who was much advanced for her times. From her photographs Urmi imagines her to be "dreamy-eyed", plain but attractive.

We cannot ascertain the exact time when Mira was growing up but from the various clues provided at random we can make out that it must have been when women's education was accepted but not their freedom of expression. And according to Shashi Deshpande's casual remark in an interview, Mira seems to have been married in the 1950s. She was an attractive and vivacious young girl, married to a young man who got so infatuated with her that he managed to propose to her family and marry her. The marriage could have been a happy one, had Mira accepted it on male terms which she did not. She had her own ideas about life and she felt miserable with her husband's obsessive love.

Mira was eighteen and talented. She probably did not have any aspirations to becoming a working woman but she did aspire to write poetry and be accepted as a poet. This we can establish through the incident when she met the poet Venu. An entry in her diary reads thus: "Written on my thirteenth birthday" and it recorded her meeting with Venu, the poet, and her secret desire to write like him. Reading this entry Urmi surmises that Mira was already a writer, "aspiring for eternity" (p. 65). Mira wrote but she was afraid of showing her poems to anybody lest they laugh at her. Mira's diary entry clearly shows her urge to write, her fear of ridicule and her questioning conscience. "Will I ever be able to write like this? Today, after hearing him, I know this is what I

want—to be able to write like this. But I can't believe I ever can. And, thank God, I never say this aloud. They will laugh at me" (pp. 65-66).

Mira was fascinated by Venu's poetry. She aspired to write like him and wanted to show him her poems. She, therefore, met him again. At this second meeting she showed her poems to him. The poet's reaction was not encouraging. It was the stock male response saying that women do not need to write. Their poetry is to give "birth to children" (p. 127). Mira resents this male view of women as breeders. She even resents her mother's self-effacing attitude, and she has a clear vision that she would not like to be like her mother.

Her diary entries show her relationship with her parents. She was closer to her father than to her mother. She did not want to be like her mother—self-obliterating, mute and helpless. "Nothing. That was all she could do in her entire life—nothing. 'Don't ask me', she used to say to us. 'Nothing is in my hand'" (p. 126). Mira hated such self-effacement and she rejected her mother. She wrote: "To make myself in your image/was never the goal I sought" (p. 124).

What was her goal? It was probably to be innovative, to be a part of a new order. One of her earlier verses shows this:

Come my brothers, come, my sisters,
let us join our hands;
a new road, a new way
a new age to begin (p. 44)

Mira was rebellious, in a way. Of course in the patriarchal system she did not have any chance to speak out but she said 'no' whenever she could. She was also possessive of her identity and resented when they changed her first name after her marriage. They called her Nirmala but Mira would not respond to this name. She wondered how a stroke of a pen could change her identity.

Despite all her anger, despair and fears, Mira was not an unwomanly woman. She loved life and wanted to live it with zest. The constant fear lurking in her writing was that she may cease to be. It seems to be a kind of premonition. Mira loved life after she became pregnant. The "spring of life" stirring within her made her happy. It was the joy of approaching motherhood. Mira was never happy as a wife, but she could be a happy mother. The author, however, does not give us the chance to know this because Mira dies in childbirth, leaving her space for Akka.

20.3.4 Shakutai

The most unfortunate woman in *The Binding Vine* is Shakutai, Kalpana's mother. She has no social status, no monetary standing, no family life and very few choices. She is the representative of the vast lower class population of our cities who just pull on. Life is a drudgery for them and without social backing and financial strength it is crippling.

Shakutai lives in a *chawl* in Bombay with her three children—Kalpana, Sandhya and Prakash. She is working in a school, probably as a peon, and

hence is economically independent. Her husband has deserted her for another woman, leaving her insecure and that is why she turns to Sulu's husband Prabhakar for male support. However, this desperate need for support makes her vulnerable. It also makes her falter in her assessment of Prabhakar's motives. Usually, women are sensitive to male moves; they judge male advances quickly. Unfortunately, Shakutai makes a mistake in judging Prabhakar, because of her love for Sulu and her dependence on Prabhakar. She has faith in him and she cannot understand that Kalpana's earlier refusal to stay with her Sulu Mavshi could have a deeper meaning. She thinks Kalpana is being whimsical. When Kalpana comes back stubbornly refusing to go to Sulu, Shakutai's reaction is predictable. "Die then", she cursed Kalpana, "What do I care? What can I give you but dry chappaties and one set of clothes?" (p. 111).

Shakutai's anger is understandable. She loves her children, is concerned for their safety and wants them to have a comfortable life. She understands the handicap of being uneducated and without support; she is put to hardships in the callous big city and she does not want her history repeated in the case of her children. She wants them to be educated. The eldest being Kalpana, Shakutai sends her to Sulu. "I wanted her to have all that I never had—education, a good life, a good marriage, respect from others. Look at me—what am I? I don't want my children to be like me" (p.112), Shakutai tells Urmi. This is normal—the dream of a mother for her children.

As a woman, Shakutai knows her limits and she is content to live within that boundary. There are pitfalls outside and she would rather be safe within. This is not acceptable to Kalpana. She is not mature enough to understand fear. She likes to dress up well, flaunts her youth and subsequently gets raped. This is how Shakutai looks at the entire episode. She repudiates Kalpana's love for good things. According to her, the best option for Kalpana is to marry Prabhakar, be a co-wife with Sulu and be happy. She cannot see beyond this.

Unfortunately, Kalpana can never toe the line set for her by her mother. The mother-daughter relations are thus strained. Shakutai is unhappy with Kalpana because of her obstinacy and Kalpana is unhappy with her mother's do's and don'ts. Shakutai, calls her "self-willed" though she admires her secretly for her smartness. "She is very smart, that's how she got that job in the shop" (p. 92). Shakutai feels proud when she recounts this to Urmi. Shakutai, as a deprived and dispossessed mother herself, fails to understand her daughter's dreams.

Dreams are not alien to Shakutai though. As a woman, Shakutai has had her dreams. Dreams of a happy married life, of a good, understanding husband, and of owning things. She tells Urmi that one of her dreams has been to get a cooking gas connection and the second one is to have a "*mangalsutra* made in gold" (p. 110). The dreams wither in the face of life's problems. Her life with her husband is pathetic and she is filled with anger when she talks about him. The man is worthless and she decides not to have a *mangalsutra*.

The full pathos of Shakutai's life bursts upon us after Sulu's death. She is inconsolable. We shudder to think of her condition with Sulu gone, Kalpana struggling between life and death, her son going wayward and the entire fabric of life shattered.

20.3.5 Kalpana

Shashi Deshpande has modelled Kalpana on a nurse about whom she tells us in one of her interviews. The nurse was “a very pretty, attractive woman, a radiant kind of person” (Pathak, p. 250), and so is Kalpana. The readers meet Kalpana only after her mutilated body has been brought to the hospital. There is no chance of meeting her in person. The author gives this responsibility to her mother Shakutai to portray her daughter. Kalpana’s character takes shape slowly through Shakutai’s outbursts. She is the only source through whom we learn that Kalpana was self-willed, obstinate, fond of dressing up and smart. People like the police officer and the doctors paint her as a tainted young woman. Urmi’s comments are however, positive. It gives the picture of Kalpana as a young, vivacious girl who loved life. Thus, Kalpana becomes a palpable reality.

Our first encounter with Kalpana is not a happy one. The girl is lying in the hospital, in a state of coma. The doctors feel that she must have been with a boy friend and when she was coming home after being with him, she must have been knocked down by some vehicle. These are negative ideas. Kalpana in this case does not get our sympathy. But the author wants to create a true picture of society and the real Kalpana emerges through Shakutai’s laments.

First of all, the fact is that Kalpana is not a girl of easy morals. We have to read between the lines to arrive at this conclusion. Kalpana refuses to stay with Sulu and her husband and nothing can induce her to go back. Shakutai gets irritated at her stubbornness. Her plan was to keep Kalpana with Sulu for her education. Shakutai fails to see anything fishy, as Kalpana does not tell her the real reason. It is only after the incident that we get a faint idea about Prabhakar’s amorous advances and Kalpana’s resentment. And if Kalpana had a boy friend, it can be understood as normal. After all, having a boyfriend and dreaming of marrying him is not a crime. And we exonerate Kalpana from any charge of being a flirt.

From Shakutai’s remarks we see that Kalpana is smart. She got a job in a shop because she could speak English. Shakutai is proud of her daughter’s persistence and carefree attitude. “People in our chawl used to laugh at her, but she didn’t care. When she wants something, she goes after it, nothing can stop her” (p. 92). This assessment gives us one side of the picture. The other side is that she is stubborn and secretive, as she did not share anything with her mother.

Shakutai blames Kalpana for having brought disaster on herself and on the family. According to her, Kalpana dressed gaudily, used nail-polish and lipstick and therefore attracted the male-gaze. Whatever the mother may say, Urmi understands that Kalpana loved life. It is not a crime to enjoy life’s joys and small pleasures.

Kalpana had her own plans for life, her own dreams. She had the courage to repel the advances of Prabhakar, to reject his offer of marriage and to make known her decision to marry a boy of her choice. She is punished for crossing the limits of a woman’s existence, and for exercising her free will and harbouring dreams. Kalpana may not wake up from her coma, but she presents

20.4 WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

1. Deshpande presents the conflicts of her protagonists without presenting simple solutions She believes that women have so deeply internalized the dominant mores that sometimes, despite being better endowed than most other Indian women, her protagonists cannot visualize an independent identity for themselves and so they become submissive (Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal, p. 38).
2. Through the female characters of her novels Shashi Deshpande gets to the root of existence itself. Male or female, there is a divide within ourselves that leads us to love and hate, to be gentle and good and at the same time become an agent of cruelty. ("Women in *The Binding Vine*" Shanthi Sivaraman in R.S. Pathak ed. *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, p. 137).
3. The novelist has skillfully portrayed her characters, though her pictures of women are more lively. Even Kishore, Harish, Amrut and Bhaskar are adequately individualized and live through their characteristic behaviour, action and words. Aju, grandfather, father, Akka and Inni represent the old generation, more loving, kind, patient, self-abnegating and of wide sympathies. ("*The Binding Vine* and Indian Ethos" by J.P. Tripathi in R.S. Pathak ed. *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, p. 152)
4. Most of the female protagonists of Deshpande reject their mothers as role models, because they represent a patriarchal outlook on life. ("Gender, Feminism and Post-coloniality: A Reading of Shashi Deshpande's Novels" by Shalmalee Palekar in Chanchala Naik ed. *Writing Difference*, p. 60.)
5. *The Binding Vine* occupies a special place in the oeuvre of Shashi Deshpande in the sense that it presents predominantly the women's world. ("*The Binding Vine*: Multi-Storied Misunderstanding" by A.G. Khan in Chanchala Naik, p. 163)
6. Deshpande's novels are all about growing up—not through an adolescent period, but growing up into selfhood.... (Jasbir Jain in *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces*, p. 264).

Check Your Progress 2

1. Write three sentences to describe Urmi's physical appearance.
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.....
.....
2. Describe briefly Mira's aspiration to be a poet. Who thwarts it?
.....
.....
.....

3. Write a note on the two incidents at Ranidurg that drew Urmi to Kishore.
.....
.....
.....
.....
4. One word answer:
- (i) Urmi called her grandmother -----
 - (ii) Shashi Deshpande uses the technique of -----to reveal her characters.
 - (iii) Anu's full name is -----
 - (iv) Urmi has ----- nightmares.
 - (v) Amrut stayed in -----

20.5 GLOSSARY

- protagonist:** main character in a literary work. These days instead of hero or heroine the word protagonist is used.
- showing and telling:** these are two broad methods authors use to delineate their characters. In “showing” the author merely presents his/her characters, acting and interacting. The novelist leaves it to the reader to infer the motives and dispositions that lie behind their words or actions. In the “telling” method, the author intervenes and tells the reader about his character. He/she often describes and evaluates his/her characters and their qualities.
- flashback:** the method in a dramatic or fictional work to show an event that happened at an earlier time. It is, in simple words, the act of looking back in time. A memory, or a reverie, or a confession may be used to represent the past.
- round and flat characters:** these terms are given to us by E.M. Forster. Round characters are complex, life-like and have the capacity to learn from experience and change accordingly. Flat characters are types and are not developed. They do not change in the course of the story or play. They are presented in outline and have just one predominant quality.

20.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed Shashi Deshpande's art of characterization and drew a few character sketches from *The Binding Vine*. We also spoke about the

importance of characters in a work of fiction and learnt to appreciate Shashi Deshpande's art of characterization. We were also able to understand the main characters in the novel as human beings with their peculiar motives, strengths and weaknesses.

20.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. This can be found in the relevant section.
2. These are the methods a writer adopts to portray his characters. In "showing", the author lets the character reveal himself/herself through his/her actions and words. The author does not comment. In "telling" method, the author is involved in describing a character's actions, words, and motives. He/she also evaluates those actions. Shashi Deshpande uses the "showing" method.
3. They exert their influence through the patriarchal power structure.
4. (i) middle class
(ii) living
(iii) showing
(iv) express
(v) Bhaskar's

Check Your Progress 2

1. She is dark complexioned. She wears glasses. She is casual in dressing up.
2. Mira, as a college student, aspired to be a poet. She was much impressed by the poet Venu and she wanted to write like him. She wrote charming verses that were inspirational in the beginning but she hid them for fear of ridicule. Later in life, after her marriage her poems became grim, exuding fear and despair. When Mira met the poet Venu and she showed him her poems, he just thwarted her dreams, advising her to leave poetry to men.
3. These have been discussed briefly in the section dealing with Kishore's character. You could elaborate these.
4. (i) Baiajji (ii) showing (iii) Anusha (iv) four (v) Delhi.

UNIT 21 TECHNIQUE

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 What is Technique?
- 21.3 What is Structure?
- 21.4 Technique in *The Binding Vine*
- 21.5 Point of View
- 21.6 The Structure of the Novel
- 21.7 *The Binding Vine* as a Stream of Consciousness Novel
- 21.8 Glossary
- 21.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.10 Answers to Exercises
- 21.11 Suggested Readings

21.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit carefully, you would be able to:

- understand the structure of the novel
- comment on the use of language
- outline the author's style
- discuss the use of point of view
- discuss the novel as portraying women's vision of life.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 20, we discussed Shashi Deshpande's art of characterization and also commented on some important characters in the novel. So now, we know the plot, the themes and the characters. To present his/her story, a novelist requires technique. It does not mean that the novelist moulds and twists the story deliberately according to some given technique. No. The writer is an artist who works with the medium of words. We cannot bind him/her within any norms. Art is spontaneous and technique emerges all by itself. When we analyze a novel as readers/ scholars/critics, we try to find the technique.

In this unit, which is the final unit of this block, we shall explore Shashi Deshpande's technique from various angles—how does she use the language? What is her style? What is the structure of the novel? And how do we rate *The Binding Vine* as a feminist novel?

21.2 WHAT IS TECHNIQUE?

Technique is the means by which the novelist chooses to tell his/her story. The novel is a living thing. It grows, leaves its impact on us and inspires the readers to ponder over it. When a novelist imagines a story and works out its

plot and characters, he/she starts the process of composing the subject matter. Experience, discovery, use of language all come together to bring forth the work of art. The writer has to write the story in a convincing manner. How should he/she begin? Who would be the narrator? How can language be used effectively? These and many such questions crop up while the story is moving in the author's mind. Sometimes after deliberation, and sometimes suddenly, the writer finds his/her path. A pattern takes shape, it acquires a rhythm with words and the story starts developing.

Shashi Deshpande, talking about various aspects of writing says that at the moment of writing a writer "steps out of the room.... Stands at a distance, a little away from her own humanity and sees the world from this vantage point of view. This gives a unique perspective, the larger picture, which is closer to the truth than anything else" (Naik, p. 34). This perspective allows a writer to see his/her strengths and weakness and accordingly present the story.

In other words, technique is "craftsmanship". Shashi Deshpande agrees in her interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom that craftsmanship is important in writing. One learns it by doing it. There are several choices before a writer in the matter of technique, in the way one wants to "tell" the story. Once a writer chooses her style, she has to follow it faithfully. Deshpande is selective about her technique. Her books, therefore, are finished works of art. They are free from strain, the story runs smoothly and the form and content do not smother each other.

Part of the purpose of a novel or story is to communicate the underlying dramatic structure or message of the writer. The other part is to make that communication as interesting and effective as possible. In addition, the story has to be readable and enjoyable. When the writer gets a plot, he/she has to determine how that plot is to be presented, how the scenes will be played out for the reader. The order in which the scenes have to come up determines which information is a first impression and which is a modifier. The first impressions usually carry more weight than anything that follows. So, a writer has to decide on a technique that will hold the interest of the reader, for which deciding the structure becomes important.

21.3 WHAT IS STRUCTURE?

In order to understand the meaning of the structure with regard to the novel, let us take an everyday example. When you want to build a house, you need a plot of land, a map, raw material and workmen to raise the structure with the raw material. The walls are raised, doors and windows are fitted and then inner decorations are done. The structure acquires a finished form and becomes a house, and when you shift in, it becomes a home.

Likewise, the writer has raw material, he/she chooses his/her tools (the use of language), raises the structure as an organized form, gives it decorations with dialogue, characters and actions according to the subject matter.

The structure of the novel is the essential organizing principle. It is not simply a fixed container into which you pour in your contents i.e. the "subject matter", but it is a combination of component parts put together according to the principle of decorum. That means, the characters, action, style of narration,

and dialogue are all used in a befitting manner according to the literary genre. It is thus the arrangement of the constituent parts. It contributes to the developing unity of a work. According to Miriam Allott, the structure of a novel can be classified into three sub-headings: (i) Unity and coherence (ii) Plot and story and (iii) Time-factor. Unity and coherence mean that the actions, dialogue and incidents must be according to the requirement of the plot and the role assigned to the character. Plot refers to the way the various events that occur in the narrative (the story) are arranged in terms of causality. Thirdly, structure also means a formal ordering of the content in time. Time may be used as linear or as non-linear. In the linear time, events are recorded as they happen but in fugal time they go back and forth. This technique is used in the stream of consciousness novel.

According to Edwin Muir, structure can be understood in terms of Time, Space and Causality. This definition may appear a little difficult at first but on re-reading it, you will find that it is meaningful. Let us explain. We, human beings, can understand the events of life in a limited sense; only God can see the whole unity from beginning to end i.e. the unity of time, space and cause. But, human imagination can create that unity in a work of art or literature by arranging time, space, cause and effect.

This will be clear to you when we take up the novel for discussion from different angles.

21.4 TECHNIQUE IN *THE BINDING VINE*

An analysis of *The Binding Vine* shows that the novel has many strands running side by side. It has two rape cases, but rape is not the central event of the story. Death may be termed as the central motif because the novel starts with Urmi grieving over the death of her infant daughter Anusha. There are several deaths reported at short intervals—Baiajji, Aju, Urmi's father, Mira, Sulu and Kalpana's near-dead condition. Women desperate with grief occupy the novel. But that again is not the only theme. In fact, the novel is an amalgam of death, violence, fear, insecurity, rape and memory. As the title suggests, the dominating theme is love and human relationship, "this cord, this binding vine of love" (p. 137).

The unifying strand is provided by Urmi, her memory, her interaction with various characters and her comments. The novel is divided in four parts all joined by a common strand. Part One opens with Urmi's grief at her loss, but this major event leads to other revelations. Urmi appears aggressive, irritable and given to hurting Vanaa. The first few sentences reveal an important streak in her character.

It is also relevant to know that Urmi harbours a kind of grudge against her mother. The author does not tell us directly that Urmi has strained relations with her mother. She reveals it slowly to heighten the suspense. On page nine of the novel, Urmi and Vanaa discuss how Urmi, as a girl, used to wear the badly-stitched dresses made by Baiajji, quietly rejecting the beautiful, expensive dresses brought by Inni. After a few pages Urmi asks her brother, Amrut, "When has she ever acted the doting mother with me..." (p. 25). This

is not a question. This is a complaint that her mother has never been a mother to her. Urmi remembers her Baiajji with deep affection but she is often rude to her mother. This sets the tone for mother-daughter tension.

We wish to know the reason. But we have to wait. The novelist chooses to solve the mystery only towards the end of the novel. Inni tells the incident when Urmi's father took the decision to send Urmi to Ranidurg. He did not consult his wife (Urmi's mother) on the issue. This fact reveals two aspects: one, in the patriarchal system a man's decision is final, and second, a woman suffers in silence as she has no voice. At this point, Urmi understands her mother's agony. She feels sorry for Inni. This revelation is important here because it leads to Urmi's growth. The pattern is thus progressive, not static.

The narrational technique is first person. The events unfold slowly with Urmi's memory playing a key role. The first person narrational technique is difficult to handle. Authors like Anthony Trollope, Henry James, Emile Zola, Charles Dickens and many others have found it limiting. Anthony Trollope once remarked, "It is always dangerous to write from the point of 'I.'" Henry James called it the "accursed autobiographic form." Shashi Deshpande uses Urmi to tell her story and she does it dexterously. Events flow back and forth without any gap, and the various strands are linked smoothly through Urmi.

The narration begins with Urmi's shattered state of mind: the death of Anu reminds her of several deaths in the family, as well as the fear of death and the human ability to get over it. This mourning period provides her with an opportunity to know Mira through her poems. Till then she did not know much about her deceased mother-in-law. Now that the trunk containing Mira's writings comes into her possession, she is able to see a woman's life from yet another angle. Every time Urmi sees the reality of woman's existence, she is led to count her blessings. Let us see, how Urmi broods over Mira's life:

Mira was only 22 when she wrote this. She had been married at the age of 18. Since then, she had lived a life which, even if normal to most women of that time, must have seemed terrible to her. It seems appalling to me when I think of the choices of my own life, of its freedom. Cloistered in a home, living with a man she could not love, surrounded by people she had nothing in common with—how did she go on? (p. 127).

Here Shashi Deshpande shows not only Mira's suffocating life but through her, she also points out that there are more choices open to women today.

While Mira rises from the dead, Urmi encounters another woman ready to march into the realm of the dead. She is Kalpana, the rape victim. Kalpana is in a coma, unable to tell her story. It is through her mother Shakutai that Kalpana comes alive. Shashi Deshpande gives another dimension to her story here. Besides "showing" the problem of rape, she provides us material to think deeply over the need to expose such cases, the vulnerability of women and the fear that is their constant companion. She blames the system through these two cases. The author does not openly blame patriarchy, she only generates an atmosphere.

There are not many descriptive passages in the novel. The only elaborate descriptions are provided by Mira and Urmi's comments on them. The rest of the situations are evoked through comments, conversations and memory. The novel is technically a successful one.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What do you understand by technique?
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2. Write a note on the technique used in *The Binding Vine*.
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3. How does Shashi Deshpande sustain our interest in the story?
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.....

21.5 POINT OF VIEW

Point of view signifies the way a story gets told. A novelist may use 'I' to narrate his story, which is called first person point of view, or he/she may use third person point of view, as if someone else is telling the story of another person. In other words, it is the perspective through which the novelist presents his characters, events, episodes, actions and setting. This is the narrative mode or narrative voice adopted by the writer. To some critics this is the fundamental device to convey his story. According to Percy Lubbock, "The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view—the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story and his book." The novelist can either describe the characters from outside, as an impartial or partial onlooker, or he can assume omniscience and describe them from within or he can place himself in the position of one of them. The question of point of view is directly related to the power of the writer—the creator.

The Binding Vine is told from the autobiographical point of view of Urmi. She is in a pivotal position. Everything happens around her or within her purview. She is the judge, the commentator, and the prime mover. The reader knows the episodes through her. The characters too come to life, as Urmi wants them. But Shashi Deshpande does not make her all powerful. Urmi's comments are countered and balanced through situational facts.

The author "shows" Urmi through her words and actions, through her motives and interactions with people around her. The other characters gain personality

through her. At the beginning of the novel Urmi gives a generalized statement about how we live as our image. She determines to fight that image and be her “self”. This is a big resolve and we have to see if Urmi succeeds in it or not. The path is not so easy. There are psychological problems too. Urmi is grief-stricken and she has to fight it out to get over it. Urmi unfolds her life through her memory, through flashbacks and through the present.

The first person point of view has limitations because one person can tell only what he/she sees, experiences and thinks. But, to get over this, Shashi Deshpande uses the diary technique. Mira is given a voice because she has written down her thoughts. These are Mira’s thoughts as interpreted by Urmi. Mira is equally a narrator, we can say. The author shows us her importance by two methods: first, the four-line stanzas from Mira’s poems become important because each stanza is an epigraph to the four parts. As we have seen in our preceding unit, an epigraph is a kind of motto. That means when Mira’s stanza becomes an epigraph, she governs the narrative. For example, the epigraph to Part One is:

The fragrance of the night-queen
crosses the hedge of thorns
touches the pinnacle of the shrine
and is no longer mine

This part shows the fleeting nature of joy and beauty. Happiness and the fragrance elude Mira and even Urmi. Mira’s thoughts influence Urmi and she gives space to Mira to tell us her side of the story. Her presence is felt throughout the novel as it ends again with Mira’s lines. Another point that establishes Mira’s importance is Shashi Deshpande’s comment in an interview when she tells Lakshmi Holstrom that her sympathies are not with Urmi but with Mira.

Kalpana’s story comes to us primarily through Shakutai. Shakutai is not the narrator. She is given this duty by circumstances. Urmi does not know Kalpana at all. Then how would she narrate her story? The point of view is Urmi’s but the narration is Shakutai’s. As a mother, she tells Urmi, how her daughter behaved, how she looked and how smart she was. Urmi reacts to her description and generates discussion, which further reveals some more facts. Shakutai does not narrate Kalpana’s story at a stretch. This would have become boring. She gives out her thoughts in bits and pieces as and when required to advance the story

Urmi is the bridge that links the stories and gives them meaning. Her comments are revealing. As Shashi Deshpande observes, “Urmi is more than a filter, a medium through whom the other stories come through...” (Pathak, p. 250).

21.6 THE STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

As we studied in section 21.3 of this unit, structure is an all-encompassing term. It includes unity and coherence, time and space and the plot, the story and the characters. All these put together give us the structure. Thus, when we think of the structure, we think of the work in its totality. Shashi Deshpande is a serious novelist. She is very careful about her craftsmanship. She is aware

that there are many choices to build up a story but she takes long to decide on the technique so that the structure holds fast and does not crumble.

The structure of *The Binding Vine* is based on the stories of three women but the responsibility to reveal the stories is given to one woman—Urmi. She is the medium who not only tells her own story of grief but also in the process discovers the lives of two other women. Together, these stories expose the entire patriarchal system and the novel comes nearer the feminist novel. The plot revolves round the themes of death, marriage, fear and violence. The importance of communication, of establishing bonds, is repeatedly emphasized. It is the death of Anu, Urmi's infant daughter that makes Urmi hysterical. In the course of the narrative, Urmi realizes that she is not the only sufferer, there are other women who are worse sufferers. The stories of Kalpana and Mira assume significance and the two sub-plots get attached to the main plot.

The themes of death, violence, fear, women's marginalization, their power, their strength despite their vulnerability give many strands to the plot. Kalpana is nearly dead. This generates fear born out of the uncertainty of the situation. Kalpana's mother thinks, that she got into trouble because she was not afraid and a woman should know fear. Urmi feels that all women instinctively know fear. The novel also takes up the theme of marriage and love. All marriages in the novel are not unsuccessful, but for making them successful, women have to sacrifice much. Inni and Papa were a happy couple, because Inni was submissive, Vanaa-Harish are happy but again it is because of Vanaa's submission. In Baiajji and Aju's case, Baiajji wielded power secretly. As for Urmi and Kishore, it is really based on understanding though Urmi feels unfulfilled due to Kishore's reticence. Akka and Mira suffer, the former as a neglected wife and the latter as a misunderstood wife. The worst marriage is of Shakutai, who is a forsaken wife, and of Sulu as a childless woman; she remains frightened and insecure, and is driven to suicide.

The overall effect of the novel is of sadness and helplessness. Particularly grim are the portions dealing with Kalpana. There are patches of humour or light conversation between Amrut and Urmi and Dr. Bhaskar and Urmi. But this is infrequent. The rest of the conversation/dialogue is angry, flippant or sad.

Angry and flippant exchanges often take place between Vanaa-Urmi, Vanaa and her daughter Mandira, and Urmi-Inni. Urmi and Vanaa are childhood friends, now they are related—Vanaa is Urmi's sister-in-law. Their exchanges are heated in which Vanaa as the meeker one is silenced. Urmi is discourteous to her mother and her mother withdraws when Urmi becomes angry. Mandira, though just a kid, is often angry with Vanaa for going out to work. She wants her mother at home.

Despite these strains and stresses, pains and agonies, the novel ends on an optimistic note. Urmi stands up as a strong character. In the beginning we find her almost broken but she gets over it. She tells her brother, "I will not break" and true to this, she does not. She understands the priorities of life, the urge to survive and the necessity to survive with hope. The heavy atmosphere clears as Urmi decides to get busy with her usual routine.

Shashi Deshpande sets the novel in Bombay, gives Urmi the required freedom, and portrays her as free, frank and uninhibited. She is the middle class, educated urban woman of the 1980's. India of the 1980's is certainly different from the small-town India of the 1940's and 50's when Mira was growing up, and living after her marriage. By allowing the characters to move according to the existing social norms, Deshpande maintains the unity of time and space. The novel has coherence. Though different stories are joined, the forging link is strong. The language is refined and the expressions are accurate. Deshpande keeps the local flavour by using words like Aju (grandfather), Ajji (grandmother) Tai and Mavshi (aunt). While describing Mira's life she refers to traditions like the change of maiden name after marriage. The rest of the ambience is neutral. The novel is recounted through the consciousness of Urmi and is a stream of consciousness novel.

21.7 THE BINDING VINE AS A STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS NOVEL

In the preceding units we have often referred to the term stream of conscious technique. We also read about clock time and psychological time. Now, let us apply these terms to *The Binding Vine* and discuss its salient points.

We know that in literature "stream of consciousness" denotes a narrative technique by which a writer chooses to tell his/her story. This phrase was first used by William James to characterize the unbroken flow of thought and awareness in the waking mind. But James was talking with reference to psychology. In literature, when a story runs in the mind of the main character, his/her senses seem to work in the past. The character remembers his/her past and the flow of thought takes us back and forth. The thoughts, memories, feelings and past associations create the world of the novel. We see and feel everything in relation to the character. For example, in our novel, Urmi comments on the rainy season in Bombay when she remembers her mother's remarks. Shashi Deshpande does not describe rains, nor does she tell us the locale of the novel. From such a flow of thoughts we know that: the novel is set in Bombay, rains in coastal areas are long and intense, and the time has passed (when the novel opened it was summer).

To convey the scenes the novelists use interior monologue, long introspective passages and flashbacks. In interior monologue, the characters express their thoughts and feelings by talking to themselves. The time is not clock time; it is psychological time. In literature many writers have used the stream of consciousness technique but we cannot say that they have all followed the same pattern. They have perfected it from time to time by making minor changes, keeping the main pattern intact.

Let us now start our discussion. *The Binding Vine* is a stream of consciousness novel because it is told from the consciousness of the main character, Urmi. What happened to Urmi? Her daughter has died and she is grief-stricken. Nobody tells us this fact. It is through Urmi's laments that we get to know it. Her consciousness works through association. Anu's death reminds Urmi of Baiajji's death, and Baiajji reminds her of her girlhood days in Ranidurg. We are not told that Urmi stayed with her grandparents. Urmi's thoughts going

back and forth reveal this fact. Was Urmi happy in Ranidurg? From her conversation, interior monologue and her thoughts we know her feelings. Her childhood was a happy one, but she missed her parents and held Inni responsible for sending her away. This shows a great psychological fact that children may be happy and comfortable with their grandparents but they do not like to be away from their parents. Urmi's thoughts also reveal to us another fact that her relations with her mother (Inni) were strained. Towards the end of the novel, Inni recounts how Urmi's Papa took the decision to send her to Ranidurg. Here we realize a significant social fact that women have no "voice".

To reveal this theme, Shashi Deshpande takes the help of Mira's diaries. Urmi's flow of thought now merges with Mira's consciousness through her writings. Mira's life is revealed to us through Urmi's interpretation. Urmi often makes use of interior monologue when she comments on life situations and Mira's philosophy of life. For example, we do not know that Mira was raped in marriage, we only know that she dreaded her husband's advances. Urmi comments, "what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too" (p. 63). This comment is not spoken out, it is nonverbal and yet, it is revealing. A powerful example of interior monologue is Urmi's summing up at the end of the novel. It gives us solid proof of Urmi's optimism, her philosophy of life, her strength and her success in getting over her grief. In the beginning of the novel she resolves, "I will not break" and by the end she shows that she is not broken.

The time used is psychological time but it is intermingled with clock-time in the Kalpana episode. Kalpana's rape takes place in the present; she is revealed to us through Shakutai. Now, it is Shakutai's memory that is at work. The present is revealed with the day-to-day happenings in Shakutai's life—her husband's visit, her son Prakash's wayward behaviour, and her sister Sulu's suicide. Shakutai reminisces only when she is recounting some past experience, otherwise it is her present that is more saddening and the future that is frightening. During this period, Urmi also lives in the present and records her movements in clock-time, like her visit to Dr. Bhaskar, and the second visit of Amrut. Past and present mingle here.

Urmi emerges as a dynamic personality. She is engrossed in the present, lives in the past through memory and association and her consciousness becomes the consciousness of the entire story. By repetition, dreams, recurrence in the structure, Shashi Deshpande has depicted inner time and created a world that is as real as life. The repeated use of Mira's poems also serves to give unity to the structure of the novel.

21.8 GLOSSARY

interior monologue:

when a character recreates a conversation in his/her consciousness and follows the question-answer pattern and talks to himself/herself, revealing other characters or situations. This is nonverbal.

psychological time: as opposed to clock time which is chronological and linear, and measured in minutes, hours, days etc., psychological time runs in the mind of the character and can go back and forth.

stream of Consciousness: literary technique that depicts the inner thoughts and feelings that flow through the mind of a character in a work of fiction. Sense perceptions like thoughts, memories, feelings and random associations are presented in a mingled manner. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is the best example of this technique.

Check Your Progress 2

1. What elements does the term structure encompass?
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2. On whose story/stories is the structure of this novel based?
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3. Comment on *The Binding Vine* as a Stream of Consciousness novel.
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4. After reading the novel, would you agree that it projects a woman's view of life?
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.....
5. Give a brief note on Shashi Deshpande's use of English language for creativity.
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.....

21.9 LET US SUM UP

In this final unit we discussed the novel in its finished form. You now know the rise of the novel, its aspects, the place of Shashi Deshpande in Indian English Literature and her works. We also studied *The Binding Vine* thoroughly with regard to theme, plot, and characters. In this last unit, we looked at:

- the structure of the novel

- the significance of technique and the technique followed by Shashi Deshpande
- *The Binding Vine* as a stream of consciousness novel

We are sure you now have an in-depth knowledge of this novel.

21.10 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Refer to section 21.2. It is discussed elaborately.
2. Refer to section 21.4.
3. Shashi Deshpande uses the technique of fragmented narration, memory and association to generate suspense and thus sustainS the readers' interest. While recounting an episode or incident, she stops when it reaches the climax and takes up another related incident. At a later stage she picks up the threads and starts again to narrate the previous episode. The story moves backwards and forwards in psychological time and we have to wait to know the result.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Structure is an all-encompassing term. It includes unity and coherence, time and space, and the plot, the story and the characters.
2. The structure of the novel is based on the stories of three women—Urmila (Urmi), Mira and Kalpana.
3. Refer to section 21.7. This is discussed elaborately.
4. Yes, the novel gives women's vision of life. It portrays a middle-class female protagonist's predicament in a male-dominated society. *The Binding Vine* is the story of Urmi, Mira and Kalpana, who are the main movers; and Shakutai, Inni, Vanaa, Akka and Baiajji who are the minor characters.

We see the modern Indian society through the eyes of Urmi, Vanaa and Priti. In this society, women are educated and have relatively more freedom than their mothers had. But, they have a double burden on them, while men are free. Urmi thinks, "it is women who take parenthood seriously; men don't, not to the same extent anyway." (p. 76). Vanaa finds it difficult to deal with Mandira, her elder daughter, who resents her going out to work. She asks, "Urmi, why is it nobody thinks of blaming Harish? He's never around, but it's never his fault" (p. 75). In fact, even children are more demanding about their mother's attention. Mandira does not want her mother Vanaa to go out but it is an accepted fact that the father has to work. He is not supposed to shoulder household responsibilities.

The novel also shows how women search for love, meaning and happiness in life. Urmi is happy with Kishore but she feels that he is too remote. She remains unfulfilled. Mira wants love but has to settle for lust. Kalpana searches for a good life but is raped. A woman, thus, cannot cross the limits imposed by society.

The novel comments on the vulnerability of women, their servile attitude, their desires and their inability to speak out. We do not know what men think of life except through a few comments that Amrut and Dr. Bhaskar provide. Urmi remembers Amrut asking her, “Do women want to be dominated?” And she comments, “No human being wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love.... But love makes you vulnerable” (p.137). Dr. Bhaskar thinks women are strange creatures and it is difficult to understand them. This he says with regard to Shakutai who wants her daughters to be married though marriage for her has been a bitter experience. To this Urmi’s answer is that for a woman like Shakutai marriage means, “you are safe from other men”.

The total picture that emerges tells us that all men are not bad and all women are not good. We are made what we are by our society, our experiences of life and our innate personality.

(Note: The examples given above can be elaborated).

5. Shashi Deshpande is an Indian writer who writes in English. Her mother-tongues are Kannada and Marathi, but she has had her education in English. She uses English with ease and there are no jarring notes in her language. Instead, her expressions flow smoothly and words are used appropriately. She keeps intact some of the words from Marathi. For example, she prefers to use Aai for mother, Mavshi for maternal-aunt, Ajji for grandmother. She finds it unnatural to use these in their English translation. When she narrates the story, she thinks in English but when she writes dialogues, she thinks in her mother-tongue. Deshpande has admitted in many of her interviews that she likes to write in English as it comes easily to her, but she also agrees that it is difficult sometimes to find exact expressions for cultural nuances. She affirms that English is no longer a foreign language, as it is much used in India.

21.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 22 FRANCIS BACON : “OF GREAT PLACE”

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 What is an Essay?
- 22.3 The English Essay: A Historical Perspective
- 22.4 Francis Bacon: A Biographical Note
- 22.5 An Introduction to “Of Great Place”
 - 22.5.1 Text
 - 22.5.2 Glossary
- 22.6 Theme
- 22.7 Prose Style
- 22.8 Writing Explanations of Passages
- 22.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.10 Suggested Reading
- 22.11 Answers to Exercises

22.0 OBJECTIVES

After a careful reading of this unit, you will be able to:

- define the essay as a literary form;
- trace its origins and growth;
- analyse Bacon’s essay “Of Great Place” with regard to its theme and prose style; and
- write explanations to selected passages.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we shall first discuss the form of the essay and then give you a note on its history with special reference to its growth and development in England.

Our focus will then shift to Bacon’s essay “Of Great Place”. A short biographical note on the author and an introduction precede the actual essay and a glossary succeeds it. After you have read the essay, we briefly discuss its theme and style. We shall also give you some exposure to writing explanations of passages from the essay.

We have prepared some exercises for you. Please complete these before moving on to the answers provided by us at the end of the unit.

22.2 WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

You must have read many articles in the daily newspapers and found that they are prose compositions usually written on single subjects. The essay is more

or less like an article, but more personal in character as shown by its genesis. The word 'essay' comes from the French word **essai** (first used by the French writer Michel de Montaigne for his *Essais*, published in 1580), which means 'to attempt' or 'to try out'. This suggests that an essay is an individual's **attempt** to look at his/her subject in a personal way.

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) called an essay "a loose sally of the mind... not a regular and orderly performance". The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines it as 'a composition more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range'. Both definitions differ from each other. What is loose, irregular and disorderly for Johnson, is minutely worked out and highly developed for the OED. The latter definition, moreover, gives us some idea about the length of an essay but Johnson's definition does not. The essay is usually short and compact but it can, occasionally, also be of book length, like "Essay on the Human Understanding" written by John Locke (1632-1794). As stated above, essays are prose compositions. However, some have also been written in verse like "Essay on Criticism" (1711) and "Essay on Man" (1732-4), written by the English poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744).

The essay is, thus, difficult to define as it is one of the most flexible and adaptable of literary genres. It can loosely be described as a composition, usually in prose, that attempts to discuss a subject. A further dimension was added by the nineteenth century English writer, Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), who said that an essayist **humanizes** knowledge, i.e; presents it in familiar terms, divesting it of all that is harsh, uncouth, abstract, exclusive, etc., so that it is of common interest, and is written in a style that appeals to us. Hence, we can conclude that an essay, as a literary form, is a short prose composition, treating a subject in a general manner, so that it can be of interest to many readers.

Essays can be written in formal as well as in informal style, depending on the purpose they are meant to achieve. A formal essay tends to be serious in tone, objective in presentation, more expository in nature, giving the reader new perspectives on the subject, and even persuading him/her to a particular point of view. The informal essay, on the other hand, is written in a lighter vein, reading more like a conversation, affording pleasure in its reading, or at times, amusing the reader if the tone adopted by the essayist is humorous or even sarcastic.

Of the three essays included for your study in this Block, Francis Bacon's "Of Great Place" is an example of a brief, formal and objective essay; "On Seeing England For The First Time" by Jamaica Kincaid illustrates both Doctor Johnson's definition of the essay being "a loose sally of the mind" and the OED definition of it being 'limited in range'; Charles Lamb's essay "A Dissertation upon A Roast Pig" is a good example of an informal essay. It's style is conversational, subjective and humorous.

While reading each essay, it will be helpful if you keep in mind its theme and style and relate it to the author's life and times.

22.3 THE ENGLISH ESSAY : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Francis Bacon :
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The essay began with Montaigne (1533-1592) in France and with Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in England. Bacon is credited with giving the English essay the status of a literary art. Since Bacon, the essay, as literary prose, has been used for a variety of purposes by seventeenth century writers like Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), John Dryden (1631-1700), Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) and others. Alexander Pope (1688-1744), as mentioned earlier, added a new dimension to essay-writing by using verse to write his "Essay on Criticism" and "Essay on Man." The eighteenth century also saw the rise of the **periodical essay** of which the chief exponents were Richard Steele (1672-1729) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719), who published their essays in their periodicals or magazines *The Tatler* (published by Steele) and *The Spectator* (published by Addison). Their essays hold a mirror to the eighteenth century social and political life of England, dealing with subjects like fashions of the day, superstitions, rural and urban manners, political rivalries etc.

The English essay really came into its own in the early nineteenth century with the Romantic Revival in English Literature. As in romantic poetry, so also in the essay the individual became the measure of all things and there appeared a group of essayists such as William Hazlitt (1778-1830), Charles Lamb (1775-1834) and Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859), who are termed as **personal essayists**. The word 'personal' here may appear repetitive since the essay, by definition, is personal in character as stated earlier. But whereas in the eighteenth century, the essay became a vehicle of social, political, literary and cultural criticism, in the early nineteenth century, in the hands of the personal essayists, it became a record of the essayist's personal emotions and feelings and, sometimes, even his whims and fancies. Because of the quality of freshness in them, we still enjoy reading the personal essays of Hazlitt such as "On Going on a Journey" and "The Fight"; Lamb's "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" and "Dream Children"; and de Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" and "The English Mail Coach", to mention only a few of their many essays. Some other outstanding essayists of the early and late nineteenth century like S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834), Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), John Ruskin (1819-1900), Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and R.L. Stevenson (1850-1896), chose to employ the genre to write formal and objective pieces on literature, aesthetics, philosophy and history rather than for writing personal essays.

The essay may not be as popular or dominant a literary form of expression today as it was in the early eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, yet it has become indispensable to our times largely because of the extensive growth of knowledge and that of magazines, periodicals and newspapers. Twentieth century essayists like A.G. Gardiner (1865-1946), G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) and Robert Lynd (1879-1949) have delighted us with many of their instructive and entertaining essays such as "The Rule of the Road", "On Running After One's Hat" and "Forgetting", respectively, to mention one each of their many memorable essays. The great names of the twentieth century who have changed the essay into a highly organized and perfected literary form for presenting their points of view and arguments cogently and systematically, are Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953), Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), E.M. Forster (1879-1970), D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), T.S. Eliot (1888-

1965), Aldous Huxley (1894-1964), George Orwell (1903-1950) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1969). The list of names is endless, but to know what an essay is and how it grew, and to enjoy its different flavours, it is best to read as many essays as you can from different periods.

Check Your Progress-1

- a. What is an essay?
- b. Name the chief exponents of the periodical essay.
- c. Who are the major personal essayists of the nineteenth century and why are they termed as such?
- d. Name four outstanding essayists of the twentieth century.

22.4 FRANCIS BACON: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the father of the English essay, was also one of the pioneers of modern philosophy and modern science. Born into an affluent family, Bacon studied law and took it up as his profession, making rapid progress in it. When twenty-three, he turned his thoughts to Parliament and entered it in 1584. Knighted in 1603, Bacon held many prominent offices in his public career. He became Solicitor-General in 1607, Attorney-General in 1613, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal in 1617, and, finally, Lord Chancellor of England in 1618. Within six months, he was elevated to nobility as Baron Verulam, and was made Viscount St. Albans in 1621. However, Bacon's career as Lord Chancellor came under a cloud with charges of bribery and corruption against him, leading to his removal from the post. Bacon died in 1626, five years after his disgrace and retirement from public life. Despite facing reverses in his public career, Bacon's literary career remained splendid and uninterrupted. His best known works on science and philosophy are: *Advancement of Learning* (1605), *Novum Organum* (1620), and *De Augmentis* (1623). He is also known for his *History of Henry VII* (1621) and *New Atlantis* (1627), the latter being a kind of imaginary dreamland akin to Thomas More's

Utopia. Bacon's fame, however, rests primarily on his work *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral*.

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It may interest you to know that Bacon had a very poor opinion of the English language and was convinced that it would 'play the bankrupt with books'. He, therefore, took care to write all his serious works in Latin 'for greater permanence' as he put it. He used English for writing his essays because he considered them as being insignificant. In fact, Bacon referred to his essays as 'certain brief notes' or 'repositories of dispersed meditation' and 'receptacles for detached thoughts'. Their genesis lay in his jotting down, at random, any brilliant or suggestive thing he heard or any illuminating thought that came into his mind, and then putting these together into a book, constantly augmenting the stock. Ironically, it is the essays Bacon wrote in English that have brought him lasting fame, while his Latin works are no more than historical curiosities today.

Although equipped with great intellect and wisdom, Bacon sadly lacked moral principles. He did not hesitate to adopt unscrupulous means to rise in life or to betray the friends who helped him to rise. Perhaps Alexander Pope was right in calling Bacon "the wisest, the brightest and the meanest of mankind".

Check Your Progress-II

Fill in the blanks below with appropriate answers:-

- a. Bacon became Lord Chancellor of England in the year _____
- b. _____ was the language Bacon used for writing all his serious works.
- c. Bacon is known today mainly for his work _____
- d. _____ has called Bacon 'the wisest, the brightest and the meanest of mankind'.

22.5 AN INTRODUCTION TO "OF GREAT PLACE"

The *Essays* of Bacon evolved in three distinct stages marked by the editions of 1597, 1612 and 1625. The first edition came out with a total of ten essays; the second was expanded to thirty-eight essays, with a few earlier essays having been revised; and the last edition carried fifty-eight essays, some of which were the revised versions of the earlier ones. "Of Great Place" first appeared in the 1612 edition.

Bacon called his essays **Counsels** and that was what they were – practical advice on a variety of subjects of general interest. "Of Great Place" is a good example of this. It constitutes a code of conduct for persons occupying high public offices, and spells out the do's and don't's for them. The essay is saturated with the worldly wisdom Bacon had acquired, through observation and experience, during his political career and is reflected in statements like 'The rising unto place is laborious: and by pains men come to greater pains...' or 'The standing is slippery, and the regress is either a downfall, or at least an eclipse...' or again, 'All rising to great place is by a winding stair...'

You may now read the essay and use the glossary to understand the meanings of difficult words.

22.5.1 Text

Men in **great place** are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state; servants of fame; and servants of business. So as they have no freedom, neither in their persons, nor in their actions nor in their times. It is a strange desire to seek power and to lose liberty; or to seek power over others, and to lose power over a man's self. The rising unto place is laborious: and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base; and by **indignities** men come to **dignities**. The **standing is slippery**, and the **regress** is either a downfall, or at least an eclipse, which is a **melancholy** thing. *Cum non sis qui fueris, non esse cur velis vivere*. Nay retire men cannot when they would; neither will they when it were reason: but are impatient of **privateness** even in age and sickness, which require the shadow: like old townsmen, that will be still sitting at their street door, though thereby they offer age to scorn. Certainly great persons had need to borrow other men's opinions, to think themselves happy; for if they judge by their own feeling, they cannot find it; but if they think with themselves what other men think of them, and that other men would fain be as they are, then they are happy as it were **by report**; when, perhaps, they find the contrary within. For they are the first that find their own **griefs**, though they be the last that find their own faults. Certainly, men in great fortunes are strangers to themselves, and while they are in the puzzle of business they have no time to tend their health either of body or mind.

*Illi mors gravis incubat,
Qui notus nimis omnibus,
Ignotus moritur sibi.*

In place there is **license** to do good and evil; whereof the latter is a curse: for in evil the best condition is not to will; the second not to can. But power to do good is the true and lawful end of aspiring. For good thoughts (though God accept them), yet towards men are little better than good dreams, except they be put in act; and that cannot be without power and place; as the vantage or commanding ground. Merit and good works is the end of man's motion; and conscience of the same is the accomplishment of man's rest. For if a man can be partaker of God's theatre, he shall likewise be partaker of God's rest. *Et conversus Deus, ut aspiceret opera quæ fecerunt manus suæ, vidit quod omnia essent bona nimis*; and then the **sabbath**. In the discharge of thy place set before thee the best examples; for imitation is a **globe of precepts**. And after a time set before thee thine own example; and examine thyself strictly whether thou didst not best at first. Neglect not also the examples of those that have carried themselves ill in the same place: not to set off thyself by taxing their memory, but to direct thyself what to avoid. Reform therefore, without bravery or scandal of former times and persons; but yet set it down to thyself, as well to create good precedents as to follow them. **Reduce things to the first institution**, and observe wherein and how they have **degenerate**; but yet ask counsel of both times; of the ancient time what is best; and of the latter time, what is fittest. Seek to make thy course regular; that men may know beforehand what they may expect; but be not too positive and **peremptory**; and express thyself well when thou **digressest** from thy rule. Preserve the

right of thy place; but stir not questions of jurisdiction: and rather assume thy right in silence, and *de facto*, than voice it with claims and challenges. Preserve likewise the rights of inferior places; and think it more honour to direct in chief than to be busy in all. **Embrace** and invite helps and advices touching the execution of thy place; and do not drive away such as bring thee information as meddlers; but accept of them in good part. The vices of authority are chiefly four: delays, corruption, roughness, and **facility**. For delays; give easy access; keep times appointed; go through with that which is in hand; and **interlace** not business but of necessity. For corruption, do not only bind thine own hands or thy servants' hands from taking, but bind the hands of **suitors** also from offering. For **integrity** used doth the one; but integrity professed, and with a manifest detestation of bribery, doth the other: and avoid not only the fault, but the suspicion. Whosoever is found variable, and changeth **manifestly** without manifest cause, giveth suspicion of corruption. Therefore, always, when thou changest thine opinion or course, profess it plainly, and declare it, together with the reasons that move thee to change; and do not think to steal it. A servant or a favourite, if he be inward, and no other apparent cause of esteem, is commonly thought but a by-way to close corruption. For roughness, it is a needless cause of discontent: severity breedeth fear, but roughness breedeth hate. Even **reproofs** from authority ought to be grave, and not taunting. As for facility, it is worse than bribery. For bribes come but now and then; but if **importunity** or **idle respects** lead a man, he shall never be without. As **Solomon** saith, *To respect persons is not good; for such a man will transgress for a piece of bread*. It is most true that was anciently spoken, 'A place showeth the man': And it showeth some to the better, and some to the worse: *Omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset*, saith **Tacitus** of Galba; but of **Vespasian** he saith; *Solus imperantium, Vespasianus mutatus in melius*. Though the one was meant of sufficiency, the other of manners and affection. It is an assured sign of a worthy and generous spirit, whom honour amends. For honour is, or should be, the place of virtue; and as in nature things move violently to their place and calmly in their place, so virtue in ambition is violent, in authority settled and calm. All rising to great place is by a **winding stair**; and if there be **factions**, it is good to side a man's self whilst he is in the rising; and to balance himself when he is placed. Use the memory of thy predecessor **fairly and tenderly**; for if thou dost not, it is a debt will sure be paid when thou art gone. If thou have colleagues, respect them, and rather call them when they look not for it, than exclude them when they have reason to look to be called. Be not too sensible or too remembering of thy place in conversation and private answers to suitors; but let it rather be said, When he sits in place he is another man?

22.5.2 Glossary

great place:	high post or position.
indignities:	meanness; undignified means such as flattery, bribery etc.
dignities:	high office; elevation in rank, place.
the standing is slippery:	their position is risky and shaky since they hold the place at the sweet will of the king or ministers only and may lose it any moment.

regress:	recede; going back or down, as opposed to progress.
melancholy:	sad.
privateness:	retirement from high office
by report:	by borrowing the general opinion of the public.

Illi mors gravis incubat, Qui notus nimis omnibus, Ignotus moritur sibi: It is a sad fate for a man to die too well known to everybody else, and still unknown to himself.

license:	freedom.
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Et conversus Deus, ut aspiceret opera quæ fecerunt manus suæ, vidit quod omnia essent bona nimis: And God turned to look upon the works which his hands had made, and saw that all were very good.

Sabbath:	rest; Sabbath is Sunday, the day of rest and prayer.
globe of precepts:	collection of rules (prepared from past examples for one's guidance).
reduce...first institution:	trace back events to their origin.
degenerate:	become bad.
peremptory:	binding, unchangeable, dictatorial.
digress:	turn away from.
de facto:	as a fact, as an actual possession.
embrace:	welcome.
facility:	undue readiness to please, give way to, or be swayed by others.
interlace:	intermingle.
suitors:	petitioners; solicitors.
integrity:	honesty.
manifestly:	obviously.
reproofs:	reprimand.
importunity:	persistent pleading.
idle respects:	petty considerations.

Solomon: King of ancient Israel, son of David. His wisdom is celebrated in the *Bible*.

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transgress: exceed the bounds of duty and propriety; be partial.

Omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset: A man whom every body would have thought fit for empire if he had not been emperor.

Tacitus: A Roman historian.

Vespasian: A Roman emperor.

Solus imperantium, Vespasianus mutates in melius: Vespasian was the only emperor whom the possession of power changed for the better.

winding stair: employment of dubious means.

factions: parties or groups.

fairly and tenderly: with justice and care.

steal: here it means to hide (highlight in the text)

sensible: in the present context it means to be aware. (highlight in the text)

22.6 THEME

Theme is the matter or content of a literary work. It is the thought on which the writer builds his work. Bacon's essays revolve around topics of perennial human interest like truth, religion, friendship, revenge, envy, love, nobility etc., which 'come home to men's business and bosom' as Bacon himself wrote in his dedication to the last edition of his *Essays*. Now that you have read "Of Great Place", answer the questions given below to work out the theme of the essay before reading the answers provided by us below each question:

a. What price do men have to pay to reach high places?

On reaching high places, men lose their personal liberty and happiness.

b. How are men in great places thrice servants?

Once people attain high posts, they are, firstly, no longer free to do as they please but have to constantly please their masters. Secondly, the great are always conscious of their reputation, and the fear of their

losing it keeps them tense. Lastly, because of the heavy duties and responsibilities of their office, they get no time for themselves. Thus, people in high posts are servants of their master, their fame and their work.

- c. Why does Bacon say that ‘great persons had need to borrow other men’s opinions, to think themselves happy’?

Persons in high places are actually quite unhappy in their hearts. They seek happiness in the thought that other people think them to be happy. They enjoy when others envy their position and aspire to be like them.

- d. What does Bacon mean by the statement: ‘All rising to great place is by a winding stair...’?

He means to say that one has to employ dubious means to rise to great place.

- e. Name the four vices, mentioned by Bacon, that are associated with high office.

The four vices are – delays, corruption, roughness and facility.

- f. In what way does ‘Of Great Place’ reflect Bacon’s idealism?

Though Bacon advocates in his essays ways to attain and sustain success in life by means scrupulous or otherwise, he emphatically states in this essay that ‘power to do good is the true and lawful end of aspiring’. He again reiterates the importance of doing good when he says that ‘Merit and good work is the end of man’s motion; and conscience of the same is the accomplishment of man’s rest’. He is convinced of the efficacy of noble actions as he knows that the best course for man is ‘to create good precedents as to follow them’. In short, Bacon feels that a man in a position of power should devote his life to good actions that are beneficial to mankind.

22.7 PROSE STYLE

In this section we shall discuss Bacon’s prose style and the literary devices he has used in writing “Of Great Place”.

Style is the manner in which a writer presents his theme. It involves the effective use of language and literary devices like similes, metaphors, parallels, anti-thesis, paired and triple constructions of sentences etc. One of the striking features of Bacon's style is his opening statements which immediately take up the subject and engage the reader's attention. You must have been intrigued by the dramatic opening of the present essay: 'Men in great places are thrice servants', and been compelled to read the sentences following it to get at its meaning. Let us consider some more examples: "Of Revenge" begins with the words: 'Revenge is a kind of wild justice'; the opening line of "Of parents and children" is: 'The joys of parents are secret; and so their griefs and fears'; the essay "Of Marriage and Single Life" starts with: 'He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune'.

Each of the above statements also shows Bacon's ability to compress abundant thought in extremely small space. This quality is called terseness. A terse speaker, as you know, is one who delivers very short but weighty lectures. All Bacon's essays are short and made up of terse and epigrammatic or aphoristic statements that say a lot in a few words, like the ones quoted above. An epigram or aphorism is a short, sharp and amusing saying, usually making a general observation. Bacon's essays are replete with epigrams that have universal appeal. Some instances from "Of Great Place" are: 'It is a strange desire to seek power and to lose liberty'; 'The rising unto place is laborious; and by pains men come to greater pains'.

Bacon seems to have a natural instinct for neat and elegant proverbial expressions that highlight his ideas and concepts in the fewest possible words. He has furnished the maximum number of proverbs to the English language. A proverb or maxim is a pithy saying expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson, or is a saying that requires an explanation. You may have heard the following proverbs which are often quoted from Bacon's *Essay*:

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.

("Of Studies")

Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark.

("Of Death")

Suspicious thoughts are like bats among birds, they ever fly by twilight.

("Of Suspicion")

Severity breedeth fear, but roughness breedeth hate.

("Of Great Place")

Bacon avoids using abundant words and drops conjunctions and linking words in his essays and yet his prose is clear and lucid. Can you think of a good reason for this? This is so because his prose is well-aided by similes, metaphors, analogies and quotations. In the essay under study, Bacon uses an interesting analogy. He writes: "All rising to great place is by a winding stair." He means to say that high posts are not achieved through fair and straight means but through dubious means, which is akin to climbing up a winding stair. Another statement from the same essay – "Imitation is a globe of precepts" persuades us to look for a different level of meaning suggested by the analogy. You must have also come across quotations, some of them in

Latin, which Bacon has used to elaborate his statements. He has quoted from various sources – the Bible, Tacitus, Solomon etc.

Although Bacon's essays emerge out of his own varied experiences in life, he is never subjective or personal in his expression. Sentences like "All rising to great place is by a winding stair" may hint at his own rapid rise in public life through questionable means, yet he adopts an objective and impersonal tone to convey it.

Bacon's unit of structure is generally a short clause. Sentences are sometimes short, at other times they consist of a number of connected clauses, but they are always loose rather than **periodic** and 'come down like the strokes of a hammer' as Dean Church so aptly put it.

After reading "Of Great Place" a few times, you must have observed that Bacon's sentences are symmetrically arranged in paired and triple constructions with their parallels and anti-thesis. Anti-thesis is a thesis or proposition opposing another. In other words, it is a statement in which thoughts or words are balanced in contrast. Read carefully the examples given below from a few of Bacon's essays, to understand how he arranges his sentences:

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability.

("Of Studies")

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.

("Of Studies")

Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder, a part of experience.

("Of Travel")

Certainly virtue is like previous odours, most fragrant when they are incensed, or crushed for prosperity doth best discover vice, adversity doth best discover virtue.

("Of Adversity")

Check Your Progress-III

By now you must have got a fairly good idea of how Bacon organizes his material and how he makes use of literary devices in his essays. Attempt the following on the basis of your reading of "Of Great Place".

1. Tick (✓) the most appropriate choice in the following statements:
 - a. The essay has an emphasis that is (i) scientific (ii) practical (iii) moral (iv) theoretical.
 - b. A distinctive feature of Bacon's style is (i) digression (ii) literalness (iii) hyperbole (iv) aphorism.
 - c. In giving a series of items in the essay, Bacon uses the stylistic device (i) parallelism (ii) paralepsis (iii) polysyndeton (iv) periphrasis.

2. Pick up an example of a paired construction with its parallel and antithesis from the essay.
3. Cite an example of a triple construction from the essay.
4. Pick up a proverb from the essay.

22.8 WRITING EXPLANATIONS OF PASSAGES

Explanations of passages from prescribed texts serve a useful purpose in conveying how well you have understood the text besides indicating your ability to relate the given text to the author's philosophy, language, style etc. Take a look at the following passage and then read the explanation with reference to the context provided by us.

Passage:

"The rising unto place is laborious: and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base; and by indignities men come to dignities. The standing is slippery, and the regress is either a downfall, or at least an eclipse, which is a melancholy thing."

Explanation:

The above passage has been taken from Francis Bacon's famous essay "Of Great Place" wherein the author deliberates upon the predicament of men in high places. Bacon refers to the two ways by which men can attain high positions: through hard labour and through questionable means. Men rise to high positions with great labour and pain but they have to suffer greater pains and make harder efforts to sustain their positions. Men may also rise to higher positions by adopting unfair and undignified means such as flattery, bribery, treachery etc. But however undignified the means, the end is endowed with honour and dignity. Once one reaches a position of high honour, everybody is bound to fear or respect him. Bacon also observes that a feeling of insecurity always accompanies those who reach high positions. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. A man who holds a high position is always on uncertain ground since there is always the risk of his losing the position he has attained. His position is risky and shaky since his fate is now controlled by the whims and fancies of those for whom he works. The incumbent is always in danger of losing his power once and for all or being eclipsed or superseded by someone in the race for power. Such loss of power and position is bound to result in making the person concerned sad and miserable.

Critical Comments:

The passage indicates Bacon's expertise in formulating precepts of practical wisdom based on his own experiences in the corridors of power.

The passage also reveals Bacon's ability to convey with economy and precision the charms and hazards of power politics. With the help of short epigrammatic sentences, Bacon imparts a world of wisdom without, of course, taking any moral stand.

Discussion:

In the above exercise we have taken the following steps:

- 1) You will notice that the explanation of the passage begins with a brief reference to the title of the work and the name of the author. (Marks are generally set aside for the purpose.)
- 2) This is followed by a detailed reference to the context wherein we have located the passage in the given essay.
- 3) Next, we have explained the meaning of the passage.
- 4) Then we have added critical comments relating the passage to the central concerns of the author with the focus on his vision, language, style etc.

Exercise

Keeping in mind the steps mentioned above, attempt an explanation of the following passage with reference to the context:-

“Certain great persons had need to borrow other men’s opinions, to think themselves happy; for if they judge by their own feeling, they cannot find it; but if they think with themselves what other men think of them, and that other men would fain be as they are, then they are happy as it were by report; when, perhaps, they find the contrary within.”

22.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have learnt that:

- an essay is a short prose composition dealing with a subject in a general manner so as to interest many readers;
- the essay began with Montaigne in France in the sixteenth century, while Francis Bacon is called the father of the English essay;
- the essays of Bacon reflect his practical wisdom;
- Bacon’s prose style is terse, epigrammatic and lucid, well aided by similes, metaphors, analogies and quotations; and
- explanation of a passage focuses attention on its relative importance and contribution to the unity of the whole essay.

22.10 SUGGESTED READING

You would benefit by reading the following essays of Bacon:

Of Religion
Of Truth
Of Virtue
Of Studies
Of Friendship
Of Parents and Children
Of Marriage and Single Life
Of Plantations

22.11 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-I

- a. An essay is a short prose composition, that attempts to discuss a subject in a general manner so that it is of common interest, and is written in a style that appeals to us.
- b. Richard Steele and Joseph Addison.
- c. The major personal essayists are William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb and Thomas de Quincey. Their essays are based on their personal emotions and feelings as opposed to the eighteenth century essayists who used the essay as a vehicle of criticism.
- d. Lytton Strachey, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley and Bertrand Russell.

Check Your Progress-II

- a. 1618.
- b. Latin.
- c. *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral.*
- d. Alexander Pope.

Check Your Progress-III

1.
 - a. (ii) practical.
 - b. (iv) aphorism.
 - c. (i) parallelism.
2. 'It is a strange desire to seek power and to lose liberty; or to seek power over others, and to lose power over a man's self.'
3. 'Men in great place are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state; servants of fame; and servants of business.'
4. 'Severity breedeth fear, but roughness breedeth hate.'

UNIT 23 JAMAICA KINCAID: “ON SEEING ENGLAND FOR THE FIRST TIME”

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Jamaica Kincaid: A Biographical Note
- 23.3 “On Seeing England for the First Time” – An Introduction
 - 23.3.1 Text
 - 23.3.2 Glossary
- 23.4 Theme
- 23.5 Prose Style
- 23.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.7 Suggested Reading
- 23.8 Answers to Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will

- appreciate that this is an essay and not a travelogue which the title seems to suggest;
- relate the essay to the author’s major theme in her writings;
- identify examples of:
 - 1) sarcasm
 - 2) irony
 - 3) pathos

23.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you saw Bacon’s attempt to look at his subject in an objective way. It was a dispassionate account written in a style characterized by brevity. In contrast, we have Jamaica Kincaid’s essay which is personal and reveals the author’s passionate indignation, characteristic of a colonized person against her colonizer. This essay is in keeping with Samuel Johnson’s definition of an essay as ‘a loose sally of the mind’ and is limited in its range as it reflects the writer’s anger against the English who had colonized her country.

23.2 JAMAICA KINCAID: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The black writer Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 as Elaine Potter Richardson in the Caribbean island of Antigua, and had her schooling there. Although she was very intelligent, her education was interrupted when her third brother was born as her stepmother was sick and could no longer support them. She went to the United States at the age of seventeen; she was supposed to be the bread writer for the family, but refused to send the money home, and

instead tried to get an education. She studied photography at the New York School of Social Research, and attended Franconia College in New Hampshire for some time. In 1973, she changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid because her family disapproved of her writing, and she did not want them to know about it. She began writing articles and short stories, and took up a job with the magazine *The New Yorker*, where she worked as a staff writer from 1976 to 1995. She married Allen Shawn, the son of William Shawn, *The New Yorker's* longtime editor. Jamaica Kincaid is the author of novels, short stories, and non-fiction works. She is a visiting professor and teaches creative writing at Harvard University.



Issue of race, gender, class and colonialism dominate her writing, and the mother-daughter relationship is a recurrent theme. Her first work, *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) was a volume of short stories based on childhood in the Caribbean. Her first novel, *Annie John* (1985) set in Antigua, explores the fierce ups and downs of a daughter's love for her mother and her motherland. Other novels include *A Small Place* (1988), *Lucy* (1990), which begin with a girl leaving Antigua for America (as Jamaica Kincaid herself did) and *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1995), a first person narrative in which a woman looks back on her troubled life. The essay “On Seeing England for the First Time” was first published in Harper's Magazine in 1991.

Speaking about her major theme in all her writings, she said: “I was always being told I should be *something*, and then my whole upbringing was *something I was not: it was English*”.

After you finish reading the essay, you will understand the essence of the above statement of Jamaica Kincaid

23.3 “ON SEEING ENGLAND FOR THE FIRST TIME” – AN INTRODUCTION

As is evident from its title, the essay was written after Kincaid's first visit to England. In this Unit, we shall examine both the subject matter and the manner of presentation in the essay, and also take note of the various literary devices used by Kincaid to express her personal feelings on being colonized.

23.3.1 Text

When I saw England for the first time, I was a child in school sitting at a desk. The England I was looking at was laid out on a map gently, beautifully, delicately, a very special jewel; it lay on a bed of sky blue – the background of the map – its yellow form mysterious, because though it looked like a leg of mutton, it could not really look like anything so familiar as a leg of mutton because it was England – with shadings of pink and green, unlike any shadings of pink and green I had seen before, **squiggly** veins of red running in every direction. England was a special jewel all right, and only special people got to wear it. The people who got to wear England were English people. They wore it well and they wore it everywhere: in jungles, in deserts, on plains, on top of the highest mountains, on all the oceans, on all the seas. When my teacher had pinned this map up on the blackboard, she said, “This is England” – and she said it with authority, seriousness, and **adoration**, and we all sat up. It was as if she had said, “This is Jerusalem, the place you will go to when you die but only if you have been good.” We understood then – we were meant to understand then – that England was to be our source of **myth** and the source from which we got our sense of reality, our sense of what was meaningful, our sense of what was meaningless – and much about our own lives and much about the very idea of us headed that last list.

At the time I was a child sitting at my desk seeing England for the first time, I was already very familiar with the greatness of it. Each morning before I left for school, I ate a breakfast of half a grapefruit, an egg, bread and butter and a slice of cheese, and a cup of cocoa; or half a grapefruit, a bowl of oat **porridge**, bread and butter and a slice of a cheese, and a cup of cocoa. The can of cocoa was often left on the table in front of me. It had written on it the name of the company, the year the company was established, and the words “Made in England.” Those words, “Made in England,” were written on the box the oats came in too. They would also have been written on the box the shoes I was wearing came in; the **bolt** of gray linen cloth lying on the shelf of a store from which my mother had bought three yards to make the uniform that I was wearing had written along its edge those three words. The shoes I wore were made in England; so were my socks and cotton undergarments and the satin ribbons I wore tied at the end of two plaits of my hair. My father, who might have sat next to me at breakfast, was a carpenter and **cabinetmaker**. The shoes he wore to work would have been made in England, as were his khaki shirt and trousers, his underpants and undershirt, his socks and brown **felt** hat. Felt was not the proper material from which a hat that was expected to provide shade from the hot sun should have been made, but my father must have seen and admired a picture of an Englishman wearing such a hat in England, and this picture that he saw must have been so **compelling** that it caused him to wear the wrong hat for a hot climate most of his long life. And this hat – a brown felt hat – became so central to his character that it was the first thing he put on in the morning as he stepped out of bed and the last thing he took off before he stepped back into bed at night. As we sat at breakfast, a car might go by. The car, a Hillman or a Zephyr, was made in England. The very idea of the meal itself, breakfast, and its substantial quality and quantity, was an idea from England; we somehow knew that in England they began the day with this meal called breakfast, and a proper breakfast was a big breakfast. No one I knew liked eating so much food so early in the day; it made us feel sleepy, tired. But this breakfast business was “Made in

England” like almost everything else that surrounded us, the exceptions being the sea, the sky, and the air we breathed.

Jamaica Kincaid:
“On Seeing England
for the First Time”

At the time I saw this map – seeing England for the first time – I did not say to myself, “Ah, so that’s what it looks like”, because there was no longing in me to put a shape to those three words that ran through every part of my life no matter how small: for me to have had such a longing would have meant that I lived in a certain atmosphere, an atmosphere in which those three words were felt as a burden. But I did not live in such an atmosphere. When my teacher showed us the map, she asked us to study it carefully, because no test we would ever take would be complete without this statement: “Draw a map of England.” I did not know then that the statement “Draw a map of England” was something far worse than a declaration of war, for a flat-out declaration of war would have put me on alert. In fact, there was no need for war – I had long ago been conquered. I did not know then that this statement was part of a process that would result in my **erasure** – not my physical erasure, but my erasure all the same. I did not know then that this statement was meant to make me feel **awe** and small whenever I heard the word “England”: awe at the power of its existence, small because I was not from it.

After that there were many times of seeing England for the first time. I saw England in history. I knew the names of all the kings of England. I knew the names of their children, their wives, their disappointments, their triumphs, the names of people who betrayed them. I knew the dates on which they were born and the dates they died. I knew their conquests and was made to feel good if I figured in them; I knew their defeats.

This view – the naming of the kings, their deeds, their disappointments – was the **vivid** view, the forceful view. There were other views, **subtler** ones, softer, almost not there – but these softer views were the ones that made the most lasting impression on me, the ones that made me really feel like nothing. “When morning touched the sky” was one phrase, for no morning touched the sky where I lived. The morning where I lived came on abruptly, with a shock of heat and loud noises. “Evening approaches” was another. But the evenings where I lived did not approach; in fact, I had no evening – I had night and I had day, and they came and went in a mechanical way: on, off, on, off. And then there were gentle mountains and low blue skies and moors over which people took walks for nothing but pleasure, when where I lived a walk was an act of labour, a burden, something only death or the automobile could relieve. And the weather there was so remarkable because the rain fell gently always, and the wind blew in gusts that were sometimes deep, and the air was various shades of gray, each an appealing shade for a dress to be worn when a portrait was being painted; and when it rained at twilight, wonderful things happened: People bumped into each other unexpectedly and that would lead to all sorts of turns of events – a plot, the mere weather caused plots.

The reality of my life, the life I led at the time I was being shown these views of England for the first time, for the second time, for the one hundred millionth time, was this: The sun shone with what sometimes seemed to be a deliberate cruelty; we must have done something to deserve that. My dresses did not rustle in the evening air as I strolled to the theatre (I had no evening, I had no theatre; my dresses were made of a cheap cotton, the weave of which would give way after not too many washings). I got up in the morning, I did my chores (fetched water from the public pipe for my mother, swept the yard), I washed myself, I went to a woman to have my hair combed freshly every

day (because before we were allowed into our classroom our teachers would inspect us, and children who had not bathed that day, or had dirt under their fingernails, or whose hair had not been combed **anew** that day might not be allowed to attend class). I ate that breakfast. I walked to school. At school we gathered in an auditorium and sang a hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful," and looking down on us as we sang were portraits of the queen of England and her husband; they wore jewels and medals and they smiled. I was a Brownie. At each meeting we would form a little group around a flagpole, and after raising the Union Jack, we would say, "I promise to do my best, to do my duty to God and the queen, to help other people every day and obey the **scouts' law.**"

But who were these people and why had I never seen them? I mean, really seen them, in the place where they lived? I had never been to England. England! I had seen England's representatives. I had seen the governor-general at the public grounds at a ceremony celebrating the queen's birthday. I had seen an old princess and I had seen a young princess. They had both been extremely not beautiful, but who among us would have told them that? I had never seen England, really seen it. I had only met a representative, seen a picture, read books, memorized its history. I had never set foot, my own foot, in it.

The space between the idea of something and its reality is always wide and deep and dark. The longer they are kept apart – idea of thing, reality of thing – the wider the width, the deeper the depth, the thicker and darker the darkness. This space starts out empty, there is nothing in it, but it rapidly becomes filled up with **obsession** or desire or hatred or love – sometimes all of these things, sometimes some of these things. That the idea of something and its reality are often two completely different things is something no one ever remembers; and so when they meet and find that they are not compatible, the weaker of the two, idea or reality, dies.

And so finally, when I was a grown-up woman, the mother of two children, and wife of someone, a person who resides in a powerful country that takes up more than its fair share of a continent, the owner of a house with many rooms in it and of two automobiles, with the desire and will (which I very much act upon) to take from the world more than I give back to it, more than I deserve, more than I need, finally then, I saw England, the real England, not a picture, not a painting, not through a story in a book, but England, for the first time. In me, the space between the idea of it and its reality had become filled with hatred, and so when at last I saw it I wanted to take it into my hands and tear it into little pieces and then crumble it up as if it were clay, child's clay. That was impossible, and so I could only indulge in not-favourable opinions.

If I had told an English person what I thought, that I find England ugly, that I hate England; the weather is like a jail sentence; the English are a very ugly people; the food in England is like a jail sentence; the hair of English people is so straight, so dead-looking; the English have an unbearable smell so different from the smell of people I know, real people, of course, I would have been told that I was a person full of **prejudice**. Apart from the fact that it is I – that is, the people who look like me – who would make that English person aware of the unpleasantness of such a thing, the idea of such a thing, prejudice, that person would have been only partly right, sort of right: I may be capable of

prejudice, but my prejudices have no weight to them, my prejudices have no force behind them, my prejudices remain opinions, my prejudices remain my personal opinion. And a great feeling of rage and disappointment came over me as I looked at England, my head full of personal opinions that could not have public, my public, approval. The people I come from are powerless to do evil on a grand scale.

Jamaica Kincaid:
**“On Seeing England
for the First Time”**

The moment I wished every sentence, everything I knew, that began with England would end with “and then it all died, we don’t know how, it just all died” was when I saw the white cliffs of Dover. I had sung hymns and recited poems that were about a longing to see the white cliffs of Dover again. At the time I sang the hymns and recited the poems, I could really long to see them again because I had never seen them at all, nor had anyone around me at the time. But there we were, groups of people longing for something we had never seen. And so there they were, the white cliffs, but they were not that pearly, majestic thing I used to sing about, that thing that created such a feeling in these people that when they died in the place where I lived they had themselves buried facing a direction that would allow them to see the white cliffs of Dover when they were resurrected, as surely they would be. The white cliffs of Dover, when finally I saw them, were cliffs, but they were not white; you could only call them that if the word “white” meant something special to you; they were steep; they were so steep, the correct height from which all my views of England, starting with the map before me in my classroom and ending with the trip I had just taken, should jump and die and disappear forever.

23.3.2 Glossary

squiggly:	a line with twists and loops.
vein:	a narrow strip of a different colour in a map. (‘Squiggly veins’ suggest the red lines running through the map of England).
adoration:	great love or worship.
myth:	a story that originated in ancient times; something that is imaginary and not true.
porridge:	eaten at breakfast—a soft food made by boiling a cereal in water or milk.
bolt:	a quantity of cloth, wound in a roll.
cabinet:	a piece of furniture with drawer or shelves for storing or displaying things.
felt (hat):	wool, hair or fur rolled flat into a thick cloth.
compelling:	extremely interesting and exciting, so that one has to pay attention.
erasure:	the action of erasing(removing), rubbing out.
awe:	feeling of respect combined with fear or wonder.
vivid:	producing strong, clear pictures in the mind.

subtler:	difficult to detect or describe, not obvious.
anew:	in a new or different way; again.
scouts' law:	laws of the Scout Association which aim to develop boys' characters through discipline, outdoor activities and public service.
obsession:	a fixed idea that fills the mind.
prejudice:	dislike or distrust of a person, group or custom that is based on fear or false information rather than on reason or experience, and that influences one's attitude or behaviour towards them.

23.4 THEME

A good essay is a cohesive unit and there has to be a continuous flow in which you discern the running theme or the subject of the author's thoughts. Answer the questions that follow to get at the theme of the essay. Do not read the answers provided by us till you have written out your own.

1. What is the main thought that links the first two paragraphs of the essay?

The first paragraph of the essay describes Kincaid's impressions of England as seen from a map in school. She found the shape of England resembling a leg of mutton, but quickly erased the comparison because she had been conditioned to think of England as a great land which could not be compared with familiar objects like a leg of mutton. She thought of England as a precious jewel that only the English had the right to wear. For the Antiguans, England was a distant land, a holy land, like Jerusalem. In short, under their colonial masters, Antiguans had no existence of their own except what the English imposed on them.

In the second paragraph, the author tells us that the Antiguans had nothing they could call their own. As a child, Kincaid had realized that everything from breakfast cereal to school uniforms, from shoes to hats and cars plying on the streets of Antigua, were made in England. Thus, the second paragraph takes off from the first and reiterates that Antigua was nothing except what England gave it to exist as a British colony.

2. Why does Kincaid feel anguished at her plight?

Kincaid's statement: "I had long ago been conquered" is full of anguish. She feels that she had no identify of her own and that she had been erased completely. The only thing that mattered was the compulsion to know about England and feel a sense of awe at its might and a sense of smallness because she was not English by birth, although her upbringing was English. She was pained at the thought that, like her, all other Antiguans were 'nobodies'; they could never be 'something'; they were just 'nothing'.

3. How did the English colonizers impose their own culture on the natives?

The children were taught only British history in the schools. The views children heard about the weather or the natural scenery, were views about the English weather and the English natural scenery. The exotic and picturesque beauty of England was totally alien to the children's imagination because the reality in Antigua was quite the opposite. There was also the compulsory singing of English hymns and paying obeisance to the English flag, with duty to the British Queen and the British people whom the children had never seen. This reveals how far the colonized Antiguans were forced to live an English life alien to their native culture. The literature they read did not relate to Caribbean islands.

4. What opinion does Kincaid form of England when she first visits it? Why can she not express her opinion?

Kincaid forms a very poor opinion of England. There is nothing in it that appeals to her. She dislikes England, its food, its weather and its people. Even the white cliffs of Dover, that she had read about at school, were a disappointment when she saw them. Kincaid knows that all her views about England, starting with the map and ending with her trip, will remain within her because colonized people were powerless to exert or express any opinion on the mighty English. She is sure that her opinions, if expressed, will be contemptuously dismissed as irrational prejudices by the English.

Check Your Progress-I

Briefly answer the following questions in your own words before you turn to the answers at the end of the unit:

- How was Kincaid familiar with the greatness of England, as a child?
- Relate the essay to the phrase "Made in England".
- How does the writer experience the space between the idea of England and the real England?

23.5 PROSE STYLE

Style is the writer's manner of presenting his/her theme, and involves a skilful use of language and literary devices. Jamaica Kincaid's major theme in all her writings, including the present essay, is to show how the colonized people find themselves at a disadvantage in becoming something in life because they are forced to live an English life alien to their native culture. In expressing her personal indignation against the English who had colonized her native home, Antigua, Kincaid is at times sarcastic in her expression and at others, ironical. However, there is a rare degree of pathos that underlies both her sarcasm and her irony. Sarcasm refers to remarks that imply the opposite of what they appear to mean and are intended to mock. In other words, sarcasm is a bitter sneer or a satirical remark in scorn or contempt. For instance, when the author says that everything in Antigua had the 'Made in England' label on it, she sarcastically points out that the only exceptions were "the sea, the sky, and the air we breathed" that were not made in England.

Irony is another literary device used by Kincaid to present her thoughts. Irony is also the expression of one's meaning by saying the opposite of what one is thinking, and is often used to be amusing. One example of an ironical expression in the essay is when the author compares her situation with that of the English people. She says: "My dresses did not rustle in the evening air as I strolled to the theatre...". The remark is ironical because she neither had fine dresses, nor took an evening stroll, nor went to any theatre. In her own words: "I had no evening, I had no theatre; my dresses were made of a cheap cotton, the weave of which would give way after not too many washings."

Pathos in literature implies a condition that excites a feeling of pity or sadness. In paragraph three, the author sums up the compulsion faced by the Antiguans to know all about England, in the statement: "Draw a map of England". Her remark excites pity at the Antiguan situation under the English domination: 'I did not know then that this statement was part of a process that would result in my erasure – not my physical erasure, but my erasure all the same. I did not know then that this statement was meant to make me feel awe and small whenever I heard the word "England": awe at the power of its existence, small because I was not from it'.

Check Your Progress-II

- a. Pick up an example of sarcasm from the essay that has not been mentioned in the discussion above.
- b. Which paragraphs in the essay show a striking contrast between the English situation and the Antiguan reality?
- c. Explain the pathos contained in the following statement occurring in paragraph two: 'And this hat – a brown felt hat – became so central to his character that it was the first thing he put on in the morning as he stepped out of bed and the last thing he took off before he stepped back into bed at night.'

23.6 LET US SUM UP

Jamaica Kincaid:
"On Seeing England
for the First Time"

In this unit you have:

- examined Jamaica Kincaid's essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" as a personal essay that reveals her anger against the English in a very candid manner;
- gathered that the essay does not present an account of travel but is an attempt to give expression to the author's thoughts as they occur to her; and
- noticed that the essay is heavily laced with sarcasm and irony, with a thread of pathos running throughout.

23.7 SUGGESTED READING

Jamaica Kincaid: *The Autobiography of My Mother*

David P. Lichtenstein: *A Brief Biography of Jamaica Kincaid*.

23.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-I

- a. As a child, Kincaid was already familiar with the greatness of England as everything she and her family used came from England, right from the breakfast cereal they ate each morning, to the clothes and shoes they wore. The child also knew of England's greatness from what she read of its history at school, or from what she had read about it in a book or seen in a picture.
- b. The essay is expressive of the indignation felt by the colonized people against their colonizers. Antigua, being a British colony, was in awe of its colonizers. As a child, Kincaid realized that her upbringing was totally English, with nothing of the native culture in it. All the things used by her and her family, like their breakfast and the clothes and shoes they wore, had "Made in England" written on them. This made her feel as if England had taken over her life and erased her very identity. It made her feel very small and insignificant, a 'nobody' who could never be 'something' in life.
- c. The writer experiences the space between the idea of England and the real England when she first takes a trip to that country. This space had previously been filled with hatred, so that when she first sets foot in England, she feels like tearing everything into pieces. She finds everything about it and its people ugly. Even the chalk-white cliffs of Dover do not appear white to her at all and she wonders why the English in Antigua had considered them so majestic and romantic.

Check Your Progress-II

- a. The author, as a schoolgirl, finds the map of England resembling a leg of mutton but remarks sarcastically that anything so great like England should not be compared to an ordinary object like a leg of mutton.
- b. Paragraphs five and six.
- c. The author's father had perhaps seen and admired a picture of an Englishman wearing a felt hat in England. Felt was right for a cold climate but not the right material for a hat that had to be used in the hot Antigua climate. Kincaid's remark about her father's hat is more pathetic than sarcastic. It arouses a sense of pity in us for her father who wore "the wrong hat for a hot climate most of his long life" just because he admired the English way of life. The extent to which the colonizers had taken hold of the native mind arouses our pity for the native situation.

UNIT 24 CHARLES LAMB: "A DISSERTATION UPON ROAST PIG"

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Charles Lamb: A Biographical Sketch
- 24.3 An Introduction to "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig"
 - 24.3.1 Text
 - 24.3.2 Glossary
- 24.4 Theme
- 24.5 Humour
- 24.6 Prose Style
- 24.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.8 Suggested Reading
- 24.9 Answers to Exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

After a careful reading of the unit, you will be able to:

- explain the theme of "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig";
- relate the essay to Lamb's personality, tastes and temperament;
- identify the devices used by Lamb to provoke humour;
- appreciate the prose style of the essay.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall look at Charles Lamb's essay "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" and discuss it in terms of its theme, use of literary devices and style. After you complete reading the essay, you should be able to answer the in-text questions and thus discover it for yourself. We will help you in discovering it by providing you with answers to the questions which you should read only after you have written your answers.

Since Lamb's essays bear essentially the imprint of his personality, you should begin by reading the brief biographical sketch of the author. The study of the theme will make you familiar with the content of the essay. From the theme we go on to observe the humorous aspects of the essay and take a look at the devices that Lamb uses to evoke humour. Then we shall proceed to examine the prose style of the essay to see it in relation to Lamb's life and times.

We have placed exercises for you at the end of sections 24.2 and 24.6 so that you may be able to 'check your progress' before you move on to the next topic. The answers are provided at the end of the unit.

24.2 CHARLES LAMB: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Charles Lamb (1775-1834), one of the most engaging personal essayists of all

Temple, London. His father held the post of clerk to Mr. Samuel Salt, a barrister and one of the benchers of the Inner Temple.



Charles Lamb spent his youth at Inner Temple and went to school in 1782 at Christ's Hospital and remained there till 1789. At Christ's Hospital, Charles formed a lasting friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge was his elder by two years. Lamb had great respect for Coleridge's genius which lasted until death dissolved their friendship. Lamb was able to read Greek, and had acquired great facility in Latin composition when he left the Hospital.

For a short while Lamb was employed in the South Sea House where his brother John held a good appointment. On 5th April 1792, he joined as a clerk in the Accounts office of the East India Company and continued there till his superannuation in 1825.

The circumstances of his personal life were harsh and even tragic. Charles and his sister Mary Ann both suffered periods of mental illness, and Charles spent six weeks in a psychiatric hospital during 1795. After 1799 they lived together and collaborated on several books for children, publishing in 1807 their famous *Tales from Shakespeare*. Literary fame came to Lamb relatively late, after many attempts in the fields of drama and poetry. He wrote four plays, none of which was successful. However, his essays, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1808), established his reputation as a critic and did much in reviving the popularity of Elizabethan drama.

Lamb began publishing his *Essays of Elia* in the *London Magazine* in 1820; they were so immediately popular that a book-length collection was published in 1823. These essays touch upon a wide range of compelling subjects from the humorous "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" to the reflective "New Year's Eve" and collectively they also comprise a fascinating personal memoir, veiled under the pseudonymous disguise of Elia.

Lamb's personality was a happy blend of tenderness, good sense and humour and he had a strong aversion to pretence and hypocrisy. His close-knit, subtle organization, his self-revealing observations on life, and his humour, fantasy, and pathos combine to make him one of the great masters of the English essay. Lamb was a gifted conversationalist and was friendly with most of the major literary figures of his time. William Hazlitt found him to be "the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men."

Check Your Progress 1

- a) At what age did Charles Lamb join Christ's Hospital?
- b) With which important writer did Charles Lamb form a friendship at Christ's Hospital that lasted a lifetime?
- c) Name the authors of *Tales from Shakespeare*.

Charles Lamb:
"A Dissertation upon
Roast Pig"

24.3 AN INTRODUCTION TO "A DISSERTATION UPON ROAST PIG"

In September, 1822, Charles Lamb published his classic essay "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" in *London Magazine* under the pen name of Elia. This is an essay that shows Lamb at his humorous best. It is full of fun from beginning to end. In this unit we shall examine both content and style of the essay and observe the various devices that Lamb uses to portray a humorous account of the origin of mankind's practice of roasting pigs besides giving us insight into his own temperament and tastes.

24.3.1 Text

- 1) MANKIND, says a Chinese manuscript, which **my friend M.** was obliging enough to read and explain to me, for the first seventy thousand ages ate their meat raw, clawing or biting it from the living animal, just as they do in Abyssinia to this day. This period is not obscurely hinted at by their great **Confucius** in the second chapter of his **Mundane Mutations**, where he designates a kind of golden age by the term **Cho-fang**, literally the Cooks' holiday. The manuscript goes on to say, that the art of roasting, or rather broiling (which I take to be **the elder brother**) was accidentally discovered in the manner following. The swine-herd, Ho-ti, having gone out into the woods one morning, as his manner was, to collect **mast** for his hogs, left his cottage in the care of his eldest son Bo-bo, a great **lubberly** boy, who being fond of playing with fire, as **youngers** of his age commonly are, let some sparks escape into a bundle of straw, which kindling quickly, spread the conflagration over every part of their poor mansion, till it was reduced to ashes. Together with the cottage (**a sorry antediluvian make-shift** of a building, you may think it), what was of much more importance, a fine **litter of new-farrowed pigs**, no less than nine in number, perished. China pigs have been esteemed a luxury all over the east from the remotest periods that we read of. Bo-bo was in the utmost **consternation**, as you may think, not so much for the sake of the **tenement**, which his father and he could easily build up again with a few dry branches, and the labour of an hour or two, at any time, as for the loss of the pigs. While he was thinking what he should say to his father, and wringing his hands over the smoking remnants of one of those untimely sufferers, an odour **assailed** his nostrils, unlike any scent which he had before experienced. What could it proceed from? - - not from the burnt cottage -- he had smelt that smell before -- indeed this was by no means the first accident of the kind which had occurred through the negligence of this unlucky young **fire-brand**. Much less did it resemble that of any known herb, weed, or flower. A

premonitory moistening at the same time overflowed his **nether** lip. He knew not what to think. He next stooped down to feel the pig, if there were any signs of life in it. He burnt his fingers, and to cool them he applied them in his booby fashion to his mouth. Some of the crumbs of the scorched skin had come away with his fingers, and for the first time in his life (in the world's life indeed, for before him no man had known it) he tasted -- **crackling!** Again he felt and fumbled at the pig. It did not burn him so much now, still he licked his fingers from a sort of habit. The truth at length broke into his slow understanding, that it was the pig that smelt so, and the pig that tasted so delicious; and, surrendering himself up to the new-born pleasure, he fell to tearing up whole handfuls of the scorched skin with the flesh next it, and was cramming it down his throat in his beastly fashion, when his sire entered amid the smoking **rafters**, armed with **retributory cudgel**, and finding how affairs stood, began to rain blows upon the young rogue's shoulders, as thick as hail-stones, which Bo-bo heeded not any more than if they had been flies. The tickling pleasure, which he experienced in his **lower regions**, had rendered him quite **callous** to any inconveniences he might feel in those remote quarters. His father might **lay on** but he could not beat him from his pig, till he had fairly made an end of it, when, becoming a little more sensible of his situation, something like the following dialogue ensued.

- 2) "You **graceless whelp**, what have you got there **devouring**? Is it not enough that you have **burnt me down** three houses with your dog's tricks, and **be hanged to you**, but you must be eating fire, and I know not what -- what have you got there, I say ?"
- 3) "O father, the pig, the pig, do come and taste how nice the burnt pig eats."
- 4) The ears of Ho-ti tingled with horror. He cursed his son, and he cursed himself that ever he should beget a son that should eat burnt pig.
- 5) Bo-bo, whose scent was wonderfully sharpened since morning, soon raked out another pig, and fairly rending it asunder, thrust the lesser half by main force into the fists of Ho-ti, still shouting out "Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig, father, only taste -- O Lord," -- with such-like barbarous ejaculations, **cramming** all the while as if he would choke.
- 6) Ho-ti trembled every joint while he grasped the abominable thing, wavering whether he should not put his son to death for an unnatural young monster, when the crackling scorching his fingers, as it had done his son's, and applying the same remedy to them, he in his turn tasted some of its flavour, which, make what sour mouths he would for a pretence, proved not altogether displeasing to him. In conclusion (for the manuscript here is a little tedious) both father and son fairly sat down to the mess, and never left off till they had despatched all that remained of the litter.
- 7) Bo-bo was strictly **enjoined** not to let the secret escape, for the neighbours would certainly have stoned them for a couple of **abominable** wretches, who could think of improving upon the good

meat which God had sent them. Nevertheless, strange stories got about. It was observed that Ho-ti's cottage was burnt down now more frequently than ever. Nothing but fires from this time forward. Some would break out in broad day, others in the night-time. As often as the **sow farrowed**, so sure was the house of Ho-ti to be in a blaze; and Ho-ti himself, which was the more remarkable, instead of **chastising** his son, seemed to grow more indulgent to him than ever. At length they were watched, the terrible mystery discovered, and father and son summoned to take their trial at Peking, then an **inconsiderable assize town**. Evidence was given, the **obnoxious** food itself produced in court, and verdict about to be pronounced, when the foreman of the jury begged that some of the burnt pig, of which the culprits stood accused, might be handed into the box. He handled it, and they all handled it, and burning their fingers, as Bo-bo and his father had done before them, and nature prompting to each of them the same remedy, against the face of all the facts, and the clearest **charge** which judge had ever given, -- to the surprise of the whole court, towns-folk, strangers, reporters, and all present -- without leaving the box, or any manner of consultation whatever, they brought in a simultaneous verdict of Not Guilty.

- 8) The judge, who was a shrewd fellow, **winked at** the manifest iniquity of the decision: and, when the court was dismissed, went **privily**, and bought up all the pigs that could be had for love or money. In a few days his Lordship's town house was observed to be on fire. The thing took wing, and now there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction. Fuel and pigs grew enormously dear all over the district. The insurance offices one and all shut up shop. People **built slighter and slighter** every day, until it was feared that the very science of architecture would in no long time be lost to the world. Thus this custom of firing houses continued, till in process of time, says my manuscript, a sage arose, **like our Locke**, who made a discovery, that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might be cooked (burnt, as they called it) without the necessity of consuming a whole house to dress it. Then first began the rude form of a **gridiron**. Roasting by the string, or spit, came in a century or two later, I forget in whose dynasty. By such slow degrees, concludes the manuscript, do the most useful, and seemingly the most obvious arts, make their way among mankind.
- 9) Without placing too implicit faith in the account above given, it must be agreed, that if a worthy pretext for so dangerous an experiment as setting houses on fire (especially in these days) could be assigned in favour of any culinary object, that pretext and excuse might be found in ROAST PIG.
- 10) Of all the delicacies in the whole *mundus edibilis*, I will maintain it to be the most delicate -- *princeps obsoniorum*.
- 11) I speak not of your grown **porkers** -- things **between pig and pork** -- those **hobbydehoys** -- but a young and tender suckling -- **under a moon old** -- **guiltless as yet of the sty** -- with no original speck of the *amor immunditiae*, the hereditary failing of the first parent, yet manifest -- his voice as yet not broken, but something between a childish treble, and a grumble -- the mild forerunner, or *praeludium*, of a grunt.

- 12) He must be roasted. I am not ignorant that our ancestors ate them **seethed**, or boiled -- but what a sacrifice of the **exterior tegument!**
- 13) There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, crackling, as it is well called -- the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the **coy, brittle resistance** -- with the **adhesive oleaginous** -- O call it not fat -- but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it -- the tender blossoming of fat -- fat **cropped in the bud** -- taken in the shoot -- in the first innocence -- **the cream and quintessence** of the child-pig's yet pure food -- the lean, no lean, but a kind of **animal manna** -- or, rather, fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one **ambrosian** result, or common substance.
- 14) Behold him, while he is doing -- it seemeth rather a refreshing warmth, than a scorching heat, that he is so passive to. How equably he twirleth round the string! -- Now he is just done. To see the extreme sensibility of that tender age, he hath wept out his pretty eyes -- **radiant jellies** -- **shooting stars** --
- 15) See him in the dish, his second cradle, how meek he lieth wouldst thou have had this innocent grow up to the grossness and **indocility** which too often accompany maturer swinehood? Ten to one he would have proved a **glutton**, a **sloven**, an obstinate, disagreeable animal -- wallowing in all manner of **filthy conversation** -- from these sins he is happily snatched away -
- “Ere sin could blight, or sorrow fade,
Death came with timely care--”
- his memory is **odoriferous** -- no clown curseth, while his stomach half rejecteth, the rank bacon -- no coalheaver **bolteth** him in reeking sausages -- he hath a fair **sepulchre** in the grateful stomach of the judicious epicure -- and for such a tomb might be content to die.
- 16) He is the best of **Sapors**. Pine-apple is great. She is indeed almost too transcendent -- a delight, if not sinful, yet so like to sinning, that really a tender-conscienced person would do well to pause -- too ravishing for mortal taste, she woundeth and **excoriateth** the lips that approach her -- like lovers' kisses, she biteth—she is a pleasure bordering on pain from the fierceness and insanity of her relish -- but she **stoppeth at the palate** -- she meddleth not with the appetite -- and the coarsest hunger might **barter** her consistently for a mutton chop.
- 17) Pig -- let me speak his praise -- is no less provocative of the appetite, than he is satisfactory to the criticalness of the palate. The strong man may **batten** on him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices.
- 18) Unlike to mankind's mixed characters, a bundle of virtues and vices, inexplicably intertwined, and not to be unravelled without hazard, he is good throughout. No part of him is better or worse than another. He

helpeth, as far as his little means extend, all around. He is the least envious of banquets. He is all **neighbours' fare**.

Charles Lamb:
"A Dissertation upon
Roast Pig"

- 19) I am one of those, who freely and ungrudgingly impart a share of the good things of this life which fall to their lot (few as mine are in this kind) to a friend. I protest I take as great an interest in my friend's pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own. "Presents," I often say, "endear **Absents**." Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chicken (those "**tame villatic fowl**"), capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste them, as it were, **upon the tongue of my friend**. But a stop must be put somewhere. One would not, **like Lear**, "**give everything**." I **make my stand upon** pig. Methinks it is an ingratitude to the Giver of all good flavours, to **extra-domiciliate**, or send out of the house, slightly, (under pretext of friendship, or I know not what) a blessing so particularly adapted, **predestined**, I may say, to my individual palate -- it argues an insensibility.
- 20) I remember a touch of conscience in this kind at school. My good old aunt, who never parted from me at the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweet-meat, or some nice thing, into my pocket, had dismissed me one evening with a smoking plum-cake, fresh from the oven. In my way to school (it was over London bridge) a grey-headed old beggar saluted me (I have no doubt at this time of day that he was a **counterfeit**). I had no pence to console him with, and in the vanity of self-denial, and **the very coxcombr**y of charity, school-boy-like, I made him a present of -- the whole cake! I walked on a little, **buoyed up**, as one is on such occasions, with a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction; but before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned, and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go and give her good gift away to a stranger, that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I -- I myself, and not another -- would eat her nice cake -- and what should I say to her the next time I saw her -- how naughty I was to part with her pretty present -- and the odour of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven, and how disappointed she would feel that I had never had a bit of it in my mouth at last -- and I blamed my **impertinent** spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness, and above all I wished never to see the face again of that **insidious**, good-for-nothing, old grey **impostor**.
- 21) Our ancestors were **nice** in their method of sacrificing these tender victims. We read of pigs whipt to death with something of a shock, as we hear of any other **obsolete** custom. **The age of discipline is gone by**, or it would be curious to inquire (in a **philosophical light merely**) what effect this process might have towards **intenerating** and **dulcifying** a substance, naturally so mild and **dulcet** as the flesh of young pigs. It looks like **refining a violet**. Yet we should be cautious while we condemn the inhumanity, how we **censure** the wisdom of the practice. It might impart a **gusto**.

- 22) I remember an **hypothesis**, argued upon by the young students, when I was at **St. Omer's**, and maintained with much learning and pleasantry on both sides, "Whether, supposing that the flavour of a pig who obtained his death by whipping (*per flagellationem extremam*) superadded a pleasure upon the palate of a man more intense than any possible suffering we can conceive in the animal, is man justified in using that method of putting the animal to death?" **I forget the decision.**
- 23) His sauce should be considered. Decidedly, a few bread crumbs, done up with his liver and brains, and a **dash** of mild sage. But, banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole onion tribe. **Barbecue** your whole hogs **to your palate**, steep them in **shallots**, stuff them out with **plantations of the rank and guilty garlic**; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are -- but consider, he is a **weakling** -- a flower.

24.3.2 Glossary

my friend M.:	the reference is to Thomas Manning (1774-1840), eastern traveller and linguist. In 1799 Charles Lamb visited Cambridge, and there made the important acquaintance of Mr. Thomas Manning, then a mathematical tutor in the university.
Confucius:	the famous Chinese sage and moralist of sixth century B.C.
Mundane Mutations:	title of a book invented by Lamb.
Cho-fang:	another term invented by Lamb.
the elder brother:	the older custom of the two.
mast:	fruits of the beech, oak, chestnuts and other forest trees used as food for pigs.
lubberly:	awkward, clumsy.
youngsters:	youngsters.
a sorry antediluvian make-shift:	a poor, prehistoric, substitute for a building.
litter of new-farrowed pigs:	A 'litter' is a brood of young ones. To 'farrow,' to bring forth young, is only used of swine.
consternation:	surprise and fear.
tenement:	cheap dwelling place.
assailed:	attacked violently.

fire-brand:	incendiary, troublemaker.
premonitory moistening:	he was forewarned of what was coming by his mouth beginning to water because of the delicious odour of the burnt pigs.
nether:	lower.
crackling:	the crisp, outer skin of roast pork.
rafters:	the sloping beams forming the framework of a roof.
retributory cudgel:	a heavy stick or club the father brought to beat his son with for starting a fire.
lower regions:	the stomach.
callous:	hardened; unfeeling.
lay on:	deal blows with vigour.
graceless whelp:	mischievous young cub.
devouring:	eating hungrily or greedily.
burnt me down:	ruined me by burning down.
be hanged to you:	confound you.
cramming:	stuffing himself.
enjoined:	commanded.
abominable:	causing hatred and disgust.
sow farrowed:	the female pig gave birth to piglets.
chastising:	punishing severely.
inconsiderable assize town:	a small town in the countryside.
obnoxious:	nasty.
charge:	the address of a judge to a jury before they proceed to give their verdict, explaining the evidence against the accused.
winked at:	shut his eyes to, connived at.
privily:	privately or secretly.
built slighter and slighter:	built their houses of more and more flimsy materials.

Locke:	the English philosopher and thinker, John Locke (1632-1704).
Gridiron:	framework of metal bars used for roasting meat or fish over a fire.
<i>mundus edibilis:</i>	world of eatables (Latin).
<i>princeps obsoniorum:</i>	the chief of dainties (Latin).
porkers:	colloquial for pigs.
between pig and pork:	too large and coarse to be sent up as 'roast pig'; not fully grown enough to be treated as pork.
hobbydehoys:	word used to denote that awkward, self-conscious stage of youth between boyhood and early manhood.
under a moon old:	less than a month old.
guiltless as yet of the sty:	unsullied by the filth of the pig-sty.
<i>amor immunditiae:</i>	love of filthiness (Latin).
<i>praeludium:</i>	prelude (Latin).
seethed:	boiled.
exterior tegument:	the outer skin, which, when roasted, becomes crackling.
coy, brittle resistance:	the resistance offered to the teeth by the hard but easily broken crackling.
the adhesive oleaginous:	the sticky, oily, indescribable sweetness.
cropped in the bud:	taken in the shoot, like a flower picked before it blossoms or a tender leaf not yet unfolded.
the cream and quintessence:	the concentrated essence.
animal manna:	heavenly food, consisting of flesh, not grain.
Ambrosian:	heavenly. According to Greek mythology, ambrosia is the food of the gods.
radiant jellies:	shooting stars. The heat of the fire causes the eyes of the pig to melt and drop out, like bright jellies or meteors.
shooting stars:	meteors.

indocility:	unwilling to be guided.
glutton:	a person who eats too much.
sloven:	a lazy fellow.
filthy conversation:	filthy behaviour.
odoriferous:	fragrant, sweet smelling.
bolthead:	to swallow hastily.
sepulchre:	tomb.
sapors:	flavours.
excoriate:	pricks.
stoppeth at the palate:	does not go beyond satisfying the taste; not substantial enough to be treated as food.
barter:	exchange.
batten:	grow fat on.
neighbours' fare:	food for good neighbours.
absents:	absent friends.
villatic fowl:	common or rural poultry.
upon the tongue of my friend:	to enjoy the taste by thinking my friend is enjoying it.
like Lear, "give everything":	like King Lear, in Shakespeare's play, who said to his daughters: "I gave you all."
make my stand upon:	firmly draw the line at.
extra-domiciliate:	an outside dwelling house (Latin).
predestined:	fore-ordained, fated to happen.
counterfeit:	made or done in imitation of another thing in order to deceive; fake.
the very coxcombry:	conceited affectation or pretension.
buoyed up:	feeling light-hearted and happy.
impertinent:	irrelevant, out of place.
insidious:	causing harm secretly; wicked.

impostor:	person pretending to be somebody he is not.
nice:	particular.
obsolete:	out of date.
the age of discipline is gone by:	the age when men believed in the discipline of the rod has passed.
in a philosophical light merely:	a question of purely philosophical interest, not with any view to practical experiment.
intenerating and dulcifying:	softening and sweetening.
dulcet:	sweet, pleasing.
refining a violet:	improving upon something already exquisite.
censure:	criticize unfavourably.
a gusto:	additional relish or flavour.
hypothesis:	idea put forward as a starting point for reasoning or explanation.
St. Omer's:	a Jesuit college in France, where many English and Irish Roman Catholics used to be educated more than a century ago.
<i>per flagellationem extremam:</i>	by whipping to death (Latin).
I forget the decision:	He will not say whether he thinks such treatment is justifiable or not. The whole of this invented incident is only a roundabout way of humorously suggesting that perhaps our ancestors, from a culinary point of view, were right.
a dash:	a small quantity.
barbecue:	roast whole.
to your palate:	to suit your taste.
shallots:	a kind of small size onion.
plantations:	huge quantities.
the rank and guilty garlic:	the coarse and pernicious garlic.
a weakling:	a frail creature.

24.4 THEME

Lamb begins the essay with a humorous anecdote which his friend Thomas Manning seems to have shared with him. The anecdote reveals how the practice of roasting pigs began in primitive times with an accidental event in a Chinese village. After providing an extremely humorous account of the event, Lamb proceeds to describe with intense feeling his unusual passion for a roasted pig and says that though he would like to share all good things of life with his friends, he would never like to part with a roast pig even out of utmost compulsions of generosity.

You are already familiar with the essay. Given below are a few questions based on it. You may answer them and then read the answers provided by us.

- 1) Write in your own words the events narrated in the anecdote that leads Lamb to his dissertation on the origin of the practice of roasting pigs.

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Lamb’s story explains how one day a mischievous young child in a Chinese village accidentally set fire to a house that had a fine litter of pigs inside. After the fire, the boy felt an appetizing flavour coming from the burnt pigs. On tasting the crackling he found it delicious. His father returned at that very time and was shocked to see his son eating the flesh of burnt pigs. But on being urged by his son, the father too tasted the burnt flesh and discovered to his utter surprise its superior taste. For a while the father and the son kept the whole incident a closely guarded secret. But, since they allowed their cottage to be burnt quite frequently, the secret became known to the villagers who too were attracted by the aroma of succulent roast pork. Nobody had smelt anything like that before because, in that particular village, it had never been a custom to cook food. Even the jury and the judge found the taste of the burnt pigs irresistible. And so, from that time, the art of roasting was discovered. However, there was a problem. From then on, every time the villagers wanted roast pork for dinner, they went and burned their houses down!

- 2) Narrate in your own words the anecdote pertaining to Lamb’s early life.

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Lamb recounts how when he was a little boy at school, his good old aunt gave him a delicious plum-cake as a present at the end of a holiday. On his way to school (over London Bridge) a grey-headed old beggar saluted him and begged him for some alms. Since he had no penny to console the beggar with, Lamb made him a present of the whole cake and felt instantly elated at his act of charity. But by the time Lamb reached the end of the bridge, he reflected upon the whole event and regretted his action. He felt that his generosity in giving away the whole cake to a total stranger was an act of ingratitude to his aunt.

- 3) How is the above anecdote related to his love for the roast pig?
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Lamb wants to emphasize his love for the roasted pig by stating that though he is generous enough to share with his friends all the good things of life, he would not under any circumstances ever desire to share with them this very delicacy. He may have given away the whole cake to please a beggar, but he wouldn't like to part with a roast pig for anything in the world.

- 4) Do you notice any sign of cruelty when Lamb is describing his passion for the roast pig?
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In waxing eloquent over his love for the roast pig, Lamb makes statements that seem to show signs of callousness towards the fate of the pigs. He enjoys the sight of the pig being roasted wherein the beautiful eyes of a pig melt and drop into the fire. Similarly, signs of cruelty can also be seen when he approves of a pig being whipped to death before being cooked.

- 5) The story of the origin of roasted pigs belongs to primitive times. But Lamb makes references to several elements in the narrative which may be called characteristically modern. Can you identify such elements?
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Lamb refers to elements like a judge, a jury and a regular trial which are essentially not a part of a primitive scene. Even the statement, "The insurance offices one and all shut up shop" shows how Lamb places a primitive incident in the context of contemporary times.

24.5 HUMOUR

Avoiding public, philosophical and didactic topics, Lamb dwelt imaginatively in the historical past, or in that of his own memories and experiences, to create exquisitely beautiful essays that are a perfect blend of humour and pathos. A strong undercurrent of his great misfortunes and pity runs through most of his essays and it is perhaps rightly believed that he hastened to laugh at everything for fear of being obliged to weep. His subject matter is always intimately related to himself. He projected in his highly personalized essays the pretty, the humorous, the pathetic in the life and incidents around him. Yet, Lamb's "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" is an exceptionally brilliant piece of prose where you may not find any trace of personal agony or pain. It is an essay where boisterous humour dominates the narrative from beginning to the end. This essay reveals to you the peculiar flavour of his humour.

One of the devices that Lamb uses to provoke laughter in this essay is exaggeration. He succeeds in exciting laughter by exaggerating the sheer absurdities in a particular situation. When Ho-ti discovers his son Bo-bo eating the roast pigs, he starts raining blows as thick as hail-stones on his errant son, which Bo-bo heeded not "any more than if they had been flies." Enjoying the tickling pleasure of tasting the crackling, Bo-bo remains unmindful of the beatings and says, "O father, the pig, the pig, do come and taste how nice the burnt pig eats." And even while offering his father the dainty meal, Bo-bo decides to keep the choice parts for his own self. Lamb's description of the scene is hilarious indeed: "Bo-bo, whose scent was wonderfully sharpened since morning, soon raked out another pig, and fairly rending it asunder, thrust the lesser half by main force into the fists of Ho-ti, still shouting out 'Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig, father, only taste -- O Lord,' -- with such-like barbarous ejaculations, cramming all the while as if he would choke."

Exaggeration is again employed by Lamb to create delightful humour when he describes how the judge and the jury respond to the crime of eating meat that was not raw. The jury fortunately had their fingers burned in the same way and tried Bo-bo's method of cooling them. And Bo-bo is promptly acquitted. The description related to the ensuing event which combines mock seriousness and gravity is humorous indeed. Lamb proceeds gravely:

"The judge, who was a shrewd fellow, winked at the manifest iniquity of the decision, and when the court was dismissed, went privily and bought up all the pigs that could be had for love or money. In a few days his lordship's town house was observed to be on fire. The thing took wing, and now there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction. Fuel and pigs grew enormously dear all over the district. The insurance offices one and all shut up shop. People built slighter and

slighter every day, until it was feared that the very science of architecture would in no long time be lost to the world.”

There is also abundant humour in the manner in which Lamb describes how “a sage arose, like our Locke, who made a discovery that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might be cooked (*burnt* as they called it) without the necessity of consuming a whole house to dress it.” The situation is humorous again when Lamb addresses the matter of his own liking for the roast pig and describes with elaborate care the process of roasting the pig and how meekly the roasted creature lies on the dinner table. Lamb almost grows ecstatic in his narration while describing his preference for the delicacy.

What is noteworthy in these instances of Lamb’s humour is the lightness of tone which never borders on malice or cynicism. He is capable of making fun of himself as well as of others but his tone is always without spite. He highlights the incongruous by describing, in a very involved manner, the pleasant nonsense and gross absurdities that are an integral part of human life. In his narrative you can see how he explores and exploits all the elements in a situation that can make an event humorous and interesting. His close-knit, subtle organization, his self-revealing observations on life, and his harmonious blend of reality and fantasy, in evoking both humour and pathos, combine to make him one of the great masters of the English essay.

24.6 PROSE STYLE

Style may be defined as the way in which the writer uses the resources of language to achieve his purpose. The effectiveness of a style is to be judged in how well it is adapted to implementing the writer’s point of view which not only controls the content of what he writes but also the style in which he writes. So we shall study in this section the various devices that Lamb uses to relate the content to his mode of expression and technique.

Charles Lamb frequently developed his essays according to associational patterns. The sequence of associations in “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” furnishes remarkable insight into the author’s personality. Both anecdotes in “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig”—one related to the events narrated in the—imaginary Chinese manuscript he refers to, and the other concerning his childhood experience of having to part with the cake which his aunt gifted to him—serve as appropriate illustrations of the point he is trying to make. These anecdotes based on hearsay or personal experiences not only heighten the effect of the essay but also reveal to us the various dimensions of Lamb’s mind and the unique charm of his personality. His ability to enthusiastically relate universal interests to personal traits lends grace and charm to his narratives and gives his style a fascination of its own.

One of the ingredients of Lamb’s style is iteration or repetition. Separated by dashes, the phrases help in conveying the cumulative effect of impressions to the reader. In this essay Lamb uses a series of phrases to emphasize his ecstatic love for the roast pig. He writes: “There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, crackling, as it is well called -- the very teeth are invited to their share of the

pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance -- with the adhesive oleaginous -- O call it not fat -- but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it -- the tender blossoming of fat -- fat cropped in the bud -- taken in the shoot -- in the first innocence -- the cream and quintessence of the child-pig's yet pure food -- the lean, no lean, but a kind of animal manna -- or, rather, fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result, or common substance.”

Lamb's style is sometimes perverse, outrageously overstuffed with archaic and pedantic words and phrases. In “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” expressions like “the adhesive oleaginous,” “villatic fowl,” “intenerating and dulcifying,” etc. do sound tedious at times but they do not, in any way, hinder the otherwise smooth flow evident in the narration. Likewise, this essay also abounds in the use of Latin expressions. In paras 10 and 11 he uses Latin expressions like *mundus edibilis*, *princeps obsoniorum*, *bamor immunditiae*, *praeludium* etc. in quick succession. But, here again, the progression of thought is not very much obstructed since it is not altogether difficult for a reader to understand the meaning of such Latin phrases from the context of the passages in question. The scholarly words and phrases are used in the mock heroic mode. Such an elevated diction is suited to epic poetry, to describe great events. When he uses it to describe trivial incidents, it is a source of humour.

A study of Lamb's style reveals his fondness for the styles adopted by various Elizabethan writers like Sir Thomas Browne, Spenser, Burton, Fuller and Izaak Walton. Lamb was undoubtedly fond of Elizabethan poets and playwrights and there are many points in which Lamb imitates these writers. But that does not mean that Lamb's style lacks originality. He succeeded in endowing his own thoughts with the strong imprint of his personality to give to his writings a strong dramatic quality not to be found in any of the writers mentioned above. Like a true Romantic, Lamb allows the spontaneous overflow of his powerful individual feelings and emotions to ignore the considerations of traditional and accepted norms of style and technique.

Check Your Progress-II

- a) Give examples of similes, one each from paragraphs 1 and 21.
- b) Give an example of iteration (that is not mentioned in the discussion above) from the essay.
- c) Identify from paragraph 1 of the essay three words or phrases that sound archaic or pedantic.
- d) Give an example of conversational style used by Lamb in the essay.

24.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have:

- examined the essay “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” in the light of the distinctive features of Lamb's style and personality;

- observed and identified the striking traits of Lamb's humour that go on to make this essay so hilariously entertaining;
- become aware of the various literary devices that Lamb uses in this essay; and
- been able to relate features of his style to his personality and to the writers of the Elizabethan period.

24.8 SUGGESTED READING

To get a more comprehensive idea of the content and style of Lamb's writings, you may read the following essays from the *Essays of Elia*, a book that you may find in most book shops and libraries:

A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People
Dream Children: A Reverie
Imperfect Sympathies
The Superannuated Man
The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers
Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago
The Old and the New Schoolmaster.

24.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-I

- At the age of seven.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- Charles and Mary Lamb.

Check Your Progress-II

- rain blows ...as thick as hail-stones.
so mild and dulcet as the flesh of young pigs.
- In paragraph 16 Lamb's eloquent praise of the pine-apple provides a striking illustration of iteration: "Pine-apple is great. She is indeed almost too transcendent -- a delight, if not sinful, yet so like to sinning, that really a tender-conscienced person would do well to pause -- too ravishing for mortal taste, she woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her -- like lovers' kisses, she *biteth*—she is a pleasure bordering on pain from the fierceness and insanity of her relish -- but she stoppeth at the palate -- she meddleth not with the appetite -- and the coarsest hunger might barter her consistently for a mutton chop."
- antediluvian, premonitory moistening, retributory cudgel.

- d) Lamb ends the essay (paragraph 23) in conversational style where he addresses the imaginary cook thus: "But, banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shallots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank and guilty garlic; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are -- but consider, he is a weakling -- a flower."

Charles Lamb:
"A Dissertation upon
Roast Pig"

UNIT 25 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: LETTER TO INDIRA GANDHI - 'THE QUEST OF MAN'

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Letter Writing – A Historical Perspective
- 25.3 Jawaharlal Nehru : A Biographical Note
- 25.4 An Introduction to “The Quest of Man”
 - 25.4.1 Text
 - 25.4.2 Glossary
- 25.5 Theme
- 25.6 Prose Style
- 25.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.8 Suggested Reading
- 25.9 Answers to Exercises

25.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this text, you will be able to

- outline Jawaharlal Nehru’s Life and Works;
- appreciate the distinctive style of his letter-writing;
- understand the essence of man’s quest for knowledge; and
- attempt a letter to a friend on a serious topic of your interest

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will familiarize you with another form of non-fictional prose—the letter. What is a letter? On the personal level, a letter is a spontaneous expression of one’s self and is often called an extension of the self. On the social level, letters hold up a mirror to the age in which they are written. Letters can exude warmth, intimacy, passion and romance, like the letters written by Napoleon Bonaparte to his lady-love Josephine. Or, they can be scurrilous and full of invective like Alexander Pope’s *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, a verse-letter in which each line comes whizzing like a poisoned dart to sink into its target. Letters can also be very informative, being at the same time very direct and informal, like Jawaharlal Nehru’s letter “The Quest of Man” that you are going to study in this unit.

25.2 LETTER WRITING – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Letter writing came to be recognized as a literary form in England during the Renaissance when critics came in touch with the works of Seneca, Cicero and Guevara. Early Renaissance letter writers include the Paston family whose

letters give us considerable insight into the social life of the age. Roger Ascham, another entertaining correspondent, achieved prose that is at once simple and straightforward in his *Two Hundred and Ninety-Five Letters*. Among the letter writers of the seventeenth century, Rachel Lady Russell's letters, that are as authentic an account of the times as the diaries and memoirs of the famous diarists Pepys and Evelyn, helped prepare the way along with diaries and memoirs for the rich blossoming of fiction during the seventeenth century.

The art of letter writing in the 18th century assumed an interesting form. It produced gossipy letters on things in general or political squibs. By means of this light, discursive literature, we have a steady flow of illuminating gossip on the life of the time, highly valuable to the social historian. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, written to her daughter from Italy, are among her best. Her *Turkish Letters* dispelled a good deal of ignorance about the Turkish character; Philip Dormer Stanhapse's literary fame rests upon the letters he wrote to his illegitimate son; Horace Walpole distinguished himself more as a letter writer than as a politician. His letters caught exquisitely the affectation and artificialities of his times. William Cowper, Lord Chesterfield, Gilbert White and Thomas Gray are some more famous letter writers of the 18th century. Many eminent novelists, both English and American, were great letter writers too. The letters of Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Henry James and many others are considered pieces of literature today. Henry James' letters are so delicately worded that Leon Edel calls them "the greatest glories" of literature.

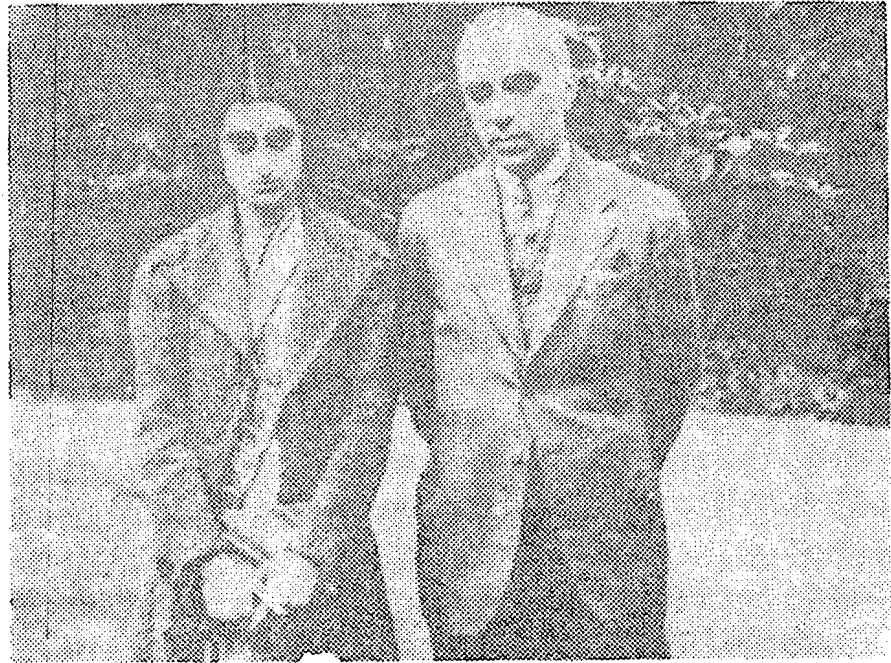
Though letters comprise non-fictional prose, they lend themselves very usefully to the writing of both fiction as well as poetry. Alexander Pope's philosophic poem "Essay On Man," consisting of four epistles, and his satirical verse-letter *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* are good examples of verse-letters. Letter as a form of expression in fiction was explored by Samuel Richardson in his epistolary novels *Clarissa* and *Pamela*. Thereafter, many English fiction writers incorporated letters in their novels to explain a situation or to advance a character. An abundant use of letters has been made by Jane Austen in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

A good public letter is a literary piece of work that explores an issue, idea, impression or interpretation. It has a focused point and has both informative value and aesthetic appeal. Among the eminent Indian letter writers, we have Vivekananda, Swami Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, whose letters not only reveal historical, political and religious thoughts but also provide a commentary on Indian culture and civilization. One such volume of letters is Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* from which "The Quest of Man" has been selected for your study in this unit.

25.3 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU : A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Jawaharlal Nehru was born in 1889 in Allahabad to Motilal Nehru, a highly successful lawyer of Kashmiri lineage. Jawaharlal was educated at home by a host of English governesses and private tutors until he was admitted to Harrow, a public school in England, at the age of sixteen. In 1907, he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, and then pursued the study of Law at the Inner Temple, London. He was called to the Bar in 1912. The same year, he

returned to India and came close to Mahatma Gandhi who had also returned to India as a lawyer, after fighting for political rights and equality for Indians in South Africa. Under Gandhi's magnetic influence, Nehru gave up his western style of living and joined Gandhi in the Civil Disobedience Movement. He remained in the forefront of the Indian Independence Movement for well over three and a half decades and was imprisoned seven times by the British rulers. His rise in Indian politics was meteoric. He was elected Congress President five times and became the first Prime Minister of Independent India, a post he held continuously till his death in 1964.



Nehru was a prolific writer with an enviable command over the English language which he used with the ease and facility of an Englishman. His language became poetic in describing a nature landscape; conversational in his personal letters and jail diaries; forceful, penetrating and occasionally scholastic in his addresses. Some of his major works like *The Discovery of India*, *Glimpses of World History*, *A Bunch of the Old Letters*, and *An Autobiography* are as thought-provoking in terms of their content as they are charming in their style.

Check Your Progress-I

- a. Name three important writers of the 18th century known mainly for their letters.
- b. Give the titles of two books written by Jawaharlal Nehru.
- c. Name two eminent Indians whose letters give an insight into Indian culture and civilization.

25.4 AN INTRODUCTION TO 'THE QUEST OF MAN'

Jawaharlal Nehru:
Letter to Indira
Gandhi – 'The Quest
of Man'

Nehru frequently interacted with his daughter, Indira Priyadarshini, through letters especially when he was serving a prison sentence during the British rule in India. The first set of letters were written in the summer of 1928, when the ten-year-old Indira was in the Himalayan hill station of Mussoorie and Nehru was in the plains. These were published in book form in 1929, with the title *Letters From a Father to his Daughter*, subtitled "Being a brief account of the early days of the world written for children." Nehru points out in his preface to the original edition of *Glimpses of World History*. These early letters were subsequently published in book form and they had a generous reception. The idea of continuing them hovered in my mind. "The result was *Glimpses of World History* published in two volumes, 1934-1935, with the subtitle "Being further letters to his daughter written in prison, and containing a rambling account of history for young people". All the 196 letters here, and his book *The Discovery of India*, were written in prison. The first such letter he wrote her was from the Central Prison in Naini, in 1930. The letter you are about to read was written two years later, in 1932, from Dehra Dun jail.

While in prison, cut off from active life and from his beloved daughter, Nehru decided to make use of the available time to write a brief and simple account of the history of the world. Nehru himself admits that he is not a historian but has attempted to put together facts and ideas he had culled from books. Very often, the facts of history are overrun by his own ideas and philosophic thinking.

"The Quest of Man", the fifty-sixth in the series of letters in *Glimpses of World History* and the first that he wrote from the district jail of Dehra Dun, takes us back to the origins of human civilization that had been preceded by the Earth's story for many thousands of years. The distinctive feature of human civilization is that it owes its existence and perpetuation to the genius of the human mind. It is the eternal curiosity of the human mind to find out and learn more and more about the world that started man on this quest. In this letter, Nehru goes beyond historical dates and facts to focus on man's innate quest to know and understand the world around him.

25.4.1 Text

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU : 'THE QUEST OF MAN'

June 10, 1932

Four days ago I wrote to you from Bareilly Gaol. That very evening I was told to gather up my belongings and to march out of the prison – not to be discharged, but to be transferred to another prison. So I bade good-bye to my companions of the **barrack**, where I had lived for just four months, and I had a last look at the great twenty-four-foot wall under whose sheltering care I had sat for so long, and I marched out to see the outside world again for a while. There were two of us being transferred. They would not take us to Bareilly station lest people might see us, for we have become **pardahnashins**, and may not be seen! Fifty miles out they drove us by car to a little station in the **wilderness**. I felt thankful for this drive. It was delightful to feel the cool night air and to see the phantom trees and men and animals rush by in the semi-darkness, after many months of seclusion.

We were brought to Dehra Dun. Early in the morning we were again taken out of our train, before we had reached the end of our journey, and taken by car, lest **prying** eyes should see us.

And so here I sit in the little gaol of Dehra Dun, and it is better here than at Bareilly. It is not quite so hot, and the temperature does not rise to 112 degrees, as it did in Bareilly. And the walls surrounding us are lower and the trees that overlook them are greener. In the distance I can even see, over our wall, the top of a palm tree, and the sight delights me and makes me think of Ceylon and Malabar. Beyond the trees there lie the mountains, not many miles away, and, **perched** up on top of them, sits Mussoorie. I cannot see the mountains, for the trees hide them, but it is good to be near them and to imagine at night the lights of Mussoorie twinkling in the far distance.

Four years ago – or is it three? – I began writing these **series of letters** to you when you were at Mussoorie. What a lot has happened during these three or four years, and how you have grown! With fits and starts and after long gaps I have continued these letters, mostly from prison. But the more I write the less I like what I write; and a fear comes upon me that these letters may not interest you much, and may even become a burden for you. Why, then, should I continue to write them?

I should have liked to place vivid images of the past before you, one after another, to make you sense how this world of ours has changed, step by step, and developed and progressed, and sometimes apparently gone back; to make you see something of the old civilizations and how they have risen like the tide and then subsided; to make you realize how the river of history has run on from age to age, continuously, interminably, with its **eddies** and **whirlpools** and **backwaters**, and still rushes on to an unknown sea. I should have liked to take you on man's **trail** and follow it up from the early beginnings, when he was hardly a man, to to-day, when he prides himself so much, rather vainly and foolishly, on his great civilization. We did begin that way, you will remember, in the Mussoorie days, when we talked of the discovery of fire and of agriculture, and the settling down in towns, and the division of labour. But the farther we have advanced, the more we have got mixed up with empires and the like, and often we have lost sight of that trail. We have just skimmed over the surface of history. I have placed the **skeleton** of old happenings before you and I have wished that I had the power to cover it with flesh and blood, to make it living and vital for you.

But I am afraid I have not got that power, and you must rely upon your imagination to work the miracle. Why, then, should I write, when you can read about past history in many good books? Yet, through my doubts I have continued writing, and I suppose I shall still continue. I remember the promise I made to you, and I shall try to fulfil it. But more even than this is the joy that the thought of you gives me when I sit down to write and imagine that you are by me and we are talking to each other.

Of man's trail I have written above, since he emerged stumbling and **slouching** from the jungle. It has been a long trail of many thousands of years. And yet how short a time it is if you compare it to the earth's story and the ages and **aeons** to time before man came! But for us man is naturally more interesting than all the great animals that existed before him; he is interesting

because he brought a new thing with him which the others do not seem to have had. This was mind – curiosity – the desire to find out and learn. So from the earliest days began man’s quest. Observe a little baby, how it looks at the new and wonderful world about it; how it begins to recognize things and people; how it learns. Look at a little girl; if she is a healthy and wide-awake person she will ask so many questions about so many things. Even so, in the morning of history when man was young and the world was new and wonderful, and rather fearsome to him, he must have looked and stared all around him, and asked questions. Who was he to ask except himself? There was no one else to answer. But he had a wonderful little thing – a mind – and with the help of this, slowly and painfully, he went on storing his experiences and learning from them. So from the earliest times until to-day man’s quest has gone on, and he has found out many things, but many still remain, and as he advances on his trail, he discovers vast new tracts stretching out before him, which show to him how far he is still from the end of his quest – if there is such an end.

What has been this quest of man, and whither does he journey? For thousands of years men have tried to answer these questions. Religion and philosophy and science have all considered them, and given many answers. I shall not trouble you with these answers, for the sufficient reason that I do not know most of them. But, in the main, religion has attempted to give a complete and **dogmatic** answer, and has often cared little for the mind, but has sought to enforce obedience to its decisions in various ways. Science gives a doubting and hesitating reply, for it is of the nature of science not to dogmatize, but to experiment and reason and rely on the mind of man. I need hardly tell you that my preferences are all for science and the methods of science.

We may not be able to answer these questions about man’s quest with any assurance, but we can see that the quest itself has taken two lines. Man has looked outside himself as well as inside; he has tried to understand Nature, and he has also tried to understand himself. The quest is really one and the same, for man is part of Nature. “Know thyself”, said the old philosophers of India and Greece; and the *Upanishads* contain the record of the ceaseless and rather wonderful strivings after this knowledge by the old Aryan Indians. The other knowledge of Nature has been the special province of science, and our modern world is witness to the great progress made therein. Science, indeed, is spreading out its wings even farther now, and taking charge of both lines of this quest and co-ordinating them. It is looking up with confidence to the most distant stars, and it tells us also of the wonderful little things in continuous motion – the **electrons** and **protons** – of which all matter consists.

The mind of man has carried man a long way in his voyage of discovery. As he has learnt to understand Nature more he has **utilized** it and **harnessed** it to his own advantage, and thus he has won more power. But unhappily he has not always known how to use this new power, and he has often misused it. Science itself has been used by him chiefly to supply him with terrible weapons to kill his brother and destroy the very civilization that he has built up with so much labour.

25.4.2 Glossary

quest: the act of seeking or searching; an undertaking with the purpose of achieving or finding some definite object.

barrack:	A group of large buildings for soldiers to live in (here for the prisoners to be confined).
purdahnashins:	an Urdu word meaning people who live behind the veil.
wilderness:	an uninhabited place.
phantom:	ghost; any imagined thing.
prying:	inquiring with too much curiosity into other people's affairs.
perch:	to sit on something high and narrow.
series of letters:	he is referring to <i>Letters from a Father to his Daughter</i> .
eddy (eddies-plural):	a circular movement of water, air or dust.
whirlpools:	a place in a river or the sea where there are strong currents moving in circles.
backwaters:	a part of a river not reached by the current, where the water does not flow.
trail:	path to be followed for a particular purpose.
skeleton:	framework.
slouch:	to stand or sit in a lazy way, often not upright.
aeons:	a very long period; many thousands or millions of years.
dogmatic:	insisting that one's beliefs are right and that others should accept them.
electrons:	tiny pieces of matter with a negative electric charge present in all atoms.
protons:	tiny pieces of matter with a positive electric charge present in all atoms.
utilize:	to use for a practical purpose.
harness:	to control and use the force or strength of something to produce power or to achieve something.

25.5 THEME

The subject matter of this letter is philosophical but it has been rendered in a simple and elegant style. The writer makes it easy for the reader (here he had a

fourteen-year-old girl in mind) to understand a serious subject matter relating to human quest for knowledge. The paragraphs are linked to make the letter read like a story about human civilization.

Answer the following questions in your own words, in the space provided for the purpose, to comprehend the subject matter of the letter. Read the answers given by us only after you have written yours.

- 1) Summarise paragraphs 1-3

Paragraphs 1 to 3 describe the author's current place of imprisonment and the sense of joy he experiences on being close to the mountains and the greenery surrounding his prison. There is no bitterness on being confined to a solitary stay in a prison. On the contrary, the writer has the rare ability to find joy even in the cool night air and trees and mountains that he can view at a far off distance.

- 2) Is the author sceptical about the worth of his writings? Give a reasoned answer.

Paragraph 4 expresses the author's scepticism as to the worth and value of his writings. It is however, our good fortune that despite his scepticism he continued to write these letters that are a delight to read even today, after a long gap of over seventy years.

In paragraphs 5 and 6 the writer attempts to recreate the history of the world from pre-historic times to modern days. Nehru says that he started with the narration about discovery of fire and agriculture and extended his writings to cover facts of history about empires and different civilizations. He wonders whether midway he had lost sight of the biggest human challenge that sought to unravel the mystery of the universe. He has written about civilisations that have come and gone, but somewhere along the line he had missed to delve upon the human quest to understand the world that man journeys through.

Paragraph 7 traces the journey of man in his long quest to know about his world. It is his mind which is man's greatest asset that helps him in his quest. Once Nehru starts writing about the quest of man, his scepticism fades away. He feels close to his daughter when he writes, as if they were sitting together and talking.

- 3) What has helped man in his quest to know more about his world?

Paragraphs 8-10 describe the twin approaches to understand the world—through religion and through science. Nehru feels that religion seeks to impose its own views that are based on faith and spiritual beliefs while science seeks answers through experiment and reason. There cannot be any single answer to what man is seeking, as his quest has taken two distinct directions – one to understand himself and the other to understand Nature. Religion looks to the inner nature of man while science to the outer nature. Both are important. But Nehru prefers the scientific approach, because it is rational and open minded, not dogmatic like religion. However, man is misusing science instead of harnessing its power, almost to the point of destroying the very civilization that he has built up.

25.6 PROSE STYLE

This letter has been selected for your study as it shows what makes a letter interesting. As you read the text, you will recognize its direct and simple style that makes you as much an addressee as Indira to whom it was first addressed. As Nehru himself says, he felt the presence of his daughter by his side when he wrote his letters as though they were talking to each other. Likewise, it is as though the reader and the writer are in conversation. The writer seems to engage his reader in direct talk and, therefore, the letter uses the direct form of address. In short, the prose style in all his letters is personal, subjective, conversational and informal. Even though Nehru's letters, to begin with, were personal and meant only for his daughter, they form a well-knit series of world history for every reader to savour.

Check Your Progress-II

- a. From which prison was Nehru transferred to the prison at Dehra Dun?
- b. Pick up a sentence from the letter that shows Nehru's preference for science and its methods.
- c. Mention three features of Nehru's prose style in the letter 'The Quest of Man'.

25.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have:

- learnt something about Jawaharlal Nehru's life and writings;
- analysed one of his letters to his daughter in terms of its background, theme and prose style; and
- picked up some idea about how a letter on a complex topic like the quest of man, can be rendered in a fluent and easy style.

25.8 SUGGESTED READING

Jawaharlal Nehru: *Glimpses of World History; An Autobiography; Letters from a Father to his Daughter.*

C.D. Narasimhaiah: *Jawaharlal Nehru: The Statesman as Writer*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001.

H.G. Wells: *Outline of History*

**Jawaharlal Nehru:
Letter to Indira
Gandhi – ‘The Quest
of Man’**

25.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-I

- a. Lady Montagu, Philip Stanhope and Horace Walpole.
- b. *Glimpses of World History. An Autobiography.*
- c. Swami Sri Vivekananda, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Check Your Progress-II

- a. Bareilly
- b. Para 8: “I need hardly tell you that my preferences are all for science and the methods of science.”
- c. Simple, direct, conversational.

UNIT 26 BILL AITKEN: *TRAVELS BY A LESSER LINE* CHAPTERS - 'LAST RESORT IN THE SOUTH' AND "THE POETIC DICTION OF STEAM"

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Travelogues – A Historical Perspective
- 26.3 Bill Aitken: A Biographical Note
- 26.4 A Background to *Travels by a Lesser Line*
 - 26.4.1 Text
 - 26.4.2 Glossary
- 26.5 Theme – Understanding the Text
- 26.6 Prose Style
- 26.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.8 Suggested Reading
- 26.9 Answers to Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective is to:

- appreciate a travelogue as a literary form;
- distinguish the prose style of a travelogue vis-à-vis other prose forms.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous four units (22-25), you have seen the distinctive prose styles used in writing an essay either on a serious or a light topic and the characteristic style –direct and informal –used in writing letters. In this unit we have selected the final two chapters from Bill Aitken's travelogue *Travels by a Lesser Line*.

What is a travelogue? It is a piece of writing about travel; it can also be a book or a film or a radio broadcast on travel. It is written in a style that is both interesting and informative. After reading excerpts from Aitken's travelogue, we will analyse their content and prose style to see what makes his travelogue a visual treat while, at the same time, making it informative and aesthetically pleasing.

26.2 TRAVELOGUES – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The passion for knowledge about other countries has always driven men to embark upon land travels and sea-voyages to distant lands, the accounts of which have been left by them for posterity. Hence, the history of travelogues is as old as the history of man's travels. Going far back in time, when the

world was not much known, there were travellers like Al-Beruni, Fahien, Hiuen Tsang and others who travelled to lands in the East (Fahien visited India from 399 to 411 B.C. and Hiuen Tasang from 627 to 645 B.C.) and the West and left rich accounts of their travels in books that have since served as important documents about the life, culture and history of the places they visited.

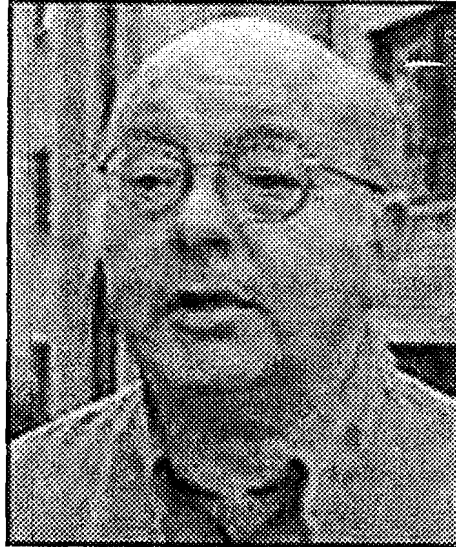
There have been almost as many written accounts of travel down the ages, as there have been travellers. Beginning with Renaissance England, a large number of Elizabethan adventurers, traders, settlers, explorers and even exploiters, influenced by Columbus' voyages in the fifteenth century, set sail to discover new lands. Innumerable narratives of travel, which we now term as travelogues, were printed during the times, of which some popular ones are: Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana*, Silvester Jourdain's *A Discovery of the Bermudas*; Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages*; and *History of Travel* by Richard Eden, that traced travels from the earliest times to the sixteenth century. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England saw the advent of diarists, letter-writers, memoir-writers and historians rather than the flourishing of travel writers. The Victorian age, however, saw a spurt in globe-trotting. Sir Richard Francis Burton, George Henry Borrow, Richard Jefferies and Laurence Oliphant were some eminent writers of nineteenth century England who were also extensive travellers. Burton's personal narrative of travel in Arabia, contained in his book *Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Mecca* (1885-56) exhibits his keen scholarly interest; Borrow's travel experiences with the gipsies, exuding an intimate charm, found expression in his *Lavengro* (1851); Jefferies' travelogue *Wild Life in a Southern Country* and Oliphant's *Narrative of a Mission to China and Japan* (1857-1859) enjoyed immense popularity. The list would be incomplete if mention were not made of David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels in South Africa* (1857) and R.L. Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey* (1879) and his canoe journey in Belgium entitled *An Island Voyage* (1878), that are still read with relish. Travel accounts are non-fictional prose but, like letters, have found their way into fiction. We have a large number of novelists – both English and American – whose novels are a mix of travel and fiction. For instance, Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is a fictionalized account of Alexander Selkirk's real-life adventures and travels; Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726-27) is also a pseudo-realistic narrative that follows the voyages of Gulliver; Herman Melville, the great American writer, has given us *Omoo* (1847), and the popular classic *Typee* (1846), his very popular *Moby-Dick, or, the Whale* (1851) that reads more like a travelogue than a novel.

India has always attracted travellers, right from Fahien and Hiuen Tsang, as mentioned earlier, to the nineteenth and early twentieth century British travellers like Moorcraft, Harcourt, Francis young husband and Penelope Chetwood whose travelogues give us rich accounts of their treks across the Himalayas or into the interiors of India. Present day writers like V.S. Naipaul, Bill Aitken and some others have opened up India to the outside world in some of their books. Naipaul, whose Indian grandparents migrated to the West Indies, has recounted his travels to India in *An Area of Darkness* (1964), and *India A Wounded Civilization* (1977). Anees Jung's book *Unveiling India* is an account of travel mixed with interviews of Indian women from different walks of life. Vikram Seth won a literary prize for his travelogue *From Heaven Lake* (1986) describing his travels from Nanjing to Nepal. Amitav Ghosh whose *In an Antique Land* (1972) is a mix of novel and travelogue

recounting his travel in Egypt, has tried his hand at travel writing in *Dancing in Cambodia*, *At Large in Burma*.

Parts of a travelogue selected for your study in this Block come from the pen of Bill Aitken, and describe his travels in India.

26.3 BILL AITKEN: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Bill Aitken was born in Scotland in 1934; he became a naturalized Indian by choice in 1972. He has written a number of books about India, capturing its Himalayan majesty, its scenic beauty and its spiritual core. He studied Comparative Religion at Leeds University in England and he moved to India in 1959. He lived in Himalayan ashrams for some time and undertook many trips all over India, extending from Nanda Devi, a Himalayan peak in the North to Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip in the South. Most of his excursions were either on an old motorbike or by the steam railway. It was not only the Indian scenic beauty that fascinated him, he was also attracted by the steam engine that helped him cover the whole of India from the North to the South, from the East to the West.

Bill Aitken has several books to his credit. Among them are:

1. *Seven Sacred Rivers* (1992)
2. *Exploring Indian Railways* (1994)
3. *The Nanda Devi Affair* (1994)
4. *Divining the Deccan: A Motorbike to the Heart of India*(1999)
5. *Branch Line to Eternity* (2001)
6. *Footloose in the Himalaya* (2003)
7. *Sri Satya Sai Baba—A Life* (2004)

Check Your Progress-I

- a. Define a travelogue.
- b. Name a Chinese traveller who came to India.
- c. Mention a biography from Aitken's books listed in 26.3.

These two chapters form the concluding part of Aitken's book *Travels by a Lesser Line* first published in 1993. These are the three gauges in the Indian Railways: Broad gauge (1.676 metre), metre gauge (1 metre in width) and narrow gauge (where the width of the rail track is 0.762 or 0.610 metre). 'Lesser Line' is a reference to metre gauge and the book describes the travel undertaken by the author along the metre gauge line from Ledo, the easternmost station in Assam to Bhuj, the westernmost station in Gujarat and again from Fazilka in Punjab to Kanyakumari in Tamilnadu. The journey took him through fourteen states and this was his attempt to find an answer to the transport riddle: "Can one travel all the way by one gauge?" If you are aware of India's size and diversity, such a unified single metric route will astonish you. This travel seems to be a railway marathon covering all the four corners of India and ends with his visit to Tiruchendur, the last resort in the south. The author has the gift of perception, a liberal and sympathetic understanding of the cultural divide between the North and the South and a gentle sense of humour that accommodates the **idiosyncrasies** of different people in different parts of India.

26.4.1 Text

Last Resort in the South

Tiruchendur is a tiny temple town that occupies the coast between Kanyakumari and Rameshwaram. Its white *gopuram* is almost on the shore. What looks like the giant hour-hand of a clock, affixed in neon lights, is actually the symbol of the lance with which Lord Murugan **vanquished** a particularly troublesome *asura*. Unusually this tower has been built to the west of the sprawling temple. Surrounded by the blue sea and waving palms, a more delightful end to one's metre gauge journey from the northern **arid** zone around Fazilka could not be imagined.

The small station has recently been renovated and is **immaculate** in appearance and operation. A notice threatens to fine anyone Rs. 16 who enters without a platform ticket, so quickly I buy one to photograph the train about to leave. This is the "732 Tirunelveli Passenger" **hailed by a diesel**. Though I can jump aboard and return by the "733 Down", the blue of the sea is too inviting and instead I settle for some conversation with the station master, who apparently has been alerted of my coming. When in Delhi, promises of flashed messages to ease my way had seemed a kind gesture by the Railway Information Officer, but to my pleasant surprise the friendliness with which I was met along the way was largely due to the promises kept in Delhi.

To make my day a steam engine lay smoking idly in the siding, waiting to haul the last of the three daily Passengers. For the end of the line, everything was perfect. The station building had been remodelled in the temple style, but tastefully so, and the **miniscule** reservation office must be the only one in the whole of India where the green discs are permanently on display. In fact you wonder how long this branch line can compete with the faster and similarly priced buses. With Tuticorin less than 40 km away, it is understandable that a famous port town can use a railway link. A friend had advised me to give Tuticorin a miss since it held little of railway or **aesthetic** interest.

The bus is much more direct than the train for the Rameshwaram-Tiruchendur section, but you pay for the convenience by becoming part of a hectic running battle between North and South. A party of 14 Hindi speakers got on a Rameshwaram-bound bus and from the word go there was **bickering** between them and the Tamil running staff. There were some rain clouds about and the travellers were worried about their luggage on the roof getting wet. The bus crew could not provide a tarpaulin and this began the **acrimony**. "If it rains, you can report me", said the conductor helpfully, implying that the clouds would go away – which they did. Next there were complaints of having to spend 25 paise every time the passengers from the free-peeing North went to spend a penny in the bus stations. Another grouse was that the driver was a great **gobber**, who marked each furlong with the discharge of spit. At speed this meant some of the passengers shared the fall-out.

The wayside halts for refreshments were spotlessly clean but almost blew customers away from their counters with the volume of Tamil rock music belted out. Another source of friction lay in the strict interpretation of 5 minutes by the bus crew. The timeless North assumed it meant anything up to 15. When you consider that most of the long-distance passengers between Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari are pilgrims from the North it means this verbal warfare occurs daily on the Tamil Nadu government buses. So much for the claims of cosy **cultural integration** that the temple at Rameshwaram puts out.

The **resilience** of Hindu culture is reflected in the casteless appeal of the six Murugan temples, of which Palani is considered third in importance. Tiruchendur is the second in the list and referred to as "**The Abode of Fulfilment**" – a very apt description of my feelings at completing the extended and involved metric circuit. It is **besieged** by busloads of pilgrims who sport on the beach as the rust-coloured breakers add another curious effect of this place with a cave valued for its "medicinal" properties. (Shankaracharya was cured here.) Many are the black-clad, bare-bodied Ayappa pilgrims bound for the Sabarimala temple in the Kerala hills. That too is a casteless attraction and it could well be the orthodox priests, seeing where the pickings are to be had, will decide to throw open their temples. Tiruchendur for all practical purposes seems a spiritual holiday resort. Devotees rent cottages overlooking the sea and though they may not **have a whale of a time** at least they upstage the much richer tourist clientele at the Hotel Tamil Nadu run by the government which is situated further behind. This hotel only had double rooms for 80 rupees, so I inquired at a new lodge nearby and ended up with a much better deal for 40 rupees, overlooking the temple and the sea. One breathed in the tantalizing realization that the **elation** one had felt at the start of one's journey on the majestic expanse of the Brahmaputra was echoed exactly in the furthest pounding of the waves at Tiruchendur, though the **cultural chasm** between the two is enormous. In shrinking the physical poles the metre gauge had performed a kind of **alchemical union** of opposites. I was tickled to recall at the half-way mark of my probings (near Dwarka) the stout **teetotaller** proposition that India's ancient **propitiatory** beer *Somras* was **lugubriously** "non-injurious to health," because the outstanding memory of this **MG quartering** had been my constant **intoxication** at the sheer wonder India still is. Those who declare India to be "poor" announce only their own poverty of acquaintance. But will

they listen to the proving imprint of a lesser track that gave this traveller a unique glimpse of a rare unity; soon to be dismantled.

**Bill Aitken: Travels
by a Lesser Line**

The Poetic Diction of Steam

Fulfilment is not just the satisfaction of seeing a laborious job through but is also felt in the more subtle relief of having performed a financial **tight-rope act** and managed to land on one's feet. My metric path **veered** crazily at times, to take in special likes such as the high ranges of Kerala. Looking back it went like a dream and all the worries about reservations and the **elbowing** through crowds that travel in the North implies, simply did not arise on the metre gauge in the South. It was leisure all the way. Full marks to the Railways for their unfailing efficiency and close sense of duty. This vast network with its million-and-a-half employees pulls together impressively to keep the economy running and the passengers for most of the time from complaining. When I started out from Ledo in furthest Assam, it was to see if it was possible to cover the whole of India by metre gauge. The answer is yes, provided you believe that journeying is as important as arrival.

That way the journey can teach you more than any university can about the diverse wonders of India so few of our political masters have the width of vision to encompass. Their India is nowhere near so remarkable as the real one which can only be viewed without **blinkers**. With its astounding **array** of human types and sublime array of beauty, anyone exposed to the marvel becomes a natural patriot. Whether it's boatmen on the Brahmaputra or toddy-tappers in Telengana, the railway gives you India like nothing else can. It enables you to ride camels in Jaisalmer and **catamarans** in Tiruchendur. Unlike the politicians who pass through in their helicopter you will know the difference between the two! Add the flavour of the metre gauge and you get the extra magic of the classic age of railway travel – the **poetic diction** of steam.

26.4.2 Glossary

vanquish:	to defeat an opponent.
arid:	(of land or a climate) having little or no rain; dry.
immaculate:	perfectly clean and tidy.
hailed by a diesel:	pulled or dragged with force by a diesel engine.
minuscule:	very small; tiny.
aesthetic:	concerned with beauty and the appreciation of beauty.
bickering:	arguing about unimportant things.
acrimony:	angry and bitter feelings or words.
gobber:	spitter.

cultural integration:	different cultures (here the Northern and the Southern cultures) closely linked together.
resilience:	the ability to recover quickly from injury or damage or shock, springing back to original form after being bent or stretched.
the abode of fulfilment:	a place of satisfaction and happiness.
besieged:	surrounded closely.
have a whale of a time:	to enjoy oneself very much; to have a very good time.
elation:	great happiness, excitement.
cultural chasm:	cultural difference.
alchemical union:	mysterious process or change that brings two different things into one.
teetotaler:	one who does not drink alcoholic drinks.
propitiatory:	intended to win the favour of others (especially gods) by a pleasing act.
lugubriously:	sadly; sorrowfully.
MG quartering:	dividing the country into four zones by the MG (metre gauge line).
intoxication:	greatly excited; drunk or under the influence of drugs or alcoholic drinks.
idiosyncrasy:	a person's particular way of thinking, behaving etc that is clearly different from that of others)
tight-rope act:	to proceed in a situation which allows little freedom of action and in which an exact balance must be preserved.
veered:	changed direction or course suddenly.
elbowing:	pushing roughly with the elbows in a specified direction, to make way to move ahead.
blinkers:	leather pieces fixed on a horse's bridle to prevent the horse from seeing sideways; not prepared to see the opinion of others; narrow-minded.
array:	impressive display or series.

catamarans:

a raft of logs tied together; a small boat made of wood, used by fishermen in Tamil Nadu.

Bill Aitken: *Travel by a Lesser Line*

poetic diction:

the style or manner of speaking or the choice and use of words appropriate to poetry.

26.5 THEME – UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

After reading the two extracts, ‘Last Resort in the South’ and ‘The Poetic Diction of Steam’, from Aitken’s travelogue *Travels By A Lesser Line*, you must have noticed the author’s eye for detail, his understanding of the cultural divide between the North and the South, and his fascination for the steam engine. Keeping in mind these three points, answer the following questions before you read the answers provided by us:

- 1) The temple and the railway station have two things in common—beauty and solidity. How does the author picturise the two in his narration?

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The railway station has been remodelled in the temple style. The author adds: “tastefully so” which means that the station architecture has an aesthetic appeal similar to that of the temple. Both are situated close to the shore, surrounded by the blue sea and waving palms.

The temple has a giant lance on its tower looking like the hour-hand of a clock. Aitken graphically describes the lance by comparing it to the hour-hand of a huge clock that one normally sees in a railway station. The lance is a symbol of the mighty lance of Lord Murugan that gives it strength and solidity in addition to being radiant because of the neon lights fixed on it.

Imagine the temple, with a white gopuram, on the seashore surrounded by blue waves and green palms and observe the majestic lance shining from the temple tower. The picture is one of beauty and solidity.

- 2) How does Aitken comment upon the cultural divide between the North and the South? Is he severely critical or is he gentle and sympathetic in his observations?

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Aitken refers to the verbal bickering between the pilgrims from the North and the Tamil staff running the bus services in the Rameshwaram-Tiruchendur section. This is a good example of the difference in perspectives between the two groups. The travellers from the North do not feel the need to be punctual, while the Tamils are strict on punctuality. The Southern people have a far greater sense of hygiene than those from the North. The charge of 25 paise to use the toilets seems an extravagance to the Northern travellers. The flip side of all this is that the Tamil driver does not mind spitting all through the journey much to the consternation of the travellers inside his bus. The constant anxiety displayed by the travellers with regard to their luggage on the uncovered roof of the bus is made light of by the bus crew causing further bickering between the two.

The author is objective. He writes about both the groups in a light-hearted vein and displays no bias for one or the other. In fact these little foibles are more of a human frailty than serious flaws and they add harmless fun to an otherwise tedious travel narration. Only a writer with sympathetic understanding and gentle compassion can have an eye for such details and this is what makes his book a good read.

3) How does the author express his fascination for the steam engine?

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He begins by saying “ To make my day a steam engine lay...”(para 3) Apart from delighting in the architectural beauty of the temple and the station—both in the vicinity of the blue sea – the author says that his day was made richer by the presence of the steam engine in the station. In his concluding chapter “The Poetic Diction of Steam”, he pays a tribute to the steam engine for giving him the ride through fourteen states in a single metre gauge line. It had also been inexpensive in comparison to the fast moving broad gauge express trains whose fares are much higher. In its leisurely pace, with no jostling crowds around, the steam engine chugged its way through different regions of India gave Aitken a glimpse of the vast country. The train travel was almost like a pleasant dream as he could see the beauty of the land, listen to the animated talk of the co-passengers, feel the spiritual quest of the people and sway to the rhythmic motion of the slow moving steam locomotive. The author feels a great sense of repose, almost sublime, similar to repose one experiences in the writing and reading of poetry.

26.6 PROSE STYLE

Bill Aitken writes about the places he had seen when he travelled through the length and breadth of India, using a narrative prose of a rare simplicity and elegance. Every town, every hillside, every stream in different parts of India comes visually alive before our eyes. This is also a splendid use of descriptive prose style. The description is factual and photographic. In the excerpts from his travelogue *Travels by a Lesser Line*, you must have noticed that he has used a simple prose with no ornamentation. His lucid style and an unpretentious use of language gives a photographic edge to his travel account. It will not be an exaggeration to state that he seems to wield a camera more than a pen in his description of the magnificent temple town of Tiruchendur in the southernmost part of India. When it comes to expressing his love for rail travel, especially on the metre gauge, and with a steam engine, he almost goes into a rhapsody, calling it “the poetic diction of steam” – (rhapsody is an ecstatic or unrestrainedly enthusiastic utterance of feeling).

Aitken’s travel account is also marked by humour of the gentle variety. Without being maliciously critical, he describes the passengers from the North, who grumbled about having to pay 25 paise for using a toilet in the bus stations, as “passengers from the free-peeing North”. He also makes gentle fun of the bus driver from the South calling him “a great gobber, who marked each furlong with the discharge of spit”. These gentle digs relieve the monotony of the otherwise prosaic account of the bus journey to Rameshwaram.

Check Your Progress-II

- a. What does ‘lesser line’ refer to?
- b. How many passenger trains left the Tiruchendur railway station daily?
Pick up the sentence that gives you the answer.
- c. How does Aitken make fun of Indian politicians?

26.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have studied an excerpt from a travelogue. You would have discovered that:

- travel writing has to be in simple, direct language;
- it has to be informative; correct to the minutest detail, requiring a perceptive eye for detail; and
- Aitken’s photographic description of Tiruchendur, his sympathetic understanding of the cultural difference between people of the North and the South, and his sense of poetic magic in the movement of the steam engine, make the extracts both informative and interesting to the reader.

26.8 SUGGESTED READING

Try to read a few of Aitken’s books on travel mentioned in 26.3, as also the following works:

Jules Verne: *Around the World in Eighty Days*
Vikram Seth: *From Heaven Lake*

26.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-I

- a. A travelogue is a piece of writing about travel. It can also be a book, or a film, or a radio broadcast on travel.
- b. Hiuen Tsang/ Fahien.
- c. *Sri Satya Sai Baba – A Life.*

Check Your Progress-II

- a. It refers to the metre gauge railway line.
- b. Three. The sentence is: "To make my day a steam engine lay smoking idly in the siding, waiting to haul the last of the three daily Passengers.
- c. Aitken says that most Indian politicians do not have the vision to encompass the diversity of India. In fact, most of them will find no difference between a camel and a boat while flying above them in their helicopters.

UNIT 27 BOSWELL'S : *LIFE OF JOHNSON*

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 James Boswell (1740-95)
- 27.3 Samuel Johnson (1709-84)
- 27.4 Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791): Text
 - 27.4.1 Birth and Early Childhood
 - 27.4.2 Lord Chesterfield's Neglect
 - 27.4.3 Johnson and Paoli
- 27.5 Biographical Techniques
 - 27.5.1 Birth and Early Childhood
 - 27.5.2 Lord Chesterfield's Neglect
 - 27.5.3 Johnson and Paoli
- 27.6 Art in *Life of Johnson*
- 27.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.8 Suggested Reading
- 27.9 Answers to Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After having gone through this unit you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with the life of Samuel Johnson;
- appreciate Boswell's biographical method;
- appreciate the art of Boswell as a biographer.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

The main intention of this unit is to acquaint you with the biographical techniques of one of the greatest biographers of all times—James Boswell. Boswell was a friend and disciple of Samuel Johnson, one of the greatest men of letters Britain has ever produced. Johnson was also a biographer. Boswell wrote the biography closely following Johnson's ideas on the art and craft of biography.

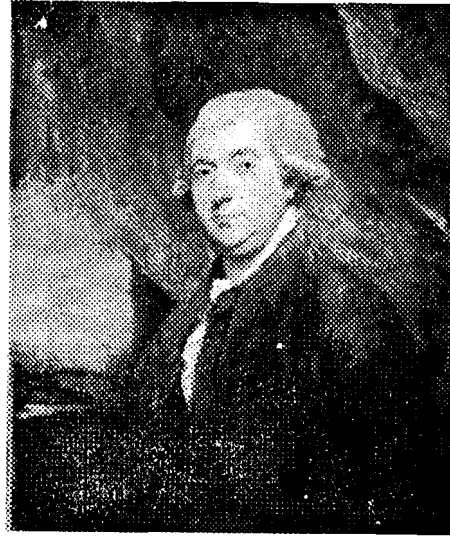
In the section on Boswell we give you an insight into Boswell's character and his method of writing biographies. This is, of course, with special reference to the *Life of Johnson* (1791).

In the next section you get some information on Johnson's life and work and his ideas on the art of biography. The pieces of information should help you co-relate the three sections from the *Life of Johnson* and appreciate them.

In the two major sections on Boswell and Johnson you learn a few things about the art and craft of biography. In the discussion that follows the three passages from the *Life* we examine the application of some of these techniques.

Lastly we examine the language of the passages you will have read.

27.2 JAMES BOSWELL (1740-95)



Boswell

Son of a Scottish Laird and Judge in Edinburgh, Boswell was trained in the family profession of law. He later became a successful advocate, especially on the criminal side. His main interest, however, was in cultivating the friendship of renowned people and becoming a great writer of English prose.

Among his friends and acquaintances were some of the most well-known people of the age—John Wilkes (1727-97) English radical M.P., journalist and agitator; David Hume (1711-76), the Scottish philosopher; Voltaire (1694-1778), the French philosopher, historian, playwright and poet; Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), the French political philosopher and novelist; Pascal Paoli, the Corsican politician and leader about whom you would read more, later in this Unit; and above all Samuel Johnson. While on his tour of the Continent he tried to meet, (with the help of one Earl Marischal), Frederick the Great (1721-86) of Prussia, but without success.

After having read his *Rambler* essays and seen his famous dictionary (1755) Boswell was keen to meet Johnson. An opportunity presented itself to him on 16th May, 1763 in the back parlour of the actor and bookseller Thomas Davies. This is how Boswell recorded the event in his *Life of Johnson*.

Mr. Davies mentioned my name and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scott, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, 'Don't tell where I come from'— 'From Scotland', cried Davies roguishly. 'Mr. Johnson, (said I) I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it.'

I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to sooth and conciliate him, and not as an humiliating abasement at the expense of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable, he seized the expression 'come from Scotland', which I used in the sense of being of that country; and, as if I had said that I

had come away from it, or left it, retorted, 'That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help.' This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next.

Johnson had defined oats in his *Dictionary*, as 'A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people', and gained a notoriety for Scot baiting. Johnson, of course, had no prejudice against the Scots. From the passage quoted above, you get a foretaste of the respect and awe with which Boswell treated Johnson. The former ruthlessly subordinated his own personality to the latter's and reported every blow that he received from his subject without reminding his readers of his own strong points—his manipulation of his subject, his powers of description, narration and analysis.

When Boswell published his first book on Johnson—*The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson LL.D* (1785)—an account of 101 consecutive days' travel in Scotland with the great friend, it was the author's fatuity and the subject's greatness that struck the reading public. When in 1791 *The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D*, was published the impression became stronger and Boswell did not receive the acclaim that was his due. On the other hand, to Hannah More who begged him to soften his portrait, he replied 'I will not make my tiger a cat to please anybody.'

In the nineteen-twenties Boswell's private papers were discovered at Malahide Castle near Dublin, and in the thirties in Aberdeenshire in Scotland, which placed him among the greatest diarists of all time. Boswell's writings are now studied with as great an avidity as Johnson's own.

Apart from the two works mentioned above, Boswell's *An Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour to That Island; and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* were published in 1768. The 70 essays entitled *The Hypochondriac* were published in the *London Magazine* between 1777 and 1783. Boswell's letters, private papers and his *London Journal* were published in the twentieth century.

Check Your Progress 1

Mention the main reasons, in the light of the above note, for Boswell's success as a biographer.

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27.3 SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-84)

Samuel Johnson has been called the symbol of the genius of England. 'He has become' wrote Sir Walter Raleigh, 'the tutelary genius of the English people. He embodies all that we most admire in ourselves.' What were those qualities of head and heart that Johnson had? Strong common sense, learning, wit, courage, honesty and sympathy. These are some of the qualities that we

admire wherever we find them but we find all these together in any one person so rarely.

Johnson was born into a family of average means. His father Michael was a bookseller. He was also a learned man and his philosophical nature rather interfered with his trade and prosperity. His mother, Sarah came from a Birmingham family of Fords who were well-to-do. She was not much educated and she also feared that their economic condition was getting worse. The result was that there was not much peace in the family. Johnson had a younger brother, called Nathaniel. He committed suicide in 1737 and within a few days Johnson too moved to London, in search of a living. There he entered the service of Edward Cave (1691-1754) the printer, and wrote for *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

Johnson had to give up his studies at Oxford in 1729 for financial reasons. In his search of employment he went, among other places, to Birmingham. There he wrote essays for the *Birmingham Journal* and translated Jeronymo Lobo's French version of *Voyage to Abyssinia* into English. Apparently, during his stay at Birmingham, Johnson also met Elizabeth Porter, wife of the draper Harry Porter. After the death of her husband. Johnson married Elizabeth who had a son as old as Johnson himself. She was 20 years older than him. With the help of the dowry she brought, Johnson opened a school at Edial. One of its students, David Garrick, became eminent in the theatre and Johnson's lifelong friend. However, the attempt was unsuccessful and the school had to be closed.

Johnson was a poet (*London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* are his most famous poems), essayist (the three series *Rambler*, *Adventurer* and *Idler* are well known), novelist (*Rasselas*, *Prince of Abyssinia*) playwright (*Irene*), socio-political pamphleteer and above all a lexicographer and biographer.

One of the works that built Johnson's reputation was his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) in which he defined over 40,000 words, illustrating them with the help of 1,14,000 quotations. These were drawn from books in every branch of knowledge written since the time of Sir Philip Sidney (1563-1626). Nathaniel Bailey had preceded Johnson in the task but Johnson's was so much superior to Bailey's that the latter was soon wiped out of public memory. However, there are many words in the dictionary to which Johnson attached indefensible meanings either in sport or petulance. Some of these were not of this class. 'Pastern' Johnson defined as 'the knee of a horse.' When a lady asked him how he came to do that, he replied with admirable frankness, 'Ignorance, Madam, pure ignorance'. There are some other definitions that are commonly remembered. Lexicographer was defined as 'a harmless drudge' and pension 'a pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.' These, however, are no specimens of the precision of the definitions of words in the *Dictionary*.

Apart from the journalism for the *Magazine*, Johnson wrote many short lives of eminent and not so eminent men. The first one was the *Life of Paul Sarp* published in 1738 in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the last ones were the well-known *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81). In all he wrote about 70 of them. In *Rambler*, No. 60 (Oct. 13, 1750) he wrote:

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. For, not only every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistake and miscarriage, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use, but there is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to human kind.

In short, biographies are more useful to us than other branches of literature because from them we learn about the merits and shortcomings and their effect on the lives of certain people which can be examples for us to imitate or avoid. Johnson preferred autobiographies to biographies because the former could convey the truth better. He thought that biographers should record and collect facts with perseverance and try to arrive at the truth. He encouraged Boswell to keep a diary for the purpose, and it has often been pointed out that Boswell employed Johnson's precepts in the writing of the latter's life.

Now do the following exercise before going any further into the unit.

Check Your Progress 2

Fill in the blank spaces with the most suitable answers:

Two of Johnson's most famous poems were and His series of essays were called, and Boswell had read his essays and seen his before he came to meet Johnson in Johnson published his *Dictionary* in the year and the *Lives of the Poets* between Johnson was born in the year and Boswell in and the latter was thus years younger than him. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was published in about years after Johnson's death.

27.4 BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON (1791): TEXT

Below (27.4.1, 27.4.2 and 27.4.3) are three short sections from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Read them, if necessary, with the help of the glossaries given at the end of each section.

27.4.1 Birth and Early Childhood

Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N.S. 1709; and his initiation into the Christian Church was not delayed; for his **baptism** is recorded, in the register of St. Mary's parish in that city to have been performed on the day of his birth. His father is there styled *Gentleman*, a circumstance of which an ignorant **panegyrist** has praised him for not being proud; when the truth is that the **appellation** of *Gentleman*, though now lost in the indiscriminate assumption of *Esquire* was commonly taken by those who could boast of gentility. His father was Michael Johnson, a native of Derbyshire, of obscure extraction, who settled in Lichfield as a bookseller and **stationer**. His mother was Sarah Ford, descended of an

ancient race of substantial **yeomanry** in Warwickshire. They were advanced in years when they married, and never had more than two children, both sons; Samuel, their first born, who lived to be the illustrious character whose various excellence I am to endeavour to record, and Nathaniel, who died in his twenty-fifth year.

When he was a child in **petticoats** and had learnt to read, Mrs. Johnson one morning put the common prayer book into his hands, pointed to the **collect** for the day, and said, 'Sam, you must get this by heart.' She went upstairs, leaving him to study it. But by the time she had reached the second floor, she heard him following her. 'What's the matter?' said she. 'I can say it,' he replied; and repeated it distinctly, though he could not have read it more than twice.

But there has been another story of his infant precocity generally circulated, and generally believed, the truth of which I am to refute upon his own authority. It is told that, when a child of three years old, he chanced to tread upon a duckling, the eleventh of a brood and killed it; upon which, it is said, he dictated to his mother the following epitaph:

Here lies good master duck,
Whom Samuel Johnson trod on;
If it had liv'd, it had been good luck,
For then we'd had an odd one.

There is surely internal evidence that this little composition combines in it, what no child of three years old could produce, without an extension of its faculties by immediate inspiration; yet Mrs. Lucy Porter, Dr. Johnson's stepdaughter, positively maintained to me, in his presence, that there could be no doubt of the truth of this anecdote, for she had heard it from his mother. So difficult is it to obtain an authentic relation of facts, and such authority may there be for error; for he assured me, that his father made the verses, and wished to pass them for his child's. He added, 'my father was a foolish old man; that is to say, foolish in talking of his children'.

Glossary I

N.S. : New Style Gregorian calendar adopted in England in 1751.

- Baptism:** a Christian ritual in which a person is touched or covered with water to make him pure and show that he has been accepted as a member of the church; generally accompanied by name giving.
- panegyrist:** one who writes panegyric, i.e. a speech or piece of writing praising somebody for something
- appellation:** a name or title, especially one that is formal or descriptive
- stationer:** a person or shop that sells stationery, i.e. writing material paper, pencils, pens etc.

- yeomanry:** the body of yeomen, i.e. men holding and cultivating a small estate; minor landowners in a rural area.
- petticoats:** skirts collectively; also, skirts worn by very young children; chiefly in the phrase (said of a boy): in petticoats
- collect:** a short prayer, varying from day to day, read near the beginning of certain Christian religious services

27.4.2 Lord Chesterfield's Neglect

Lord Chesterfield to whom Johnson had paid the high compliment of addressing to his Lordship the Plan of his *Dictionary*, had behaved to him in such a manner as to excite his contempt and indignation. The world has been for many years amused with a story confidently told and as confidently repeated with additional circumstances, that a sudden disgust was taken by Johnson upon occasion of his having been one day kept long in waiting in his Lordship's antechamber, for which the reason assigned was, that he had company with him, and that at last, when the door opened, out walked **Colley Cibber**; and that Johnson was so violently provoked when he found for whom he had been so long excluded, that he went away in a passion, and never would return. I remember having mentioned this story to **George Lord Lyttelton**, who told me, he was very intimate with Lord Chesterfield; and holding it as a well-known truth, defended Lord Chesterfield, by saying that Cibber, who had been introduced familiarly by **the back-stairs**, had probably not been there above ten minutes. It may seem strange even to entertain a doubt concerning a story so long and so widely current, and thus implicitly adopted, if not sanctioned, by the authority which I have mentioned; but Johnson himself assured me, that there never was any particular incident which produced a quarrel between Lord Chesterfield and him; but that his Lordship's continued neglect was the reason why he resolved to have no connection with him. When the *Dictionary* was upon the eve of publication, Lord Chesterfield, who, it is said, had flattered himself with expectations that Johnson would dedicate the work to him, attempted, in a courtly manner, to sooth, and **insinuate** himself with the Sage, conscious, as it should seem, of the cold indifference with which he had treated its learned author; and further attempted to conciliate him, by writing two papers in *The World*, in recommendation of the work; and it must be confessed, that they contain some **studied** compliments, so **finely** turned, that if there had been no previous offence, it is probable that Johnson would have been highly delighted. Praise, in general, was pleasing to him: but by praise from a man of rank and elegant accomplishments, he was peculiar **gratified**.

Johnson, who thought that all was false and hollow; ... despised the honeyed words, and was even indignant that Lord Chesterfield should, for a moment, imagine that he could be the **dupe** of such an artifice. His expression to me concerning Lord Chesterfield, upon this occasion, was, 'Sir, after making great professions, he had, for many years, taken no notice of me; but when my *Dictionary* was coming out, he fell a scribbling in *The World* about it. Upon which, I wrote him a letter expressed in civil terms, but such as might show him that I did not mind what he said or wrote, and that I had done with him.'

This is that celebrated letter of which so much has been said, and about which curiosity has been so long excited, without being gratified. I for many years **solicited** Johnson to favour me with a copy of it, that so excellent a composition might not be lost to posterity. He delayed from time to time to give it me; till at last in 1781, when we were on a visit at **Mr. Dilly's** at Southill in Bedfordshire, he was pleased to dictate it to me from memory. He afterwards found among his papers a copy of it, which he had dictated to **Mr. Baretti**, with its title and corrections, in his own handwriting. This he gave to **Mr. Langton**; adding that if it were to come into print, he wished it to be from that copy. By Mr. Lington's kindness, I am enabled to enrich my work with a perfect **transcript** of what the world has so eagerly desired to see.

'To the Right Honourable the Earl of Chesterfield

February 7, 1755

'My Lord,

'I have been lately informed, by the proprietor of *The World*, that two papers, in which my *Dictionary* is recommended to the public, were written by your Lordship. To be so distinguished, is an honour, which being very little accustomed to favours from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

'When upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address; and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*;—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world **contending**; but I found my attendance so little encouraged, that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

'Seven years, my Lord, have now passed, since I waited in your outward rooms, or was **repulsed** from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last, to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a Patron before.

'The shepherd in **Virgil** grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.

'Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the Public should consider me as owing that to a Patron, which **Providence** has enabled me to do for myself.

'Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less; for I have been long wakened from that dream of hope, in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, my Lord, your Lordship's most humble, most obedient servant.

'Sam Johnson'

'While this was the talk of the town,' (says Dr. Adams, in a letter to me) 'I happened to visit **Dr. Warburton**, who finding that I was acquainted with Johnson, desired me earnestly to carry his compliments to him, and to tell him, that he honoured him for his manly behaviour in rejecting the treatment he had received from him, with a proper spirit. Johnson was visibly pleased with this compliment, for he had always a high opinion of Warburton. Indeed, the force of mind which appeared in this letter, was congenial with that which Warburton himself amply possessed.'

Glossary II

- Lord Chesterfield:** Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773), a statesman and diplomat, English ambassador at the Hague 1728-32. He is best known for his letters to his son, Philip Stanhope (1732-1768), published by the son's widow in 1774. These letters consisting of instructions in etiquette were considered a handbook of good manners.
- Colley Cibber (1617-1757):** a minor comic playwright and critic.
- George Lord Lyttelton:** a prominent politician, and an opponent of Robert Walpole and a liberal patron of literature.
(1709-73)
- backstairs:** private stairs at the back or side of a house, generally used by servants.
- insinuate:** to suggest (something unpleasant) by one's behaviour, or questions or comments.
- The World:** the title of a periodical (January 1753—December 1756) edited by Edward Moore.
- studied:** carefully thought or considered especially before being expressed.
- finely:** closely and delicately.
- gratified:** to give pleasure and satisfaction to (often used in the passive)
- dupe:** noun—a person who is tricked or deceived (by someone else) verb—to trick or deceive.

solicited:	asked for money, help, a favour, etc. from a person.
Mr Dilly:	John Dilly (1731-1806), brother of Edward and Charles Dilly, booksellers who published Boswell's <i>An Account of Corsica</i> . Johnson paid a visit to John Dilly in company with Boswell and Charles Dilly in June 1781
Mr Baretti:	Guiseppe Baretti (1719-89), an Italian teacher introduced to Johnson by one of his students called Charlotte Lennox, actress and playwright
Mr Langton:	Bennet Langton (1737-1801), a valued friend of Johnson, who read the <i>Rambler</i> essays and on their conclusion came to see him in London. Langton came from an ancient and noble family and his pedigree had been traced to Cardinal Stephen Langton in the reign of King John (1167-1216). Johnson admired him.
transcript :	something transcribed, a written or printed record.
Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre:	The conqueror of the conqueror of the earth: Boileau, <i>L' Art Poetique</i> iii 272.
contending:	to compete as in a race or against difficulties.
repulsed:	to refuse coldly; push away (a friendly person).
Virgil:	(70-19 B.C.) the greatest Roman poet, best known for his epic the <i>Aeniad</i> (about 30 B.C., unfinished at his death). His <i>Eclogues</i> (pastoral poems) influenced everyone who could read Latin.
Providence:	God and his wise care and direction of the affairs of living creatures, fate as a kindly influence.
Warburton:	Dr. William Warburton (1698-1779), rose to be bishop of Gloucester in 1759. His edition of Shakespeare in eight volumes brought out in 1747, was criticized as unscholarly. He was Pope's literary executor, and published an edition of his works in 1751. He admired Dr. Johnson, who remained grateful for his early praise of his essay on <i>Macbeth</i> (1747): Johnson said, "He praised me at a time when praise was of value to me."

On the evening of October 10, I presented Dr. Johnson to **General Paoli**. I had greatly wished that two men, for whom I had the highest esteem, should meet. They met with a manly ease, mutually conscious of their own abilities, and of the abilities of each other. The General spoke Italian, and Dr. Johnson English, and understood one another very well, with a little aid of interpretation from me, in which I compared myself to an **isthmus** which joins two great continents. Upon Johnson's approach, the General said, 'From what I have read of your works, Sir, and from what Mr. Boswell has told me of you, I have long held you in great veneration.' The General talked of languages being formed on the particular notions and manners of a people, without knowing which, we cannot know the language. We may know the direct **signification** of single words; but by these no beauty of expression, no sally of genius, no wit is conveyed to the mind. All this must be by allusion to other ideas. 'Sir (said Johnson) you talk of language, as if you had never done any thing else but study it, instead of governing a nation.' The General said, '*Questo e un troppo gran complimento*; 'this is too great a compliment. 'I should have thought so, Sir, if I had not heard you talk.' The General asked him, what he thought of the spirit of **infidelity** which was so prevalent.

JOHNSON. 'Sir, this gloom of infidelity, I hope, is only a transient cloud passing through the hemisphere, which will soon be dissipated, and the sun break forth with his usual splendour.'

'You think then, (said the General) that they will change their principles like their clothes.'

JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, if they bestow no more thought on principles than on dress, it must be so.' The General said, that a great part of the fashionable infidelity was owing to a desire of showing courage. Men who have no opportunities of showing it as to things in this life, take death and futurity as objects on which to display it.'

JOHNSON. 'That is mighty foolish affectation. Fear is one of the passions of human nature, of which it is impossible to divest it. You remember that the **Emperour Charles V**, when he read upon the tomb-stone of a Spanish nobleman. "Here lies one who never knew fear," wittily said, "Then he never snuffed a candle with his fingers."

Dr. Johnson went home with me, and drank tea till late in the night. He said, 'General Paoli had the loftiest **port** of any man he had ever seen.' He denied military men were always the best bred men. 'Perfect good breeding' he observed, 'consists in having no particular mark of any profession, but a general elegance of manners; whereas, in a military man, you can commonly distinguish the brand of soldiers, *I'homme d'epée*.'

Dr. Johnson shunned to-night any discussion of the perplexed question of fate and free will, which I attempted to agitate. 'Sir (said he) we know our will is free, and there's an end on't.'

Glossary III

Pascal Paoli: (1725-1807) was a Corsican democratic leader in exile in England. His father had been one of the leaders of the Corsicans in their revolt against Genoa in 1734. Paoli himself was

chosen by the Corsicans as their General-in-Chief in 1755. In 1769 the island was conquered by the French and Paoli escaped in an English ship and arrived in England on 20 September. Paoli returned to Corsica in 1789. This was in response to Mirabeau's recall of the Corsican patriots, in the National Assembly of France, Paoli was appointed Lieutenant General and military commandant in Corsica by Louis XVI.

In Walpole's *Memoirs of the Reign of George III* we see Paoli in a rather unfavourable light. Walpole wrote,

Paoli's character had been so advantageously exaggerated by Mr. Boswell's enthusiastic and entertaining account of him, that the opposition were ready to incorporate him in the list of popular tribunes. The Court artfully intercepted the project; and deeming patriots of all nations equally corruptible, bestowed a pension of \$1000 a year on the unheroic fugitive.

This is a rather unflattering picture of Paoli and also, to some extent, Boswell who had dedicated *An Account of Corsica* to him. Boswell later introduced Johnson to Paoli. You have read the account of the meeting.

- isthmus:** a narrow area of land with sea on each side, joined to a large land mass at both ends.
- signification:** the intended meaning of a word.
- infidelity:** (an example or act of) disloyalty, unfaithfulness.
- Emperour Charles V:** (1500-1558) Holy Roman Emperor (1519-56) and king of Spain (as Charles I, 1516-56) who abdicated in September 1556 and joined the monastery of Yuste in Spain in February 1557.
- port:** The manner in which one bears oneself; external deportment; carriage, bearing .
- L'homme d'eepee:** the man of the sword.

27.5 BIOGRAPHICAL TECHNIQUES

Let's now examine some of the biographical techniques employed by Boswell in the three sections you have read from his *Life of Johnson*.

27.5.1 Birth and Early Childhood

Notice Boswell's narration of the family background of Johnson. Johnson's father, Boswell carefully establishes, was not well-to-do or belong to a well-known family. The title of Gentleman, Boswell tells his readers, was 'taken by those who could not boast of gentility'. His mother, on the other hand came from a well-known family of small landowners. Boswell, no matter how appreciative of Johnson, was a biographer, who wished to enable his readers to see the man described and discussed in the life, and not a panegyrist. He was in a way, following Johnson's precept. 'He that narrates,' wrote Johnson in *Idler* No. 84, 'the life of another.....shows his favourite at a distance, decorated and magnified like the ancient actors in their tragic dress and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero!' Boswell tried to project the man. Notice also the emphasis on 'never' in the first paragraph. It gives us a hint of the amount of research and interviews Boswell conducted in order to arrive at definite facts on the life of Johnson. In the second and third paragraphs Boswell tried to establish the precise nature of Johnson's precocity (prematurely developed in some faculty).

27.5.2 Lord Chesterfield's Neglect

Notice once again the pains Boswell takes to discover the true story about Johnson's break with Chesterfield. He tells us about the testimony of Lord Lyttelton, that palliates the act of Chesterfield to some extent. He narrates the manner in which he got a copy of the letter Johnson wrote to Chesterfield and having given the letter he tells us what one of his eminent contemporaries William Warburton thought about Johnson.

Boswell's biography is interesting and useful not only because he tries to tell us the true story objectively but also because he draws inferences from the events described. You will recall that in 'Birth and Early Childhood' Boswell said that he would endeavour to record the 'various excellences' of Johnson's character. It is this effort to record the qualities of the man and of course his shortcomings that is of central importance to us. Incidents and events only go to show the man that Johnson was. Can you now point out Boswell's observations on Johnson's character in the second section from the *Life* in this unit? Read the last sentence of the first paragraph. Can you relate it to the information you gained in the previous section on Johnson's birth and childhood?

Finally we may point out that there is a letter of Johnson quoted in full in this section. It is so perfectly worded that it has been committed to memory by many. Historians have pointed out that this letter signals the end of the system of patronage in England. You may like to know that Boswell painstakingly collected all the letters of Johnson he could and incorporated them into his *Life*. This set the trend in the nineteenth century, of writing the two-volume *Life and Letters* of so and so. In our own time, when collections of letters are published separately, biographers use letters with discretion.

27.5.3 Johnson and Paoli

One of the strengths of Boswell's *Life* is his reports of meetings and conversations of Johnson with or about the other eminent people of the age, and many a time also with people not so well known. In the short space of the

first paragraph we have Johnson's views on language, infidelity and courage and fear, that he expressed before Paoli. In the last paragraph Johnson discusses good breeding and free will and pre-determination with Boswell. In the west very frequently and sometimes in India as well, religious people wish to know to what extent human beings are free to take moral decisions in their lives, and to what extent they are pre-planned for specific actions and functions by God. Orthodox Christians believe that we are free unlike animals and Johnson holds the same point of view.

Now answer the following questions and discover for yourself how well you have understood the three sections from Boswell's *Life*.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Who wrote the epitaph for the eleventh duckling of the brood? What authority was there for saying that Samuel Johnson wrote it?
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.....

- 2) Name the persons he received information/material from for the episode in the *Life* relating to Chesterfield's neglect of Johnson.
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- 3) What did Paoli think about language and why do you think he should have begun their talk with that subject?
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27.6 ART IN LIFE OF JOHNSON

Biography is often defined as an account of a person's life, and a branch of history. In the previous section, we examined the ways in which Boswell collected and sifted his material on Johnson's life. In Boswell's own time there were at least four others who wrote Johnson's life—Mrs. Piozzi, John Hawkins, William Shaw and Arthur Murphy. Many others have written since

then and Johnson is still popular as a subject of biography. C.L. Reade, Joseph Wood Krutch, James L. Clifford and John Wain have written Johnson's life in this century and the need for another life of Johnson is still felt and Donald Greene is writing another one. Notwithstanding this, Boswell's *Life* is still read and edited, despite its voluminous size. Is it only because of its authentic material? No.

Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is a piece of art. In spite of the fact that the arrangement of the material is chronological rather than topic-wise, there is a unity of design. This unity is given to the work by Boswell's respect for the penetrating wisdom of the man that Johnson was, his piety, his courage, his wit, his learning, his sympathy for the oppressed, the weak and the poor.

It is often said that Boswell kept notes on Johnson's conversations. This is true but the way he recorded just the essence of a talk and not the chaff of the trivialities that often go on in company makes Boswell's biography so effective. Notice the brevity of Boswell's report of the meeting of Paoli and Johnson. Boswell was there on that occasion. Did he not say anything? He did. But what exactly did he say? That we do not know. Why did Boswell not tell us anything about it? Possibly because he said nothing of value. Possibly because what he said would have told us more about Boswell than about Johnson. Possibly because he wanted to maintain an artistic distance. Hence it is in his selection of material that Boswell employed his artistic talent.

Related to this is the issue of authenticity. If Boswell was trying to make his history interesting did the historical Johnson actually say what Boswell's Johnson says in the *Life*? Modern scholarship, through its comparison of the accounts of incidents related in the biography with those in the notes or the journals of Boswell and reports of others present on the occasions shows that Johnson was absolutely faithful in reporting the words of different persons. It is in condensation that Boswell exercised his artistic manipulation.

Sir Harold Nicolson has pointed out that Boswell's artistic talent lay in 'projecting his detached photograph with such continuity and speed that the effect produced is that of motion and of life.' There is both narrative speed and descriptive force in Johnson's biography. You do not only follow the narrative or a philosophical discussion you also see Lucy Porter talking to Johnson and Boswell in a homely setting and Johnson and Paoli in a very formal one. You feel the hurt pride of Samuel Johnson as he hits back Chesterfield in his reply to him. You live the tension of October 10, 1769 in Boswell's mind when Paoli paid Johnson a visit. These are made possible by Boswell's peculiar abilities of description and narration, analysis, exposition and intuitive understanding of his subject's mind.

James L. Clifford suggested that Boswell constantly tried to make his expression precise and suggestive of colour and charm. For instance, 'loved and caressed by everybody' of the notes become, 'caressed and loved by all about him', 'remarkably lively and gay and very happy' became 'a gay and frolicsome fellow'. Thus we find that the power of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is a result of a variety of talents Boswell possessed—painstaking research, accurate description, honest narration, an imaginative understanding of the subject, and a command over the English language.

27.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have examined Boswell's and Johnson's ideas on the art and craft of biography, and acquainted you with some of the bare facts of Johnson's life in order to enable you to place the three sections from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* in proper perspective. After you read and understood the three pieces, we discussed Boswell's biographical techniques as employed in the extracts from the *Life*. Finally we discussed some prominent features of Boswell's biographical art.

27.8 SUGGESTED READING

Lives of the Poets by Samuel Johnson (1779-1781). There are many popular editions of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* available in the market and also in the libraries. Abridged editions of the *Life* are also easily available. Two of these are by M.A. Pink (Macmillan: London, 1957) and Irvin Ehrenpreis (Washington Squares Press: New York, 1965). The most easily available collection of criticism is *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Boswell's Life of Johnson*, edited by J.L. Clifford (Prentice Hall: New Jersey, 1970). References are from this anthology.

Queen Victoria by Lytton Strachey (1921).

Rajaji: A Life by Rajmohan Gandhi (Viking Penguin Book India, 1997).

The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi by Rajmohan Gandhi (Penguin Books India, 1995).

27.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- a) Exaltation of his subject's personality even at his own expense
- b) Manipulation of life (that is the person Johnson) for purposes of art
- c) Powers of description, narration and analysis

Check Your Progress 2

London.
The Vanity of Human Wishes.
Rambler, Adventurer and Idler.
Rambler.
Dictionary.
1763.
1755.
1779-81.
1709.
1740.

31 years.
1791.
7 years.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Lucy Porter held on the authority of Johnson's mother that he wrote the epitaph and Boswell heard her say so in Johnson's presence. Nonetheless, Samuel Johnson affirmed that his father Michael wrote it and wanted it to be taken as his son's.
- 2) Samuel Johnson, Lord Lyttelton, Bennet Langton, Dr. Adam and Dr. Warburton.
- 3) It is possible that Paoli thought of language as a topic for discussion because while he spoke Italian and Dr. Johnson English, they understood one another well enough. Hence Paoli may have wondered why they did not talk in the same language; either Italian or English. Moreover, Paoli must have known about Johnson's compilation of the *Dictionary* (1755).

It was in this context that Paoli thought aloud. To know a language properly involves a knowledge of the customs and traditions, notions and manners of the native speakers of that language. Beauty of expression and creative use of language were based on such a knowledge and not just the meanings of some words. Since they could not speak in one another's language effectively Paoli and Johnson chose to speak in their own languages banking on the other's ability to understand the language of the other person, with the help of Boswell as interpreter.

UNIT 28 M. K. GANDHI'S : AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY or THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH

Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction to Autobiography
- 28.2 M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948)
- 28.3 Text "A Month With Gokhale"
 - 28.3.1 Chapter 17
 - 28.3.2 Chapter 18
 - 28.3.3 Chapter 19
- 28.4 Glossary
- 28.5 Discussion
- 28.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.7 Suggested Reading
- 28.8 Answers to Exercises

28.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- understand and define autobiography as a form of prose;
- read and comprehend "A Month With Gokhale – I, II, III" from M. K. Gandhi's *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927);
- appreciate Gandhis' art and craft of autobiography.

28.1 INTRODUCTION TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

What is Autobiography?

Autobiography is a branch of biographical literature written in subjective prose. It is always incomplete as it is the story of a person who writes it him/herself. It is usually written at a later stage in life. The events are recollected either in chronological sequence or at random, moving back and forth in time. However, all autobiographies are not written when the author is old. For example, Dom Moraes wrote his autobiography entitled *My Son's Father* when he was only twenty two!

An autobiography may appear biased which is justified because one person's point of view is being presented. Details of personal experience are made interesting so that regardless of the fame or obscurity of the writer, the reader's attention is engaged and curiosity aroused. Writers talk freely about themselves making frequent use of the first person pronoun. The reader is expected to be sympathetic rather than to sit on judgement. What is important in such a literary form is not a rigid or strictly logical structure, but a spontaneous, easy and flexible movement. Thus we cannot judge

autobiography in the same way as we would biography. In a biography, the objectivity of the writer is a major consideration in judging its overall merit.

M.K. Gandhi's : *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

Informal Autobiography

Autobiographies can either be informal or formal. Informal autobiographies may or may not be intended for publication. Letters, diaries and journals fall within this category. Letters of famous men like Byron are an index to their personalities and therefore of great interest to the reader. The young Jewish girl Anne Frank's *Diary* created such an impact that it has often been staged as well as filmed. You will be reading about it in the next unit. Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* (1897) record her experiences providing us with information about the little-known facts about her more famous brother, the poet Wordsworth. All these books represent a self-conscious form of revelation. But they are not important only for the information that they provide but are also aesthetically pleasing. Memoirs are another form of informal autobiography. Here the emphasis is on the events and experiences remembered rather than on the personality of the person who remembers.

Formal Autobiography

Formal autobiography attempts to reconstruct a life through recollection. The autobiographer has the advantage of first-hand experience of his/her own subject i.e. him/herself. The problem that the author faces is that of striking a balance between sounding too modest or too aggressive. What are the other types of autobiographies? There are religious autobiographies like St. Augustine's *Confessions* (circa AD 397 to AD 401) and intellectual ones such as J.S. Mill's *Autobiography* (1873). (Mill's autobiography was published posthumously). Fictionalized autobiographies like James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916) transpose the actual experiences of the author onto a fictional plane and as such do not come under the category of non-fictional prose.

Autobiography and Memoir

An autobiography is distinct from a memoir. As Roy Pascal put it. 'In the autobiography, proper attention is focused on the self, in the memoir or reminiscence on others' (*Design and Truth in Autobiography* RKP, 1960, p. 5). These two forms may be found in the same book or even the same page. But the difference lies in the focus. In an autobiography the emphasis is always on the self. It is clear that the individual does not live outside society. And thus even in an autobiography, it is essential to portray people and places. But in general the interest remains mainly on the self.

Biography and Autobiography: Differences

- 1) In autobiography, childhood is portrayed prominently. On the other hand, in biography the author concentrates on the active period of the individual especially his/her success.
- 2) The biographer places special emphasis on the death of the individual while in an autobiography, needless to say, death does not figure at all.
- 3) Autobiographies often feature the relationship with parents and siblings. Biographies, on the other hand, deal with relationships with friends and colleagues who directly or indirectly contributed to the person's success.

- 4) A biographer has to rely on external evidence. He may have a close relationship with the subject. Or he may reconstruct his/her life by culling evidence from documents, diaries and letters. An autobiographer does not need to rely on such evidence. S/he can take recourse to his/her memory.
- 5) The main difference, as we know, lies in the point of view. In a biography the life is recreated by a third person narrator, who may or may not be objective. In an autobiography, the first person narrator is mainly subjective.

Why do we read Autobiographies?

The reasons for reading autobiography are as manifold as those for reading biography. One reason could be curiosity and the other could be the desire to gain insight into the lives of people like ourselves. Another could be simply delight in the book as a work of art.

Autobiography, as you know is the most personal of literary forms. What are the ways of reading autobiography? One can read it as a historical record or as a work of art. A literary autobiography is read as a work of art. Here one would keep in mind the idea behind the writing. For example, how does the writer perceive his/her own nature and development and how does s/he give form to this perception? To put it simply, how does s/he shape his/her material? Another relevant question at this point would be: how effectively does s/he use language to convey his/her experience to the reader?

An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth is the autobiography of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (or Mahatma Gandhi) and covers his life from early childhood through to 1920. It was initiated at the instance of Swami Anand, Jeramdas and other close co-workers of Gandhi, in his mother-tongue Gujarati entitled *Satyanā Prayogo athvā Ātmakathā* published in two volumes – Vol. I in 1927 and Vol. II in 1929. It was translated into English by Mahadev Desai and first appeared serially in *Young India* before being published in book form.

In this unit you are going to read three short chapters from Part III of Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, which describe his month long stay with Gokhale in Bengal when he was on a visit to India from South Africa in 1901 in order to plead his cause for improving the condition of Indians settled in South Africa. You must remember that at this time in his life, Gandhi did not have the title of 'Mahatma' nor had he yet conceived of the idea of an independent India or of becoming a national leader in this cause. At the time of which you will read, he was a loyal British subject, a young lawyer in South Africa, who had been struck by the injustice meted out to the Indians there. So you will gain some insight into the making of a great leader and get a glimpse of some of the important people who influenced and shaped his thoughts.

Read the text carefully. You may not know about some of the places and people mentioned but give an uninterrupted first reading. You may consult the glossary later in subsequent readings.

Check Your Progress 1

Answer the following questions in about 100 words each.

1) What is autobiography? Name some forms of autobiography.

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2) What are the differences between biography and autobiography?

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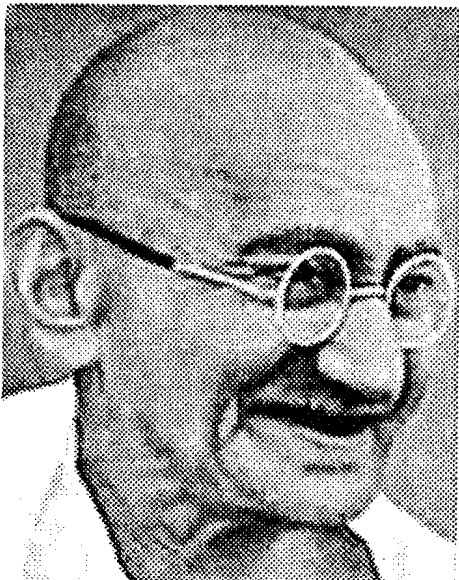
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Before you proceed to the text, we will quickly refresh your memory about the life of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our nation.

28.2 M. K. GANDHI (1869-1948)



Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the youngest son of Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai. Karamchand Gandhi was the Diwan of Porbandar State for some time, and later became the Diwan of Raikot State. Of his mother, Putlibai, Gandhi once said, "If there is any purity in me, it is all due to my mother."

Born in Porbandar in the present day state of Gujarat in India on October 2, 1869, he studied law at University College, London. In 1891, after having been admitted to the British bar, Gandhi returned to India and attempted to establish a law practice in Bombay, but with little success. Two years later, an Indian firm with interests in South Africa retained him as legal adviser in its office in Durban. Arriving in Durban, Gandhi found himself treated as a member of an inferior race. He threw himself into the struggle for elementary rights for Indians in South Africa.

Gandhi remained in South Africa for twenty years, visiting India twice, in 1896 and 1901. When pleas and petitions failed, Gandhi began to teach a policy of passive resistance to, and non-cooperation with, the South African authorities. He was inspired by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and the 19th-century American writer Henry David Thoreau, especially by Thoreau's famous essay "Civil Disobedience." However, Gandhi considered the terms passive resistance and civil disobedience inadequate for his purposes and chose another term, *Satyagraha*. In Part IV, chapter XXVI of his autobiography, Gandhi relates how the term came into being:

"...I could not for the life of me find out a new name [for passive resistance], and therefore offered a nominal prize through *Indian Opinion* to the reader who made the best suggestion on the subject. As a result, Maganlal Gandhi coined the word "Satagraha" (Sat=truth, Agraha=firminess) and won the prize. But in order to make it clearer I changed the word to *Satyagraha*..."

Gandhi returned to India in 1914 and launched his movement of non-violent resistance to Great Britain. In 1920, witnessing a massacre of Indians protesting against the Rowlatt Act at Amritsar by British soldiers, Gandhi proclaimed an organized campaign of non-cooperation. As a consequence, Gandhi was arrested but the British were soon forced to release him.

Economic independence for India, involving the complete boycott of British goods, was made a corollary of Gandhi's Swaraj (which means "self-rule" in Sanskrit) movement. British industries had brought about extreme poverty and the virtual destruction of Indian home industries. As a remedy for such poverty, Gandhi advocated revival of native Indian industries and the production of Khadi was one step in this direction. Gandhi therefore, did not dream of an India free from the British rule but also free from poverty, social injustice and religious evils. Indians revered him as a saint and began to call him Mahatma.

In 1921 the Indian National Congress, the group that spearheaded the movement for nationhood, gave Gandhi complete executive authority, with the right of naming his own successor. The British government again seized and imprisoned him in 1922.

After his release from prison in 1924, Gandhi withdrew from active politics and devoted himself to propagating communal unity. Unavoidably, however, he was again drawn into the vortex of the struggle for independence. In 1930,

he proclaimed a new campaign of civil disobedience, calling upon the Indian population to refuse to pay taxes, particularly the tax on salt. This campaign was the famous Dandi march, in which thousands of Indians followed Gandhi from Ahmedabad to the Arabian Sea, where they made salt by evaporating sea water. Once more the Indian leader was arrested, but he was released in 1931, halting the campaign after the British made concessions to his demands. In the same year Gandhi represented the Indian National Congress at a conference in London.

In 1932, Gandhi began new civil-disobedience campaigns against the British. Arrested twice, the Mahatma fasted for long periods several times; these fasts were effective measures against the British, because violence might well have broken out in India if he had died. In September 1932, while in jail, Gandhi undertook a "fast unto death" to improve the status of the Hindu Untouchables. Although he was himself a member of the *Vaishya* (merchant) caste, Gandhi was a great leader of the movement in India dedicated to the eradication of the injustice of the caste system.

In 1934 Gandhi formally resigned from politics and was replaced as leader of the Congress party by Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi travelled through India, teaching *ahimsa* (non-violence) and demanding eradication of "untouchability." A few years later, in 1939, he again returned to active political life because of the pending federation of Indian principalities with the rest of India. His first act was a fast, designed to force the ruler of the state of Rajkot to modify his autocratic rule. Public unrest caused by the fast was so great that the colonial government intervened and the demands were granted. The Mahatma again became the most important political figure in India.

By 1944 the Indian struggle for independence was in its final stages, the British government having agreed to independence on condition that the two contending nationalist groups, the Muslim League and the Congress party, should resolve their differences. Gandhi stood steadfastly against the partition of India but ultimately had to agree, in the hope that internal peace would be achieved after the Muslim demand for separation had been satisfied. India and Pakistan became separate states when the British granted India its independence in 1947. During the riots that followed the partition of India, Gandhi pleaded with Hindus and Muslims to live together peacefully. On January 13, 1948, he undertook a fast in New Delhi to bring about peace, but on January 30, 12 days after the termination of that fast, as he was on his way to his evening prayer meeting, he was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a fanatic Hindu.

Gandhi's death was regarded as an international catastrophe. A period of mourning was set aside in the United Nations General Assembly, and condolences to India were expressed by all countries. The teachings of Gandhi came to inspire nonviolent movements elsewhere, notably in the U.S. under the civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. and in South Africa under Nelson Mandela.

Gandhi was not just a lawyer, a politician or even a social reformer; he was a man who thought hard about life and humanity and eventually gave a whole new philosophy of life and governance. He did not claim either this philosophy or himself to be perfect; as the title of his autobiography states clearly, he saw his life as a series of experiments. You will now take a closer

look at his quest, his search for the true path by reading the following extract from his autobiography. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Part III, Chapters 17, 18 and 19. (Trans. Mahadev Desai. Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 2005. pp. 213-220).

28.3 TEXT: "A MONTH WITH GOKHALE"

28.3.1 Chapter 17

A MONTH WITH GOKHALE-I

From the very first day of my stay with him **Gokhale** made me feel completely at home. He treated me as though I were his younger brother, he acquainted himself with all my requirements and arranged to see that I got all I needed. Fortunately my wants were few, and as I had cultivated the habit of self-help, I needed very little personal attendance. He was deeply impressed with my habit of fending for myself, my personal cleanliness, **perseverance** and regularity, and would often **overwhelm** me with praise.

He seemed to keep nothing private from me. He would introduce me to all the important people that called on him. Of these the one who stands foremost in my memory is Dr. (now Sir) **P. C. Ray**. He lived practically next door and was a very frequent visitor.

This is how he introduced Dr. Ray : "This is Prof. Ray who having a monthly salary of Rs. 800, keeps just Rs. 40 for himself and devotes the balance to public purposes. He is not, and does not want to get married."

I see little difference between Dr. Ray as he is today and as he used to be then. His dress used to be nearly as simple as it is, with this difference of course that whereas it is khadi now, it used to be Indian mill-cloth in those days. I felt I could never hear too much of the talks between Gokhale and Dr. Ray, as they all pertained to public good or were of educative value. At times they were painful too, containing, as they did, strictures on public men. As a result, some of those whom I had regarded as stalwart fighters began to look quite puny.

To see Gokhale at work was as much a joy as an education. He never wasted a minute. His private relations and friendships were all for public good. All his talks had reference only to the good of the country and were absolutely free from any trace of untruth or insincerity. India's poverty and subjection were matters of constant and intense concern to him. Various people sought to interest him in different things. But he gave every one of them the same reply : "You do the thing yourself. Let me do my own work. What I want is freedom for my country. After that is won, we can think of other things. Today that one thing is enough to engage all my time and energy." His reverence for **Ranade** could be seen every moment. Ranade's authority was final in every matter, and he would cite it at every step. The anniversary of Ranade's death (or birth, I forget which) occurred during my stay with Gokhale, who observed it regularly.

There were with him then, besides myself, his friends Prof. Kathavate and a Sub-Judge. He invited us to take part in the celebrations and in his speech he

gave us his reminiscences of Ranade. He compared incidentally Ranade, **Telang** and **Mandlik**. He eulogized Telang's charming style and Mandlik's greatness as a reformer. Citing an instance of Mandlik's **solicitude** for his clients, he told us an anecdote as to how once, having missed his usual train, he engaged a special train so as to be able to attend the court in the interest of his client. But Ranade, he said, towered above them all, as a **versatile** genius. He was not only a great judge, he was an equally great historian, an economist and a reformer. Although he was a judge, he fearlessly attended the Congress, and everyone had such confidence in his **sagacity** that they unquestioningly accepted his decisions. Gokhale's joy knew no bounds, as he described these qualities of head and heart which were all combined in his master.

Gokhale used to have a horse-carriage in those days. I did not know the circumstances that had made a horse-carriage a necessity for him, and so I **remonstrated** with him: "Can't you make use of the tramcar in going about from place to place? Is it **derogatory** to a leader's dignity?" Slightly pained, he said, "So you also have failed to understand me! I do not use my Council allowances for my own personal comforts. I envy your liberty to go about in tram-cars, but I am sorry I cannot do likewise. When you are the victim of as wide a publicity as I am, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for you to go about in a tramcar. There is no reason to suppose that everything that the leaders do is with a view to personal comfort. I love your simple habits. I live as simply as I can, but some expense is almost **inevitable** for a man like myself." He thus satisfactorily disposed of one of my complaints, but there was another which he could not dispose of to my satisfaction.

"But you do not even go out for walks," said I. "Is it surprising that you should be always **ailing**? Should public work leave no time for physical exercise?" "When do you ever find me free to go out for a walk?" he replied.

I had such a great regard for Gokhale that I never **strove** with him. Though this reply was far from satisfying me, I remained silent. I believed then and I believe even now, that, no matter what amount of work one has, one should always find some time for exercise, just as one does for one's meals. It is my humble opinion that, far from taking away from one's capacity for work, it adds to it.

28.3.2 Chapter 18

A MONTH WITH GOKHALE-II

Whilst living under Gokhale's roof I was far from being a stay at-home. I had told my Christian friends in South Africa that in India I would meet the Christian Indians and acquaint myself with their condition. I had heard of Babu Kalicharan Banerji and held him in high regard. He took a prominent part in the Congress, and I had none of the misgivings about him that I had about the average Christian Indian, who stood aloof from the Congress and isolated himself from Hindus and Mussalmans. I told Gokhale that I was thinking of meeting him. He said: "What is the good of your seeing him? He is a very good man, but I am afraid he will not satisfy you. I know him very well. However, you can certainly meet him if you like." I sought an appointment, which he readily gave me. When I went, I found that his wife was on her death-bed. His house was simple. In the Congress I had seen him in a coat and trousers, but I was glad to find him now wearing a Bengal dhoti

and shirt. I liked his simple mode of dress, though I myself then wore a Parsi coat and trousers. Without much ado I presented my difficulties to him. He asked: "Do you believe in the **doctrine of original sin**?"

"I do," said I. "Well then, Hinduism offers no **absolution** therefrom, Christianity does," and added: "The wages of sin is death, and the Bible says that the only way of deliverance is surrender unto Jesus." I put forward Bhakti-marga (the path of devotion) of the Bhagavad Gita, but to no avail. I thanked him for his goodness. He failed to satisfy me, but I benefited by the interview. During these days I walked up and down the streets of Calcutta. I went to most places on foot. I met Justice Mitter and Sir Gurudas Banerji, whose help I wanted in my work in South Africa. And about this time I met Raja Sir Pyarimohan Mukarji.

Kalicharan Banerji had spoken to me about the Kali temple, which I was eager to see, especially as I had read about it in books. So I went there one day. Justice Mitter's house was in the some locality, and I therefore went to the temple on the same day that I visited him. On the way I saw a stream of sheep going to be sacrificed to Kali. Rows of beggars lined the lane leading to the temple. There were religious **mendicants** too, and even in those days I was **sternly** opposed to giving **alms** to sturdy beggars. A crowd of them pursued me. One of such men was found seated on a verandah. He stopped me, and **accosted** me: "Whither are you going, my boy?" I replied to him. He asked my companion and me to sit down, which we did.

I asked him: "Do you regard this sacrifice as religion?"

"Who would regard killing of animals as religion?"

"Then, why don't you preach against it?"

"That's not my business. Our business is to worship God."

"But could you not find any other place in which to worship God?"

"All places are equally good for us. The people are like a flock of sheep, following where leaders lead them. It is no business of us sadhus."

We did not prolong the discussion but passed on to the temple. We were greeted by rivers of blood. I could not bear to stand there. I was **exasperated** and restless. I have never forgotten that sight.

That very evening I had an invitation to dinner at a party of Bengali friends. There I spoke to a friend about this cruel form of worship. He said: "The sheep don't feel anything. The noise and the drum-beating there deaden all sensation of pain."

I could not swallow this. I told him that, if the sheep had speech, they would tell a different tale. I felt that the cruel custom ought to be stopped. I thought of the story of Buddha, but I also saw that the task was beyond my capacity.

I hold today the same opinion as I held then. To my mind the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the

life of a lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man. But he who has not qualified himself for such service is unable to afford to it any protection. I must go through more self-purification and sacrifice, before I can hope to save these lambs from this unholy sacrifice. Today I think I must die pining for this self-purification and sacrifice. It is my constant prayer that there may be born on earth some great spirit, man or woman, fired with divine pity, who will deliver us from this heinous sin, save the lives of the innocent creatures, and purify the temple.

How is it that Bengal with all its knowledge, intelligence, sacrifice, and emotion tolerates this slaughter?

28.3.3 Chapter 19

A MONTH WITH GOKHALE-III

The terrible sacrifice offered to Kali in the name of religion enhanced my desire to know Bengali life. I had read and heard a good deal about the **Brahmo Samaj**. I knew something about the life of **Pratap Chandra Mazumdar**. I had attended some of the meetings addressed by him. I secured his *Life of Keshav Chandra Sen*, read it with great interest, and understood the distinction between Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and Adi Brahmo Samaj. I met Pandit Shivanath Shastri and in company with Prof. Kathavate went to see Maharshi **Devendranath Tagore**, but as no interviews with him were allowed then, we could not see him. We were, however, invited to a celebration of the Brahmo Samaj held at his place, and there we had the privilege of listening to fine Bengali music. Ever since I have been a lover of Bengali music.

Having seen enough of the Brahmo Samaj, it was impossible to be satisfied without seeing **Swami Vivekanand**. So with great enthusiasm I went to **Belur Math**, mostly, or maybe all the way, on foot. I loved the **sequestered** site of the Math. I was disappointed and sorry to be told that the Swami was at his Calcutta house, lying ill, and could not be seen.

I then ascertained the place of residence of **Sister Nivedita**, and met her in a **Chowringhee** mansion. I was taken aback by the splendour that surrounded her, and even in our conversation, there was not much meeting ground. I spoke to Gokhale about this, and he said he did not wonder that there could be no point of contact between me and a volatile person like her. I met her again at Mr. Pestonji Padshah's place. I happened to come in just as she was talking to his old mother, and so I became an interpreter between the two. In spite of my failure to find any agreement with her, I could not but notice and admire her overflowing love for Hinduisim. I came to know of her books later.

I used to divide my day between seeing the leading people in Calcutta regarding the work in South Africa, and visiting and studying the religious and public institutions of the city. I once addressed a meeting, presided over by Dr. Mullick, on the work of the **Indian Ambulance Corps** in the **Boer War**. My acquaintance with *The Englishman* stood me in good stead on this occasion too. Mr. **Saunders** was ill then but rendered me as much help as in 1896. Gokhale liked this speech of mine, and he was very glad to hear Dr. Ray praising it.

Thus my stay under the roof of Gokhale made my work in Calcutta very easy, brought me into touch with the foremost Bengali families, and was the beginning of my intimate contact with Bengal.

I must needs skip over many a reminiscence of this memorable month. Let me simply mention my flying visit to Burma and the *foongis* there. I was pained by their **lethargy**. I saw the golden pagoda. I did not like the innumerable little candles burning in the temple, and the rats running about the sanctum brought to my mind thoughts of Swami Dayanand's experience at Morvi. The freedom and energy of the Burmese women charmed just as the **indolence** of the men pained me. I also saw, during my brief **sojourn**, that just as Bombay was not India, Rangoon was not Burma, and that just as we in India have become commission agents of English merchants, even so in Burma have we combined with the English merchants in making the Burmese people our commission agents.

On my return from Burma I took leave of Gokhale. The separation was a **wrench**, but my work in Bengal, or rather Calcutta, was finished, and I had no occasion to stay any longer.

Before settling down I had thought of making a tour through India travelling third class, and of acquainting myself with the hardships of third-class passengers. I spoke to Gokhale about this. To begin with he **ridiculed** the idea, but when I explained to him what I hoped to see, he cheerfully approved. I planned to go first to Benares to pay my respects to Mrs. Besant, who was then ill.

It was necessary to equip myself anew for the third-class tour. Gokhale himself gave me a metal tiffin-box and got it filled with sweetballs and puris. I purchased a canvas bag worth twelve annas and a long coat made up of **Chhayawool**. The bag was to contain this coat, a dhoti, a towel and a shirt. I had a blanket as well to cover myself with and a water jug. Thus equipped I set forth on my travels. Gokhale and Dr. Ray came to the station to see me off. I had asked them both not to trouble to come, but they insisted. "I should not have come if you had gone first class, but now I had to," said Gokhale.

No one stopped Gokhale from going on to the platform. He was in his silk turban, jacket and dhoti. Dr. Ray was in his Bengali dress. He was stopped by the ticket collector, but on Gokhale's telling him that he was his friend, he was admitted.

Thus with their good wishes I started on my journey.

28.4 GLOSSARY

Gokhale: Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) was born at Kolhapur in a humble Chitpavan Brahman family. Graduating in arts from the Elphinstone College, Bombay, in 1884, he joined as Professor of history and political economy at the Fergusson College, Poona. Recognizing his services, he was conferred Professor to Order. He was one of the founding social and political

leaders during the independence movement against the British Empire in India. Actively identified with the Indian National Congress, he was for some years the joint secretary of the Congress and in 1905, proclaimed its President at the Benares session. A few months before his death, he declined a knighthood. Gokhale was a mentor to Mahatma Gandhi when he returned from South Africa. In 1905 he founded his Servants of India Society which aimed at bringing about social reform. Though his last years were clouded by illness, he was a powerful member of the Indian Public Services Commission 1912-5.

perseverance: persistent determination.

overwhelm: overcome, as with emotions.

Dr. P. C. Ray: Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray (1861–1942) was a Professor of Chemistry in the University and a scientist of international acclaim. His activities were concerned with all spheres of human interest—educational reform, industrial development, employment generation, poverty alleviation, economic freedom and political advancement of the country. He was a pioneer in social reforms in the country. Ray was a voracious reader of literature, history and biography. He knew half-a-dozen languages. He was knighted (and became Sir P. C. Ray) by the British monarch for his scientific achievements.

Ranade: Rao Bahadur (Justice) Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901) was an energetic social, political and religious reformer. In the political sphere he founded the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, through which he frequently helped the government with sound advice, and was one of the originators of the Indian National Congress. Ranade became a member of the legislative council of Bombay in 1885, and occupied that position until he was made a justice of the High Court in 1893. He published books on Indian economics and Maratha history. For this service, he was appointed Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire.

Telang: Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850-1893) was a judge of the Bombay High Court and one of the founders of the Indian National Congress. Along with P.M. Metha, he was the originator of the Bombay Presidency Association. His translation of the Bhagavad Gita into English prose and verse is a standard work. His intimacy with Sanskrit enabled him to study and quote the Hindu law-books with an ease not readily attained by European lawyers and judges. He was nominated to the Bombay legislative council in 1884, but declined a similar position on the Viceroy's council.

Mandlik:	R. N. Mandlik was a member of the Executive Committee, Satyagraha Sabha, Bombay.
solicitude:	anxious concern.
versatile:	talented, having many skills.
sagacity:	ability to make good judgements.
remonstrated:	protested.
derogatory:	below one's dignity/showing a low opinion.
inevitable:	which cannot be avoided or prevented.
ailing:	ill or prone to illness.
strove:	struggle.
doctrine of original sin:	according to Christian tradition, original sin is the general condition of sinfulness (lack of holiness) into which human beings are born because of the Fall. The Fall refers to the first sin, committed when Adam and Eve succumbed to the serpent's temptation.
absolution:	salvation from sin; the condition of being formally forgiven by a Christian priest.
mendicants:	beggars.
sternly:	strictly; in a severe manner.
alms:	money or goods given to the poor as charity.
accosted:	approached and spoken to by someone.
exasperated:	greatly annoyed or impatient.
Brahmo Samaj:	It is a social and religious movement of the nineteenth century, founded by Raja Ram Mohun Roy on 20th August 1828. Brahmo Samaj literally means the society of worshippers of "One True God." "Brahmo" means one who worships Brahman, or the supreme spirit of the universe, and "Samaj" means community of people united together. It promoted belief in one God or monotheism, support for the rights of women, and opposition to such aspects of Hinduism as idolatry and animal sacrifice. The organization attained considerable importance but began to decline after the death of Roy in 1833. It was revived by Devendranath Tagore in 1843 under the name of Calcutta Brahmo Samaj. It got divided in 1866 under the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen , who formed the Adi (original) Brahmo

Samaj. In 1869, Keshab Chandra Sen chose from amongst his missionaries, four persons and ordained them as *adhyapak*s or professors of four old religions of the world – Gour Govinda Ray for Hinduism, **Pratap Chandra Mazumdar** for Christianity, Aghore Nath Gupta for Buddhism and Giris Chandra Sen for Islam. Adi Brahmo Samaj itself suffered a split on 15th May 1878 when the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was formed, led by Ananda Mohan Bose, Shibchandra Deb and Umesh Chandra Datta.

Swami Vivekananda: The pre-monastic name of Vivekananda (1863-1902) was Narendranath Dutta. He was one of the most famous and influential spiritual leaders on the philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga. He was the first known Hindu Swami to go to the West, where he introduced Hinduism, Yoga and Vedanta at the World's Parliament of Religions, in connection with the World Fair in Chicago, in 1893. It was there that he achieved world-wide fame by drawing huge audiences in Chicago and then later elsewhere in America. He was the chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the founder of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. He died on July 4, 1902 at Belur Math near Kolkata at the young age of 39.

sequestered: providing privacy or seclusion.

Belur Math: located in the bank of the River Hooghly near Calcutta, has the Ramakrishna Temple, as well as many other temples. In 1899, Swami Vivekanand established it as the Mother House for all the monks of the Ramakrishna Order who live in various branch centres of the Ramakrishna Mission in different parts of India and the world.

ascertained: find out or determine with certainty.

Sister Nivedita: Nivedita (1867–1911) was christened Margaret Elizabeth Noble. She was an Anglo-Irish social worker, author, teacher and disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who gave her the name Nivedita (which means one who is dedicated to God) on March 25, 1898. She started a school for girls and worked to improve the lives of Indian women of all castes. Later, she took up the cause of Indian independence. At the time when Gandhiji saw her, Sister Nivedita was the guest of two ladies at the American consulate. She was not, therefore, responsible for “the splendour that surrounded her”.

Chowringhee: Chowringhee Road is a major road in Kolkata. In his book *The Changing Face of Kolkata*, David William Martin says, “It represents the nearest equation in India to what Piccadilly is to London, Fifth Avenue to New

York and the Champs Elysees to Paris. Nostalgic Londoners like to regard their Circus as the centre of the universe. Kolkatans are more reserved in their acclaim, although the fervour they display for their city is perhaps unmatched.”

Indian Ambulance Corps: When the Boer war broke out in 1899, Gandhi organized The Natal Indian Ambulance Corps of 1100 Indian men. Its task was to take the wounded brought by the Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps from the battlefield and carry them to the railhead.

Boer War: It was fought from 11 October 1899 until 31 May 1902, between the British Empire and the two independent Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic (Transvaal Republic). After a protracted hard-fought war, the Boers were defeated, and the two independent republics were absorbed into the British Empire. It is also known as the Anglo-Boer War (among some South Africans) and in Afrikaans (the language of the Boers), as the *Anglo-Boereoorlog* or *Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (“Second War of Independence”). The Boers were descendants of the Dutch colonizers of South Africa.

The Englishman: It was a newspaper began by British merchants in 1821 by the name of *John Bull in the East* to support the British rule in India. Stocqueler changed its name to “The Englishman.”

Mr. Saunders: Mr. J. O’B.Saunders brought *The Englishman* after the 1857 first war of independence, and became its editor.

foongis: monks.

lethargy: inactivity; showing an unusual lack of energy.

indolence: inactivity resulting from a dislike of work.

sojourn: a temporary stay.

wrench: painful uprooting or parting.

ridiculed: subject to laughter or ridicule.

Chhaya wool: wool from Chayya, a place in Porbandar State noted for its coarse woollen fabrics.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Who introduced Gandhi to Dr. P. C. Ray and how?
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2) What was Gandhi's opinion about physical exercise?

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3) Describe Gandhiji's visit to the Kali temple in Calcutta.

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4) Name the people whom Gandhi goes to meet and succeeds in doing so during his stay with Gokhale.

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28.5 DISCUSSION

Gandhi begins the chapter by praising his host, G. K. Gokhale and his attentions towards him. However, note that Gandhi observes the people he meets and then comments on his estimation about them while at the same time trying to learn from them what he deems to be good. Twice he is dissatisfied with Gokhale's conduct and voices his concern – first, when he sees Gokhale using an expensive horse-carriage and second, when he complains that Gokhale's ailments could well be due to the lack of physical exercise. Gokhale's explanation about the use of the horse-carriage satisfies him but not his excuse for not exercising. It is made quite clear that while he keeps an open mind to others' ideas, he is a man of strong convictions.

Another instance of both his open mindedness on the one hand and strong convictions on the other can be seen when he insists on visiting Babu Kalicharan Banerji. He does not dismiss the man simply because he has chosen to convert to Christianity, but seeks to know what might have prompted such a decision. He likes his simple dress and listens to Banerji carefully though in the end, he does not agree with him. Again, his strong belief in Hinduism does not make him blind to the evils practiced in the name of his religion and cannot condone the killing of sheep in sacrifice to Kali. We witness here his flair for making his point, a skill essential for someone who is

a lawyer by profession – when a friend argues that the sheep feel no pain in the noise of the drum-beating, Gandhi opposes such an outrageous excuse for cruelty.

“I told him that, if the sheep had speech, they would tell a different tale.”

Notice also that Gandhi feels incapable of stopping this custom and wishes, like the average person, for the birth of some great spirit to save the lives of the innocent sheep. He does not yet think of himself as a leader of the people, or as someone who could lead a revolution. He behaves just like you and me in wishing that someone else should stop the cruelty. However, the difference in his wish lies in the fact that he does not lament his helplessness but wishes to go through self-purification and self-sacrifice in order to become capable of saving others. He knows that before changing the world, you must first change yourself and rid yourself of weaknesses.

It is quite clear from our reading of the text that Gandhi not only had a very deep curiosity for knowledge and the desire to learn, but was willing to go through substantial trouble, criticism and hardship to attain his goals. He decides to travel third class in the trains on his tour of India, not to impress people or to make a political statement, but simply to understand the conditions in which third class passengers travelled and thereby gain knowledge about their hardships so that he could then decide how the situation could be improved, if at all.

In Part IV, Chapter XI of his autobiography, Gandhi comments thus on the writing of his autobiography:

“I understand more clearly today what I read long ago about the inadequacy of all autobiography as history. I know that I do not set down in this story all that I remember. Who can say how much I must give and how much omit in the interests of truth? And what would be the value in a court of law of the inadequate *ex parte* evidence being tendered by me of certain events in my life? If some busybody were to cross-examine me on the chapters already written, he could probably shed more light on them, and if it were a hostile critic’s cross-examination, he might even flatter himself for having shown up ‘the hollowness of many of my pretensions’.”

Gandhi is here emphasizing the fact that one cannot write down *everything* in an autobiography. We have just read about a whole month of Gandhi’s stay with Gokhale in a few pages and of course he does not describe every single moment of that stay: “I must needs skip over many a reminiscence of this memorable month.” While we can easily dismiss descriptions of mundane activities like eating or sleeping, he might have casually met many more people and seen more places than the ones he mentions. Here we must understand that an autobiography describes only those aspects of the author’s life that the author believes to be important and worth reading by others. Also, the author might omit embarrassing moments or events which he/she does not wish to disclose to public knowledge. And finally, there might be many things that he/she has simply forgotten although his friends or acquaintances might remember them and judge them to be important. All these omissions can lead us to question the “truth” of an autobiography and Gandhi voices his dilemma of how to select material while writing about his life. He says that he does not

wish to distort the truth but he must be selective. He is also aware that he cannot provide “evidence” or proof for some of the things that he is writing. It is here that the role of the reader becomes all-important for it is up to the readers to interpret what they read according to their own judgement and preconceptions.

Gandhi establishes a relationship with his readers by moving back and forth between the past that he is describing in the autobiography and the time when he is actually writing it down. For example, he says:

“I see little difference between Dr. Ray as he is today and as he used to be then.”

“I believed then, and I believe even now, that, no matter what amount of work one has, one should always find some time for exercise...”

“I came to know of her books later.”

In the last sentence, Gandhi is talking about Sister Nivedita. He did not have a very favourable opinion of her from his first meeting but the second meeting made him admire her love for Hinduism and the reader is then told that he later came to know more of her through her books. This movement in time reminds the reader that this is not simply a chronological account of events but by writing this autobiography, the author is engaging in a conversation with the reader about his experiences and how he changed with time.

Check Your Progress 3

1) How were Gandhi's days spent in Calcutta?

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2) Briefly describe Gandhi's impression of Burma.

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3) Why did Gandhi wish to travel third class? What preparations did he make?

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28.6 LET US SUM UP

The narrative of Gandhi's autobiography is structured by balancing contrasts – of praise and criticism, success and failure, past and present. He presents to the reader both the positive and the negative opinions about the people whom he meets and the customs and beliefs he encounters. He is successful in espousing his cause in South Africa but fails to do anything to stop the cruelty that he loathes in the Kali temple. Similarly, he succeeds in meeting many important people but not Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. There are two clear times mentioned in the text – the past or the time *of which* he is writing from memory and the present, i.e., the time *at which* he is writing the autobiography. There is of course a *third* time – the time when you are reading his words in the twenty-first century and have the advantage of knowing what was to happen later in his life, a knowledge that he did not share when he was writing in the 1920s.

28.7 SUGGESTED READING

An Autobiography by Jawaharlal Nehru (1936)

The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian by Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1951)

28.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) An autobiography is a branch of biographical literature. It is the story of the life of a person written in his/her own words. It is usually written at a later stage in life, and events are recollected either in chronological sequence or at random. Autobiographies are either formal or informal. Memoirs and diaries are a kind of informal autobiography.
- 2) A biographer has to rely solely on external evidence, but an autobiography uses memory as a major source. The main difference lies in the point of view. In biography, the life is recreated by a third person narrator who gathers evidence from documents, diaries and letters. In autobiography, the first person narrator is generally subjective. A biographer concentrates on the successful middle class of a person's life, while autobiography childhood is portrayed extensively.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Gokhale introduced Gandhi to Dr. P. C. Ray by saying that Dr. Ray was a man who devoted nearly all his salary for public work, keeping just Rs. 40 for his own needs. He had decided not to marry.
- 2) Gandhi believed that no matter what amount of work one has, one should always find some time for exercise, just as one does for one's meals. Further, he believed that physical exercise adds to one's capacity for work and keeps the body free from diseases.

- 3) Gandhi's visit to the Kali temple left a deep impression on his mind. He was appalled at the sight of a stream of sheep going to be sacrificed to Kali. He also did not like the line of beggars along the lane that led to the temple among whom were also present able-bodied sadhus and Gandhi was strongly opposed to giving alms to those who could earn their own livelihood by working. He talked to one such sadhu who refused to take the responsibility of stopping the cruelty to the sheep. Inside the temple, he was exasperated at the rivers of blood and it was a sight that he never forgot.
- 4) The people whom Gandhi goes to meet and succeeds in doing so include Dr. P.C. Ray, Babu Kalicharan Banerji, and Sister Nivedita.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Gandhi's days in Calcutta were spent in seeing important people regarding his work in South Africa, and visiting and studying the religious and public institutions of the city.
- 2) Gandhi's most important impression of Burma was that just as Bombay was not India, Rangoon was not Burma and that the Indians had joined hands with English merchants in Burma in making the Burmese people their commission agents, i.e., Indians were equally responsible for the exploitation of the Burmese. Gandhi was pained by the lethargy of the monks or foongis and did not like the innumerable candles and rats in the golden pagoda. However, he was charmed by the freedom and energy of the Burmese women.
- 3) Gandhi wished to travel third class in order to acquaint himself with the hardships faced by the third class passengers. He was given a metal tiffin-box by Gokhale which he got filled with sweet balls and puris. He purchased a canvas bag worth twelve annas and a long coat made of wool. He also carried a blanket and a water-jug.

UNIT 29 ANNE FRANK'S : THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL

Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction : Diary Writing as a Literary Form
- 29.2 The Holocaust
- 29.3 Life of Anneliese Marie "Anne" Frank
- 29.4 Entries from Anne Frank's Diary
 - 29.4.1 Text
 - 29.4.2 Glossary
- 29.5 Discussion
- 29.6 Anne Frank's Diary as a Literary Work
- 29.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.8 Suggested Reading
- 29.9 Answers to Exercises

29.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- comprehend the diary of a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl who lived in Holland under Nazi rule;
- outline the horrors of the Holocaust, the persecution of the Jews, and the trauma of the Second World War; and
- appreciate the art and craft of writing a diary.

29.1 INTRODUCTION: DIARY WRITING AS A LITERARY FORM

A diary, like an autobiography or a memoir, belongs to the autobiographical genre of writing. It is a literary form in which the writer maintains a regularly kept record of his or her own life and thoughts. As a genre it has been practiced for over five hundred years. The name diary is derived from the Latin word 'dies' meaning 'days' which makes clear the 'day to day' nature of the writing. In a diary, to avoid the monotony of a monologue, the writer often invents a fictional addressee, a recipient of the words that are created. The phrase 'Dear Diary', or as Anne Frank's christening of her diary 'Kitty', helps the writer avoid the pain of writing in a vacuum. The diary as a narrative of events in a day by day chronological order, records truthfully the thoughts hopes and emotions of the diarist which are often intensely personal and private. At its purest diary writing is a form of self reflection, a therapeutic mediation of one's life not intended for public eyes. Thus the diaries help individuals, as in the case of Anne Frank, to cope with the stress and trauma in their lives. Yet diaries are also intended for posterity and have future readership in mind. Writers like Jonathan Swift and Samuel Pepys have used the diary form not only to contempt upon the lives, but also as a means of describing and critically analyzing the society, culture and politics of their times.

The diary is also a valuable historical document of an individual life and gives the historian written evidence of the historical, social and political circumstances of a particular period. It helps to enhance our understanding of key periods in history. It is an individual's response to a public calamity and, as is typical of the genre, is an interesting mix of the 'literary' and 'non-literary', the public and private.

The main intention of this unit is to acquaint you with the literary form called the diary using the work of one of the greatest diary writers of all times – Anne Frank.

A diary, like an autobiography or a memoir, belongs to the autobiographical genre of writing. It is a literary form in which the writer maintains a regularly kept record of his or her own life and thoughts. As a genre it has been practised for over five hundred years. The name diary is derived from the Latin word 'dies' meaning 'days' which makes clear the 'day to day' nature of the writing. In a diary, to avoid the monotony of a monologue, the writer often invents a fictional addressee, a recipient of the words that are created. The phrase 'Dear Diary', or Anne Frank's christening of her diary 'Kitty', helps the writer avoid the pain of writing in a vacuum. The diary as a narrative of events in a day by day chronological order, records truthfully the thoughts, hopes and emotions of the diarist which are often intensely personal and private. At its purest, diary writing is a form of self reflection, a therapeutic mediation of one's life not intended for public eyes. Thus the diaries help individuals, as in the case of Anne Frank, to cope with the stress and trauma in their lives. Yet diaries are also intended for posterity and have future readership in mind. Writers like Jonathan Swift and Samuel Pepys have used the diary form not only to comment upon their own lives, but also as a means of describing and critically analyzing the society, culture and politics of their times.

Anne Frank's diary is a clandestine diary written in secret. Thus it is an example of the diary form used for providing an outlet for ideas, words and thoughts that would have been illegal or would have caused a scandal or even death for the writer had it been seized during the time of its writing.

The diary is also a valuable historical document of an individual life and gives the historian written evidence of the social and political circumstances of a particular period. It helps to enhance our understanding of key periods in history. Thus Anne Frank's diary offers us numerous glimpses of the lives of the victims of the Holocaust and gives us valuable insights into the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War. It is an individual's response to a public calamity and, as is typical of the genre, is an interesting mix of the 'literary' and 'non-literary', the public and the private.

During times of great social unrest when public records may have been suppressed, altered or destroyed, the diary can be relied upon to provide a truthful account of the events as is the case with Anne Frank's diary. In chronicling the life of a Jewish family in hiding in Nazi-occupied Holland, it gives us a powerful record of social history that would have remained unknown otherwise.

Anne Frank was a Jewish girl born in Hitler's Nazi Germany. Her diary reveals the trauma and agony of the Holocaust. Her diary, gifted to her on her thirteenth birthday, was named 'Kitty' by her and chronicles the events of her

life from June 14, 1942 to August 1, 1944. These two years of her life, spent in hiding with her family in a 'Secret Annexe' in Amsterdam to escape Nazi persecution, also coincides with the height of World War II. Anne Frank died in a concentration camp after their hideout was discovered by the Gestapo in 1944. Friends found her diary in the attic of the hideout and it was published by her father Otto Frank under the title *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947).

Anne Frank's diary is a remarkable book, a book that speaks truthfully about one of the most despicable chapters in human history – the Holocaust.

29.2 THE HOLOCAUST

What is a Holocaust?

Holocaust refers to the state-sponsored systematic killing of millions of Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its allies under the rule of Adolf Hitler during World War II (1939 – 45). The Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933 and from the very beginning, their policies were anti-Semitic (founded on hatred of the Jews). Under the Nazi rule the Jewish businesses were boycotted, Jews were dismissed from government services and finally they were also deprived of all citizenship rights. Synagogues were destroyed and Jews began to be hunted down, imprisoned in concentration camps or forced into ghettos. The early years of the World War II saw the victory of Germany and many parts of Europe came under Nazi rule. In all these places the Jews were systematically evacuated and killed or forced into slave labour under inhuman conditions. By the end of the Second World War, when the Allies defeated Germany nearly six million Jews had been killed by the Nazis.

29.3 LIFE OF ANNELIESE MARIE “ANNE” FRANK



Anne Frank

Anne Frank (1929-1945) was born in Germany as the second daughter of Otto Heinrich Frank and Edith Hollander. Her sister's name was Margot Frank. In 1933, when Hitler's Nazi party won the election and Anti-Semitic demonstrations began taking place in Germany, Otto Frank moved with his family to Amsterdam and started business there. In 1940 Germany invaded the Netherlands and Jews began to be persecuted in there too. The early references in Anne's diary depict the changes taking place under the German occupation. When a notice summoning Margot to the Nazi office was issued, Otto Frank and his family decided to move into a hiding place behind the company's premises which was called the "Secret Annexe". On July 6, 1942, the family moved into the secret annexe. The hideout consisted of two small rooms with an adjoining toilet on the first level, a large and smaller room at the second level and an attic. The door to the secret rooms was covered with a bookshelf. Another family consisting of Mr and Mrs Van Daan and their sixteen year old son Peter, joined Anne's family of four. Later a dentist called Albert Dussel was also given shelter. They were supported and looked after by a group of local friends — Koophuis, Miep, Elli and Menk Van Senten. Thus this group of eight people started their life in the cramped quarters of a secret hideout. In the beginning Anne speaks of her pleasure at having people to talk to, but soon tensions develop within the group. Anne's relationship with her mother is much strained but she remains very close to her father. Soon there is a romance between Peter and Anne.

Anne's time is mostly occupied by reading and studying and writing her diary. She constantly dreams of going back to school. The pages of her diary reveal the feelings and beliefs, ambitions and hopes of a young girl. She continued to write with increasing hope and joy, never disheartened by fear or isolation, until the last entry of August 1, 1944.

On August 4, 1944, Anne and her family and friends were captured and sent off for interrogation at the Gestapo headquarters and later on to the concentration camps. Anne Frank died at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp a few weeks before the British troops liberated it on April 15, 1945. Only Otto Frank survived and when he came across Anne's diary salvaged by his friends, he decided to publish it.

You shall now read a few entries taken from Anne Frank's Diary.

29.4 ENTRIES FROM ANNE FRANK'S DIARY

Anne Frank wrote in Dutch, and excerpts have been translated into English.

29.4.1 Text

Saturday, 20 June, 1942.

Dear Kitty,

I haven't written for a few days, because I wanted first of all to think about my diary. It's an odd idea for someone like me to keep a diary; not only because I have never done so before, but because it seems to me that neither I – nor for

that matter anyone else – will be interested in the **unbosomings** of a thirteen-year-old school girl. Still, what does that matter? I want to write, but more than that, I want to bring out all kinds of things that lie buried deep in my heart.

There is a saying that “paper is more patient than man”; it came back to me on one of my slightly melancholy days, while I sat chin in hand, feeling too bored and limp even to make up my mind whether to go out or stay at home. Yes, there is no doubt that paper is patient and as I don’t intend to show this cardboard-covered notebook, bearing the proud name of “diary”, to anyone, unless I find a real friend, boy or girl, probably nobody cares. And now I come to the root of the matter, the reason for my starting a diary: it is that I have no such real friend.

Let me put it more clearly, since no one will believe that a girl of thirteen feels herself quite alone in the world, nor is it so. I have darling parents and a sister of sixteen. I know about thirty people whom one might call friends – I have strings of boy friends, anxious to catch a glimpse of me and who, failing that, peep at me through mirrors in class. I have relations, aunts and uncles, who are darlings too, a good home, no – I don’t seem to lack anything. But it’s the same with all my friends, just fun and joking, nothing more. I can never bring myself to talk of anything outside the common round. We don’t seem to be able to get any closer, that is the root of the trouble. Perhaps I lack confidence, but anyway, there it is, a stubborn fact and I don’t seem to be able to do anything about it.

Hence, this diary, in order to enhance in my mind’s eye the picture of a friend for whom I have waited so long, I don’t want to set down a series of bald facts in a diary like most people do, but I want this diary itself to be my friend, and I shall call my friend Kitty. No one will grasp what I’m talking about if I begin my letters to Kitty just out of the blue, so albeit unwillingly, I will start by sketching in brief the story of my life.

My father was thirty-six when he married my mother, who was then twenty-five. My sister Margot was born in 1926 in Frankfort-on-Main, I followed on June 12, 1929, and, as we are Jewish, we **emigrated** to Holland in 1933, where my father was appointed Managing Director of Travies N.V. This firm is in close relationship with the firm of Kolen & Co. in the same building, of which my father is a Partner.

The rest of our family, however, felt the full impact of Hitler’s anti-Jewish laws, so life was filled with anxiety. In 1938 after the **pogroms**, my two uncles (my mother’s brothers) escaped to the U.S.A. My old grandmother came to us, she was then seventy-three. After May 1940 good times rapidly fled: first the war, then the capitulation, followed by the arrival of the Germans, which is when the sufferings of us Jews really began. Anti-Jewish decrees followed each other in quick succession. Jews must wear a yellow star, Jews must hand in their bicycles, Jews are banned from trams and are forbidden to drive. Jews are only allowed to do their shopping between three and five o’clock and then only in shops which bear the placard “Jewish shop.” Jews must be indoors by eight o’clock and cannot even sit in their own gardens after that hour. Jews are forbidden to visit theatres, cinemas, and other places of entertainment. Jews may not take part in public sports. Swimming

baths, tennis courts, hockey fields, and other sports grounds are all prohibited to them. Jews may not visit Christians. Jews must go to Jewish schools, and many more restrictions of a similar kind.

So we could not do this and were forbidden to do that. But life went on in spite of it all. Jopie used to say to me, "You're scared to do anything, because it may be forbidden." Our freedom was strictly limited. Yet things were still bearable.

Granny died in January 1942; no one will ever know how much she is present in my thoughts and how much I love her still.

In 1934 I went to school at the Montessori Kindergarten and continued there. It was at the end of the school year, I was in form 6B, when I had to say good-bye to Mrs. K. We both wept, it was very sad. In 1941 I went, with my sister Margot, to the Jewish Secondary School, she into the fourth form and I into the first.

So far everything is all right with the four of us and here I come to the present day.

Friday, 9 October, 1942

Dear Kitty,

I've only got **dismal** and depressing news for you today. Our many Jewish friends are being taken away by the dozen. These people are treated by the Gestapo without a shred of decency, being loaded into cattle trucks and sent to Westerbork, the big Jewish camp in Drente. Westerbork sounds terrible: only one washing cubicle for a hundred people and not nearly enough lavatories. There is no separate accommodation. Men, women, and children all sleep together. One hears of frightful immorality because of this, and a lot of the women, and even girls, who stay there any length of time are expecting babies.

It is impossible to escape; most of the people in the camp are branded as inmates by their shaven heads and many also by their Jewish appearance.

If it is as bad as this in Holland whatever will it be like in the distant and barbarous regions they are sent to? We assume that most of them are murdered. The English radio speaks of their being gassed.

Perhaps that is the quickest way to die. I feel terribly upset. I couldn't tear myself away while Miep told these dreadful stories, and she herself was equally wound up for that matter. Just recently for instance, a poor old crippled Jewess was sitting on her doorstep; she had been told to wait there by the Gestapo, who had gone to fetch a car to take her away. The poor old thing was terrified by the guns that were shooting at English planes overhead, and by the glaring beams of the searchlights. But Miep did not dare take her in; no one would undergo such a risk. The Germans strike without the slightest mercy. Elli too is very quiet: her boy friend has got to go to Germany. She is afraid that the airmen who fly over our homes will drop their bombs, often weighing a million kilos, on Dirk's head. Jokes such as "he's not likely to get a million" and "it only takes one bomb" are in rather bad taste. Dirk is certainly not the only one who has to go: trainloads of boys leave daily. If they

stop at a small station en route, sometimes some of them manage to get out unnoticed and escape, perhaps a few manage it. This, however, is not the end of my bad news. Have you ever heard of **hostages**? That's the latest thing in penalties for **sabotage**. Can you imagine anything so dreadful?

Prominent citizens - innocent people - are thrown into prison to await their fate. If the saboteur can't be traced the Gestapo simply put about five hostages against the wall. Announcements of their deaths appear in the paper frequently. These outrages are described as "fatal accidents". Nice people, the Germans! To think that I was once one of them too! No, Hitler took away our nationality long ago. In fact, German and Jews are the greatest enemies in the world.

Yours, Anne

Wednesday, 10 March, 1943

Dear Kitty,

We had a short circuit last evening, and on top of that the guns kept banging away all the time. I still haven't got over my fear of everything connected with shooting and planes, and I creep into Daddy's bed nearly every night for comfort. I know it's very childish but you don't know what it is like. The A. A. guns roar so loudly that you can't hear yourself speak. Mrs. Van Daan, the **fatalist**, was nearly crying, and said in a very timid little voice, "Oh, it is so unpleasant! Oh, they are shooting so hard", by which she really means "I'm so frightened."

It didn't seem nearly so bad by candlelight as in the dark. I was shivering, just as if I had a temperature, and begged Daddy to light the candle again. He was relentless, the light remained off. Suddenly there was a burst of machine-gun fire, and that is ten times worse than guns. Mummy jumped out of bed and, to Pim's annoyance, lit the candle. When he complained her answer was firm: "After all, Anne's not exactly a **veteran** soldier," and that was the end of it.

Have I already told you about Mrs. Van Daan's other fears? I don't think so. If I am to keep you informed of all that happens in the "Secret Annexe", you must know about this too. One night Mrs. Van Daan thought she heard burglars in the attic, she heard loud footsteps and was so frightened that she woke her husband. Just at that moment the burglars disappeared and the only sounds that Mr. Van Daan could hear were the heartbeats of the frightened fatalist herself. "Oh, Putti [Mr. Van Daan's nickname], they are sure to have taken the sausages and all our peas and beans. And Peter, I wonder if he is still safely in bed?" "They certainly won't have stolen Peter. Listen, don't worry and let me go to sleep." But nothing came of that. Mrs. Van Daan was far too nervous to sleep another wink. A few nights after that the whole Van Daan family was woken by ghostly sounds. Peter went up to the attic with a torch—and scamper-scamper! What do you think it was running away? A swarm of enormous rats! When we knew who the thieves were, we let Mouschi sleep in the attic and the uninvited guests didn't come back again; at least not during the night.

Peter went up to the loft a couple of evenings ago to fetch some old newspapers. He had to hold the trap door firmly to get down the steps. He put

his hand down without looking... and went tumbling down the ladder from the sudden shock and pain. Without knowing it he had put his hand on a large rat, and it had bitten him hard. By the time he reached us, as white as a sheet and with his knees knocking, the blood had soaked through his pajamas. And no wonder; it's not very pleasant to stroke a large rat; and to get bitten into the bargain is really dreadful.

Yours, Anne

Sunday, 2 May, 1943

Dear Kitty,

If I just think of how we live here, I usually come to the conclusion that it is a paradise compared with how other Jews who are not in hiding must be living. Even so, later on, when everything is normal again, I shall be amazed to think that we, who were so **spick and span** at home, should have sunk to such a low level. By this I mean that our manners have declined. For instance, ever since we have been here, we have had one oilcloth on our table which, owing to so much use, is not one of the cleanest. Admittedly I often try to clean it with a dirty dishcloth, which is more hole than cloth. The table doesn't do us much credit either, in spite of hard scrubbing. The Van Daans have been sleeping on the same flannelette sheet the whole winter, one can't wash it here because the soap powder we get on the ration isn't sufficient, and besides it's not good enough. Daddy goes about in frayed trousers and his tie is beginning to show signs of wear too. Mummy's **corsets** have split today and are too old to be repaired, while Margot goes about in a brassiere two sizes too small for her.

Mummy and Margot have managed the whole winter with three vests between them, and mine are so small that they don't even reach my tummy.

Certainly, these are all things which can be overcome. Still, I sometimes realize with a shock : "How are we, now going about in worn-out things, from my pants down to Daddy's shaving brush, ever going to get back to our pre-war standards?"

They were banging away so much last night that four times I gathered all my belongings together. Today I have packed a suitcase with the most necessary things for an escape. But Mummy quite rightly says: "Where will you escape to?" The whole of Holland is being punished for the strikes which have been going on in many parts of the country. Therefore a state of **siege** has been declared and everyone gets one butter coupon less. What naughty little children!

Yours, Anne

Tuesday, 4 April, 1944

Dear Kitty,

For a long time I haven't had any idea of what I was working for any more, the end of the war is so terribly far away. So unreal, like a fairy tale. If the war isn't over by September I shan't go to school any more, because I don't want to be two years behind. Peter filled my days—nothing but Peter, dreams and thoughts until Saturday, when I felt so utterly miserable, oh, it was terrible. I was holding back my tears all the while I was with Peter, then laughed with

Van Daan over a lemon punch, was cheerful and excited, but the moment I was alone I knew that I would have to cry my heart out. So, clad in my nightdress, I let myself go and slipped down onto the floor. First I said my long prayer very earnestly, then I cried with my head on my arms, my knees bent up, on the bare floor, completely folded up. One large sob brought me back to earth again, and I quelled my tears because I didn't want them to hear anything in the next room. Then I began trying to talk some courage into myself. I could only say : "I must, I must, I must ...". Completely stiff from the unnatural position, I fell against the side of the bed and fought on, until I climbed into bed again just before half past ten. It was over!

And now it's all over. I must work, so as not to be a fool, to get on, to become a journalist, because that's what I want! I know that I can write, a couple of my stories are good, my descriptions of the "Secret Annexe" are humorous, there's a lot in my diary that speaks, but – whether I have real talent remains to be seen.

"Eva's Dream" is my best fairy tale, and the queer thing about it is that I don't know where it comes from. Quite a lot of "Cady's Life" is good too, but, on the whole, it's nothing.

I am the best and sharpest critic of my own work. I know myself what is and what is not well written. Anyone who doesn't write doesn't know how wonderful it is; I used to bemoan the fact that I couldn't draw at all, but now I am more than happy that I can at least write. And if I haven't any talent for writing books or newspaper articles, well, then I can always write for myself.

I want to get on; I can't imagine that I would have to lead the same sort of life as Mummy and Mrs. Van Daan and all the women who do their work and are then forgotten. I must have something besides a husband and children, something that I can devote myself to!

I want to go on living even after my death! And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift, this possibility of developing myself and of writing, of expressing all that is in me.

I can shake off everything if I write, my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn. But, and that is the great question, will I ever be able to write anything great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, oh, I hope so very much, for I can recapture everything when I write, my thoughts, my ideals and my fantasies.

I haven't done anything more to "Cady's Life" for ages, in my mind I know exactly how to go on, but somehow it doesn't flow from my pen. Perhaps I never shall finish it, it may land up in the wastepaper basket, or the fire ... that's a horrible idea, but then I think to myself, "At the age of fourteen and with so little experience, how can you write about philosophy?"

So I go on again with fresh courage, I think I shall succeed, because I want to write!

Yours, Anne

Friday, 26 May, 1944

Anne Frank's : *The
Diary of a Young Girl*

Dear Kitty,

At last, at last I can sit quietly at my table in front of a crack of window and write you everything.

I feel so miserable, I haven't felt like this for months; even after the burglary I didn't feel so utterly broken. On the one hand, the vegetable man, the Jewish question, which is being discussed minutely over the whole house, the invasion delay, the bad food, the strain, the miserable atmosphere, my disappointment in Peter; and on the other hand, Elli's engagement, Whitsun reception, flowers, Kraler's birthday, fancy cakes, and stories about cabarets, films and concerts. That difference, that huge difference, it's always there, one day we laugh and see the funny side of the situation, but the next we are afraid, fear, suspense, and despair staring from our faces. Miep and Kraler carry the heaviest burden of the eight in hiding. Miep in all she does, and Kraler through the enormous responsibility, which is sometimes so much for him that he can hardly talk from pent-up nerves and strain. Koophuis and Elli look after us well too, but they can forget us at times, even if it's only for a few hours, or a day, or even two days. They have their own worries, Koophuis over his health, Elli over her engagement, which is not altogether rosy, but they also have their little outings, visits to friends, and the whole life of ordinary people. For them the suspense is sometimes lifted, even if it is only for a short time, but for us it never lifts for a moment. We've been here for two years now; how long have we still to put up with this almost unbearable, ever increasing pressure?

The sewer is blocked, so we mustn't run water, or rather only a trickle, when we go to the W.C. we have to take a lavatory brush with us, and we keep dirty water in a large Cologne pot. We can manage for today, but what do we do if the plumber can't do the job alone? The municipal scavenging service doesn't come until Tuesday.

Miep sent us a currant cake, made up in the shape of a doll with the words "Happy Whitsun" on the note attached to it. It's almost as if she's ridiculing us, our present frame of mind and our uneasiness could hardly be called "happy". The affair of the vegetable man has made us more nervous, you hear "shh, shh" from all sides again, and we're being quieter over everything. The police forced the door there, so they could do it to us too! If one day we too should ... no, I mustn't write it, but I can't put the question out of my mind today. On the contrary, all the fear I've already been through seems to face me again in all its frightfulness.

This evening at eight o'clock I had to go to the downstairs lavatory all alone, there was no one down there, as everyone was listening to the radio, I wanted to be brave, but it was difficult. I always feel much safer here upstairs than alone downstairs in that large, silent house, alone with the mysterious **muffled** noises from upstairs and the tooting of motor horns in the street. I have to hurry for I start to quiver if I begin thinking about the situation.

Again and again I ask myself, would it not have been better for us all if we had not gone into hiding, and if we were dead now and not going through all this misery, especially as we shouldn't be running our protectors into danger

any more. But we all **recoil** from these thoughts too, for we still love life, we haven't yet forgotten the voice of nature, we still hope, hope about everything. I hope something will happen soon now, shooting if need be – nothing can crush us more than this restlessness. Let the end come, even if it is hard, then at least we shall know whether we are finally going to win through or go under.

Yours, Anne

Tuesday, 6 June, 1944

Dear Kitty,

“This is **D-day**,” came the announcement over the English news and quite rightly, “this is the day”. The invasion has begun!

The British gave the news at eight o'clock this morning: Calais, Boulogne, Le Havre, and Cherbourg, also the Pas de Calais (as usual), were heavily bombarded. Moreover, as a safety measure for all occupied territories, all people who live within a radius of thirty-five kilometers from the coast are warned to be prepared for bombardments. If possible, the English will drop pamphlets one hour beforehand.

According to the German news, British parachute troops have landed on the French coast, “English landing craft are in battle with the German Navy,” says the B. B. C.

We discussed it over the “Annexe” breakfast at nine o'clock: Is this just a trial landing like Dieppe two years ago?

British broadcast in German, Dutch, French, and other languages at ten o'clock: “The invasion has begun!” – that means the “real” invasion. English broadcast in German at eleven o'clock: speech by the Supreme Commander, **General Dwight Eisenhower**.

The English news at twelve o'clock in English: “This is D-day”. General Eisenhower said to the French people: “Stiff fighting will come now, but after this the victory. The year 1944 is the year of complete victory, good luck.”

BBC news in English at one o'clock (*translated*): 11,000 planes stand ready, and are flying to and fro nonstop landing troops and attacking behind the lines, 4000 landing boats, plus small craft, are landing troops and material between Cherbourg and Le Havre incessantly. English and American troops are already engaged in hard fighting. Speeches by Gerbrandy, by the Prime Minister of Belgium, King Haakon of Norway, De Gaulle of France, the King of England, and last, but not least, **Churchill**.

Great commotion in the “Secret Annexe”! Would the long-awaited liberation that has been talked of so much, but which still seems too wonderful, too much like a fairy tale, ever come true? Could we be granted victory this year, 1944? We don't know yet, but hope is revived within us, it gives us fresh courage, and makes us strong again. Since we must put up bravely with all the fears, privations, and sufferings, the great thing now is to remain calm and steadfast. Now more than ever we must clench our teeth and not cry out.

France, Russia, Italy, and Germany, too, can all cry out and give vent to their misery, but we haven't the right to do that yet!

Anne Frank's : *The Diary of a Young Girl*

Oh, Kitty, the best part of the invasion is that I have the feeling that friends are approaching. We have been oppressed by those terrible Germans for so long, they have had their knives so at our throats, that the thought of friends and delivery fills us with confidence!

Now it doesn't concern the Jews any more, no, it concerns, Holland and all occupied Europe. Perhaps, Margot says, I may yet be able to go back to school in September or October.

Yours, Anne

P.S. I'll keep you up to date with all the latest news!

29.4.2 Glossary

unbosomings:	to reveal the innermost thoughts and desires.
emigrated:	to leave one country to settle in another.
pogrom:	organized massacre, originally of Jews in Russia.
dismal:	causing or showing gloom.
hostage:	a person given or seized by another as pledge or security.
sabotage:	wilfully destroy.
fatalist:	a person who submits to all that happens as inevitable, who believes that everything is predetermined.
veteran:	a person who has a long experience of military service and war
spick and span:	very neat.
corsets:	a woman's close fitting supporting undergarment.
siege:	persistent attack.
muffled:	to reduce sound for secrecy.
recoil:	to move back suddenly.
D-day:	day on which any important operation is scheduled to begin; the Allied forces invaded northern France on 6 June 1944.

General Eisenhower:	Commander of the Allied forces and later President of the U S.
Churchill:	British Prime Minister during World War II and eminent statesman and writer.

29.5 DISCUSSION

You have just read a few entries in Anne Frank's Diary. It describes the incidents in her life from her thirteenth birthday in June 1942 till she was captured by the Gestapo in August, 1944. The entries are full of interesting anecdotes, thoughts and dreams that are part of the life of a young girl. She truthfully describes the fear and hopes of a group of people comprising immediate family and friends who took refuge in a secret hideout to escape the persecution of the Nazis. Let us look at some of the important incidents and people in Anne's Diary.

Anne's early recollections of Jewish persecution

Anne was born of Jewish parents in Germany who emigrated to Holland in 1933, when Anne was four years old, due to Jewish persecution. Even there, the family felt the impact of Hitler's anti-Jewish laws. Once the Second World War started and the Germans captured Holland, life became really hard. Many Anti-Jewish laws were passed. Jews had to wear a yellow star to distinguish them, they had to hand in their bicycles, and they were banned from trams and forbidden to drive. They could shop only between three and five and only in Jewish shops. Cinemas and theatres were forbidden to Jews and they could not take part in public sports. Jewish children could study only in Jewish schools. So Anne had to discontinue her regular school and attend the Jewish Secondary School.

The family's escape to the 'Secret Annexe'

Anne's father had decided that they would escape the Germans before they came to collect them. When the Nazis summoned Anne's sister Margot, the family decided that the time has come to go into hiding. Anne and Margot packed their essentials into school bags. Their friends Miep and Henk took some bags filled with clothes. Early in the morning each family member put on a number of clothes and giving the impression that they were going to school, they walked to the secret annexe in the building of Anne's father's office. The annexe was hidden behind the office and contained a few rooms with minimum facilities. They were soon joined by the Van Daans and later on by a dentist called Albert Dussel. Thus this group of eight people lived in the confines of the secret annexe for two years.

Anne's relationship with her parents

Anne's relationship with her mother was strained. But she was deeply attached to her father Otto Frank. She had little in common with her mother. She felt that her mother loved her sister Margot more than her. Anne adored her father to whom she was emotionally the closest.

Initially Anne looked forward to the arrival of the Van Daan at the secret annexe since there would be more company. She describes their son, Peter as not yet sixteen and rather 'soft, shy and gawky'. At first she does not like his company but later on they fall in love. Anne does not like the quarrels between Mrs. and Mr. Van Daan who shout at each other. She constantly makes fun of Mrs. Van Daan who is often described as 'unbearable'.

Check Your Progress 1

Read the questions given below and answer them in your own words in the space provided before you turn to the answers supplied by us at the end of the unit:

1) What does Anne call her diary and what are her reasons for writing a diary?

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.....
.....
.....

2) Why does Anne think she is living in a paradise?

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.....
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3) Why is Anne thankful to God?

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29.6 ANNE FRANK'S DIARY AS A LITERARY WORK

Anne Frank's Diary is a touching and beautifully written commentary on war and its terrible impact on human life. Though a first person narrative which describes individual and personal experiences, one can hear in it the voice of over six million people affected by the Holocaust. As a writer and humanist, she is the spokesperson of an age, while at the same time speaking to future generations about the folly of indifference. Thus, her diary is a social, historical and literary document. Though a diary, one can read it like a good novel because it is able to sustain tension in the reader. Anne portrays the curious mental state of transformation from a child to an adult which is both a universal and personal experience. Her prose style is characterized by precision, confidence and tenseness. But what is most striking is her stunning honesty which makes her diary a valid historical document. Anne is a master in characterization and is able to portray the people around her with great psychological realism. Occasionally, she becomes shrewd and cruel in her

character analyses but these can be seen as part of the mood swings of adolescence. But she is most critical and uncompromising in her analysis of herself. The most endearing quality of the diary is Anne's self-introspection. The reader is able to peep into the depths of the mind of a young girl living in great stress under extraordinary conditions. Yet her cheerfulness and optimism, her perseverance and will power, her courage in speaking the truth, make her writing unique in itself. Her prose style is also characterized by warmth and wit, sensitivity and humanity, all combining with vivid picturization and psychological insight. She wrote under the threat of death but her writing has immortalized her. Anne Frank's diary is a fitting memorial to her fine spirit and offers a rich and rewarding experience in reading. Today Anne Frank's diary is considered a classic and has been translated into more than thirty-one languages, including Bengali and Malayalam. It has been published in thirty countries and has sold more than one million copies in hard cover alone. It has been adopted into numerous plays and films. Anne Frank's wish "I want to go on living even after my death", has thus come literally true. She lives on through her diary.

29.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have

- acquainted you with the life and times of Anne Frank;
- analyzed the prose form of diary writing;
- discussed the Holocaust and its significance; and
- read a few entries from Anne Frank's diary

29.8 SUGGESTED READING

It is recommended that you read the whole diary of Anne Frank.

Anne Frank: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Introduction by Eleanor Roosevelt.
New York: Bantam Books.

Budget Jones's Diary: A Novel by Helen Fielding (Picador, 1966).

29.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Anne names her diary Kitty. Her reason for starting a diary is that she has no real friend and she feels Kitty is the friend she had been wanting for so long.
- 2) When Anne compares her life with the fate of millions of Jews who are not in hiding and are suffering great persecution at the hands of the Nazi regime, she feels that she is living in paradise.
- 3) Anne wants to be remembered even after her death and so she thanks God for giving her the gift of writing which helps her to develop herself and express all her thoughts. When she writes, her sorrows disappear and she feels courageous enough to face the world again.

UNIT 30 MARGARET LAURENCE'S : "MY FINAL HOUR"

Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 What is a Speech?
- 30.3 Margaret Laurence: Life and Works
- 30.4 Laurence's Social Concerns
- 30.5 "My Final Hour": Excerpts from Laurence's Speech
 - 30.5.1 Text
 - 30.5.2 Glossary
- 30.6 Discussion
 - 30.6.1 Summary
 - 30.6.2 Features of Laurence's Speech
- 30.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.8 Suggested Reading
- 30.9 Answers to Exercises

30.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall read and discuss excerpts from a speech delivered by Margaret Laurence at Trent University. After a careful reading of this unit, you should be able to:

- outline the life and works of Margaret Laurence;
- understand a speech as a form of literary expression;
- consider the commitment of Laurence to the cause of nuclear disarmament; and
- explain the main features of Laurence's speech.

30.1 INTRODUCTION

We have now come to the final unit of this block. In the previous three units, i.e. 27, 28 and 29, we introduced you to three written forms of non-fictional prose, i.e; biography, autobiography and diary, respectively. In this unit, we shall acquaint you with a spoken form of non-fictional prose—a speech. For this, we have selected a speech by Margaret Laurence, "My Final Hour", given at Trent University. You will be reading excerpts from this speech in this unit.

30.2 WHAT IS A SPEECH?

A speech is a "continuous spoken utterance" or a "spoken communication or expression of thought in prose" addressed to an audience. It presents the personal viewpoint of the speaker in a convincing manner, on a subject that is

of universal importance. A speech can be spoken from a written draft or be delivered extempore (given on the spur of the moment; without prior preparation; an extempore speech is one that is delivered without the help of any text or notes).

Speeches are generally associated with politicians. But not all political speeches have literary merit. Usually, a political speech becomes a mere vote-catching rhetoric (a showy and declamatory expression), that is designed to elicit superficial public applause. On a slightly lesser scale, it becomes an oration rather than a speech. Is there a difference between an oration and a speech? Only very slight as both terms are generally treated as having interchangeable meanings. But, since we are analyzing a speech as a form of literary expression, we must point out the difference between an oration and a speech, especially with regard to their aim, content and presentation.

Oratory is the art of public speaking. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), a great Roman orator who captivated his audience with his stately oration, wrote a textbook on oratory, *Treatise de Gratore*, in which he laid down the laws of rhetoric. The aim of the orator is to sway multitudes and decide dynastic fortunes, electoral issues, and fates of national and international issues. What differentiates an oration from a speech is the presentation or style. The content of an orator is not as important as its presentation. In other words, oratory is more a matter of style than of substance; more an issue of manner than of matter; less a question of content (subject matter) and more of diction (choice of words). The same ideas may occur to many, but an orator dresses them well, thereby capturing the attention and admiration of the listeners. When we call someone a good orator, it is not because we like the content of his/her speech but because of the manner in which the speech is delivered. Thus, an oration is a skilful speech intended to create an impression, and relies on slogans, catchphrases, epigrams, and, in its extreme form, on rhetorical devices like a high flown and pompous language and a great deal of theatricality. Most, not all, political speeches are rhetorical orations with an inflated, over-decorated and insincere style. In fact, it would not be wrong to call them harangues (loud, pompous and wordy addresses made to a multitude). Some modern-day religious discourses are in the nature of rhetorical orations.

A fine speech, on the other hand, is not delivered with the aim to excite or rouse the audience to tumultuous applause. Rather, it is made to inspire and persuade the hearers to think along the lines the speakers wishes them to. Unlike in an oration, it is the content in a speech that is of primary importance and which lends force to it. A power-packed speech is one that is charged with the sturdy conviction the speaker has in his/her beliefs. This makes his/her speech persuasive and convincing. It comes direct from the heart of the speaker and goes, just as direct, into the hearts and minds of the listeners, bringing a radical change in their way of thinking.

History is witness to many a powerful speech, made by eminent persons like Swami Vivekananda, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, to name just a few, that have marked a turning point in the life of people and nations of the world. For instance, Swami Vivekananda won demonstrative recognition abroad for India and Vedantism with his magnetic personality together with the thought-

provoking address he gave at Chicago in September 1893, during the World Parliament of Religions, in which he advocated tolerance and universal acceptance and condemned bigotry and fanaticism. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the most famous black civil rights leader, changed the way America treated its black citizens with his most stirring and fiery extempore speech 'I Have A Dream'. Delivered in 1963 to more than 2,50,000 people in Washington, this speech marked a turning point in American history. Following the speech, the cause of the blacks occupied centre stage, with 'I Have A Dream' as the national mantra, till the 1964 Civil Rights Act made racial discrimination illegal. One still remembers that unforgettable and landmark speech 'Tryst With Destiny' made by Jawaharlal Nehru to the Constituent Assembly, at the midnight hour of Indian independence, August 14, 1947, in which he defined and captured the essence of the triumphant culmination of years of freedom struggle against the British Empire in India.

Both a powerful content and the manner of speaking imbue a speech with literary merit. By manner is meant style or presentation of the subject matter. A judicious and effective use of language and literary devices adds literary value to a speech. Good speakers have a way with words. They are persons of eloquence, that is, they know the art of expressing their strong emotion in correct, appropriate, expressive and fluent language. Since a speech is vocal, voice modulation and intonation (the rise and fall in pitch in the voice) in its delivery are also desirable. Literary devices like humour, pathos, irony, metaphorical expressions, forceful repetitions etc. give additional flavour to a speech.

In a nutshell, an orator speaks for effect, banking on a skilful use of language, while a fine speaker is one who reasons justly and expresses himself/herself elegantly upon a subject he/she passionately believes in. Margaret Laurence's "My Final Hour" included in this unit for a detailed study by you, is a good example of a fine speech.

30.3 MARGARET LAURENCE: LIFE AND WORKS



Margaret Laurence

Margaret Laurence (1926-1987) is universally acclaimed as one of the most compelling voices of Canadian Literature. Although firmly rooted in the Canadian soil, her stories and novels touch the psyche of all developing nations.

Born on July 18, 1926, in Neepawa, Manitoba, as Margaret Wemyss, she began writing at the age of seven, though she took herself seriously as a writer only when she was twenty-three. In 1948, Margaret married a civil engineer, Jack Laurence, with whom she first proceeded, to England and then to Somaliland in East Africa, where they lived for two years. Later the Laurences lived in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) for five years. This seven-year sojourn in Africa, where she had a first-hand experience of the stunting effects that colonization can have over the natives and their cultures, shaped her socio-political commitment as a writer. Here she also saw the bondage and subjection of women and realized their position to be that of victims of a male-centric society—a theme she took up in her African novels and later elaborated in the Canadian novels. In 1957, the Laurences moved to Vancouver. In 1962, Margaret separated from her husband and settled in England where she wrote four out of her five Canadian novels. She finally went back to Canada where she was honoured with various awards and citations for her work. In 1986, she was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, and, in 1987, unable to bear her illness, she took an overdose of sleeping tablets and ended her life.

A prolific writer, Laurence has seven novels to her credit. *This Side Jordan* (1969) and *The Tomorrow Tamer* (1963) constitute her African novels and are set in Ghana. *The Stone Angel* (1964) is the first of Laurence's Canadian novels and tells the story of ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley and her life-long journey towards self-understanding; *A Jest of God* (1966) tells the story of Rachel Cameron, a woman struggling to come to terms with herself and her world; *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) explores the dilemmas of personal identity of the protagonist Stacey MacAindra; *A Bird in the House* (1970) is a set of eight interconnected stories that constitute the "fictional autobiography" of Laurence; *The Diviners* (1974) is the last of the Canadian series and is a powerful story of an independent woman, Morag Gunn, who refuses to abandon her search for love.

In addition to the novels, Laurence has also written four books for children. Her autobiography *The Prophet's Camel Bell* was written in 1963 and a book of translations *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* in 1954. A large number of her essays, articles, interviews and speeches have been published in various anthologies, the more prominent ones being *Long Drums and Cannons* (1968) and *Heart of a Stranger* (1976). Her memoir *Dance on the Earth* was published posthumously in 1989.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is Margaret Laurence's nationality?
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- 2) Name any two novels of Laurence that are set in Canada.
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- 3) What was the main cause of Laurence's death?
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.....
- 4) Who gave the speech 'I Have A Dream'?
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.....

30.4 LAURENCE'S SOCIAL CONCERNS

Before you begin to read the speech "My Final Hour" by Margaret Laurence, it will help you to know something about her commitment to social causes, especially the one of nuclear disarmament, so that once the background to the speech is clear to you, you can understand the views expressed by Laurence more clearly. "It is my feeling that as we grow older we should become not *less* radical but *more* so," said Margaret Laurence in her speech "My Final Hour". Acting on this belief, Laurence turned from fiction-writing to promoting causes like nuclear disarmament, social justice and environmental protection, through didactic lectures, essays and even direct-mail fund raising campaigns during the final decade of her life. Animated by moral and religious urgency, she even lent her prestigious name to other causes.

On all nuclear questions, Laurence's arguments were the simple observations of a moral, sensitive person. She argued that when it comes to a nuclear war, "there are not two sides," as there will neither be any victors nor any vanquished, but only a handful of survivors, that too if the earth survives the nuclear holocaust. To Laurence, the nuclear issue was most important. If the issue of a nuclear attack was not solved, according to her, there was not going to be anyone around to solve any of the other issues like those of starvation, disease, hardships and sufferings that existed in so many parts of the world. To quote her: "For the price of one Trident nuclear submarine, malaria could be wiped off the face of the earth. That gives me pause. These two issues, the old one of the needless suffering in the world, and the building of nuclear weapons, are very closely tied together."

For Laurence, the problem in the nuclear arms race was due to a "crisis in the imagination" on the part of world leaders, particularly the two great superpowers, who talked about megadeath without realizing, as Laurence put it, "that these are real live human beings, that they're talking about our children, real people, who in a nuclear holocaust would die horribly.....". She further pointed out that while writing a novel she always tried to feel that her characters were as real as she was, that their joys and pains were as real as hers, and declared that , "...the inability to feel the reality of others is what enables people to become so brutalized that they are able to torture and murder their fellow human beings."

Laurence emphasized the importance of the ordinary people who could have an effect in halting the nuclear arms race. If people realized that none of them was ordinary, that they all were unique human beings who mattered, they could get together and force their respective governments to bring about global disarmament of nuclear weapons.

As a writer, too, Laurence was committed to solving the nuclear issue, although she found it hard to address the question or tackle it through her articles, talks, lectures etc. As she summed it : “I cannot write novels that preach, but what I can do is to affirm my whole life-view through the characters in my books. I think that in all my writing, a very strong kind of celebration of life itself comes through.”

This speech expresses Margaret Laurence’s commitment to resolve the nuclear issue. She speaks out against the use of nuclear arms and the expenditure of billions of dollars on their production. She emphatically advocates global nuclear disarmament.

30.5 “MY FINAL HOUR” : EXCERPTS FROM LAURENCE’S SPEECH

Margaret Laurence had a long and close association with Trent University. After her return to Canada in 1969, Margaret finally established permanent residence in Lakefield, a small town ten minutes drive from Trent University. She was awarded an honorary degree by Trent in 1972, and she joined the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Canadian Studies* in 1973. Her association with Trent University deepened in the years that followed. She became Trent’s first Writer-in-Residence in 1974, participating generously in the life of the university, attending tutorials and seminars, delivering formal and informal talks and counseling young writers. Two most splendid examples of Laurence engaging her friends and community in a direct way are her addresses “Books That Mattered to Me” and “My Final Hour” given at Trent University. “My Final Hour”, is an address first delivered to the Trent University Philosophy Society on 29 March 1983, at the Trent Seminary.

30.5.1 Text

“My Final Hour”

This is the first time I have ever had the privilege of addressing graduating students who are candidates to the **ministry** of the church. I must admit to a feeling of nervousness, in standing here and making a statement of personal belief. In accepting this invitation, I requested that a solid **lectern** be provided—something I could lean on. I told a friend about this need, and she said, “Margaret, what you really want is not a lectern but a **pulpit**”. Well, I don’t think that is the case at all, but it is true that in speaking to you now, I feel the need of something solid to lean on, physically, but also the need—not just now but every day—of something spiritual to lean on. This **sustaining** force is faith.

First I would like to pass on one piece of advice. If, as you grow older, you feel you are also growing stupider, do not worry. This is normal, and usually occurs around the time when your children, now grown, are discovering the opposite—they now see that you aren’t nearly as stupid as they had believed when they were young teen-agers. Take heart from that. True, your new-found sense of stupidity will no doubt be partly due to the fact that the technology of the age has far outstripped any feeble knowledge of it that you

may once have felt you had. It may, however, also be due to the fact that at last you may be learning a little healthy humility—humility in its true and indeed religious sense, which of course has nothing at all to do with self-effacement but with a recognition of your human limitations. I would not claim that I have learned that kind of humility—that struggle to learn which will never cease. But at least I now can accept with some sort of equanimity that many things are beyond my power.

My limitations extend to many fields. I know now that I will never know an enormous amount about music and painting. My knowledge of science is likely to remain minuscule. I will never know as much as I would like to about the planets and their patterned courses. Even in my own area of so-called expertise, I will never read all the novels I would like to read, even though I read great numbers of them yearly. I will also never write a novel with which I am really satisfied.

....Well, an acceptance of limitations does not mean that one is not constantly trying to extend the boundaries of knowledge and accomplishment. And it certainly does not mean an acceptance of defeat, in whatever fields our endeavours take place. It is my feeling that as we grow older we should become not *less radical* but *more so*. I do not, of course, mean this in any political-party sense, but in a willingness to struggle for those things in which we passionately believe. Social activism and the struggle for social justice are often thought of as natural activities of the young but not of the middle-aged or elderly. In fact, I don't think this was ever true, and certainly in our own era we are seeing an enormous upsurge of people of all ages who are deeply and committedly concerned about the state of our hurting and endangered world.

We are faced now with an emergency that concerns not only our own personal lives, but the lives of all people and all creatures on earth.

Ours is a terrifying world. Injustice, suffering and fear are everywhere to be found. It is difficult to maintain hope in such a world, and yet I believe there is hope. I want to proclaim and affirm my personal belief in the **social gospel**. I speak as a Christian, a woman, a writer, a parent, a member of humanity and a sharer in life itself, a life I believe to be informed and infused with the holy spirit. I do not think it is enough to hope and pray that our own lives and soul will know **grace**, even though my entire life as a writer has been concerned with my belief that all human individuals matter, that no one is ordinary. Our Lord's new commandment speaks very clearly. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The social gospel is no easier now than it ever was. My generation was the first in human history to come into young adulthood knowing that the human race now had the dreadful ability to destroy all life on earth and possibly the earth itself. Only later did we realize the full extent of the destruction of life, a continuing destruction passed on to the then-unborn children of survivors, but we did know that after **Hiroshima**, August 6th, 1945, the world would never be the same again. The **annihilation** caused by the first atomic bombs was unthinkable, but it had happened. Also, we had **taken it for granted** that through wars, through disasters, yet would the earth endure for ever. It was clear to many of us in 1945 that this was no longer to be taken for granted. We have lived with that thought ever since, and have yet borne our children,

lived our lives, done our work. The will to survive and to pass on important caring to future generations is very strong. But today we have to realize that the bombs used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were *small* bombs, compared to today's nuclear weapons.

I ask you to think of the **Holocaust** in Europe, when the **Nazis** murdered a very great part of all the Jewish communities. That horror, surely, must *never* be forgotten. No amount of mourning will *ever* be enough for those millions of children, women and men whose unique and irreplaceable lives were torn away by the group of **dehumanized humans** who had taken power in **Hitler's** Germany. Despite the lessons of Hiroshima and of the Holocaust, today's leaders can speak with apparent **complacency** of "winning a nuclear war" or of "a limited nuclear war", or—in a **jargon** that **demeans** languages itself—of "**overkill**". Such concepts must be called by their true name, and that name is Evil.

Do the world's leaders really suppose that it is all just an act on TV and that the dead would get up again and take on a different role in another TV series so they might be killed again and again? I fear greatly that many of the world's leaders have so little imagination and so little caring that they cannot visualize at all what a nuclear holocaust would mean. Do they really think that they and their families and executive staffs would survive in deep-buried **bunkers**? And if, by any unlikely chance they did, what kind of a world do they think they would emerge back into?

Dr. Helen Caldicott who has done so much in the struggle against nuclear arms, says, "If we look behind the headlines and understand the historical perspective, we realize that America is preparing to fight a nuclear war. Now, that should make us all distinctly uncomfortable. In fact, we should be screaming in the streets, if we really care about ourselves, our children, and those people we love, and if we really love this planet". With well-researched figures, Dr. Caldicott also says, "In the event of a nuclear war, we predict that within 30 days after an exchange, 90% of Americans will be dead. So will Canadians, probably Mexicans, certainly Russians, certainly Europeans, the British, and probably the Chinese".

It is precisely this failure of the imagination on the part of militarists and leaders that is so dangerous today, the failure to visualize what a nuclear holocaust would mean, the apparent inability to imagine the scorched and charred bodies of children... our children or children of Russian parents or parents anywhere, and to know, by an extension of imagination that *all* children are our children. The jargon of the militarists is a distortion and a twisting of language, of our human ability to communicate. Language itself becomes the vehicle of concealment and deception. Such words as "overkill" and "**megadeath**" do not convey in any sense at all what would really happen—the dead, mutilated, and dying people clogging the ruined cities and towns like so much unvalued discarded rubbish, the suffering humans screaming for help with no medical help available, no water, no relief at all for the unbearable pain of millions of humans except finally the dark relief of death for all. Any shelters that the few might reach would in time turn into tombs. Civil defence plans are a sham. In a nuclear war there would be nowhere to hide, and nowhere except a dead and contaminated world to

emerge back into. I profoundly believe that we must proclaim that *this must not happen*.

Margaret Laurence's :
"My Final Hour"

In Somaliland, many years ago, I saw people, I saw children, who were dying of thirst. I can never forget. Now, in that area, things are much, much worse. The late Dr. Barbara Ward, the great economist, in one of her books put forward the thesis that if the world's economy could be geared less towards arms production and more towards helping people, it would be possible for anyone in the world to have enough fresh water. Dr. Helen Caldicott says that for one third of the cost of trident nuclear submarine, malaria could be eliminated from the world. In East and in West Africa I saw children who were desperately ill with malaria. My own two children had malaria, as babies, in Ghana. They were fortunate. They had medical help, and had previously been given anti-malaria medication, and they recovered. But I remember as though it were yesterday—and it was in fact nearly thirty years ago—my own sense of helplessness and anguish. How many parents in malarial areas, now as then, mourn their children, killed by a disease that could have been eradicated years ago? One third of the cost of a Trident submarine! Here in Canada, native people in such places as Grassy Narrows are slowly and painfully dying of Minamata disease, caused by mercury poisoning in the fish they must eat for lack of other food. These are only a few, a very few, of the tragic issues in this desperately hurting world. These sufferings and deaths could be halted, could be prevented. Yet world-wide spending on instruments designed only for killing goes on and is escalating.

I have to speak about how I feel as a writer. I believe that as a writer, or as an artist, if you will... I have a responsibility, a moral responsibility, to work against the nuclear arms race, to work for a recognition on the part of governments and military leaders that nuclear weapons must never be used and must systematically be reduced. Throughout human history, artists have affirmed and celebrated life. Whether we work in words, in painting, in film, in bronze or stone or whatever our medium may be, the artist affirms the value of life itself and of our only home, the planet Earth. ... Artists have passed on to succeeding generations the tales, the histories, the songs, the sagas, the skills of their trade. Can we conceive of a world in which there would be no succeeding generations? A world in which all the powerful works of the human imagination would be destroyed, and would never again be seen or listened to or experienced? We must conceive that this is now a possibility, and one not too far in our uncertain future, either. We must not, as artists, or so I feel, stand by and passively allow this to happen. The death of the individual is the end which we will all one day meet, but the knowledge that our children and their children will live, that *someone's* children will go on, that the great works of humankind will endure keeps us going. ... The individual is the leaf on the tree. The leaves fall but the tree endures. New leaves are born. This concept has been the **mainstay** of our species from time immemorial. Now the tree itself is threatened.

As a writer, therefore, I feel I have a responsibility. Not to write pamphlets; not to write **didactic** fiction. That would be, in many ways, a betrayal of how I feel about my work. But my responsibility seems to me to be to write as truthfully as I can, about human individuals and their dilemmas, to honour them as living, suffering and sometimes joyful people. My responsibility also must extend into my life as a citizen of my own land and ultimately of the world.

Dr. Helen Caldicott speaks of “psychic numbing”—the temptation to shut out from our minds and hearts all the horrifying things in our world. To think that the problems may just possibly go away if we ignore them. They will not go away. It is not all happening on TV. It is happening on our earth, and we are the **custodians** of that earth. We cannot afford passivity. We must take on responsibility for our lives and our world and we must be prepared to make our government listen to and hear us. Our aim must be no less than human and caring justice, and peace*for all people that on earth do dwell.*

30.5.2 Glossary

ministry:	office of clergymen; the clerical profession.
lectern:	a reading desk from which the lessons are read.
pulpit:	a raised structure in the church for preaching from. Note : since the audience comprised graduating clergymen, her friend thought perhaps Margaret needed a pulpit for giving a religious discourse.
sustaining:	anything that supports or helps to keep things going.
radical:	holding extreme views favouring fundamental changes.
social gospel:	a strongly advocated system, belief in social changes.
grace:	undeserved mercy of God.
Hiroshima:	A Japanese city on which America dropped its first atom bomb on August 6, 1945.
annihilation:	total destruction, reduction to nothing.
taken for granted:	to presuppose; to assume, tacitly or unconsciously.
Nagasaki:	a city in Japan on which a second atom bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945.
Holocaust:	a huge slaughter or destruction of life; here the word beginning with a capital ‘H’ refers to the state-sponsored systematic killing of millions of Jews by the Nazis under the rule of Hitler during the Second World War (1939-45).
Nazis:	National-socialist; the National Socialist German Workers Party led by Hitler.
dehumanized humans:	people who lack of human qualities.

Hitler:	Adolf Hitler (1880-1945) German Nazi dictator.
complacency:	self-satisfaction; unwarranted calmness.
jargon:	artificial or barbarous language, language used by a particular group of speakers.
demeans:	makes means; degrades.
"overkill":	the word is explained in the following paragraph.
bunkers:	bomb proof shelters, generally underground.
megadeath:	death of millions.
fantasy:	fanciful imagination or mental image.
mainstay:	chief support.
didactic:	intended to teach, instructive.
custodians:	caretaker or keeper.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Where did Laurence give two of her most splendid addresses : "Books That Mattered To Me" and "My Final Hour"?
.....
.....
- 2) Who was Margaret Laurence addressing in her speech "My Final Hour"?
.....
.....

30.6 DISCUSSION

You have just read Margaret Laurence's speech "My Final Hour". The speech is simple and direct with no ostentation and theatricality to mar its appeal. The ideas expressed follow each other in a connected and systematic manner that leaves no place for ambiguity. We shall now take up a brief summary of the speech to analyse the main points that Laurence is putting across to her audience. At the same time, we shall note Laurence's deep commitment to social causes.

30.6.1 Summary

At the outset, Laurence admits to being nervous in presenting her personal belief before would-be clergymen graduating from Trent University. She

feels the need to have a physical prop to lean on. At the same time, she feels she needs a spiritual prop i.e. a strong **faith** that will sustain her.

In the next paragraph Laurence suggests that as we grow old we should not feel inhibited by our limitations or accept defeat in our endeavours, but we should become more radical and struggle for things we passionately believe in. She feels happy to see that the old and the young alike are feeling concerned about the “state of our hurting and endangered world” and are rising to save it. This quite naturally leads Laurence to list the dangers being faced by the world today, namely, injustice, suffering and fear. Despite these dangers, she feels there is still hope for mankind. She affirms her personal belief in the social gospel and in the Lord’s commandment that says we should love our neighbours like ourselves.

Laurence then comments on two world events that changed the face of the earth. First, the dropping of atom bombs, by America, on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which caused unbelievable annihilation and established beyond doubt man’s dreadful ability to destroy himself and his earth (though people still hope the earth would endure through all disasters, a hope belied by the appearance of nuclear arms); and second, the Holocaust in Europe when the Nazis exterminated millions of Jews and proved how little human lives mattered to world leaders. (You already know something about this after reading Anne Frank’s diary in the previous unit.) Despite these two catastrophes, world leaders are contemplating fighting a war using nuclear weapons that are far more deadly than the atomic bomb.

To strengthen her case against the use of nuclear weapons, Laurence quotes Dr. Helen Caldicott as saying that America and Russia now have enough nuclear arms to “overkill every person on earth 16 times”, and that it will not only kill 90% of Americans if Russia strikes first or vice-versa, but people in many other countries would also die.

Laurence expresses astonishment at the enormous amounts of money being spent on the production of nuclear arms – amounts which, if properly utilized, could supply enough fresh water to everyone in the world or eradicate malaria from the face of the earth.

In concluding her speech, Laurence makes two points – one, that a person must affirm life and, therefore, we should all actively commit ourselves to saving the world by bringing about nuclear disarmament; and two, that an artist must commit to the generations of the future and, therefore, she as a writer feels it her responsibility to write truthfully about the dilemmas being faced by individuals everywhere and to ensure that the succeeding generations live to inherit the wonderful achievements of the human mind.

30.6.2 Features of Laurence’s Speech

Conversational Tone

The first thing we notice in “My Final Hour” is the conversational style that Laurence has adopted. By admitting at the very beginning that she is nervous in making a statement of her belief before an august audience of graduating candidates who will be priests in the church, Laurence at once takes them into

her confidence, while at the same time making it clear that she is going to talk **to** them, one to one, and not talk **down** to them. Hence, the tone adopted by her is personal and subjective. She shares with her audience instances from her personal experience in Africa. She recalls how she saw children dying of thirst in Somaliland and of malaria in East and in West Africa. She also discloses before them her commitment as a writer to the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Clarity of Expressions

There is clarity of expression in the speech which reflects the clarity of Laurence's thoughts. She is very clear in her mind what she has to present before her listeners and uses a language that is lucid and simple. There is no disjointedness in her discourse. One idea leads to another very systematically. For instance, she first mentions the catastrophes that have already overtaken man and destroyed large chunks of human life on earth and then proceeds to talk about the imminent catastrophe—a nuclear war—that might finish the earth itself. Thereafter, she makes out a clear case for the necessity of nuclear disarmament by all nations.

A Forceful Style

Without taking recourse to any rhetorical devices, Laurence succeeds in delivering a powerful speech. The power comes from her sturdy conviction in her belief that the nuclear arms race must stop. She quotes facts and figures given by eminent people, like Dr. Helen Caldicott and Dr. Barbara Ward, to convince her audience about the sheer undesirability of using nuclear weapons.

Use of Humour and Pathos

Laurence's speech displays both her sense of humour as well as pathos. There is a touch of humour in her advice to her listeners not to worry if they grow stupid as they grow old. She informs them that this is quite 'normal'. She pokes fun at the parent-child relationship, saying " your children, now grown, are discovering the opposite – they now see that you aren't nearly as stupid as they had believed when they were young teenagers. She also succeeds in creating a pathetic picture of a post-nuclear-war world with graphic descriptions like ".....the dead, mutilated and dying people clogging the ruined cities and towns like so much unvalued discarded rubbish, the suffering humans screaming for help with no medical help available, no water, no relief at all for the unbearable pain of millions of humans except finally the dark relief of death for all." The easily-visualised description leaves a deep impact on the minds and hearts of the listeners. And this is what a good speaker always aims at — to make the audience think and feel.

A speech that is heard leaves a greater impact on the mind than the one that is read because while hearing it you can feel and share the passion with which it is delivered by the speaker. Therefore, it will help you to get a feel of "My Final Hour" if you read it aloud to yourself or before your friends at the study centre. Also note, that some words and phrases are in italics – Laurence would have given greater emphasis to these when delivering her speech.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In what ways did Margaret Laurence become a radical in the last decade of her life?
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- 2) What does Dr. Helen Caldicott mean by “psychic numbing”?
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.....
.....
- 3) What moral responsibility does Laurence have as a writer?
.....
.....
.....
- 4) Explain the metaphorical expression used by Laurence in the following lines:

The individual is the leaf on the tree. The leaves fall but the tree endures. New leaves are born. This concept has been the mainstay of our species from time immemorial. Now the tree itself is threatened.

.....
.....
.....

30.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have:

- discussed a spoken form of non-fictional prose, i.e; a speech;
- acquainted you with the life and works of Margaret Laurence;
- read and discussed a speech given by Laurence at Trent University; and
- discussed the style of her speech.

30.8 SUGGESTED READING

Margaret Laurence : “My Final Hour”
Jawaharlal Nehru : “Tryst With Destiny”
Martin Luther King Jr.: “I Have A Dream”

30.9 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Canadian
- 2) *The Stone Angel; A Jest of God.*

- 3) An overdose of sleeping pills.
- 4) Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Trent University
- 2) Graduating students who were candidates to the ministry of the Church.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In the last decade of her life, Margaret Laurence turned a radical and promoted causes like nuclear disarmament, social justice and environmental protection through didactic speeches, lectures, essays and even direct-mail fund raising campaigns.
- 2) Dr. Caldicott means to shut our minds to all terrifying problems of our world, thinking that they might possibly go away if we ignore them.
- 3) She has the moral responsibility to work against the nuclear arms race and to make the governments and military leaders realise that nuclear weapons must never be used but must be systematically reduced.
- 4) Laurence underscores the destructive consequences of a nuclear war in these lines, by using a metaphorical expression. She says that individuals are like leaves of the tree that represents the earth. The leaves fall and new one are born, while the tree endures. Similarly, individuals die but new generations take their place to enjoy the earth and the great achievements of the human mind that live on. However, due to the threat of a nuclear war, the tree itself i.e. the earth is in danger of being wiped out of existence.

APPENDIX

What is a Biography?

We know that biography, as a literary form is the written story of the life of an individual. Is this story 'true' or 'fictional'? Should it be written in prose or verse? Are there any special methods by which this story can be written? Before we examine these questions at some length, let us define biography. Broadly, it may be defined as a truthful account of the life of an individual, written in prose. A biography is the life of an individual as opposed to a group. While it may depict several characters, these are depicted only in relation to the individual whose life is being recreated. In short, the focus is always on the individual. A biography must be a truthful account. But while a good biography must be factual it must also be something more. It must have literary value. Now we might well ask: in what does this literary value lie? We may locate it in the writer's use of language. Or in his/her imaginative selection and use of documentary evidence so that the work emerges as a unified whole. Or in the writer's use of literary devices. However, we would like to point out that all these factors contribute to the literary quality of a biography. To sum up, a biography must combine the authenticity of history and the creativity of fiction.

Biography and History

Biography is closely related to history on the one hand and to fiction on the other. It is related to history because like history, it deals with the past and it also makes use of the same resources that a historian needs for research. Does that mean that biography is a branch of history? No. The crucial difference lies in the fact that history is a factual record of individuals and events. In biography, the focus is not on the background but on the individual. The aim of the biographer is not just to convey facts but to probe into the psyche of the individual and to make him/her come alive. This imaginative rendering of personal experience links biography to fiction. But fiction is primarily imaginative whereas biography aims at truthful presentation of detail.

Biography and Fiction

Thus we see that the biographer needs to employ the methods of the historian as well as of the writer of fiction. Biography uses the techniques of research to test whether the material at hand is true or false. The biographer must also make a selection of interesting and relevant incidents. By imposing a certain design on the selected material the writer must transform the lifeless material into a living experience. Thus biography has many aspects. It is historical, psychological and aesthetic. It is historical because it provides a factual account of the life of an individual. It is psychological because it probes into the mind of the individual. And it is aesthetic because the writer imposes a certain design on his/her material and renders it pleasing by his/her use of language and other literary devices. As an art form, it not only aims to delight the reader but also to provide a certain insight into the character of another individual. The reader is made to identify with certain feelings and experiences of the character who seem to come alive.

Biography as an Art Form

Margaret Laurence's :
"My Final Hour"

How can we distinguish between a well-composed and a sub-standard biography? There are several ways in which a biography can be marred. Sometimes there is an undue tendency to celebrate and praise the dead by suppressing unpalatable facts. At other times, the author's personality intrudes unnecessarily into the narrative. At other times a biography suffers if the author starts with a certain thesis or preconceived idea and bends fact to suit it.

On the other hand, a well-written biography, is an honest portrayal of historical facts without suppressing any unpleasant truth. There are no unnecessary digressions impeding the flow of the narrative and the events selected are apt and to the point. A good biography is brief and gripping so that it might seem as if one is reading an interesting novel. As Leon Edel puts it 'The biographer may be as imaginative as he pleases—the more imaginative the better—in the way in which he brings his material together. But he must not imagine the materials. He must read himself into the past: but then he must read the past into our present. (*Literary Biography*, p. 1) This clearly means that writing a biography involves exhaustive research. But as a creative artist, the biographer must assimilate facts and then present them in the most interesting manner possible.

Use of Time

Does a biography proceed in strict chronological sequence? This is a question that you might well ask! As biography is not history it is not necessary to follow the birth to death sequence. The biographer does not have to begin his/her account of the individual's life from the day s/he was born and conclude the narrative at the death. The biographer can and often does use time in a flexible manner, moving forward and backward in time. Thus an individual life is not portrayed strictly by the clock. This method helps to make the person come alive, as Leon Edel believes (*Literary Biography*, xvi)

Selection of Details

Lytton Strachey, an extremely successful practitioner of the form, suggests that a biography must have 'a brevity which excludes anything that is redundant and nothing that is significant' (Preface to *Eminent Victorians*). Does this mean that a biography has to be brief? There are no hard and fast rules about the length of a biography. It may run into hundreds of pages as we find in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* or it may be as brief as a character sketch. The idea is to make the character come alive and to project an impression of unity in the work. The length then becomes a matter of individual choice.

Why do we Read Biography?

Clearly different persons would have different reasons for selecting specific reading material. Curiosity about the lives of others may be one reason for reading biographies. However, the function of biography is not only to interest and delight but also to stimulate our sympathy so that our understanding of the human condition is enhanced and our sympathies extended. It is for this reason that Lytton Strachey described biography as 'the

most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing'. H.W. Longfellow, the American poet has said:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And departing leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.

By reading about the lives of others, we can draw some lessons that have a relevance to our own lives. This is didactic aspect of biography.

Reading Biography

When we read a biography critically, we must keep the following aspects in mind:

- there must be no redundant details. Only the relevant details must be carefully selected by the author to advance the narrative;
- a biography must be brief and to the point with no unnecessary explanation, digression and comments;
- it should neither be too complimentary nor too critical but must be an objective and detached presentation of facts;
- the events must be arranged in an interesting manner so that the reader's interest is sustained;
- the language must be used artistically;
- the character portrayed must come alive;
- there must be an impression of unity and the interest must never deflect from the main character

Let us pause for a while and answer the following questions before we move to the section on the origins of biography and how this form developed over the ages.

Check Your Progress 1

Read the following questions and write the answers in the space provided. If you need to refer to the previous section, do so by all means. But do write your answers in your own words!

- 1) Define biography in about 4/5 sentences.
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- 2) How is biography different from history on the one hand and fiction on the other? Give you answer in about 100 words.
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3) Why do people read biography? Give your reasons in about 4/5 sentences.

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ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND FORMS OF BIOGRAPHY

Earliest Biographical Literature

The initial impulse towards biography can be found in the ancient sagas and epics and elegies written to commemorate dead friends, relatives and public figures. The first biography was written by the fifth century B.C. Greek poet Ion of Chios. He wrote brief sketches of his famous contemporaries such as Pericles and Sophocles. The Church also began to record the lives of its early founders and saints. This branch of biography is called hagiography or commemoration of the lives of saints. At this points, another function was added to biography. At the very beginning only the dead were commemorated, but now it became didactic as well. The lives were recorded in order to provide ethical models of conduct for others. While the history of biography is as old as human history, the word biography was first used only in the seventeenth century to create an identity for this kind of writing.

Development of Biography

Biography, as we now understand the term, began to appear in the sixteen century. Cardinal Morton's *Life of Richard III* (circa 1513) and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* (1554-7) are two of the first biographies written. The more famous of seventeenth century biographies are Bacon's *Life of Henry VIII* (1621) and Walton's *Lives* (1640-78). Among the biographies written in the eighteenth century, also known as the age prose, Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) and Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791) established the form beyond doubt. Johnson's contribution to the form consists in insisting that only the undiluted truth be told. Boswell broke the stiffness and formality of tone by speaking in his natural voice. In the nineteenth century, primarily an age of the novel, there was a decline in the form but the more famous biographies written are Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837-38) and Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863). In the Victorian age the decline also occurred because of the undue tendency to eulogize.

Biography in the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century, however, has seen a flowering of the form. Lytton Strachey found himself famous after the publication of *Eminent Victorians* (1918). This set the trend for 'debunking' or exposing the feet of clay of venerated public figures. There was a change in point of view as well. The author was no longer the admiring, sympathetic underling in the service of the hero/heroine but an equal who may admire or be critical according to his/her understanding of the situation. The impulse to eulogize was replaced by the impulse to reconstruct the life as vividly as possible. Instead of the tendency to praise or hero worship, the twentieth century witnessed an increasing trend of presenting the characters in their human dimension—with all their positive and negative aspects. This Virginia Woolf termed as the 'new biography'. Another prominent example of this is Leon Edel's biography of the famous American novelist Henry James.

Another visible change in twentieth century biography was the reduced length. Biography no longer ran into several volumes but was often the size of a novel. The biographer was no longer a chronicler but an artist. Biography thus acquired an aesthetic dimension. The biographer did not just portray the outer life of work and activity but also the inner life of emotion and thought. There were no fixed standards of morality to which the subject must conform. The interest was in the individual as a human being with all his/her faults and idiosyncrasies. Biography from its status as a hybrid form began to acquire an identity as a distinct genre.

Forms of Biography

There are many kinds of biographies but let us broadly place them in two categories—those compiled by first hand knowledge of the individual and those compiled by research. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791) belongs to the first category. Boswell was a friend and admirer of the great literary figure of his age, Samuel Johnson. As such Boswell spent a lot of time with him observing him and recording his conversations in his diaries. On the other hand, Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* (1992) is biography based on research. Also based on research are reference biographies that we find in Encyclopedias and dictionaries or biographies. Their function is to provide factual information. However, we are interested in biography as a literary form and will not discuss biographies used purely for reference purposes.

Some biographies are written subjectively with the author's personality intruding upon the narrative while others are written objectively and with detachment. In such cases, the author does not intrude with comments or explanations but recounts the main events so that we have an effect of a life unfolding itself. This form of biography is known as 'standard' biography. 'Fictionalized' biography is another form in which conversations are imagined and material invented without any consideration for factual information. There is an attempt to fuse the appeal of biography with the charm of the novel. Irving Stone's *Lust for Life* (1959) is a fictional account of the life of Vincent van Gogh, the famous Dutch painter. Allied to this form is fiction presented as biography—there is no attempt at authenticity. It is simply a novel written as biography or autobiography. Somerset Maugham's *Moon and Sixpence* (1919) does not attempt to project itself as a life. The attempt is

to evoke a life (the painter Gauguin's in this instance) rather than to recreate it.

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions in your own words.

- 1) Describe the two main changes that took place in biography in the twentieth century.

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- 2) Name two famous biographies each from the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.

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Answers to Exercises

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Biography is a truthful account of the life of an individual. It is written in prose. While it is based on facts, a biographer uses his/her imagination to present a lively and interesting picture of the person portrayed.
- 2) History is a factual record of individuals and events while in biography the focus is not on the background but on the individual. Fiction is independent of facts and operates solely in the realm of the imagination. While a biographer must be imaginative, s/he cannot lose sight of facts.
- 3) Curiosity about the lives of others may be one reason. Another may be to draw lessons that may have some relevance to our lives. By reading about the lives of others, our understanding of the human conditions is enhanced and our sympathies extended.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In earlier time, there had been a tendency to praise the subject. In the twentieth century, a 'new' biography developed wherein one can find that the biographer is not an admiring subordinate but a critical equal who examines the character from all angles—positive and negative. Biographies also became almost as short as the novel. The interest shifted from a mere depiction of outer events to the states of mind of the character.

Non-Fictional Prose-II:
Biography,
Autobiography, Diary
and Speeches

2)

18th Century:

Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*.

Boswell's *Life of Johnson*

20th Century:

Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria*

Leon Edel's *Henry James*.

Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

I

Early Modern English Poets

William Shakespeare, John Milton, John Donne and, Andrew Marvell



School of Humanities
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

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Block

1

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH POETS

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PLEASE REMEMBER

Welcome to this revised course on *Understanding Poetry* (BEGE106). As in the earlier course (EEG06) it has three chunks:

- Blocks 1 to 5 on **English Poetry**
- Blocks 6 and 7 on **American Poetry**
- Block 8 on **Indian English Poetry**

However, we have introduced new material, especially to the sections on American and Indian English poetries. In all now you have 40 units to read. If you read a unit in roughly three days you will take 120 days to read the entire course. Let us add 30 days more for a few holidays and extra reading for some units that have some long poems. Then you can complete the first reading of the course in 150 days. Second revision of the course may take 75 days and the third revision will take still less time. In short, by consistent work you can be fully prepared for your exam well before the end of a year.

Now, let me tell you a few words about the blocks on **English poetry**. The five blocks divide among them into five broad periods of English poetry. They are as under:

- i) The Renaissance,
- ii) The Augustan and Transition,
- iii) The Romantic,
- iv) The Victorian, and
- v) High and Late Modernist periods

We have left out **Old English** and **Medieval English** periods which are now understood as the **Postclassical** period. I will try to introduce you through my prefatory notes in each block to the broad tendencies of these periods but you must acquaint yourself with the history of English Literature of these periods by reading books – not more than one or two – on History of English Literature. You will get to know about these books as you proceed. Then read the poems in the different blocks to see if you agree with our points of view regarding the general tendencies of the various periods and how they characterize the evolution of the cultural makeup of the English people. ‘Read’ as Francis Bacon said, ‘not to contradict and confute nor to accept and take for granted but to weigh and consider.’

I know that students read not only to learn and discover new ideas and experience novel events and people but also to be successful in exams. So, here are a few tips for you.

This course on poetry in English is an elective course. Some of you will like to go on and do an M.A in English. So you must learn poetry properly. For this you must be able to understand the music of English speech and the role of metre in verse in particular. The second unit thus becomes very important. You need not read it at the outset but you must read it sooner rather than later and **drill yourself in scansion**. It will enhance your ability to appreciate English poetry. Take help from friends, relatives or teachers to learn prosody and scansion.

Next in importance is the critical terminology of literature such as **lyric, sonnet, ode, epic, verse drama, assonance, consonance, alliteration, simile,**

metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, imagery, symbolism , euphemism, hyperbole, periphrasis, litotes, terza rima, Spenserian stanza, etc. You as a student of literature are expected to be familiar with them. On these questions you have a good chance of scoring high marks.

Next in importance is your familiarity with the history of the poetries in English, American and Indian English literatures. You will be introduced to these in the introductions to the blocks. Master them as one question of 16 marks you may have to answer (See question no. 3 on p. 33) base on the introductions.

Besides prosody, critical terminology and literary history we will ask you to show your familiarity with the text of the poems in two ways: a) through reference to context questions (four of eight marks each) and, b) two critical questions, each carrying 16 marks. A model question paper is given here for your help but remember that they are meant to give direction to your study for **examiners are free to make the question paper in the manner they like and the pattern may change from year to year.**

When we were preparing EEG06 – that is *Understanding Poetry* in its earlier form – we gave portraits of poets. We have not done so in this course because now you have access to the internet where you will get pictures and reading material on poets and their age aplenty. Make use of it if also with discretion. You must visit your study centre and interact with the counsellors and **classmates** and remain in contact with them. You will then be able to get a lot of help from one another.

We once again welcome you to this course and hope that by regular and methodical study and sometimes in **groups** you will derive the joy that literature is meant to provide and also do well in exams.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma
Editor

INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 1

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: PERIODIZATION IN HISTORY, THE POSTCLASSICAL ERA AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

You are going to study British, American and Indian English poetry in this course. The 'Introductions' to the blocks will provide you with brief historical backgrounds for a proper study of the poets and the poems in the block. Poets and other creative artists are valued owing to their uniqueness but historians and scholars try to see coherence in a period of history and discover certain common features in the various events, political, social, economic, constitutional, or cultural, taking place in that period. For a literary scholar the artistic creations are like events in political, economic or constitutional histories and historians of literature try to understand the spirit of an age by trying to establish certain common features between different works of arts. This is how we will try to bring order to an otherwise diverse productions of the different periods.

Historians divide the entire history of a nation into periods. Traditionally, history of English literature starts with the **Anglo-Saxon Period**, followed by the **Anglo-Norman Period** which is also called the **Medieval Period**, the **Renaissance Period**, etc. We begin this course with the Renaissance period which is also further subdivided into the **Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline** and **Restoration** periods. It is now customary to call the medieval period **Postclassical Age** and the Renaissance **Early Modern Period**.

You may like to know the reasons for the change in nomenclature. I must tell you about the **Annales School** (French pronunciation: a'nal) historians in France in the twentieth century who stressed long term social history, also called *longue duree*. *Long duree* gives priority to long-term historical structures over events that Francois Simian called *histoire evenementielle* or 'event history'. In this light the dividing line between the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval eras vanishes and the dominant tendencies can be understood better as *early post classical* and *later postclassical periods*.

It has been pointed out that the Ancient European civilization which was born in Greece and flourished under the Roman empire began to decline in the third century of the C E. There were several elements that caused the disruption of the Pax Romana - the peace of the Romans. The Roman empire was plunged into military anarchy, was raided by Germanic tribes and, was burdened by economic dislocation. Besides, eastern religions undermined the Greco-Roman civilization that was based on rational enquiry. The Roman world began to move in a direction in which the quest for the divine was to predominate over all human enterprise.

The political void thus left by the Romans was filled by the Germanic tribes such as the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Visigoths in Hispania, Franks and Burgundians in Gaul and Western Germany and the Angles and Saxons in Britain. We find that the old English epic poem *Beowulf* narrates, according to Gregory (c 540 -94), Bishop of Tours, the events of the sixth century Merovingian period of French history. The Geatish king Hygelac in *Beowulf* has been identified with 'Chociliacus' (in Latin), a Scandinavian leader, who conducted a raid in 520 against the Frisian territory of the Franks. While the event that *Beowulf* narrates took place in the sixth century the poem was actually written in the tenth.

The epic narrates two major events in the life of the Geatish hero Beowulf son of Ecgtheow: the first when in his youth, he fights and kills Grendel who has been attacking Heorot, the hall of the Danish king Hrothgar. Next night Grendel's mother *merewif* (sea woman) or *brymwylf* (sea wolf) or *grundwyrge* (ground monster), etc. as she is called, comes to avenge her son but meets the same fate. Beowulf is suitably feasted and rewarded and returns to his own land. Beowulf later himself becomes king of the Geats and has a prosperous reign of forty years when he slays a dragon which has ravaged his land but in the fight receives a mortal wound. The poem ends with the funeral ceremonies in honour of the dead hero. There is a strong thread of Christian commentary that runs through the poem and scholars are of the view that the poem was written in the eighth century when England was being won over by Christianity, seemingly inappropriate to the date of the historical events it describes.

Two other poems that refer to the pre-Christian age are 'Widsith' (i.e. 'the far traveller') and 'Deor.' The former dates substantially from the seventh century and is thus the earliest poem in the English language. It is constructed around three 'thulas' (i.e. mnemonic name lists) connected by the events in the life of the eponymous minstrel. The first names the great rulers; the second the tribes among whom the minstrel travelled and the third the people the minstrel claimed to have sought out.

'The Lament of Deor' records the effusions of a minstrel who has fallen out of favour and who consoles himself in 42 lines of seven unequal sections with the refrain, 'His sorrow passed away so will mine.' Deor recalls the past misfortunes of Wayland the Smith, Theodoric and Hermanric. 'Deor' unlike other elegies in Old English does not end with a Christian consolation.

'Waldere' or 'Waldhere' consists of two fragments in 63 lines which must have been part of a longer poem. Waldere was the son of a king of Aquitaine. He was given up to Atilla the Hun and became one of his generals. He later eloped with Hiltgund, a Burgundian princess, to whom he had been betrothed as a child. In the course of their flight they were attacked by assailants whom Waldere defeated but received injury as well. Waldere and Hiltgund continued their journey and were finally married.

'[I]t was in their war songs' wrote Emile Legouis that the Anglo-Saxons best retained the vestiges of their wild, primitive mood, especially in those which celebrated their own battles.' Most prominent among such 'songs' are 'The Battle of Brunanburh' and 'The Battle of Maldon'. The former narrates the battle fought between the English under Athelstan, grandson of Alfred (849–99), and the Danes under Anlaf who came from Dublin supported by the Scots and the Welsh. The poem celebrates the victory of Athelstan and his brother and successor Edmund in their defeat of the invaders.

'The Battle of Maldon' deals with the battle fought between the Danes and Byrhtnoth (c. 926–91) who rejects the demand for tribute by the former. The English are defeated partly because some of his men flee but partly also because of Byrhtnoth's 'ofermod', his excessive pride in yielding ground to the Danes as a gesture of magnanimity. The latter half of the 325-line poem concerns itself with the loyalty of the followers of Byrhtnoth to their dead leader who vow to avenge his death.

The poetry of Old English or Early Postclassical period falls into two divisions – the pre-Christian and Christian. The former represents the poetry which the Anglo-Saxons brought with them in the form of oral sagas; the latter represents

the poetry developed under the teaching of the monks. The old pagan religion had vanished but it retained its hold on the life and language of the people. I have briefly described the pre-Christian poetry that is vigorous and varied. Let's now turn to the poetry on Christian themes, though large in quantity, as preserved by the clerks - clergymen of the five minor orders as distinct from the higher or 'holy orders' - which are derivative in nature and thus of relatively inferior quality.

One of the salutary influences of the spread of Christianity in England was that it gave the people some relief from the frightful wars that were fought between the petty kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons. The conversions of the English to Christianity was led by Augustine (d. between 604 -609) from Rome who founded a monastery at Canterbury. He is not the same as St. Augustine (354-430) bishop of Hippo in North Africa and author of *City of God* (413-27) and the autobiographical *Confessions*. The former Augustine was prior of Pope Gregory's monastery of St. Andrew in Rome. (A prior is a superior officer at a religious house or order.) Augustine was sent by Gregory with some forty monks, in 596, to preach in England. He was received by King Ethelbert of Kent who was later converted. The Augustinians spread the new religion in the South and center of England, especially in the Kingdom of Essex. They, however, produced no literature of lasting value.

St. Aidan (d. 651) came to Northumbria from Ireland which country had been a center of Christianity and education for all Western Europe. The Northumbrian School was centred mainly at the monasteries and abbeys at Jarrow and Whitby and the three great figures of Anglo-Saxon age produced by them were Bede (673-735), Caedmon (7th c.) and Cynewulf (8th c.).

Venerable Bede, as he is generally called, has been hailed as the father of English learning. He wrote more than forty tracts in Latin. His translation of the gospel of St. John into Anglo-Saxon has been lost. His most frequently cited work is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. We know of Caedmon the Anglo-Saxon Milton, from Bede's account of Abbess Hilda at the monastery at Whitby where Caedmon was a layman and until maturity never learned any poetry. Once in a dream someone stood by and said, 'Caedmon sing me something' and Caedmon answered 'I cannot sing.' But according to Bede's history the person said to him again, 'Caedmon, sing to me.' And he asked, 'What shall I sing?' and he answered, 'Sing the beginning of created things.' And Caedmon began singing in his sleep. Next morning Caedmon narrated his story to the steward of the monastery who conveyed it to the Abbess Hilda. She called him to her presence and asked him to relate his tale to her. After hearing him she arranged, it is said, to have the Bible explained to him in bits which he then converted into songs in his native tongue. The *Paraphrase* attributed to him is, however, not entirely his creation. Another important work of the school of Caedmon is *Judith* based on an apocryphal book of the Old Testament.

The only one of the Anglo-Saxon poets who signed his works was **Cynewulf**. The name, however, was not written plainly but in runes - characters of the early Teutonic alphabet used extensively by the Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. The script dates from the 2nd or 3rd century. It is based on Roman or Greek letters adapted to be inscribed on wood or stone. The only poems signed by Cynewulf are *Christ II*, *Juliana*, *The Fates of Apostles* and, *Elene*. The poems attributed to him or his school are *Andreas*, the *Phoenix*, the *Dream of the Rood*, the *Descent into Hell*, *Guthlac*, the *Wanderer* and, a few *Riddles*. Some of the riddles, such as 'The Storm Spirit' and 'The Swan', are of unusual beauty. Below are lines of the 'The Swan' in Brougham's translation:

My robe is noiseless while I tread the earth,
Or tarry 'neath the banks, or stir the shallows,
But when these shining wings, this depth of air,
Bear me aloft above the bending shores
Where men abide, and far the welkin's strength
Over the multitudes conveys me, then
With rushing whirl and clear melodious sound
My raiment sings. And like a wandering spirit
I float unweariedly o'er flood and field.

Of the four of Cynewulf's poems *The Christ* has been considered the most characteristic of him. It is a poem in three parts: the first celebrates the Nativity or birth of Jesus; the second, 'His Ascension' and the third, 'Doomsday' narrating the torments of the wicked and the endless joy of the redeemed. The poem reflects Cynewulf's love for Christ and his reverence for the Virgin Mary. *Elene* is the story of St. Helena, the mother of Constantine (274–337), the Roman emperor (306–37) who converted to Christianity and transferred the capital of the empire to Byzantium which he renamed Constantinople. In *Elene* Cynewulf tells us about Constantine's vision of the Rood or Christ's Cross on the eve of a battle. After his victory he sends his mother Helena to Jerusalem to search for the original cross and the nails. '[I]t is' writes Emile Legouis, 'to see in [Cynewulf] the author of *The Dream of the Rood*, since such a dream is said to have determined his conversion'. There is an intimation here of the theme of the search for the Holy Grail in the literature of the succeeding period.

This flowering of Northumbrian literature came to an untimely end towards the end of the eighth century by the conquest of the Danes. The few fragments that are preserved are the work of Alfred (849–901) the great Anglo-Saxon king who preserved the poetry of the Northumbrians in the dialect of the West Saxons.

Edward the Confessor (1042–66) died heirless on 5 January, 1066. The Witan, the Assembly of Wise Men, elected Harold, son of Godwin, to the throne. Now Edward was more of a Norman than English. He came to the throne at the age of thirty-five but he had spent twenty-five years of this period continuously in Normandy, France. He was at least as familiar with Norman speech and customs as with English and gave preferment to people of Norman origin in the offices of the Church and government. Godwin was a Saxon but he and his sons often behaved quite irresponsibly and so they were unpopular. Duke William of Normandy had come to see Edward, his cousin, and got an assurance that he would succeed him to the throne. The Norman party at Edward's court supported this move. Before Edward died Godwin had been put to death and so his son gained the throne in January 1066. At this time William of Normandy Conquered Britain and declared himself king.

The Normans were Northmen, the Danes who had settled in the North-West of France and quickly adopted their language, culture and habits. Under Norman influence Anglo-Saxon was simplified to modern English by losing many declensions. Here we are interested in primarily the poetry of the period, i.e. **1066 to 1350**. 'Homilies, sermons in prose and in verse, translation of the Psalms or parts of the Bible, rules for a devout life, lives of the saints, and prayers' wrote Emile Legouis, 'fill the pages which form the mass of what may be called English literature until about the middle of the fourteenth century.'

About 1200 an Augustinian canon called Orm in the East Midland wrote a voluminous poem he called after himself *The Ormulum*. It constitutes of paraphrases of the gospels, around 1105 *Moral Odes* and *Proverbs of Alfred* and in the first half of the thirteenth century *Orison to our Lady*, *Genesis* and *Exodus* and *Proverbs of Hendyng* were composed.

Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1155) probably a Benedictine monk of Monmouth at Oxford in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136) narrates the history of Britain from the time of Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas to Cadwallader (AD 689) the last of the British Kings of England after whom the British would be called Welsh (foreign). This work influenced Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1200), the most important of the English rhyming chronicles. It marks the first appearance of the Arthurian legend in English.

Metrical romances with their celebration of courtly love, Chivalry and religion distinguishes the century and a half before Chaucer from other periods. However, the most outstanding work of the genre in English was Sir Thomas Malory's (d 1471) *Le Morte D' Arthur* (1470) published by William Caxton (c. 1422–91) in 1485.

Metrical romance was brought to England by the Normans. It soon became so popular that it overshadowed all other forms of literary expression. Romances are long poems or series of poems treating of love or knightly adventure or both. Its characters are ladies in distress, warriors in armour, giants, dragons, enchanters and enemies of the Church and State. The enormous number of these verse romances are divided, according to subject, into the so called matter of France, Rome and, Britain.

The matter of France centres largely around Charlemagne (742–814) king of the Franks (768). He and his Paladins are the subject of several *chasons de geste*, or epic poems in old French, of which *Chason de Roland* is the most famous. The Paladins were the twelve peers of Charlemagne. The Paladins were brave warriors under the leadership of Roland and Oliver. All of them perish in Roncesvalles. Roland was the most famous of the Paladins of Charlemagne. Einhard (?770–? 840), a Frankish noble in the service of Charlemagne, who wrote the famous biography of the emperor, *Vita Caroli Magni* narrates the event of August 778.

The rearguard of the French army of the emperor was returning through the Pyrenees from a successful expedition in the north of Spain when it was surprised in the valley of Roncesvalles by the Basque inhabitants of the mountains. The baggage was looted and the rearguard killed.

In later retelling of the story - *chanson de geste* or 'song of heroic deeds' - beginning in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries the Basques were replaced by the Muslims or the Saracen, as they were called by the Europeans, in the *La Chanson de Roland* or *The Song of Roland* (1040–1115).

Roland, the commander of the rearguard, is appointed at the behest of the traitor Ganelon, who is in league with Marsile the Saracen King. Now Oliver is introduced as Roland's companion in arms. He is brother of Aude, Roland's betrothed. Oliver thrice calls upon Roland to summon aid by blowing his horn but Roland from excess of pride defers doing so until it is too late. However, Charlemagne returns and destroys the Saracen army. Ganelon is tried and executed.

Jean Boedel a late twelfth-century romance writer divided the vast literature of the genre into three categories, i.e. the Matter of France, Rome and Britain.

While the literature on the theme of Charlemagne and his circle was ‘The Matter of France’ that on King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table was called ‘The Matter of Britain’. The interesting thing about the legend of Arthur, Gawain, Launcelot, Merlin, the quest of the Holy Grail, etc. are Celtic in origin, their literary form is due to French poets who originated the metrical romances. The English romances are their copies or translations of the French. This is true not only of the matter of France or of Britain as pointed out above but also of Rome, i.e. cycles of romances dealing with the deeds of Alexander and the siege of Troy with which the Britons thought they had some connection. In the twentieth century English scholars, diverging from Jean Boedel’s classification of the metrical romances, called romances concerned with English heroes such as *King Horn* (c. 1225), or *Havelok the Dane* (before 1272) Matter of England.

The English author of *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1320), a poetical work of pseudo–history and hagiography covering mankind’s spiritual history from the Creation to the Last Judgment, divided into seven ages, testified to the popularity of these romances in his work:

Men yernen jestis for to here
And romances rede in diverse manere

The author then went on to summarize the great cycles of romances in his own work.

The romances came into existence in England owing to the French and were thus an upper class phenomenon but here and there were singers who made **ballads** for the common people. Next to the romances these ballads are the most significant of the works of the Norman period. The ballads alone give us an insight into the lives and aspiration, fears and hopes of the common people. However, on account of its obscure origin and oral transmission the ballads are the most difficult of literary topics to discuss. Some of these, such as ‘Merrie greenwood men’ got assimilated into the *Geste of Robin Hood*. ‘All literature’ wrote William Long, ‘is but a dream expressed, and “Robin Hood” is the dream of an ignorant and oppressed but essentially noble people, struggling and determined to be free.’

Older than *Havelok* and *Horn* was *The Owl and the Nightingale* written in imitation of the *disputoisons* or tensons of the poets of Provence. Tensons or Tenzons were contests in verse making by the troubadours, i.e. the epic poets in northern France. The poem in 1794 lines is a debate between the grave owl and the gay nightingale who represent the religious and the love poets respectively. It is a learned poem touching on scholastic legalism on issues of contemporary interests such as foreknowledge, music, confession, papal missions, etc. Contrary to the serious tone of *The Owl and the Nightingale* Medieval lyrics of the age of **Edward I (1272–1307)** such as ‘Alysoun’, ‘Springtime’ (c. 1300) and ‘Cuckoo Song’, though still inspired by French models, are more interesting than the romances and the ballads. The graceful ‘Alysoun’ has stanzas of mixed three and four-accented lines that have rhymes repeated even five times:

Bytuene Mersh and Averil,
When spray biginneth to springe,
The lutel foul¹ hath hire wyl
On hyre lud² to synge.
Iche libbe³ in love loginge
For semlokest⁴ of all thinge.
She may me blisse bringe;
Icham⁵ in hire baundoun⁶.

An hendy hap ichabbe yhent⁷,
Ichot⁸ from hevene it is me sent,
From alle wymmen mi love is lent⁹
And lyht¹⁰ on Alysoun.

[**Glossary:** ¹Little bird. ²in her language. ³I live. ⁴fairest. ⁵I am. ⁶power, bondage ⁷a pleasant fate I have attained. ⁸I know. ⁹gone. ¹⁰lit, alighted.]

These lines herald the coming of Geoffrey Chaucer as also does the felicitous ‘Cuckoo Song’ with its yet freer and native rhythms:

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu,
Groweth sed and bloweth med,
And springth the wde nu,
Sing Cuccu.

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu.
Bullucsterleth, buckeverteth,
Murie sing cuccu.
Cuccu, cuccu.
Wel singes thu, cuccu
Ne swikethunaver nu.

The poet observes in the first stanza that summer has come in and so he beckons the cuckoo to sing loudly. The poet again observes the seeds sprouting and the meadows blossoming and the wood springing with its new foliage and the poet summons the cuckoo to sing.

In the second stanza the poet describes the ewe bleating after the lamb and the cow lowing after the calf, the bullock receiving new sensation in its body and the deer breaking wind and so the poet makes a mute signal to the cuckoo to never ‘swike’ or cease to sing ‘now’ (nu).

Political songs began to appear from the middle of the thirteenth century. At first they were written in Latin and French by the clerks (or clergymen) and meant for the ruling class but very soon the minstrels began to compose them for the people and therefore in English. These songs, such as *Song of the Husbandman* sided with the people and against their governors.

During the reign of **Edward III (1327-77)** these lays burst into songs of triumph. Laurence Minot, probably a soldier, came forward as an official bard to Edward to sing his victories in Scotland and France. ‘The great victories of Edward III’ wrote Emile Legouis, ‘were being sung in London, and Minot’s poems were current in the country side when Chaucer was born and when his mind received its first impressions.’ The historians of English literature went on,

Glory in the field of battle was followed by literary achievement as brilliant. The long period of dependence was about to end. The English language, which had hitherto coned what others said, often stammering the while, now had faith in its destiny. Nothing is more striking than the number, the originality, and the worth of the works which made the latter half of the fourteenth century a flowering season in English literature.

The reference is to the dependence of the English on French literature which was now on its way out just as on the battlefield Edward's forces won victories at Crecy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) against France. At the treaty of Bretigny (1360) France admitted the English claim to the South-West of France. 'To con' is to 'peruse', 'scrutinize' and 'learn (by heart)'. Legouis has admirably summed up the end of a period and advent of the age of Chaucer.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400) is definitely the most prominent poet of the latter half of fourteenth century and among the greatest poets in English poetry but there were other prominent figures round about him. Among them were William Langland (c 1332–c 1386) the author of *Piers Plowman*, the anonymous author of the Cotton Nero A x manuscript, popularly known as the Pearl Poet, John Gower (? 1330–1408) and, John Barbour (c. 1320–95).

Chaucer was son of John Chaucer (c. 1312–'68) a London vintner. In 1359 he was in France with Edward III's invading army, taken prisoner but ransomed by the king. He married Philippa sister of John of Gaunt's third wife. Philippa died in 1387 but Chaucer enjoyed Gaunt's patronage throughout his life. He made a journey to Genoa and Florence in 1372–3 in the course of which he could have met Boccaccio (1313–75) and Petrarch (1304–74). In 1378 he was sent to France and Lombardy.

Chaucer's writings develop through his career from a period of French influence in the late 1360s of which the culmination was *The Book of The Duchess* (1369?). The 'middle period' of Chaucer's poetry is dominated by the Italian influence as reflected in *The Hous of Fame* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. *The Canterbury Tales* (1307) Chaucer's most celebrated work in 17000 lines is a product of his 'English period', the last phase. 'Alone among his contemporaries' wrote Legouis, 'Chaucer put art first'. They went on, 'He did not seek to direct men, to judge events, to reform morals, or to present a philosophy. Poetry was his only object'.

Quite unlike Chaucer was **William Langland** whose *Piers Plowman* which first appeared in 1362 as a poem in 1800 lines, is a clarion call to every man, king, priest, noble or labourer to do his Christian duty. *Piers Plowman* is an allegory. In the first vision of the 'Field Full of Folk' we see Piers lying down on the Malvern Hills when a vision comes to him in sleep. He sees a crowd expressing the varied life of the world. The genius of the throng is Lady Bribery who stands for the corruption in her society. Langland's narration has force and vigour:

In a somer sesun, whon softe was the sonne,
I schop¹ me into a shroud, as I a scheep were,
In habite as an hermite, unholy of werkes,
Went wyde in this world, wonders to here,
Bote in a Mayes mornynge, on Malverne hulle,
Me byfel a ferly², of fairie me thought,
I was wery, forwanddred, and went me to reste
Undur a brod banke, bi a bourne³ side;
And as I lay and lened, and loked on the waters,
I slumbred in slepyng – hit swyed⁴ so murie...

[**Glosary:** ¹ clad. ² wonder. ³ brook. ⁴ sounded.]

John Gower was a friend of Chaucer and a dedicatee along with Ralph Strode, fellow of Merton College, Oxford of the latter's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Gower wrote in three languages, French, Latin and, English. He wrote *Cinkante Balades* and his first large scale work *Mirour de l' Omme* (*Speculum Meditantis* in c. 1376–8) in Anglo-Norman. His second major work, even more ambitious than the

previous one, was *Vox Clamantis* (c. 1379–81) in Latin. *Confessio Amantis* (1390s) his principal work was in English. It is a collection of 141 stories in over 33000 octosyllabic couplets. The frame story is the confession of a lover, Amans, to Genius, a priest of Venus. The confessor helps to examine the lover's conscience by telling him exemplary stories of behaviour and fortune in love. However, Gower's stories lack the development and scope of Chaucer's. 'Gower' wrote Legouis, 'learned, industrious, and copious, is the typical average poet of his century. His writings are what Chaucer's might have been without Chaucer's genius.'

John Barbour was a Scottish poet and Archdeacon of Aberdeen in 1357. The only poem ascribed to him with certainty is *The Bruce* or *The Actes and Life of the Most Victorious Conquerour, Robert Bruce King of Scotland* (1376) a long poem in 13000 lines. It is the national poem of Scotland just as *Chason de Roland* is of France. The poem is animated by the spirit of freedom, independence and patriotism that Bruce stood for. Like Maharana Pratap and Shivaji Maharaj in India Bruce led the life of a hunted beast, hiding in the mountains and forestalling the traps laid for him until in 1314 he completely routed the English under Edward II at Bannockburn, near Stirling and secured the independence of Scotland. However, *The Bruce* was written at a time when the glory of Bannockburn had been tarnished by sanguinary defeats. Barbour's message to his nation was that freedom is of greater value 'than all the gold in world that is' and that 'He levys at es that frely levys' (He lives at ease who freely lives.)

There is no indication of the authorship of four remarkably beautiful poems – *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*, *Pearl*, *Purity* and *Patience* – preserved in a manuscript (Cotton Nero A x) in the British Library (formerly British Museum). They are written in West Midland dialect spoken in Lancashire. Historians date it in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght* is in Edward Albert's view 'without doubt the finest of all the Middle English romances, for its mastery of plot handling, its realism, characterization, descriptive powers and use of the alliterative long line.' It is the only secular work in the collection. It owes much to the Arthurian romances, and especially to the *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal* (1181–90) of Chrestien de Troyes (fl. 1170-90).

Pearl was the author's daughter who died when she was two years old and the poem in her memory is a vision of paradise. *Purity* deals with three topics from the Scriptures: the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and, the fall of Belshazzar. *Patience* recounts the story of Jonah a bit humorously. Both *Purity* and *Patience* are in alliterative verse but without rhyme or stanzas.

England produced no poet worthy to rank with Chaucer for two centuries. In this period, i.e. **1400 – 1550**, 'Miserly Nature', as Emile Legouis pointed out, 'created only imitators and reiterators of outworn themes.' 'The sense of the beautiful' Legouis went on, 'seems to have died with the sense of life and of reality.' Chaucer's successors in the fifteenth century were his disciples but they were aware how far below him they were in poetic inspiration and execution. Thomas Hoccleve or Hoccleve admitted,

Fader Chaucer fayne wold han me taught,
But I was dul, and learned lite or nought

The sentiment was repeated by John Lydgate who held that no poet in his time was left 'that worthy was his ynkehorne for to hold'.

Very little is known, except what can be gathered from his writings, about

Thomas Occleve (1370?–1454?). He led a life of debauchery in his youth and none was known better to the tavern keepers and cook-shops in Westminster. He became a clerk in Privy Seal office, from which he retired on a pension to Hampshire in 1424. Occleve was the author of *Letter of Cupid*, long ascribed to Chaucer. *La Male Regle de T. Occleve* is a sort of confession of his debauched life. His principal work *De Regimine Principum* was written in 1411-12 to win the favours of the Prince of Wales, later Henry V. It is a series of lessons on conduct. It is an imitation of the work of Roman Aegidius of the same title written for Philip the Fair.

The dates of **John Lydgate** (1370–1451) are only approximately fixed. Lydgate was a friend of Chaucer. He became a monk at Bury St Edmunds where he rose to become a priest in 1397. He had a wide reputation in his time both as a scholar and poet but the enormous mass of his poems enhance their futility. About 1,40,000 lines of verse, authentically his, are extant. *The Fall of Princes*, full of platitudes, is 7000 verses long. *The Temple of Glas* is shorter and so is *Story of Thebes* a supposed addition to *The Canterbury Tales*. The authorship of *London Lick penny* the most popular of the poems ascribed to him is uncertain. *The Complaint of the Black Knight* has a few pleasant descriptions of nature but this Benedictine monk could hardly lift his eyes from books and these pictures have been, as pointed out by E. Legouis, lifted from them.

John Skelton, Alexander Barclay and Stephen Hawes come rather late in this period but they represent variously rather the last stirrings of the dying Medieval period than the early signs of life of the Renaissance. **John Skelton** (1406?–1529) earned praise from Erasmus as a learned humanist. He was tutor to the future Henry VIII and rector of Diss in Norfolk. Skelton found heroic verse of his time debased and instead of reforming it wrote loose octosyllabic couplets rhyming more than a dozen times. Skelton was aware of his faults but his aim was to strike hard and straight:

Though my rime be ragged,
Tatter'd and jagged,
Rudely raine-beaten,
Rusty and moth-eaten;
If ye take wel therewith,
It hath in it some pith,

Skelton's pith is mostly satire. In an age of dull repetitions Skelton's pleases owing to his brutality and coarseness. Some of his most interesting poems are *The Bowge of Court*, *The Boke of Colin Clout* and, *Why Come ye not to Court?*

The Bowge of Court (1509?) reminds us of *The Ship of Fools*. It is an allegory. The poet is on board a magnificent ship which is to take him to the land of favour. However, the voyage is troubled by Fortune's friends, Flattery, Suspicion, Disdain and Dissimulation, who conspire against him and he is about to throw himself into the waters when he wakes up.

In *Colin Clout* (1519) reminiscent of *Piers Plowman*, Skelton chastises the vices of the clergy.

Why come ye not to Court? (1522) is an indictment of cardinal Wolsey the all-powerful minister of Henry VIII:

He ruleth all at will,
Without reason or skill;
Howbeit the primordial,

Of his wretched original
And his base progeny,
And his greasy genealogy,
He came of the sank royal
That was cast out of a butcher's stall.

Skelton did not hesitate to castigate Wolsey's 'sank' or 'blood' royal.

Alexander Barclay (1474-1552) a Dominican and a Latinist was more a translator than a poet. He in 1509 translated the Strasbourg poet Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* not directly but through his Latin and French translations. It is a fiction of a ship in which all fools are invited to embark. This gives the poet an opportunity to review diverse kinds of eccentricities and follies of mankind. Barclay added some peculiarly English types to the crew. *Certayne Ecloges* (1541) another of Barclay's works is the earliest English collection of pastorals. Barclay's language is rude and his verse is unrhythmical.

Stephen Hawes (1457-1523) is the most uninspired of the poets of this period. He lived mainly by his *Example of Vertue* (1503-4) and the better known *The Pastime of Pleasure, or Histories of Graunde Amoure and La Belle Pucel* (1505-6). Both works are allegorical in character with the then-obsolete spirit of romance. 'In general' wrote Legouis, 'Hawe's style, sometimes aggrandized by Latinized words, sometimes entangled by awkward constructions, is the worst known to English poetry'.

Chaucer's personal influence was dominant as much in Scotland in this period, i.e. 1400-1550, as it was in England but the Scot, as Legouis has pointed out, 'had a vitality which contrasted happily with English languor.' 'This' Legouis goes on, 'is the most glorious period of all their old poetry.'

If we look for the patriotic impulse in the manner of Barbour in *The Bruce* we can find it only in the *Wallace* (c. 1416) of **Blind Harry**, a minstrel. The fabulous element is much larger in the latter poem than in the former, for Blind Harry was writing about a hero who lived hundred and fifty years before him but both poets tell their tales in naked simplicity and monotonously. Blind Harry, however, heightens by contrast, the ornate and brilliant character of the verse of this period.

Chronologically the first Scottish poet to be influenced by Chaucer was **King James I** (1394-1436). He was taken prisoner by the English for nineteen years at the age of eleven along with his ship that was carrying him to France. However, he was honourably treated and properly educated by them. During his captivity James fell in love with Lady Jane Beaufort, niece to Henry IV, whom he married in 1424. *The Kingis Quair* (quire or book) written during his captivity describes his first sight of the lady who was destined to be his wife, who had in James's words, 'Beautee eneuch to mak a world to dote.'

The Dunfermline schoolmaster **Robert Henryson** (1452-1500) read and admired Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* but was shocked by the conclusion of the story. How could the faithful Troilus be killed and the fickle Criseyde be happy with Diomedes? he wondered, 'Quha wait gif all that Chaucer wrait was trew?' (Who knows if all that Chaucer wrote was true?) So Henryson decided to recast the conclusion of the story and wrote *The Testament of Cresseid*.

Henryson's Diomedes soon deserts Cresseid and she is afflicted by Heaven with leprosy. She goes begging from door to door begging with her 'cop and clapper'. One day Troilus, who is returning from a glorious expedition, passes near the

place where she sits and gives her a generous alms in memory of his 'fair Cresseid'. When she learns from the other leper folk about the giver of the alms she falls to the ground. She writes her testament before her death in which she bequeaths her body to the worms and toads and all her goods to the lepers, save her ring set with a ruby, which is to be carried to Troylus after her death. When he receives it and hears her story his heart bleeds for his Cresseid and he has 'ane tomb of merbell gray', to be raised above her grave. While Henryson was a moralist and wished to set the horrible chastisement for the Cresseids of this world his morality was penetrated with sympathy and humanity.

Henryson was a prolific poet. The longest of his poems is the *Moral Fabillis of Esope. Orpheus and Eurydice* is an adaptation from Boethius. 'Robene and Makyne' and 'Garmond of Gude Ladies' are two better known of his thirteen lyrics.

William Dunbar (1406?–1520?) is considered the chief of the Scottish Chaucerian poets. He did not have Chaucer's or Henryson's gift of observation but he had virtuosity of style and versification. In Legouis' words, 'He dazzles the eyes and ravishes the ears.' *The Thrissil and the Rois* is meant to commemorate the marriage of Margaret Tudor daughter of Henry VII to James IV of Scotland in 1503. The *Golden Targe* is an allegory in which the poet is accused by Dame Beauty and defended by Reason who shields him with a golden targe or Shield. His *Dance of the Sevin Deadly Synnis* does not offer 'either propriety of details or religious horror of vice'. 'It has' in Legouis' words, 'instead the marks of a strange coarseness, and is fuller of buffoonery than of edification.'

Dunbar began as a Franciscan friar who was unfrocked. He was at one time a wandering preacher, sent by James IV on embassies to London and Paris. In 'How Dunbar was desired to be ane freir' he sees a demon in the guise of saint Francis who brings him the habit of his order to whom he explains why it does not please him to resume it. Dunbar sharpens his barbs against the Franciscans in 'The Tournament' which is in the form of an apology to the guild of traitors who have complained of his ridicule.

In *Lament for the Makaris* he names the poets of his country and of England who have died.

Dunbar was a commoner but **Gavin Douglas** (1475?–1522?) was a member of the famous Douglas family, his father being the fifth Earl of Angus, Archibald 'Bell the Cat'. Gavin Douglas became a priest and, rose to be Bishop of Dunkeld. He participated in the high politics of his time, but after the disaster of Flodden in 1513, lost his bishopric, was expelled to England and quietly passed away in London. His *Palice of Honour* (1501) was written when Douglas was twentysix. It was an imitation of Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*. *King Hart* exhibits a cunning mingling of humour and melancholy in which King Hart or Heart is made captive by Dame Pleasance, and delivered by Dame Pietie. However Hart marries Pleasance but after seven years when Age knocks at the palace of Pleasance all the courtiers flee and are at last followed by the dame herself. Reason and wit then advise the king to return to his own castle where before long he is assailed by an army of Decrepitude. Heart makes an ironic testament before his death.

Douglas has a greater claim to fame for his translation of Virgil (1512–13) into verse. Chaucer did indeed translate a few fragments but they are a poor performance. Caxton had published a prose version of Virgil but it was really a medieval romance and Douglas opined,

It has nathing ado tharwith, god wait,
Ne an mair than the devil and Sanct Austyne,

The most curious parts of Douglas's Virgil are the prologues to the various books. Description of winter begins the seventh book and one of spring opens the twelfth. Douglas's poetic abilities are evident in his faithfulness to nature and prodigality of detail.

Sir David Lyndsay (1490–1555) is the last of the Scottish poets of the fifteenth century. On the one hand he was an associate of John Knox (1505–72), the Protestant religious reformer and, on the other also a companion of James V who gave him the heraldic office of Lyon King of Arms.

His *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the three Estaitis* is a morality play. In *The Dreame* (1528) Lyndsay descends into Hell where he sees popes, kings, cardinals and archbishops being chastised for their ambition which kept them from succouring the poor. *The Monarchie, or Ane Dialog of the Miserable Estait of this World* (1552) was Lyndsay's most considerable poem. 'Lyndsay' according to Legouis, 'has nothing of the poet except metre, but his brutal satire strikes hard and multiplies blows without flinching.'

The years 1400 – 1550 appears to be a sterile period in terms of literary productions as most of the poets appeared to be poor imitators of Chaucer. However, this era has also sometimes been called a period of preparation for the Renaissance. The work that would most eminently fall under that rubric is Richard Tottel (c. 1519–c. 1562) and Nicholas Grimald's compilation *Songes and Sonnettes* (1557) better known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. Its popularity can be gaged from the fact that Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Shakespeare would have Tottel's 'book of songs and sonnets' with him while courting Anne Page than forty shillings and the grave digger in *Hamlet* mumbles Vaux's song from the same collection. *Tottel's Miscellany* contains the chief works of Wyatt and Surrey.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–42) held several diplomatic positions in the service of Henry VIII, in France, Italy, Spain and, the Netherlands. It is probable that during his visit in 1527 to Italy he got the idea of translating and imitating Petrarch in his works, especially his sonnets. The sonnet in English became the principal vehicle for the direct expression of personal feeling without recourse to fiction or allegory. Of Wyatt's ninety-six love poems in the *Miscellany* the most noteworthy are the thirty-one sonnets, the first in English. Ten of these were translations from Petrarch while all were written in the Petrarchan form, apart from the concluding couplet which Wyatt introduced.

Henry Howard, (by courtesy) **Earl of Surrey** (1517–47) also like Wyatt studied Italian models, especially Petrarch, but his sonnets were predominantly in the 'English' form (abab cdcd efef gg) which was later used by Shakespeare. Forty of his poems were published in *Tottel's Miscellany*, ten years after his death. A still more durable innovation of Surrey was his use of 'blank verse' in his *Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aeneis turned into English Meter* (1557), a translation of the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid*.

The two poets, Wyatt and Surrey, were much in advance of their times and a whole generation passed before their lead was followed. The two poets of their time who deserve mention are **Thomas Sackville** (1536– 1608) and **George Gascoigne**

(1525?–77). Sackville's only contribution to poetry was his 'Induction' to be followed by 'The Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham' written in 1563 for *A Mirror for Magistrates* a work planned originally by George Ferrers and William Baldwin. George Gascoigne was a soldier in the Netherlands, from 1572 to 74 spending four months as a prisoner of the Spanish. His poems and plays were published during his absence, as *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* (1573). This was supposedly without his authority. On his return he brought out a corrected and enhanced version under the title *The Poesie of George Gascoigne*. His *Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English* is a pioneering account of English versification. His *The Steele Glas* (1576) is a satire in verse, Gascoigne's only work still read with interest.

Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) the Italian humanist – known chiefly for his prose dialogues *Il libro del cortegian* (1528), translated into English as *The Courtier* (1561), discusses the qualities of the ideal courtier. It had much influence on English literature, namely on Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare and W.B. Yeats. Yeats laments the 'soldier, scholar, horseman' in his 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' who was to Yeats 'our Sidney and our perfect man'.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86) was the most commanding literary figure before Spenser and Shakespeare. He took a brilliant part in the military, courtly and literary life of his time. However, all his writings were published after his decease at the early age of 32 at Zutphen on the battlefield while assisting the Dutch against the Spaniards.

His finest achievement was his 108 love sonnets, the *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) addressed to Penelope Devereux daughter of the Earl of Essex. She is his 'Stella' or 'star' while he is the 'astrophel' or 'lover of the star'. These sonnets owe much to Petrarch (1304–74) and Ronsard (1524–85), the French poet, leader of the Pleiade. Sidney dedicated *Astrophel and Stella* to his wife Frances (daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham). These made Sidney the greatest Elizabethan sonneteer except Shakespeare.

Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595) has taken its place among the most memorable critical essays in English. In it Sidney defends poetry as greater than history or philosophy. While assessing Sidney we must remember that he wrote before most of the great poets and any of the Elizabethan dramatists had published their works.

Since Sir Philip Sidney's works were published after his death, **Edmund Spenser** (1552–99) took precedence over him in revealing poetic beauty to his generation. Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–99) was born at East Smithfield, near the Tower of London and was educated at Merchant Taylors' school founded in 1561 to which the dramatist Thomas Kyd (or kid 1558–94), Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626) one of the divines appointed to translate the Bible, known as the Authorized Version of 1611 and, Thomas Lodge (1558–1625) traveller, explorer and author of *Rosalynde* (1590) his best known romance, also went. Richard Mulcaster (c. 1530–1611) was its first eminent headmaster who later became high master of St. Paul's.

Spenser studied also at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, as poor sizar and fag for wealthy students. At Cambridge he read the great Italian and French poets and wrote several poems of his own. His sonnets in imitation of the Italian Petrarch (1304–74) and the French Joachim Du Bellay (1522–60) author in 1549–50 of the first sonnet

sequence *L' Olive* in French, he contributed to van der Noodt's *Theatre for Worldlings* (1569). Spenser's *The Vision of Bellay* later also appeared in the *Complaints* of 1591. Chaucer whom Spenser called 'well of English undefyled' here became his beloved master, but his ambition was to express the dream of English chivalry as Ariosto (1474–1535) had done for Italy in *Orlando Furioso* (1532).

Spenser left Cambridge in 1576 and went to the north of England on what occupation or quest it is not known. It is not improbable that there, in his youth he fell in love and began to record his melancholy over the lost Rosalind in *The Shepheardes Calender*. In 1578 he became secretary to John Young, Bishop of Rochester. In 1579 on the invitation of his college friend Gabriel Harvey (c. 1550–1631) he went to London with his poems. Harvey introduced him to the Earl of Leicester who invited him to live in his house. At Leicester House Spenser came in contact with Sir Philip Sidney to whom he dedicated his *Shepheardes Calender* (1579). 'For the England of 1579' wrote Emile Legouis,

'lagging behind the continent, seeing the Renaissance flower there while she remained sterile, the appearance of the *Shepheardes Calender* inaugurated a period of self-confidence and vast hopes.' Legouis went on,

Spenser was the master of the language whose 'numbers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse'. He seemed able to tune English verse, which had been so long rebellious, to the tones of his voice. For him the language ceased to be refractory.

1579 was propitious year for him for he married Machabyas Chylde in that year and began to write *The Faerie Queene* as well.

The Elizabethan court was full of intrigue, lying and flattery and Spenser was ill at ease there. His suffering is evident from the following lines of 'Mother Hubberd's Tale':

Full little knowest thou, that has not tried,
What hell it is, in suing long to bide:
To lose good days, that might be better spent;
To waste long night in pensive discontent;
.....
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares;
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs,
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone,

Through Leicester's influence Spenser, who was utterly weary of his dependent position, became in 1580 secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton, the queen's deputy in Ireland. This way the third phase of his life began, the first two being those at Cambridge and London.

Spenser accompanied Grey through a campaign of savage brutality in putting down an Irish rebellion in Munster. In reward he was given an immense estate of 3000 acres acquired from Earl Desmond and the Kilcolman Castle near Limerick. Here he settled and occupied himself with his writing – an elegy, *Astrophel*, for Sidney and, preparing *The Faerie Queene* for the press. Sir Walter Raleigh (?1554–1618) was in Ireland in 1580 and got acquainted with Spenser. Spenser approved of Raleigh's commanding role in the massacre of Smerwic, in which 600 Spanish mercenaries were killed. At one of his visits in 1589 Raleigh heard *The Faerie Queene* with enthusiasm, hurried the poet to London and presented him to the queen. The first three books met with instant success on its

publication and was declared the greatest work in the English language. An annual pension of fifty pounds was conferred by the queen on him but it was rarely paid. Spenser returned unwillingly to Ireland which he regarded as lonely exile:

My luckless lot,
That banished had myself, like wight forlore,
Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.

In 1596, after more than fifteen years residence there he wrote his only prose work *View of the State of Ireland*, not published until 1633. In it he submitted a plan for 'pacifying the oppressed and rebellious people'. His suggestion was to send a huge force of cavalry and infantry into Ireland, give them a short period to submit and then hunt them down like wild beasts. He reckoned that cold, famine and pestilence would assist the sword and after they had been hounded for two winters the following summer peace would descend upon Ireland. Strange as it might appear, Spenser's views were excellently well received in England as most statesman like.

Spenser returned to Ireland after nearly two years residence in London. This time he fell in love with an Irish girl called Elizabeth Boyle whom he had wooed in his *Amoretti*, a series of 88 sonnets. His marriage to her was celebrated in *Epithalamion*. Both were printed together in 1595. The same year he visited London again and stayed at Leicester House, now occupied by the new favourite of the Queen, Essex. There Spenser also met other luminaries, Shakespeare among them. In 1596 he published Books IV to VI of *The Faerie Queene* and his *Fowre Hymnes* while he stayed at the house of the earl of Essex. There he wrote the *Prothalamion* and also his *View of the State of Ireland*.

Spenser once again returned to Ireland in 1596 or '97. His castle at Kilcolman was burnt in 1598 in a sudden insurrection of the O'Neills under the earl of Desmond. Spenser was forced to flee to Cork with his wife and three children. Some of his manuscripts got burnt. Spenser's last days were spent at an inn in king street at Westminster, according to Ben Jonson 'for want of bread'. Spenser was buried near his favourite, Chaucer, in Westminster Abbey, the earl of Essex paying his funeral expenses. Twenty years later a monument was erected to him by Lady Anne Clifford which describes him as 'THE PRINCE OF POETS IN HIS TYME'. There have been few periods in English literary history in which Spenser's name has not been taken in the highest esteem.

I hope that this historical background will help you in reading this block with understanding.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 1 WHY READ A POEM ? AND, HOW TO STUDY *UNDERSTANDING POETRY?*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Answering the Question, ‘What is a Poem?’
- 1.3 The Scope of this Course: The Syllabus
- 1.4 Assignments and Term-End-Examination
 - 1.4.1 Assignments
 - 1.4.2 Why Examinations?
 - 1.4.3 A Model Term-End-Examination Question Paper
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Answers to Self-check Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to,

- explain the purpose of a formal study of poetry,
- appreciate the importance of poetry in life,
- understand the range of topics, poets and poems covered in this course, gauge our expectations from you and thus
- give direction to your study of this course.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Did you ask yourself why you decided to read this course on poetry? Reading of poetry does not enable a person to do anything such as repair a watch, a mobile phone, an AC or a car. It does not lead to any application in technology as physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology and geology would do. Political science, sociology and economics have social relevance. People also seek the help of psychiatrists and lawyers but poets are of no “practical” use, apparently. I will try to make a few suggestions in the next section; read it and then discuss it in your study group. Just by doing so you will make your study of this course meaningful.

Passive education is no education. The T.V. has been called an ‘idiot box’. People who watch the t v for long hours are passive learners. They actually learn nothing. Education should make us wise. ‘Read’ wrote Francis Bacon, ‘not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider.’ Weighing and considering will indeed make you wiser. Study of literature is part of liberal culture or education. Will reading poetry give more meaning to your life? It is akin to history and philosophy. It is ‘for delight, for ornament, and for ability.’

1.2 ANSWERING THE QUESTION ‘WHAT IS A POEM?’

Self-check Exercises I

- 1) Have you talked to your friends about any poem that either you or they may have liked? If not, would you like to do so now and record your response below?

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- 2) Do you like singing film songs? Write down why you do so?

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- 3) Imagine that the government has banned film songs. What would happen then?

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Answering the question ‘What is a Poem?’

Well, a poem is an instance of ‘poetry’ and ‘poetry is a variety of literature; the other varieties being non fictional prose, fiction - the short story and the novel - drama and literary criticism. We treat the essay - in both its forms, the long ones, or treatises, such as David Hume’s (1711 - 76) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739 - 40) and the shorter performances such as Charles Lamb’s (1775-1834) *The Essays of Elia* (1820-23) or Francis Bacon’s (1561 - 1626) *The Essays, or Counsels, Civil and Morall* (1597, 1612, 1623) – memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, letters, etc. as nonfiction and literary criticism as a major separate variety of it.

We have said that a ‘poem’ is an example of poetic expression. The Oxford English Dictionary calls poetry ‘expression of beautiful or elevated thought, imagination or feeling in appropriate language and usually in metrical form’. Notice the word ‘usually’ since poetry need not always be in verse. We have prose poems such as ‘The Book of Job’ in the Old Testament, ‘Dream Children’

of Lamb, 'The Vision of Mirza' of Joseph Addison, *The Waves* of Virginia Woolf and passages in Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography that are pure poetry. Nehru describes the cremation of his father on the banks of the Ganga in the following words in his autobiography:

As evening fell on the river bank on that winter day, the great flames leapt up and consumed that body which had meant so much to us who were close to him as well as to millions in India. Gandhiji said a few moving words to the multitude, and then all of us crept silently home. The stars were out and shining brightly when we returned lonely and desolate. (Page 247)

This can be called a piece of prose poem; it has all the qualities of poetry except metre.

Plays have been written in prose as by George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950) and in verse as by T.S.Eliot (1888 – 1965) and William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616). The success of a literary artist rests on many factors but most of all on his imagination, thought and feeling couched in a language that felicitously conveys them to us. Let's take an example from the fifth act of *Macbeth* (1605). Macbeth has just heard about his wife's death and befitting the situation he bursts out thus:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays are lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing. (Act V, Sc. V)

You may ask if Shakespeare was not indiscreet in embellishing a murderer of his friend Banquo and his monarch Duncan with the grand poetry that he has been endowed with? The personification of 'day' creeping at a 'petty pace' the congerie of metaphors of 'brief candle', 'walking shadow', 'poor player' and 'a tale told by an idiot' for life demonstrate the profundity of Macbeth's imagination. How could a man who was capable of such deep philosophical meditation commit crimes of such ghastly proportions? These are debatable points but we can immediately feel the power of Shakespeare's poetry. 'A poem' wrote Wallace Stevens, 'must resist the intelligence almost successfully.' Shakespeare will be read as long as English will be read and understood.

Poets don't read philosophical treatises before writing their poems but philosophers, scientists, and artists, and people in all walks of life are influenced by the spirit of the age which impacts their work. A student of poetry would do well to explore the political, social and cultural history of the society and the life of the poet whose poem they are going to study. A poem is a product of *the man*, *the milieu* and, *the moment*. Just think of some of W.B. Yeats's poems: 'September 1913', 'Easter 1916', 'Nineteen Hundred Nineteen' and above all 'Among School Children'. They were influenced by Irish history but Yeats did not give us the details of events in his poems as a historian does. The poems are simultaneously public and private documents, thoughtful and emotional accounts

of experiences at the same time, that Yeats wanted to share with his readers. 'Poetry' wrote Aristotle, 'is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal, and history only the particular'.

'Reality' wrote Wallace Stevens, 'is a cliché from which we escape by metaphors'. 'A poet' Stevens went on, 'looks at the world as a man looks at a woman.' Philip Larkin's 'Church Going' is a strange poem about the poet, a disbeliever's visit to a church. He writes:

Hatless, I take off

My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

The poet seems to have reverence for the "house of god" notwithstanding his lack of faith. The poem ends with a confessions:

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

At the end of the nineteenth century Matthew Arnold (1822 - 88) the great Victorian poet wrote in his preface to the *Hundred Greatest Men*:

The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve.

'Theories in politics and science change; one dogma in religion founders and a new one arises in its place but poetry stays'. Arnold went on,

Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it... The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry.

Is Philip Larkin's 'Church Going' not about the poetry latent in religion? Poetry 'is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge' as William Wordsworth pointed out.

How does poetry stand with respect to science? Francis Bacon has been called the first martyr of science because he caught cold while stuffing dead birds with snow and died. 'Poesy' he wrote 'is part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth, truly refer to the imagination, which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches' (*The Advancement of Learning, BK II, 1605*). He also pointed out that poesy offers 'magnanimity, morality, and ... delectation' but it is reason which 'buckle[s] and bow[s] the mind unto the nature of things.' So reason according to him is superior to poetry.

Another major figure of the age of Scientific Revolution and of Reason was John Locke (1632 - 1704) whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) offers a study of the human mind and the mechanism of understanding. He rejected the doctrine of 'innate ideas' and pointed out that the source of ideas is experience. Locke believed that sensation is always of a quality and qualities are either primary, i.e. extensions, figure, motion and number or secondary which do not really belong but are imputed to them. Colour, for instance is a secondary quality which is a subjective perception. We are also ignorant of spiritual entities.

John Dryden (1631-1700) a contemporary of Locke seems to have been influenced even more by the scientific ethos of his age. Charles Sedley, Lord Buckhurst as Eugenius in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatick Poesy* holds the view that his age was superior to the ancients because 'natural causes [are] more known than in the time of Aristotle.' So it follows from it that 'poesy and other arts may with the same pains, arrive still nearer to perfection'. Eugenius wants the method of science to serve as a model for poets. Crites (Sir Robert Howard) shares with Eugenius the euphoria on science. He asks,

Is it not evident in these last hundred years, when the study of philosophy has been the business of all the virtuosi in Christendom, that almost a new nature has been revealed to us? That more errors of the School have been detected, more useful experiments in philosophy have been made, more noble secrets in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy discovered, than in all those credulous and doting ages from Aristotle to us? – so true it is, that nothing spreads more fast than science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

Eugenius points his finger at the new discoveries such as those of Galileo (1564 - 1650) and Descartes (1596 - 1650) in optics and physics and Andreas Vesalius (1515 -64) and William Harvey (1578 - 1657) in anatomy and physiology took European science ahead of those of Aristotle, a constant butt of Galileo's jibes, Galen, the Arabs such as Al Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes and the Schoolmen such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus and Abelard.

Dryden, as Neander, compares the sub-plots which he calls 'under-plots or by-concernments' in drama with phenomenon in Ptolemaic astronomy:

Our plays, besides the main design, have under-plots or by-concernments, of less considerable persons and intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main plot: as they say the orb of the fixed stars and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the motion of the primum mobile, in which they are contained.

Dryden or Neander, whose role in the essay is to defend English drama against the French stage goes on:

That similitude expresses much of the English stage; for if contrary motions may be found in nature to agree, if a planet can go east and west at the same time – one way by virtue of his motion, the other by the force of the first mover – it will not be difficult to imagine how the under-plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

In the literature of a nation production of works of art are dialogical in nature and also there is a progression in the appearance of literary pieces. Alexander Pope

(1688 - 1744) came at the cusp of the neoclassical era in Western Europe: the two strands of neo-classicism and science meet in poets and critics such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. By reading *An Essay of Criticism* (1711) against the background of Locke's ideas on primary and secondary qualities we can appreciate it better. 'True Wit' wrote Pope, 'is Nature to advantage dress'd, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;'. The office of the poet was to provide felicitous expression to truth, to 'Nature'. Pope recommends classical plainness such as we find in the Parthenon on the Acropolis at Athens on the one hand and in the ideas of Sir Isaac Newton (1642 - 1727) in the ground breaking *Philosophia Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) on the other. Pope's euphoria can be gaged from his couplet on Sir Isaac Newton:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in Night:
God said, *Let Newton be*; and all was Light.

Ignorant of India's achievements in astronomy and mathematics, Pope in his *An Essay on Man* (1732 - 4) scoffed at us,

Lo, the poor Indian! Whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind:
His soul, proud science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;

He did not know about the scientific ideas of the Buddhists, the Sankhya philosophy of Kapil, the theory of the atom of Kanad, the medical ideas of Charak or Sushrut. He also derided, the Persian dervishes for imitating the circular movements of the planets in the hope of knowing god.

As Eastern priests in giddy circles run
And turn their heads to imitate the Sun,

Against the 'irrational' Asians Pope pitted the scientific mind of the English:

Superior beings when of late they saw
A mortal man unfold all Nature's law,
Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape,
And shew'd a NEWTON as we shew an Ape.

Alexander Pope's poet plays the second fiddle to a scientist.

When Samuel Johnson, that last of the Romans, tried to define the function of the poet, in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759) he apparently compared a poet to a scientist. 'He', i.e. the poet, Johnson opined, 'must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place.'

British conquest of India in the eighteenth century changed all this. Sir William Jones translated Kalidas's *Shakuntala* into English and in course of time a Wordsworth could say,

The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown
benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet,
singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices
in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly
companion.

Wordsworth went on to pronounce his most famous words,

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.

We read poetry as the 'finer spirit of all knowledge' and so a proper study of poetry is important.

**Why Read a Poem? and,
How to Study *Understanding
Poetry?***

1.3 THE SCOPE OF THIS COURSE: THE SYLLABUS

Let's at the outset find out what you have to study in this course. Read the syllabus properly and prepare a good strategy for studying it. In other words you must plan your study of the course.

Understanding Poetry (Revised) BEGE106

This course has eight blocks comprising of 40 units as under:

Block I

Early Modern Period

- 1) Introductory Unit
- 2) On metre and poetic devices
- 3) Shakespeare and his sonnets (29 and 30)
- 4) John Milton : 'L' Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' 'On the Late Massacre' and 'When the Assault'
- 5) John Donne: 'The Sun Rising', 'The Anniversary' and, 'The Relic'
- 6) Andrew Marvell: 'Thoughts in a Garden', 'To his Coy Mistress'

Block II

The Long Eighteenth Century

- 7) John Dryden: *Mac Flecknoe*
- 8) Alexander Pope: *An Essay on Man*
- 9) Samuel Johnson: *The Vanity of Human Wishes*
- 10) Thomas Gray: *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*

Block III

The Romantic Poets

- 11) William Wordsworth: 'Intimations of Immortality', 'Tintern Abbey'
- 12) S.T. Coleridge: 'Kubla Khan'
- 13) Lord Byron: 'Roll on Thou Deep and Dark Blue Ocean', 'George the Third'
- 14) P.B. Shelley: 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark'
- 15) John Keats: 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode to a Nightingale'

Block IV

The Great Victorian Poets

- 16) Alfred, Lord Tennyson: 'The Splendour Falls', 'Tears, Idle Tears', 'Ulysses'
- 17) Robert Browning: 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister', 'Andrea del Sarto'
- 18) Matthew Arnold: 'The Strayed Reveller', 'The Scholar-Gypsy'

Early Modern English Poets

- 19) Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'Pied Beauty', 'The Windhover'
- 20) Thomas Hardy: 'To an Unborn Pauper Child', 'Great Things'
- D.H. Lawrence: 'Bavarian Gentians'

Block V**The High Modernist, Postmodernist and Recent Poets**

- 21) William Butler Yeats: 'To a Shade', 'No Second Troy', 'No Second Coming'
- 22) T.S. Eliot: 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Gerontion'
- 23) Philip Larkin: 'Church Going', 'The Whitsun Weddings'
- 24) Ted Hughes: 'The Thought-Fox', 'Hawk Roosting', 'How to Paint a Water Lily'
- 25) Seamus Heaney: 'Death of Naturalist'

Block VI**The American Poets I**

- 26) R. W. Emerson: 'The Snowstorm' and 'Hamatreya'
- 27) Walt Whitman: 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry'
- 28) Edgar Allan Poe: 'The Raven'
- 29) H.W. Longfellow: 'A Psalm of Life', From 'The Song of Hiawatha'
- 30) Emily Dickinson: 'Because I Could not Stop for Death', 'A thought went Up my Mind Today', 'Death Sets a thing Significant'

Block VII**The American Poets II**

- 31) Robert Frost: 'After Apple Picking' and, 'A Boundless Moment'
- 32) William Carlos Williams: 'Spring and All', 'A Widow's Lament in Springtime' and, 'The Dead Baby'
- 33) Wallace Stevens: 'The Snow Man', 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream'
- 34) Langston Hughes: 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers', 'Young Gal's Blues' and, 'Mother to Son'
- 35) Allen Ginsberg: 'A supermarket in California', 'Sunflower Sutra'

Block VIII**Indian English Poetry**

- 36) Rabindranath Tagore: 'I Cast my Net into the Sea', 'When I go Alone at Night'
- Sarojini Naidu: 'Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile', 'Cradle Song'
- 37) Nissim Ezekiel: 'Ganga', 'A Poem of Dedication'
- Kamala Das: 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'
- 38) A.K. Ramanujan: 'Self-Portrait', 'Chicago Zen', 'On the Death of a Poem'
- Jayant Mahapatra: 'Hunger', 'A Rain of Rites'
- 39) Arun Kolatkar: 'Suicide of Rama', 'Chaitanya', 'Ajamil and the Tigers'
- Agha Shahid Ali: 'Postcard from Kashmir'
- 40) Dilip Chitre: 'The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep'
- Keki N. Daruwalla: 'Hawk', 'Chinar'

1.4 ASSIGNMENTS AND TERM-END- EXAMINATION

As in the conventional universities we ask our students to do some homework and also hold public examinations. Let's discuss them here one by one.

1.4.1 Assignments

IGNOU earlier had a policy of 3 assignments per eight-credit course. I think it was a good policy for that way we could monitor students' study better and promote active reading as they could learn from their teachers and discover the finer points as they progressed. Assignments should not only be a ritual, or university requirement.

1.4.2 Why Examinations?

Examinations, tests and assessments are not a necessary evil. They play an important part in our study and mental growth. They tell us where we stand with respect to our peer-group. They also help employers select the right type of employees. Employers often also conduct their own test. Do you know that imperial examinations were held for the first time in ancient China by the Sui Dynasty (581-618 C.E.) in 605. It was abolished by the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912) in 1905, i.e. 1300 years later. Thomas Taylor Meadows, Britain's Counsel in Guangzhou (or Canton), China observed in his *Desultory Notes on the Government and People of China* (1847) that 'the long duration of the Chinese empire is solely ... owing to the good government which consists in the advancement of men of talent and merit only'. He advised against the system of preferment, patronage or purchase and making the civil service a meritocratic institution. The East India Company College had been founded in 1806 to train 'writers' (administrators) of the age of 16 to 18, for the EIC. (The officers for the army were trained at Addiscombe Military Seminary, Surrey.) William Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, set up a commission under Stafford Northcote (1818-87) and Charles Trevelyan (1807-86) to look into the operation and organisation of the Civil Service. Influenced by the Chinese imperial examination they made their recommendation for recruitment based on merit through standardized written examination. Standardized testing was adopted by the British Universities in the 1850's.

1.4.3 A Model Term-end-Examination Question Paper

You can take the final examination after studying this course for a year. If you don't feel sufficiently prepared you can sit for the exam in June or December. Read the handbook and follow the instructions properly.

Now let me give you a few tips for the final examination. These will give direction to your study.

- All good students will learn scansion, taught in the following unit. ('Here you have a few sections of Block-I, Unit 2 of *British Poetry (MEG 01)*. You can get a copy of it from senior students/Study Centre/ Book Shop.)
- Remember that the more you drill yourself the more confident you will become in scanning units of verse. You must also develop familiarity with poetic devices, genres and various types of metrical compositions.

Early Modern English Poets

- A close reading of the texts of poems is done through ‘reference to context questions. You will be required to explain 4 passages from the texts of poems prescribed for you. This question would carry 32 marks. Each answer may be in 150 to 200 words only. Avoid long answers.
- The introductions to the various blocks deal with literary history. They will give your study of the major poets and their poems in their proper perspectives. You may be required to answer one question of 16 marks based on the introductions as in question no 3 on the next page.
- Now we move to general questions that carry a total of 32 marks. They will be on the *poets, poems, and their age*. You may have to write two essays, each in about 750 words.

Finally you must remember that a good question paper is one that covers all segments of the course adequately, i.e. there should be more questions from the largest segment of the course, such as British poetry (Blocks I to V). However, no section should remain unrepresented on the question paper. The purpose of the examinations is not to find out what the student does not know but to find out how well she/he knows what she/he knows. This can be done by giving the student sufficient choice. Below you have a model term-end-examination question paper. **Remember that examiners may change the pattern of the question paper but it is advisable not to do so as the course has been planned and executed with certain goals that get reflected in the question paper given here.** Moreover students must be told before hand if the pattern of the question paper is to change which is rather difficult in a distance education scenario.

Model Term End Question Paper

Understanding Poetry (Revised)

Full Marks – 100

Time 3 Hours

Answer questions 1 and 2 and 3 and any two of the remaining questions.

- 1) a) Scan **one** of the following passages and comment on its prosodic features:
Scansion 5 + Comments 5
 - i) The way was long, the wind was cold,
The minstrel was infirm and old;
The harp, his sole remaining joy,
Was carried by an orphan boy,
 - ii) One more unfortunate
Weary of breath
Rashly importunate
Gone to her death!
 - b) Write short notes on any **two** of the following:
 - (i) Caesura (ii) Epic (iii) Synecdoche $5 \times 2 = 10$
 - (iv) Spenserian stanza (v) Aposiopesis
- 2) Explain **any four** of the following passages with reference to their context supplying brief critical comments where necessary: $8 \times 4 = 32$
 - a) Let the bird of loudest lay
On the sole Arabian tree
Herald sad and trumpet be,
To whose sound chaste wings obey,

- b) Say first, of god above, man below,
what can we reason, but from what we know?
Of man what see we, but his station refer?
- c) Five years have past, five summers, with the length
of five long winter! And again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.
- d) No wonder of it : sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-buak embers, ah my dear,

Fale gall themselves, and gas Gold-vermillion
- e) There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
- f) we paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground –
The roof was scarcely visible –
The cornice – in the ground –
- g) I feel that I would like
to go there
and fall into those flowers
and sink into the marsh near them,
- h) I don't know politics but I know the names
of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months,
beginning with Nehru,
- i) I always loved neatness. Now I hold the half inch Himalayas in my hand.

- 3) Critically comment on Emile Legouis' words, 'The great victories of Edward III were being sung in London, and Minot's poems were current in the countryside when Chaucer was born and when his mind received its first impressions.'

Or

Write short notes on any four of the following:

A) Venerable Bede B) Sir Philip Sidney C) The Augustan Age D) The Symbolist Movement E) Phillis Wheatley F) Black Mountain Poets G) Henry Derozio

16

- 4) Attempt an evaluation of any **one** of the following poets, with special reference to the poems prescribed for you:
- a) Andrew Marvell
b) P.B. Shelley
c) Allen Ginsberg
d) Arun Kolatkar

16

- 5) Critically evaluate **one** of the following poems:
 - a) ‘Ode to a Nightingale’
 - b) ‘Ulysses’
 - c) ‘After Apple-Picking’
 - d) ‘Hawk’ 16
- 6) Do you agree with the view that Victorian poetry is a pale imitation of Romantic poetry? Provide reasons for your answer. 16
- 7) Examine Langston Hughes’s contribution to the Harlem Renaissance. 16
- 8) What are the distinguishing features of Indian Poetry in English? Illustrate your answer with suitable examples. 16

Self- check Exercise II

- 1) Jot down a few points regarding your plans for reading of this course.

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- 2) How would you prepare for your exams? Note down at least 5 points in the space provided below:

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit was concerned with giving direction to your study of this course. We did this by enabling you to think about poetry and its purpose in our life.

All formal education is an efficient way of acquiring knowledge in a short period of time and that is utilizable. We want to give you a fair understanding of *British*, *American* and *Indian* poetries in English methodically so that you may be able to make the best use of your time.

You should try to meet your counsellor every week and *form a study circle* in which you can help one another clarify the points in this and other units.

We hope you will enjoy reading this course.

1.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

Answers to the three questions will be unique to each student but don't ignore them. Think over them and discuss them in your study circle.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Your answer may be somewhat as below:

- Start with the reading of unit 2 and master scansion.
- Prepare British Poetry in 5 months, one block every month
 - a) Poets' lives
 - b) Poems
-

- 2) • Master scansion and secure 10 marks. 10 days – half-an-hour / day, - revision every week for 3 months, then once a month.
- **Draw up a list of literary terms and prepare my notes with the help of a dictionary of literary terms and a search engine on the internet**
 - For rhetorical terms such as **quesitio, percontatio, epanadiplosis, prosopopeia, aposiopesis**, etc. take help of *The Growth and Evolution of Classical Rhetoric* by Amiya Bhushan Sharma
 - Master the topics for notes and secure 10 marks. 10 days – half-an-hour / day - revision every week for 3 months, then once a month
 - Master the introductions to either 1,2 and 3 or 6,7 and 8 first which will help me attempt question no. 3
 - Read blocks 1 to 5 thoroughly in 5 months and attempt at least 20 reference to context questions from them.

UNIT 2 ON METRE, SCANSION AND, PROSODY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Versification: The Grammar of Poetry
 - 2.2.1 Prosody, Metre, Scansion
 - a) Prosody
 - b) Metre and Metrics
 - c) Scansion
- 2.3 Types of Metres
 - 2.3.1 Syllable-stress or Accented Syllabic Metres
 - i) The Iambic Metre
 - ii) The Trochaic Metre
 - iii) The Anapaestic Metre
 - iv) The Dactylic Metre
 - v) The Amphibrachic Metre
 - 2.3.2 Strong-stress Metres
 - 2.3.3 Syllabic Metres
 - 2.3.4 Quantitative Metres
- 2.4 Rhyme and Rhythm in Poetry
 - 2.4.1 Rhyme and Rhyme Schemes
 - 2.4.2 Rhythm
- 2.5 Analysis of a Poem
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 A Brief Annotated Bibliography
- 2.8 Answers to Self-check Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to appreciate any work of literary art better, specially a poem. To split it into more concrete terms:

- You will be able to speak about the abstract entity that is a poem – in other words the ontology of a poem;
- Speak on the acoustic aspects of poems such as metre, rhyme, and rhythm. And finally;
- You will complete the task of appreciation by bringing together the capacities developed in the successive sections of this unit.

With this theoretical background you will be better equipped to study this course.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The function of this unit is, in a way to complete the task we had set for ourselves in the previous unit, i.e. preparing you for a study this course on poetry.

This course on literature, perhaps like any other course on literature, seeks to educate you effectively, improve your ability for appreciation, give you better insights into the ways literary artists, especially the poets, communicate.

There is a still more subtle and deep level which is the rhythm. This is a product of metre and rhyme and of many other effects which perhaps even the poets are not always conscious of. The entire sound effect or prosody of a poem is a common ground of the society, the individual and the language. We will examine some of the fundamental ideas in prosody in the third, fourth and fifth sections. These sections of this unit would require drilling as you do in mathematics.

The last major section i.e. 2.5 shows how all your study can be employed in “deciphering” the text of a poem.

Don't break off at any of the subsections within a section as that may interrupt the discussion in your mind. Then you may feel muddled.

We have not discussed the poetic forms such as the **lyric, epic, allegory or fable or the various aspects of figurative language such as simile, metaphors, irony, hyperbole, or terms of art such as fancy, imagination, gothic, classic, neo-classic, romantic, pastoral, elegy, Satire, pathos, bathos, myth, romance, sensibility, wit and humour**, etc. We expect you to prepare your notes from books suggested at 2.7.

Although a little time consuming, this unit will enhance your ability to study poetry properly. You may study this unit for an hour or two daily over a week or two.

2.2 VERSIFICATION: THE GRAMMAR OF POETRY

In one his last poems written in 1938 called ‘The Statues’ the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (1865 - 1939) marvelled at ‘The Lineaments of a plummet measured face’. As you know masons work with plummets which is a plumb or ball of lead attached to a string for testing perpendicularity of wall, etc. And yet the ‘plummet measured face’ has its distinctive features of lineaments. Earlier on in the poem Yeats had written:

... for the men
That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
All Asiatic vague immensities,
And not banks of oars that swam upon
The many-headed foam at Salamis.
Europe put off that foam when Phidias.
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

Salamis, which you may locate on a map of Greece, was the site of the rout in 480 B.C. of Xerxes (485 – 465 B.C.) the son of Darius, the Persian King (521 – 485 B.C.) - by the Greeks. According to Herodotus (5th B.C.) the Greek historian who had participated in the war and left an account of it, the armies of the Persians were fantastic, their might unchallenged. However they were defeated by the cooperation of Athens and Sparta. Salamis is seen here as a symbol of the victory of mathematics, calculation, number over ‘vague immensities’ and the proverbial Asiatic grandeur. We are reminded of the sea battle at Salamis by the

'many headed foam' in the sixth line of the quotation above. In the same line Yeats cunningly slips in the name of Phidias, who was perhaps the greatest artist of ancient Europe. His colossal statue of Zeus at Olympia in the south-east of Acropolis wrought in ivory and gold over a core of wood was the most famous statue of antiquity. He had also contributed three statues of Athene on Acropolis. One of them was wrought in ivory and gold. He had also probably designed and certainly supervised the construction of the frieze of Parthenon. Yeats perhaps wants to tell us that it was Phidias' artistry, his life-like creations, products of calculation and measurement nonetheless that set high standards for the society of Pericles(492 – 429 B.C.).

We may, may not or only partially agree with Yeats' observations above on 'Asiatic vague immensities' but we cannot deny that pieces of art, or any work in politics or warfare for that matter, are human contrivances of planning with the help of cold concrete facts – be they words, or colours or rocks and mortar or people and locations.

A student who wishes to learn poetry properly must learn the basics of metre, especially if s/he wishes to appreciate the poetry in a foreign language. With reference to the study of ancient Greek and Latin literature by English students Eliot opined:

We have to learn a dead language by an artificial method, and our methods of teaching have to be applied to pupils most of whom have only a moderate gift for language.

While delivering his W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture (1942) at Glasgow Eliot went even further and emphasised the study of English metre even for the native English speaker:

Even in approaching the poetry of our own language, we may find the classification of metres, of lines with different numbers of syllables and stresses in different places, useful at a preliminary stage, as a simplified map of a complicated territory: but it is only the study not of poetry but of poems, that can train our ear.

What Eliot says after the colon gives the impression that if you know the technique some day inspiration would descend and give your verse the life that is poetry. The 'soul of rhythm' Sri Aurobindo (whose writings you are going to read in another course) wrote 'can only be found by listening in to what is behind the music of words and sound and things'. He admitted, that the 'intellectual knowledge of technique helps... provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter' Aurobindo appears to be in agreement with Eliot but they appear on the surface to place their emphases a little differently. Aurobindo points out:

Attentions to technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it that the becomes indifferent to substance. But if the substance is adequate, the attention to technique can only give it greater beauty.

'It is in my view' Aurobindo went on,

a serious error to regard meter or rhyme as artificial elements, mere external and superfluous equipment restraining the movement and sincerity of poetic form. Metre, on the contrary, is the most natural mould of expression for certain states of creative emotion and vision; it is much more natural and spontaneous than a non-metrical form; the emotion expresses itself best and most powerfully in a balanced rather than in a loose and shapeless rhythm.

The search for techniques is simply the search for the best and most appropriate form for expressing what has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it.

In different words though, Eliot and Aurobindo appear to be in agreement about the place and utility of the knowledge of versification in the writing and, by extension for us, the study of poetry in English.

2.2.1 Prosody, Metre, Scansion

- a) **Prosody** : That part of grammar which deals with laws governing the structure of verse is called prosody. It encompasses the study of all the elements of language that contribute towards acoustic or rhythmic effects, chiefly in poetry but also in prose. Ezra Pound called Prosody “the articulation of the total sound of a poem”. However, we know that alliteration (the rhythmic repetition of consonants) and assonance (repetition of vowel sounds) occur as much in prose as in poetry. Besides assonance and alliteration rhythmic effects are produced in poetry as well as in prose by the repetition of syntactical and grammatical patterns. However, compared with even the simplest verse, the “prosodic” structure of prose would appear haphazard and unconsidered.
- b) **Metre and Metrics** :Metre measures the rhythm of a line of verse. The word metre derives from the Greek word *metron* which means ‘measure’. Traditionally metre refers to the regular, recurrence of feet. According to the Hungarian-American linguist John Lotz (b. 1913), ‘In some language there are texts in which the phonetic material within certain syntactic frames, such as sentence, phrase, word, is numerically regulated. *Metrics* is the study of meter. A nonmetric text is called prose.’ In the words of Seymour Chatman (b. 1928) ‘Meter might be defined as a systematic convention whereby certain aspects of phonology are organised for aesthetic purposes. In order to find out where the accent falls we scan a line.’ ‘Like any convention’ Chatman goes on, ‘it is susceptible of individual variation which could be called stylistic, taking “style” in the common meaning of “idiosyncratic way of doing something”’.
- c) **Scansion** : In general parlance, to scan is to look intently at all parts successively. Radars cause particular regions to be traversed by a controlled beam. In prosody scansion refers to metrical scanning of verse. When a unit of verse – a foot, a line or a stanza – is scanned with the help of symbols the metre can be seen as well as heard.

We make use of a few symbols in order to scan a passage in verse (and sometimes also in the case of prose). The symbols are shown below:

Symbol	Name of the symbol	Purpose
/	The acute accent	Metrically stressed syllable
∪	The grave	Metrically weak syllable
	A single line	Division between feet
	A double line	Caesura or pause in the line
^	A rest	A syllable metrically expected but not actually present.

2.3 TYPES OF METRES

There are basically four types of metres. They are:

- i) Syllable–stress or accented syllabic metres
- ii) Strong–stress metres
- iii) Syllabic metres
- iv) Quantitative metres

We will now discuss each one of them one by one.

2.3.1 Syllable-stress or Accented Syllabic Metres

The smallest unit of metre in poetry is a foot. A **foot** in prosody is a pattern of phonetically stressed and unstressed syllables. The four principal feet found in English verse are illustrated below:

- | | | |
|----|----------|--|
| a) | iambic | U / U / U / U / |
| | | appear, behold, attack, supply |
| b) | trochee | /U / U / U / U |
| | | tiger, holy, upper, grandeur |
| c) | anapaest | U U / U U / U U / |
| | | understand, colonnade, reappear |
| d) | dactyl | / U U / U U / U U / U U |
| | | Desperate, messenger, property, infamous |

Besides, the four major feet the **spondee**(//) and the **Pyrrhus** (UU) also occur as substitutions in a passage of verse. Some theorists also admit the **amphibrach** (U/U), **amphimacer**(/U/) and **tribrach** (UUU) into their scansion. However, these are rather uncommon in English poetry.

Syllable stress metres got established in English in the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340? - 1400). After him, for about two centuries the syllable-stress metre fell into disuse or was misunderstood. It was only towards the end of the 16th century that the syllable-stress metres got re-established.

Now we will scan a passage of each major metrical type and then leave a few stanzas unscanned for you to scan. After having scanned them with a *pencil* you may compare your scansion with those scanned at the end of the unit.

i) The Iambic metre:

U / U /
With rav/ished ears

U / U /
The mon/arch hears

U / U /
Assumes / the God

U / U /
Affects / to nod

U / U / U /
And seems / to shake / the spheres.

Dryden.

Comments: the five line stanza above is in iambic dimeter (two feet). However, the concluding line is in iambic trimeter. The rhyme scheme is a a b b a.

Self-Check Exercise 1

Now you may scan the following passages and comment briefly on the metrical features:

Passage 1: In woods a ranger
To joy a stranger

Comments:

2: Thy way not mine, O Lord
However dark it be;
Lead me with thine own hand
Choose out the path for me.

Comments:

3: The way was long, the wind was cold,
The minstrel was infirm and old;
The harp' his sole remaining joy,
Was carried by an orphan boy,

Comments:

4: Confusion shame remorse despair,
At once his bosom swell
The damps of death bedewed his brow,
He shook, he groaned, he fell.

Comments:

5: I put my hat upon my head
And walked into the Strand,
And there I met another man
Whose hat was in his hand.

Comments:

The passages above, you must have noticed, are clumsily regular. They may qualify as passable verse but don't have the power to move us as poetry does.

By far the most common measure of English poetry is the **iambic pentameter**. It is generally found in two distinct kinds – the unrhymed variety called **blank verse** and the rhymed variety **heroic couplet**.

As epics concentrated on a typical hero such as an Achilles or an Aeneas they were generally called heroic poems. Dryden and Pope translated Virgil (70-19 B.C.) and Homer (9th Century B.C.) respectively in the rhyming couplet. It became the dominant metre of late seventeenth and eighteenth century poetry. Hence the metre began to get called “heroic”. The Restoration playwrights in trying to transfer epic grandeur to their stage made their characters speak in heroic couplet. The effect, however, was grandiose rather than grand. The heroic couplet reached perfection in the hands of Alexander Pope. Below we scan four lines from his *Essay on Criticism* (1711):

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
When A/jax strives/ some rock's/ vast weight/ to throw,

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
The line/ too lab/ours, and// the words/ move slow;

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
Not so,// when swift/ camil/la scours/ the plain

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
Files o'er/ the unbend/ ing corn/ and skims/ along/ the main.

The lines above are in regular iambic pentameter except the sixth which is an hexameter. An iambic hexameter line is also called an **alexandrine**. In the second foot of the fourth line we notice an elision, i.e. omission of a syllable in pronunciation. Thomas Norton (1532 - 84) and Thomas Sackville used *blank verse* for the first time in their play *Gorboduc* (1561). Below is a specimen from the play:

The royal king and eke his sons are slain;
No ruler rests within the regal seat;
The heir, to whom the scepter 'longs, unknown
Lo, Britain's realm is left an open prey,
A present spoil for conquest to ensue

The regimented uniformity of the iambic pentameter lines above communicates monotony and as poetry it is lifeless.

Christopher Marlowe (1564 - 93), a poet and playwright, changed all this by varying the accents, introducing the medial pause (called **caesura**) and allowing the sense to flow into a freer sentence structure. Here is an example from *Doctor Faustus* (1604) :

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
Was this/ the face/ that launched/ a thous/ and ships,

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
And burnt/ the top/less tower/ of ill/ ium?

/ / u / u / u u /
Sweet Helen,/ make me/ immortal/ with a kiss,

u / u / u / u / u /
Her lips/ suck forth/ my soul;/ see where/ it flies!

/ u / u / u / u /
Come; Helen,/ come, give me/ my soul/ again.

u / u / u / u u u u /
Here will/ I dwell/ for hea/ven is/in these lips,

u / u / u / u / u /
And all/ is dross/ that is/ not Hel/ena.

You would notice that the passage above is dominated by blank verse, i.e. unrhymed iambic pentameter. However, the third and fifth lines are tetrameter lines. Whereas the first foot of the third line is a spondee, there is an anapaestic variation in the last foot. With the help of an extra unstressed syllable before “Kiss” Marlowe succeeds in communicating, as it were, Faustus’s longing for Helen.

Marlowe introduces the fifth line with a trochaic inversion. This is succeeded by an amphimacer. However, you would notice that while there are metrical variations in the two lines, the number of accented syllables remain uniformly five in each line of the passage. Marlowe thus achieves a felicity of expression by adopting a unique rhythm apposite for the character and his situation in the play but without contravening the natural rhythm of the English language.

Even more flexibility was introduced into English poetry by Shakespeare. You may scan one of his sonnets or some of the passages you like in his plays you may have read on the *Understanding Drama* course.

Self-Check Exercise III

Now you may scan a couple of passages from Shakespeare and Keats and write your comments on them in the space provided:

- a) Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swell/ing act
Of the imperial theme. I thank you, gentlemen.
This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair.
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

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On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and Kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bard in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep browed Homer ruled as his demesne
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like about Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

John Keats.

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In the examples above you noticed that two measurements are involved in metre: we have to speak about the **kind** of foot and the **number** of feet. You scanned passages in the iambic metre in two feet or **dimeter**, three feet or **trimeter**, four feet or **tetrameter**, five feet or **pentameter**, six feet or **hexameter** and seven feet or **septameter**. You noticed that the **septameter** verse often divided into lines of tetrameter alternating with trimeter. It has been estimated that ninety per cent of English poetry is in the iambic pentameter. Now we will examine a few examples of the trochee, anapaest and dactyl also.

ii) The Trochaic Metre

Below we scan a stanza in trochaic tetrameter:

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
May thou/ month of/ rosy/ beauty,

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
Month when/ pleasure/ is a/ duty,

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
Month of/bees and/ month of/ flowers,

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
Month of/ blossom/ laden/ bowers.

Do the drill below in order to find how well you have understood the trochaic metre.

Self-Check Exercise IV

- a) Dreadful gleams,
Dismal screams,
Fires that glow,
Shrieks of woe,
Sullen moans,
Hollow groans.

A. Pope

- b) Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure.

J Dryden

- c) When the British warrior queen
Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought with an indignant mien
Counsel of her country's gods.

- d) Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream;
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem

.A.W. Longfellow

- e) All that walk on foot or ride in chariots
All that dwell in palaces or garrets
-
-

- f) On a mountain stretched beneath a hoary willow
Lay a shepherd swain and viewed the rolling billow.
-
-

Above you scanned passages of trochaic mono-, di-, tri-, tetra-, penta-, and hexameters. However, I may remind you that in good poetry you do not find long stretches in the trochaic metre. The iambus and trochee are bisyllabic feet. Now let us examine the anapaest and dactyl which are trisyllabic feet, i.e. they are made of three syllables.

iii) The Anapaestic Metre

Below is scanned a passage in anapaestic trimeter:

U U / U U / U U /
I am mon/arch of all/ I survey,

U / U U / U U /
My right/ there is none/ to dispute;

U U / U U / U U /
From the cen/tre all round/ to the sea

U U / U U / U U /
I am lord/ of the bird/ and the brute

You will notice above that the first foot of the second line is an iambus. Verses in the anapaestic metre often have iambic substitution. Now you may do the following self- check exercise.

Self-Check Exercise V

- a) How fleet is the glance of the mind
Compared with the speed of its flight!
The tempest itself lags behind
And the swift winged arrows of light
-
-

- b) The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.
-
-

- c) Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot,
O'er the grave where our hero we buried.
-
-

- d) I am out of humanity's reach, **Prelude of the Study**
I must finish my journey alone.
-
-

The couple of lines are in anapaestic trimeter. However, the first foot is an iambic substitution.

iv) The Dactylic Metre

It helps to recall a trochee as the converse of an iambus, and the dactyl as the opposite of an anapaest. Below we scan a passage in dactylic dimeter.

/ u u / u u
Touch her not scornfully

/ u u / u u
Think of her mournfully.

/ u u / u u
Gently and humanly;

/ u u / u u /
Not of the remains of her

/ u u / u u
Now is pure womanly.

The passage above is in dactylic dimeter. The rhyme scheme is a a a b a.
Now do the following exercise.

Self-Check Exercise VI

Scan the following and then briefly comment on the scansion.

- a) One more unfortunate
Weary of breath
Rashly importunate
Gone to her death!
Take her up tenderly;
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly young and so fair!
-
-

- b) Merrily merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.
-
-

Above you have learnt to scan passages in the four dominant feet of English i.e. the iambus, trochee, anapaest and dactyl.

v) **The Amphibrachic Metre**

In a word such as eternal you notice that the emphasis falls on the middle syllable. ‘Eternal’ thus is in the amphibrachic foot. Let’s scan a line in the amphibrachic metre.

 u / u u / u u / u u /
 O hush thee,/ my babie/ thy sire was/ a knight

You may have noticed that the last foot is an iambus.

Self-Check Exercise VII

Scan the following passage and then comment on your scansion:

- a) Most friendship is feigning
 Most friendship mere folly.
-
-

Compare your scansion with the passage scanned for you under 2.9.

Above you have an outline of the “traditional” English metres. These were established by the Renaissance theorists who tried to subject the vernacular English forms to the rules of classical prosody. Let us now turn to examine three other forms of metres.

2.3.2 Strong-stress Metres

Antecedent to the syllable – stress metres was the strong – stress metre of Old and Middle English poetry. The strong-stress metres for that reason are often called the “native” metres and they are indigenous to the Germanic languages (such as German, English, Dutch, Swedish, etc.). In strong-stress verse there are a fixed number of stresses in each line. The unstressed syllables may, however, vary considerably. The use of strong-stress metre can be seen in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* (C. 1000) and in William Langland’s vision poem, *Piers Plowman*. Below you have the opening four lines from the latter:

 / / / /
 In a somer sesun // whon softe, was the sonne

 / / / /
 I schop me in-to a schroud // a scheep as I were;

 / / / /
 In habite of an hermite // un-holy of werkes

/ / / /
Wende I wydene in this world // wondres to here.

You would notice in the four lines above that each line divides into a medial pause (II) or caesura. On both sides of the caesura there are two stressed syllables. The passage is also marked by alliteration.

With the rise of French literature in England in the 12th and 13th centuries rhyme replaced alliteration and stanzaic forms replaced the four-stress line. However, the strong-stress rhythm was too strong to be abandoned completely and it can be felt in the love lyrics and popular ballads of the 14th and 15th centuries. If you scan ‘Lord Randall’ you will find a mixture of the iambus and the anapaest of the “traditional” metre along with the four stresses divided equally on two sides of the caesura.

/ / / /
O where ha you been // Lord Randall, my son?

/ / / /
And where ha you been // my handsome young man?

/ / / /
I ha been at the greenwood; // mother, mak my bed soon

/ / / /
For I’am wearied wihuntin, // and fain wad lie down.

Today the strong-stress survives in nursery rhymes and songs:

/ / / /
Jack and Jill // went up the hill,

/ / / /
To fetch a pail // of water,

/ / / /
Jack, fell down, and // broke his crown

/ / / /
And Jill // came tumbling after.

Above there is an alternation of four and three stresses in alternate lines. However, there is more regularity in most of the nursery rhymes:

/ / / /
One, two // buckle my shoe;
/ / / /
Three, four // knock at the door;

/ / / /
Five, six // pick up sticks;

/ / / /
Seven, eight // lay them straight;

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the revival of interest in the strong-stress metres due to the innovations of Walt Whitman (1819 - 92) in America and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 - 89) in England. In the 20th century a number of poets, including Ezra Pound (1885 - 1972), T.S. Eliot (1888 - 1965) and W.H. Auden (1907 - 73) revived the strong – stress metre. Pound’s *Pisan Cantos* (1948) and Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1943) testify to the energy of the strong – stress metre.

2.3.3 Syllabic Metres

In syllabic metres stresses and pauses vary. The number of syllables in each line, however, remains fixed. Poetry in Romance languages (languages that have grown out of Latin, the language of ancient Rome, such as French, Italian and Spanish) is dominated by the syllabic metres. In English, however, to most ears, the syllable-count alone does not produce any rhythmic interest.

2.3.4 Quantitative Metres

Quantity in the present context refers to the *time* we take to pronounce a syllable. It is a product of the duration for which we pronounce the vowel at the nucleus of the syllable. For instance you can pronounce “sweet rose” in various ways shortening and lengthening the vowel sound as you please. This variability, however, would hinder communication between the poet and you as the reader. Now if you compare Sanskrit, or Hindi for the matter, with English you find that you cannot exercise your discretion in lengthening or shortening the vowel sound or the *quantity* of the syllable in the two Indian languages. They are predetermined by the linguistic system of Sanskrit and Hindi.

The quantitative metres dominated Greek and Latin poetry because they are highly inflected. (To inflect a word is to change its form at the end according to its peculiar, case, mood, tense and number. For instance we can say that “child” and “boy” inflect differently in the plural.) The inflection promoted the construction of long, slow - paced lines because those languages supported the alternation of the long vowels in the roots and the short ones in the inflections. English which lost most of its inflections in the 15th century, unlike German, is less hospitable to the quantitative metres.

2.4 RHYME AND RHYTHM IN POETRY

You know that verse is generally distinguished from prose as a more compressed and regularly rhythmic form of statement. One of the most important constituents of rhythm in **metre** about which you know already. There are, however, other factors such as **alliteration** (the use of several nearby words or stressed syllables beginning with the same consonant), **assonance** (the repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds usually in accented syllables), **consonance** (the repetition of a pattern of consonants with changes in the intervening vowels such as in *linger, longer, languor*) and **onomatopoeia** (which is direct verbal imitation of natural sounds) that also contribute to rhythm. Besides metre on the one hand and alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia on the other, rhyme helps to create rhythm and define units of verse in subtle ways. Let’s now examine *rhyme* and what it does, however, after you’ve done a short exercise.

Self-Check Exercise VIII

Don't scan the following passages. However, identify the use of alliteration, assonance, or consonance in them and then supply your comments in the space provided. Having done so compare your answers with those supplied at the end of the unit.

- a) Ruin hath taught we thus to ruminare
 That Time will come and take my love away.
 Shakespeare : Sonnet 64
-
-

- b) In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,
 Before polygamy was made a sin,
 Dryden : 'Absalom and Achitophel'
-
-

- c) For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.
 Keats : 'Ode or melancholy'
-
-

- d) Not the twilight of the gods but a precise dawn
 If sallow and grey bricks, and the newsboys crying war
 Louis MacNeice.
-
-

- e) It seemed that out of battle I escaped
 Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
 Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
 Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned
 Wilfred Owen : 'Strange Meeting'
-
-

2.4.1 Rhyme and Rhyme Schemes

Rhyme consists generally of identity of sounds at the end of lines of verse.

Now let's read the following lines:

Faith is not built on disquisitions *vain*;
The things we must believe are few or *plain*

John Dryden : *Religio Laici*

Above 'vain' and 'plain' are rhyming words. You will notice that both are accented monosyllabic words. Such a rhyme is called **masculine**.

When the accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable (as in 'hounding' and 'bounding') the rhyme is called **feminine**. An example is given below:

Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow.

You notice above that 'sorrow' and 'morrow' are bisyllabic words and the accent falls on the first syllables. You will notice also that there is **doubled rhyme** above.

In English **triple rhyme** is used for comic or satiric purposes, as Byron does in *Don Juan*:

...oh!, ye lords of ladies intellectual
Inform us truly, have they not henpecked you all?

Above the last three syllables that have been underlined rhyme.

Sometimes syllables within the same line may rhyme as in the last stanza of Browning's 'Confessions' :

Alas,
We loved, sir – used to meet;
How sad and bad and mad it was –
But then how it was sweet!

The words 'sad', 'bad' and 'mad' in the passage above rhyme though within the same line. This is an example of **internal rhyme**.

When rhymes are only rhymes in appearance and not in sound as in the case of 'alone' and 'done' or 'remove' and 'love' we have eye **rhyme**.

Above (SCE VIII,e) you read a few lines from Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting'. The poem furnishes examples of *assonance*. However, Owen called it **pararhyme**. Such rhymes are now used for special effects but it was earlier understood as a sign of pressing exigency or lack of skill. It was thus called **off rhyme** (or *partial*, *imperfect* or *slant rhyme*).

You have read above that Old English and Old Germanic heroic poetry as well as the lyrics in O.E. were written in strong-stress metre. With the ascendancy of the influence of French on English rhymes replaced alliteration and stanzaic forms gave way to four stress lines of the so called "native" or strong –stress metres.

However, blank verse is unrhymed verse and until the advent of *free verse* it alone achieved wide popularity in English. Although used by the Earl of Surrey in translating Vegil's *Aeneid* blank verse was employed primarily in drama. Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), however, was one of the first epic poems in English to use it. In the nineteenth century Wordsworth's *the Prelude* (1868 - 1869), Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1833) and Browning's *the Ring and the Book* (1868 - 1869) were written in blank verse.

Sometimes stanzaic forms do not exist in poetry in blank verse as in the case of Milton's 'Lycidas' (1637) and *Paradise Lost* this is true also of rhymed verse as

in Samuel Johnson's 'London' (1738) and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' (1749). The texts are divided into units of sense as in prose paragraphs and are thus called **verse paragraph**.

The recurring feature of English poetry is, however, a *stanza* which consists of a fixed number of lines and a well defined rhyme scheme. However, it is not so in the case of Dryden's 'Alexander's Feast' (which you will read in Block 5) which has lines of varying lengths as well as number of lines. Similarly Spenser's *Epithalamion* is in the stanzaic form but the stanzas are constituted of lines of varying lengths and rhymes. In this case stanzaic form is reinforced by a **refrain** i.e. a line repeated at the end of each stanza.

The simplest form of a stanza is the **couplet**; that is two lines rhyming together. A single couplet in isolation is called a **distich**. When a couplet expresses a complete thought and ends in a terminal punctuation sign we call it a **closed couplet**. You have already read about the **heroic couplet**.

A traditional form of the couplet is the **tetrameter**, or **four beat couplet**:
Milton's

'L' Allegro' and Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' are admirable examples of great poetry in the octosyllabic couplet.

A three rhymed pattern is called a **triplet** or **tercet**. Below is an example of it from Dryden's poetry:

Warm'd with more particles of Heav'nly Flame
He wing'd his upward flight, and soar'd to fame:
The rest remained below, a Tribe without a Name

Three lines with one set of rhyming words can be found also in Tennyson's 'The Eagle'. This is, however, not very common in English and generally used to give variety to a poem in the rhyming couplet. However, the rhymes are sometimes linked from verse to verse and may run as aba – bcb – cdc – ded- and so on. This form of triplet is called **terzarima**. It is borrowed from Italian and was employed by Dante (1265 - 1321) in his *Divine Comedy*. The finest example of it in English is Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" which, however, ends on a couplet.

Quatrains are stanzas of four lines. Above you read about the **ballad stanza** in which tetrameter and trimeter lines alternate. A variety of rhyme schemes have been observed in quatrains: a b a b (in which lines rhyme alternately); a b c b (in which the second and fourth lines only rhyme).

Dryden (in *Annus Mirabilis*) and Gray (*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*) in the eighteenth century employed five stress iambic lines that rhyme alternately. In the nineteenth century Tennyson used tetrameter quatrains rhyming a b b a in *In Memoriam* and FitzGerald used pentameter quatrains that rhyme a b a in his translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

There are, however, stanzas of five six, seven and eight lines which are too numerous to be differentiated. Here we will discuss some of the "named varieties".

a) **Rhyme royal** was used by Chaucer for the first time in English in *Troilus and Criseide* (c. 1385/88) and then by Shakespeare in *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). The rhyme scheme of a seven line stanza in rhyme royal is a b a b b c c. It looks as if a quatrain has been dovetailed onto two couplets.

- b) **Ottavarima** was introduced in England by Wyatt in the sixteenth century. The premier example of this verse form is *Byron's Don Juan*. The rhyme scheme of the eight lines stanza is a b aa b a b c c. You will notice that an extra a rhyme has been introduced in the rhyme royal scheme. The couplet at the end of the stanza gives a witty verbal snap to the foregoing section.
- c) The **Spenserian stanza** like the preceding two stanza forms discussed above has iambic pentameter lines. However, the last line is an Alexandrine. Edmund Spenser devised it for *The Faerie Queene*. In the nineteenth century Keats employed it brilliantly for *Eve of St. Agnes* and Shelley for *Adonais*. The nine lines rhyme a b a b b c b c c. You notice that the b sound recurs 4 times and c three. The pattern is intricate and poems in this stanza form are slow-moving.
- d) The **Sonnet** was originally a stanza used by the Sicilyanschool of court poets in the thirteenth century. From there it went to Tuscany where it reached its highest expression in the poetry of Petrarch (1304 - 74). He wrote 314 sonnets idealizing his beloved Laura.

In England it was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517 - 47) and Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503 - 42) who experimented with the sonnet form and gave it the structure that Shakespeare used and made famous. Since then the sonnet has proved itself to be one of the most versatile of the poetic forms. It was used in recent years by Vikram Seth in his novel *The Golden Gate*. Long poems composed of a series of sonnets are called **sonnet sequence**. Poets such as Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, Conrad Aiken and Rainer Maria Rilke have grouped together sonnets dealing with a particular lady of situation. However, the degree in which they are autobiographical or tell a coherent story is a matter on which opinions diverge.

The sonnet today is defined as a lyric of fourteen lines in the iambic pentameter form. However, originally it was a stanza in the Italian. There have been sonnets in the hexameter as for instance the first of *Sidney's Astrophil and Stella* and Milton's 'On the New Forces of Conscience', which is in twenty lines. Most of the sonnets, however, fall into two or three categories – the **Petrarchan**, **Shakespearean** and **Spenserian**.

The **Petrarchan sonnet** is divided into two parts of eight and six lines each called the octave and the sestet. Originally the sonneteer set forth a problem in the octave and resolved it in the sestet. However, Milton did not follow the convention nor did he use it as a medium for the expressions of his amorous inclinations as Petrarch had done before him. Wordsworth and Keats both wrote Petrarchan sonnets. a Petrarchan rhymes may be employed such as cdccdc or cdecde.

The **Shakespearean sonnet** is usually divided into three quatrains to be followed by a rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet: is ababcdcdefefgg.

A **Spenserian sonnet** is also divided into three quatrains and a rhyming couplet. However, there are fewer rhymes in a Spenserian sonnet than in the Shakespearean. The former follows rhyme scheme:

Ababbcbccdcdee.

Above we have discussed rhymes and the various types of rhyme schemes employed by poets writing in English. Now let us examine the function of rhythm in poetry.

2.4.2 Rhythm

Rhythm is to borrow Plato's words, 'an order of movement' in time. We generally speak of rhythm in connection with poetry or music. However, you must have heard people talking of the rhythms of nature of even biological rhythm. Perhaps periodic repetition of a certain pattern is the *sine qua non* of rhythm. All the arts – painting, sculpture, and architecture – have their rhythm. Here, however, we will talk of rhythm in the context of poetry only. Above you studied about a variety of acoustic effects in poetry such as metre, rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc. They contribute to the rhythm of a poem. Prosody which takes into account the historical period to which poem belongs, the poetic genre and the specificities of a poet's style goes closer to the rhythmic aspect of a poem.

For instance, quantity (or vowel length) is a rhythmic but not a metrical feature of English poetry. This is because English does not impose any strict regularity in quantity as it does with respect to stress. For example in 'sweet rose' the vowel sounds can be lengthened or shortened at will. This cannot be done in many Indian languages. However, the lengthening and shortening of the vowel sound does affect the rhythm of the poem. Similarly, the rise and fall in the human voice, especially in reading poetry which is called **cadence** is a rhythmic not a metrical feature. Many other factors contribute to the rhythm of a piece of verse or prose. Grammatical features are some of these.

Roman Jakobson drew our attention to grammatical features in poetry. He compared the role of pure grammatical parallelism in poetry to geometrical features in painting 'For the figurative art' he wrote, 'geometrical principles represent a "beautiful necessity"...' and went on to add, 'It is the same necessity that in language marks out the grammatical meanings.' In his 'Yeats' "Sorrow of Love" through the Years' written along with Stephen Rudy they drew attention to Yeats's predilection for "art that is not mere story – telling". They went on:

According to Yeats, "the arts have already become full of pattern and rhythm. Subject pictures no longer interest us. "In this context he refers precisely to Degas, in Yeats' opinion an artist whose excessive and obstinate desire to 'picture' life – "and life at its most vivid and vigorous" – had harmed his work. Jakobson and Rudy go further and point out,

The poet's emphasis on pattern reminds one of Benjamin Lee Whorf, the penetrating linguist who realized that 'the patternment' aspect of language always overrides and controls the 'lexation' or name – giving aspect, "and an inquiry into the role of "pattern" in Yeats' own poetry becomes particularly attractive, especially when one is confronted with its constant and careful modification of his own works.

The two authors go on and draw attention to Yeats' epigraph to his *Collected works in Verse and Prose* which reads:

The friends that have it I do wrong
When ever I remake a song.
Should know what issue is a stake:
It is myself that I remake.

In the course of his revisions, the patternings, Yeats claimed not just to be improving his poems lexationally but pattern-wise, rhythm-wise which he

equated with remaking himself under the influence of some much more deep and subtle truth which we can apprehend if at all only transiently.

If we scan a couple of sonnets of Shakespeare and compare their rhythm we can appreciate its role in poet's style. Let's first scan two sonnet of Shakespeare – sonnets 71 and 116. They are given below:

U / U / U / U / U /
 No long/er mourn/ for me/ when I /am dead
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Than you/ shall hear/ the sur/lisul/len bell
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Give warn/ing to/ the world/ that I/ am fled
 U / U / U / U / U /
 From this/ vile world/ with vil/ est worms/ to dwell
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Nay if/ you read/ this line, /remem/ber not
 U / U / U / U / U /
 The hand/ that writ/ it; // for/ I love/ you so,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 That I/ in your/ sweet thoughts/ would be/ forgot,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 If think/ing on/ me then/ should make/ you woe
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Oh, if/ (I say,) / you look/ upon/ this verse
 U / U / U / U / U /
 When I/ (perhaps)/ compound/ed am/ with clay
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Do not/ so much/ as my/ poor name/ rehearse
 U / U / U / U / U /
 But let/ your love/ even with/ my life/ decay
 U / / / U / U / U /
 Lest the/ wise world/ should look/ into/ your moan
 U / U / U / U / U /
 And mock/ you with/ me af/ter I/am gone.

(Sonnet, 71)

/ U / / U / U U / /
 Let me/ not to/ the marr/iage of/ true minds
 U / U / U / / U U /
 Admit/ impe/dements, // Love is/ not love
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Which al/ters when/ it al/ tera/ tion finds,
 U / / U U U / U U U /
 Or bends/ with the/remo/ ver to/ remove:
 U / U / U / U / U /
 O, no,/ it is/ an e /ver fix/ ed mark,

U / U / U / U / U /
 That looks/ on tem/ pests and/ is ne /ver shaken:
 U / U / / U / U /
 It is/ the star/ to ev/ery wand/ ring bark,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Whose worth's/ unknown/, although/ his high/ be taken
 / U / / U / U / U /
 Love's not/ Time's fool/ though ro/sy lips/ and cheeks
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Within/ his ben/ ding si/ckle's com/ pass come:
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Love al/ters not/ with his/ brief hours /and weeks
 U / U / / / U / U /
 But bears/ it out/ even to/ the edge/ of doom.
 U / U / U / U / U /
 If this/ be er/ror and/ upon/ me proved,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 I ne/ ver writ/, nor no/ man ev/ er loved. (Sonnet, 116)

You may have noticed above that in sonnet 71 Shakespeare's theme is death, his own death, not death in the abstract as in the case of Donne. Shakespeare is addressing his beloved, the dark lady and asking her to forget all about him. The legacies of time are suffering and despair and Shakespeare conveys his slow progress towards them with the help of the solemn regularity of the iambic pentameter. It is, however, gently disturbed as the narrative progresses. A caesura divides the third foot of the sixth line. There are parentheses in lines 9 and 10. In the last line of the third quatrain Shakespeare asks his beloved to forget him (after having written the sonnet to perpetuate his memory) nay more, let her love decay along with decay of the lover's body. The irony of this audacious request finds echo in a spondaic third foot of the twelfth line. Shakespeare's resigned irony soon finds voice in the thirteenth line where the pyrrhic first foot is succeeded by a spondee in the next.

Rhythm derives from the Greek *rhythmos* which in turn derives from *rhein* which means to flow. Rhythm is generally understood as an ordered alternation of contrasting elements. However, you noticed above that Shakespeare gave expression to his personal feelings in sonnet 71 by wrenching the metre. Mutability, death and decay were a recurrent theme in the poetry of the Elizabethan age and the ground rhythm of iambic pentameter adequately expresses it. However, if Shakespeare had made periodicity of accent the *sine qua non* of his rhythm it would have been only at the cost of his expressive range.

Unlike sonnet 71 sonnet 116 is, to use Gerard Manley Hopkins's term, metrically "counter-pointed". Trochaic reversal in the first foot is not unusual in an iambic pentameter line. However, Shakespeare makes use of a trochaic foot even in the second. In fact the only iambic foot is the third foot which is succeeded by a pyrrhic-spondaic combination. The first line is enjambed i.e., it runs over to the second line with its three iambic feet and a caesura and a reversed fourth foot. The sudden violence of the poet's felling is checked with the help of two pyrrhic feet alternating with the iambic ones in the last line of the first quatrain. The iambic ground rhythm is fully established only in the second quatrain.

The third quatrain, however, begins with a reversal and a spondaic substitution. In the last line of the quatrain the rhetorical emphasis on the third foot is supported acoustically with the use of a spondee. These deviations help the poet in lifting the theme above mundane realities and communicating his “meaning” better.

We had a glimpse of Shakespeare’s manipulation of meter in two of his sonnets. Even with the help of just two samples we can say that Shakespeare has a powerful and distinctive style. The prosody of every poet of genius is unique and his rhythm is perhaps the most personal of the expressive equipments. However, we cannot forget that a language has a metrical pattern peculiar to itself. There is also a historical determinant of the choice of metre. Complex factors contribute towards the determination of rhythm. Nature herself said Aristotle, ‘teaches the choice of the proper measure’. However, it is the poet’s task to hear her voice with sincerity and humility if s/he is to discover her/himself.

Self-Check Exercise IX

1) Briefly distinguish between rhyme and rhythm.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What according to you is rhythm? Write in about 30 of your *own* words.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3) Do you think that rhythm can be an indicator of a poet’s style? Give reasons for your answer. Does a poet’s style tell us about the person that s/he is?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.5 ANALYSIS OF A POEM

In the foregoing sections you read about the various elements of poetry. A knowledge of some of the theoretical aspects of poetry would help you in reading poems. Below you will read an analysis of Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.' Did you scan the poem and write your observations in SCE III (b) ? If you did not you should now do so in order to benefit from in section. Let's now analyse the poem.

'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'

John Keats (1795 - 1821) was the youngest of the Romantic poets. He was the son of manager of a livery stables in Moorfields. He died when Keats was eight. His mother remarried but died of tuberculosis when he was fourteen. John the eldest child, had two brothers – George and Tom – and a sister, Fanny. Keats was apprenticed to an apothecary-surgeon at the age of fifteen. Before the apprenticeship he had received his early education at Clarke's school an Enfield.

On evening in October 1816 Keats read the works of Homer in the translation of the Elizabethan poet George Chapman. He did this in the company of Charles Cowden Clarke, son of his former master and his life long friend. That Keats had a monumental experience is clear from "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer".

Somewhat like a true Petrarchan sonnet this poem also clearly divides the treatment of the theme between the octave and the sestet. In the octave Keats sets the background while the sestet describes the effect on him of his experience.

In the first half of the octave Keats speaks of his wide of Western literature – which he characterizes as "realms of gold". Keats's metaphor gives us an insight into his attitude towards literature. The 'goodly states' and 'Kingdoms' are the poet's territories they have marked out as their own in the infinite area of the English or Western languages. However, these territories are held by poets not insolently as Kingdoms are held but as a sign of their loyalty towards Apollo, the ancient classical god of poetry. This is a sign of Keat's literary piety for we know that Keats like Shelley was not a Christian poet.

The second half of the octave extends the metaphor of the kingdom of poetry to tell us that Keats had heard about Homer's epics although he had never read them. Homer is traditionally recognized as the first epic poet of Europe just like Valmiki and Vyasa were of India. They can be considered pure and original because they did not borrow their images from other poets. Homer knew and understood human nature dispassionately. His understanding was clear and unclouded by doubts, distractions and fears. Besides, Homer was the monarch of poets deserving the exalted title of 'serene'. It is at the end of the octave that Keats tells us about the cause of his exaltation i.e. his reading (with Charles Cowden Clarke) of Homer in Chapman's translation. The octave structurally is not divided from the sestet as it ends in a colon.

Having told us about the background of his poem in the octave Keats turns to communicate his enjoyment of Homer to us in the sestet. This is done through two unforgettable images. The first of these is that of a professional astronomer into whose sight a new planet has moved in. the second is that of a discoverer such as Hernan Cortez who conquered Mexico for Spain and became the first western adventurer to enter Mexico city. Historically, however, it was Vasco Nunez de Balbao who was the first European in 1513 to stand upon the peak of

Darien in Panama. It is significant that Keats does not name any astronomer such as Galileo who had discovered new satellites of the planet Jupiter. It would be in keeping with Keats's piety to infer that in referring to 'some watcher of the skies' he is making use of the primitive figure of speech of periphrasis. If the images help Keats in communicating his peculiar felling or flavor of the sense or meaning the rhythm of his verse gives further density by suggesting the right tone and unfolding the intention while reemphasizing his meaning or sense, and feeling.

As pointed out earlier, 'On First Looking' is a Petrarchan sonnet that makes use of four rhymes in the following scheme: abbaabba cdcddc. Perhaps it would be apposite to point out that because of such few rhymes, i.e. 4, the intensity of feeling is communicated better than it could have been done with the help of a Shakespearean sonnet with its seven rhymes and relatively loose structure more suitable for a meditative and philosophical tone.

Although European in appeal thematically, Keats's sonnet is typically English with its ground rhythm of iambic pentameter. There are only two variations in the first quatrain. There is a pyrrhic foot in the first and another in the fourth line. The second quatrain begins with a trochaic reversal and it announces the turn in the subject matter. From literature in general, Keats narrows down to Homer in the second half of the octave.

The sestet which describes Keats's state of exaltation conveys it at the acoustic level through variations from the blank verse ground rhythm. Lines 10, 11, 12 and 13 have pyrrhic substitutions. In case we elided the unstressed first foot to include the article 'a' in the first foot of the tenth line we could read it as an anapaestic foot. However, in that case the line would have only four feet. It would become brief and fast suggesting the swimming of a planet into the range of vision of the astronomer with astronomical speed. There is another anapaestic substitution in the fourth foot of the twelfth line. However, the line retains the five feet notwithstanding the trisyllabic foot. The last four lines are given to the explorers in the new world and the crescendo comes in the last line which begins with a trochaic reversal. The importance of the theme for the poet is suggested by the spondaic second foot of the eleventh line which begins the new comparison.

Keats has been called a poet of the senses. The abstract idea of the discovery of a new planet gives joy is cerebral but the sight of the seascape from the peak in Darien is more sensual and akin to Keats's character. The choice of Keats's imagery in this sonnet and marrying it to the appropriate rhythm clinches the success of the poem. 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' has, no wonder, become a felicitous record of one of Keats's unforgettable personal experiences of an encounter with the father of European poetry that was Homer.

Above we have tried to show how the various aspects of the poem can be knit together into an account of your appreciation of it especially with respect to your observations or rhythm. If you were in a class with your friends we might have analysed a few poems and seen how our responses varied. If possible try it out from time to time, at the Study Centre or at a privately formed Study Group.

2.6 LET'S SUM UP

In the previous unit we examined in the first place the thing called poetry in somewhat abstract terms. In this unit we examined the prosodic aspect of poetry. Finally we showed how the various aspects can be put together in our critical appreciation of a poem. This is what we expect you to be able to do on this

course. Critics say that the evolution of the rhythm of a language tells us about the cultural evolution of the people, their changing and evolving consciousness. If this is a tall claim I leave you to decide for yourself.

Hereafter the units will tell you either about an age or a poet or about some poems. We will expect you to be able to respond to all the three – the man, the milieu and the moment that gave birth to the poem – in your comments on passages set from poems prescribed for detailed study and printed in these blocks.

This is a long unit. You must not have expected it to be longer. You should prepare your own notes on **lyric, epic, ode**, etc. or figures of speech such as **simile, metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy**, etc. You should consult a dictionary of literature in order to discover the terms of art as and when you feel the need to do so.

2.7 A BRIEF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This unit does not tell you about literary terms, figures of speech, etc. However, as a student of literature you will be required to understand and use them in various contexts including your essays and answers. Below are recommended a few dictionaries and encyclopedias for your use.

The new edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1985) edited by Margaret Drabble is intended to serve, as its predecessor Sir Paul Harvey's (1932), as a 'useful companion to ordinary everyday readers of English literature'. It gives brief notes on authors of books, literary trends such as Neoclassicism and Romanticism, (Postmodernism is alas missing), figures of speech such as oxymoron and litotes, literary movements such as the Oxford, or Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements and many other facts that a student of English literature would wish to know from time to time. It is possible that the new edition has not reached the shelves of the library you have access to. That should not disturb you. I found Sir Paul's work very delightful and in the beginning Drabble's work with its shorter notes was a bit of a disappointment to me. Besides the *Companion* you may consult, *Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Harry Shaw published by McGraw Hill Book Co. (New Delhi, 1972) and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Chris Baldick (Delhi, 1990). The *Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry* edited by Ian Hamilton (Delhi, 1994) has a much broader coverage on poetry in English.

Literary criticism today more than ever before has been under the influence of disciplines such as rhetoric and Linguistics. You would find Amiya Bhushan Sharma's *The Growth and Evolution of Classical Rhetoric* (Ajanta: New Delhi, 1991, '92) at the Study and Regional Centres. It is meant to introduce classical rhetoric to distant learners in India like yourself. For a quick reference to terms such as **felicity conditions of lexie** consult *A Dictionary of Stylistics* by Katie Wales published by Logman (London, 1989). *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* edited by Martin Coyle et.al. (Routledge: London, 1990) has long articles written by experts on various aspects of literature including an article on 'Postmodernism' by Robert B. Ray (pp. 131 - 147).

In case you wish to study some thought provoking essays on poetry and its 'meaning' I should recommend just two: the first one is by Roman Jakobson called 'What is Poetry?' (pp. 368 - 378) in *Language and Literature* edited by Krystyan Pomorska and Stephen Ruddy (Harvard University Press: Cambridge,

2.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I :

 u / u / u
1. In woods/ a ran/ger

 u / u / u
 To joy/ a stran/ger

The two lines above are in iambic dimeter. However, they are *hypermetrical* which means that an unaccented rhyming syllable is at the end of each line.

 u / u / u /
2. Thy way/ not mine, / o Lord,

 u / u / u /
 Howev/er dark/ it be;

 u / u / u /
 Lead me / with thine / own hand,

 u / u / u /
 Choose out/ the path/ for me.

The quatrain above is in regular iambic trimeter.

 u / u / u / u /
3. The way/ was long/ the wind/ was cold,

 u / u / u / u /
 The min/strel was/ infirm/ and old;

 u / u / u / u /
 The harp, / his sole/ remain/ ing joy,

 u / u / u / u /
 Was car/ ried by /an or/ phan boy.

Above there are two couplets in regular iambic tetrameter.

 u / u / u / u /
4. Confu /sion, shame,/ remorse/ despair,

 u / u / u /
 At once/ his bos/ om swell

 u / u / u /
 The damps/ of death/ bedewed/ his brow;

 u / u / u / u /
 The damps/ of death/ bedewed/ his brow;

 u / u / u /
 He shook,/ he groaned,/ he fell.

In the stanza above iambic trimeter lines alternate with iambic tetrameter lines. We also notice that 'swell' and 'fell' rhyme but the first and third lines don't. We thus get the impression that the stanza could also be written as iambic heptameter couplets.

U / U / U / U /
 5. I put /my hat/ upon /my head
 U / U / U /
 And walked/ into/ the strand
 U / U / U U /
 And there/ I met ano/ ther man
 U / U / U /
 Whose hat /was in/ his hand.

The poem above is iambic in rhythm alternating tetrameter and trimeter in verse length.

Self-Check Exercise II

Now you may scan a couple of passages from Shakespeare and Keats and write your comments on them in the space provided:

- a)
- / / U /
 Two truths/ are told,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 As hap/py pro/ logues to / the swell/ing act
 U U U / U / U / U / U /
 Of the/ imper/ial theme// I thank/ you, gen/ telmen.
 / U U / U / U / U /
 This su/ perna/tural/ soliciting
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,
 U / U / / U U U /
 Why hath/ it gi/ ven me ear/ nest of /success,
 U / U U U / U / U / U /
 Commend/ing in/ a truth?// I am Thane of Caw/ dor
 U / U / U / U / U / U /
 If good, why do/ I yield/ to that/ sugges/tion
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Whose hor/ rid im/age doth/ unfix/ my hair.
 U / U / U / U / U /
 And make/ my sea/ted heart/ knock at/my ribs...

Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

If you read Shakespeare's *Macbeth in Understanding Drama* you must have recognized the words of the eponymous hero, in the play. Macbeth met the three witches on his way back from the battlefield who had addressed him successively as duke of Glamis, thane of Cawdor and finally as king of Scotland. Impressed by his display of courage Duncan has honoured him by giving him the dukedom of Glamis and thaneship of Cawdor. However, Macbeth is not yet King of Scotland which he cannot be, unless, he thinks, he murders Duncan, his king and benefactor. The idea of regicide and ingratitude has shaken him and he admits of having his 'functions' being 'smothered in surmise'. The given extract is the opening part of his introspection (for us) and soliloquy for the audience in the theatre.

The ground rhythm of the extract is iambic pentameter. However, he does not follow it slavishly. There are interesting variations. They are as below:

- the first line is iambic dimeter;
- the first foot is a spondee;
- there are at least three pyrrhuses in passage of ten lines i.e. in the 3rd, 6th and 7th;
- seventh and eight lines are hypermetrical;
- there are two caesuras – in the third and seventh lines;
- the third foot of the sixth and the fourth foot of the seventh lines have an elision.

With the help of these variations Shakespeare imparts colloquial ease and informality to the soliloquy. We notice here, to use Coleridge’s words, as we did not in the case of Sackville and Norton, metre being used as a pattern of expectation, fulfilment and surprise. As Macbeth makes his progress from confusion to clarity in the course of the soliloquy we notice the ground rhythm becoming more and more natural. According to Harvey Gross, the function of prosody is ‘to image life in a rich and complex way’. We notice here for ourselves how prosody has succeeded in articulating the movement of the mind of Macbeth.

b) On first Looking into Chapman’s Homer

U / U / U U U / U /
 Much have/ I tra/velled in/ the realms/ of gold,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 And ma/ny good/ly states/ and King/doms seen;
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Round ma/ny west/ren is/lands have/ I been
 U / U / U U U / U /
 Which bards/ in feal/ty to Appol/o hold
 / U U / U / U / U /
 Oft of/ one wide/ expanse/ had I /been told,
 U / U / U / U / U /
 That deep/ browed Ho/mer ruled/ as his/ demesne
 U / U U / U / U /
 Yet did/ I ne/ver breathe/its pure/ serence
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Till I/ heard Chap/man speak /out loud /and bold:
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Then felt/ I like /some watch/er of /the skies
 U U U / U / U U /
 When a /new pla/net swims/ into/ his ken;
 U / U U U U / U /
 Or like/ stout Cort/ez when/ with eag/le eyes
 U / U U U / U U / U /
 He stared/at the Paci/fic, and all/ his men

/ / / / / / /
 Looked at/each oth/er with/ a wild/ surmise
 / / / / / / /
 Silent/ upon/ a peak/ in Da/rien.

For comments on the prosodic features of this sonnet read section 2.6.

Self-Check Exercise IV

- a) / /
 Dreadful gleams,
 / /
 Dismal screams,
 / /
 Fires that glow,
 / /
 Shrieks of woe,
 / /
 Sullen moans,
 / /
 Hollow groans,

You could say that above there are three couplets in trochaic monometer. However it would be more appropriate to call it a passage in trochaic dimeter with the second foot being catalectic in each case. Perhaps the best idea would be to call it a passage in the amphimacer foot. The passage can be scanned in any of the three ways.

- b) / / /
 Rich the/ treasure,
 / / /
 Sweet the/ pleasure.

J. Dryden

The two lines are in trochaic dimeter.

- c) / / / / / / / / / /
 When the/ British/ warrior/ queen ^
 / / / / / / / /
 Bleeding/ from the/ Roman/rods, ^
 / / / / / / / /
 Sought with/ an in/dignant/mien ^
 / / / / / / / /
 Counsel/ of her /country's/gods. ^

The stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. However, the last foot of every line is catalectic. We call a foot catalectic that has just an accented syllable.

- d) / / / / / / / /
 Tell me/ not in /mournful/ numbers
 / / / / / / / /
 Life is /but an /empty /dream; ^

/ u / u / u / u
 For the/ soul is /dead that/ slumbers,
 / u / u / u /
 And things/ are not /what they/ seem. ^ A.W. Longfellow

The stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. However, the last foot of the second and fourth lines are catalectic. The rhyme scheme of the passage above is: a b a b.

/ u / u / u / u / u
 e) All that/ walk on/ foot or/ ride in/ chariots
 / u / u / u / u / u
 All that/ dwell in/ palac/es or /garrets

The stanza is in trochaic pentameter.

/ u / u / u / u / u / u
 f) On a /mountain/ stretched be/neath a/ hoary/ willow
 / u / u / u / u / u / u
 Lay a /shepherd/ swain and/ viewed the/ rolling/ billow.

The couplet is in trochaic hexameter.

Self-Check Exercise V

u / uu / u u /
 b) How fleet /is the glance/ of the mind
 u / uu / uu /
 Compared /with the speed/ of its flight!
 u / uu / u u /
 The tem/pest itself/ lags behind
 uu / uu / uu /
 And the swift /winged ar/rows of light

The ground rhythm of the passage above is anapestic trimeter. However, the first foot of each of the first three lines is an iambus. Iambic substitutions in lines in the anapestic meter is quite common.

u u / u u / u u / u u /
 b) The Assyr/ ian came down/ like a wolf/ on the fold
 uu / uu / u / uu /
 And his co/horts were gleam/ing in pur/ple and gold;
 uu / uu / uu / uu /
 And the sheen/ of their spears/ was like stars/ on the sea,
 uu / uu / uu / uu
 When the blue/ wave rolls night/ly on deep/ Galilee.

The passage is without any variation in anapaestic tetrameter.

uu / u / uu / uu /
 c) Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
 uu / uu / u / u /
 As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;

U U / U U / U U / U /
 Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot,
 U U / U U / U / U /
 O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

If repetition of a pattern is the *sine qua non* of rhythm, the passage is uniformly in tetrameter. However, out of sixteen feet only ten are in the anapaest. The remaining feet are in the iambic.

U / U U / U U /
 d) I am out/ of human/ity's reach,
 U U / U U / U U /
 I must fin/ish my jou/rney alone.

The couple of lines are in anapaestic trimeter. However, the first foot is an iambic substitution.

Self-Check Exercise VI

Scan the following and then briefly comment on the scansion.

/ U U / U U
 b) One more un/fortunate
 / U U /
 Weary of /breath ^ ^
 / U U / U
 Rashly im/portunate
 / U U /
 Gone to her /death! ^ ^
 / U U / U U
 Take her up/ tender ly;
 / U U /
 Lift her with/ care; ^ ^
 / U U / U U / U U /
 Fashion'd so slenderly /young and so/ fair! ^ ^

The two stanzas above are in dactylic dimeter. They rhyme alternately i.e. a b a b c d c d. the second, fourth, sixth and eight lines are catalectic.

/ U U / U U / U U /
 a) Merrily/ merrily/ shall I live/ now
 / U U / U U / U U /
 Under the/ blossom that/ hangs on the/ bough.

The couplet/ distich above is in dactylic trimeter.

Self-Check Exercise VII

U / U U / U
 a) Most friendship/ is feigning,
 U / U U / U
 Most friendship/ mere folly.

Both the lines are in amphibrachic dimeter.

Self-Check Exercise VIII

- a) There is alliteration in ‘ruin’ and ‘numinate’ on the one hand and ‘taught’, ‘time’ and ‘take’ on the other.
- (b) Dryden by employing ‘pious’, ‘priestcraft’ and ‘polygamy’ on the one hand and ‘begin’ and ‘before’ on the other in his distich makes use of the figure of sound of alliteration.
- c) The repetition of the sibilants i.e. ‘shade’ and ‘soul’ on the one hand and ‘drowsily’ and ‘drown’ on the other create an acoustic effect that is daily experience. This particular type of effect is called alliteration.
- d) In the two lines the consonants in ‘dawn’ and ‘war’ are different. However, there is an identity of vowel sounds. This is an example of assonance.
- e) It seemed that out of betel I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned.

Wilfred Owen : ‘Strange Meeting’

In the passage above we have underlined four words. ‘Escaped’ and ‘scooped’ have an identity of consonants while the vowels differ just as in ‘groin’ and ‘groan’ also. These are two examples of consonance.

Self-Check Exercise IX

- 1) Rhyme refers to the agreement in terminal sounds of two or more words of lines in verse such as rich and which; increase and peace; descend and extend. Rhythm indicates measured flow of words and phrases in prose or verse or movement suggested by the succession of strong or weak elements or of different conditions in a given time span.
- 2) Rhythm is one of the factors of style. It indicates flow or progression in time. Certain units get repeated in rhythm – a foot in English poetry when repeated contributes to the rhythm of that poem. Poets often achieve effects not by regularity but through breaks in the order, the established ground rhythm of the poem.
- 3) Every poet, for that matter any artist, has a distinctive style and his/her rhythm contributes to words it. We talk about Milton’s grand style and contrast it with the gentle art of Shakespeare. Milton writes about Heaven and Hell, God and satan; Shakespeare about ordinary men and women involved in their common love and hate, ambition and defeat, pride and humility such as we experience ourselves. Their choice of words, rhythm of their language are thus poles apart just as are their themes. All these tell us something about the persons the Milton and Shakespeare must have been in their inner lives.

UNIT 3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 William Shakespeare: The National Poet of England
 - 3.2.1 Introduction
 - 3.2.2 Early Life
 - 3.2.3 In the Theatre
 - 3.2.4 The Poet
 - 3.2.5 Achievements
- 3.3 Shakespeare's Sonnets
 - 3.3.1 Background
 - 3.3.2 The Themes of Shakespeare's Sonnets
- 3.4 Sonnets 29 and 30: A Study in Comparison
 - 3.4.1 The Texts
 - 3.4.2 An Analysis
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES

You have already read some of Shakespeare's sonnets and learnt to scan them. After reading this unit you will be able to think, speak and write on William Shakespeare and his sonnets in general and two sonnets, 29 and 30 in particular.

This will lay the foundation for an appreciation, in the long run not only of Shakespeare's sonnets but also other sonnet sequences and long poems of Elizabethan poets such as Edmund Spenser (1552 – '99), Sir Philip Sidney (1554 – '86), Christopher Marlowe (1564 – '93), Samuel Daniel (1563 - 1619) and, quite a few others.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will read a brief life sketch of William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) and two of his sonnets. Read this unit section by section in the order presented here giving yourself a short break from time to time. Don't try to read both sonnets in quick succession. It may be a good idea to read them several times day after day till you have committed them to memory.

There is plenty of material on the internet on Shakespeare and other Elizabethan poets and poems; you may read them also if you like **and** if you have time.

3.2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE NATIONAL POET OF ENGLAND

3.2.1 Introduction

Shakespeare is certainly the most famous of literary artists of the English Speaking world. He has been compared with Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749 - 1832) in Germany, Victor Hugo (1802-85) in France, Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) in Spain, Alighieri Dante (1265 -1321) in Italy, Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) in Russia and Tulsidas (1532? - 1623) in India. Ben Jonson (1574-1637) one of Shakespeare's great contemporaries called him the greatest European writer:

Of all, that insolent *Greece*, or haughtie *Rome*
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come
Triumph, my *Braitainne*, thou hast one to showe,
To whom all scenes of *Europe* homage owe,

Shakespeare has retained his place in the Western literature as the artist par excellence.

3.2.2 Early Life

William was the eldest son of John Shakespeare as glover and dealer in other commodities such as barley, timber and wood. John's father Richard Shakespeare was a yeoman farmer of Snitterfield. He farmed in two manors one of which belonged to Robert Arden maternal grandfather of William. Richard, William Shakespeare's grandfather died in 1561. John married Mary Arden around 1557 and William was born on 23 April, 1564 as he was according to local Church records baptized at the Holy Trinity Church Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April, 1564, three days after his birth following the local tradition. Mary Arden and John Shakespeare had eight children of whom four sons and a daughter survived childhood. For a time John Shakespeare was very successful. He was the burgess of the borough and chosen and alderman in 1565 and bailiff in 1568.

William may have gone to the grammar school at Stratford run by the borough where he may have learnt to read, write and speak Latin and some of the classical poets. William Shakespeare certainly did not go to the University. Instead at the age of 18, in November or December 1582 he married Anne Hathway of Shottery only two miles away from Stratford. She was eight years his senior and three months pregnant by William. Their daughter Susanna was baptized on 26 May, 1583. Anne gave birth to their son Hamnet and daughter Judith on 2 February, 1585. We employment at this time except from the antiquary and biographer John Aubrey's (1626-97) account of Shakespeare as a school master in the country.

3.2.3 In the Theatre

Shakespeare probably entered the world of theatre in 1587 when the Queen's Men came to Stratford to stage a play. One of their men had been murdered and William Shakespeare filled the vacancy. The first recorded reference to his drama is by Robert Greene (1558-92) in his *Greenes groats-worth of wittee* (1592) in which he called Shakespeare 'an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers. Greene had been educated at St. John's College and Clare Hall, Cambridge from 1575 until 1583 and had been incorporated at Oxford in 1588. Greene was a

University Wit – a name coined by George Saintsbury (1845 -1933) the chair, since 1895 of rhetoric and English literature at Edinburgh for twenty years. The other Elizabethan playwrights who had been to Oxford or Cambridge were Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). John Lyly (1554-1606) and Thomas Lodge (?1558-1625) Greene or his editor Henry Chettle (c. 1560-? 1607) printer and playwright of sorts also called Shakespeare un absolute Johannes Factotums in his own conceit the only Shake scene in a country. As 'Johannes Factotum' or 'Jack of all trade' Shakespeare was criticized for being a second-rate tinkerer with the works of others.

Greene's attack is the earliest surviving mention of Shakespeare's career in the theatre. Apart from *Henry VI* in 3 parts Shakespeare had also published *Titus Andronicus* and *King John* by 1592. Shakespeare began his writing career by adapting existing scripts, altering and modifying them which accounts for the variability in these early pieces.

3.2.4 The Poet

Shakespeare finds mention for the first time in the Stationer's List in 1593 for *Venus and Adonis*. This was followed by *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594. Both were dedicated to young Henry Wriothesley (pronounced Risley, Riesley or Rosely) the third Earl of Southampton. Both were a literary and commercial success. The warmth and ardour of the dedication to Southampton of *The Rape* matches the fire and enthusiasm of the sonnets addressed to the 'Fair Youth' and it is quite certain that they were getting written about this time. The sonnets were not meant for the general public but only for the eyes of one or two lovers mentioned in the poems. They were published by Thomas Thorpe, without Shakespeare's agency, in 1609. The volume includes the poem 'A Lover's Complaint'. In the meantime Robert Chester had published Shakespeare's 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' in his *Loves Martyr* (1601) a collection of poems by various hands.

Poetry appears to have been Shakespeare's pastime during the plague years in 1592 and '93. When the theatres opened in 1594 Shakespeare received a sum of hundred pounds, a great sum in those days, from Southampton with which he became a sharer in Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most important acting companies then in London. As a sharer he was part owner of the stocks of the company and shared also in its expenses and profits. In 1596 John Shakespeare at Stratford applied for and got a coat of arms which established his gentility. Next year William bought New Place, the second largest house in Stratford. In 1598 Richard Burbage, the famous actor died and his two sons invited Shakespeare and four other of the principal actors in the Lord Chamberlain's men to invest for a half share in the new globe theatre which they built on the Thames using timber from the old theatre for the foundations. The venture was a success and in 1602 Shakespeare could buy 107 acres of land and 20 acres of pasture from a local magnate John Combe. In 1603, at the accession of James I the company was renamed King's Men.

3.2.5 Achievements

Shakespeare wrote some of his greatest tragedies such as *Hamlet* (1601), *King Lear* (1605), *Othello* (1604) and *Macbeth* (1606), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) and *Coriolanus* (1608) by 1608. His last plays, perhaps his most perfect, were romances: *Pericles* (1607), *Cymbeline* (1609), *The Winter's Tale* (1611) and *The Tempest* (1611). Shakespeare returned to Stratford in 1613 where he died on 23

April, 1616. Tow of his colleagues in the theatre, namely John Heminges (1556-1630) and Henry Condell (d. 1627) together edited the first folio (1623) of his plays and Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) wrote his memorial verses for the in which he proudly proclaimed:

He was not of an age, but for all time
And all the Muses still were in their prime
When like *Apollo* he came forth to warme
Our eares, or like a *Mercury* to charme!
Nature her selfe was proud of his designes
And joy'd to were the dressing of his lines
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.

Shakespeare has attracted the greatest number of scholars engaged in the study of English Literature in each generation and in every land. Shakespeare has found admirers not only in literature but also in cinema.

Now that you have read a brief note on Shakespeare's life and work find out for yourself how well you have understood it with the help of the exercise below.

Self- check Exercise I

1) Name some of the literary artists in Western literature of world fame.

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2) Name some of the poems of William Shakespeare along with the dates of their composition/ publication.

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3) Name some of the famous tragedies of Shakespeare.

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4) What was the name of the company which Shakespeare also partially owned?

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3.3 SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

3.3.1 Background

Sonnets are fourteen-line poems in two or three rhyme schemes. One of them is named after the Italian humanist and poet Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca) (1304-74) who used the sonnet sequence to praise Laura whom he first met in 1327. His odes and sonnets in praise of Laura were later included in *conzoniere of Rime* (1360). His sonnets structurally and also in thought process are divided into octaves and sestet, i.e. eight-and six-line stanzas. The octaves follow the rhyme scheme abba, abba but the rhyme scheme of the sestet vary:

Ccd ccd or cdcdcd or cdecde. Petrarch had profound influence on European literature as he showed the way for the revival of interest in ancient Greek and Latin literatures. The most well known name in English for the immediate influence of Petrarch is that of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) who held many diplomatic assignments in France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands in the service of the Tudor monarch Henry VIII(1509-47).

Sir Thomas visited Italy for the first time in 1527 when he got inspired by Petrarch's poems and essays and translated them into English. The most accomplished writers of Petrarchan sonnets in English are Milton and Wordsworth.

Henry Howard, (by courtesy) Earl of Surrey (? 1517 - 47) was in the English army in France (1544-6). However, his sonnets were predominantly in the 'English' form, i.e. abab, cdcd, efef, gg which was later used by Shakespeare. A third variety of the sonnets is that invented by Spenser. The rhyme scheme of a Spenserian sonnets is:

abab bcbc cdcd ee

3.3.2 The Themes of Shakespeare's Sonnets

Shakespeare did not write his sonnets for publication. Thomas Thorpe published them in 1609 without his permission. He got the manuscript from someone whose name bears the initials W.H. A.L. Rowse opines that Shakespeare must have given his sonnets to Henry Wriothesley ten years younger than himself to whom he had dedicated his *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece* and who was the 'fair youth' to whom the first 127 sonnets were addressed along with the 25 addressed to the dark lady from some lewd background and the last two to cupid the god of Love, thus making in all 154 in the sequence. These sonnets are amatory in character but it was in these sonnets that Shakespeare bared his soul and must have found their publication quite embarrassing.

Scholars are of the view that a large number of the sonnets were written in the years 1592-94 when the theatres were closed in London due to plague and Shakespeare was in the country. Young Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton about 19 was young and beautiful and Shakespeare 29. Marlowe described Southampton in his portrait of Leander in *Hero and Leander* with liveliness and precision

His dangling tresses that were never shorn,
His body was as straight as Circes wand,
Jove might have sipped out Nectar from his hand,
Even as delicious meat is to the taste,
So was his neck in touching, and surpassed,
The white of Pelop's shoulder.

In Greek mythology Pelops was grandson of Zeus. His father Tantalus, cooked and served Pelops to the gods at a banquet but only Demeter, mourning the loss of her daughter Persephone, was distracted enough to eat from the dish. The gods ordered the body restored but the shoulder. Demeter's portion, was missing, and Pelops was given a replacement of ivory. The body of Pelops, says Marlowe, was whiter than ivory.

Marlowe's description of Southampton in the person of Leander would have been approved by his contemporaries:

Some swore he was a maid in man's attire
For in his looks were all that men desire.....
And such as knew he was a man would say,
Leander, thou are made for amorous play:
Why are thou not in love, and loved of all?
Though thou be fair, yet be not thine own thrall.

Marlowe advised Leander, i.e. Southampton, to avoid narcissistic tendencies in himself and open himself to others' affections.

Shakespeare's expressions of love in the 'fair youth' sonnets are more platonic than sexual. Let's read sonnet 18:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair some time declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd

In the first two quatrains we get a picture of the impact Southampton has made on Shakespeare's mind, the portrait draws its power and force by comparison with nature. There is 'twon' or 'Volta opening of the third quatrain. The mood of the poem shifts and the poet expresses a revelation:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rst in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

Shakespeare's epiphany is in actual fact condescension in the garb of true esteem which ceases to remain muffled in the last two lines of the sonnet:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Compared with the spiritual love for the 'fair youth' in sonnet 18 Shakespeare's sonnets for the Dark Lady are overtly sexual in appeal. It is evident from the poems that the lady has dun coloured skin and black hair. Shakespeare scholars have named Lucy Negro a London prostitute, Mary Fitton and Emilia Lanier as likely candidates for the dubious distinction of being Shakespeare's partner in the acts of love.

3.4 SONNETS 29 AND 30: A STUDY IN COMPARISON

3.4.1 The Texts

Sonnet XXIX

*When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone bewep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts my self almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.*

Sonnet XXIX

*When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.*

3.4.2 An Analysis

'When to the sessions' and the preceding sonnet 29 – 'When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes' – are companion pieces. In 29 the poet bewails certain retrogression in his fortune and in 30 the loss of friends and many things he sought in life which he could not get. In both poems Shakespeare cheers up when he remembers his friend. Then he overcomes the hurt caused by his outcast state or depression inflicted by his lack of achievements or loss of friends. However, for a lyric (sonnet 30) that tells us about the intimate experiences of the poet, its language couched in formal court vocabulary may appear wooden on cogitation is seamless in offering the contradictory aesthetic experience of pain and happiness.

In both sonnets i.e. 29 and 30 Shakespeare recounts common losses, unfulfilled ambitions, decease of friends, etc. In sonnet 29 Shakespeare seems to bemoan certain qualities and influence he could not acquire: 'Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope'. In sonnet 30 he sighs the lack of many a thing he sought. The

immediate reason for the downcast state in which he finds himself is fall from the favour of goddess Fortuna as well as people around him. Nothing precipitous accounts for the dip in happiness in sonnet 30 but idle memory: 'sessions of sweet silent thought'. So while in sonnet 29 the poet like Job in the Old Testament troubles deaf heaven with his bootless cries' in sonnet 30 he wastes his 'dear' time summoning old thoughts to the court of his mind. A setback in his career forces the poet to take recourse to the reassurance of religion in sonnet 29; in sonnet 30, the relaxed indulgence in past memories makes him somewhat distant, aloof and offish. So while in sonnet 30 he is conscious of the wastage of his time, in sonnet 29 the experience is more intense and the poet like Job curses his fate.

Shakespeare wrote the sonnets when he was in his late twenties and early thirties. It appears somewhat strange that he should be overcome by grief for 'precious friends hid in death's dateless night.' We recall that Marlowe, born in the same year as Shakespeare himself and the only contemporary poet Shakespeare alluded to in his plays died in 1593 and his only son Hamnet passed away in August 1596 and Spenser in 1599. Their decease could bring tears to his eyes. The overarching self-possession in sonnet 30 is expressed by the poet's assertion that his eyes are 'unused to flow.' Still the loss remembered in sonnet 30 is so personal in nature and affecting his person that he cannot help crying:

And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:

The memory of his son Hamnet must have been profound and moving. Did Shakespeare use Hamnet to buttress some scene or character in some of his early plays which comes to him with a sense of guilt? The poet bemoans 'The expense of' some of his 'vanished sight.'

Sonnets 29 and 30 may be called complementary: the former is full of tear and cries and in the latter Shakespeare seems to have gained self-control and authority even compensating for the loss in the former sonnet. The second quatrain of sonnet 29 exposes Shakespeare's innermost desire. He was a commoner, unlike Henry and Robert i.e. Southampton and Essex. However, he was conscious of his gifts. And still, he must have felt that he was inferior even as a playwright, to Christopher Marlowe of his own age. He must have desired the art of Marlowe and Spenser and the scope of earls of Southampton and Essex to whose circle he belonged. Marlowe was University educated; Shakespeare had to give up his education owing to some catastrophic decline in his father's fortune. The latter's status in the late 16th century was that of a hanger on and an ordinary actor and at best an insignificant playwright. He lacked many things: the skills of Marlowe as well his scope as one of Walsingham's circle and of course the 'influence' of Essex who was very dear to Queen Elizabeth. But more than all these Shakespeare sought the company of Henry Wriothsley, Earl of Southampton 'the world's fresh ornament' of which he never felt he had his full.

Let's now turn to the third quatrains in the two sonnets. It is typical of Shakespeare to turn around the train of thought. Sonnet 30 is a more formal, public conscious utterance, so Shakespeare introduces the idea of now grieving over his grievances mentioned in the preceding quatrains. In a way, the melancholic strain is strengthened in the third stanza which gives an epiphanic character to the concluding lines of the poem:

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

This revival of spirit comes faster in sonnet 29. The third quatrain reverses the melancholic atmosphere of the foregoing quatrains. Here Shakespeare tells his reader that while he is despising himself on several counts he remembers his friend, i.e. Southampton, his 'state' or body begins to sing,

Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;

Shakespeare has used an epic simile in a lyric and an extremely fresh and rejuvenating one. The poet's gloom was like the darkness of night, like the solidness, sullenness and miserableness of the dark earth but the lark symbolizes joy and light just like the 'break of day' and it rises from the sullen earth carrying with it earth's music in the form of 'hymns', 'at heaven's gate.' Shakespeare has offered a scintillating image of light in the lark in sonnet 29 which reminds us of 'the main of light' in sonnet 60 where 'nativity' the birth of an infant is compared, by suggestion to dust particles in a shaft of light in an otherwise dark room.

The end of sonnet 29 is as luminescent as the image of the 'lark at break of day arising':

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Sonnets 29 and 30 are on the theme of memory but while the former is rich in passion the latter is restrained in emotion. The poetic devices never stand out for their own sake; they unobtrusively enrich the texture of the poem and enrich our aesthetic experience.

Now would you like to answer some of my questions?

Self-check Exercise II

1) What is an image? Cite two examples of images from the sonnets you have read in this unit.

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2) What is the rhyme scheme of the two sonnets you have read above?

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3) Copy a heroic couplet from one of the poems you have read.

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4) Copy a line from one of the texts where you find an example of alliteration.

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Shakespeare was called a ‘Star of *Poets*’ who was ‘not of an age but for all time’. In this unit you read a brief biography of him and of his contributions to English drama and poetry. Next you read about the sonnet with special reference to Shakespeare’s.

In this unit you also read two sonnets of Shakespeare. They have been compared as they are on the theme of memory. Shakespeare’s treatment of the subject in the two poems is quite different but appropriate to the mood. You must read the poems several times or better still memorize them.

UNIT 4 JOHN MILTON

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
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- 4.2 John Milton (1608-1674)
- 4.3 ‘L’ Allegro’ & ‘Il Penseroso’
 - 4.3.1 The Background of the Poems
 - 4.3.2 The Text: ‘L’ Allegro’
 - 4.3.3 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘L’ Allegro’
 - 4.3.4 The Text: ‘Il Penseroso’
 - 4.3.5 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘Il Penseroso’
 - 4.3.6 ‘L’ Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’: A Discussion
- 4.4 ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’
 - 4.4.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 4.4.2 The Text
 - 4.4.3 An Appreciation
- 4.5 ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’
 - 4.5.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 4.5.2 The Text
 - 4.5.3 An Appreciation
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Suggested Reading
- 4.8 Answers to Self-check Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read the unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Milton, the poet
- Discuss and appreciate ‘L’ Allegro’ & ‘Il Penseroso’
- Examine ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’
- Appreciate ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As a student of literature you might have heard the name of John Milton. Who was he? Why is he famous for? What is his contribution to English poetry? Most of you might be well familiar with these issues. This unit is an attempt to extend your knowledge of Milton still further and make you very intimate with the poet who wrote the first great epic in English. We shall first try to know Milton both as a person and litterateur. You will agree that knowing the person will give us greater insight into his poems. Then we shall take up four of his poems – two pastoral poems and two sonnets.

4.2 JOHN MILTON (1608 - 1674)

John Milton was born in London on 9 December 1608 in a well-to-do family. He was the second child of John and Sara (née Jeffrey). Milton's father, John Milton Sr., was a man of culture, a classical scholar and a musician of no mean ability. He supported the reformers against his father's will. We can very well guess the consequences when one goes against the will of one's parents. Milton Sr., too, was disinherited by his parents for casting his lot with the Reformers. This forced him to work for his living in different capacities - as a scrivener, legal secretary as well as a person dealing in real estate transactions and money lending. He also served as a composer of church music. Perhaps it was because of this that his son (Milton, the poet) too experienced a lifelong delight in music. Our Milton (the poet) took lessons in classical languages, first by private tutors at home and then at St. Paul's School in 1620. Milton himself spoke of his childhood:

“My father destined me from my infancy to the study of polite literature, which I embraced with such avidity, that from the age of twelve, I hardly ever retired from my books before midnight. This proved the first source of injury to my eyes, whose natural weakness was attended with frequent pains in the head; but as all these disadvantages could not repress my ardour for learning, my father took care to have me instructed by various preceptors, both at home and at school.” (Quoted from Crompton-Rickett)

In 1625, Milton was admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge. He was a hardworking student; but he was also argumentative and could not easily accept injustice. Naturally, only a year later, in 1626, he got suspended after a dispute with his tutor, William Chappell. The suspension, however, also proved a blessing in disguise, as it was during his temporary return to London that he attended plays, and perhaps began his first forays into poetry.

At his return to Cambridge, Milton was assigned a new tutor, Nathaniel Tovey. Life at Cambridge was still not easy on Milton. On the one hand, he was dissatisfied with the curriculum and on the other hand, many of his fellow students disliked him and Milton knew this very well. It was at Cambridge that he composed 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' on December 25, 1629. Crompton- Rickett gives a very good picture of Milton's life: "Proud and austere even at college, Milton conceived as lofty a view of the poet's calling as did Wordsworth two centuries later, and like Wordsworth, felt himself to be a consecrated spirit. In age of considerable licence and loose manners, Milton set a fine example by his sobriety of life."

In 1642, after receiving his M.A. *cum laude* at Cambridge, Milton returned to the family homes in London and Horton, Buckinghamshire. Here, for several years he devoted his time to private study and literary composition. It was during this period that Milton wrote poems such as 'On Shakespeare', 'L'Allegro' and 'IL Penseroso'. His *Comus*, a masque, was performed at Ludlow Castle in 1644. This masque was first published anonymously in 1647 with music from Henry Lawes, the well known court composer.

For Milton, 1647 was the year of misfortune and losses. In April 1647, his mother died and only a few months later, in August, his friend Edward King died by drowning. In November, upon his memory, Milton composed the beautiful elegy, 'Lycidas'. Thus, the loss became a gain in terms of literary achievement. This elegy was published in a memorial volume at Cambridge in 1648.

Milton set out for a tour of Europe in the spring of 1648 and met several eminent persons. These persons included Hugo Grotius and Giovanni Batista (biographer of Torquato Tasso). Milton wrote 'Mansus' in the latter's honour. Upon reaching Geneva, Milton found out about the death of his childhood friend, Charles Diodati in London. Milton's tour of Europe was cut short with rumours of impending civil war in England. He returned home in July 1649 and shortly thereafter composed 'Epitaphium Damonis', a Latin poem in the memory of his dearest friend.

During the Civil War, Milton emerged as a prolific pamphlet writer. He wrote pamphlets on political and religious matters. His 'Of Reformation', 'Animadversions', and 'Of Prelatical Episcopacy' were published in 1641 and 'The Reason for Church Government' in February, 1642.

In the spring of 1642, at the age of 44, Milton married Mary Powell who was half his age (17 years old). The marriage, however, was an unhappy one. Shortly after their marriage, Mary left him to visit her family and did not return. The political interests of the two families also came in the way of their marriage. The Powells sided with the King in the Civil War and this further worsened the matter. However, his bitter experiences in marriage motivated Milton to write his so-called Divorce Tracts in which he spoke for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. In 1644, Milton published the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, which had its second, longer edition in early 1644. In 1644, Milton also published *The Judgement of Martin Bucer Concerning Divorce*. His Divorce Tracts caused such an uproar all around - in parliament, amidst the clergy, and general populace - that he was nicknamed "Milton the Divorcer."

The attempted censorship of the Divorce Tracts by the Stationers' Company provoked Milton to publish his eloquent *Areopagitica* in late 1644. It was an oration advocating freedom of the press. Milton also had time to write a treatise *Of Education*, which prescribed a rigorous course of study for English youth. In 1645, Milton published *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, and registered *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin*.

Milton's personal life took a favourable turn and he got reunited with Mary Powell. The fruition of this reunion was the birth of two daughters - Anne in 1646 and Mary in 1648.

Two weeks after the public execution of Charles I on January 30, 1649, Milton published *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and in March. As a reward to his services during the Civil War, the Cromwellian government appointed Milton Secretary for Foreign Tongues and ordered him to write an answer to Charles I's purported *Eikon Basilike* (Royal Image). After publishing *Observations on the Articles of Peace*, Milton published *Eikonoklastes* (Image Breaker) in October, 1649. In 1650, the Council of State ordered Milton to write a response to Salmasius' *Defensio Regia* - the Continental outcry against the English action (Defense of Kingship). *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* was published in February, 1651. Milton's first son, John, was born in March and the Miltons moved to Westminster.

The year 1652 was another year of losses and gains. It was in this year that he lost his sight. This was a great personal loss but this also made him introspect his 'talent' as well as the future course of life. The loss of sight prompted him to write the well known sonnet 'When I Consider How My Light is Spent' also known as 'On his blindness'. In May, 1652, Mary after giving birth to a daughter, Deborah, died and their one year old son John met with the same fate in June.

In 1654, Milton published *Defensio Secunda* and in 1655, *Defensio Pro Se* (“Defense of Himself”). In 1656, Milton married Katherine Woodcock and in late 1657, their daughter Katherine was born. However, his new wife and their daughter both passed away in 1658. Milton wrote the sonnet ‘Methought I saw my late espoused saint’ in the memory of his wife Katherine Woodcock.

In early 1659, Milton published *A Treatise of Civil Power and Ready and Easy Way To Establish a Free Commonwealth*. However, for his propaganda writings, Milton had to go into hiding, for fear of retribution from the followers of King Charles II. The reason was obvious: with the death of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell in 1658 the Commonwealth were coming to a close. King Charles II was restored to the throne on May 40, 1660.

In 1664, notwithstanding his daughters’ protest, Milton married again. This time to Elizabeth Minshull. It was during this time that Milton completed his epic, *Paradise Lost* which is among the greatest works ever written in English. With this Milton overcame the pangs of his blindness. You may wonder how a blind person could write so prolifically and also compose such a great work. Well, it is said that he would compose verse upon verse at night in his head and then dictate them from memory to his aides in the morning. *Paradise Lost* finally saw publication in 1667, in ten books. It was reissued in 1668 with a new title-page and additional materials. The book was met with instant success. It amazed several persons. Even Dryden is reported to have said, “This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too.”

Hereafter, Milton wrote prolifically: *History of Britain* was published in 1670; *Paradise Regain’d* and *Samson Agonistes* were published together in 1671. *Of True Religion* and *Poems, &c. upon Several Occasions* were published in 1674. In summer 1674, the second edition of *Paradise Lost* was published, in twelve books.

Milton died peacefully of gout in November, 1674, and was buried in the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate. His funeral was attended by “his learned and great Friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the Vulgar.” A monument to Milton rests in Poets’ Corner at Westminster Abbey.

From the brief sketch of Milton’s life, it is obvious that Milton was the child both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. His childhood was spent at a time when the Renaissance was in the ascendancy. His youth witnessed the rise of Puritanism, and his old age marked the consummation of the Puritan ideals. Naturally, in his poetry we notice a nice fusion of elements both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. A link between the Age of the Renaissance and the Puritan Age is well perceived in his poetry. He is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation.

On the basis of our discussion in this section, we can put Milton’s works in four periods.

- **The College Period.** His college poems, Latin and English, are for the most part simply a young man’s experimental work, and are of little importance. But ‘the Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ is an exception. It is written on a Biblical subject, but glows with imagination and is full of pagan imagery, thus revealing a fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation influences.
- **The Horton Period.** To this period belong four minor poems. These poems are ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ (1644), *Comus* (1644), and ‘Lycidas’

(1647). From them we now learn that he began to write chiefly under the inspiration of the learning and art of the Renaissance. The Puritan element was at first quite subordinate but it gradually gained in strength and depth till it became at last the dominant element. 'L' Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' present charming contrasted pictures of man, nature and art. The first poem is in the mood of gladness whereas the second in that of melancholy. What is remarkable in these poems is that there is little that is characteristically Puritan. In fact, there is a good deal that is really un-puritan; for, the poet dwells frankly upon the pleasures of romance and rustic sports, upon the beauty of Church architecture and music – all these were the objects of uncompromising hatred to the religious fanatic. *Comus*, which is the finest example in our literature of Masque, also belongs to the Renaissance.

However, in 'Lycidas' we have a Puritanism which is political and ecclesiastical as well as spiritual and ethical. The religious accent in this elegy is unmistakably puritan. Its fair attack upon the corrupt church and the hireling clergy also openly proclaims Milton's adherences to the Puritan cause. However, Like Spenser's 'Astrophel', 'Lycidas', too, is in the conventional style of the classical pastoral elegy. Thus, in terms of form, 'Lycidas', too, like *Comus*, belongs to the Renaissance.

- **The period of religious and political controversies.** In his 41st year, Milton willingly got himself into the fierce controversies of the hour. To use his own words, by choosing to do that he embarked "on a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes". In fact, to discharge in his opinion, 'a great public duty', he laid aside his ambition to write a great epic which had always taken shape in his mind. For the next twenty years, Milton continued actively as a writer of prose and was involved in political and religious controversies all the time. He thus turned from poetry entirely and this was a great loss to poetry.
- **The Period of the Great Epics.** Eventually, when he turned back to poetry, he produced *Paradise Lost*, the greatest English epic, the stupendous masterpiece of intellectual energy and creative power. Here, we have the complete fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation elements. This is not the case with *Paradise Regained* which is completely dominated by Puritanism. The entire space in this epic is taken by the spiritual conflict between good and evil. As such, there is hardly any action in it.

The labours of Milton's closing years triumph again in *Samson Agonistes*. As in *Paradise Lost*, in this 'dramatic poem', too, Milton applies the form of classical art to the treatment of a Biblical subject. *Samson Agonistes* is fashioned strictly upon the principle of Great tragedy, while the matter, mood, tone and outlook are strictly Hebraic and Biblical.

We may say, on the basis of our presentation so far that Milton represents the highest and the complete type of Puritanism. However, the culture of the Renaissance was never totally exterminated by his puritanical bend of mind. In his poetry, the puritanical strain is apparent in following manners (a) in the choice of religious subjects, especially in the later poems, (b) the sense of responsibility and moral exaltation, (c) the fondness for preaching, and lecturing, which in *Paradise Lost* is a positive weakness, and (d) the narrowness of outlook, strongly puritanical, seen in his outbursts against his opponents (as in *Lycidas*), in his belief regarding the inferiority of women, and in his scorn for the "miscellaneous rabble". Similarly, the Renaissance elements are seen in his love

of beauty, his classical learning, and his use of classical forms of poetry. Don't you think that studying such a poet who offers so much will be a fascinating exercise? Why to wait then? Let's read in detail some of his poems and see for ourselves what he offers to us.

Self Check Exercise 1

- 1) In the space provided below write the names of Milton's work belonging to
 - a) The Horton Period
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 - b) The Period of the Great Epics
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- 2) What impact did blindness leave on Milton's life and his career?
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- 3) Why did Milton involve himself in religious and political controversies?
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- 4) 'Milton is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation.' Explain.
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4.3 'L' ALLEGRO' & 'IL PENSEROSO'

4.3.1 The Background of the Poems

'L'Allegro' (which means "the happy man" in Italian) is a pastoral poem by John Milton. This poem is invariably paired with 'Il Penseroso' ("the melancholy man"), which depicts a similar day spent in contemplation and thought. It is uncertain when 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' were composed because they do not appear in Milton's Trinity College manuscript of poetry. However, if we go by the settings in the poems, we may infer that they were possibly composed shortly after Milton left

Cambridge. As far as their publication is concerned, both these poems were first published in Milton's 1645 collection of poems. In the said collection, the two poems complement each other structurally and contain images which are in specific dialogue with one another. They also serve as a balance not only to each other but also to his Latin poems, including 'Elegia 1' and 'Elegia 6'.

Several critics are of the opinion that it is nearly impossible to understand and appreciate 'L' Allegro' without also having read its companion piece, 'Il Penseroso'. If L' Allegro is "the happy person" who spends an idealized day in the country and a festive evening in the city, Il Penseroso is "the thoughtful person" whose night is filled with meditative walking in the woods and hours of study in a "lonely Tower."

4.3.2 The Text: 'L' Allegro'

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
 Of Cerebus and blackest Midnight born
 In Stygian cave forlorn,
 'Mongst horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy
 Find out some uncouth cell.
 Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings.
 And the night-raven sings :
 There, under ebon shades and low-browed rocks.
 As ragged as thy locks.
 In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell. 10
 But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
 In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,
 And by men heart-easing Mirth ;
 Whom lovely Venus, at a birth.
 With two sister Graces more,
 To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore :
 Or whether (as some sager sing)
 The frolic wind that breathes the spring.
 Zephyr, with Aurora playing.
 As he met her once a-Maying, 20
 There, on beds of violets blue.....

 On summer eves by haunted stream, 140
 Then to the well-trod stage anon.
 If Jonson's learned sock be on.
 Or sweetest Shakspeare, Fancy's child.
 Warble his native wood-notes wild.
 And ever, against eating cares,
 Lap me in soft Lydian airs.
 Married to immortal verse,
 Such as the meeting soul may pierce.
 In notes with many a winding bout
 Of linked sweetness long drawn out 140

With wanton heed and giddy cunning.
 The melting voice through mazes running.
 Untwisting all the chains that tie
 The hidden soul of harmony ;
 That Orpheus' self may heave his head
 From golden slumber on a bed
 Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
 Such strains as would have won the ear
 Of Pluto to have quite set free
 His half-regained Eurydice.
 These delights if thou canst give,
 Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

150

(From 'L' Allegro')

Glossary

- L'Allegro.** : The happy or cheerful person; "lively, gay, merry."
- Melancholy** : A physiological condition associated with both depression and genius
- Cerberu** : The three-headed hound that guards the gates of hell
- Uncout** : Unknown, desolate.
- Ebon** : A type of hard, black wood
- Cimmeria** : The Homeric land of the Cimmerians was so close to the edge of the world that it was eternally wrapped in "mist and cloud" of night (Odyssey 11.14 -9).
- ycleap'd** : Named, called. Most editors point to this archaism as particularly Spenserian.
- Euphrosyne** : The Goddess of Mirth
- Sager** : Wise men
- Zephir with Aurora** : This alternate ancestry of Euphrosyne makes her the daughter of the west wind and the dawn. As Roy Flannagan suggests, Milton may be saying that accurately tracing Mirth's origin is not important: "getting there is all the fun, in the sense that the begetting of Mirth must be joyful and guilt-free" (Flannagan 66).
- Fill'd her** : Begot, as if he were breathing wind into her. In other words, Mirth will awaken man to his joyful potential.
- Cranks** : Like "quip" and "wile," a crank is a fanciful verbal trick.
- Becks** : "A gesture expressive of salutation or respect; an inclination of the head.
- Hebe's** : The goddess of youth
- Sport** : Youthful mockery, jest
- trip...toe** : Here, "trip" means to step or dance full of life and

	: vigour.
crue	: “Crew,” reminiscent of Comus’s gang of revellers.
Unreproved	: Blameless, or simply unblamed
Lark	: The counterpart to nightingale in ‘Il Penseroso’; traditionally the first bird to sing in the morning.
Bid good morrow	: There has been some disagreement over who comes to the window to “bid good morrow.” While critics have suggested Mirth, the Lark, and the Dawn, most editorial opinion supports L’Allegro himself. For a discussion on this issue see Stanley Fish 114-15.
Eglantine	: Honeysuckle
the Cock	: The rooster and his Dames are the first of several paired figures (for example, the clouds and the mountain’s breast, and so on) which Casey Finch and Peter Bowen suggest reflect the poem’s theme of sexual companionship.
Scatters the rear	: As in military combat, the rooster’s crowing forces Darkness’ troops to retreat quickly.
Stack	: Haystack
Chearly	: Cheerfully
Hoar Hil	: The dew-covered hills of a summer morning.
Som time	: Analyzing ‘L’Allegro’ as if it were a cinematic montage with dream sequences and slow dissolves, Herbert Phelan notes that while lines 41-56 seem to be in the present tense, 57-69 describe a different time period (Phelan 4) .
State	: The sun begins his stately march as if he were a king.
Dight	: Clothed
tells his tale	: Most editors identify this as a play on words: the shepherd recounts his story and/or counts his sheep.
Lantskip	: Landscape
Measures	: To travel over, traverse (a certain distance, a tract of country)
Pide	: Pied, spotted
Cynosure	: Something that attracts attention by its brilliancy or beauty; a centre of attraction, interest, or admiration.
Corydon and Thyrsi	: Greek pastoral figures
Phillis...Thestylis	: Two more Virgilian shepherds
Bowre	: Cottage
Mead	: Meadow
Secure	: Free from care; derived from the Latin meaning.
Rebecks	: A medieval form of fiddle with three strings
Faery Mab	: Queen of the fairies

Early Modern English Poets	Junkets	: “Any dainty sweetmeat, cake, or confection”
	Friars Lanthorn	: Friar’s Lantern.
	Goblin	: Several editors have suggested the goblin here is a version of Shakespeare’s Puck, the hobgoblin from Midsummer Night’s Dream . Milton’s goblin will do housework and field work only if he is fed by the homeowner.
	Lubbar Fend	: Lubber Fiend: “A beneficent goblin supposed to perform some of the laborious work of a household or farm during the night”
	Chimney’s	: Fireplace
	Crop-ful	: Sated, full. Presumably, the goblin has just gorged himself on the cream which was set out for him.
	Mattin	: Morning song
	Towred Cities	: The scene now shifts from a day in the country to a night in the city.
	Weeds	: Garments, here courtly costumes.
	Triumphs	: Courtly festivals
	Hymen	: God of marriage
	Sock	: The slipper worn by Greek comic actors. Traditionally the sock refers to comic performances and the buskin to tragic.
	fancies childe	: As if Shakespeare were the child of imagination (fancy) personified.
	Lydian Aires	: John Carey and Alastair Fowler note that in the Republic 4.498 -9, Plato associates this Greek musical mode with laxness, conviviality, softness and sloth. James Hutton, however, suggests that Milton may not have meant this as a pejorative term, since Cassiodorus speaks of it approvingly as providing relaxation and delight.

4.3.3 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘L’Allegro’

The first 10 lines of ‘L’Allegro’ may be looked upon as prelude. Here, the speaker ritually banishes melancholy and disease, associated with hell and darkness. Milton follows the traditional classical hymn model when the narrator invokes Mirth/ Euphrosyne and her divine parentage between lines 11 and 24. He first welcomes Mirth (fair vs dark, free vs cave). She is known as the daughter of Venus (love) and Bacchus (wine, revelry), sister to brightness and bloom. But in typically Miltonic alternative genealogy, she is daughter of Zephyr (west wind) and Aurora (dawn). Mirth embodies time of day the poem celebrates, and is connected with May rituals (fertility, community), and flowers. She is buxom (yielding) and gentle. In lines 25-46, we find the speaker inviting her to bring personified friends - Jest, Jollity, Hebe (youth), Sport and Laughter, followed by the mountain nymph Liberty (political resonance?) or Freedom (not license or luxury). In lines 44-48, Mirth and Liberty are linked – linked to lark (dawn), which pushes

back darkness, and bids him (sun) good morning. Then we have the depiction of crowing cock scattering darkness, while infinitive (speaker, not cock) hears hounds and horns (49-56). We also have a subtle hint of “sometime walking” (57-68). This something is presumably the speaker. He is listing all the things he’d do if he joined the crew. The ‘something’ also walks by the ploughman, milkmaid, mower, shepherd, all about to, or actually at, work. All these references along with Shepherds “tell” (either tallying sheep, or telling stories, or both) very well link up with pastoral and georgic poetry.

Then, the speaker straightway eyes new pleasures (69-80): landscape, mountains, brooks, rivers, towers (country estate). Then we find shepherds meeting for lunch and then the suggestion (81-90) that Phyllis needs to haste (present emphatic) to work, a different job whatever the season (seasonal rounds and rural rituals). We are then carried to a local village, on a holiday (91-117) where we have bells and dancing all day. Here, the poem has literary links about English lore (Mab, Friar, Hobgoblin, Robin Goodfellow): Robin joins with others in unending toil of rural life; he leaves at dawn. The tales done, the villagers go to bed.

From line 117, the scene changes again and we are brought to cities’ pleasures: social life, people, ladies, beauty, city marriages, feasts, revelry and masques. These references add to the poem’s appeal to romance. This is further reinforced when the suggestion about fantasy. One wonders if the entire poem is a fantasy (the sights young poets dream “on summer’s eve by haunted stream”) vision.

That the art is part of this “ideal” day is made explicit, from line 141 onwards, though the suggestion was implicit throughout the poem. Now we have references to the theatre of Jonson, Shakespeare (learned, and “native” comedy respectively), and music, married to verse (song): “linked sweetness long drawn out”. The speaker is requested to be immersed in the poetry and the pleasures that Mirth is able to produce:

And ever against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse
Such as the meeting soul may pierce (lines 145–148)

In the last two lines we are told that these are the delights, if Mirth can give them, that would make speaker join her. The final lines of the poem is a response to questions found within Elizabethan poetry, including Christopher Marlowe’s ‘Come live with me and be my love’:

These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee, I mean to live. (lines 151–152)

4.3.4 The Text: ‘Il Penseroso’

Hence, vain deluding Joys,
The brood of Folly without father bred !
How little you bested,
Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys !
Dwell in some idle brain.
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess.
As thick and numberless
As the gay motes that people the sunbeams.
Or likest hovering dreams,

The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train.
 But, hail ! thou Goddess sag and hoy!
 Hail, divinest Melancholy !
 Whose saintly visage is too bright
 To hit the sense of human sight.
 And therefore to our weaker view
 O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue ;
 Black, but such as in esteem
 Prince Memnon's sister might beseem,
 Or that starred Ethiope queen that strove
 To set her beauty's praise above
 The Sea Nymphs, and their powers offended.
 Yet thou art higher far descended :
 Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore
 To solitary Saturn bore ;
 His daughter she ; in Saturn's reign
 Such mixture was not held a stain.
 Oft in glimmering bowers and glades
 He met her, and in secret shades
 Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
 While yet there was no fear of Jove.
 Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure.
 Sober, steadfast, and demure,
 All in a robe of darkest grain.
 Flowing with majestic train.
 And sable stole of cypress lawn
 Over thy decent shoulders drawn.
 , Come, but keep thy wonted state.
 With even step, and musing gait,
 And looks commercing with the skies,
 Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes :

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(Excerpt from 'Il Penseroso')

Glossary

- Il Penseroso** : The thoughtful contemplative person melancholy person or personality
- Bested** : Bestead; help, assist, relieve
- Toyes** : Idle fancies and imaginary playthings
- Fond** : Foolish
- gay motes** : Tiny bits of dust that become visible in a bright ray of sunshine.
- Pensioners** : "One who is in receipt of pension or regular pay.
- Morpheus** : In Greek mythology, Morpheus is the god of dreams - one of the sons of Hypnos, the god of sleep. He and his brothers, Phobetor and Phantasus, are responsible for the variety of dreams experienced by human beings.

- Melancholy** : Stella Revard believes that Milton’s goddess Melancholy is an earlier version of Urania, the Muse he invokes in *Paradise Lost* .
- Visage** : The face or features as expressive of feeling or temperament; the countenance.
- To hit the Sense** : Literally, too bright for the human sense of sight to apprehend it, or endure it. Milton imagines the female personification of Melancholy has been “O’erlaid with black” to accommodate “our weaker view,” or sense of sight.
- with black** : Melancholy was one of ancient medicine’s four humours: black bile, under Saturn’s influence. Milton allows his personification to appear to have a black face, but this is simply the way she must appear to worldly mortals.
- Wisdoms hue** : Solomon often is cited as wisdom personified.
- Memnon’s sister** : In Homer, Memnon is an Ethiopian king who fights for Troy. John Leonard notes that later writers ascribe to him a sister of legendary beauty.
- Ethiope Queen** : Cassiopeia, Queen to Ethiopian King Cephalus. She was stellified - hanged into a constellation—after she claimed to be more beautiful than the sea nymphs or Nereids.
- higher far descended** : Compare Melancholy’s single genealogy with the two versions of Mirth’s origins in *L’Allegro* 14-24.
- Vesta** : Roman goddess of the hearth, and daughter of Saturn, Vesta vowed to remain a virgin. Milton imagines his personified Melancholy as Vesta’s daughter, and Saturn as her Father.
- Saturn’s reign** : In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which tells a story of the world’s beginnings, the reign of Saturn, or Saturnine age, was a golden age.
- Bowres** : A place closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants; a shady recess, leafy covert, arbour.
- Ida’s inmost grove** : Saturn’s capital was, according to legend, on Mount Ida in Crete. There Jove was born; he ended the golden age and ushered in the silver by usurping his father’s throne.
- Nun** : An archaic word for pagan priestess, but Milton would also have considered Catholic nuns virtually pagan.
- Demure** : Sober, grave, serious; reserved or composed in demeanour
- Cypress Lawn** : Cypress (fine black) linen
- wonted state** : The dignity and attendance to which she is accustomed

Early Modern English Poets	Commercing with the skies	: Conversing with the skies
	Forget thyself to marble	: The reader is imagined as changed into a marble monument. This may allude to the myth of Niobe, who was turned to stone for bragging that her children were greater than Latona's children, Apollo and Diana
	Leaden	: According to the Renaissance astrological systems, lead is linked to Saturn.
	Cherub	: Cherubim, one of the higher orders of angels, passed their time in contemplation of God.
	Hist	: Summon silently
	Philomel	: A nightingale; Refers to the story of the rape of Philomela and her transformation into a nightingale.
	Cynthia	: The moon; another name for Diana, goddess of the moon, sometimes identified or associated with Hecate. Legend had it that she rode a chariot drawn by dragons.
	Charm	: Can mean both "song" and "spell".
	Towr	: Contrast Il Penseroso being inside the tower, while L' Allegro views a tower from a distance
	Thrice great Hermes	: Hermes Trismegistus (three times great). Neo-Platonists of the Renaissance regarded Hermes as knowing everything.
	fleshly nook	: An allusion to the Neo-Platonic idea of human souls as trapped within fleshly bodies
	Dæmons	: Daimons were thought to be spirits, half mortal and half immortal, that served to communicate between the gods and mortals.
	Pall	: "Fine or rich cloth (as a material); especially as used for the robes of persons of high rank"
	Pelops line	: Pelops' descendants make up the characters of much of Greek tragedy: Atreus, Thyestes, Agamemnon, Orestes, Electra, and Iphigeneia.
	Troy	: A sacred city according to Homer; also the setting for several ancient Greek tragedies
	Buskind	: The buskin was the traditional footwear of the tragic actor, as opposed to the sock of the comic actor in L' Allegro.
	Musaeus	: A mythical poet, sometimes described as the son of Orpheus and a priest of Demeter, and is thus interpreted as the founder of religious poetry.
	Him that left half told	: Refers to Geoffrey Chaucer; his the unfinished <i>Squire's Tale</i>
	Virtuous	: Magical
	civil-suited	: Soberly attired

- brown** : Dusky, dark
- Sylvan** : Pertaining to Sylva, the Roman woodland deity
- massy proof** : Massive strength. Milton always used the older “massy” instead of “massive”
- dight** : Decorated, decked
- Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell** : This phrase reinforces the preceding line’s mention of “hermitage.” A hair shirt would often be worn by a man doing penance. Sir Thomas More was famous for wearing a hair shirt under his daily clothes. “Cell” can mean “a dwelling consisting of a single chamber inhabited by a hermit or other solitary”.
- Spell** : “Spell” can mean “to engage in a study or contemplation of something”

4.3.5 Appreciating the Stages of Progression of the Poem ‘Il Penseroso’

‘Il Penseroso’ is a vision of poetic melancholy. The speaker of this reflective ode dispels “vain deluding Joys” from his mind in a ten-line prelude, before invoking “divinest Melancholy” to inspire his future verses. You will do well by noticing how the melancholic mood is idealised by the speaker as a means by which to “attain / To something like prophetic strain”. It is also important to note how the central action of ‘Il Penseroso’ proceeds: the speaker speculates about the poetic inspiration that would transpire if the imagined goddess of Melancholy he invokes were his Muse. It is true that the highly digressive style dually precludes any summary of the poem’s dramatic action. However, it is not difficult to find out that the vision of poetic inspiration offered by the speaker of ‘Il Penseroso’ is an allegorical exploration of a contemplative paradigm of poetic genre.

If you read the poem carefully, you will notice that like ‘L’ Allegro’, in this poem, too, the first 10 lines serve as prelude. As prelude to his invocation of Melancholy, the speaker dismisses joy from his imagination. Vain joys and folly are ritually banished. You may also note here a dig at their parentage. Soon after the prelude, the speaker invokes a Melancholy goddess, veiled in black. In the next 20 lines, Melancholy is linked to holy, divine, saintly wisdom garbed in devotional colours. Following the form of classical hymn, she claims her heritage with the Roman pantheon. Here we also find reference to her parents - solitary Saturn and Vesta - and a sort of link to secrecy, shades and twilight. Having invoked the Melancholy goddess, the speaker imagines her ideal personification. So from line 45 onward, we have references to her companions: Peace, Quiet, Fast (Milton had a thing about food), Leisure, Retirement. The main companion, equivalent to Liberty, is Contemplation and the favourite bird is Philomel (nightingale) with her sweet and sad music: melancholic person’s favourite bird (vs lark).

The central action of the poem proceeds as poetic visions of Melancholy, imagined by the speaker. In the lines 65-76, we see the speaker walking in evening (‘unseen’ vs ‘not unseen’: solitary) under moon. He hears curfew bell (8 o’clock), over sullen roar of distant waves on rocky beach. Then if weather (air) does not permit, he moves indoors (77-96), by a quiet fireside for bellman’s charm or stay up late to read and study, as Milton did as a youth. The speaker is found reading philosophy, Hermes Trismegistus (ancient mystic text, popular in the

Renaissance, of Gnostic or hermetic writing; they thought it ancient Egyptian, but it was late Greek). You cannot fail to notice art associated with Melancholy, which includes tragedy: ancient, or contemporary (97-102), or other forms of art (104-20): Musaeus (father of priestly poetry), Orpheus in underworld or Chaucerian Squire's tale, or "sage and solemn" Spenser. Here we also notice a succinct definition of allegory. The speaker's love of studies is further reinforced in lines 121-140. The speaker is found studying all night. Then arrives the morning - sombre, raining and windy and the speaker walks abroad (141-154). He walks to (Tolkienesque) woods, quiet, ancient, dark and deep, at times pauses by a brook, sleeps, dreams and listens to sweet music; i.e. Contemplation. At the end of his reverie on poetic Melancholy, the speaker invokes the Muse's song; he imagines that his Muse will reward his studious devotion to her by revealing a heavenly vision. As the final ten lines reveal, the speaker aspires to a revelation of divine knowledge to inspire his great poetry. The final couplet issues an ultimatum to the Melancholy mood; the speaker will devote himself to the existence of a solitary hermit, staking his life upon the contemplative ideal he has illustrated throughout the poem, which he imagines will be rewarded by a vision of the divine. These are all the pleasures Melancholy gives and the speaker declares "I with thee do chose to live".

4.3.6 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso': A Discussion

'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' - both poems were very popular during the eighteenth century. They were also widely imitated by poets. You can measure their popularity by the fact that William Blake made illustrations to both 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. Critics' opinions vary on the merits and significance of these poems. Critics like Stelle Revard believe that Milton "takes care to showcase himself as a poet in these first and last selections and at the same time to build his poetic reputation along the way by skilful positioning of poems such as 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso.'" Barbara Lewalski is of the view that 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' "explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles... that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence". There has been a variety of responses with regard to their classification in various traditions and genres. E. M. W. Tillyard views them as an example of academic writing, Sara Watson call them pastoral, Maren-Sofie Rostvig view them as part of classical philosophy whereas S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush view them as part of Renaissance encomia and similar to Homeric hymns and Pindaric odes. Stelle Revard believes that the poems follow the classical hymn model, which discuss goddess that are connected to poetry and uses these females to replace Apollo completely.

Notwithstanding the multiple views of the critics, the best way to understand these poems is to read them carefully. If we do so, we shall agree that 'L'Allegro' celebrates Grace Euphrosone through the traditional Theocritan pastoral model. The poem is playful and is set within a pastoral scene that allows the main character to connect with folk stories and fairy tales in addition to various comedic plays and performances. If we read these poems together, we shall also notice a sort of progression from the pleasures found in 'L'Allegro' with the pleasures found within 'Il Penseroso'. We shall also notice that except one similarity that both are set in traditional form, there is no poetic antecedent for Milton's pairing.

'L'Allegro' invokes Mirth and other allegorical figures of joy and merriment, and extols the active and cheerful life, while depicting a day in the countryside according to this philosophy. Here, it is important to note that Mirth, as one of

the Graces, is connected with poetry within Renaissance literature. We will do well by noticing that the poem, in its form and content, is similar to dithyrambs to Bacchus or hymns to Venus. However, the pleasure that Mirth brings is moderated, and there is a delicate balance between the influence of Venus or Bacchus achieved by relying on their daughter.

'Il Penseroso', on the other hand, celebrates Melancholy through the traditional Theocritan pastoral model. The setting focuses on a Gothic scene and emphasises a solitary scholarly life. The speaker of the poem invokes a melancholic mood with which the speaker wanders through an urban environment and the descriptions are reminiscent of medieval settings. In his pursuits, he devotes his time to philosophy, to allegory, to tragedy, to Classical hymns, and, finally, to Christian hymns that cause him to be filled with a vision. Besides being set in a traditional form, there is no poetic antecedent for Milton's pairing.

It is also to be noted that Melancholy, in 'Il Penseroso' does not have the same parentage as Mirth does in 'L' Allegro'. Melancholy comes from Saturn and Vesta, who are connected to science and a focus on the heavens. Melancholy is connected in the poem with the "heavenly" muse Urania, the goddess of inspiring epics, through her focus and through her relationship with Saturn. Furthermore, she is related to prophecy, and the prophetic account within the final lines of 'Il Penseroso' does not suggest that isolation is ideal, but they do emphasise the importance of experience and an understanding of nature. The higher life found within the poem, as opposed to the one within 'L' Allegro', allows an individual to experience such a vision.

It is very common to view 'L' Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' as companion poems, but as a serious reader we need to find out for ourselves how and why they are related. Is it a battle between Day and Night/Mirth and Melancholy, as Tillyard has pointed out? Or, do these poems represent opposing paths (of pleasure and wisdom), as pointed out by Gerard Cox, toward complete union with God? Or, do these poems represent, as pointed out by Zacharias, Milton's own struggle to become a "whole" man and a truly great poet? Or, can we claim after Roy Flannagan that L' Allegro is the light-hearted Charles Diodati and Il Penseroso, the studious Milton?

Notwithstanding these varied responses, one thing is clear and almost all critics agree that "[w]hat one poem twists, the other untwists" in an unending cycle of what might be called "dissonant companionship" (Finch and Bowen 18). If we wish to appreciate their complementary sounds, we have to read these poems aloud. Then we shall discover how lilting pitch and images of crowing roosters and singing larks deeply of 'L' Allegro' contrasts with sombre tone and "Belmans drousie charm" of 'Il Penseroso'.

Another remarkable feature of these companion poems is the highly digressive style which dually precludes any summary of the poems' dramatic action as it renders them interpretively ambiguous to critics. However, it can surely be said that the vision of poetic inspiration offered by the speaker of 'Il Penseroso' is an allegorical exploration of a contemplative paradigm of poetic genre.

According to Barbara Lewalski, 'Il Penseroso' along with 'L' Allegro' "explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles... that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence". Milton's "companion poems" explore the pleasures associated with two competing (or perhaps complementary) lifestyles, and the attractions of two

competing (or perhaps complementary) sources of artistic inspiration, with corresponding descriptions of their differing subjects and genres. Both are in a sense extended versions of Marlowe's 'Come live with me and be my love', the paradigmatic seduction poem, though here it is the poet who is being seduced: which life, or which art, is more appealing? Graceful, urbane, evocatively descriptive, and technically virtuoso, these two poems have exerted an enormous influence on later English poetry.

Self Check Exercise 2

1) List a range of activities associated with each:

a) 'L' Allegro'

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b) 'Il Penseroso'

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2) List a range of figures associated with each:

a) 'L' Allegro'

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b) 'Il Penseroso'

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3) Describe briefly what actually happens in each poem?

a) 'L' Allegro'

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b) 'Il Penseroso'

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4) Comment on the life style presented in each poem

a) 'L' Allegro'

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b) 'Il Penseroso'

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5) Which life style you find more attractive? Give reasons

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6) Do these life styles compete with each other or complement each other? Explain.

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4.4 ‘ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEDMONT’

4.4.1 The Background of the Poem

‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ is a sonnet which is inspired by the massacre of Waldensians in Piedmont by the Charles Emmanuel II, Duke of Savoy, in April 1655. Piedmont is a region of Italy, which especially at that time was a strongly Catholic country. Annoyed with the peoples’ choice against Catholicism, the troops unleashed an unprovoked campaign of loot, rape, torture, and murder. They killed around 2,000 people and forcibly converted another 2,000 to the Catholic faith. The news of the killings spread quickly throughout Europe. Great efforts were made to remove any survivors from the area and bring them to safety. This massacre inspired John Milton to write his sonnet “On the Late Massacre in Piedmont.”

The Waldensians or Vaudois were Protestants who had long lived in the territories of the Roman Catholic rulers of Piedmont, and were thought of, by Protestants of Milton’s day, as having preserved a simple scriptural faith from earlier times. Confined by the treaty to certain mountain valleys, they had gradually intruded into the plain of Piedmont. Ordered to retire, they had been pursued into the mountains and there massacred by the Piedmontese soldiery in April 1655. In documents penned by Milton as Latin secretary, Cromwell strongly protested against such treachery and cruelty. Later in the year, possibly after Morland returned with his report (see below, 7-8 note), Milton wrote his sonnet, first published in *Poems*, 1674.

The largest theme of the sonnet is religion but with a view to enact justice. The other theme is the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The poem compares the theme of vengeance from the Old Testament to the theme of regeneration in the New Testament. The clear example of vengeance in the poem is the address in first line “Avenge, O Lord,” which could be a reference to Luke 18:7, a bible verse that speaks about vengeance. An example of regeneration is the lines “grow/ A hundredfold” and “Mother with Infant.”

4.4.2 The Text

On the Late Massacre in Piedmont

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
 Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
 Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
 When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones;
 Forget not: in thy book record their groans 5
 Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
 Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
 The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
 To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow 10
 O’er all th’ Italian fields where still doth sway
 The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
 A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Glossary

thy slaughtered saints	: The innocent victims are saints because they held their faith
Alpine mountains	: a rigid mountain range whose peaks are often covered in snow.
Pure	: the victims as people of light, undeserving of their fate
thy book	: Refers to the books to be consulted at the Judgment (Revelation 20:12)
thy sheep	: Emphasises the innocence of the massacred
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled	: Milton's style mimics the rolling of the people
Mother with infant down the rocks	: the way the mother and infant have died
Vale	: valley; the valleys "redouble" or grow into hills. In this image of nature, the low point of the land has become the high point, and the people whose lives have ended so tragically have been raised to heaven.
Redoubled	: re-echoed
Babylonian woe	: The Babylonian Exile is an infamous event of Jewish and Judeo-Christian history. The Babylonians invaded and destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem, but the religion endures. This allusion to the Babylonians' taking advantage of the temple and the land is reflected here in the destruction of the bodies of the martyrs.

4.4.3 An Appreciation

'On The Late Massacre in Piedmont' is a sonnet with the theme of good, pious people trapped in a dark world. You will also notice that the themes of the struggle of good and evil as well as freedom and oppression make their presence strongly felt in the poem. Milton calls on God to avenge the martyrs at Piedmont. The use of the word 'martyrs' in the poem is significant. These innocent victims are martyrs because they have been killed for their Protestant faith. As a perceptive reader, you will do well to notice the transition in the nature that Milton effectively brings about in the poem. Milton invokes images of nature to set a grim tone in the beginning of the poem. The Alpines are a rigid mountain range. Their peaks are often covered in snow. The bones scattered on the cold mountains creates a grim tone, a dark world. So the reference to the Alpines and their association with the words such as 'avenge', 'slaughtered' and 'saints' in the first two lines set the grim tone:

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold

At the very outset, Milton forcefully evokes the slaughtering of 'pious' people as a tragic act. Mark the use of 'pure' that identifies the victims as people of righteousness, undeserving of their fate. Milton's style in the lines that follow

mimics the rolling of the people. This thought ends with a period, a crafted absolute stopping point, the way the mother and infant have died, their own lives terminated. However, a transition begins to appear from the fifth with his request to the Lord to ‘record their groans’ in ‘thy book’. This transition is complete by the end of the poem with the ‘blood of the martyrs’ making the nature around it ‘fertile’. It is an interesting transition, and Milton is not speaking of literally making the ground more fertile for plants to grow, but people:

that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

The reference to ‘the Babylonian woe’ is significant here. Most Christian faiths hold the belief that a person’s body is a temple, sacred and to be well-kept. Additionally, many Protestants of Milton’s time identified the Catholic Church with Babylon and the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation. So what these lines seek to emphasise is that when one believer dies for his or her faith, a hundred more will take his or her place. Their deaths have transformed the image of Piedmont from a bone-covered rigid and cold mountain range to a fertile field.

The theme of the sonnet is usually understood to be sorrow for the victims and anger at the forces that were responsible for the massacre. This idea is reinforced by the fact that this prayer to ‘Lord, &c’ on behalf of the persecuted protestants was not entirely without effect. For Cromwell exerted himself in their favour.

However, you will notice for yourself that the poem is an address to God and not to the perpetrators of the massacre. Milton emphasises in the poem that God should be blamed for the occurrence of the massacre because He allows the event to happen even though He has direct intervention in it. The author stresses that the poem prophesies the one action that can justify God’s ways to His faithful.

The poem may very well be understood in the light of Tertullian’s famous phrase, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” and the parable of the sower (Matthew 14:4-9) where the seed that fell on good ground brought forth as much as a hundredfold. Such was to be the blood of these martyrs sown where the Pope (triple tyrant in his mitre with its three crowns) still rules: it was to make converts who, having learned God’s truth, would renounce the idolatry of Rome (figured, as Protestants believed, by the Babylon of Revelation 16:19, etc.) and thus escape the woe of God’s punishment upon it.

As far as the stanza form is concerned, Milton’s present sonnet (which is also known as sonnet 18) follows an iambic pentameter rhythm scheme with ten syllables per line consisting of 14 lines. You will observe that Milton’s sonnet does not follow the Shakespearean sonnet form. Instead, it follows the ABBA, ABBA, CDCDCD rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme changes in the third quatrain, and the poem reveals who is behind the massacre: the “Triple Tyrant,” a reference to the Pope with his triple crown.

Self Check Exercise 4

1) How will you evaluate “On The Late Massacre in Piedmont” as a sonnet?

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2) Throw light on the stanza form of the poem.

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3) The poem is an address to God and not to the perpetrators of the massacre. How far do you agree with the statement?

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4.5 WHEN THE ASSAULT WAS INTENDED ON THE CITY

4.5.1 The Background of the Poem

‘When the Assault was intended on the City’ is Milton’s eighth sonnet. It was written by the poet in 1642 as a form of joke – a ‘serious joke’ as it has been described. In this sonnet, Milton imagines himself at his home in London at a period when it might have been attacked by King Charles I and his army. Originally, it was untitled but subsequently it got the title ‘When Assault Was Intended to the City’. In the Manuscript this sonnet was written by another hand, with the title “On his door when the City expected an assault”. The present title is reported to have been written by Milton. He scratched out the title ‘On his door when the City expected an assault’ and wrote with his own hand “When the assault was intended to the City.” The date was also added 1642, but blotted out again; incidentally, it was in November 1642 that the King marched with his army as near as Brentford, and put the city in great consternation. Milton was then in his 44th year.

4.5.2 The Text

‘When the Assault was intended on the City’
Captain or Colonel, or Knight in Arms,
Whose chance on these defenceless dores may cease,
If ever deed of honour did thee please,

Guard them, and him within protect from harms,
 He can requite thee, for he knows the charms 5
 That call Fame on such gentle acts as these,
 And he can spread thy Name o’re Lands and Seas,
 What ever clime the Sun’s bright circle warms.
 Lift not thy spear against the Muses Bowre,
 The great Emathian Conqueror bid spare 10
 The house of Pindarus, when Temple and Towre
 Went to the ground: And the repeated air
 Of sad Electra’s Poet had the power
 To save th’ Athenian Walls from ruine bare.

Glossary

Colonel	: Three syllables, usually pronounced “coronel”
Sease	: Seize
Charms	: Referring to both magic spells (Old English <i>ciern</i>) and songs (Latin <i>carmen</i>)
gentle acts	: Adjective suggesting both mild and noble; as well as generous, as becomes a knight in arms
Emathian Conqueror	: Alexander the Great was given this title in recognition of his father’s reign as king of the Emathia district of Macedoia. In Putarch’s <i>Alexander</i> 11.450, the conqueror spared the house of the poet Pindar during the sack of Thebes.
Temple and Towre	: A frequent combination in the old metrical romances that recurs in <i>Paradise Regain’d</i>
Sad	: Serious, solemn
Electra’s Poet	: Plutarch’s <i>Lysander</i> 15.4 tells the story of how Athens was spared from destruction by Lysander when a Spartan general recited the first chorus from Euripides’ <i>Electra</i> 167-69.

4.5.3 An Appreciation

The poem’s fancy is that it should be written out on a piece of paper which is then pinned to the outside of the door and acts as a means of an appeal to spare the life of the poet who cowers inside. The supposed model for doing this is Alexander the Great’s sparing of the poet Pindar during the seizure of Emathia. It is Alexander who is given the title ‘Emathian Conqueror’ in the poem.

The poem’s appeal is to the readers’ imagination. He invites readers to imagine that the poet pins this sonnet to his door to protect his property during a military attack. Here, you will notice a touch of reality. Milton, like most of London in 1642, probably expected the King’s forces to attack the city. You may infer from this that Milton designs this sonnet as a plea for special protection for poets in time of war. In its gesture, the poem alludes to Alexander the Great, who is said to have spared the house of the poet Pindar during his invasion of Thebes.

We, as reader, may ask why should a poet be spared by an invading army more than any other person? It may be argued that the poet is a talented person who might act as a valuable resource for the invader. However, the fact remains that in a

situation of civil war and revolution, the seizure and control of the means of production of ideas would be an important part of the struggle. Elimination of an opposing voice (if it could not be suborned) would be important to Charles and his supporters. In that sense, then, it would be more sensible for Milton to hide himself away as a non-exceptional person whom the invaders would not bother to hunt or kill. This leads us to ask: is the poet overstating his importance? But the associated question is: why should he do so? We may say that the poet is deliberately overstating his importance for comic effect. However, at the same time he is having an undercurrent of what must be understandable and indeed justifiable fear. Fear, because if an outspoken individual such as Milton had been taken by the enemy, then he would certainly have been in serious trouble. Several critics such as Barbara Lewalski are of the view that this sonnet “inaugurates the political sonnet in the English tradition”.

The sonnet’s structure is formally quite straightforward. It is written in the conventional iambic pentameter and follows a rhyming scheme of *abba abba dedede*. It would have been more normal for the final two lines to have had an ‘ff’ rhyme scheme and to act as a couplet which concludes and summarises in some way the content and meaning of the poem – this is a technique that had been much used by Shakespeare. Milton avoids this technique and gives the feeling of life continuing into the future, an unknown future to be sure without a specific end point. For a poet of Milton’s calibre, it may be assumed that even the smallest detail has meaning.

Self Check Exercise 4

1) How will you evaluate ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’ as a political sonnet?

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2) Throw light on the stanza form of ‘When the Assault was Intended on the City’.

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3) Do you agree that the poem is a ‘serious joke’?

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life of John Milton. Then, his four poems; namely, ‘L’ Allegro’, ‘Il Penseroso’, ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ and ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’. The first two are pastoral poems and the last two sonnets. The first two poems are also treated as companion poems and both are very lengthy as well. Hence, we could give you just excerpts. You need to study the complete poems to have a better grasp of them. We have tried to give you the gist of the poem but it would be better if you do more exercise with your counsellor at the study centre.

As far as the two sonnets are concerned, we have included the complete text. When we talk of Milton the image that comes to our mind is that of a poet who wrote the first great epic in English. We regard him chiefly as a puritan writer. But as you have found out for yourself by going through the poems in this unit that John Milton, the Puritan writer of the great biblical epic *Paradise Lost*, also wrote about 24 sonnets though many of them are not known to the common reader. The most effective of the personal sonnets is sonnet 19, usually called ‘On his Blindness’ or ‘When I Consider How My Light is Spent’. Here, we find allusion to his blindness for the first time. This sonnet records his fear that he will never be able to use his God-given gift for poetry again. Yet God may demand an accounting of his righteousness. And his entry into Heaven will depend upon how well he has used the gifts that God gave him. The sonnet ends with Milton’s acceptance of the fact that what God wants of him is obedience and resignation. He can then serve God even if he cannot write poetry, for “they also serve who only stand and wait.”

Milton’s sonnets, or poem, are composed in Petrarchan style, but in iambic pentameter, similar to William Shakespeare’s sonnets. However, John Milton differs from his contemporaries and his literary idols in choice of topic for poems. While other poets wrote primarily about love or God, John Milton chose more pedantic topics, such as politics, or friendships he enjoyed, or even personal crises. The tension he creates in his poems seldom breaks the confines of form and metre. His emotion and his poetic form remain under control, even as his passion or emotions threaten to break through. Each line has a perfect five beats within. However, if you read his poems carefully, you will note that at times he even cheats a little, shortening some words rather than sacrificing the form of the poem (as in “stol’n”, “shew’th”, or “endu’th”).

Sonnet 18 along with the sonnets and the poems that we have dealt with in this unit very well illustrates that the general perception about Milton as a writer of rebellion is not very tenable. There is no denying the element of rebellion in his poetry but it is also a fact that there were many other writers of rebellion. We usually tend to forget his devotion to the old masters of literature which was greater than anyone else’s. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that he spent six years of his education in a self-devised deliberate study and emulation of poets such as Virgil and Petrarch.

Milton has often been praised for his grandiloquence of voice and vision, his peculiar diction and phraseology. His stylistic innovations such as grandiloquence of voice and vision, peculiar diction and phraseology and use of blank verse influenced later poets. Before Milton, poetic blank verse was considered distinct from its use in verse drama, and *Paradise Lost* was taken as a unique example. Isaac Watts in 1744 made a significant comment, “Mr. Milton is esteemed the parent and author of blank verse among us”. “Miltonic verse” might be

synonymous for a century with blank verse as poetry, a new poetic terrain independent from both the drama and the heroic couplet.

Lack of rhyme was sometimes taken as Milton's defining innovation. He himself considered the rhymeless quality of *Paradise Lost* to be an extension of his own personal liberty. His pursuit of freedom was largely a reaction against conservative values entrenched within the rigid heroic couplet. Within a dominant culture that stressed elegance and finish, he granted primacy to freedom, breadth and imaginative suggestiveness, eventually developed into the romantic vision of sublime terror. Milton's blank-verse paragraph, and his audacious and victorious attempt to combine blank and rhymed verse with paragraphic effect in 'Lycidas', lay down indestructible models and patterns of English verse-rhythm, as distinguished from the narrower and more strait-laced forms of English metre. The varied manifestations of personal liberty in Milton's works (e.g. abandonment of rhyme, irregular rhythms, and peculiar diction) converge to create specific Miltonic effects that live on to this day.

You might have come to realise why Milton is regarded by many as the "greatest English author" (William Hayley) and "as one of the preeminent writers in the English language". Critical reception, no doubt, has oscillated in the centuries since his death but that is chiefly because of his political affiliation. Samuel Johnson praised *Paradise Lost* as "a poem which...with respect to design may claim the first place, and with respect to performance, the second, among the productions of the human mind," but he also viewed Milton's politics as those of an "acrimonious and surly republican".

We hope now that now you are ready to read some more poems of Milton and form your own opinion about him.

4.7 SUGGESTED READING

There are several seminal works on Milton and his poetry. For Milton's biography, you may study "Life of John Milton" by Anniina Jokinen in *Luminarium* which is available on Internet and this article has been used in this unit as well. You will do well by reading 'Milton' in *A Short History of English Literature* by Crompton – Rickett (New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, Reprint 1988) *Milton: A Biography* Vol 1 by William Riley Parker (Oxford: Clarendon Press) and "A Brief Life of Milton" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (9th ed, 1888).

For Milton's literary work, you are advised to read *John Milton: A Literary Life* by Cedric Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), *The life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* by Barbara K. Lewalski (Blackwell Publishers, 2001), *John Milton: Twentieth Century Perspectives* (in five volumes) edited by Martin J. Evans (Taylor & Francis, 2002), *John Milton: A Short Introduction* by Roy C. Flanagan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), *John Milton: Reader's Guide to his Poetry* by Nicholson, Marjorie (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964) and *Studies in Milton* by E. M. W. Tillyard (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951)

For special light on 'L' Allegro' & 'Il Penseroso' and the two sonnets, you may read 'Milton: 'L' Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' in *The Miltonic Setting, Past and Present* by E. M. W. Tillyard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 'Milton's Ideal Day: Its Development as a Pastoral Theme' by Sara Watson (*PMLA* 57 (1942): 404–420), *Variorum: The Minor English Poems* Vol 2 by, A. S. P.

Woodhouse and Douglas Bush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972). You can also search *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus* and other John Milton's works in HTML format on the internet.

4.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self Check Exercise 1

1. a) The Horton Period: 'L'Allegro', 'Il Penseroso', 'Comus' and 'Lycidas'
- b) The Period of the Great Epics: *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*

- 2) The loss of sight in 1652 was a great personal loss but this also made him introspect his 'talent' as well as the future course of life. The loss of sight prompted him to write the well known sonnet 'When I Consider How My Light is Spent' or 'On his Blindness'. This may be viewed as a blessing in disguise, as it was after his blindness that he wrote his epic, *Paradise Lost* which is among the greatest works ever written in English. With this Milton overcame the pangs of his blindness. It is said that he would compose verse upon verse at night in his head and then dictate them from memory to his aides in the morning. *Paradise Lost* finally saw publication in 1667, in ten books. It was reissued in 1668 with a new title-page and additional materials. The book was met with instant success. It amazed several persons. Even Dryden is reported to have said, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too."

- 3) Milton involved himself in religious and political controversies in order to discharge, to choose his own words, 'a great public duty'. He did it willingly and for this he laid aside his ambition to write a great epic poem for over two decades. During the Civil War, Milton wrote pamphlets such as 'Of Reformation', 'Animadversions', 'Of Prelatical Episcopacy' and 'The Reason for Church Government'. He also wrote his so-called 'Divorce Tracts' in which he spoke for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. The attempted censorship of the 'Divorce Tracts' by the Stationers' Company provoked Milton to publish his eloquent *Areopagitica* in late 1644. It was an oration advocating freedom of the press. In early 1659, Milton published *A Treatise of Civil Power and Ready and Easy Way To Establish a Free Commonwealth*. However, for his propaganda writings, Milton had to go into hiding, for fear of retribution from the followers of King Charles II, as with the death of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell in 1658 the Commonwealth were coming to a close.

- 4) Milton's childhood was spent at a time when the Renaissance was in the ascendancy. His youth witnessed the rise of Puritanism, and his old age marked the consummation of the Puritan ideals. Naturally, in his poetry we notice a nice fusion of elements both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. A link between the Renaissance and the Puritan Age is well perceived in his poetry. He is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation. Take for example, 'the Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity' which is written on a Biblical subject, but glows with imagination and is full of pagan imagery, thus revealing a fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation influences. In his companion pastoral poems 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' that present charming contrasted pictures of man,

nature and art, there is little that is characteristically Puritan. The poet dwells frankly upon the pleasures of romance and rustic sports, upon the beauty of Church architecture and music. However, in *Lycidas* we have a Puritanism which is political and ecclesiastical as well as spiritual and ethical. The religious accent in this elegy is unmistakably puritan. However, in *Paradise Lost*, the greatest English epic, we have the complete fusion of the Renaissance and Reformation elements. Even in *Samson Agonistes*, Milton applies the form of classical art to the treatment of a Biblical subject. This is the reason that it is said that 'Milton is both a belated Elizabethan and a fervent disciple of the Reformation.'

Self Check Exercise 2

- 1) a) The activities in 'L'Allegro' include: Ritual banishing of melancholy, invoking mirth, welcoming mirth, inviting mirth to bring personified friends, 'sometime walking', speaker straightway eyeing new pleasures, shepherds meeting for lunch, bells and dancing in a local village, Robin joining with others in unending toil of rural life, leaving at dawn, the villagers going to bed, feasting and revelry in cities, delights offered by Mirth, etc.
- b) The activities in 'Il Penseroso' include: dismissing joy from imagination, ritually banishing vain joys and folly and invoking a Melancholy goddess, Melancholy claiming her heritage with the Roman pantheon, the speaker walking in evening under moon, hearing curfew bell, moving indoors, sitting by a quiet fireside for bellman's charm or staying up late to reading and studying philosophy; arrival of morning - sombre, raining and windy - and the speaker walking to woods and declaring to Melancholy "I with thee do chose to live".
- 2) a) The figures associated with 'L'Allegro' include: melancholy, Mirth/Euphrosyne and her divine parents Zephyr (west wind) and Aurora (dawn), her personified friends - Jest, Jollity, Hebe (youth), Sport and Laughter along with the mountain nymph Liberty, "sometime walking" (presumably the speaker), the ploughman, milkmaid, mower, shepherd, Mab, Friar, Hobgoblin, Robin Goodfellow, etc.
- b) The figures associated with 'L'Allegro' include: Melancholy, joys, folly, the Roman pantheon, Melancholy's parents Saturn and Vesta, her companions - Peace, Quiet, Fast, Leisure, Retirement, Liberty, Philomel (nightingale), Musaeus (father of priestly poetry), Orpheus in underworld or Chaucerian Squire's tale, or "sage and solemn" Spenser and the Muse.
- 3) a) **What actually happens in L'Allegro':** The speaker ritually banishes melancholy and invokes Mirth/Euphrosyne. He first welcomes Mirth, the daughter of Zephyr (west wind) and Aurora (dawn). Mirth embodies time of day the poem celebrates, and is connected with May rituals (fertility, community), and flowers. The speaker invites her to bring her friends - Jest, Jollity, Hebe (youth), Sport and Laughter along with the mountain nymph Liberty or Freedom. Amidst the multiplicity of sound, we have a subtle hint of "sometime walking", presumably the speaker. He is listing all the things he'd do if he joined the crew. The 'something' also walks by the ploughman, milkmaid, mower, shepherd, all about to, or actually at, work. The speaker straightway eyes new pleasures: landscape,

mountains, brooks, rivers, towers (country estate). The shepherds meet for lunch. We see a local village, on a holiday, where we have bells and dancing all day. Tales done, the villagers eventually go to bed. On the other hand, we have the picture of cities' pleasures: social life, people, ladies, beauty, city marriages, feasts, revelry and masques. The speaker is requested to be immersed in the poetry and the pleasures that Mirth is able to produce. In the last two lines we are told that these are the delights, if Mirth can give them, that would make speaker join her.

- b) **What actually happens in 'IL Penseroso'**: The speaker dismisses joy from his imagination. He ritually banishes vain joys and folly and invokes a Melancholy goddess, veiled in black. He links Melancholy to holy, divine, saintly wisdom garbed in devotional colours and refers to her parents solitary Saturn and Vesta. He also talks about her companions: Peace, Quiet, Fast, Leisure, Retirement, Contemplation and the bird Philomel (nightingale) with her sweet and sad music. The speaker walks in evening under moon. He hears curfew bell (8 o'clock) as well as over sullen roar of distant waves on rocky beach. As weather (air) does not permit, he moves indoors, by a quiet fireside for bellman's charm or stays up late to read and study, as Milton did as a youth. The speaker is found reading philosophy. He is found studying all night. Then arrives the morning - sombre, raining and windy and the speaker walks to woods in contemplation. At the end of his reverie on poetic Melancholy, the speaker invokes the Muse's song; he imagines that his Muse will reward his studious devotion to her by revealing a heavenly visions. Finally, he declares "I with thee do chose to live".
- 4) a) Life style presented in 'L' Allegro': L' Allegro is "the happy person" who spends an idealized day in the country and a festive evening in the city. 'L' Allegro', thus, celebrates Grace Euphrosone and is playful. It extols the active and cheerful life, while depicting a day in the countryside as well the pleasures of the city life. It explores the ideal pleasures appropriate during day time, various comedic plays and performances. There the lilting pitch of crowing roosters and deep singing of larks. All these make the environment very cheerful and add to the romantic life style depicted in the poem. The pleasures offered by Mirth in a way seduce the speaker to accept to live with Mirth.
- b) **Life style presented in 'Il Penseroso'**: Il Penseroso is "the thoughtful person" whose night is filled with meditative walking in the woods and hours of study in a "lonely Towr." 'Il Penseroso' depicts a day spent in contemplation and thought. In fact, the melancholic mood is idealised. There is no room for imagination or for vain joys and folly. The speaker invokes a melancholic mood with which the speaker wanders through an urban environment. He walks in evening under moon, listening to curfew bell, sullen roar of distant waves on rocky beach. Then if weather (air) does not permit, he moves indoors, by a quiet fireside for bellman's charm or stays up late to read and study. In his pursuits, he devotes his time to philosophy, to allegory, to tragedy, to Classical hymns, and, finally, to Christian hymns that cause him to be filled with a vision. Impressed with the pleasures of Melancholy the speaker declares "I with thee do chose to live".

- 5) 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' explore and contrast the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles. Both these life styles are important and they in fact complement each other. However, if I am to choose between the two, I would prefer the life style presented in 'Il Penseroso'. The reason is that the life without meditation and thoughtfulness is no life at all. Mirth no doubt has a very significant role in man's life. However, it is meditation that gives meaning to life. Hence, like the speaker of 'Il Penseroso', I too will like to devote my time to study and contemplation to be filled with a vision.
- 6) 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles. The life style in 'L'Allegro' is playful, celebrating Mirth and extolling the active and cheerful life. 'Il Penseroso', on the other hand, emphasises a solitary scholarly life celebrating a melancholic mood. However, we read these poems carefully, we shall find that for a balanced life, we need both. Naturally, we notice a sort of progression from the pleasures found in 'L'Allegro' with the pleasures found within 'Il Penseroso'. That is why several critics have noted that that "[w]hat one poem twists, the other untwists" in an unending cycle of what might be called "dissonant companionship" (Finch and Bowen 18). Barbara Lewalski has very rightly observed that 'Il Penseroso' along with 'L'Allegro' "explore and contrast in generic terms the ideal pleasures appropriate to contrasting lifestyles... that a poet might choose, or might choose at different times, or in sequence". In short, both life styles complete each other.

Self Check Exercise 3

- 1) A sonnet is a poetic form consisting of 14 lines. There are two major types of sonnets – one, Italian type (Petrarchan) sonnets divided into two stanzas of eight and six lines; another, English type (Shakespearean) sonnets divided into three quatrains (a stanza of four lines) and a couplet (two lines). Milton's sonnets, or poem, are composed in Petrarchan style, but in iambic pentameter, similar to William Shakespeare's sonnets. However, John Milton differs from his contemporaries and his literary idols in choice of topic for poems. While other poets wrote primarily about love or God, John Milton chose more pedantic topics, such as politics, or friendships he enjoyed, or even personal crises. 'On the Late Massacre in Piedmont' is a sonnet of Italian type. At the very outset, Milton forcefully evokes the slaughtering of "pious" people as a tragic act. And in the sestet there is reference to "the Babylonian woe" which is very significant. Many Protestants of Milton's time identified the Catholic Church with Babylon and the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation. So what these lines seek to emphasise is that when one believer dies for his or her faith, a hundred more will take his or her place. Their deaths have transformed the image of Piedmont from a bone-covered rigid and cold mountain range to a fertile field. Milton's sonnet does not follow the Shakespearean sonnet form. Instead, it follows the ABBA, ABBA, CDCDCD rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme changes in the third quatrain, and the poem reveals who is behind the massacre: the "Triple Tyrant," a reference to the Pope with his triple crown.
- 2) Milton's sonnets, or poem, are composed in Petrarchan style, but in iambic pentameter, similar to William Shakespeare's sonnets. Milton's present sonnet (which is also known as sonnet 18) follows an iambic pentameter rhyme scheme with ten syllables per line consisting of 14 lines. You will observe that Milton's sonnet does not follow the Shakespearean sonnet form. Instead, it

follows the ABBA, ABBA, CDCDCD rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme changes in the third quatrain, and the poem reveals who is behind the massacre: the “Triple Tyrant,” a reference to the Pope with his triple crown. Milton’s emotion and his poetic form remain under control, even as his passion or emotions threaten to break through. Each line has a perfect five beats within.

- 3) ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’ is a sonnet which is inspired by the massacre of Waldensians in Piedmont. The theme of the sonnet is usually understood to be sorrow for the victims and anger at the forces that were responsible for the massacre. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the prayer to ‘Lord, &c’ on behalf of the persecuted protestants was not entirely without effect. For, Cromwell exerted himself in their favour. However, on a serious note, the poem is an address to God and not to the perpetrators of the massacre. Milton emphasises in the poem that God should be blamed for the occurrence of the massacre because He allows the event to happen even though He has direct intervention in it. One can say that the poem prophesies the one action that can justify God’s ways to His faithful.

Self Check Exercise 4

- 1) ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’ is Milton’s eighth sonnet and it is remarkable for its political overtones. The poem’s appeal is to the readers’ imagination. It invites readers to imagine that the poet pins this sonnet to his door to protect his property during a military attack. Here is the touch of political reality. Milton, like most in London in 1642, expected the King’s forces to attack the city. We can say that Milton designs this sonnet as a plea for special protection for poets in time of war. In its gesture, the poem alludes to Alexander the Great, who is said to have spared the house of the poet Pindar during his invasion of Thebes. It is because of this political association of the poem that several critics such as Barbara Lewalski are of the view that this sonnet “inaugurates the political sonnet in the English tradition”.
- 2) ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’, Milton’s eighth sonnet, has a quite straightforward structure. It is written in the conventional iambic pentameter and follows a rhyming scheme of *abba abba dedede*. It would have been more normal for the final two lines to have had an ‘ff’ rhyme scheme and to act as a couplet which concludes and summarises in some way the content and meaning of the poem – this is a technique that had been much used by Shakespeare. Milton avoids this technique and gives the feeling of life continuing into the future, an unknown future to be sure without a specific end point.
- 3) ‘When the Assault was intended on the City’, Milton’s eighth sonnet was believed by many to be a ‘serious joke’. The reason is obvious. Milton, here, imagines himself at his home in London at a period when it might have been attacked by King Charles I and his army. And so he intends to write this poem on a piece of paper and to keep it pinned to the outside of the door. This is supposed to act as a means of an appeal to spare the life of the poet who cowers inside. The supposed model for doing this is Alexander the Great’s sparing of the poet Pindar during the seizure of Emathia. It is Alexander who is given the title ‘Emathian Conqueror’ in the poem. That this poem is a ‘serious joke’ becomes clear when we try to answer why a poet should be spared by an invading army more than any other person. It may be

argued that the poet is a talented person who might act as a valuable resource for the invader. However, the fact remains that in a situation of civil war and revolution, the seizure and control of the means of production of ideas would be an important part of the struggle. Elimination of an opposing voice (if it could not be suborned) would be important to Charles and his supporters. In that sense, then, it would be more sensible for Milton to hide himself away as a non-exceptional person whom the invaders would not bother to hunt or kill rather than proclaim his importance. Hence, it is right to say that the poem is a 'serious joke'.

UNIT 5 JOHN DONNE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 John Donne: Life and Works
- 5.3 Poem: The Sun Rising
 - 5.3.1 Glossary
 - 5.3.2 Discussion
 - 5.3.3 Appreciation
- 5.4 Poem: The Anniversary
 - 5.4.1 Glossary
 - 5.4.2 Discussion
 - 5.4.3 Appreciation
- 5.5 Poem: The Relic
 - 5.5.1 Glossary
 - 5.5.2 Discussion
 - 5.5.3 Appreciation
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Suggested Reading
- 5.8 Answers to Self-check Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be reading three poems of John Donne, a leading metaphysical poet. On reading this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the features of the metaphysical school of poetry;
- appreciate the salient features of the poetry of John Donne;
- understand the stylistic achievements of John Donne; and
- understand the popularity of John Donne with modern poets.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

John Donne is the most influential poet of the Metaphysical School, a name that was given by Dr. Johnson in the eighteenth century. It was a disparaging christening in as much as it was meant to suggest a major drawback of the poetry that Donne and his followers wrote. In *Lives of the Poets* Dr. Johnson commented: *the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions.*

It can be seen that there is little association of this poetry with metaphysics, a subject that enjoyed a high rank in the classical learning. Dr. Johnson only meant that the poets pretended to be learned.

Succeeding Shakespeare and Ben Jonson immediately, John Donne wrote a poetry of love which clearly breaks from the Elizabethan courtly and pastoral tradition. The lover addresses neither a princess nor a lady of rank who is virtually unapproachable nor does he relate himself to a shepherdess living in idyllic landscape, away from the

din and bustle of a city. She is rather a person who reciprocates the lover, is of the same social class and has been on terms of real intimacy. There is a genuine earthly touch about this kind of love. Shorn of loftiness and vague imaginative touches, the poems articulate feelings of fulfilment or frustration that can be shared by common men. The bold physicality of approach makes the experience of love more concrete and human. It is not an experience of the distant ages in a remote diction; it is an everyday experience given in startling words and idioms.

What is very striking is the fact that despite private circulation – Donne's poems were not published in his lifetime – his writings could have almost a mass following as every poet of the seventeenth century is seen imitating his attitude and style of expression.

It is the style which basically provoked Dr. Johnson's censure; but it was this that was actively imitated by Donne's contemporaries. A major characteristic of this style was its colloquialism, its closeness with the spoken language of London of its time. What Ben Jonson used in his satirical plays is here as a vehicle of poetry, creating an immediate bond with the readers. In a sense this kind of writing was a revolt against Elizabethan diction, its tenderness and selectiveness. Lines like *Busy, old unruly Sun, Go and catch a falling star* were somewhat harsh and unpoetic and yet they created a tone of conversation, natural and familiar.

Being an ecclesiastical figure himself, Donne also wrote religious poems in which again his non-conformism is evident. Instead of writing in a humble devoted manner, he chose to express his doubts and apprehensions, even his sinfulness so candidly that it altered the texture of religious poetry. However, it was seen by his contemporaries as an honest representation of human predicament, of the fundamental situation of being in sin and aspiring for the grace of God at the same time. This was later on termed as tension between flesh and soul – a motif that recurs in the works of George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan.

A curious fact about Donne is his influence on T.S. Eliot who credited him for uniting feeling with thought. Generally, poets are supposed to be concerned with feeling, the emotional response to a situation in which there is little intervention of thinking. But, in Donne and the metaphysical poets T.S. Eliot observed: *a thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility in Chapman there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling which is exactly what we find in Donne.*

What is implied in this remark is the power of poetry to incorporate thought into the framework of feeling so that an experience could be communicated in its totality. The truth is that in any experience feeling and thought are inextricably fused; a poet by emphasizing the one robs poetry of its comprehensiveness.

John Donne therefore should be seen not as an innovative poet, but as a poet who corrected the course of poetry. In the modern age his influence has been very deep both on the writing of poetry and critical thought.

Self-Check Exercise

1) Bring out two important characteristics of Donne's poetry.

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2) Point out the influence of John Donne on his contemporaries.

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3) Who called Donne a metaphysical poet and why?

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4) What did T.S. Eliot appreciate Donne for?

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5.2 JOHN DONNE: LIFE AND WORKS

John Donne was born in a Roman Catholic family in 1572. After the death of his father in 1576, his mother, Elizabeth Heywood, married one Dr. John Syminges. Donne studied in Cambridge and then at Lincoln's Inn. But he had bitter experiences of religious persecution, a fact of his life that turned him into a rebellious thinker. His brother was put to great torture for his religious views and practices. All this left a painful imprint on the mind of John Donne.

By a stroke of good luck, Donne came to enjoy political patronage. He travelled in Spain and Italy and fought against Spain in the company of the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh. At the age of 25 he entered into a diplomatic career as Chief Secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton at

whose house he had opportunity to mix with the high and the mighty of the London society.

Donne’s falling in love with Anne More, the niece of Egerton, ruined his career. He was imprisoned. On release he had to remain content with a country life, making his living as a lawyer.

In 1602 Donne was elected Member of Parliament from Brackley. His financial difficulties were not yet over. But his way with the rich and the influential was further supported by his poetry that was now in circulation among the elite of London. Sir Robert Drury became the chief patron of Donne, for whom he wrote many poems. On acceding to King James’s wishes Donne was ordained into the Church of England. He was awarded an honorary degree in divinity by Cambridge in 1615. In 1621 he was made Dean of St. Paul’s.

In addition to his poetry, John Donne’s sermons have exercised great intellectual appeal. His famous lines from the sermons are: *no man is an island, one equal music* and *for whom the bell tolls*. They have been used by modern writers as titles of their works. Ernest Hemingway chose *For whom the Bell Tolls* as a title of a novel of his. Interestingly, Vikram Seth’s novel is *An Equal Music*.

The years of poverty and uncertainty had a toll on Donne’s health. He is supposed to have died of stomach cancer in 1631.

Major Works

Anniversary	1611
The Progress of the Soul	1611
Anatomy of the World	1611
Holy Sonnets	1613
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions	1624
A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy’s Day	1627

(The above are actually dates of composition given by editors of Donne’s manuscripts)

Self-Check Exercise

1) How did Roman Catholicism affect Donne’s life?

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2) How did Donne become part of the glamorous life of London?

3) Describe the later years of Donne's life.

5.3 POEM: THE SUN RISING

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
 Why dost thou thus,
 Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
 Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
 Late school boys and **sour prentices**,
 Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
 Call **country ants** to harvest offices;
 Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
 10 Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so revered and strong
 Why shouldst you think?
 I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
 But that I would not lose her sight so long;
 15 If her eyes have not blinded thine,
 Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
 Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
 Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.
 Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
 20 And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,
 Nothing else is.
 Princes do but play us; compared to this,
 All honour's **mimic**, all wealth **alchemy**.
 25 Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
 In that the world's contracted thus.

Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.

Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;

30 This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

5.3.1 Glossary

Saucy	: rude, offensive
Pedantic	: academic, teachers
Sour	: having bitter taste, implying people who have become bored by their routine of hard work
Prentices	: apprentices, trainee mechanics
Country ants	: peasants, so called because of their hard work
Mimic	: imitation, a copy (it has a Platonic / Aristotlean echo), to imitate
Alchemy	: a form of chemistry studied in the Middle Ages which involved trying to discover how to change ordinary metals into gold.

5.3.2 Discussion

Let us visualize the situation – the speaker and his beloved are still in bed when the former observes the sun's rays falling on windows and curtains. This provokes his anger. In a sharp rebuke to the sun he says that it has no business to disturb the lovers. Love is not a slave to time and season; the world's time-keeper, the sun, has therefore transgressed its limits by trying to awaken the lovers.

There is significant novelty in this situation to attract and sustain the attention of the reader. With great amusement one hears the mocking tone of the speaker and is almost persuaded of the crime of the sun. The lines that follow make a well-argued case on behalf of the speaker who seems to be quite knowledgeable as well as quite sure of the privileges of lovers.

The speaker asks the sun to mind its business which is to regulate the conduct of late school boys, mechanics, hunters and village farmers. These are the people who should follow the regulations of time. A school boy must get ready for school in the morning, a mechanic should make preparations for his everyday work, a hunter should get ready to accompany the king and equip himself with arms accordingly, and village farmers should do agricultural work demanded by the season. These worldly activities cannot go on in the absence of the sun. Therefore, it is quite logical to ask the sun to supervise the activities of the above-mentioned classes of men.

More boastful claims follow in the next two sections of the poem. The speaker says that he can eclipse the sun by closing an eye of his. But he is not ready to lose the sight of his beloved even for an instant by doing so. Whatever is rich and magnificent in the world – precious spices, gems of the eastern countries or the royal power – they all happen to be there contracted in his bedroom. Finally, he asks the sun to mind its old age and take rest. This it can avail of by forsaking its daily travelling from east to west and showering its beams on the two lovers. There is reversal of the speaker's stand in the last; but it is in the interest of the sun that he makes such a concession.

5.3.3 Appreciation

You should take note of some important features of the language, structure and thematic novelties of the poem.

Donne’s tone is colloquial and deliberately irreverential. Can you see that he is trying to imitate the attitude of seventeenth century scientists who were trying to research planetary motions and were entirely rational and objective in their approach? The sun and other stars were objects of study, not of worship. Donne goes a step further and calls the sun *a busy old fool*, brushing aside all reverence that theology suggested.

Words and phrases like *motions, Indias of spice and mine, all states, alchemy, thy centre, thy sphere* have been taken from astronomy and politics. Not only they connect the audience with contemporary scientific attitudes, they give a new orientation to poetic activity. It is no longer an entry into the recesses of emotions and feelings; it is an interiorization of the external world.

The use of hyperbolic expressions is quite abundant. The defiant mood of the lover is established thereby. The situation of the lovers in the bedroom is in itself quite different from the lover begging a glimpse of the beloved, the staple theme in the Elizabethan sonnets.

The poem is developed as a thesis that proves that the bedroom is the centre of the world. Something of the traditional glorification of love is however still there in Donne’s claim that all wealth and power are perishable; being in love alone gives a joy that is eternal.

The beginnings of a dramatic monologue can be felt in a poem like this where the speaker, in a specific situation of his life, speaks to a silent listener. There is enactment of drama; the changing gestures and verbal attacks create varieties of scenes. The concentration and slow movement of a lyric have been substituted by fast tempo.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Why is the sun called unruly?
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2) Who should the sun wake up?
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3) How could the speaker eclipse the sun?

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4) How is the bedroom the centre of the world?

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5) What are the contemporary political and scientific references in the poem?

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5.4 POEM: THE ANNIVERSARY

All kings, and all their favorites,
 All glory' of honors, beauties, wits,
 The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
 Is elder by a year, now, than it was
 5 When thou and I first one another saw:
 All other things to their destruction draw,
 Only our love hath no decay;
 This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday;
 Running it never runs from us away,
 10 But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my **corse**;
 If one might, death were no divorce.
 Alas, as well as other princes, we
 (Who prince enough in one another be)
 15 Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and ears,
 Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt tears;
 But souls where nothing dwells but love
 (All other thoughts being **inmates**) then shall prove
 This, or a love increased there above,

- 20 When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.
 And then we shall be thoroughly blest,
 But we no more than all the rest;
 Here upon earth, we're kings, and none but we
 Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be;
- 25 Who is safe as we, where none can do
 Treason to us, except one of us two?
 True and false fears let us refrain,
 Let us love nobly, 'and live, and add again
 Years and years unto years, till we attain
- 30 To write threescore, this is the second of our reign.

5.4.1 Glossary

Corse : corpse, dead body

inmates : inhabitants, dwellers

5.4.2 Discussion

Apparently the poem is the celebration of the first anniversary of falling in love, the occasion on which the speaker turns quite philosophical. He has passed a year in love and had an opportunity to follow the movement of time in the world and in the realm of love. It is this dual movement of time that is the subject of the speaker's reflection.

He refers first of all to the important political milestones of the year – the changes in the fortunes of the princes and the kings. He finds that all of them have suffered a change. The sun, the marker of time and change, is also older by a year. And then he turns to the personal phenomenon, the act of falling in love. He finds that there has taken place no loss, no disfigurement, no change – the indications of decay in other substances of the world. Love alone has been above all change. It seems to be constant. Once it has occurred it simply continues to be.

The thought of death amidst this feeling of certitude appears to be out of tune. But it is part of a strategy. And Donne's poems are at once an exercise in argument and a splendid strategy by which the speaker wins the beloved's heart. The issue of death the speaker brings in intentionally only to allay all doubts in the last. At one instant he lets his beloved apprehend – *we must leave at last in death*.

But this is all momentary. He tries to convince that the real grave is the body from which the soul, at the moment of death, will find quick and sure release. Then he announces his programme. As the two alone are real sovereigns between whom there is no chance of breach of trust they should continue to be in love for the next three scores of years.

5.4.3 Appreciation

Now that you have read two of Donne's poems you can better understand what metaphysical conceit is. It is essentially a use of images from diverse worlds, an extended metaphor that combines two entirely different ideas into a single one. In *The Sun Rising* the two Indias, alchemy, sphere, eclipse are geographical and technical images, used in a context of love. In *The Anniversary* the solar movements and the political affairs are juxtaposed against love's constancy. They

create a sequence of arguments and connect things and experiences which are apparently unconnected.

Donne’s interest in politics and science is not merely superficial. The readers of his manuscripts were the highest of the nobility, capable of enjoying the subtlest of references to political plots and intrigues. More importantly they underline Donne’s independent thinking and secular interests.

It would be interesting to see common patterns in Donne’s love-poems. A very important point is the use of unconventional situations – it may be the bedroom scene, celebration of anniversary, a planning of the future, or simply a continuation of a quarrel. An attitude to death also forms part of these poems – in some poems the tone is mocking and satirical, while in some Donne is quite melancholic and yet capable of rising above the fit of sadness to a brilliancy of wit. There is always something unexpected and sparkling in his poems, forcing the readers to be watchful and alert. The line of his argument is simple, almost predictable and yet the conclusions can be hilarious and complex.

Self-Check Exercise II

1) How does the speaker mark the change in a year?

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2) What is unchanged in the opinion of the speaker and how?

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3) What is the speaker’s argument about death?

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4) Summarise the line of argument in the poem.

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5) Note the examples of alliteration, conceit, paradox and hyperbole in the poem.

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5.5 POEM : THE RELIC

When my grave is broke up again
 Some second guest to entertain
 (For graves have learned that woman head
 To be to more than one a bed),
 5 And he that digs it, **spies**
 A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
 Will he not let' us alone,
 And think that there a loving couple lies,
 Who thought that this device might be some way
 10 To make their souls, at **the last busy day**,
 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?
 If this fall in a time, or land,
 Where **mis-devotion** doth command,
 Then he that digs us up, will bring
 15 Us to the Bishop and the King,
 To make us relics; then
 Thou shalt be' a **Mary Magdalen**, and I
 A something else thereby;
 All women shall adore us, and some men;
 20 And since at such time, miracles are sought,
 I would have that age by this paper taught
 What miracles we harmless lovers wrought.

First, we loved well and faithfully,
 Yet knew not what we loved, nor why,
 25 Difference of sex no more we knew,
 Than our guardian angels do;
 Coming and going, we

Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;
 Our hands ne'er touched the seals,
 30 Which nature, injured by late law, sets free:
 These miracles we did; but now, alas,
 All measure and all language I should pass,
 Should I tell what a miracle she was.

5.5.1 Glossary

- spies** : to discover suddenly
the last busy day : Judgment day
mis-devotion : false mode of worship
Mary Magdalen : a prostitute from whom Christ cast out seven devils; she has been painted by Renaissance painters with long golden hairs.

5.5.2 Discussion

The poem is a fine example of the unconventional ways of thinking of John Donne. He imagines here discovery of a long bright hair around the bone of the speaker's corpse in case of digging of his grave. The hair is rightly pictured as a bracelet, an ornament, priceless and indestructible. In fact, the entire thing is a brilliant imaginative exercise that continues in the subsequent lines. The discovery would lead to speculation that the single grave accommodated a lover-couple. Donne contradicts this and says that it could be a device by which – *To make their souls, at the last busy day / Meet at this grave, and make a little stay.*

As on Judgment day, men would be resurrected, this hair would revive not only the speaker but also his beloved and reunite them. It is a very clever way of sanctifying love, of raising it to a Christian scale of values.

The speaker thinks of a second possibility of being discovered in this fashion where heathen practices are in force. In that case the diggers would have this preserved as a relic and would be used as a magical object. The speaker thinks that his beloved may be viewed as another Magdalene, and he as an evil cast out from her body.

The rest of the poem is a marvellous pun on miracle. A miracle is a phenomenon that is beyond common laws of nature and science. In this sense the love affair of the speaker was also a miracle, not merely an earthly phenomenon. He recapitulates his affair from the beginning. *They loved well and faithfully.* The sexual suggestion is not lacking here. But something is in-comprehensible – *yet knew not what we loved nor why.* Love has a physical basis, but there is a transcendental element in it. It is these vague perceptions of transcendence that have been suggested – *perchance we might kiss, these miracles we did.* To love was to go beyond the limits of mortality. And it is in this sense that the affair is a miracle. It is no wonder that the hair of his beloved is on his bone.

5.5.3 Appreciation

Of all the poems written by Donne this one seems to be quite popular. Although it has an argumentative structure like other poems of his, there is a touch of sentiment also in this slight picture of a bright hair about the bone. Whatever Donne may say in its defence, it is truly a bright idea. Something very tender and passionate enters into this

picture. There is in love something very pure and ethereal that transcends time and death.

From a poet who treated love in its physical form or simply as a fashion of the day, it would have required a little devotion to speak of this eternity of love. A study of the holy sonnets of Donne shows that actually there is no break between his love poems and religious poems. Already he was on the way to realize that love opened such areas of sensitiveness to which divine reflections came quite easily and naturally.

Donne’s knowledge of scientific affairs apart, we are impressed by his mastery of ecclesiastical facts which he subjects to an idiosyncratic vision. To bring the judgment and Magdalene’s hairs together, to talk of miracles in a witty fashion and to weave a poem around a slender idea – all this shows a complexity that characterizes his poetry.

Self-Check Exercise III

1) With what new idea does the poem begin?

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2) What explanation would the diggers give?

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3) What alternative explanations does the speaker offer?

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4) What view of love does the poem express?

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5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied:

- the poetry of John Donne, the leading metaphysical poet;
- the three well-known poems of John Donne, noting their stylistic features;
- the influence of John Donne on his contemporaries and also on modern poets.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

For a more detailed study you can refer to the following books:

E. Gosse, *Seventeenth Century Studies*, Oxford, 1883

H.J.C. Grierson, *Crosscurrents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, 1929

R.L.Sharp, *From Donne to Dryden*, Oxford, 1929

P.Legouis, *Donne, The Craftsman*, Paris, 1928

J.B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit*, Cambridge, 1951

5.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) The sun is called so because he has dared to disturb the sleeping lovers.
- 2) The sun should wake up all kinds of workmen. Give details.
- 3) The speaker could do so by closing of his eyes.
- 4) The bedroom is the centre of the universe as only a fixed point can be a centre. The lovers have remained unchanged; everything else has changed its position.
- 5) Consult a history text book for more details.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) The change is reflected in the position of the sun and in the conditions of kings and princes.
- 2) There is no change in the attitude to love.
- 3) Death is inevitable but the speaker believes that the body is a grave from which the soul will get a release in death.
- 4) Consult discussion.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) It begins with the discovery of a lock of bright hair on the bone of the speaker.
- 2) They would think that a couple was lying in the grave.
- 3) There are many alternatives. Consult discussion.
- 4) The poem presents a very exalted notion of love. Consult Appreciation.

UNIT 6 ANDREW MARVELL

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Andrew Marvell: Life and Works
- 6.3 Poem: Thoughts in a Garden
 - 6.3.1 Glossary
 - 6.3.2 Discussion
 - 6.3.3 Appreciation
- 6.4 Poem: To His Coy Mistress
 - 6.4.1 Glossary
 - 6.4.2 Discussion
 - 6.4.3 Appreciation
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Suggested Reading
- 6.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be reading two well-known poems of Andrew Marvell. He shows the influence of John Donne, though he is also different from him.

On reading the Unit you will be able to:

- understand the range of metaphysical poetry,
- understand the distinctive achievement of Marvell whose lucidity of expression is quite appealing.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Andrew Marvell led a distinguished civil life as a teacher, a political activist and as an associate of John Milton. He had an opportunity to spend sometime in the rural countryside, a factor that shaped his poetic interests. There he had time to observe natural phenomena and the life of birds, trees and plants from close quarters. He has written about these things sometimes as a detached observer and sometimes as a person who is privy to their secrets:

*Thus I, easy philosopher
Among the birds and trees confer
And little now to me make wants
Or of the fowls, or of the plants*

He was also influenced by the poetry of Donne. He liked its candour, its bold romanticism and the playfulness of language with which things were expressed. With a little exercise he was able to catch up with the new style. Under Donne's influence he now wrote of love quite frankly – his persuasions of the bashful mistress make a delightful reading; his sensuousness creates a warmth and his arguments have an intellectual appeal.

There is a third element in his poetry – he writes of spiritual experiences which do not fit exactly with his puritan background. There is in them simply a realization of the release that moments of meditation provide to the soul, its distancing from the things corporeal and material and an aspiring after the heavenly and the ethereal.

A simplicity of utterance remained an important feature of all the phases of his writing which was also united by a well-directed growth of emotional life. From acute observations of Nature to romantic exuberances and then to a cultivation of mystical attitude, his journey can be likened to that of W.B. Yeats. Both of them remained rooted to deeply private experiences and yet they explored the spiritual moorings of human life.

Self-check Exercise

1) What are the principal themes of Andrew Marvell’s poetry?

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2) What influence did Donne exert on him?

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3) In what way is he different from other metaphysical poets?

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6.2 ANDREW MARVELL: LIFE AND WORKS

Andrew Marvell was born on March 31, 1621. His father was a clergyman and was later appointed Lecturer at Holy Trinity Church. For two years Andrew Marvell, on graduating from Cambridge University, served as a tutor to the daughter of Lord General Thomas Fairfax.

Andrew Marvell started writing and publishing poems when he was studying at Cambridge. He had interest in the political affairs of England, reflected in his *Horatian Ode* and *Character of Holland*. He had also a long association with Oliver Cromwell and John Milton. Because of his active political life he was

elected Member of Parliament. On restoration of Charles II, he managed to avoid punishment and was re-elected M.P. for Hull in 1661.

Although he continued to write poems when he was travelling in the continent or in a state of retirement, his political interests compelled him to compose essays and pamphlets in prose in which his views are expressed in a satirical view. His important prose works are *The Rehearsal Transposed*, *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England*, *Mr. Smirke or the Divine in Mode*.

He died in 1678, when he was addressing meeting of his constituents in Hull.

Major Works

Horatian Ode	1650
To His Coy Mistress	1652
Upon The Appleton House	1652
Last Instructions to a Painter	1667

Self-Check Exercise

1) Describe the early life of Andrew Marvell.

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2) Describe the political background of Marvell.

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3) What prompted Marvell to write prose?

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6.3 POEM: THOUGHTS IN A GARDEN

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their **incessant** labors see
Crowned from some single herb, or tree,

5 Whose short and **narrow-verged** shade
 Does **prudently** their toils **upbraid**;
 While all flowers and all trees do close
 To weave the garlands of **repose**!

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
 10 And Innocence, thy sister dear?
 Mistaken long, I sought you then
 In busy companies of men.
 Your sacred plants, if here below,
 Only among the plants will grow;
 15 Society is all but rude
 To this delicious solitude.

No white nor red was ever seen
 So **amorous** as this lovely green.
 Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
 20 Cut in these trees their mistress' name:
 Little, alas, they know or heed
 How far these beauties hers exceed!
 Fair trees, wheresoe'er your barks I wound,
 No name shall but your own be found.

25 When we have run our passion's heat,
 Love hither makes best **retreat**.
 The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
 Still in a tree did end their race:
Apollo hunted **Daphne** so,
 30 Only that she might laurel grow;
 And **Pan** did after **Syrinx** speed,
 Not as a nymph, but for a reed.

What wondrous life is this I lead!
 Ripe apples drop about my head;
 35 The luscious clusters of the vine
 Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
 The nectarine and curious peach
 Into my hands themselves do reach;
 Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
 40 Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
 Withdraws into its happiness;
 The mind, that ocean where each kind
 Does straight its own resemblance find;
 45 Yet it creates, transcending these,
 Far other worlds and other seas,
 Annihilating all that's made
 To a green thought in a green shade.
 Here at the fountain's sliding foot,

Early Modern English Poets 50 Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,
 Casting the body's vest aside,
 My soul into the boughs does glide:
 There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
 Then whets and combs its silver wings,
 55 And, till prepared for longer flight,
 Waves in its plumes the various light.

Such was that happy **garden-state**,
 While man there walked without a mate:
 After a place so pure and sweet,
 60 What other help could yet be meet!
 But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
 To wander solitary there:
 Two paradises 'twere in one
 To live in paradise alone.

65 How well the skillful gardener drew
 Of flowers and herbs this dial new,
 Where, from above, the milder sun
 Does through a fragrant **zodiac** run;
 And as it works, th' industrious bee
 70 Computes its time as well as we!
 How could such sweet and wholesome hours
 Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers?

6.3.1 Glossary

Incessant	: never-stopping (in a disapproving tone)
narrow-verged	: having a small area
prudently	: sensibly, carefully
upbraid	: to reproach, to criticize angrily
repose	: the state of rest
amorous	: showing love
retreat	: a place for rest, quiet and prayer
luscious	: having a strong pleasant taste
nectarine	: a round red and yellow fruit
annihilating	: destroying completely
vest	: a clothing worn next to the skin
whets	: increases the desire
Garden-state	: the state when Adam and Eve were in Paradise, free from fears of mortality and sin
Zodiac	: the imaginary area in the sky in which the sun, moon and planets appear to lie and which has been divided into twelve equal parts

- Apollo** : The sun god
- Pan** : the Greek god of shepherds and herdsmen, part man and part goat in appearance
- Daphne** : Zeus transformed Daphne into a laurel-tree to enable her to escape the passionate pursuit of Apollo
- Syrinx** : she was also changed into reeds when Pan chased her

5.3.2 Discussion

The title of the poem is self-revelatory. It is about the thoughts arising in the speaker when he is in a garden. The very situation is such that the speaker enjoys a quietness of mind. There is a scene of natural beauty spread before him which further augments this sense of quietude.

A new set of ideas come to mind in this condition. The thought process starts with a feeling of pleasant surprise, the realization that there is no use going anywhere in quest of peace which is available in such abundance in every corner in a garden. Peace cannot be found in the company of men; it is present in its most charming form in the garden. The poet visualizes peace as a beautiful maiden, good looking and inducing a state of calm.

The garden lies spread before the speaker in an expanse of green, a colour not associated with romance, and yet it arouses romantic ecstasy in him. This is so because his eyes can catch relics of lovers' activities in the garden: they have inscribed their names on the banks of trees. The pleasure is not only of sight; it is one of the saturation of all senses- there is fragrance and also the reaching of ripe fruits and vines into the mouth of the speaker.

From this pleasure there is a further ascent of the mind. For the first time the speaker is aware of the creative powers of mind, its power of creating a new world and also of being firmly concentrated in one attitude. This attitude the speaker names *a green thought in a green shade*. It is very difficult to specify this green thought – it is full of ambiguities, it may be a highly productive thought or it simply may be the habit of mind to take on the colour of the surroundings. A new vista is added to the experience of the speaker when he feels that his soul has flown out of the body and like a bird freed from a cage has taken seat among the branches of a tree of the garden. The soul in the form of the bird starts singing in an ecstasy of freedom. This is actually the culmination of the experience of the speaker. In the garden he first discovered a repose, then a satisfaction of all the senses, and finally a spiritual release. It is logical therefore for him to view the garden as a replica of Paradise, the first seat of man's ancestors. He can understand that in this garden the movement of time and change of seasons can be read only in terms of increasing fragrance and wholesomeness of herbs and flowers.

6.3.3 Appreciation

The most important feature of this poem is its symbolism. There are a number of symbols – garden, green, ocean, bird, flight etc. That these words mean more than what they literally suggest becomes obvious because of their repetition and also because of the context in which they have been used.

The speaker becomes aware of the immense value of the garden only gradually. It is a realization that comes to him in stages of clear apprehension, feelings and

thoughts. In the first stage there is the sense of peace and solitude, a state when the mind is quickened to respond to the beauty of this new environment. There is the second stage of sense-fulfilment, of fruits and vines pouring juices into the mouth of the speaker, instilling a new energy. However, this relish of fruit juices induces a new capacity of contemplation, of becoming aware of the several capacities of mind – of its becoming a repository of all experience, of its power of transcending experience and creating new worlds, and then of cancelling all and being firmly established in an attitude of total concentration. In the last the speaker experiences spiritual freedom – freedom from physicality, mortality and terrestrial restrictions.

There is an interplay of sensuousness and spirituality. To call solitude *delicious* is to communicate a pleasure with which the word is not associated. Solitude is a state of being alone with pleasant thoughts. But in the surroundings of the garden, full of herbs, flowers, fruits and vines, this can naturally become a thing of taste. You should also understand that sensuousness has not been seen as an obstruction; it has been presented as a stage leading to spiritual fulfilment. The suggestion is that it is only when the senses have been properly gratified that man can rise above bodily limitations and aspire for spiritual elevation.

The use of pagan references – Apollo – Daphne, Pan-Syrinx episodes – and of the Biblical story of Paradise create an exciting complexity in the poem. Both of them however emphasize that the herbs and plants of the garden constitute retreat from passion and create ideal atmosphere for realization of the spiritual potential of man.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Why does the speaker call society rude?

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2) What pleasures does the speaker enjoy in the garden?

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3) What functions of the mind does the speaker allude to?

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4) What role of the garden does the speaker talk of?

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6.4 POEM: TO HIS COY MISTRESS

Had we but world enough, and time,
 This coyness, lady, were no crime.
 We would sit down, and think which way
 To walk, and pass our long love's day.
 5 Thou by the Indian Ganges side
 Shoudst **rubies** find; I by the tide
 Of **Humber** would complain. I would
 Love you ten years before the flood,
 And you should, if you please, refuse
 10 Till the **conversion of the Jews**.
 My vegetable love should grow
 Vaster than empires and more slow;
 An hundred years should go to praise
 Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
 15 Two hundred to adore each breast,
 But thirty thousand to the rest;
 An age at least to every part,
 And the last age should show your heart.
 For, lady, you deserve this state,
 20 Nor would I love at lower rate.
 But at my back I always hear
 Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity.
 25 Thy beauty shall no more be found;
 Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
 My echoing song; then worms shall try
 That long-preserved virginity,
 And your quaint honor turn to dust,
 30 And into ashes all my lust:
 The grave's a fine and private place,
 But none, I think, do there embrace.
 Now therefore, while the youthful hue
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
 35 And while thy willing soul **transpires**
 At every pore with instant fires,
 Now let us sport us while we may,
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 40 Than languish in his **slow-chapped** power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Through the iron gates of life:
 45 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

6.4.1 Glossary

rubies	: red, precious gemstones, supposed to preserve virginity
Humber	: the Humber river flows through Marvell's nature town, Hull
conversion of Jew	: to occur, as Christian tradition holds, at the end of history
vegetable love	: love growing abundantly
transpires	: breathes out
slow-chapped power	: slowly consuming

6.4.2 Discussion

The poem is a clever presentation of the *carpe diem* philosophy – the view that the days of youth are short and so should be best used in the enjoyment of pleasures of love. The speaker presents this view before his sweetheart in order to persuade her to accept his proposal without delay since the end of youth is imminent and without youth there is no pleasure.

The satirical vein directed at the poor understanding of the lover is evident in the speaker's reference to the two continents where two rivers, the Ganges and the Humber, flow and maintain the division of the world. The lovers would have been by the banks of the two rivers and would have passed time in waiting if only they had the privilege of control over time. This is the beginning of a tedious argument – of the references to the beginning of the creation, its end and to the recent growth of European imperialism. All these historical stages have been crossed over a long stretch of time. Had the lovers had that much time in their disposal, the speaker would have taken a hundred years to look at her beautiful eyes and two hundred years to gaze at her breasts. All this is in hyperbolic mode, implying its sheer improbability.

The second stanza is downright realistic by contrast. The speaker turns to the vision of the old age and death. The marble body of his beloved would decay and perhaps they could unite only in the moment of death, of dust and ashes. The force of argument is strongest here as the beloved can be easily convinced of the futility of union in this state.

The third and the final stanza restores the brilliance of the scene with which the poem began. The speaker refers to the glowing skin of the beloved, to the fires burning in the cells of the body and suggests that the available time should be enjoyed in love – the only means to defeat time.

6.4.3 Appreciation

Having read the two poems of Andrew Marvell you can see for yourself with what great ease the poet could write poems of two different strains. *Thoughts In A Garden* is celebration of peace, solitude and spirituality; *To His Coy Mistress* is the celebration of youth and beauty in frankly erotic terms.

There reigns over such diversity of theme and style a definite influence of John Donne. He reiterated the power of rhetoric and ratiocination and also of the value of religious urge amidst the sinfulness of human life.

Marvell’s argument is marked by originality and copiousness. He contrasts the amplitude of time that characterizes the slow growth of civilization with the painful short duration of youth. Compared to the developments in the history of the world man’s life is short, and youth is even shorter. But can anything match the glory of youth?

Of the several rhetorical constructions and conceits you should note chiefly – *Time’s winged chariot* and *deserts of vast eternity*. They are perfectly in tune with the hyperbolic opening of the poem. But they are also examples of epigrammatic condensation. Time is flying in a non-stop chariot – a very dynamic image, a powerful suggestion of lack of man’s control over time. The visualization of eternity in the form of deserts stretched before the eyes is not exact as it is suggestive of the intense, hurting pain.

Self-check Exercise II

1) What is the crime of the lady?

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2) What could the speaker have done had they had time in their control?

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3) How does the speaker create a sense of decay and death?

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4) Write a detailed note on the argument in the poem.

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6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied:

- the life and works of Andrew Marvell, noting the affinities between him and John Donne;
- two poems, having two different themes, in which the distinctive contribution of Marvell is well-represented.

6.6 SUGGESTED READING

For a detailed study you can consult the following books on Andrew Marvell:

H.M. Margoliouth, ed *Poems and Letters, 2 Vols*, Oxford, 1927, reprinted 1953

Bradbrook and Lloyd Thomas, *Andrew Marvell*, Cambridge, 1940

H.J.C. Grierson, *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, 1921

6.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Society is a disciplining institution. To call it rude is an example of paradox. Marvell calls society rude since it does not allow man's spiritual growth; it keeps him involved in the affairs of the world.
Elaborate the above idea.
- 2) The speaker enjoys in the garden peace, solitude and gratification of senses. There are pleasures of the initial stage. As he prolongs his stay the garden offers him a moment of release, an opportunity to rise above the limitations of the body.
- 3) Normally, mind is the organ that helps us organize disparate thoughts and experiences in a whole.
But Marvell alludes to a higher power of mind – it has God-like power to create and annihilate.
- 4) Go through Discussion and Appreciation.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) She is indifferent to the speaker's entreaties. In so far as it involves waste of youth, it is a crime.
- 2) The lady would have waited and the speaker would have spent thousands of years simply gazing at her body.
- 3) Consult Discussion.
- 4) Consult Discussion.

Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

II

The Long Eighteenth Century

John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson and Thomas Gray



**School of Humanities
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi**

Block

2

THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

UNIT 7

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 2

THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

No century is longer than any other; still the period of 1660 to 1784 is often referred to as the Long Eighteenth Century. In order to understand the significance of the year 1660 you must have a peep into British history. In **1660** prince Charles of the House of Stuart ascended the throne of England as Charles II. Charles II was son of Charles I (1625 – ‘49), the British monarch and, queen Henrietta Maria sister of the French king. Charles I had been beheaded on 30 January, 1649 at the end of a Civil War. After having been defeated by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester on 3 September, 1651 the then-prince Charles had taken asylum in France. Regarding **1784**, Samuel Johnson the famous lexicographer often called ‘the last of the Romans’ died in that year and brought a period of English literature to a close. It would be a good idea to acquaint yourself with the political history of this period by going through a short history of the British Isles or the relevant entries in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

The first author in this block that you are going to read is John Dryden (1631 - 1700). He, Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744) and others such as Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, the periodical essayists and, Jonathan Swift the author of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) are the preeminent figures of the the **Augustan Age** in English literature. The epithet ‘Augustan’ derives from Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE) the Roman emperor during whose reign poets such as Virgil, Horace and Ovid flourished. The English authors drew frequent parallels between themselves and their Roman counterparts and imitated their works. Oliver Goldsmith (c 1730 – ‘74) in his ‘Account of the Augustan age in England’ (1759) published in *The Bee*, identified the Augustan Age with the reign of Queen Anne (1702 –‘14). The habit of imitating the great authors of antiquity was admirably summed up by Alexander Pope, the greatest poet of this period, in a couplet:

Those RULES of old discover’d, not devis’d,
Are Nature stll, but Nature methodiz’d,

This was a reference to the influence of classical critics such as Aristotle, Horace, Longinus and Quintiliana on the literatures of this period.

A poet such as Samuel Johnson took pride in carrying forward the neoclassical ethos of the age of Dryden and Pope. However, in the works of James Thomson, particularly *The Seasons* (1730), Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770), George Crabbe with his harsh view of life in rural England in *The Village* (1783), Thomas Gray (1716 - ‘71) in *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eaton College* (1747) and the famous *Elegy written in a County Churchyard* (1751) and William Collins (1721 – ‘59) in *Ode to Evening* we discover the rise of an **Age of Sensibility**. ‘Sensibility’ wrote William Callan, ‘is not of course the discovery of the poets of the later eighteenth century; but in the earlier poets it was incidental, in the later ones it is paramount.’ While reading the poems in this block you should bear in mind the slow transition in the literary ethos from Dryden on the one hand to Thomas Gray on the other and its many reflections of that spirit in their poetries.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 7 JOHN DRYDEN:*MAC FLECKNOE*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 JOHN DRYDEN (1631-1700)
- 7.3 MAC FLECKNOE (1682)
- 7.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.5 Suggested Reading
- 7.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine John Dryden's poem *Mac Flecknoe*, a poem which goes beyond critical sniping to a rage at the deathliness of human stupidity. This unit will also discuss briefly the biographical and historical background of John Dryden, the poet. Our intention in this unit is also to show how far whatever Dryden wrote was almost automatically suggested by events in his contemporary life.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will briefly introduce the poet John Dryden, paying special attention to the manner in which his writings were generally conditioned by the historic events of his society. As you already know, John Dryden was appointed Poet Laureate in 1668 and Historiographer Royal in 1670. But on the accession of James II to the English throne, Dryden became a Catholic, and refusing to abandon his new faith after 1688, he was stripped of the Laureateship and other royal appointments. So this unit will highlight the criss-cross of attractions and revulsions that gradually emerged in John Dryden, the man and the poet.

This unit will then go on to examine John Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* (1682) through relevant extracts and see how the poem defines by negatives and discrepancies, undoes epic pretensions by playing with the mock-heroic and lets dullness express itself.

7.2 JOHN DRYDEN (1631-1700)

John Dryden was born at Aldwinkle All Saints, Northamptonshire in 1631. His father, the Rev. Erasmus Dryden, the third son of the Baronet, Sir Erasmus, was Rector of Aldwinkle All Saints. Dryden's mother was Mary Pickering, daughter of the Rector of Aldwinkle All Saints. Both the Drydens and the Pickerings were well-to-do families with Puritan leanings and sympathies. Young Dryden was educated at Oundle and later at Westminster under the famous headmaster Dr. Busby. His first attempts at verse composition date from this period. He then proceeded to Cambridge and, after a stay of four years, left the university in 1657 and settled in London about the same year.

Arriving in London, Dryden devoted himself to politics and literature. He became secretary to Sir George Pickering, his cousin on his mother's side who stood high in the Protector, Cromwell's favour. The death of Cromwell in 1658 gave Dryden his first opportunity to appear in the limelight by publishing a copy of verses to deplore the event. *The Heroic stanzas on the Death of the Lord Protector* was published early in 1659, and it inaugurated the poetical and political career of John Dryden.

After nearly eighteen months of anarchy, Charles II who had been spending much of his exile in France, where he was attracted towards French Literature of the day dominated by a brilliant set of writers, actuated by Classical models, ascended the throne of England. Nothing daunted the young poet John Dryden who quickly got over his discomfiture by ingratiating himself with the Royalists and by bringing out his *Astraea Redux* (a poem on the happy restoration and return of the sacred majesty Charles II) in 1660, in sharp contrast with his very recent eulogy of and Elegy on the death of Cromwell produced in so indecent a haste. This was followed by a coronation poem *A Panegyric on the King's Coronation* (April 1661) and the *Epistle to Lord Chancellor* (New Year's Day 1662). All these early poems were written in heroic couplets.

In November 1662, Dryden became a Member of the newly founded Royal Society which began to exact from all the members "a close, naked, natural way of speaking". But Dryden was foremost a poet, and, in poetry, he was primarily a craftsman. This "man of letters" was also a dramatist, critic and translator, and his life was largely controlled by economic exigencies and dependence on the Court. He cherished as his first ambition as an artist the making of good verse.

It is worth noting here that nearly everything that Dryden wrote was almost automatically suggested by events in his contemporary life. The first group of Dryden's poems was brought to a close by *Annus Mirabilis* (1667)

In 1670, Dryden was made Historiographer Royal in the Court of Charles II. After some time, he found in the aims and methods of the Whig intriguers a subject made to his hand. Soon the big question arose: who should succeed Charles II? The anti-Catholics led by the brilliant and unprincipled Shaftesbury tried to set aside the succession of James, the Catholic brother. The infamous Popish plot of Titus Oates and the tragi-comic attempts to place Monmouth on the English throne were incidents in the conspiracy. But before the final collapse, Shaftesbury was arrested and sent to the Tower. These were the circumstances in which Part I of *Absalom and Achitophel* appeared in 1681. Part II of *Absalom and Achitophel*, of which only a little is Dryden's (much is Nahum Tate's) appeared in 1682. Both were anonymous. By giving his satire a Biblical setting and presenting Monmouth and Shaftesbury as the rebellious Absalom encouraged by the wily counsellor Achitophel respectively, Dryden caught the ears of the Whig and Puritan citizens of London who had been Shaftesbury's strongest supporters. Yet another invective against Shaftesbury came out in *The Medal* in 1682.

Dryden's contribution of some two hundred lines of abuse in Part II of *Absalom and Achitophel* is worth commenting on very briefly. The sketches of the "Heroically mad" Elkanah Settle (Doeg) and of Thomas Shadwell (Og) have a vicious palpability about them. Shadwell (?1642-1692) became the object of Dryden's satire purely as a result of his political affiliations, but more directly as

a result of an increasing unfriendly rivalry in the theatre. Shadwell's operatic adaptation of *The Tempest; The Enchanted Isle* of 1679 was a particularly galling success. Dryden's bitter distaste for the flippancy and shoddiness of Shadwell's work as a poet reached its peak in the lampoon which he had begun in 1670s but published only in 1682, *Mac Flecknoe or A Satyr upon the True Blue Protestant Poet, T.S.*

Dryden's Odes and lyrical poems of the last fifteen years (1685-1700) form the last outstanding group. Here we have inspiration struggling to express itself, with an attention to style that is often too minute. *The Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687) composed in the heat of his recent conversion to Roman Catholicism, is pure in form and has a communicative musical beauty and sweetness.

But his conversion from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism at a time when the latter was in favour at the Court, laid him open to suspicion as to his sincerity. And in 1688 when King James II was driven from England by the Great Revolution which gave the throne to the Protestant William and Mary, Dryden lost all his offices including the Laureateship and the pension that had been conferred on him of late. Ironically enough, Thomas Shadwell was appointed as the new Poet Laureate.

But still undaunted, John Dryden in his sixty seventh year once more devoted himself to classical literature which inspired him to undertake translations from the Latin of Juvenal, Perseus and Virgil – all of which opened up fresh sources of income. In 1697 came out *Alexander's Feast* containing his best known poems including the *Second Ode*. His modernizations of Chaucer and Boccaccio under the title of *Fables*, and the translation of the Classics were two pieces of literary work (published in 1699) which were particularly suited to his temperament. Six months after the publication of his *Fables*, Dryden died in 1700.

Thus Dryden's literary achievements were enormous. And though in verse the next generation was to improve upon his model, the model was actually his. He is almost as strong in blank verse as he is in his chosen instrument, the heroic couplet. In non-dramatic verse, he has scarcely left any kind of poetry unattempted except the epic proper. His satirical and didactic poems can be regarded as among the most successful attempts ever made to conduct arguments and deliver attacks in a polished metrical form. A clear thinker, he has pondered over the rules of his art, and has sought them in the works of the ancients, in those of the French. His various essays, prefaces, epistles, prologues and epilogues inaugurate in England modern literary criticism, and propound, not without certain strong personal touches the doctrine of Classicism then in the opening stage.

Self-check Exercise I

- a) Name the poem which inaugurated the poetical and political career of John Dryden.

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b) When did Dryden become a Member of the newly founded Royal Society?

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c) Discuss briefly the literary activities of John Dryden in his sixty seventh year.

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7.3 MAC FLECKNOE (1682)

Dryden’s *Mac Flecknoe*, or *A Satyr upon the True – Blue Protestant Poet, T.S.* (1682) is a scathing personal attack on a former friend Thomas Shadwell, who had replied to Dryden’s *The Medal* (1682) in a poem with scurrilous abuse. Richard Flecknoe, who died in 1678, was an Irish priest and a poetaster who wrote a little good verse and a great deal of bad. This Richard Flecknoe was a stock subject for satire, and even Andrew Marvell wrote against him as early as 1645. Evidently, this suggested Dryden’s choice of Flecknoe, as he noticed how natural was the connection between a bad poet and Flecknoe. Dryden and Shadwell of the Tory and the Whig parties respectively came to satirize each other, and Flecknoe’s name was found handy because of the contemporary references to him by poets and critics. Flecknoe finds his true heir in his son (Mac) Shadwell, a loquacious Celtic bard, irrepressible and irresponsible.

Mac Flecknoe is constructed in a mock-heroical epical framework with all the solemnity and grandeur in the Homeric style. Its scheme is highly ingenious. It can be interpreted as perhaps the best expression of the various forces which served to diffuse the satiric spirit in the age of Dryden. In his ready-made frame, Dryden displays all the classical power of form. Helped by a clear and well thought out plan, the framework of his construction acquires almost an architectural quality. It has all the features of a mock-heroic fantasy. The development is masterly from the very opening in which the aged monarch of Dullness, Flecknoe, is represented in the epic manner down to the closing speech in which he enjoins his heir – the supreme dullard (Shadwell) to trust nature and not labour to be dull. The poem begins:

“All human things are subject to decay,
 And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey.
 This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
 Was called to empire, and had governed long.
 In prose and verse was owned without dispute through all the realms of
 Nonsense absolute.”

The elevated tone of the opening couplet crashes once Flecknoe emerges as a fatuous Augustus having “governed long in prose and verse” but “through all the realms of Nonsense absolute”. Flecknoe, a prince among fake poetasters, realizes that he has ruled too long and decay is only the order of the day and the call of Fate cannot be ignored.

And this aged prince does at length debate to settle the succession of his state (of “Nonsense absolute”) and ponders which of all his sons was fit to reign and wage immortal war with wit. He decides:

“Shadwell alone my perfect image bears
 Mature in dullness from his tender years;
 Shadwell alone of all my sons is he
 Who stands confirmed in full stupidity”.

Thus Shadwell comes out as the right choice for the succession because he is described as “Mature in dullness from his tender years” and “stands confirmed in full stupidity. Dryden’s personal satire against Shadwell can be noticed here as coming out very directly.

The poem next goes on to describe the site of the coronation which has been selected to be in the disreputable quarters of London:

“Amidst this monument of vanished minds;
 Pure clichés the suburban muse affords.
 Here Flecknoe as a place to fame well known
 Ambitiously designed his Shadwell’s throne.”

So the place chosen for the coronation is also presented with a sarcastic venom that actually delights the readers. The monument chosen has been described as one of “vanished minds”, and the place chosen is praised mockingly and ironically as one well known to fame, and Flecknoe is presented as ambitiously designing his Shadwell’s throne. The mock-heroic tone of Dryden can be noticed running through such descriptions. This monument chosen in the disreputable quarters of London is actually only a wretched Nursery – a training centre for actors, where only stupid dramas are the usual favourites.

The next few lines describe the actual coronation of Shadwell:

“The hoary prince in majesty appeared
 High on a throne of his ownlabours reared,
 At his right hand our young Ascanius sat
 Rome’s other hope and pillar of the state
 His brows thick fogs instead of glories grace,
 And Lambent dullness played around his face”.

The “hoary Prince” is Flecknoe, and the throne is made up of his own books. The reference to Ascanius takes us back to the relationship between Ascanius and Aeneas. Shadwell is to Flecknoe what Ascanius was to Aeneas. The gently brilliant “dullness” playing around Mac Flecknoe’s face once again reinforces the satiric thrust on Shadwell.

In the next few lines, come Flecknoe’s unusual prophecy and unique benediction. The father invokes God’s blessings on the son and visualizes a bright future for him in a prophetic mood:

“Then thus continued he: My son advance
Still in new impudence, new ignorance.
Success let others teach, learn thou from me
Pangs without birth and fruitless industry”.

So Shadwell is given an unconventional benediction in which he is blessed to advance still in “new impudence” and “new ignorance”. Flecknoe desires Shadwell to learn from him how to produce “pangs without birth” and “fruitless industry”.

The poem ends with Flecknoe suddenly and dramatically disappearing, thus putting an abrupt end to the entire procedure. The last few lines of the poem give almost an anticlimactic bang:

“He said, but his last words were scarcely heard,
For Bruce and Longville had a trap prepared.
And down they sent the declaiming bard,
Sinking, he left his drugget robe behind
Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.
The mantle fell to the young prophet’s part
With double portions of his father’s art”.

Bruce and Longville are actually characters in Shadwell’s *Virtuoso*, and the drugget robe is made of coarse woollen cloth. So as the “declaiming bard” (Flecknoe) says his last words to the young prophet (Shadwell), the father’s mantle falls on Shadwell with a double bang.

Thus *Mac Flecknoe* can be regarded as a highly entertaining though abusive attack on Shadwell, light in weight, concentrated in its venom, devastating in its capacity to hit by means of its satirical thrusts charged with a vision after the epic manner. Dryden, in *Mac Flecknoe*, emerges in a relaxed, uninhibited mood attacking Shadwell in a burlesque lampoon which is purely, even at times surrealistically, comic. *Mac Flecknoe* can be rightly considered as a striking example of the mock-heroic in English Literature.

Self-check Exercises II

a) Comment critically on the dramatic significance of the following lines:

“All human things are subject to decay
And when Fate summons, monarchs must obey”

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b) Explain briefly what Dryden suggests in the following lines:

“Shadwell alone my perfect image bears
Mature in dullness from his tender years”

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c) Comment briefly on the following lines:

“The hoary prince in majesty appeared
High on a throne of his own labours reared”

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d) Discuss briefly the satiric effect created by the following lines:

“Success let others teach, learn thou from me
Pangs without birth and fruitless industry”

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e) Discuss the dramatic importance of the following lines:

“The mantle fell to the young poet’s part
With double portion of his father’s art”

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7.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied and understood the important phases of John Dryden's personal life, political and literary career. We have also observed how Dryden's writings were generally conditioned by the historic events of his society. We have also examined closely John Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* through relevant extracts from the text and seen how the mock-heroic epical framework has been artistically used by Dryden to write the lampoon on Shadwell. *Mac Flecknoe* finally emerges as a striking example of the mock-heroic in English Literature.

7.5 SUGGESTED READING

Hammond, Paul, *John Dryden: A Literary Life*(London, 1991)

Hopkins, David, *John Dryden*(Cambridge, 1986)

King, Bruce, *Dryden's Mind and Art*(Edinburgh, 1969)

Kinley, Helen, *Dryden: The Critical Heritage*(London, 1971)

Sanders, Andrew, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*(Oxford University Press, 2004)

Winn, James Anderson, *John Dryden and his World*,(New Haven, 1987)

7.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- a) *The Heroic Stanzas on the Death of the Lord Protector* inaugurated the poetical and political career of John Dryden.
- b) Dryden became a Member of the newly founded Royal Society in November 1662.
- c) In his sixty seventh year, Dryden devoted himself to classical Literature which inspired him to undertake translations from the Latin of Juvenal, Perseus and Virgil.

Self-check Exercise II

- a) These opening lines of Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* are dramatically significant because they set the mock-heroic tone of the entire poem. These lines set up a very serious tone in which all the human beings are described as mortal, and the ponderous truth that when the call of Death comes, even Kings have to respond. But the elevated tone of the couplet crashes once *Flecknoe* emerges with his "realms of absolute Nonsense". This couplet, therefore, raises the expectations of the readers which are later on only denied ironically
- b) Dryden exposes the confirmed stupidity of Shadwell in these lines when *Flecknoe* is described here as positively admitting that of all his sons it is only Shadwell who resembles him perfectly as being dull and stupid right from his tender years.

- c) These lines describe ironically the actual place where Shadwell is to be crowned as the successor of Flecknoe. The “hoary prince” is Flecknoe himself, and throne prepared for Shadwell is one made up of the books of Flecknoe. So the mock-heroic satire of Dryden continues even here. The “prince”, “majesty” and “throne” conjure images of grandeur which do not match the satiric story being narrated.
- d) The satiric effect created here by these lines is indeed pungent. Here Shadwell is given a unique, unconventional blessing in which Flecknoe desires him to learn from him how to produce “pangs without birth” and “fruitless industry”. In a way, Flecknoe is actually asking Shadwell do be fruitless in his literary creations.
- e) The dramatic importance of these concluding lines is immense. Contrary to the opening couplet which started on a highly serious note, this concluding couplet ends with an anticlimactic bang. The last words of Flecknoe are scarcely heard as he suddenly falls in the trap-door which opens below his feet. But as Flecknoe falls, his woollen garment is carried upwards by a sudden gust of wind. This is the ‘mantle’ that falls on Shadwell, and he inherits from his father a stupidity which is two times more than that of Flecknoe. The stupidity of Flecknoe has only been doubled in the absurdity of Mac Flecknoe, and the lampoon *Mac Flecknoe* has reached its culminating point.

UNIT 8 ALEXANDER POPE: AN ESSAY ON MAN

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)
- 8.3 *AN ESSAY ON MAN* (1733-4)
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Suggested Reading
- 8.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will analyze and explicate Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* (1733-4), through relevant extracts from the text, a poem in which the poet attempts with cheerful optimism to "vindicate the ways of God to Man," arguing that "WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT". This unit will also comment briefly on the biographical and historical background of Alexander Pope, and try to discover the subtle connections between Pope the man and the artist in the context of the age in which he was writing.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce Alexander Pope in the biographical, literary and historical perspective and try to examine the relationship between the man and the artist. As you already know, the age of Alexander Pope is sometimes called the classic Age and sometimes the Augustan age of English Literature. It may be well to explain the senses in which these terms should be understood. The epithet 'Classic' we may take to denote, first, that the poets and the critics of this age believed that the works of the writers of the classical antiquity (really of the Latin writers) presented the best models and the ultimate standards of literary taste, and, secondly, in a more general way, that, like these Latin writers, they had little faith in the promptings and guidance of individual genius, and much in laws and rules imposed by the authority of the past. Pope expressed the principle of classicism in the following lines in his *Essay on Criticism* (1711):

"Tis more to guide than spur the Muse's stand;
Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed"

So the Muse had to be guided, the fury had to be restrained, and the speed had to be checked by a masterly control.

The other epithet "Augustan" was applied in the first instance as a term of high praise, because those who used it believed that the Age of Augustus was the golden age of Latin literature, and, therefore the age of Pope was regarded as the golden age of English literature.

This unit will then go on to analyze and respond to Pope's *An Essay on Man* with the help of suitable extracts from Epistle I, and see how the poem illuminates and explains the premises of contemporary moral philosophy in the form of popular and accessible verse. The four Epistles that make up *An Essay on Man* variously explore the relationship of human kind to the Newtonian universe ("a mighty maze! But not without a plan") and they offer observations on human limitation, passion, intelligence, sociability, and the potential for happiness.

8.2 ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)

Alexander Pope was born in London in 1688 – the year of the Revolution and of John Bunyan's death. His father, a prosperous linen – draper, was a Roman Catholic; and on account of his religion, Pope was excluded from the public schools and universities. As a result, he picked up most of his knowledge in a haphazard way. So although Pope read widely, he never became an accurate scholar. This want of sound learning somehow creeps into his work. Extraordinarily precocious (in his own famous words, he "lisp'd in numbers for the numbers came") he published his *Pastorals* in 1709 and his *Essay on Criticism* in 1711.

Pope lived with his parents first at Binfield, on the skirts of Windsor Forest, and then at Chiswick, till the completion of his translation of Homer, the financial success of which enabled him in 1719 to buy a house at Twickenham. At Twickenham, he passed the rest of his life, and there he died in 1744.

Pope's poetic career neatly falls into three periods – an early and a late period of original work divided by a period (1715-25) of translation. To the period before 1715, belong a number of miscellaneous poems of which the most important are *Pastorals* (1709), short poems on spring, summer, autumn and winter, closely fashioned on Virgil; *Essay on Criticism* (1711) which is a remarkable performance for a man of twenty one, and *Windsor Forest* (1713) in which the landscape is copied out of the Greek and Latin poets. In this period also comes out Pope's mock-heroic poem *The Rape of the Lock* which can certainly be regarded as his masterpiece. It appeared first in 1712, and later in an enlarged form in 1714. The characteristic miniaturizing effect of Pope's use of the mock-heroic has been related by many critics to the fact that he was only four feet and six inches' tall and suffered from the curvature of the spine.

The translation of Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – the former made single-handed and the latter with much help from the others represents the labour of Pope's second period. The translation of *Iliad* was published in instalments between 1715 and 1720; and the translation of *Odyssey* appeared in 1725-26.

After the publication of his translation of Homer, Pope confined himself almost wholly to satire and didactic poetry. The principal works of the third period are: *Four Moral Essays* (1731-35), *The Dunciad* (1728), *An Essay on Man* (1733-34), *Imitations of Horace* (between 1733 and 1737), and *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1742).

The Dunciad, a long and elaborate satire on the 'dunces' – the bad poets and pretentious critics of Pope's day, used the mock-epic machinery and was obviously influenced by Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*. But the inspiration for *The*

Dunciad came also from Pope's innumerable quarrels with all sorts of people. In 1742, Pope produced the *New Dunciad* in continuation of the earlier poem, and in 1743 this was added as Book Four to a new edition of *The Dunciad*, the hero being changed from Theobald to Colley Ciber, the Poet Laureate.

In *An Essay on Man*, a poem in four Epistles (containing portions only of a larger plan that was never carried out), Pope undertakes a defence of the moral government of the universe and an explanation of the physical and moral evil in it, on the optimistic postulate that "WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT". It must be noted here, however, that Pope was not a philosopher and he had no natural leanings towards philosophy, and no training for it. It was simply the influence of others, and especially of his Deistic friend Lord Bolingbroke, which induced him to dabble in it. Consequently, *An Essay on Man* has been branded by many critics as confused and even self-contradictory. But the poem contains many passages which are justly famous and are still often quoted for their rhetorical beauty and power.

Pope's last years were spent in a rented riverside house at Twickenham, where he played out his own version of the Horatian retirement. Imitating a landed gentleman, he indulged in a mock-heroic, miniaturized version of landscape-gardening, designing a whimsically romantic "grot" in a tunnel which linked the water front with his back garden. Before his death, Pope received his last sacrament, never having abandoned his catholic religion.

The artist Alexander Pope has been critically evaluated as the embodiment of the kind of intelligence which was currently known as "wit", and which the classical age cultivated and admired. He has also been regarded as a marvelously clever and adroit literary craftsman. The neat, compact, antithetic and epigrammatic style of writing which was the Classical ideal, assumed perfection in his hands. He is also considered to be the most consummate master of the classic couplet, which he trimmed of some of the licences which Dryden is supposed to have permitted himself. Pope's perfect models were followed with great fidelity by all other poets who used the couplet till the early nineteenth century.

Self-check Exercise I

a) Explain briefly the principle of classicism as enunciated by Alexander Pope.

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b) State briefly why Pope was excluded from the public schools and universities.

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c) Sum up in one sentence the main theme of Pope's *The Dunciad*.

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8.3 AN ESSAY ON MAN: EPISTLE I (1733-4)

In his *An Essay on Man*, Alexander Pope turns to the philosophical which he hoped would crown his poetic career. Pope published *An Essay on Man* anonymously so as to wrong-foot his enemies, who were not sure whether to condemn it as Pope's, or to praise it as superior to anything Pope could have achieved. In four heroic-couplet Epistles addressed to the Tory politician Lord Bolingbroke, Pope attempts with cheerful optimism to "vindicate the ways of God to man", arguing that "WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT". Pope expounds the medieval and Renaissance concept of a "chain of being", with its primitive blend of theology and natural philosophy, and reconciles it uneasily with the modern empirical science of Sir Isaac Newton. The work becomes a kind of handbook of popular Enlightenment notions throughout Europe and has been extensively translated.

An Essay on Man expresses the Deist view that God can be apprehended through nature, and not only through revealed scriptures Epistle I makes significant observations on the nature and state of Man with respect to the universe. The poem introduces man as a "mighty maze" but not without a plan. The Epistle now goes on to vindicate the ways of God to Man:

"Say first, of God above, or Man below,
What can we reason, but from what we know?
Of Man, what see we but station here,
From which to reason, or to which we refer?
Thro' worlds unnumber'd thro' the God be known,
'T is ours to trace Him only in our own."

Thus the poet places God above, and Man below, and goes on to argue that our reasoning can be based only on knowledge. God is known through numberless worlds, but Man has to find Him only in his own. Thus a strong relationship is already established between God and man.

The poem goes on to unfold yet another aspect of Man by observing:

“Presumptuous Man! the reason wouldst thou find,
Why form'd so weak, so little and so blind?
First, if thou canst the harder reason guess,
Why form'd no weaker, blinder and no less?
Ask of the mother earth, why oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?”

Pope suggests here a natural plan in the ways of God to Man. He begins by denouncing Man as a “presumptuous” being, complaining about his being made weak and small. The poet asks Man to take comfort in thinking why he has not been made weaker and even smaller. Mother Earth, representing Nature, may be asked why oak trees have been made taller than the weeds they are out to protect. So Pope is already suggesting an optimistic view of life by observing that Man should remember that it could have been worse. Besides, Nature provides a particular size to every object for a certain purpose. And it is in the nature of the things that they should be exactly what they are made to be.

Pope next switches on to yet another stand by observing pointedly:

“Respecting Man, whatever wrong we call
May, must be right and relative to all”

Pope's optimistic stand is still further strengthened here when he asks the “respecting” Man to understand that whatever we may call wrong must be right and only relative to everything else. The modern scientific principle of relativity has been artistically suggested here. “Presumptuous” Man has now become “Respecting” Man, and the tone of Pope has mellowed down, and the optimistic point of view of Pope spills over into yet another positive realization:

“Then say not Man's imperfect, hear'n in fault;
Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought:
His knowledge measur'd to his state and place;
His time a moment, and a point his space.
If to be perfect in a certain sphere,
What matter, soon or late, or here or there?
The blest today is as completely so
As who began a thousand years ago.”

So Man is brought out as “as perfect as he ought” to be. Man is not imperfect. Man should realize that he may be perfect in a certain sphere of life, and once one has achieved success it does not matter whether he had become successful soon or late.

Now God comes out as seeing everyone with an equal eye:

“Who sees with equal eye as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall
Atoms or systems into rain hurl’d
And now a bubble burst, and now a world”

Here the poet suggests strongly that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, as He sees with an equal eye a hero dying or a sparrow falling. For God, atoms hurled in the rain making the world come to pieces are as important in the eyes of God as a bursting bubble.

So the poet now advises philosophically:

“Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar,
Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore,
What future bliss be given, not thee to know,
But gives that Hope to be thy blessing now
Hope springs eternal in the human breast
Man never Is, but always To be blest.”

The poem now achieves a new philosophical dimension in which Man is advised to be hopeful but with humility. He should only wait for the profound teacher Death and praise God. Man does not know what future happiness is actually waiting for him. Hope is a blessing which springs forever in the body of Man, and blessings are in fact, only waiting to be showered on him.

And Epistle I ends with the following piece of advice:

“Cease then, nor ORDER Imperfection name,
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Know thy own point: This kind, this due degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heav’n bestows on thee.
Submit – In this, or any other sphere
Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear....
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason’s spite
One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.”

These concluding lines of Epistle I give a brilliant poetic expression to a mood of enlightened confidence which characterizes the period. An optimistic philosophy of life is enunciated when Pope observes that Man’s proper happiness actually depends on what he complains about. Man should try to have a self-realization and submit to the Divine will and accept that whatever is, is right.

So *An Essay on Man First Epistle* artistically prepares us for the opening lines of the second Epistle:

“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.”

Indeed, with great craftsmanship, Pope really vindicates the ways of God to Man in his *An Essay on Man Epistle I*, and artistically presents Man as a “mighty maze” but “not without a plan”. The poet admits that Man is befogged by Pride and wrong Reason. But in spite of these hurdles one truth is obviously clear,:
WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.

Self-check Exercise II

a) Explain briefly the message you get from the following lines:

“Thro’ worlds unnumber’dtho’ the God be known,
‘T is ours to trace Him only in our own”

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b) Comment critically on the main idea of the following lines:

“Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?”

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c) Discuss briefly the significance of these lines:

“Respecting Man, whatever wrong we call
May, must be right and relative to all”

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d) Explain briefly what Pope suggests here:

“Then say not Man’s imperfect, heav’n in fault;
Say rather, Man’s as perfect as he ought.”

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e) Comment briefly on the message which comes in the following lines:

“And spite of Pride, in erring Reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.”

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8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have examined Alexander Pope in the biographical, literary and historical perspective and moved on to a critical discussion of his poem *An Essay on Man* with special reference to Epistle I. On the basis of some important extracts from the actual text, we have discovered that Pope’s *An Essay on Man* puts across an optimistic philosophy of life which is that WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.

8.5 SUGGESTED READING

Erskine – Hill, Howard, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London, 1983)

Fairer, David, *Pope’s Imagination* (Manchester, 1984)

Fairer, David (ed), *Pope: New Contexts* (London, 1990)

Mack, Maynard, *Pope: A Life* (New Haven, 1985)

Porter, Roy, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1982)

8.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

a) According to Alexander Pope, the poetic Muse had to be restrained rather than provoked. This meant that little faith was to be put on the prompting and guidance of individual genius and much on the laws and rules imposed by the authority of the Past.

- b) Pope was excluded from the public schools and universities because he was a Roman Catholic.
- c) *The Dunciad* is a long sative on the dunces – the bad poets and pretentious critics of Pope’s day.

Self-check Exercise II

- a) The message Pope gives here is that though God is known through many worlds, Man has to find Him only in his own. So the best way to know God is through man’s self-realization.
- b) The poet suggests that it is only a natural process of the earth that the oak trees should be taller and stronger than the weeds they are made to protect.
- c) These lines are significant because here Pope politely addresses Man as self-respecting, and assures him to note that whatever may appear to be wrong to him is actually only right, and a matter of sheer relativity.
- d) Pope here gives an optimistic message when he affirms that Man should not consider himself as imperfect, and that Heaven has made any mistake. Actually, man is as perfect as he ought to be.
- e) This is the final optimistic message of *Epistle I of An Essay on Man* where Pope concludes that in spite of all the human Pride and defective Reason, **WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT**

UNIT 9 SAMUEL JOHNSON: *THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-84)
- 9.3 *THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES* (1749)
- 9.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.5 Suggested Reading
- 9.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to examine Samuel Johnson's poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes* as an unrelenting exposition of the precariousness of secular hope as compared to patient submission to the will of God. This unit begins with a brief survey of the biographical background of Samuel Johnson exploring how the artist gradually triumphed over the man who was marred by ill-health right from his childhood.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will briefly introduce Samuel Johnson the individual, paying special attention to the obstacles he had to face starting from his childhood days. The humbly born Samuel Johnson, the struggling young writer, the setter aside of aristocratic patrons, and the maker of his own way in the world was to emerge, somewhat incongruously, as the challenger of what was seen as the smug, tidy, enclosed, and elitist values of an age that had put too much store by the power of human reason.

This unit will then examine *The Vanity of Human Wishes* and observe how far the poem can be said to be having a Christian stoicism which seeks to deflate human pride.

9.2 SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-84)

Samuel Johnson, critic, poet, lexicographer, essayist, was born in 1709 at Lichfield to elderly parents, and his childhood was marred by a tubercular infection which affected his sight and hearing, and his face was scarred by scrofula, then popularly called "King's Evil". He was educated at Lichfield Grammar School and in 1728 he went up to Pembroke College, Oxford. His studies at the university were, however, cut short by poverty, and in 1729 he returned to Lichfield, adversely affected by melancholy and depression.

After a brief period as a schoolmaster at Market Bosworth, Johnson moved to Birmingham, where he contributed articles (now lost) to the *Birmingham*

Journal. In 1735, he married Elizabeth Porter, a widow twenty-two years senior to him in age, and using her money attempted to start a school at Edial, near his home town. The school quickly failed, and in 1737 Johnson set off to London accompanied by one of his pupils, the actor David Garrick. Lack of a university degree hindered Johnson from pursuing a profession, and he determined to make his living by writing.

Edward Care, the founder of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, allowed him to contribute articles, and for many years, Johnson made his living by hack writing. His *Parliamentary Debates* were published in this magazine, and were widely accepted as authentic.

It was in 1738 that the publication of his poem *London* revealed his literary abilities. However, the project of compiling the *Dictionary of the English Language*, which was to occupy his next nine years, testifies to Johnson's concern to produce saleable material. Lacking a patron, he approached Lord Chesterfield with the plan. But the Lord gave him such a snub that brought out to light the decline of the patronage system.

In 1749, the poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes* was published and Johnson's play *Irene* was staged by David Garrick, who had much earlier accompanied him to London after the failure of his school in 1737. In 1750, Johnson began the twice-weekly periodical *The Rambler* to add to his income and also as a relief from the *Dictionary* work.

The death of his wife in 1752 returned Johnson to the melancholy and depression he had suffered after leaving Oxford. However, he continued to contribute to periodicals, and in 1755 the *Dictionary of the English Language* was published, bringing him wide acclaim which also included, by the intervention of friends, an honorary doctoral degree from Oxford. From 1758 onwards, he wrote the *Idler* essays for the *Universal Chronicle*, and in 1759 *Rasselas* was published. In 1762, a crown pension relieved some of the financial pressure, and the following year he met James Boswell, who was to become his biographer.

In 1765, Johnson's spirits were much lifted as he made the acquaintance of the Thrales, and over the next few years he spent much time at their home in Streatham. In 1765, his edition of Shakespeare, for which he wrote a special *Preface* appeared.

In 1777, Johnson began working on *The Lives of the Poets*, (1779-81), at the request of the booksellers. In 1784, estranged from his friend Mrs. Thrale by her remarriage, Johnson died in his home in Bolt Court.

Thus it is evident from this survey of the life and works of Samuel Johnson that genius ultimately triumphs. The child who was marred by ill health, grew up into a man of letters whom many years later Thomas Carlyle described as a new kind of hero who stood apart from the narrow confines of his time and had an essentially romantic awareness of the long sweep of cultural history. To Carlyle, Johnson was not the sum of the virtues of his time but the heroic redeemer of its faults. The decades that immediately succeeded Johnson's death in 1784 were to witness cataclysmic political and cultural changes in Europe. The Revolution of France in 1789 was to turn the world upside down. It was to bring about not only a series of radical reassessments of the British constitutional

settlement of 1688, but, perhaps more significantly, a profound re-estimate of a rational world-order and of a culture which drew its inspiration from a perception of divine symmetry.

Self-check Exercise I

a) Explain briefly why Samuel Johnson’s studies at the University were cut short.

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b) Name the poem which first revealed Johnson’s literary abilities, and state when exactly it was published.

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c) Who described Samuel Johnson as a new kind of hero who stood apart from the narrow confines of his time?

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9.3 THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES (1749)

Samuel Johnson’s *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) has been written in imitation of the tenth satire of Juvenal. But in Johnson’s poem Juvenal’s acerbic laughter is tempered by a Christian stoicism, seeking to deflate human pride and bring out the folly of human aspiration. Johnson’s interest in the moral art of biography is evident in his exploration of the examples of blind confidence challenged by time or destiny. Cardinal Wolsey falls from his “full blown dignity”; imagined aspirants to knowledge, longevity and beauty find themselves caught out by the inevitability of change and decay, and the once victorious Charles XII of Sweden meets defeat, exile, ignominy and an obscure death.

The poem's unrelenting exposition of the precariousness of secular hope as compared to a patient submission to the will of God is conveyed through an adjectival precision and a steadily reverberant rhythm.

The Vanity of Human Wishes begins with:

“Let Observation, with extensive view,
Survey mankind from China to Peru;
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,
O’erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate,
Where wavering man, betray’d by venturous pride,
To tread the dreary paths without a guide”.

So the poem begins with a serious reflection in which Observation is asked to survey man from China to Peru, giving the poem a wide comprehensive sweep right from the start. The poem then focusses its attention on the “anxious toil”, “eager strife” and the “busy scenes of life”, and then highlights the abstract attributes of “hope”, “fear”, “desire” and “hate” and the clouded “maze of fate” afflicting the “wavering man”. But this perplexed man is himself betrayed by Pride and therefore tries to make his progress on the paths of life without a “guide”. This lack of a proper guide takes the reader to the very heart of the matter, for this “guide” has to be discovered as the poem unfolds itself.

The poem then goes on to expose other problems that Man creates for himself:

“How rarely Reason guides the stubborn choice
Rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant voice.....
But scarce observed, the knowing and the bold
Fall in the general massacre of gold....”

So in these lines, the poem reinforces the vanity of human wishes by stating very clearly that Man is stubborn with Reason guiding him only rarely. Man's “bold hand” and “suppliant voice” scarcely ever listen to Reason. The “general massacre of gold” tempts even the knowing and the bold people.

The poem next goes on to further highlight the fundamental human weaknesses by observing:

“Unnumber’d suppliants crowd Preferment’s gate,
A thirst for wealth, and burning to be great;
Delusive Fortune hears the incessant call;
They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall,
On every stage the foes of peace attend,
Hate dogs their flight, and insult mocks their end”

The poem has now come out with a full exposure of the “anxious toil” and “eager strife” of Man mentioned in the opening lines. Numberless suppliants crowding for preferment and wealth, “burning to be great” with Fortune delusively only listening to the unending calls bring out the “anxious toil” of Man in great detail. Human beings are now described as mounting, shining and then evaporating and falling, crushed with defeat. The human aspirations are always facing the

enemies of peace, with hatred and insult always creating problems. Human wishes indeed are vain.

But the poem ends not on a note of despair, but with a promise of hope after raising certain overwhelming questions:

“Where, then, shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
Must dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?”

Johnson has here raised his queries about the “human wishes”. He questions regarding the place where Hope and Fear will find their objects. He worries whether “dull suspense” will continue to contaminate the “stagnant mind”. He is genuinely concerned about the helpless Man, and he questions whether Man will just keep on rolling down the twists and turns of Fate.

But the answers to all such questions are given in the concluding lines of the poem:

“But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.
Safe in His power, whose eyes discern afar
The secret ambush of a specious prayer,
Implore His aid, in His decisions rest,
Secure whate’er He gives, He gives the best....
Obedient passions, and a will resign’d,
For love, which scarce collective man can fill,
For patience, sovereign o’er transmuted ill;
For faith, that, panting for a happier seat,
Counts death kind Nature’s signal of retreat
These goods for man the laws of Heaven ordain,
These goods He grants, who grants the power to gain;
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find.”

So the poem ends with Johnson imploring Man to leave the measure and the choice to Heaven itself. Man should feel safe by submitting himself to Divine power. The vanity of human wishes becomes clear in yet another way in which the poet advises the human beings to submit their wishes to the wishes of God. Man should only implore the help of God, rest content with “His decisions” and feel secure that whatever “He gives, He gives the best”. The human passions should be obedient and the human will should be resigned. Love should fill all humanity and patience should be held supreme, faith should pant for happiness, and Death should be accepted only as kind Nature’s signal of retreat. And all these positive virtues have actually been ordained by the laws of Heaven. God grants these positive virtues, and gives Man the power to achieve them. And together with these positive goods the Wisdom of Heaven calms the human mind and gives the happiness which Man has not yet been able to find anywhere else in the world.

Thus *The Vanity of Human Wishes* can be considered as a poem which begins with an exposure of how vain human wishes actually are. But the poem ends on a note of optimism and final submission to the Heaven. This patient submission to

the will of God gives the final answers to all the overwhelming questions raised earlier in the poem. Hope and Fear ultimately find their objects. And dull suspense does not have any chance any more to corrupt the stagnant mind. Helpless Man in sedate ignorance does not have to roll darkling down the torrent of fate any more. He has only to submit to the Divine will with the positive goods like “love”, “patience” and “faith”: Calmness of mind will be given by “celestial wisdom”, and the human being will be blessed with a happiness, yet unknown.

Self-check Exercise II

a) Explain briefly the following lines:

“Where wavering man, betray’d by venturous pride
To tread the weary paths without a guide”

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b) Comment critically on the main idea of the following:

“How rarely Reason guides the stubborn choice
Rules the bold head, or prompts the suppliant voice

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c) Discuss briefly the significance of the following lines:

“Unnumber’d suppliant, crowd Preferment’s gate
A thirst for wealth, and burning to be great.

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- d) Explain briefly what the poet suggests here:
“Where then, shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
Must dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?”

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- e) Explain the message which comes in these lines:
“But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice
Safe in His power, whose eyes discern afar.”

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9.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have broadly surveyed the life and works of Samuel Johnson and then focussed our attention on his poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes* examining it as an exposition of the precariousness of secular hope as compared to the patient submission to the will of God. We have also observed that the poem concludes with the positive message that it is best to leave everything to Heaven and feel safe in His power. The human wishes (with all their subtle shades of “anxious toil”) are indeed vain. It is only the Divine will that ultimately matters.

9.5 SUGGESTED READING

Bate, Walter Jackson, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1955)
Grundy, Isobel, *Samuel Johnson and the Scale of Greatness* (Leicester, 1986)
Hudson, Nicholas, *Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988)
Rogers, Pat, *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1993)
Turbeville, A.S., *Johnson’s England* (Oxford, 1952)

9.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- a) Samuel Johnson's studies at the University were cut short by poverty.
- b) The poem *London* published in 1738 revealed Johnson's literary abilities
- c) Thomas Carlyle described Samuel Johnson as a new kind of hero standing apart from the narrow confines of his time.

Self-check Exercise II

- a) In these lines, the poet projects the vanity of human wishes, by focusing his attention on Man who seems to be in a wavering condition, betrayed by his own pride. He makes his difficult journey without a guide.
- b) The poet here brings out the basic problem of the human being which is that he only rarely is guided by Reason in making his choice which becomes a stubborn one. Reason is not given the chance to rule Man's bold decision or his voice.
- c) These lines comment critically on the numberless people who crowd to get their personal promotions, forever thirsting for money and social prestige.
- d) The poet here raises certain overwhelming questions and asks where exactly will Hope and Fear find their objects, and must the stagnant mind continue to be corrupted by dull suspense.
- e) The message that comes here is optimistic, and the poet concludes his poem here by observing that Man should surrender everything to the will of Heaven and feel secure in the Divine power who sees everything everywhere.

UNIT 10 THOMAS GRAY: *ELEGY* *WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY* *CHURCHYARD*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Thomas Gray (1716-71)
- 10.3 *ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD* (1749)
- 10.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.5 Suggested Reading
- 10.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to analyze and explicate Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* in the biographical, historical and literary perspective. The unit will also discover how far Gray's *Elegy* reflects the first rumblings of Romanticism through the choices the poet makes regarding the selection and treatment of his theme in this poem.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will begin with providing some brief biographical information about Thomas Gray, paying special attention to the important poems he wrote during his literary career. And then the unit will come straight to examine Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and bring out the special literary merits of the poem. The discussion of the poem will be based entirely on selected extracts from the poem, and an attempt will be made to see how far the *Elegy* reveals Romantic features which are later built on by William Wordsworth and other Romantic poets.

10.2 THOMAS GRAY (1716-71)

Thomas Gray, the sole survivor of twelve children, a man of poor physique himself, was born in Cornhill, London in 1716. His father, a scrivener, was mentally unbalanced, and Gray was brought up by his mother who sent him to Eton where he made friends with Horace Walpole. Gray went on to Peterhouse, Cambridge, and gained a high reputation for his Latin poetry, though he failed to take a degree.

In 1739, he embarked on a tour of the continent with Walpole, but in 1741 they quarreled, and Gray returned alone. He turned to the study of law and began writing a tragedy *Agrippina* which remained unfinished. The death of Richard West, a close friend from his Eton days in 1742 precipitated a period of poetic

activity, and Gray's first publication was the *Ode On a Distant Prospect of Eton College* written in 1742 but published anonymously by Dodsley in 1747.

From 1742, Gray lived in Peterhouse and later Pembroke College, Cambridge, except for a period (1759-61) in London where he pursued his studies in the British Museum. Relations with Walpole were soon restored, and it was the death of Walpole's cat which inspired Gray to write the delightful mock-heroic poem *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat* (1748)

In 1742, Gray also started writing *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* while staying with his mother and aunt at their retirement home in Stoke Pages. The poem was carefully revised over a long period and was eventually published by Dodsley in 1751, achieving instant recognition as a masterpiece. It quickly went through fifteen editions and was often pirated.

With this poem, a great change appears, and many features make it historically very important. There is first the use of Nature which, though employed only as a background, is still handled with fidelity and sympathy. There is next the churchyard scene, the twilight atmosphere, and the brooding melancholy of the poem, which at once connects it with one side of the romantic movement – the development of the distinctive romantic mood. The contrast between the country and town – the peasant's "simple life" and the "madding crowds' ignoble strife" – is a third particular which should be noted. Finally, in the tender feeling shown for the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" and the sense of human values of the little things that are written in the short and simple annals of the poor we see poetry, under the influence of the spreading democratic spirit, reaching out to include humble aspects of life hitherto ignored. Thus despite the poet's continued use of the Augustan trick of personification and capital letters, the *Elegy* marks a stage in the evolution of Gray's poetic genius.

In 1761, Gray wrote a number of poems reflecting a mixture of bookish scholarship and romantic primitivism very characteristic of the period: *The Fatal Sisters*, *The Descent of Odin* (An Ode from the Norse tongue), *The Triumphs of Owen* (A Fragment from the Welsh) were all published in 1768 in Dodsley's collected edition of his works: *Poems by Mr. Gray*. These poems were filled with a new conception of the poet as an inspired singer rather than an accomplished artist – in the terms of the eighteenth century antithesis, an "enthusiast" rather than a 'wit'.

In 1768 Gray was appointed Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, though he never delivered a lecture.

In 1769 he travelled to the Lake District and his *Journal* published posthumously in 1775 relates his reactions to the sublime scenery. His *Letter* reveal a profoundly learned but witty and entertaining personality.

Thus Thomas Gray can be rightly considered as a scholar who produced little but precious little English poetry. What he wrote was not only exquisite in quality and finish but also curiously interesting as a kind of epitome of the changes which were coming over English literature of his time. He began with versified pamphlets in Pope's manner, passed on through conventional lyrics to the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and ended with experiments which were fundamentally romantic in character.

It will be apt to conclude this part of the unit with Gray's brief prose epitaph for his mother's tomb in Stoke Pages Churchyard in which he noted that she was "the tender careful mother of many children: one of whom had the misfortune to survive her". It is a typically self-pitying comment, one accentuated by the fact that when Thomas Gray died in 1771 and was himself buried in the same tomb no further reference was made to him on the stone. In sharp contrast, the monument later erected to his memory in Westminster Abbey, immediately under that to Milton, bore a more assertive quatrain by his friend William Mason (1725-97):

"No more the Grecian Muse unrivall'd reigns,
To Britain let the Nations homage pay;
She felt a Homer's fire in Milton's strains,
A Pindar's rapture from the Lyre of Gray"

Self-check Exercise I

a) Give the title of the first publication of Thomas Gray.

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b) Name the mock-heroic poem written by Thomas Gray inspired by the death of Walpole's cat.

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c) Explain briefly how far you regard Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* as making a great change in English poetry.

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10.3 *ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD (1751)*

Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* has been considered as the most enduringly famous, fluent and diversified of all 'graveyard' poems. And the term *Elegy*, as you already know, has been defined as any poetic meditation on the death of an individual or upon death itself. Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* broadly meditates on the obscure destinies of the unknown and undistinguished villagers buried in the country churchyard and culminates in the celebrated comment on unfulfilled greatness; "village Hampdens, "mute inglorious Miltons and "guileless Cromwells", who have in the village had both their talents and their potentials confined by a lack of opportunity.

But Gray is not making a political protest on behalf of the meek or the downtrodden. He is merely siding with the passive placidity of rural rhythm and rustic verse. The poetry of sophistication complements the unsophisticated rhymes on the grave-stones. The *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* intermixes the poetry of country retirement with a self-reflective nocturnal musing on the egalitarian nature of mortality.

The unnamed "hoary headed swain" at the end of the poem becomes a memorializer of an inconspicuous bard. He speaks not in "uncouth rhymes", but in the smooth closing quatrains which form an epitaph, and renders the melancholy poet one with the dead villagers. So the *Elegy* finally focuses on a solitary poet, a man of "humble birth" and a stranger to "national glory, to fortune, and to fame,"

Now let us look more closely at the poem itself. *The Elegy* begins with a quatrain that sums up the very mood and thematic content of the whole poem:

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me"

The curfew mournfully tolling the end of a day, the lowing herd winding slowly over the lea, the tired ploughman plodding his way home – all go to build up a dark and dismal mood that artistically prepares one for the dark thoughts about to come in the *Elegy*. And when the world is left over to darkness, the poet mentions himself in identification with this natural scene of a dusk being overtaken by the darkness of the night. The poet has introduced himself right in the very opening quatrain as a part of the natural landscape. Such an identification between the poet and the natural landscape is later to emerge in the Romanticism of William Wordsworth.

The *Elegy Written in a country Churchyard* next goes on to the Churchyard itself:

"Beneath those rugged elms, that few tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep".

The hamlet's churchyard is described as one with objects of Nature significantly pointed out. "The rugged elms", and the "yew tree" provide the necessary shade, and the churchyard has near it the mouldering "heap of turf". The rude ancestors of the village have been buried in this simple churchyard hemmed in with various objects of Nature. The forefathers are described respectfully as sleeping in their narrow cells.

But the *Elegy* soon switches over to the active Past of these "sleeping Forefathers" when it asserts:

"Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrows oft the stubborn glebe has broke
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!"

The poet makes the readers aware of the pleasant lives of these peasants whose Past had been made up of energetic activities. Their sickles had yielded so many harvests, their furrows had often broken the stubborn earth, the woods had surrendered so easily to their powerful strokes and how happy they had been moving over with their teams in the fields.

In the next quatrain, the poet champions the cause of these once active peasants by observing:

"Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destinies obscure
Nor Grandeur bear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor"

The poet wants that ambitious people should not mock at the useful actions the farmers had performed as well as at their homely pleasures and obscure destinies. Grandeur must not disdainfully smile at the short and simple stories of these poor people. So the *Elegy* now begins to talk about the unknown and unsung heroes of the village:

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire
Hands that the rod of empire might have sway'd
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre
But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll
Child Penury repress'd their noble rage
And froze the genial current of the soul"

Here the poet brings out these "rude Forefathers" as people who could have achieved a lot had they been given the opportunity. Poverty stifled the flowering of these geniuses, and so the poet laments that perhaps in this very neglected spot is buried a person who could have achieved greatness had he been given the chance to get knowledge.

So in the country churchyard are buried simple villagers who could have become great had they been given the chance. These sleeping "rude Forefathers" might have been great only if they had been given the opportunity.

And the poem ends with the poet identifying once again with the village scene, as he had done much earlier in the opening quatrain. Now the poem observes:

“Haply some hoary-headed swain may say
Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Breathing with hasty steps the dews away
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn
One morn I miss’d him on the custom’d hill
Along the heath, and near his favourite tree”

The curfew tolling the end of the parting day of the opening quatrain of the *Elegy* has now been replaced by the “peep of dawn”, and the “hoary headed swain” mentions the poet being seen at the “peep of dawn”, “breathing with hasty steps” to “meet the sun upon the upland lawn”. The earlier dusk has been replaced by dawn now, but the reference to the mourning continues when the hoary headed swain laments:

“The next with dirge, due in sad array
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn”.

The poet now imagines himself as having become a part and parcel of the same churchyard when he projects the swain reporting on ‘the poet’ as dying and being carried with a funeral song through the same country churchyard. The *Elegy* ends with an Epitaph that artistically sums up the entire mood and thematic pattern of the whole poem:

“Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A Youth, to Fortune and to Fame unknown
Fair Science frown’d not on his humble birth
And Melancholy mark’d him for his own.”

This Epitaph sums up the *Elegy* and shows the poet himself imagining as having come near the “rude Forefathers” he had been referring to in the earlier part of the poem. This “poet” in the Epitaph is unknown to Fortune and Fame, is of humble birth and is marked for Melancholy. The poet here imagines himself as having becomes one with the other humble people sleeping in the narrow cells of the country churchyard.

So, Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* does prove to be a literary masterpiece.

Self-check Exercise II

- a) Comment critically on the dramatic significance of the following lines
“The ploughman homeward plods his weary way
And leaves the world to darkness, and to me”.

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b) Explain briefly the following lines:

“Oft did their harvest to the sickle yield,
Their furrows oft the stubborn glebe has broke”

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c) Comment critically on these lines:

“Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure.”

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d) Explain briefly what the poet suggests here:

“But knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll”.

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e) Explain briefly the importance of the following lines:

“Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A Youth, to Fortune and to Fame unknown”

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10.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have observed closely Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* in the biographical and sociological context of the poet. We have also seen that although Gray wrote very few poems, his poetry carries significant seeds of the changes that were taking place in the literary scene. Our study has also revealed that Gray's *Elegy* comes out with distinctive Romantic features that were later developed still further by the other Romantic poets like William Wordsworth.

10.5 SUGGESTED READING

Barrell, John, *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840*, (Cambridge, 1980)

Butler, Marilyn, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background* (1760-1830), (Oxford, 1981)

Gosse, Edmund William, *Gray* (London, 1902)

Sanders, Andrew, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, (Oxford University Press, 2004)

Sells, A.L; *Thomas Gray: His Life and Works*, (London, 1980)

10.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- a) Thomas Gray's first publication was *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*.
- b) The mock-heroic poem written by Thomas Gray inspired by the death of Walpole's cat was *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat*.
- c) Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* marked a great change in English poetry because Nature here is handled with fidelity and sympathy, and the churchyard scene connects it with one side of the romantic movement creating a distinctly romantic mood.

Self-check Exercise II

- a) These lines are dramatically significant because they set the basic thematic tone of the poem. The dark mood comes when the exhausted peasants are described as plodding their way homeward, leaving the natural scene of dusk to darkness and to the poet. The poet projects himself as identifying himself with the entire natural scene
- b) These lines bring out the past hectic attributes of the village poor who have been earlier described in the poem as sleeping and buried in the churchyard. In their Past days those peasants had often made their sickles yield innumerable harvests and had struck deeply into the stubborn earth to pave their own way towards success.

- c) In these lines, the poet challengingly tells ambitious people not to mock at the useful labour of these village poor. The domestic moments of happiness and the unknown lives of the rural poor should not be laughed at but sympathized with. These lines bring out the poet as championing the cause of the poor.
- d) These lines suggest that the village poor did not get the opportunity to be properly educated, and so wealth never came their way. These people did not get the chance, although they did possess the talent.
- e) These lines are very important because here the poet imagines himself as having become one with the village people buried in the churchyard. Like the other “rude Forefathers” of the hamlet sleeping in the cells, the poet projects himself as a youth unknown to Fame and Fortune. The poet imagines himself as having finally identified himself with the natural scene of the country churchyard.

APPENDIX: TEXTS OF POEMS

Mac Flecknoe

BY JOHN DRYDEN

A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.

All human things are subject to decay,
And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey:
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was call'd to empire, and had govern'd long:
In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute
Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.
This aged prince now flourishing in peace,
And blest with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the State:
And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit;
Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for nature pleads that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me:
Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dullness from his tender years.
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike through and make a lucid interval;
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day:
Besides his goodly fabric fills the eye,
And seems design'd for thoughtless majesty:
Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain,
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.
Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,
Thou last great prophet of tautology:
Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,
Was sent before but to prepare thy way;
And coarsely clad in Norwich druggot came
To teach the nations in thy greater name.
My warbling lute, the lute I whilom strung
When to King John of Portugal I sung,
Was but the prelude to that glorious day,
When thou on silver Thames did'st cut thy way,
With well tim'd oars before the royal barge,
Swell'd with the pride of thy celestial charge;
And big with hymn, commander of an host,
The like was ne'er in Epsom blankets toss'd.
Methinks I see the new Arion sail,
The lute still trembling underneath thy nail.

At thy well sharpen'd thumb from shore to shore
 The treble squeaks for fear, the basses roar:
 Echoes from Pissing-Alley, Shadwell call,
 And Shadwell they resound from Aston Hall.
 About thy boat the little fishes throng,
 As at the morning toast, that floats along.
 Sometimes as prince of thy harmonious band
 Thou wield'st thy papers in thy threshing hand.
 St. Andre's feet ne'er kept more equal time,
 Not ev'n the feet of thy own Psyche's rhyme:
 Though they in number as in sense excel;
 So just, so like tautology they fell,
 That, pale with envy, Singleton forswore
 The lute and sword which he in triumph bore
 And vow'd he ne'er would act Villerius more.
 Here stopt the good old sire; and wept for joy
 In silent raptures of the hopeful boy.
 All arguments, but most his plays, persuade,
 That for anointed dullness he was made.

Close to the walls which fair Augusta bind,
 (The fair Augusta much to fears inclin'd)
 An ancient fabric, rais'd to inform the sight,
 There stood of yore, and Barbican it hight:
 A watch tower once; but now, so fate ordains,
 Of all the pile an empty name remains.
 From its old ruins brothel-houses rise,
 Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys.
 Where their vast courts, the mother-strumpets keep,
 And, undisturb'd by watch, in silence sleep.
 Near these a nursery erects its head,
 Where queens are form'd, and future heroes bred;
 Where unfledg'd actors learn to laugh and cry,
 Where infant punks their tender voices try,
 And little Maximins the gods defy.
 Great Fletcher never treads in buskins here,
 Nor greater Jonson dares in socks appear;
 But gentle Simkin just reception finds
 Amidst this monument of vanish'd minds:
 Pure clinches, the suburban muse affords;
 And Panton waging harmless war with words.
 Here Flecknoe, as a place to fame well known,
 Ambitiously design'd his Shadwell's throne.
 For ancient Decker prophesied long since,
 That in this pile should reign a mighty prince,
 Born for a scourge of wit, and flail of sense:
 To whom true dullness should some Psyches owe,
 But worlds of Misers from his pen should flow;
 Humorists and hypocrites it should produce,
 Whole Raymond families, and tribes of Bruce.

Now Empress Fame had publisht the renown,
 Of Shadwell's coronation through the town.
 Rous'd by report of fame, the nations meet,
 From near Bun-Hill, and distant Watling-street.
 No Persian carpets spread th'imperial way,
 But scatter'd limbs of mangled poets lay:
 From dusty shops neglected authors come,
 Martyrs of pies, and reliques of the bum.
 Much Heywood, Shirley, Ogleby there lay,
 But loads of Shadwell almost chok'd the way.
 Bilk'd stationers for yeoman stood prepar'd,
 And Herringman was Captain of the Guard.
 The hoary prince in majesty appear'd,
 High on a throne of his ownlaboursrear'd.
 At his right hand our young Ascanius sat
 Rome's other hope, and pillar of the state.
 His brows thick fogs, instead of glories, grace,
 And lambent dullness play'd around his face.
 As Hannibal did to the altars come,
 Sworn by his sire a mortal foe to Rome;
 So Shadwell swore, nor should his vow be vain,
 That he till death true dullness would maintain;
 And in his father's right, and realm's defence,
 Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense.
 The king himself the sacred unction made,
 As king by office, and as priest by trade:
 In his sinister hand, instead of ball,
 He plac'd a mighty mug of potent ale;
 Love's kingdom to his right he did convey,
 At once his sceptre and his rule of sway;
 Whose righteous lore the prince had practis'd young,
 And from whose loins recorded Psyche sprung,
 His temples last with poppies were o'er spread,
 That nodding seem'd to consecrate his head:
 Just at that point of time, if fame not lie,
 On his left hand twelve reverend owls did fly.
 So Romulus, 'tis sung, by Tiber's brook,
 Presage of sway from twice six vultures took.
 Th'admiring throng loud acclamations make,
 And omens of his future empire take.
 The sire then shook the honours of his head,
 And from his brows damps of oblivion shed
 Full on the filial dullness: long he stood,
 Repelling from his breast the raging god;
 At length burst out in this prophetic mood:

Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let him reign
 To far Barbadoes on the Western main;
 Of his dominion may no end be known,
 And greater than his father's be his throne.
 Beyond love's kingdom let him stretch his pen;

He paus'd, and all the people cry'd Amen.
 Then thus, continu'd he, my son advance
 Still in new impudence, new ignorance.
 Success let other teach, learn thou from me
 Pangs without birth, and fruitless industry.
 Let Virtuosos in five years be writ;
 Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.
 Let gentle George in triumph tread the stage,
 Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage;
 Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling, charm the pit,
 And in their folly show the writer's wit.
 Yet still thy fools shall stand in thy defence,
 And justify their author's want of sense.
 Let 'em be all by thy own model made
 Of dullness, and desire no foreign aid:
 That they to future ages may be known,
 Not copies drawn, but issue of thy own.
 Nay let thy men of wit too be the same,
 All full of thee, and differing but in name;
 But let no alien Sedley interpose
 To lard with wit thy hungry Epsom prose.
 And when false flowers of rhetoric thou would'st cull,
 Trust Nature, do not labour to be dull;
 But write thy best, and top; and in each line,
 Sir Formal's oratory will be thine.
 Sir Formal, though unsought, attends thy quill,
 And does thy Northern Dedications fill.
 Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame,
 By arrogating Jonson's hostile name.
 Let Father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise,
 And Uncle Ogleby thy envy raise.
 Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part;
 What share have we in Nature or in Art?
 Where did his wit on learning fix a brand,
 And rail at arts he did not understand?
 Where made he love in Prince Nicander's vein,
 Or swept the dust in Psyche's humble strain?
 Where sold he bargains, whip-stitch, kiss my arse,
 Promis'd a play and dwindled to a farce?
 When did his muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,
 As thou whole Eth'ridge dost transfuse to thine?
 But so transfus'd as oil on waters flow,
 His always floats above, thine sinks below.
 This is thy province, this thy wondrous way,
 New humours to invent for each new play:
 This is that boasted bias of thy mind,
 By which one way, to dullness, 'tis inclin'd,
 Which makes thy writings lean on one side still,
 And in all changes that way bends thy will.
 Nor let thy mountain belly make pretence
 Of likeness; thine's a tympany of sense.

A tun of man in thy large bulk is writ,
But sure thou 'rt but a kilderkin of wit.
Like mine thy gentle numbers feebly creep,
Thy Tragic Muse gives smiles, thy Comic sleep.
With whate'er gall thou sett'st thy self to write,
Thy inoffensive satires never bite.
In thy felonious heart, though venom lies,
It does but touch thy Irish pen, and dies.
Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame
In keen iambics, but mild anagram:
Leave writing plays, and choose for thy command
Some peaceful province in acrostic land.
There thou may'st wings display and altars raise,
And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.
Or if thou would'st thy diff'rent talents suit,
Set thy own songs, and sing them to thy lute.
He said, but his last words were scarcely heard,
For Bruce and Longvil had a trap prepar'd,
And down they sent the yet declaiming bard.
Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,
Born upwards by a subterranean wind.
The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,
With double portion of his father's art.

An Essay on Man: Epistle I

BY ALEXANDER POPE

To Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke

Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things
To low ambition, and the pride of kings.
Let us (since life can little more supply
Than just to look about us and to die)
Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man;
A mighty maze! but not without a plan;
A wild, where weeds and flow'rs promiscuous shoot;
Or garden, tempting with forbidden fruit.
Together let us beat this ample field,
Try what the open, what the covert yield;
The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;
Eye Nature's walks, shoot folly as it flies,
And catch the manners living as they rise;
Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;
But vindicate the ways of God to man.

I.

Say first, of God above, or man below,
What can we reason, but from what we know?
Of man what see we, but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer?
Through worlds unnumber'd though the God be known,
'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.
He, who through vast immensity can pierce,
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
Observe how system into system runs,
What other planets circle other suns,
What varied being peoples ev'ry star,
May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are.
But of this frame the bearings, and the ties,
The strong connections, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Look'd through? or can a part contain the whole?

Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee?

II.

Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou find,
Why form'd so weak, so little, and so blind?
First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,
Why form'd no weaker, blinder, and no less!
Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?
Or ask of yonder argent fields above,
Why Jove's satellites are less than Jove?

Of systems possible, if 'tis confest
That Wisdom infinite must form the best,
Where all must full or not coherent be,
And all that rises, rise in due degree;
Then, in the scale of reas'ning life, 'tis plain
There must be somewhere, such a rank as man:
And all the question (wrangle e'er so long)
Is only this, if God has plac'd him wrong?

Respecting man, whatever wrong we call,
May, must be right, as relative to all.
In human works, though labour'd on with pain,
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;
In God's, one single can its end produce;
Yet serves to second too some other use.
So man, who here seems principal alone,
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.

When the proud steed shall know why man restrains
His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains:
When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,
Is now a victim, and now Egypt's God:
Then shall man's pride and dulness comprehend
His actions', passions', being's, use and end;
Why doing, suff'ring, check'd, impell'd; and why
This hour a slave, the next a deity.

Then say not man's imperfect, Heav'n in fault;
Say rather, man's as perfect as he ought:
His knowledge measur'd to his state and place,
His time a moment, and a point his space.
If to be perfect in a certain sphere,
What matter, soon or late, or here or there?
The blest today is as completely so,
As who began a thousand years ago.

III.

Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of fate,
All but the page prescrib'd, their present state:
From brutes what men, from men what spirits know:
Or who could suffer being here below?
The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed today,
Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?
Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry food,
And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood.
Oh blindness to the future! kindlygiv'n,
That each may fill the circle mark'd by Heav'n:
Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,

A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
 Atoms or systems into ruin hurl'd,
 And now a bubble burst, and now a world.

Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;
 Wait the great teacher Death; and God adore!
 What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,
 But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.
 Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
 Man never is, but always to be blest:
 The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
 Rests and expatiates in a life to come.

Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind
 Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
 His soul, proud science never taught to stray
 Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
 Yet simple nature to his hope has giv'n,
 Behind the cloud-topt hill, an humbler heav'n;
 Some safer world in depth of woods embrac'd,
 Some happier island in the wat'ry waste,
 Where slaves once more their native land behold,
 No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
 To be, contents his natural desire,
 He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire;
 But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
 His faithful dog shall bear him company.

IV.

Go, wiser thou! and, in thy scale of sense
 Weigh thy opinion against Providence;
 Call imperfection what thou fanciest such,
 Say, here he gives too little, there too much:
 Destroy all creatures for thy sport or gust,
 Yet cry, if man's unhappy, God's unjust;
 If man alone engross not Heav'n's high care,
 Alone made perfect here, immortal there:
 Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
 Rejudge his justice, be the God of God.

In pride, in reas'ning pride, our error lies;
 All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.
 Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,
 Men would be angels, angels would be gods.
 Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,
 Aspiring to be angels, men rebel:
 And who but wishes to invert the laws
 Of order, sins against th' Eternal Cause.

V.

Ask for what end the heav'nlybodies shine,
 Earth for whose use? Pride answers, " 'Tis for mine:

For me kind Nature wakes her genial pow'r,
 Suckles each herb, and spreads out ev'ryflow'r;
 Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew,
 The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;
 For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings;
 For me, health gushes from a thousand springs;
 Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise;
 My foot-stool earth, my canopy the skies."

But errs not Nature from this gracious end,
 From burning suns when livid deaths descend,
 When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests sweep
 Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep?
 "No, ('tis replied) the first Almighty Cause
 Acts not by partial, but by gen'ral laws;
 Th' exceptions few; some change since all began:
 And what created perfect?"—Why then man?
 If the great end be human happiness,
 Then Nature deviates; and can man do less?
 As much that end a constant course requires
 Of show'rs and sunshine, as of man's desires;
 As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,
 As men for ever temp'rate, calm, and wise.
 If plagues or earthquakes break not Heav'n's design,
 Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline?
 Who knows but he, whose hand the lightning forms,
 Who heaves old ocean, and who wings the storms,
 Pours fierce ambition in a Cæsar's mind,
 Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind?
 From pride, from pride, our very reas'ning springs;
 Account for moral, as for nat'ral things:
 Why charge we Heav'n in those, in these acquit?
 In both, to reason right is to submit.

Better for us, perhaps, it might appear,
 Were there all harmony, all virtue here;
 That never air or ocean felt the wind;
 That never passion discompos'd the mind.
 But ALL subsists by elemental strife;
 And passions are the elements of life.
 The gen'ral order, since the whole began,
 Is kept in nature, and is kept in man.

VI.

What would this man? Now upward will he soar,
 And little less than angel, would be more;
 Now looking downwards, just as griev'd appears
 To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears.
 Made for his use all creatures if he call,
 Say what their use, had he the pow'rs of all?
 Nature to these, without profusion, kind,

The proper organs, proper pow'rs assign'd;
 Each seeming want compensated of course,
 Here with degrees of swiftness, there of force;
 All in exact proportion to the state;
 Nothing to add, and nothing to abate.
 Each beast, each insect, happy in its own:
 Is Heav'n unkind to man, and man alone?
 Shall he alone, whom rational we call,
 Be pleas'd with nothing, if not bless'd with all?

The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)
 Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
 No pow'rs of body or of soul to share,
 But what his nature and his state can bear.
 Why has not man a microscopic eye?
 For this plain reason, man is not a fly.
 Say what the use, were finer optics giv'n,
 T' inspect a mite, not comprehend the heav'n?
 Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,
 To smart and agonize at ev'ry pore?
 Or quick effluvia darting through the brain,
 Die of a rose in aromatic pain?
 If nature thunder'd in his op'ning ears,
 And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres,
 How would he wish that Heav'n had left him still
 The whisp'ring zephyr, and the purling rill?
 Who finds not Providence all good and wise,
 Alike in what it gives, and what denies?

VII.

Far as creation's ample range extends,
 The scale of sensual, mental pow'rs ascends:
 Mark how it mounts, to man's imperial race,
 From the green myriads in the peopled grass:
 What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme,
 The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam:
 Of smell, the headlong lioness between,
 And hound sagacious on the tainted green:
 Of hearing, from the life that fills the flood,
 To that which warbles through the vernal wood:
 The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
 Feels at each thread, and lives along the line:
 In the nice bee, what sense so subtly true
 From pois'nous herbs extracts the healing dew:
 How instinct varies in the grov'ling swine,
 Compar'd, half-reas'ning elephant, with thine:
 'Twixt that, and reason, what a nice barrier;
 For ever sep'rate, yet for ever near!
 Remembrance and reflection how allied;
 What thin partitions sense from thought divide:
 And middle natures, how they long to join,

Yet never pass th' insuperable line!
Without this just gradation, could they be
Subjected, these to those, or all to thee?
The pow'rs of all subdu'd by thee alone,
Is not thy reason all these pow'rs in one?

VIII.

See, through this air, this ocean, and this earth,
All matter quick, and bursting into birth.
Above, how high, progressive life may go!
Around, how wide! how deep extend below!
Vast chain of being, which from God began,
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from infinite to thee,
From thee to nothing!—On superior pow'rs
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:
Or in the full creation leave a void,
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroy'd:
From nature's chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.

And, if each system in gradation roll
Alike essential to th' amazing whole,
The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the whole must fall.
Let earth unbalanc'd from her orbit fly,
Planets and suns run lawless through the sky;
Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurl'd,
Being on being wreck'd, and world on world;
Heav'n's whole foundations to their centre nod,
And nature tremble to the throne of God.
All this dread order break—for whom? for thee?
Vile worm!—Oh madness, pride, impiety!

IX.

What if the foot ordain'd the dust to tread,
Or hand to toil, aspir'd to be the head?
What if the head, the eye, or ear repin'd
To serve mere engines to the ruling mind?
Just as absurd for any part to claim
To be another, in this gen'ral frame:
Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains,
The great directing Mind of All ordains.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, chang'd through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,

Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
 Spreads undivided, operates unspent,
 Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
 As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;
 As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
 As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;
 To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
 He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

X.

Of blindness, weakness, Heav'n bestows on thee.
 Submit.—In this, or any other sphere,
 Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:
 Safe in the hand of one disposing pow'r,
 Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.
 All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
 All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;
 All discord, harmony, not understood;
 All partial evil, universal good:
 And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
 One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.

THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES

The Tenth Satire of *Juvenal*,
IMITATED By SAMUEL JOHNSON

Let Observation with extensive View,
Survey Mankind, from *China* to *Peru*;
Remark each anxious Toil, each eager Strife,
And watch the busy Scenes of crouded Life;
Then say how Hope and Fear, Desire and Hate,
O'er spread with Snares the clouded Maze of Fate,
Where wav'ring Man, betray'd by vent'rous Pride,
To tread the dreary Paths without a Guide;
As treach'rous Phantoms in the Mist delude,
Shuns fancied Ills, or chases airy Good.
How rarely Reason guides the stubborn Choice,
Rules the bold Hand, or prompts the suppliant Voice,
How Nations sink, by darling Schemes oppres'd,
When Vengeance listens to the Fool's Request.
Fate wings with ev'ry Wish th' afflictive Dart,
Each Gift of Nature, and each Grace of Art,
With fatal Heat impetuous Courage glows,
With fatal Sweetness Elocution flows,
Impeachment stops the Speaker's pow'rful Breath,
And restless Fire precipitates on Death.

But scarce observ'd the Knowing and the Bold,
Fall in the gen'ral Massacre of Gold;
Wide-wasting Pest! that rages unconfi'd,
And crowds with Crimes the Records of Mankind,
For Gold his Sword the Hireling Ruffian draws,
For Gold the hireling Judge distorts the Laws;
Wealth heap'd on Wealth, nor Truth nor Safety buys,
The Dangers gather as the Treasures rise.

Let Hist'ry tell where rival Kings command,
And dubious Title shakes the madded Land,
When Statutes glean the Refuse of the Sword,
How much more safe the Vassal than the Lord,
Low sculks the Hind beneath the Rage of Pow'r,
And leaves the *bonny Traytor* in the *Tow'r*,
Untouch'd his Cottage, and his Slumbers sound,
Tho' Confiscation's Vulturs clang around.

The needy Traveller, serene and gay,
Walks the wild Heath, and sings his Toil away.
Does Envy seize thee? crush th' upbraiding Joy,
Encrease his Riches and his Peace destroy,
New Fears in dire Vicissitude invade,
The rustling Brake alarms, and quiv'ring Shade,

Nor Light nor Darkness bring his Pain Relief,
One shews the Plunder, and one hides the Thief.

Yet still the gen'ral Cry the Skies assails
And Gain and Grandeur load the tainted Gales;
Few know the toiling Statesman's Fear or Care,
Th' insidious Rival and the gaping Heir.

Once more, *Democritus*, arise on Earth,
With chearful Wisdom and instructive Mirth,
See motley Life in modern Trappings dress'd,
And feed with varied Fools th' eternal Jest:
Thou who couldst laugh where Want enchain'd Caprice,
Toil crush'd Conceit, and Man was of a Piece;
Where Wealth unlov'd without a Mourner dy'd;
And scarce a Sycophant was fed by Pride;
Where ne'er was known the Form of mock Debate,
Or seen a new-made Mayor's unwieldy State;
Where change of Fav'rites made no Change of Laws,
And Senates heard before they judg'd a Cause;
How wouldst thou shake at *Britain's* modish Tribe,
Dart the quick Taunt, and edge the piercing Gibe?
Attentive Truth and Nature to descry,
And pierce each Scene with Philosophic Eye.
To thee were solemn Toys or empty Shew,
The Robes of Pleasure and the Veils of Woe:
All aid the Farce, and all thy Mirth maintain,
Whose Joys are causeless, or whose Grievs are vain.

Such was the Scorn that fill'd the Sage's Mind,
Renew'd at ev'ry Glance on Humankind;
How just that Scorn ere yet thy Voice declare,
Search every State, and canvass ev'ry Pray'r.

Unnumber'd Suppliants croud Preferment's Gate,
Athirst for Wealth, and burning to be great;
Delusive Fortune hears th' incessant Call,
They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall.
On ev'ry Stage the Foes of Peace attend,
Hate dogs their Flight, and Insult mocks their End.
Love ends with Hope, the sinking Statesman's Door
Pours in the Morning Worshiper no more;
For growing Names the weekly Scribbler lies,
To growing Wealth the Dedicator flies,
From every Room descends the painted Face,
That hung the bright *Palladium* of the Place,
And smoak'd in Kitchens, or in Auctions sold,
To better Features yields the Frame of Gold;
For now no more we trace in ev'ry Line
Heroic Worth, Benevolence Divine:
The Form distorted justifies the Fall,
And Detestation rids th' indignant Wall.

But will not *Britain* hear the last Appeal,
 Sign her Foes Doom, or guard her Fav'rites Zeal;
 Through Freedom's Sons no more Remonstrance rings,
 Degrading Nobles and controuling Kings;
 Our supple Tribes repress their Patriot Throats,
 And ask no Questions but the Price of Votes;
 With Weekly Libels and Septennial Ale,
 Their Wish is full to riot and to rail.

In full-blown Dignity, see *Wolsey* stand,
 Law in his Voice, and Fortune in his Hand:
 To him the Church, the Realm, their Pow'rs consign,
 Thro' him the Rays of regal Bounty shine,
 Turn'd by his Nod the Stream of Honour flows,
 His Smile alone Security bestows:
 Still to new Heights his restless Wishes tow'r,
 Claim leads to Claim, and Pow'r advances Pow'r;
 Till Conquest unresisted ceas'd to please,
 And Rights submitted, left him none to seize.
 At length his Sov'reign frowns — the Train of State
 Mark the keen Glance, and watch the Sign to hate.
 Where-e'er he turns he meets a Stranger's Eye,
 His Suppliants scorn him, and his Followers fly;
 Now drops at once the Pride of awful State,
 The golden Canopy, the glitt'ring Plate,
 The regal Palace, the luxurious Board,
 The liv'ried Army, and the menial Lord.
 With Age, with Cares, with Maladies oppress'd,
 He seeks the Refuge of Monastic Rest.
 Grief aids Disease, remember'd Folly stings,
 And his last Sighs reproach the Faith of Kings.

Speak thou, whose Thoughts at humble Peace repine,
 Shall *Wolsey's* Wealth, with *Wolsey's* End be thine?
 Or liv'st thou now, with safer Pride content,
 The richest Landlord on the Banks of *Trent*?
 For why did *Wolsey* by the Steps of Fate,
 On weak Foundations raise th' enormous Weight
 Why but to sink beneath Misfortune's Blow,
 With louder Ruin to the Gulphs below?

What gave great *Villiers* to th' Assassin's Knife,
 And fixed Disease on *Harley's* closing life?
 What murder'd *Wentworth*, and what exil'd *Hyde*,
 By Kings protected and to Kings ally'd?
 What but their Wish indulg'd in Courts to shine,
 And Pow'r too great to keep or to resign?

When first the College Rolls receive his Name,
 The young Enthusiast quits his Ease for Fame;
 Resistless burns the fever of Renown,
 Caught from the strong Contagion of the Gown;

O'er *Bodley's* Dome his future Labours spread,
 And *Bacon's* Mansion trembles o'er his Head;
 Are these thy Views? proceed, illustrious Youth,
 And Virtue guard thee to the Throne of Truth,
 Yet should thy Soul indulge the gen'rous Heat,
 Till captive Science yields her last Retreat;
 Should Reason guide thee with her brightest Ray,
 And pour on misty Doubt resistless Day;
 Should no false Kindness lure to loose Delight,
 Nor Praise relax, nor Difficulty fright;
 Should tempting Novelty thy Cell refrain,
 And Sloth's bland Opiates shed their Fumes in vain;
 Should Beauty blunt on Fops her fatal Dart,
 Nor claim the triumph of a letter'd Heart;
 Should no Disease thy torpid Veins invade,
 Nor Melancholy's Phantoms haunt thy Shade;
 Yet hope not Life from Grief or Danger free,
 Nor think the Doom of Man revers'd for thee:
 Deign on the passing World to turn thine Eyes,
 And pause awhile from Learning to be wise;
 There mark what Ills the Scholar's Life assail,
 Toil, Envy, Want, the Garret, and the Jail.
 See Nations slowly wise, and meanly just,
 To buried Merit raise the tardy Bust.
 If Dreams yet flatter, once again attend,
 Hear *Lydiat's* Life, and *Galileo's* End.

Nor deem, when Learning her lost Prize bestows
 The glitt'ring Eminence exempt from Foes;
 See when the Vulgar 'scap'ddespis'd or aw'd,
 Rebellion's vengeful Talons seize on *Laud*.
 From meaner Minds, tho' smaller Fines content
 The plunder'd Palace or sequester'd Rent;
 Mark'd out by dangerous Parts he meets the Shock,
 And fatal Learning leads him to the Block:
 Around his Tomb let Art and Genius weep,
 But hear his Death, ye Blockheads, hear and sleep.

The festal Blazes, the triumphal Show,
 The ravish'd Standard, and the captive Foe,
 The Senate's Thanks, the Gazette's pompous Tale,
 With Force resistless o'er the Brave prevail.
 Such Bribes the rapid *Greek* o'er *Asia* whirl'd,
 For such the steady *Romans* shook the World;
 For such in distant Lands the *Britons* shine,
 And stain with Blood the *Danube* or the *Rhine*;
 This Pow'r has Praise, that Virtue scarce can warm,
 Till Fame supplies the universal Charm.
 Yet Reason frowns on War's unequal Game,
 Where wasted Nations raise a single Name,

And mortgag'd States their Grandsires Wreaths regret
 From Age to Age in everlasting Debt;
 Wreaths which at last the dear-bought Right convey
 To rust on Medals, or on Stones decay.

On what Foundation stands the Warrior's Pride?
 How just his Hopes let *Swedish Charles* decide;
 A Frame of Adamant, a Soul of Fire,
 No Dangers fright him, and no Labours tire;
 O'er Love, o'er Force, extends his wide Domain,
 Unconquer'd Lord of Pleasure and of Pain;
 No Joys to him pacific Scepters yield,
 War sounds the Trump, he rushes to the Field;
 Behold surrounding Kings their Pow'r combine,
 And One capitulate, and One resign;
 Peace courts his Hand, but spread her Charms in vain;
 "Think Nothing gain'd, he cries, till nought remain,
 "On *Moscow's* Walls till *Gothic* Standards fly,
 "And all is Mine beneath the Polar Sky."
 The March begins in Military State,
 And Nations on his Eye suspended wait;
 Stern Famine guards the solitary Coast,
 And Winter barricades the Realms of Frost;
 He comes, nor Want nor Cold his Course delay;—
 Hide, blushing Glory, hide *Pultowa's* Day:
 The vanquish'd Hero leaves his broken Bands,
 And shews his Miseries in distant Lands;
 Condemn'd a needy Suppliant to wait,
 While Ladies interpose, and Slaves debate.
 But did not Chance at length her Error mend?
 Did no subverted Empire mark his End?
 Did rival Monarchs give the fatal Wound?
 Or hostile Millions press him to the Ground?
 His Fall was destin'd to a barren Strand,
 A petty Fortress, and a dubious Hand;
 He left the Name, at which the World grew pale,
 To point a Moral, or adorn a Tale.

All Times their Scenes of pompous Woes afford,
 From *Persia's* Tyrant to *Bavaria's* Lord.
 In gay Hostility, and barb'rous Pride,
 With half Mankind embattled at his Side,
 Great *Xerxes* comes to seize the certain Prey,
 And starves exhausted Regions in his Way;
 Attendant Flatt'ry counts his Myriads o'er,
 Till counted Myriads sooth his Pride no more;
 Fresh Praise is try'd till Madness fires his Mind,
 The Waves he lashes, and enchains the Wind;
 New Pow'rs are claim'd, new Pow'rs are still bestowed,
 Till rude Resistance lops the spreading God;
 The daring *Greeks* deride the Martial Shew,
 And heap their Vallies with the gaudy Foe;

Th' insulted Sea with humbler Thoughts he gains,
A single Skiff to speed his Flight remains;
Th' incumber'd Oar scarce leaves the dreaded Coast
Through purple Billows and a floating Host.

The bold *Bavarian*, in a luckless Hour,
Tries the dread Summits of *Cesarean* Pow'r,
With unexpected Legions bursts away,
And sees defenceless Realms receive his Sway;
Short Sway! fair *Austria* spreads her mournful Charms,
The Queen, the Beauty, sets the World in Arms;
From Hill to Hill the Beacons rousing Blaze
Spreads wide the Hope of Plunder and of Praise;
The fierce *Croatian*, and the wild *Hussar*,
And all the Sons of Ravage croud the War;
The baffled Prince in Honour's flatt'ring Bloom
Of hasty Greatness finds the fatal Doom,
His foes Derision, and his Subjects Blame,
And steals to Death from Anguish and from Shame.

Enlarge my Life with Multitude of Days,
In Health, in Sickness, thus the Suppliant prays;
Hides from himself his State, and shuns to know,
That Life protracted is protracted Woe.
Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,
And shuts up all the Passages of Joy:
In vain their Gifts the bounteous Seasons pour,
The Fruit autumnal, and the Vernal Flow'r,
With listless Eyes the Dotard views the Store,
He views, and wonders that they please no more;
Now pall the tastless Meats, and joyless Wines,
And Luxury with Sighs her Slave resigns.
Approach, ye Minstrels, try the soothing Strain,
And yield the tuneful Lenitives of Pain:
No Sounds alas would touch th' impervious Ear,
Though dancing Mountains witness'd *Orpheus* near;
Nor Lute nor Lyre his feeble Pow'rs attend,
Nor sweeter Musick of a virtuous Friend,
But everlasting Dictates croud his Tongue,
Perversely grave, or positively wrong.
The still returning Tale, and ling'ring Jest,
Perplex the fawning Niece and pamper'd Guest,
While growing Hopes scarce awe the gath'ring Sneer,
And scarce a Legacy can bribe to hear;
The watchful Guests still hint the last Offence,
The Daughter's Petulance, the Son's Expence,
Improve his heady Rage with treach'rous Skill,
And mould his Passions till they make his Will.

Unnumber'd Maladies each Joint invade,
Lay Siege to Life and press the dire Blockade;
But unextinguish'd Av'rice still remains,

And dreaded Losses aggravate his Pains;
 He turns, with anxious Heart and crippled Hands,
 His Bonds of Debt, and Mortgages of Lands;
 Or views his Coffers with suspicious Eyes,
 Unlocks his Gold, and counts it till he dies.

But grant, the Virtues of a temp'rate Prime
 Bless with an Age exempt from Scorn or Crime;
 An Age that melts in unperceiv'd Decay,
 And glides in modest Innocence away;
 Whose peaceful Day Benevolence endears,
 Whose Night congratulating Conscience cheers;
 The gen'ral Fav'rite as the gen'ral Friend:
 Such Age there is, and who could wish its end?

Yet ev'n on this her Load Misfortune flings,
 To press the weary Minutes flagging Wings:
 New Sorrow rises as the Day returns,
 A Sister sickens, or a Daughter mourns.
 Now Kindred Merit fills the sable Bier,
 Now lacerated Friendship claims a Tear.
 Year chases Year, Decay pursues Decay,
 Still drops some Joy from with'ring Life away;
 New Forms arise, and diff'rent Views engage,
 Superfluous lags the Vet'ran on the Stage,
 Till pitying Nature signs the last Release,
 And bids afflicted Worth retire to Peace.

But few there are whom Hours like these await,
 Who set unclouded in the Gulphs of fate.
 From *Lydia's* monarch should the Search descend,
 By *Solon* caution'd to regard his End,
 In Life's last Scene what Prodigies surprise,
 Fears of the Brave, and Follies of the Wise?
 From *Marlb'rough's* Eyes the Streams of Dotage flow,
 And *Swift* expires a Driv'ler and a Show.

The teeming Mother, anxious for her Race,
 Begg for each Birth the Fortune of a Face:
 Yet *Vane* could tell what Ills from Beauty spring;
 And *Sedley* curs'd the Form that pleas'd a King.
 Ye Nymphs of rosy Lips and radiant Eyes,
 Whom Pleasure keeps too busy to be wise,
 Whom Joys with soft Varieties invite
 By Day the Frolick, and the Dance by Night,
 Who frown with Vanity, who smile with Art,
 And ask the latest Fashion of the Heart,
 What Care, what Rules your heedless Charms shall save,
 Each Nymph your Rival, and each Youth your Slave?
 An envious Breast with certain Mischief glows,
 And Slaves, the Maxim tells, are always Foes.

Against your Fame with Fondness Hate combines,
The Rival batters, and the Lover mines.
With distant Voice neglected Virtue calls,
Less heard, and less the faint Remonstrance falls;
Tir'd with Contempt, she quits the slipp'ry Reign,
And Pride and Prudence take her Seat in vain.
In croud at once, where none the Pass defend,
The harmless Freedom, and the private Friend.
The Guardians yield, by Force superior ply'd;
By Int'rest, Prudence; and by Flatt'ry, Pride.
Here Beauty falls betray'd, despis'd, distress'd,
And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest.

Where then shall Hope and Fear their Objects find?
Must dull Suspence corrupt the stagnant Mind?
Must helpless Man, in Ignorance sedate,
Swim darkling down the Current of his Fate?
Must no Dislike alarm, no Wishes rise,
No Cries attempt the Mercies of the Skies?
Enquirer, cease, Petitions yet remain,
Which Heav'n may hear, nor deem Religion vain.
Still raise for Good the supplicating Voice,
But leave to Heav'n the Measure and the Choice.
Safe in his Pow'r, whose Eyes discern afar
The secret Ambush of a specious Pray'r.
Implore his Aid, in his Decisions rest,
Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best.
Yet with the Sense of sacred Presence prest,
When strong Devotion fills thy glowing Breast,
Pour forth thy Fervours for a healthful Mind,
Obedient Passions, and a Will resign'd;
For Love, which scarce collective Man can fill;
For Patience sov'reign o'er transmuted Ill;
For Faith, that panting for a happier Seat,
Thinks Death kind Nature's Signal of Retreat:
These Goods for Man the Laws of Heav'n ordain,
These Goods he grants, who grants the Pow'r to gain;
With these celestial Wisdom calms the Mind,
And makes the Happiness she does not find.

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

Thomas Gray

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.
The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?

Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.
The applause of listening senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet even these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
Ev'n from the tomb the voice of nature cries,
Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.
For thee, who mindful of the unhonoured dead
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
'Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
'Brushing with hasty steps the dews away
'To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
'That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
'His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
'And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
'Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,
'Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
'Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

'One morn I missed him on the customed hill,
'Along the heath and near his favourite tree;
'Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
'Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

'The next with dirges due in sad array
'Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne.
'Approach and read (for thou can'st read) the lay,
'Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'

The Epitaph

*Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy marked him for her own.*

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend.*

*No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)
The bosom of his Father and his God.*











Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE-106

III

The Romantic Poets

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats



School of Humanities
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

Block

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THE ROMANTIC POETS

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 3

POETRY OF THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In Block II you read about a period of English literature that was influenced by classicism, the artistic principles developed in ancient Greece and Rome. In this block you are going to read the literature of Romanticism ‘an innovatory aesthetic creed, as opposed to an orthodox art.’ The literature of the previous period, in spite of Methodism in the religious life of the nation and the rise of ‘Sensibility’ in the realm of culture, was governed by the values of the ‘old order’ or the ‘*ancien régime*’, as the French would have it. The *ancien régime* in France supported the opulence of the nobility and the clergy at the cost of the Third Estate, the common people, who stooped in poverty but paid for the other two - the nobility and the clergy - in various ways. This disparity of wealth, income and opportunity characterized life and society of Europe including that of England.

In this block you move from the peace of the Augustans to an era of Revolutions – American in 1776 and the French in 1789. ‘Intense emotion’ opine Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, ‘coupled with an intense display of imagery, such is the frame of mind which supports and feeds the new literature.’ We can observe these new tendencies in the poetries of the most eminent Robert Burns (1759-‘96), William Blake (1757-1827), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), S.T. Coleridge (1802-‘52), George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821).

Burns was born into a poor Scottish family and led a precarious existence as a farmer. For some time his financial and domestic problems were so acute that he considered emigrating to Jamaica but he wrote vigorously in 1785-86 and the publication of his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786) was an immediate success. Henry Mackenzie (1745 - 1831) the author of *The Man of Feeling* (1771), which Burns valued ‘next to the Bible’, called him ‘a heaven-taught ploughman’. In his youth, ‘Burns was the god of my idolatry’ admitted Charles Lamb (1775 - 1834). Burns was an extremely handsome person and temperamentally gregarious which led him into a life of dissipation and amorous complexity. Many of his women find mention in his poems: Alison Begbie in ‘Mary Morison’, Mary Campbell in ‘To Mary in Heaven’. Some of his well known poems are, ‘The Cotters Saturday Night’, ‘To a Mouse’, ‘To a Mountain Daisy’, ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’, ‘Auld Lang Syne’ and of course ‘Tam O’ Shanter’ (1791). The last poem narrates in a mock-heroic fashion Tam’s journey home from drinking. On his way he encounters a witches’ dance and flees. His mare loses her tail in the chase forcing Tam to draw the moral that when one’s thoughts turn to alcohol and sexual indulgence, ‘Think, ye may buy the joys o’er dear, / Remember Tam O’ Shanter’s mare.’ You may study and discuss the life and poems of Robert Burns or any other topic of interest to you in your study group.

William Blake did not go to school but began his career as an apprentice to James Basire, engraver to the Society of Antiquaries. (An engraver cuts designs and letters on hard surfaces such as wood or metal.) He later went to the Royal Academy and at the age of 22 he was employed as an engraver by Joseph

Johnson, a radical publisher and bookseller at St. Paul's Churchyard in London. He held literary dinners over his shop where his guests included Henry Fuseli, a Swiss artist who came to England in 1764 and settled in London, William Godwin, an atheist and philosopher of anarchical views, Joseph Priestley discoverer of oxygen and a radical Dissenter and Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man* and an upholder of the politics of the Enlightenment. At Joseph's Blake met Fuseli and John Flaxman (1755-1826) English neo-classical sculptor and draughtsman. The latter was a follower of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a theosophist and mystic who claimed not only to have visions but also converse with angels in his waking life. Blake's works both as an engraver and poet were influenced by Swedenborg's mysticism.

Historians of English literature have often called Blake and Burns Pre-Romantics, an epithet that better suits Thomas Gray and William Cowper, Macpherson and Percy. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Robert Southey (1774-1843) the first generation of the Romantic poets are frequently described as the Lake Poets. Byron, Shelley and Keats belong to the second generation of the romantic poets. John Gibson Lockhart today remembered for his *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (his father-in-law), was as editor (1825-53) of *The Quarterly Review* better known for the name given to himself: 'The scorpion'. He was savage as a critic and in the *Blackwood's Magazine* he and his associates began a scathing attack 'On the Cockney School of Poetry'. Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt and John Keats, all Londoners, were frequently derided for their humble origin and contrasted with great writers, all of whom were 'men of some rank'. To the reviewers the younger poets were 'the vilest vermin' and people of 'extreme moral depravity'. We have selected works of only five poets of the Romantic period for some detailed study. I hope you will enjoy reading them and discussing them in your study circle.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 11 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Structure

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- 11.2 William Wordsworth (1770-1850)
 - 11.2.1 Characteristics of his Poetry
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- 11.3 ‘Intimations of Immortality’
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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Talk and write about Wordsworth the poet;
- Discuss Wordsworth’s poetry with special reference to ‘Intimations of Immortality’ and
- ‘Tintern Abbey’

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we have discussed William Wordsworth’s life in brief. He is regarded the greatest poet of Nature and also the foremost of the Romantic poets. He brought about a revolutionary change in English poetry by his language, his sense of the influence of Nature on the mind, and his insight into emotion.

The first poem is an extract from ‘Intimations of Immortality’ which can also be termed as autobiography in poetry. Wordsworth talks about how memories recollected in tranquillity / calmness strengthen and inspire us if we remain true to Nature. We have scanned five lines of the poem. You may practice scansion by scanning the rest of the poem.

The second poem is also an extract from ‘Tintern Abbey’. It contains the essence of Wordsworth’s thought as a poet. The extract discusses how Nature soothes and heals a mind and heart in turmoil.

Both the poems are representatives of Wordsworth's theory of poetry: "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity."

After going through the unit, we hope, you would be able to appreciate the fact that Wordsworth was the poet of Man, of 'man as they are men within themselves.' He celebrates both 'Nature in her modesty' and 'Nature in her sublimity'.

It is better if you read through the unit section by section and do the exercises as you read. Do give yourself a break after you have worked on a section.

11.2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

Wordsworth along with Coleridge and Southey belonged to the first generation of the Romantic poets.

Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770 at Cockermouth on the Derwent in the Cumberland highlands of Lake District. By the age of fourteen he had become an orphan. His school days at Hawkshead, in his own words, "were very happy one, chiefly because I was left at liberty then, and in the vacations, to read whatever books I liked." Here he received his early impression "derived neither from books nor from companions, but from the majesty and loveliness of scenes around him... loved with the first heats of youth." He spent his first summer vacation at Hawkshead where "after a night spent in dancing, I was deeply moved by a splendid sunrise." Speaking of this experience, he says in *The Prelude* :

"Ah! need I say, dear friend! that to the brim
My heart was full : I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated spirit."

But he did not relish the petty restrictions of University life and atmosphere of St. John's College, Cambridge, and felt like "a fowl of the air, ill-tutored for captivity." His days at the University are well documented in *The Prelude*.

After obtaining his B.A. degree in 1791, Wordsworth went to live for some months in London where the multitudes of the huge city brought him a vision of totality – human sympathies into his thoughts of Nature – and made him recognize "the unity of man," the unity of life.

In 1791 Wordsworth went to France to learn French in order to fulfil his cherished idea of becoming a touring tutor. There, like so many of his generation, he was very enthusiastic about the Revolution of 1789 and the revolutionaries. In particular he was charmed by the personality of Michael de Beaupuis whom he met at Blois in 1792. His influence revealed to him the power and potentiality of man - to attain "rational liberty, and hope in Mind, Justice and peace." At Blois he fell in love with Annette Vallon. He did not marry her, but she bore him a daughter.

He was compelled to return to England because his guardians in England threatened to cut off his allowances. The next few years were a period of

disillusionment and disappointment for him. He was filled with remorse on account of his desertion of Annette and the child. Besides, the violent course of events in France rudely shattered his dreams of a new world of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity – the ideals of the French Revolution. Further, the war between France and England divided his loyalties in the most agonizing way.

His stay at Racedown, Somerset, between 1795 and 1797 is significant because he gradually overcame the depression and disillusionment caused by the French Revolution. Here he wrote 'Guilt and Sorrow' and his only drama *The Borderers*, a tragedy in blank verse, both being attempts at the psychology of guilt and expiation.

In 1797, Wordsworth along with his sister, Dorothy, moved to Alfoxden to be near to S.T. Coleridge, whose genius for philosophical speculation offered him an intellectual companionship that answered his needs. Here the two greats thought of embarking upon a book of poems to meet the expenses of a walking tour of Germany. Their joint venture resulted in the publication of the remarkable and monumental *The Lyrical Ballads* for which 'Tintern Abbey' was composed. *The Lyrical Ballads* was a manifesto of a new spirit in poetry we know as the Romantic Revival. Among the notes of new poetry were a new and intense interest in Nature, and a new faith in Man. In this period he wrote some of his best poems like 'Ruth', 'Nutting', 'The Poet's Epitaph' and the Lucy poems like 'The Idiot Boy', 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal', 'She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Way', 'The Education of Nature', etc. This period also saw the publication of 'Peter Bell', a poem written as a reply to Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Like Coleridge's poem, this poem is also about the redemption of human soul.

In the beginning of 1800, with Dorothy, he settled at Dove cottage, Grasmere. In October 1802, he married Mary Hutchinson. In the following lines from 'She was a Phantom of Delight' he describes her thus:

"The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;
A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warm, to comfort, and command."

Here he planned his great philosophical poem *The Recluse* in three parts, of which he was able to write only two parts: *The Prelude* by way of introduction and the second part, *The Excursion*. In 1813, he settled at his favourite place Rydal Mount where he died on April 23, 1850, and was buried in the Grasmere churchyard. In the meantime, in 1843, he was appointed the Poet-laureate in succession to Robert Southey (1774-1843).

11.2.1 Characteristics of his Poetry

Every critic of English poetry has come to the conclusion that Wordsworth is the greatest Nature poet of England. Indeed, after reading his poetry, we are moved deeply and experience a kind of calm pleasure. To him, like the mystics, Nature was not a mere physical entity or loveliness or a sensuous presentation and description, but revelation of the Supreme Being; a vision, an interpretation, a path to perception of the unseen and infinite as both the poems here selected show. To him the myriad forms and phenomena in the universe were the

manifestations of the divine – to him God in Man and in Nature is one as the super-sensuous world appeared to be more real than the world of sense-perception.

One cardinal principle of his poetry is his love for human beings – to love Nature is to love Man who is part and parcel of Nature. A distinguishing feature of this belief in Man is his glorification of childhood, of which the ‘Intimations of Immortality’ is the supreme example.

Another characteristic of his poetry is that Nature is a great teacher, healer and soother. In the ‘Tables Turned’ he says:

“One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man;
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.”

But to learn lessons from Nature one must “bring with a heart /That watches and receives.”

His attitude to Nature did not become mystical and spiritual all at once. There were three stages in this development and they are described very vividly in the ‘Tintern Abbey’ and the ‘Immortality Ode’. In the first stage, his love of Nature was like that of child – sheer animal delight in the freshness and beauty of natural objects. This, in the second stage, developed into an impassioned love and sensuous beauty of Nature. In the third stage these passions, joys and raptures of youth yielded place to a quieter and more sober approach in which he became aware of the spiritual and human significance of Nature . He realized that Nature was the abode of God, and that there was an indissoluble bond between Nature, Man and God. This realization filled him with universal love and faith that all God’s creation is full of His blessings.

11.2.2 His Theory of Poetry

Wordsworth elaborated his theory of poetry in his Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* . He writes:

“I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction , the tranquillity gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation , is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind .” But adds:

“Though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, has also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feelings are modified and directed by our thought, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings.”

In his view, sensibility alone was not sufficient to ensure good poetry; it must be directed by “thought long and deep ,” i.e. by a calm mind.

What Wordsworth implies is, to quote Herbert Read, that “good poetry is never an immediate reaction to the provoking cause ; that our sensations must be

allowed time to sink back into the common fund of our experiences, there to find their level and due proportion. That level is found for them by the mind in the act of contemplation, and then in the process of contemplation the sensation revive, and out of the union of contemplating mind and the receiving sensibility, rises that unique mode of expression which we call poetry.” This is what Wordsworth means when he asserts that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity”- a product which provides ‘pleasure’ and ‘delight’, the purpose being ‘instruction through pleasure’. Wordsworth’s theory of poetry is rooted in his ideas of a poet as a ‘man speaking to men’ who reveals to his fellow beings the hidden unity of their experiences. The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of the passions of people and therefore his language is very akin to theirs.

He writes in *The Lyrical Ballads* : “ Low rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity , are less under restraint , and speak a plainer and more emphatic language ; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated.... The language too of these men is adopted...because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived....”

Wordsworth in this way discarded the abstract and frigid style of the 18th century poetry in order to find a suitable language for the new poetic movement.

Do you find Wordsworth’s life and his creed interesting? If you do, you will find a longer introduction in any History of English Literature.

Now find out how well you have read and understood the section with the help of the following exercise. In case you fail to locate the answers, read the whole section again.

<p>Self-check Exercise I</p> <p>1) How old was Wordsworth when he became an orphan? </p> <p>2) From where did Wordsworth receive his Bachelor’s degree? </p> <p>3) Wordsworth wrote <i>The Lyrical Ballads</i> in collaboration with and was first published in</p> <p>4) Name Wordsworth’s sister and wife. </p> <p>5) Wordsworth succeeded as poet-laureate of England in the year</p>
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11.3 INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

11.3.1 The Background of the Poem

The full title of the present poem is 'Ode : Intimations of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood'. The poem is in eleven stanzas containing 204 lines. The present extract is stanza IX.

Partly composed in 1802 and partly in 1804, 'Intimations of Immortality' is one of the noblest poems of Wordsworth. Around the year 1802 the poet was facing a spiritual crisis. The 'visionary experiences' that he had come across as an adolescent and a young man, and which were the source of his 'deepest illumination' were gradually losing their shine and glory. The present poem gives expression to the poet's spiritual crisis, the causes of the lost glory and an answer to the poet's problem.

C.M. Bowra in *The Romantic Imagination* observes that the first part (sts. , I-IV) presents the **crisis**, the second (sts. , V-VIII) attempts an **explanation**, the third and concluding part (sts., IX-XI) offers a **consolation**. Though "the radiance ... once so bright" is no more, yet all is not lost; Nature will still 'uphold' and 'cherish' us is the message that the poem conveys.

11.3.2 The Text

O joy ! that in our **embers**
 Is something that **doth** live,
 That nature yet remembers
 What was so **fugitive!**
 The thought of our past years in me doth **breed**
Perpetual benedictions : not indeed
 For that which is **most** worthy to be **blest**;
 Delight and liberty, the **simple creed**
 Of childhood, whether busy or at **rest**,
 With **new-fledged** hope still **fluttering** in his **breast** :
 Not for these I raise
 The song of thanks and praise;
 But for those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,
 Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
 Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
 Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised;
 But for those first **affections**,
 Those **shadowy** recollections,
 Which, be they what they may
 Are yet the **fountain light** of all our day,
 Are yet a **master-light** of our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being
 Of the **eternal** Silence : truths that wake,
 To perish never;

Which neither **listlessness**, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor **Man** nor **Boy**,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy.
 Can utterly abolish or destroy !
 Hence, in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our souls have sight of that immortal **sea**
 Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Glossary

ember	: ashes; remnant of his former being
doth	: still
fugitive	: of fleeting nature
breed	: create; perpetuate
Perpetual	: ever; constant
benediction	: thankfulness to God; thanks giving
most	: very thanks for
blest	: given
simple	: innocent
creed	: faith
rest	: contentment
new-fledged	: young hope
fluttering	: move lightly and quickly
breast	: heart
blank misgivings	: vague doubts about the reality of objects
affection	: love, impression
shadowy	: vague
fountain light	: the real source of our knowledge
master light	: the chief source of light
Uphold	: support
eternal	: without beginning or end; existing for ever ; frequent
listlessness	: indifference
high instincts	: lofty ideas / institutions
Man	: manhood
Boy	: boyhood
sea	: previous existence with God
land	: earthy life

11.3.3 The Stanza Form

‘Intimations of Immortality’ is written in an English Pindaric of the irregular form. This form is also known as Cowleyan ode. Wordsworth had never tried such a metre before. Each stanza has its own shape and length, and its own rhyme-scheme.

The first four lines are scanned for you.

/ / /
 O joy ! / that in / our em / bers
 / / /
 Is some / thing that / doth live,
 / / /
 That na / ture yet / remem / bers
 / / /
 What was / so fu / gitive !

This passage is an example of Iambic verse.

Variations : The first four lines are Trimeter. The first and third lines are hypermetrical. These four lines are rhymed and the rhyme scheme is a b a b.

11.3.4 A Discussion

The poem is a reminiscence in the sense that it is a poetic account of immortal nature of the human spirit intuitively known by the child, almost forgotten by the grown-up man, but to be known through recollection in tranquillity of heart and mind.

In this extract, the poet considers the child as superior to the grown-up man in the spiritual perception of divinity. But it is indeed a joy that even in our mature age, we can recall and recollect the elusive visions – the feeling of immortality and heavenly life – experienced during our childhood. In the same breath, the poet makes it clear that his joys in recollecting those experiences is not due to the blessings of childhood, delight and liberty, rather he is full of gratefulness and thanks “for those obstinate questions of sense and outward things,” i.e. , the poet is not thankful for those blessings for which he should feel most grateful. Our maturity force us to question and doubt the existence of tangible objects of the world around us , the vague intimations of the existence of a world of spirit and the natural instincts as experienced during the childhood. During the childhood period he had doubts about the reality of the visible world in which he moved about. The material things seemed to move away from him, and vanish into unreality. But as a grown-up man he feels like a guilty person, for now his life is devoid of the former loftiness. He is grateful to that period because of those innocent feelings and those vague remembrances of a previous existence in heaven which have always been a source of joy. Whatever may be their ultimate cause and effect, they are the primary source of knowledge, wisdom and happiness. These memories / recollection strengthen and inspire us. As a result the years of troubled and noisy times spent in the world are after all just transitory moments in this vast eternity. They support us, sustain us, and have the power to convert the noise and fury of our life into an eternal calm and serenity, i.e., they are capable of making our troubled period appear to us like a

momentary interval of disturbance placed between tranquil eternity of life before birth and after death.

The poet believes that once these truths are visualized through mystical illumination, neither idleness, nor the mad pursuit of or endeavour to possess material objects, nor the preoccupations of boyhood or manhood, nor ‘all that is at enmity with joy’, can distory their influence. Hence, when man is advanced in years, the soul has the glimpse of the sea of immortality which helped us in coming on this earth. Our soul can in a moment recollect the experiences of childhood. When our mind is vacant and tranquil, and the imagination at its sublime, by recollecting the experiences of childhood, we can easily and instantly go back to the shore of eternity. In other words, in our innocent imagination we can have a vision of our eternal home.

In this excerpt Wordsworth picturises childhood with the help of apt images. The first is the image of fire(embers) which slowly dies out in the course of time, leaving ashes behind. The vision of childhood also slowly dies out when we grow up, yet the spark remains. In another image ‘hope’ has been likened to a young bird which flutters with its new-fledged wings. The third, ‘affection’ is used to describe innocent experiences.

The words used to describe the process to visualize the eternal abode spontaneously drive home the purpose of the poet – instruct through pleasure/ delight in a very convincing manner in lines colloquial yet full of meaning. They dignify the simplicity, but at times rises to grandeur without falling into pomposity.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) The first four lines of the extract have been scanned. Now scan the next six lines.

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- 2) What are the qualities of childhood?

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3) Can you trace/find Wordsworth’s concept of Nature in the extract you have read aloud just now?

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11.4 TINTERN ABBEY

11.4.1 The Background of the Poem

The sub-title of the poem ‘Tintern Abbey’ is ‘Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’. The poem was composed in 1798, five years after his first visit to the banks of the river Wye, for *The Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798. His first visit in 1793, the year following his return from France, when he was in a state of intellectual and emotional turmoil, was still afresh in his mind. About the composition of this poem, Wordsworth writes: “No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern after crossing Wye...Not a line of it was altered...”

The main cause of his mental and moral crisis was his disillusionment with the French Revolution in 1789 and the war between England and France in 1793. He lost his faith in Man and even in God. He cherished to find some solace and this consolation came to him in the lap of Nature. Therefore, when he revisited Tintern in 1798, he was a chastened person fully aware of the sufferings of humanity. He now no longer cried and longed for ‘dizzy raptures’ and ‘glad animal movements’, but looked for a deeper meaning in Nature. On this tour of 1798 with Dorothy, he discovered that ‘Man had much to learn from Nature which was Man’s prime teacher’.

11.4.2 The Text

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
 Of five long winter ! and again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With a soft inland murmur. – Once again
 Do I behold these **steep and lofty cliffs**,
 That on a wild secluded scene impress
 Thought of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
 The day is come when I again **repose**
 Here, under this dark **Sycamore**, and view
 These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard **tufts**

Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
 Are clad in one green **hue**, and lose themselves
 'Mid **groves** and **copses**. Once again I see
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
 Of sportive wood run wild : these pastoral farms
 Green to the very door; and **wreaths** of smoke
 Sent up in silence, from among the trees !
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem
 Of **vagrant dwellers** in the houseless woods,
 Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
 The **Hermit** sits alone,
 Through a long absence, have not been to me
 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye :
 But **oft**, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the **din**
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
 And passing even into my purer mind,
 With tranquil restoration : feelings too
 Of unremembered pleasure : such, perhaps,
 As have no **slight or trivial** influence
 On that best portion of a good man's life,
 His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
 Of kindness and of love.

Glossary

Tintern Abbey	:	A monastery, situated in the ruins on the bank of the river Wye, in Monmouthshire
Steep and lofty cliffs	:	Precipitous and high mountains
Repose	:	Take rest
Sycamore	:	A kind of fig tree common in the Middle – East countries.
Tufts	:	A bunch of hair, feathers, grass, etc. growing or held closely together at the base
hue	:	The degree or brightness in a colour
grove	:	a group of trees
copses	:	small trees or bushes
wreaths	:	column
vagrant dwellers	:	gypsies
Hermit	:	a holy person; sage
oft	:	often
din	:	a continuous loud and unpleasant sound
slight or trivial	:	ordinary; petty

11.4.3 The Stanza Form

The first four lines are scanned for you.

/ / / / /

Five years / have past ; / five sum / mers , with / the length

/ / / / /

Of five / long win / ters ! and / again / I hear

/ / / / /

These wa / ters , rol / ling from / their moun / tain – springs

/ / / / /

With a / soft in / land mur / murs. Once / again

This passage is an example of unrhymed Iambic Pentametre versification.

The first foot of the fourth line is Trochaic.

11.4.4 A Discussion

Wordsworth begins with a particular scene and a personal memory as experienced five years ago. In these five years he had passed through a period of great despondency. He was distressed by his love-affair with Annette Vallon who also bore him a daughter in 1792, and by political events – The Reign of Terror in France after the Revolution and the war between his motherland, England, and France, the country he wanted to settle in.

The poet gives a vivid account of his second visit to the Wye where he has come again after five years. He again hears the water rolling from their mountain springs with a soft inland murmur. Once again he feels elated in the presence of the wooded hills overhanging the Wye. The precipitous and high mountains, thick Sycamore trees , the cottage ground, the orchards with ripe fruits, the hedge row, etc. etc. are all observed and remembered by him and he recalls an experience. The remembrance of these sights and scenes has been a source of sweet, soothing and healing sensations from 1793 to 1798 when he had been living in London and when the crushed ideals of the Revolution and other sundry things had shaken his inner spirit. Yet the lastingness of his impression derived from the passionate fusion with the myriad forms of Nature sustained him in these critical years of his life. The revisit to the Tintern Abbey on the Wye with all its surroundings gave him mental relief, restored his peace of mind and thrilled the innermost recesses of his heart. The impressions gathered / received from the Nature left a moralizing influence on his character and inspired him to perform the ordinary deeds of love and kindness done in daily life, which are often forgotten and ignored.

Wordsworth always looked towards Nature for peace and comfort for his sorrow-stricken heart and in hours of weariness amid din and bustle of city life. In short, whenever he was in communion with Nature, he discovered spiritual and intellectual meaning in Her as if he were in the presence of some unseen power.

In the above extract the metre is blank verse – unrhymed ten – syllabled iambic lines. The lines of the excerpt use a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation. The excerpt is a lyrical meditation on the theme of Nature and its effect on a troubled mind.

Self-check Exercise III

1) Enumerate Wordsworth's causes of distress between 1793 and 1798.

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2) Find out the two phrases that are used to celebrate Nature.

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3) The first four lines have been scanned for you. Now scan the next four lines.

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4) What soothes the poet's mind?

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11.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have read about the life of William Wordsworth and examined two excerpts from his poetry.

Wordsworth owes his distinctive position in English literature to his spiritual interpretation of Nature. He penetrated to the very heart of Nature and saw in it a revelation of universal spirit of God in the woods, mountains, meadows and men. He has been called a pantheist because he saw the one Universal Spirit

permeating the whole universe. Therefore, he was also a mystic. He made it his mission to influence and convert humanity to this new religion – a religion to soothe and heal the tired humanity. His another important mission was to teach, and his greatest poems like ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘Intimations of Immortality’ and *Prelude* enabled him to transmute his teaching into pure poetry which are indeed music to our ears and inspire in us obedience to divine eternal law.

11.6 SUGGESTED READING

Meyer Abrams, : *The Mirror and the Lamp*

Meyer Abrams, ed: *Wordsworth : A collection of Critical Essays*

A. C. Bradley : *Oxford Lectures*

Boris Ford : *From Blake to Byron*

Graham Hough : *The Romantic Poets*

11.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) 14 years old.
- 2) St. John’s College , Cambridge.
- 3) (a) S.T. Coleridge (b) 1798
- 4) Dorothy; Mary Hutchison

Self-check Exercise II

- 1)

/ / / / /
 The thought / of our / past years / in me / doth breed
 / / / / /
 Perpe / tual be / nedic / tions : not / indeed
 / / / / /
 For that / which is / most wor / thy to / be blest ;
 / / / / /
 Delight / and li / berty / , the sim / ple creed
 / / / / /
 of child / hood , whe / ther bu / sy or / at rest ,
 / / / / /
 with new /- fledged hope / still flut / tering in / his breast :

These six lines are Iambic Pentametre. Its rhyme scheme is c c d c d d .

- 2)
 - a) The child is intuitively aware of the immortality of the human spirit.
 - b) His spiritual perception of divinity is superior.
 - c) He is at liberty to spend his days in delightful acts.
 - d) His feelings and thoughts are innocent.
 - e) A child can have glimpses of eternal abode.
- 3) Yes, Wordsworth firmly believed that Nature was the abode of God, that there was an indissoluble bond between Nature , Man and God, that God in

Man and in Nature is one. When we are child, we are the inhabitants of Nature, and therefore most near to Him. When we become man, we realize Him in the perfect sense; when we are calm and serene we can visualize Him in everything around us. Even after questions and doubts about immortality, i.e. existence of a world of spirit, disappear only if we go nearer to Nature.

Read the previous sections for more information.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) i) His love-affair with the French girl, Annette Vallon, and their daughter.
ii) Failure of the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.
iii) The war between England and France in 1793.

- 2) i) Nature in her modesty and
ii) Nature in her sublimity.

- 3) / / / / /
Do I / behold / these steep / and lof / ty cliffs ,
/ / / / /
That on / a wild / seclu / ded scene / impress
/ / / / /
Thoughts of / more deep / seclu / sion and / connect
/ / / / /
The land / scape with / the qui / et of / the sky.

An example of unrhymed Iambic Pentametre.

- 4) Read the Text and the Discussion and find out the natural objects of beauty described therein.

UNIT 12 S.T. COLERIDGE: ‘KUBLA KHAN’

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834)
 - 12.2.1 Poems of Coleridge
- 12.3 Kubla Khan
 - 12.3.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 12.3.2 The Text
 - 12.3.3 Scansion
 - 12.3.4 A Discussion
- 12.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.5 Suggested Reading
- 12.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this Unit you will be able to:

- Talk and write about Coleridge the poet; and
- Appreciate ‘Kubla Khan’.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we have discussed Coleridge’s life in brief and his poetry in general. It has been pointed out by critics that his whole life was a fragment and so are almost all his poetic creations.

It is better if you read through the Unit section by section and do the exercises as you progress. Do give yourself a break after you have worked on a section.

12.2 SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1834)

Coleridge was born on October 21, 1772 in Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire. After studying at Christ’s Hospital, a charity school in London, he went to Cambridge, but left the University without completing his studies, and enlisted for some time as a private in a cavalry regiment. Heavy debt might have been the reason of this erratic step. Right from his childhood, he was a sensitive and lonely boy who enthusiastically read whatever books he found around him.

Disillusioned with the French Revolution and convinced that freedom was impossible in Great Britain, he together with Robert Southey and other friends conceived the Utopian idea of Pantisocracy in which twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles would marry twelve ladies, migrate to Susquehanna, somewhere in the United States of America, and form a classless community. They proposed to work on a farm two hours a day to eke out a living and devote the rest of their time in literary pursuit. Lack of fund and young ladies

forced them to abandon the venture. But in his enthusiasm for it, Coleridge married Sarah Fricker, Southey's sister-in-law, a step he repented throughout his life.

The Coleridges settled at Clevedon in Somerset where he pursued his literary interests and the result was the publication of a political and literary magazine, *The Watchman*, which, as was his wont with other activities, was short lived. He also published a volume of poems, *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1796. But it was only in the contact and companionship with Wordsworth that he discovered himself, his mental peace, security and environmental harmony, to write his most enduring poems between 1797 and 1800 – 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', the first part of 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan'. In collaboration with Wordsworth, *The Lyrical Ballads*, the manifesto of 'New spirit in poetry', was published in 1798.

In 1804, Coleridge decided to separate from his wife and went to Malta and Italy in search of health. However, he returned to England in 1806 and found a permanent home at Highgate in the house of Dr. Gillman. Here he gave up his addiction to opium. In 1817, he published his magnum opus *Biographia Literaria* – literary autobiography – which, though not an organized treatise, contains some of the most philosophical principles of poetic composition to be found anywhere. In it he has made a distinction between Fancy and Imagination. According to him, Fancy is passive which simply computes isolated mental pictures – memories and associations. It is intellectual rationalism. On the other hand, Imagination is creative, synthetic and magical power which brings about the fusion of human faculties.

When in 1824, under the patronage of George IV, The Royal Society of Literature was founded, Coleridge was nominated as one of the first ten associates with an annual pension of £100.

He published his last work *On the Constitution of Church and State* in 1830. He breathed his last at Highgate, London, on July 25, 1834.

Coleridge was a poet, philosopher and critic all rolled into one. He possessed the most vigorous mind among the Romantic poets. His versatility, however was also his undoing.

Do you find Coleridge's life interesting? If you do, you will find a longer introduction to it in any History of English Literature.

Now find out how well you have understood the section you read just now.

Self-check Exercise I

1) What was the aim of Pantisocracy?

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2) Who was Sarah Fricker?
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3) In the space provided below mention Coleridge’s most celebrated poems.
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.....
.....

4) The Royal Society of Literature was founded in the year

12.2.1 Poems of Coleridge

Among the poets of the 19th century Coleridge is the most fragmentary and unsystematic. Of the three poems on which his fame traditionally rests, only ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ is complete. ‘Christabel’ and ‘Kubla Khan’ are merely fragmentary. Apart from these three great poems, he also wrote ‘The Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ – a poem of hope and joy as experienced by the poet, ‘Frost at Midnight’, which subscribes to the theory of pantheistic philosophy – presence of divine spirit in nature, ‘Dejection: An Ode’, and ‘Youth and Age’ express poet’s sense of failure of creative powers. He also composed some political poems like ‘France: An Ode’, which underlines the disgust caused by the failure of the French Revolution and subsequent reign of terror; ‘The Destruction of Bastille’ extols the event, whereas ‘The Ode on the Departing Year’ fears the fall of England.

Coleridge was the true pantheist who took delight in everything around him, even the weird and bizarre. In his later days, however, under the influence of German transcendental philosophy, he added a new note to it that the external world is phenomenal rather than actual and in whatever form the external objects appear, is actually given to them by ourselves, i.e., Nature lives in us and the impressions we receive from it are nothing distinct from us but a reflection of our own thoughts. He, however, honestly adhered to his own view of poetry: “the best words in the best order.”

In his three important poems on which his fame rests, there is an element of romance enveloped in mystery and marvel of the unknown and untravelled regions. Nature is depicted in its myriad forms – familiar and comforting, tender and soothing, cheerful and jubilant, weird and horrifying, desolate and mournful, tumultuous and perturbing. All these are linked to produce the harmony of a perfect and moral impression. To the critics most of his poems may appear to be

fragmentary, but to the reader they present a wholesome experience. While, on the one hand, other romantic poets – Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and others – weave a web of romance from their personal experience, Coleridge sees it among the wonders of the external world, links them to the subtleties of human psychology and presents them in a story rich in dramatic situations and psychological truths with a delicate sense of morality.

The essence of Coleridge's romanticism lies in his artistic rendering of the supernatural. In 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' there are a phantom ship with its ghastly crew of Death and Life-in-Death, the Polar spirit seeking vengeance for the murder of the Albatross, the two supernatural voices representing Justice and Mercy and a troop of celestial spirits animating the dead crew. The whole atmosphere of this long poem is charged with a sense of heightened mystery. In 'Christabel', the evil spirit that haunts the body of Geraldine and blast the innocent happiness of sweet and lovely Christabel is in the true tradition of vampires and Coleridge infuses a mysterious dread into her. In 'Kubla Khan', a poet, a creator, is shown caught in a spell of creative inspiration which transcends his mundane existence into a purely supernatural being.

Coleridge's chief purpose, and also a problem, while writing about supernatural characters and events as he himself said, was "to transform from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes the poetic faith", i.e. one has to willingly suspend the disbelief to enjoy poetry, written in frenzy and at the height of imagination.

Coleridge's treatment of the supernatural elements made it imperative for him to lay the scenes in the Middle ages, marked for its magic, witchcraft and superstition. And yet his treatment of the supernatural was quite modern, full of philosophical and psychological hints.

The most distinguishing feature of Romantic poetry is its emphasis on imagination, and Coleridge's poetry reveals his intense imaginative power. He decreed poetry to be governed by the principles of Imagination and not by those of Fancy. To him Imagination was an organizing and integrating principle in absence of which no great poetry could be written.

12.3 KUBLA KHAN

12.3.1 The Background of the Poem

'Kubla Khan' was published by Coleridge in 1816 at the request of Lord Byron. It was described by Coleridge as 'A Vision in a Dream, a Fragment', and in a brief preface to the poem, the poet writes that after taking anodyne he "fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence ... in *Purchas's Pilgrimage*: 'Here the Kubla Khan commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground was enclosed with a wall' On awakening he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole ... and instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business ... and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained

some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away”

12.3.2 The Text

In **Xanadu** did **Kubla Khan**

A **stately** pleasure-dome **decree** :

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through **caverns** measureless to man

Down to a **sunless sea**.

So twice five miles of fertile ground

With walls and towers were **girdled round** :

And there were gardens bright with **sinuous rills**,

Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree ;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic **chasm** which **slanted**

Down the green hill **athwart** a **cedarn** cover !

A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon was **haunted**

By woman **wailing** for her demon-lover !

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil **seething**,

As if this earth in fast thick **pants** were breathing,

A mighty fountain **momently** was forced :

Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst

Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,

Or **chaffy grain** beneath the **thresher's flail** :

And 'mid these **dancing rocks** at once and ever

It flung up momentarily the sacred river.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion

Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,

Then reached the caverns measureless to man,

And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean :

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far

Ancestral voices prophesying war !

The shadow of the dome of pleasure

Floated midway on the waves;

Where was heard the mingled **measure**

From the Fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,

A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a **dulcimer**

In a vision once I saw :

It was an Abyssinian maid,

And on her dulcimer she played,

Singing of Mount Abora.

Could I revive within me

Her symphony and song,

To such a deep delight 'twould win me,

That with music loud and long,

I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice !
And all who heard should see them there ,
And all should cry, Beware ! Beware !
His flashing eyes, his floating hair !
Weave a circle around him **thrice**,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Glossary

Xanadu	:	The summer capital of Kubla Khan
Kubla Khan	:	The grandson of the great Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongolian Empire. Kubla Khan ruled from 1257 to 1294. He founded the city Peking(Beijing).
stately	:	splendid; grand
decree	:	order
caverns	:	deep caves
sunless sea	:	subterranean sea
girdled around	:	enclosed
sinuous	:	winding
rills	:	small streams
chasm	:	a broad, deep opening in the earth
slanted	:	sloped
athwart	:	across
cedarn	:	cedar trees
haunted	:	visited again and again
wailing	:	sobbing; crying; moaning
seething	:	bubbling with a hissing sound
pants	:	short breaths
momently	:	every moment
chaffy grain	:	grain not yet freed from chaff
thresher's flail	:	a mechanical device to separate grain from chaff
dancing rocks	:	large pieces of rocks being thrown about
measure	:	music
dulcimer	:	a stringed musical instrument
thrice	:	a favourite number in magical rites

12.3.3 Scansion

Let us scan lines 47 to 50 of the poem.

/ / / /
 That sun / ny dome ! / those caves / of íce
 / / / /
 And all / who heard / should see / them there,
 / / / /
 And all / should cry, / Beware ! Beware !
 / / / /
 His fla/shing eyes, / his floa/ting hair !

Though the poem is composed in irregular metre, these four lines are quite regular written in iambic tetrameter.

Now scan the following four lines:
 Weave a circle round him thrice,
 And close your eyes with holy dread,
 For he on honey-dew hath fed,
 And drunk the milk of Paradise.

For answers see Answers to Exercises II.

12.3.4 A Discussion

‘Kubla Khan’ is a poem about the act of poetic creation. It is significant for a thrilling picture of a poet in ecstasy in the process of creation. Kubla Khan (1216-1294), one of the powerful Asiatic kings, was the founder of the Mongol dynasty in China. The poem is both descriptive and suggestive – descriptive in the sense that it describes in detail Kubla Khan’s pleasure-dome of “rare device”, the source of the sacred river Alph, the maid, and suggestive in that if the poet could revive his inspiration a great poetry would follow. Coleridge also hints at some physical clues to identify a poet in his moments of inspiration.

Kubla Khan ordered a magnificent pleasure-palace to be built for him in Xanadu, also called Chandu or Shandu. So a ten-miles of fertile land on the banks of the sacred river Alph was enclosed with walls and towers. The source of the sacred river was a deep mysterious gorge that ran down a green hill across a wood of cedar trees. All these make the enclosed area wild, savage and enchanted, yet it is holy, fit to be frequented by a woman wandering about in the light of a waning moon in search of her demon-lover. Amidst the loud, tumultuous noise caused by the fall of water into the sunless sea, Kubla Khan could hear the voices of his ancestors to be prepared for a war in the near future.

In the last stanza, the poet gives us a vivid picture of an inspired poet and the act of poetic creation. Once, in a vision, he saw and heard an Abyssinian maid playing on her dulcimer and singing sonorously of the wild splendour of Mount Abora. The poet says that if he could recreate in his imagination the sweet, enchanting music of the maid, he would feel so inspired and ecstatic that with the music of his poetry he could build Kubla Khan’s pleasure-dome in the air / imagination, i.e., the listeners would see it in their imagination. In other words, a poet in a spell of poetic inspiration is capable of creation like God (Read the section on the Background).

In the last five lines Coleridge draws a picture of a poet inspired. When a poet's eyes are flashing, his hair floating and seem to be withdrawn from the material world, the listeners / readers ought to be beware of him and feel awed, but not fearful, for he has fed on honey-dew and drunk the milk of Paradise. In that moment he transcends into a superhuman being.

The poem is full of suggestive phrases and lines capable of evoking mystery. The description of the deep romantic chasm, the woman wailing for her demon-lover, the ancestral voices prophesying war, the source of the river Alph, sinuous rills, etc. are natural phenomena, but are suggested in such a way as if they were supernatural occurrences. The poet takes us to distant times and remote and unknown regions where the very unfamiliarity of the scenes prompt us to suspend our reasoning faculties, "willing suspension of disbelief" as Coleridge called it.

The very idea of poetic creativity taking shape under divine inspiration and of the poet transcending his mundane existence and transforming himself to the level of superhuman being when caught in his poetic frenzy evokes a world of magic and enchantment, a romantic concept of poetry.

Kubla Khan's strength and splendour are symbols of the might of poetry and his architectural achievements suggest power of the poetic imagination. The image of 'dome' suggests fulfillment and satisfaction of the might of finished creation.

The rhythm and the sound are perfect and conform to Coleridge's dictum : 'the best words in the best order'.

Self-check Exercise II

1) What is the subtitle of the poem?

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2) Identify the similes used for the **mighty fountain**.

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3) Read the text of the poem carefully and find out the number of proper nouns. What do they suggest?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4) Write down the images used for **dome**.

.....

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.....

.....

5) What is the epithet used for the word **river**.

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6) Identify one paradoxical line in the poem.

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7) Scan the last four lines given in the section 12.3.3.

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12.4 LET US SUM UP

Coleridge was the philosopher of the Romantic movement. His poems reveal his love of the marvelous and his great power to fuse natural with the supernatural. 'Kubla Khan' illustrates vividly what he meant when he called the imagination a 'synthetic and magical power', a power which 'instantly' fuses 'shattered fragments of memory' to produce a great poem.

The poem composed in irregular metre, is the recollection of a dream Coleridge saw when he had fallen asleep while reading *Purchas's Pilgrimage*. Coleridge was an avid reader of travel literature.

The poem is about the act of poetic creation, and notable for a thrilling picture of a poet in ecstasy.

12.5 SUGGESTED READING

M.H. Abrams : *The Mirror and the Lamp*

C.M. Bowra : *The Romantic Imagination*

Graham Hough : *The Romantic Poets*

A.R. Jones and William Tydeman(ed) : *Coleridge* (Casebook Series)

William Walsh : *Coleridge: The Poet*

12.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1)
 - i) To establish a classless society
 - ii) To work for two hours to earn a living, and devote the rest of the time in literary pursuit.
- 2) Coleridge's wife and Southey's sister-in-law.
- 3)
 - i) *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
 - ii) 'Christabel'
 - iii) 'Kubla Khan'
- 4) 1824

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) 'A Vision in a Dream, a Fragment'.
- 2) Huge fragments volted like rebounding hail
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail (ll 20-21)
- 3) Xanadu, Kubla Khan, Alph, maid, Mount Ebor, Paradise
They suggest remoteness, fear and awe.

- 4) i) stately pleasure-dome (l 2)
ii) a dome of pleasure (l 31)
iii) a sunny pleasure-dome (l 36)
- 5) sacred
- 6) A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice ! (l 35)
- 7) Answer to the scansion (12.3.3)

/ / / /
Weave / a cir / cle round / him thrice,
 / / / /
And close / your eyes / with ho / ly dread,
 / / / /
For he / on hon / ey-dew / hath fed,
 / / / /
And drunk / the milk / of Pa / radise.

Though this poem is composed in irregular metre, these four lines are quite regular written in iambic tetrameter.

Variation : the only variation is that in the first line the first foot is Trochaic.

UNIT 13 LORD BYRON

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Lord Byron (1788-1824)
- 13.3 ‘Roll on Thou Deep and Dark Blue Ocean’
 - 13.3.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 13.3.2 The Text
 - 13.3.3 The Stanza Form
 - 13.3.4 An Appreciation
- 13.4 ‘George The Third’
 - 13.4.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 13.4.2 The Text
 - 13.4.3 A Discussion
- 13.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.6 Suggested Reading
- 13.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Byron the poet;
- Appreciate ‘Roll on Thou Dark and Deep Blue Ocean’, and
- Examine ‘George the Third’ as a piece of satire.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we have discussed Byron’s life in brief because it has often been said that Byron’s life itself was poetic. Critics have read his poetry as a record of his life. We will see how this is true.

The first poem is an extract from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* which is very close to a travelogue in verse. In the fourth canto from which the poem has been taken, Byron drops the mask of Childe Harold and talks about his experiences more directly. We have scanned a stanza of the poem. You may practice scansion by scanning the poem selected for you.

The second poem is a piece of satire born out of a feud with another poet—Robert Southey. We have, in the introduction to the poem shown how Byron ridicules Southey. Thus in both cases Byron is a participant in his poetry, a matter that critics have repeatedly pointed out.

It is better if you read through the unit section by section and do the exercises as you read. Give yourself a break after you have worked on a major section.

13.2 LORD BYRON (1788-1824)

Byron was the eldest of the second generation of the Romantic Poets. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey belonged to the first generation. You have already learnt about the first two. In the present and the succeeding two units you will read about the second generation. i.e. Byron, Shelley and Keats.

Byron was born in London on 22 January 1788 while his mother was on her way to Aberdeen. He was born in poverty and of a club foot. While the former disappeared by the time he was 10 years of age the latter remained permanently with him.

Byron was the son of one captain Jack Byron often remembered as ‘Mad Jack’. He had run through the fortunes of two heiresses—a marchioness who gave birth to Augusta Byron, the poet’s half sister, and Catherine Gordon of Gight, mother of the poet. It was while running away from her rapacious (typical of a person who takes everything he can, especially by force) husband that she gave birth to George.

When Byron was three years old his father died (1791). In 1794, when Byron was six, his cousin, the heir to the Byron title, was killed. So when the fifth Baron Byron died in 1798, Byron inherited the title at the age of ten and the mother and son moved to Newstead Abbey, a dilapidated Gothic inheritance.

In Scotland, Byron attended the grammar School at Aberdeen. He later went to Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge. Byron had always been a rebel. In order to avoid the regulation that forbade keeping dogs he kept a bear as a pet in his room at Cambridge. He also became a member of the Whig Club along with John Hobhouse, about whom you will read more later in this unit, and Lord Broughton.

Later Byron went to the Parliament. He spoke in support of the ‘frame-breakers’, or workers who had destroyed some textile machines through fear of unemployment. On another occasion he supported relief of Catholics in Scotland. He had sympathy for both Napoleon and George Washington. Byron almost wished that Napoleon were not defeated at Waterloo by the British.

Byron lived a considerable part of his life on the continent. It was at Leghorn in Italy that Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) joined him and they produced *The Liberal* magazine in which was published *The Vision of Judgement* an extract from which you are going to read later in this unit.

Byron, perhaps of all British poets, was the most European in outlook. Comparing him with Wordsworth, Bernard Blackstone, a critic, wrote:

Wordsworth’s topos is a narrow one, the Lake District, and this limits his appeal to the European reader. Byron’s is a very broad one, the whole of Europe and the Mediterranean world, and this makes him strange to the English reader. Mosques, temples, bazaars, dervishes, pashas, deserts, wadis, don’t go down very easily to a palate accustomed to clergymen, farmers, public-houses, markets, churches and cottages. So that Byron has never seemed quite real to an English audience though his work was very real to himself and to his Mediterranean readers (*Byron: A Survey*, London, Longman, 1975, p.xi).

Mosques, temples and bazaars, dervishes, pashas, deserts and wadis are unusual in English poetry. So was Byron's personal life unusual. Byron married Annabella Milbanke on 2 January 1815 but he had many women with whom he had affairs—Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Oxford, Mary Godwin's step sister Claire Clairmont, Teresa Guiccioli and an incestuous relationship with his half sister Augusta. The result was that he and Annabella got separated only after a year of marriage.

It has often been said that Byron's life imitated literature and his poetry makes its primary impact as a historical and biographical document. Perhaps it is generally true to say about the Romantics that it helps us to appreciate a poet's work if we know his or her life. This is more true in case of Byron. Perhaps his last 'poetic' act was his death (19 April, 1824) on the island of Missolonghi while he was working for Greek independence from the Turks.

Do you find Byron's life interesting? If you do you will find a longer introduction to it in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, at your Study Centre.

Now find out how well you have understood the short section you read just now.

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) In the space provided below write the names of the Romantic Poets of, the first generation

..... the second generation

- 2) How old was Byron when he died?

.....

- 3) How did George Byron become a Lord and what did he inherit?

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13.3 ROLL ON THOU DEEP AND DARK BLUE OCEAN

13.3.1 The Background of the Poem

'Roll on Thou Deep and Dark Blue Ocean' is an extract from Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. We have here the stanzas CLXXVIII (178) to CLXXXIII (183). These are the last but 3 stanzas of the canto.

The poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* describes the journey of Childe Harold, whose experiences correspond to Byron's own. On 2 July 1809 Byron left England along with a Cambridge friend John Cam Hobhouse, his servant Fletcher and his 'little page', Robert Rushton. On 6 July they reached Lisbon.

The first two cantos describe the pilgrim, surfeited with his past life of sin and pleasure, finding diversions in his journey across Portugal, Spain, the Ionian Islands and Albania. Byron returned to Newstead in England in 1811 and the first two cantos were published in 1812. It was received enthusiastically by London society and lauded Byron as a major poet of England. 'I woke one morning' Byron wrote in March 1812, 'and found myself famous.'

In April 1816 Byron left England, never again to return to it. He went to Geneva in Switzerland where he met Shelley and completed the third canto of *Childe Harold*, which was published the same year. It describes the pilgrim's travels to Belgium, the Rhine, the Alps and Jura. *Childe Harold* also reflects on the Spanish War, and the Battle of Waterloo (1815) at which, Napoleon suffered his final defeat against the United Kingdom.

In October 1816, Byron left Geneva for Venice with Hobhouse. In the fourth canto he speaks directly about his experiences in Italy, his meditations on time and history, on Venice and Petrarch, Ferrara and Tasso, Florence and Boccaccio, Rome and her great men ending with the symbol of the sea. Byron had an abiding interest in the mountains and the sea. The extract that you are going to read is a meditation on the symbol of the sea.

13.3.2 The Text

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
 There is a **rapture** on the lonely shore,
 There is a society, where none intrudes,
 By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:

I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
 From these our interviews, in which I steal
 From all I may be, or have been before,
 To mingle with the Universe, and feel
 What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean — Roll!
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
 Man marks the earth with ruin — his control
 Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
 A shadow of man's **ragave**, save his own,
 When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
 Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.

His steps are not upon thy paths, — thy fields
 Are not a spoil for him, — thou dost arise
 And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
 For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
 And sends't him, shivering in thy playful spray
 And howling, to his Gods, where **haply** lies
 His petty hope in some near port or bay,
 And dashest him again to earth:— there let him lay

The armaments which thunderstrike the walls
 Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake,
 And monarchs tremble in their capitals,
 The oak **leviathans**, whose huge ribs make
 Their clay creator the vain title take
 Of lord of thee, and **arbiter** of war —
 These are thy toys, and, as the snowy flake,
 They melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar
 Alike the **Armada's** pride or spoils of **Trafalgar**.

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee —
 Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?
 Thy waters wash'd them power while they were free,
 And many a tyrant since; their shores obey
 The stranger, slave, or savage; their decay
 Has dried up realms to deserts: — not so thou; —
 Unchangeable, save to thy wild waves' play,
 Time writes no wrinkle on thine **azure** brow:
 Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
 Glasses itself in tempests; in all time, —
 Calm or **convulsed**, in breeze, or gale, or storm,
 Icing the pole, or in the **torrid** clime
 Dark—heaving boundless, endless, and sublime,
 The image of eternity, the throne
 Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime
 The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
 Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.

Glossary

rapture	: great joy and delight.
ravage	: to ruin and destroy; (of an army or a rabble) that robs (an area) with violence.
spurn	: to treat or refuse with angry pride.
haply	: (old use) perhaps.
leviathan	: a Biblical sea-monster; huge ship
arbiter	: a person who has complete control or great influence over actions, decisions.
armada	: the fleet sent by Philip II of Spain against England in 1588 and defeated in the English Channel.
Trafalgar	: Cape on the South Coast of Spain near which the British fleet under Nelson gained victory over the fleets of France and Spain on 21 st October 1805.
azure	: sky blue
torrid	: very hot

- convulsion** : an unnaturally violent and sudden movement,
convulse : to shake (a person or animal and by extension a society) violently.

13.3.3 The Stanza Form

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is in an old stanza form. It was invented by Edmund Spenser (1552-99) and used in *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), his greatest work. It thus came to be called the Spenserian stanza. In his preface to the first and second cantos of the poem Byron wrote thus:

The stanza of Spenser, according to one of our most successful poets, admits of every variety. Dr. Beattie makes the following observation: – ‘Not long ago, I began a poem in the style and stanza of Spenser, in which I propose to give full scope to my inclination, and be either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humour strikes me; for if I mistake not, the measure which I have adopted admits equally of all these kinds of composition. Strengthened in my opinion by such authority, and by the example of some in the highest order of Italian poets I shall make no apology for attempts at similar variations in the following composition; satisfied that if they are unsuccessful, their failure must be in the execution, rather than in the design, sanctioned by the practice of Ariosto, Thomson, and Beattie.

Byron saw himself in the tradition of Ludovico Ariosto author of the famous romantic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1532), James Thomson (1700-48), author of *The Seasons* (1726-30) and James Beattie (1735-1803) who wrote *The Minstrel* in Spenserian stanza and was an influence on *The Prelude* of Wordsworth.

/ / / / /
 Roll on/thou deep/ and dark/blue O'/ cean, roll,
 / / / / /
 Ten thou/sand fleets/ sweep o/ ver thee/ in vain
 / / / / /
 Man marks/ the earth/ with ru/ in; his/ control
 / / / / /
 Stops with/ the shore; / upon/ the wat / ery main
 / / / / /
 The wrecks / are all / thy deed; / nor doth/ remain
 / / / / /
 A shad / ow of / man's ra / vage save / his own,
 / / / / /
 When for / a moment like / a drop / of rain
 / / / / /
 He sinks / into /thy depths / with bub / bling groan
 / / / / / /
 Without / a grave, / unknelled / uncof / fined, and / unknown.

Above we have eight five-foot iambic lines, followed by an iambic line of six feet. The lines rhyme ababbcbcc. You know that a five-foot iambic line is also

called iambic pentameter of which **blank verse** is made and a six-foot iambic line is known as iambic hexameter and also **Alexandrine**.

Byron has used this stanza form because he agreed with James Beattie that it would be able to express his variety of moods effectively. Notice that a poet makes a conscious decision about a variety of matters before writing poetry. This may appear contrary to the popular notion that poetry gets written without conscious effort. Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' was composed in a dream; Shelley wrote about the Eolian Harp. However, poetry is in words what a flower is in its petals and sepals, androecium and gynaeceum, more than a sum of its parts. A great poem is likely to elicit a unique response from every individual who reads it. You may, now that you have read the poem carefully yourself, read my appreciation of it.

13.3.4 An Appreciation

'Roll on, Thou Deep and Dark Blue Ocean' is a ceremonial song in praise of the sea. It is an anthem to the Ocean. It is the classic voice of a poet not in the Apollonian but in the Dionysian tradition. Here there is not the clarity and balance, neatness of outlines and the beauty of form but the rapture, the enthusiasm, the exuberance and joy of youth. Here is Romantic poetry in its splendour.

The English Romantics were lovers of nature. 'I love not Man the Less' proclaims Byron, 'but nature more'. Byron's nature, as that of the classical poets – Dryden and Pope, Johnson and Goldsmith — was not truth — the laws of nature-but God's variegated creation, its soothing power, its destructive aspect and creative force — Shelley's destroyer and preserver. What Shelley saw in the 'wild' West Wind, Byron sees in the sea. The 'West Wind's clarion O'er the dreaming earth' drives 'sweet buds like flocks to feed in air'. Byron's ocean chastises the vain man, melts his Armadas and the spoils of Trafalgars into the yeast of its waves. From its slime are born the monsters of the sea.

'Roll on' is a hymn to the sea, because it is the Almighty's 'glorious mirror'. It is His throne. It is the image of eternity itself. It expresses God's grandeur in its varied aspects — calm and violent as in a 'breeze, or gale, or storm'; frigid as in the polar regions and dark and tempestuous as in the equatorial. In looking at the sea as a symbol of the Divine, because of its variegated beauty, Byron pre-empted Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844'-89). Hopkins in 'Pied Beauty' saw God represented in beauty that is in many colours, as in certain birds, or the sky—azure and white—or the fish (trout) with its 'rose-moles' (red dots)—or the landscape with its bends, portions fallow and ploughed, or the freckled skin. What we find in the last stanza of 'Roll on' is magnified many times by Hopkins in 'Pied Beauty' but the seed of experience in both cases is the same.

In 'Roll on', the sea has been apostrophized. The poem is an address to the sea. It is the expression of the rapture of communion with the 'Universe' which Byron thinks he 'can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal'. However, Byron's rapture is well communicated to the reader through the images in and the cadences of the poem. The tone is set in the first stanza itself.

There is society.....

By the deep sea, and music in its roar!

Byron does something more. He ignores the barriers raised by human language, by refusing to distinguish between the sea and ocean as he declines to accept that society is made only of human beings. For Byron there is music in the beat of the drum, the roar of the sea.

Byron was a poet of the mountain peaks and the sea just as Wordsworth of the child and 'the meanest flower' and Keats of the 'unravished bride' and the 'fruit with ripeness to the core'. It is strange, but true that the creator of Don Juan loved loneliness— 'the pathless wood', 'the lonely shore'. The dichotomy of the poet finds expression in the oxymorons.

Byron's repudiation of man's pride and power finds expression in the image of man compared to rain drop falling on the surface of the sea. Like the rain drop, he dies with no more than a 'bubbling groan'. Worse still is his image in the third stanza where he is rejected and thrown into the sky, ridiculed by the cold and 'playful spray' and sent back to some port or bay nearby. In the fourth stanza it is not the ordinary man but his monarch who is subjected to the same insult. The 'clay creator' refers to the man who makes the ships of war— 'oak leviathans'. Man claims to rule over the waves and assumes titles such as 'arbiter of war'. However, the truth is that it is the sea which has complete control over the monarch, the empire builder. For the sea, his ships are objects to play with.

Byron began with an image of the insignificance of man in the second stanza and through the fifth he develops it into the futility of his exploits—the decay of ancient civilizations of Assyria, Greece, Rome and Carthage. To Byron, the poet, it matters not which came first—Assyrian or Greek, Roman or Carthagian. Poets are insular to the prosaic world of facts. What matters to them is the core of humanity, made in the image of God. Byron feels that man's acquisitive instinct has led him to ruin. Wordsworth said, 'Getting and spending we lay waste our powers'. Byron's sea scorns the emperor, spurns the conqueror and lays waste civilizations that are expressions of man's greed. While they decay, the sea remains as young as it was in the first dawn of creation. It is the image of eternity.

If on the one hand Byron decries the British victory on the Spanish Armada in the sixteenth century and the Battle of Trafalgar in his own time, with contempt, on the other he remembers Shakespeare, if only in a veiled way, with approval. There is an echo of Sonnet 60. In the last two lines of the fifth stanza, Shakespeare wrote:

Time doth transfixe the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauties brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scieth to mow.

From the second through the fourth stanzas are the various images of man as an ordinary individual compared to a rain drop, as a king and tyrant who is repulsed to the shore; as a conqueror whose ships are the ocean's toys, and as a builder of civilizations that decay. Byron has presented a series of word pictures that drive

his point home. The last two lines of the fifth stanza, in reminding us of ‘creation’s dawn’ prepare us for the ‘image of eternity’ that the sea becomes in the last stanza. The transition, due to those two lines, becomes smooth and gentle.

There is a happy marriage of sound with sense in the poem. The choice of the word ‘roll’ is a stroke of genius of a master craftsman. The epanadiploic (from **epanadiplosis**) use of roll in the first line of the second paragraph echo in our ears the sound of the wave and the sound suggests its ebb and flow to our visual imagination. The pattern of rhyme suggested by the words —roll, vain, control, plain, remain... as it were, bring the elation to our heart that the sight of the gigantic waves in the sea themselves bring. Byron thought that the Spenserian stanza was capable of expressing a variety of moods. In this short specimen itself we notice that while the second, through fifth stanzas, at the level of the sound, picture the sea the first supports an introspective mood and the last a meditative one. The introspective mood is suggested by the three assertive statements of the first stanza.

The repetition of ‘There is’ three times suggests that the introspection is only a prelude to the rhetorical vein in which Byron is soon going to get into. However, the rhetoric here only brings in variety to the poetry. It does not detract us from the rich poetic experience that Byron has to offer. The poem has remained unforgettable because it has pictured in words the sights and sounds of the actual experience of standing in front of the expanse of the sea. It is a product of Byron’s catholic temper, his love for the sea and above all an abiding faith in man’s capacity to improve himself in the face of adversity.

Self-check Exercise II

A) Comment on the following examples of literary devices from ‘Roll on’ in the space provided for the purpose:

a) There is society where none intrudes.

By the deep sea.....

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b) I love not man the less....

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c) What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

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d)his control
Stops with the shore.....

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e) Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd and unknown

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f) The Oak leviathans whose huge ribs make
Their clay-creator the vain title take
Of lord of thee....

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g) Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, What are they?

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h) Thy waters washed them power while they were free.

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i) The stranger, slave, or savage....

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j) Time writes no wrinkles on thine azure brow
Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

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k) Thou glorious mirror.

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B) Look up in the dictionary for the meanings of 'Apollonian' and
'Dionysian' and record them below.

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13.4 GEORGE THE THIRD

13.4.1 Background of the Poem

Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) is a parody of Robert Southey's (1774-1843) original poem, *A Vision of Judgment* (1821). (Notice the difference in the two titles.) Southey's was meant to be a panegyric to George III of England who died in 1820. Byron's is a satire both on Southey and the King.

In Southey's poem, the poet in a trance sees George III rise from his tomb and reach the gates of Heaven where the Devil and Wilkes the democrat leader come to charge him with crimes he committed on earth. However, they retire in discomfiture when Washington eulogises him and he is greeted by the previous English monarchs, the eminent English and finally his own family.

In the preface to his poem Southey made a direct attack on Byron's works and referred to him as the leader of the 'satanic school' of poetry. In response Byron wrote the parody in which Southey is swept up by one of the devils from the Lake District where he offers to write Satan's biography and on being declined the favour, Michael's. when he attempts to read his own 'Vision' Saint Peter,

Upraised his keys,
And at the fifth line knock'd the poet down;

Southey fell into the lake but there he did not drown,

'He first sank to the bottom —like his works,
But soon rose to the surface —like himself;
For all corrupted things are buoy'd, like corks,
By their own rottenness, light as an elf,
Or wisp that flits O'er a morass;

This is trenchant satire and Southey had provoked Byron to deserve it.

The extracts that you are going to read are mainly satire on George III. In it, however, Byron praises George's domestic virtues. His family life was free from the characteristic vice of his predecessors. However he wanted to re-establish his personal rule prevalent during the reigns of the later Stuarts. He opposed Catholic emancipation, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. He suffered from recurring fits of insanity and finally became insane in 1811. His eldest son was appointed regent until his father's death in 1820.

If you now read the satire you will be able to appreciate the darts that Byron shoots at George.

13.4.2 The Text

In the first year of freedom's second dawn
Died George the Third; although no tyrant, one
Who shielded tyrants, till each sense withdrawn
Left him nor mental nor external sun:
A better farmer ne'er brush'd dew from lawn,
A worse king never left a realm undone!

He died – but left his subjects still behind,
One half as mad - and t'other no less blind.

He died ! His death made no great stir on earth:
His burial made some pomp; there was profusion
Of velvet, gilding, brass, and no great dearth
Of aught but tears — save those shed by collusion.
For these things may be bought at their true worth:
Of elegy there was the due infusion-
Bought also; and the torches, cloaks, and banners,
Heralds, and relics of old Gothic manners,

Form'd a sepulchral melodrame. Of all
The fools who flock'd to swell or see the show,
Who cared about the corpse? The funeral
Made the attraction, and the black the woe.
There throb'd not there a thought which pierced the pall;
And when the gorgeous coffin was laid low,
It seem'd the mockery of hell to fold
The rottenness of eighty years in gold.

....'Look to the earth, I said, and say again:
When this old, blind, mad, helpless, weak, poor worm
Began in youth's first bloom and flush to reign,
The world and he both wore a different form,
And much of earth and all the watery plain
Of ocean call'd him king: through many a storm
His isles had floated on the abyss of time;
For the rough virtues chose them for their clime.

'He came to his sceptre young; he leaves it old;
Look to the state in which he found his realm,
And left it; and his annals too behold,
How to a minion first he gave the helm;
How grew upon his heart a thirst for gold,
The beggar's vice, which can but overwhelm
The meanest hearts; and for the rest, but glance
Thine eye along America and France.

'Tis true, he was a tool from first to last
(I have the workmen safe); but as a tool
So let him be consumed. From out the past
Of ages, since mankind have known the rule
Of monarchs —from the bloody rolls amass'd
Of sin and slaughter —from the Ceasar's school,
Take the worst pupil; and produce a reign.
More drench'd with gore, more cumber'd with the slain

'He ever warr'd with freedom and the free:
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,
So that they utter'd the word 'Liberty!'

Found George the Third their first opponent. Whose
History was ever stain'd as his will be
With national and individual woes?
I grant his household abstinence: I grant
His neutral virtues, which most monarchs want;

'I know he was a constant consort; own
He was a decent sire, and middling lord.
All this is much, and most upon a throne;
As temperance, if at Apicius' board,
Is more than at an anchorite's supper shown.

'I grant him all the kindest can accord;
And this was well for him, but not for those
Millions who found him what oppression chose.
'The New World shook him off; the Old yet groans
Beneath what he and, his prepared, if not
Completed: he leaves heirs on many thrones
To all his vices, without what begot
Compassion for him—his tame virtues; drones
Who sleep, or despots who have now forgot
A lesson which shall be re-taught them, wake
Upon the thrones of earth: but let them quake!'

(From *The Vision of Judgment*)

Glossary

freedom's second dawn	: 1820 was a year of political unrest in southern Europe including the beginning of the Greek revolt against Turkey
ought	: I don't know; don't care
herald	: a person who carried messages from a ruler and gave important pieces of news to the people
gothic	: of or concerning a Germanic people called Goths, who fought against the Roman empire; their style in art and architecture; old fashioned
sepulchre	: tomb
sepulchral	: a reminder of the dead
melodrame	: melodrama
abyss	: a bottomless hole
scepter	: a short rod or bar carried by a monarch
annals	: historical records
minion	: a person who flatters his superiors for favours.
helm	: the position from which things are controlled.
cumber	: encumber – to fill up (a place) inconveniently
sire	: the father of an animal, especially of a horse.

- middling** : fair, quite
Ram is middling good in soccer.
- Apicius** : a person who knew a lot about food and drink in the time of Tiberius. He hanged himself when he found he had spent a large part of his fortune on his luxuries.
- anchorite** : hermit
- quake** : tremble, shake.

13.4.3 A Discussion

‘George the Third’, as you know, is an extract from Byron’s *The Vision of Judgment*. The scene which the poem has in the foreground is that of the decease, funeral and ascent of George III to Heaven.

The first stanza sets the background of the poem. It announces the event — the demise of George III — and sets the comico-satirical tone of the poem. 1820 was the year in which the struggle for Greek independence began in which Byron also took some interest. George died in the same year. Byron thus makes use of periphrasis. He tells us about some of George’s good qualities— that he was no tyrant and was a good farmer—and some bad ones — that he shielded tyrants, (perhaps a reference to Lord Castlereagh about whom you will read also in the Unit on Shelley); that he left his kingdom undone, that he was blind, etc. A satirist attempts to rectify the vices of the society in which he lives. While Byron, apparently ridicules the king alone, at times he hints at the shortcomings in the British people also. He points out that George left his subjects, ‘One half as mad — and other no less blind.’

The second and the third stanzas describe the melodrama that the funeral was. There was plenty of everything, velvet, gilding, brass, elegies, torches, cloaks, banners and heralds and dearth of only one thing—genuine sorrow for the deceased.

From the fourth through the seventh stanzas are the words of the Devil who has come to claim George from Michael at the Heaven Gate. Hence you find the king subjected to caustic satire. The ‘I’ of the first line of the fourth stanza refers to the Devil. His chief attack is on George’s attempt to establish personal rule in England. During his reign Britain’s American colonies became independent. Britain, both in trying to suppress the American colonies and Napoleon who was in the popular imagination a symbol of liberty, became the butt of Byron’s satire. Besides being a foe to liberty George had an insatiable thirst for gold. The sovereign besides was a tool in the hands of other people.

The last two lines of the seventh stanza make a transition to the main subject of the eighth, recounting, George’s virtues — ‘his household abstinence’, faithfulness to his wife, qualities as a father, etc. These the Devil admits would not have been seen as virtues in a person at a lower station in life. The two telling images that clinch the point are those of ‘Apicius’s board’ and ‘an anchorite’s supper.’

The last stanza shifts the focus of our attention from a dead British monarch to the monarchs of Europe who either as drones sleep on their thrones unmindful of their country's plights or are despots who have refused to learn from the mistakes of the deceased monarch.

Byron's satire thus has a noble intention, that is, of rectifying the sources of politico-administrative power of their ills. The sovereigns on the European thrones are George's heirs, metaphorically speaking and Byron's satire is directed at them also.

Self-check Exercise III

Do the following exercises in the space provided:

- a) Read the first stanza and indicate the rhyme scheme.

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- b) State briefly George III's qualities as a person.

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- c) What were the monarch's shortcomings according to Byron?

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- d) What in the short run was the aim of *The Vision of Judgment*?

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e) What in essence is Byron's aim through the satire?

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13.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life of Lord Byron and examined two excerpts from his poetry.

The first is from his epic poem, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* which is an account of Byron's own travels on the continent and in Asia Minor. It is written in the Spenserian stanza and we hope that you can now scan the remaining stanzas of the poem yourself. Do the exercise with your counsellor at the Study Centre.

The second extract is from Byron's satire on Southey and George III. You have seen how Byron had two or three goals behind writing *The Vision of Judgment* and how he fulfilled them.

We hope now you will try to read a few more poems of Byron you may find in anthologies or the collected works of Byron.

13.6 SUGGESTED READING

There is a good survey of Byron's work in *Byron: A Survey* by Bernard Blackstone from which I have quoted a passage in this unit. *Byron's Poetical Works* edited by Frederick Page and re-edited by John Jump has been published by the Oxford University Press (Oxford, 1970). R.K. Kaul has edited Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* which is published by College Book Depot (Jaipur, 1965). *The Growth and Evolution of Classical Rhetoric* by A.B. Sharma (Delhi, Ajanta Books International, 1991) will be helpful in understanding the rhetorical devices used in the course generally and this unit particularly.

13.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise 1

- 1) See paragraph one of 13.2
- 2) 36 years
- 3) Read the 4th paragraph in 13.2 beginning—When Byron was three.....

Self-check Exercise II

- a) Paradox

- b) Anastrophe in 'love not' we normally say 'don't love'. Through the inversion the statement has been made more effective.
- c) Parallelism in the two parts of the line in ideas and sound —called Isocolon.
- d) Alliteration (repetition of 's' sound)
- e) Different words here express different ideas but of the same general kind. This is synchresis.
- f) Unusual collocation in 'oak leviathans' for ship. 'clay-creator' for man. They are also metaphors.
- g) Rhetorical question or Interrogatio.
- h) Alliteration in 'water washed' and ellipsis in 'them power'. The latter's full form would be 'washed them of their power'.
- i) Alliteration.
- j) Personification of 'Time' and 'Dawn'.
- k) Apostrophe.

Self-check Exercise III

- a) a b a b a b c c
- b) George took interest in British agriculture.
He was a good husband.
He was no tyrant.
- c) George shielded tyrants (such as Castlereagh). He worked against freedom and liberty in America and against France.
- d) It was meant to be a satire on Robert Southey who had attacked him in the first instance.
- e) Byron perhaps wishes to improve monarchs of Europe and make them more sensitive to their subjects' lives.

UNIT 14 P.B. SHELLEY

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)
- 14.3 Ode to the West Wind
 - 14.3.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 14.3.2 The Text
 - 14.3.3 Analysis
 - 14.3.4 The Stanza Form
- 14.4 To A Skylark
 - 14.4.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 14.4.2 The Text
 - 14.4.3 Analysis
- 14.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.6 Suggested Reading
- 14.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- know about Shelley's life and work;
- appreciate 'Ode To The West Wind'; and
- 'To A Skylark'.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we have discussed Shelley's life and work because his eventful as well as unconventional life has influenced his writings and probably an understanding of his life may help you in analyzing and appreciating his poetry in general and the prescribed poems in particular.

The first poem 'Ode to the West Wind' is a lyric of great complexity and consummate artistic design. Shelley glorifies the west wind because it destroys to preserve, and his optimism is also evident in the last line, 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind'?

The second poem 'To a Skylark' is an impassioned invocation to the invisible bird which pours out its heart 'In profuse strains of unpremeditated art and singing still dost soar and soaring ever singest'. It is a very famous lyric in which the poet glorifies the blissful life of the skylark, a heavenly bird, and contrasts her fate with human suffering.

14.2 PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792-1822)

P.B. Shelley was one of the greatest romantic poets of early nineteenth century. He was an uncompromising rebel. He continued his struggle for the cause of individual liberty, social justice and peace. He wished to bring social reforms by his inspiring and courageous works of literature. He dreamt of an ideal society in which there should be no slavery and no exploitation.

Shelley was born on 4 August 1792 at Field Place, Broadbridge Heath, near Horsham, West Sussex, England. He was the eldest legitimate son of Sir Timothy Shelley — a Whig Member of Parliament for Horsham from 1790 -1792 and for Shoreham from 1806- 1812; and Elizabeth Pilford, a Sussex landowner. Shelley had four younger sisters and one much younger brother. He received his early education at home, tutored by Reverend Evan Edwards of nearby Warnham. He spent a happy and contented childhood largely in country pursuits such as fishing and hunting.

In 1802, he entered the Syon House Academy of Brentford, Middlesex. In 1804, Shelley entered Eton College, where he performed poorly, and was subjected to an almost daily mob torment at around noon by older boys. Surrounded, the young Shelley would have his books torn from his hands and his clothes pulled at and torn until he cried out madly in his high-pitched voice. This daily misery could be attributed to Shelley's refusal to take part in fagging and his indifference towards games and other youthful activities. These idiosyncrasies acquired him the nickname 'Mad Shelley'.

On 10 April 1810, he matriculated at University College, Oxford. It is said that Shelley attended only one lecture while at Oxford, but often read sixteen hours a day. His first publication was a Gothic novel, *Zastrozzi* (1810), in which he voiced his early atheistic view through the villain Zastrozzi. In 1811, Shelley published his second Gothic novel, *St. Irvyne* and a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. The latter gained the attention of the university administration and he was called to appear before the College's fellows, including the Dean, George Rowley. His denial to disclaim the authorship of the pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford on 25 March 1811.

After four months of his expulsion from Oxford, on 28 August 1811 the nineteen year-old Shelley eloped to Scotland with the sixteen year-old Harriet Westbrook, a pupil at the same boarding school as Shelley's sisters, whom his father had forbidden him to see. Harriet Westbrook had been writing Shelley passionate letters threatening to kill herself because of her unhappiness at the school and at home. Shelley, heartbroken after the failure of his romance with his cousin, Harriet Grove, cut off from his mother and sisters, impetuously decided to salvage Harriet Westbrook and make her his beneficiary. The Westbrooks pretended to object but secretly encouraged the elopement. Sir Timothy Shelley, however, annoyed that his son had married below his status cancelled Shelley's allowance and refused ever to receive the couple at Field Place. Shelley was also at that time involved in a deep spiritual relationship with Elizabeth Hitchener, a twenty eight year-old unmarried school teacher whom Shelley called the 'sister of my soul' and "my second self". She became his muse and soul mate in the writing of his philosophical poem *Queen Mab*.

Shelley was gradually unhappy with his marriage to Harriet and essentially disliked the influence of her older sister Eliza, who discouraged Harriet from breastfeeding their baby daughter. Shelley accused Harriet of having married him for his money. Longing for more intellectual female companionship, he initiated spending more time away from home, among other things, studying Italian with Cornelia Turner and visiting the home of William Godwin.

William Godwin had three highly educated daughters, two of whom, Fanny Imlay and Claire Clairmont, were his adopted step-daughters. Godwin's first wife, the celebrated feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, had died giving birth to Godwin's biological daughter Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, named after her mother. Fanny had been the illegitimate daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and her lover, the diplomat speculator and writer, Gilbert Imlay. Claire was the illegitimate daughter of Godwin's much younger second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont Godwin, whom Shelley considered a vulgar woman –not a proper person to form the mind of a young girl. Mary was being educated in Scotland when Shelley first became acquainted with the Godwin family. When she returned, Shelley fell madly in love with Mary.

On 28 July 1814, Shelley abandoned Harriet, though pregnant with their son Charles, he ran away to Switzerland with Mary, then sixteen, inviting her stepsister Claire Clairmont, who was also sixteen, along because she could speak French. The older sister Fanny, was left behind, to her great disappointment, for she, too, had fallen in love with Shelley. The three sailed to Europe, and made their way across France to Switzerland on foot. After six weeks, homesick and destitute, the three young people returned to England. In mid-1816, Shelley and Mary made a second trip to Switzerland. They were prompted to do this by Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, who, in competition with her sister, had initiated a liaison with Lord Byron. Regular conversation with Byron had an invigorating effect on Shelley's output of poetry. While on a boating tour the two took together, Shelley was inspired to write his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, often considered his first significant production since *Alastor*.

After Shelley and Mary's return to England, Fanny Imlay, Mary's half-sister and Claire's stepsister, despondent over her exclusion from the Shelley household and perhaps unhappy at being omitted from Shelley's will, travelled from Godwin's household in London to kill herself in Wales in early October. On 10 December 1816, the body of Shelley's estranged wife Harriet was found in an advanced state of pregnancy, drowned in the Serpentine in Hyde Park, London. On 30 December 1816, a few weeks after Harriet's body was recovered, Shelley and Mary Godwin were married.

Early in 1818, the Shelleys and Claire left England to take Claire's daughter, Allegra, to her father Byron, who had taken up residence in Venice. In 1818 and 1819 Shelley's son Will died of fever in Rome, and his infant daughter Clara Everina died during yet another household move. A baby girl, Elena Adelaide Shelley, was born on 27 December 1818 in Naples, Italy and registered there as the daughter of Shelley and a woman named 'Marina Padurin'. However, the identity of the mother is an unsolved mystery. However, Elena was placed with foster parents a few days after her birth and the Shelley family moved on to yet another Italian city, leaving her behind. Elena died 17 months later, on 10 June 1820.

Shelley completed *Prometheus Unbound* in Rome, and he spent mid-1819 writing a tragedy, *The Cenci*, in Leghorn (Livorno). In this year, prompted among other causes by the Peterloo massacre, he wrote his best-known political poems: *The Masque of Anarchy* and *Men of England*. These were probably his best-remembered works during the 19th century. Around this time period, he wrote the essay *The Philosophical View of Reform*, which was his most thorough exposition of his political views.

In 1820, hearing of John Keats' illness from a friend, Shelley wrote him a letter inviting him to join him at his residence at Pisa. Keats replied with hopes of seeing him, but instead, arrangements were made for Keats to travel to Rome with the artist Joseph Severn. Inspired by the death of Keats, in 1821 Shelley wrote the elegy *Adonais*. On 8 July 1822, less than a month before his 30th birthday, Shelley drowned in a sudden storm while sailing back from Leghorn (Livorno) to Lerici in his boat, *Don Juan*. He was returning from having set up *The Liberal* (a magazine) with the newly arrived Leigh Hunt.

Shelley's most remarkable poems are *Ozymandias*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, *Music*, *When Soft Voices Die*, *The Cloud* and *The Masque of Anarchy*. His other major works include long, visionary poems such as *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Adonais*, the unfinished work *The Triumph of Life*; and the visionary verse dramas *The Cenci* (1819) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).

Self-check Exercise I

a) When was Shelley born? How was his childhood?

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b) Why was Shelley expelled from Oxford University?

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c) When and where did Shelley die?

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d) Name the three important works of Shelley.

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e) Write the name of other two great Romantic poets who belonged to younger generation of 19th century English poetry along with P.B. Shelley.

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14.3 ODE TO THE WEST WIND

14.3.1 The Background of the Poem

In order to know the background of the composition of Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', it is relevant to know what the poet says in this regard. The poem was inspired by his life at Arno near Florence in 1819. Shelley's note says: 'This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to cisalpine regions'. His mythopoeic imagination seized on scientific facts and phenomena and transformed them into beautiful images; his iconoclastic intellect tore at all outdated and meaningless conventions of society, religion and politics. His revolutionary zeal burns through his great 'Ode to the West Wind'.

14.3.2 The Text

O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
 Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
 Pestilence- stricken multitudes: O thou
 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill;

Wild Spirit which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preservers; hear, O, hear!

II

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angles of rain and lightening; there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: O, hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
Thy voice and suddenly grow grey with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: O, hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
 Scarce seemed a vision, I would ne'er have striven

As thou with thee in prayer in my sore need.
 Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
 One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
 And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
 Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Glossary

- Hectic red** : an unhealthy red as though flushed with fever.
- Winged seeds** : seeds with wing-like growths which enable them to be blown away and scattered.
- Azure sister** : the warm west wind (the Zephyrus of the Poets) which blows from the clear blue skies.
- Clarion** : trumpet. The spring wind wakes them up as the angel blows its trumpet to summon the dead on the Judgment day.
- Destroyer and preserver** : The West Wind combines in himself the role of destroyer & preserver: it destroys the old decaying leaves; it scatters the seeds and thus preserves life.
- Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean** : The whole universe should be shaken up—the air and the sea as well as the earth, both horizontally and vertically. The Wind seems to let loose the clouds as he blows off the dead leaves.

- The locks** : the rain clouds are the wind's locks of hair.
- Thou dirge** : The sound of the wind becomes a funeral song (dirge) for the dying year; the dark clouds become the dome of a vast tomb (sepulcher). The forces of destruction will erupt from these ruins. The poet prophesies the destruction of an old order and the birth of a new one.
- O, hear!** : The poet seems to warn us with a prophetic zeal.
- his** : the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean is a symbolical of the wealthy aristocracy who live a voluptuous life of indolence cut off from the living stream of reform and change.
- coil** : murmur. The word generally means commotion or tumult.
- Crystalline** : clear and transparent
- intenser day** : clearer light.
- azure** : blue.
- the Atlantic level powers** : the smooth waters of the Atlantic ocean.
- While far below..... despoil themselves** : Shelley's own note may be given in explanation: "This phenomenon...is well-known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of the seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it."
- oozy woods** : the vegetation on the oozy bed (the soft mud at the bottom) of the sea.
- despoil themselves** : deprive themselves ; they change colour and fall off even as the leaves shed themselves from trees in winter.
- O ,hear!** : The first three stanzas end on this note of prophetic warning: the poet calls upon the powers of the earth, the sky and the sea to listen the clarion call of reform and change.
- When to outstrip....Vision:** In my boyhood I did not consider it a mere vision to go faster than you"(west wind).
- Skiey speed** : your speed through the sky.
- Make me thy lyre** : Let me be the poet of revolution, reform and change.
- Be thou me** : Here the poet identifies himself completely with the tumultuous west wind.

If winter comes...behind?: The poem begins in a tone of impatient indignation and then passes on to a state of utter helplessness and sadness but ends on a note of hope. Gloom will be followed by hope as surely as winter will be followed by spring.

14.3.3 Analysis

The poet invokes the wild West Wind of autumn, which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they may be nurtured by the spring, and asks that the wind, a ‘destroyer and preserver,’ hear him. He calls the wind the ‘dirge / Of the dying year,’ and describes how it stirs up violent storms, and again implores it to hear him. The poet says that the wind stirs the Mediterranean from “his summer dreams,” and cleaves the Atlantic into choppy Chasm.

The second section of the poem deals with the sky. Like withered leaves, the loose clouds fall from the unseen forests of the heaven into the river of the west wind. Suddenly, the imagery of the leaves is replaced by the human imagery. The clouds become hair of a huge giant. The west wind then becomes transformed into a mournful tune. And the rapidly encroaching night becomes the dome of an extensive sepulchre, canopied by the unifying power of the west wind.

The third section presents the effects of the wind on the sea. Here the placid Mediterranean is personified- asleep, dreaming of old palaces and towers which are only reflections. The west wind drives away unreal thoughts of the Mediterranean Sea. The under- water vegetation feels the arrival of the wind and sheds the leaves.

The poet says that if he were a dead leaf that the wind could bear, or a cloud it could carry, or a wave it could push, or even if he were, as a boy, “the comrade” of the wind’s ‘wandering over heaven,’ then he would never have needed to pray to the wind and invoke its powers. He pleads with the wind to lift him “as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!”—for though he is like the wind at heart, untamable and proud—he is now chained and bowed with the weight of his hours upon the earth.

The poet asks the wind to ‘make me thy lyre,’ to be his own Spirit, and to drive his thoughts across the universe, ‘like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth.’ He asks the wind, by the incantation of this verse, to scatter his words among mankind, to be the “trumpet of a prophecy.” Speaking both in regard to the season and in regard to the effect upon mankind that he hopes his words to have.

The last section of the poem presents the details of this identification sought to be established between the poet and the west wind. He desires to become the mouth piece of the west wind, as the forest is the lyre on which it plays the rustling tune. He asks the west wind to drive his old dead ideas which will form the manure to help the blossoming forth of new conceptions. The poet wants that the prophetic note of the west wind should spread throughout the world through his mouth. The optimistic prophecy, ‘If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?’ makes the poem full of optimism and new hopes.

In short, Shelley invokes the wind magically, describing its power and its role as both ‘destroyer and preserver,’ and asks the wind to sweep him out of his torpor

‘as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!’ In the fifth section, the poet then takes a remarkable turn, transforming the wind into a metaphor for his own art, the expressive capacity that drives ‘dead thoughts’ like ‘withered leaves’ over the universe, to ‘quicken a new birth’—that is, to quicken the coming of the spring. Here the spring season is a metaphor for a “spring” of human consciousness, imagination, liberty, or morality—all the things Shelley hoped his art could help to bring about in the human mind. Shelley asks the wind to be his spirit, and in the same movement he makes it his metaphorical spirit, his poetic faculty, which will play him like a musical instrument, the way the wind strums the leaves of the trees.

14.3.4 The Stanza Form

Each of the five parts of ‘Ode to the West Wind’ contains five stanzas—four three-line stanzas and a two-line couplet, all metered in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme in each part follows a pattern known as terza rima, the three-line rhyme scheme employed by Dante in his **Divine Comedy**. In the three-line terza rima stanza, the first and third lines rhyme, and the middle line does not; then the end sound of that middle line is employed as the rhyme for the first and third lines in the next stanza. The final couplet rhymes with the middle line of the last three-line stanza. Thus, each part of ‘Ode to the West Wind’ follows this scheme: ABA BCB CDC DED EE.

Self-check Exercise II

Answer the following questions in the given space:

a) What is the rhyme scheme in the first stanza of the poem?

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b) Why does the poet call the west wind destroyer and preserver?

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c) 'Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed'!

Explain the meaning of these lines in your own words.

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d) 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind'? What does the poet want to convey?

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e) Give two examples of simile and one example of personification being used in the poem *Ode to the West Wind*.

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14.4 TO A SKYLARK

14.4.1 The Background of the Poem

The sources and influences which stimulated Shelley's imagination when he composed the Skylark are not merely significant in themselves, but also essential in understanding its meaning. Let us see the natural observations which led Shelley to compose his poem 'To A Skylark'. From June 15 to August 5, 1820, Shelley, Mary, and Claire Clairmont stayed at Casa Ricci, the Leghorn home of John and Maria Gisborne. In a note of 1839 Mrs. Shelley says: 'In the spring we spent a week or two near Leghorn, borrowing the house of some friends, who were absent on a journey to England. It was on a beautiful summer evening while wandering among the lanes, whose myrtle hedges were the bowers of the fireflies, that we heard the caroling of the skylark, which inspired one of his most beautiful poems'.

14.4.2 The Text

Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
 Bird thou never wert,
 That from heaven, or near it
 Pourest thy full heart
 In profuse strain of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
 From the earth thou springest
 Like a cloud of fire;
 The blue deep thou wingest,
 And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
 Of the sunken sun,
 O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
 Thou dost float and run;
 Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
 Melts around thy flight;
 Like a star of heaven,
 In the broad daylight
 Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight.

Keen as are the arrows
 Of that silver sphere,
 Whose intense lamp narrows
 In the white dawn clear,
 Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
 With thy voice is loud,
 As, when night is bare,
 From one lonely cloud
 The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflow'd.

What thou art we know not,
 What is most like thee?
 From rainbow clouds there flow not
 Drops so bright to see,
 As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Like a poet hidden,
 In the light of thought,
 Singing hymns unbidden,
 Till the world is wrought
 To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not;

Like a high-born maiden
 In a palace-tower,

Soothing her love-laden
 Soul in secret hour
 With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower;

Like a glow-worm golden
 In a dell of dew,
 Scattering unbeholden
 Its aerial hue
 Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view;

Like a rose embower'd
 In its own green leaves,
 By warm winds deflower'd,
 Till the scent it gives
 Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-winged thieves:

Sound of vernal showers
 On the twinkling grass,
 Rain-awaken'd flowers,
 All that ever was
 Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.

Teach us, sprite or bird,
 What sweet thoughts are thine;
 I have never heard
 Praise of love or wine
 That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine;

Chorus hymeneal,
 Or triumphal chaunt,
 Match'd with thine would be all
 But an empty vaunt
 A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains
 Of thy happy strain?
 What fields, or waves, or mountains?
 What shapes of sky or plain?
 What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance
 Languor cannot be :
 Shadow of annoyance
 Never came near thee:
 Thou lovest - but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

Waking or asleep,
 Thou of death must deem
 Things more true and deep
 Than we mortals dream,
 Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now!

Glossary

- blithe spirit..... Bird thou** : The Skylark is symbolical of the Romantic poet
- never wert** : who considers poetry as “a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.”
- Cp. Wordsworth’s To the Skylark:
“Thou dost pour upon the world a flood/of harmony”
- the blue deep thou wingest** : you fly across the blue sky.
- unbodied joy** : At its great height the bird is invisible; therefore it seems to be an ‘unbodied joy’.
- Whose race is just begun** : before the misery of the world has crowded upon him.
- even** : evening.
- the arrows/of that silver sphere** : the shafts of the light or rays from the silver-white Venus. By implication, it may also mean the shafts of love. The bright planet shrinks and finally becomes invisible in the growing light of day.
- Like a poet** : A poet keeps himself in the background but allows his thoughts to flash out over the world. It was Shelley’s own wish to stir the world with human sympathy and hope to

rouse it from its callous indifference to oppression and misery.

unbidden	: spontaneously.
deflowered	: ravished; robbed of their flowers or their scent.
heavy winged thieves	: the winds laden with scent and moving slowly.
spirit or bird	: whether you are a bird or a spirit.
chorus hymeneal	: songs of marriage; Hymen, in classical mythology is the god of marriage.
empty vaunt	: mere boast.
joyance	: joy, rejoicing (poetic and archaic).
languor	: indifference (i.e. to the problems of life).
satiety	: excess to the point of disgust.

14.4.3 Analysis

In the poem ‘To a Skylark’ the poet has addressed a skylark (little bird) that soars up at a great height and sings so sweetly that the world is enchanted and bewitched by its sweetness. The skylark symbolizes high imagination, eternal happiness and harbinger of peace and progress. It is a spirit. Though it is unseen, yet it pours forth profuse sweetness. It stands for idealism and newly built society – free from corruption, exploitation and economic slavery. The Skylark’s sweet note and ideal message spread everywhere in the atmosphere. It is heard by the poet who is highly impressed. He boldly claims that the skylark is a superior thing in the sky. The cloud, the stars, the moon, the sun – all are left behind and the skylark dominates by its excellent tune and soothing voice.

The poet himself does not know what the skylark actually is. The mystery of the Skylark is still unsolved to the poet. But he is sure of the fact that he can learn a message of welfare from it and can spread in the world for recreation of the society. The poet had drawn beautiful comparison. In such comparison, he has proved his imaginative quality and an extraordinary talent.

He has compared the beauty and sweetness of the skylark to a highly born beautiful girl who lives in her tower like palatial building and sings sweet love songs. Similarly, its comparison with golden glow-worm among the flowers and grass and with rose having soothing scent is excellent and befitting. The poet is so confident about the sweetness and joy of Skylark’s song that he says that even the rainbow clouds do not spread as bright drops as the presence of the skylark spreads a rain of melody. In short, the music of the Skylark surpasses every pleasure of nature.

The poet wishes to get instruction and messages from the skylark. So he asks it to teach him its sweet thoughts. The poet is confident that the skylark is pouring out a flood of rapture which is divine.

The line, “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought” is very meaningful. It tells the philosophy of Shelley’s life. What Shelley wants to convey here is that we like a song dealing with pleasure no doubt but it has a

transitory effect. We forget the happy moments of life very soon. It does not impress us for long. But on the other hand, tragedy of life leaves a powerful stamp on our life. It becomes eternal in its appeal because it affects our heart emotionally. We are lovers of tragedy because we cannot escape it. Sorrow is part and parcel of human life. Naturally, sad thoughts impress us in a greater degree than happy thoughts we like to sing or listen to a tragic song more eagerly than a pleasant song.

The skylark scorns the nasty habits of the earth and stands for bliss, joy and prosperity of the world. The poet is of cosmopolitan outlook. He is restless to preach his idealism in the world. Therefore he earnestly requests the skylark to teach him the message.

Some critics say that P.B Shelley was not a practical man. He was far away from realism. So his skylark always flew higher and higher and did not come to the earth, like the skylark of Wordsworth. Shelley’s skylark can achieve perfection because it is ‘scorner of the ground’. This is where we find the difference of attitude of the two Romantic poets, Shelley and Wordsworth. Shelley’s skylark is an inhabitant of purely ethereal world and is a symbol of perfection. On the other hand, Wordsworth’s skylark in his poem ‘To the Skylark’ is an inhabitant of both earth and ether: ‘Type of the wise who soar, but never roam; /True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home’!

On the whole, ‘To a Skylark’ is one of the best lyrics of P. B. Shelley The flow of art, the similes, the flight of imagination and lyrical quality make this poem unparalleled in romantic poetry.

Self-check Exercise III

Now you have already read the poem ‘To a Skylark’. Answer the following questions in the space provided:

- a) Why does the poet address the skylark ‘a blithe spirit?’

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- b) Explain the expression ‘profuse strains of unpremeditated art’.

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c) Explain the simile 'Like a cloud of fire'.

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d) 'Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun'—Explain.

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f) 'Like a poet hidden/In the light of thought'. Explain the simile used by the poet.

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g) 'Teach us, spirit or bird...a flood of rapture so divine'—why does the poet say so?

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h) 'We look before and after...Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts'. Explain the meaning.

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i) What is the difference between Shelley’s skylark and that of Wordsworth?

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14.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have read Shelley’s life and work with a focus on his poetic genius. You have also read about Terza Rima which has been used in his ‘Ode to the West Wind’ successfully. Finally, you have gone through his two famous poems carefully and critically. Now you are able to analyse and discuss Shelley’s poetry in general and the two poems in particular.

14.6 SUGGESTED READING

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Shiv. K. Kumar.ed.1966. *British Romantic Poets: Recent Revaluations*.

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14.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- a) See second paragraph of 14.2
- b) See fifth paragraph of 14.2
- c) On 8 July 1822 Shelley drowned in a sudden storm while sailing back from Leghorn to Lerici in his boat.
- d) See last paragraph of 14.2
- e) John Keats and Lord Byron

Self-check Exercise II

- a) aba bcb cdc ded ee.
- b) See glossary ‘Destroyer and preserver’
- c) See fourth paragraph of 14.3.3
- d) See the sixth paragraph of 14.3.3
- e) Read critically any stanza of ‘Ode to the West Wind’.

- a) Shelley is listening to the song of a bird, which is itself invisible. It seems to the poet that the bird, while singing, soaring high above the ground, has lost its physical existence and has become a spirit.
- b) The birds are 'unpremeditated', that is, natural or spontaneous in the sense that those are not preconceived or pre-planned, unlike the human art, generally, or more specifically, the poet's art, which is preconceived.
- c) The skylark in its venture up in the sky is compared to a cloud lit up by the rays of the setting sun at twilight. Shelley links the bird to the image of fire in order to emphasise the bird's abstract existence as a quality having the power to purify the human mind.
- d) Shelley seeks to convey the idea that in its flight for singing, the bird, as if, has found a new life, a life of abstract delight which is possible only by transcending the body and becoming a spirit.
- e) In a poem the presence of the poet can be felt in the radiance of the thoughts and ideas s/he intends to convey to the reader. As a poet remains physically absent yet spiritually present in a poem, the skylark remains hidden in the sky while singing.
- f) The poet is very much pained to find his own world filled with sorrows and anxieties whereas the skylark remains untouched and unaffected by all these things. To him the bird is a bodiless embodiment of joy, and that is why he seeks inspiration of "sweet thoughts" in its song.
- g) What Shelley wants to convey here is that we like a song dealing with pleasure no doubt but it has a transitory effect. We forget the happy moments of life very soon. It does not impress us for long. But on the other hand, tragedy of life leaves a powerful stamp on our life. It becomes eternal in its appeal because it affects our heart emotionally. We are lovers of tragedy because we cannot escape it. Sorrow is part and parcel of human life. Naturally, sad thoughts impress us in a greater degree than happy thoughts we like to sing or listen to a tragic song more eagerly than a pleasant song.
- h) Wordsworth's skylark in his poem 'To the Skylark' is a creature of flesh and blood, while Shelley's skylark is a philosophical abstraction. It despises the cares and anxieties of the world while Wordsworth's has its eyes fixed on its nest on the ground.

UNIT 15 JOHN KEATS

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 John Keats (1795-1821)
- 15.3 ‘Ode On A Grecian Urn’
 - 15.3.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 15.3.2 The Text
 - 15.3.3 A Discussion
- 15.4 ‘Ode to A Nightingale’
 - 15.4.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 15.4.2 The Text
 - 15.4.3 A Discussion
- 15.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Write about John Keats’s life and work;
- Discuss Keats’s poetry in detail with special reference to:
 - i) ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’
 - ii) ‘Ode to a Nightingale’

15.1 INTRODUCTION

John Keats was born in London, to Thomas and Frances Jennings Keats, on 31 October, 1795. Neither of his parents, nor any of his family members exhibited any taste for art. Thus, parentage threw no light on his poetic genius. He was educated at a private school at Enfield because of his parent’s poor financial condition. As a young lad Keats showed no intellectual interest and was known for fighting with people and is estimated as a morbid hysterical youth. At the age of fourteen he gave in to books. When he was of age fifteen, his parents died and his guardians took him from school and apprenticed him to a surgeon. In 1814 he transferred his residence to London, and followed part of the regular course of instruction for medical students. Already, however, his poetical bent of mind was becoming apparent. Surgery lost its slight attraction and giving up all thoughts of a medical career, he devoted himself to literature. The career of a poet became a bright possibility when he got acquainted with Leigh Hunt (1816), the famous Radical journalist and poet, whose collisions with the Government had caused much commotion and his own imprisonment. Keats was soon intimate with the Radical brotherhood that surrounded Leigh Hunt, and thus he became known to Shelley and others. Keats was in circle where great spirits flourished. Wordsworth, Lamb and Leigh met the young enthusiast and each in his own way

fed the poetic enthusiasm in Keats. In 1817 he published his first volume of verse, which in spite of the championship of Hunt, could attract little notice. After the publication, he went to the Isle of Wight and the suburbs of London, where his affliction might be remedied and free him from distractions. But it ill-suited his temperament and he returned to London. By the end of this year he completed the first draft of *Endymion*. While he was staying there he was acquainted with Fanny Browne, and afterwards was engaged to her for a time. His physical problem, however, became worse, and the mental and physical distress caused by his complaint, added to despair regarding the success of his love affair, produced a frantic state of mind painfully reflected in his letters to the young lady. These letters were printed (1878), long after the poet's death.

His second volume of verse, published in 1818, was brutally assailed by the *Quarterly Review* and by *Blackwood's Magazine*. The reaction towards *Endymion* was also quite unfavorable. "*Keats association with Hunt was sufficient in itself in certain quarters to discredit him; for Hunt's political radicalism had made him odious to the great Tory reviews*". (Compton- Rickett, 1989) Keats bore the attack with apparent serenity, and always protested that he minded it little; but there can be little doubt that it affected his health to some degree and it is believed that he took such assaults of the critics deeply to his heart. In 1820, he was compelled to seek warmer skies, and died in Rome early in the next year, at the age of twenty-five.

15.2 JOHN KEATS (1795-1821)

At the age of seventeen, John Keats became acquainted with the works of Spenser when he read "Faerie Queen" which was given to him by his friend Cowden Clarke and this proved to be the turning point in his life. The mannerisms of the Elizabethan poet immediately captivated him, and he resolved to imitate him. His earliest attempt at verse is his *Imitation of Spenser* (1813), written when he was eighteen. This and some other short pieces were published together in his *Poems* (1817), his first volume of verse. This book contains little of any outstanding merit, except for some of its sonnets, which include the superb *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. While on one hand we can say that Spenser had been Keats' first enchanter, the second being Homer; on the other he owed much to Leigh Hunt for wise and generous encouragement and direction. The poems, which include *Sleep and Poetry* and *I stood tip toe upon a little hill*, show the influence of Spenser and more immediately, of Leigh Hunt, to whom the volume was dedicated.

Of a different quality was his next volume, called *Endymion* (1818). Probably based partly on Drayton's *The Man in the Moon* and Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess*, this remarkable poem of *Endymion* professes to tell the story of the lovely youth who was kissed by the moon goddess on the summit of mount Latmos. Keats develops this simple myth into an intricate and flowery and rather obscure allegory of over four thousand lines. The work is clearly immature, and flawed with many weaknesses both of taste and of construction, but many of the passages are the most beautiful, and the poem shows the tender budding of the Keatsian style- a rich and suggestive beauty obtained by a richly ornamented diction. However the crudeness of the work laid it open to attack and the hostile reviews found it an easy prey.

Among his shorter poems *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, a kind of lyrical ballad, is considered to be one of the choicest in the language.

In 1819 Keats collaborated in a drama, *Otho the Great*, and began another, *King Stephen*, which he did not complete. Neither effort is of much consequence. *The Cap and Bells*, a longish fairy-tale which also is unfinished, is much below the level of his usual work.

Intellectually Keats was strongly in sympathy with Shelly and Byron in terms of religious philosophy he was much more extreme and whole heartedly pagan than either. For Keats there was no other religion than the religion of beauty; for him the earth was his great consoler. He never let his political inclination effect his poetry.

Compton-Rickett is of the view that “*where Wordsworth spiritualizes and Shelly intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express her through the senses: the colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsing music.*”

15.3 ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

15.3.1 The Background of the Poem

Keats was a romantic poet and where in most of his poems we find the solace of romance in this poem Keats has changed it to the solace of art. The theme of Ode on a Grecian Urn is about the attempt to escape from the complexities of time and escape into the world of unchanging art although it is achieved at a certain price. It considers the arresting of time and life by art as both profit and loss—it represents the escape from change and decay into eternity, but at the expense of eternal fulfillment: the “unravished bride” remains forever between the wedding ceremony and the bridal bed, as it were. Beauty and permanence remain with the figures on the urn, but they are after all only an “Attic shape”, and “attitude”, a “cold pastoral”.

15.3.2 The Text

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave

Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! withbrede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

John Keats

Glossary

Tempe	:	valley in Thessaly
Arcady	:	a region of ancient Greece, but primarily a vision of the pastoral ideal
Sensual	:	sensuous
And . . . return	:	The "little town" is not on the urn but exists only in the implication of art
Attic	:	pertaining to Attica, i.e. Athens
Brede	:	embroidery

Tease. . . thought : as in the “epistle of John Hamilton Reynolds” l. 77

Beauty . . . know : there has been much critical controversy as to where Keats intended the quotation to end: I follow Douglas Bush in assigning the entire last two lines (ll. 49-50) to the urn, and not just the first five words of l. 49.

15.3.3 The Discussion

The poem is both *to* and *on a Grecian Urn* as the poet is both talking ‘to the Urn’ by addressing it as a bride while it is ‘on the urn’ because the poet is detailing about the pictures drawn on the urn. The poet addresses the urn and calls it the bride of quietness and the child of silence and slow time as if it is wedded for ever to quietness and also it is unchanged or unchangeable because a piece of art is a permanent thing. So the bride is ‘still unravished’. In this poem, the poet believes that the pictures on the urn are frozen in time therefore they will never change or come to an end.

In the first stanza, the speaker stands before an ancient Grecian urn and addresses it. He is preoccupied with its depiction of pictures frozen in time. It is the “still unravish’d bride of quietness,” the “foster-child of silence and slow time.” The bride who is unravished will never consummate her love thus would never fulfill that desire. But a spark of wanting would remain forever. Addressing the bride as unravished could also mean that she is the one who has not been tainted with impurities. He also describes the urn as a “Sylvian historian” who can tell a story. He believes that this historian can tell a story in a much better way than any poet. He wonders about the figures on the side of the urn and asks what legend they depict and from where have they come. The picture seems to show a group of men chasing a group of women in the forest. The scene is such that it is hard for the poet to understand that what could be happening. He wonders what could be their story and asks questions like: “What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?”

Looking at another picture on the urn, the speaker talks about a young man playing a pipe and is lying with his lover beneath a glade of trees. The speaker calls the music as the “unheard” melodies because they can never be heard but still he tries to listen to them and he believes that they are sweeter than mortal melodies as they are unaffected by time. As the song in the picture would never end; the trees would never shed their leaves and it would always be spring. He tells the youth that, though he can never kiss his lover because he is frozen in time, he should not grieve, because her beauty will never fade.

In the following lines, the poet talks about the surroundings that are feeling happy. The trees will never shed their leaves, the songs of the piper will be “forever new,” and that the love of the boy and the girl will last forever, unlike mortal love, which lapses into “breathing human passion” and eventually vanishes, leaving behind only a “burning forehead, and a parching tongue.” Therefore, everyone in the picture is happy as there is no fear of losing. Nothing would fade away. The picture on the urn is timeless. Evil has not been introduced. It is not affected by the cycle of life where everything deteriorates.

The speaker examines another picture on the urn, this one of a group of villagers leading a heifer to be sacrificed. He wonders where they are going and from

where have they come. The scene is probably of an animal sacrifice. He imagines a little town there, empty of all its inhabitants for this purpose and he believes the streets will forever remain empty and silent, for those who have left it will never return as it is a picture and pictures are static in time. The final stanza, contains the beauty-truth equation, the speaker again addresses the urn itself, saying that it, like Eternity, “doth tease us out of thought.” Through the poet’s imagination, the urn has been able to preserve a temporary and happy condition in permanence, but it cannot do the same for the poets and their generation. As old age will waste everything and bring them grief. He thinks that when his generation would be long lost in time, the urn will remain, telling future generations its story. He believes that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” The speaker says that this is the only thing the urn knows and the only thing it needs to know. This may also indicate that this is the only thing we know on earth as there is more to know after the life on this earth comes to an end.

Thus to summarize, it can be said that in the poem the poet is trying to show that *“human life and happiness may be brief, yet art may enshrine them with an ideal beauty that outlives the years. The figures and all they symbolized are gone but art has given them a lasting durability and so links the ages together”*. (Compton-Rickett 1989)

15.4 ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

15.4.1 The Background of the Poem

Ode to a Nightingale is generally admired for its rich and slow moving verse and for its expression of what are considered to be emotions proper to romantic poetry. But its true merits are of higher kind, deriving from its treatment of the nightingale’s song as symbol of the timeless, of the escape from the world of change and decay. The relation between art, death and life is the true theme of the poem as it is of the Ode on a Grecian Urn. The poem portrays Keats’ speaker’s engagement with the fluid expressiveness of music and has a different flavor of romanticism.

15.4.2 The Text

Ode to a Nightingale

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
 ’Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thy happiness,—
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
 O for a draught of vintage, that hath been
 Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
 Tasting of Flora and the country green,
 Dance, and Provencal song, and sun-burnt mirth!

O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

John Keats

Glossary

Lethe, a river flowing from the Greek underworld; it's also known as the river of forgetfulness, for those who drink from it forget everything. The allusion coincides with one of the themes of the poem, Keats' desire to forget everything as he listens to a bird sing, or as he writes poetry.

Light-winged Dryad of the trees In Greek Mythology, Dryads are the female spirits of nature (nymphs) who preside over forests and groves. The two mythological references establish a surreal mood—that state between reality and dreaming perhaps. This supports the theme that the poet wants to escape reality, and does.

Draught of vintage that hath been / Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth / tasting of Flora and the country greenis Hippocrene. In Greek Mythology, Hippocrene is the name of a fountain on Mt. Helicon. It was sacred to the Muses and was formed by the hooves of Pegasus. Drinking the fountain's water brings forth poetic inspiration.

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen / And with thee fade away into the forest dim" Thee in this citation refers to the nightingale.

Not charioted by Bacchus... / but on the viewless wings of Poesy the depressed speaker wishes to escape through poetry. Bacchus is an allusion to the Roman god of wine and revelry.

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain— / To thy high requiem become a sod. The problem with dying is the poet would no longer be able to listen to the nightingale's song

Forlorn snaps the poet out of his trance. The nightingale has flown and the poet wonders “Was it a vision, or a waking dream?”

15.4.3 A Discussion

The speaker feels a pain at heart and opens with a declaration of his own heartache. He feels a kind of uneasy drowsiness as if he is drunk. But his condition is not because he is envious of the nightingale whom he hears singing somewhere in the forest and says that it is not due the bird’s happiness, but is rather from sharing the experience wholly. The happiness is from the Nightingale’s singing as it sings the music of summer from amid some unseen plot of green trees and shadows.

The song of the nightingale seems to have paralyzed the poet’s mind as he wants to give up his senses and be one with the nightingale. For this, he longs for a drop of alcohol, so that he could experience the feeling completely and escape from reality. He wants to exist as one with the bird and forget all the pains and sorrow of this world. The poet longs for wings like Nightingale as it would help him see the world from a different height. He desires to fade away, saying he would like to forget the troubles the nightingale has never known. It doesn’t know the pains of human life and truth that everything is mortal. It doesn’t know that youth gets pale and that beauty loses its charm as time flies; it doesn’t know that life is full of sorrow and misery.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker asks the nightingale to fly away, and he will follow, not with the help of alcohol, but through his poetry, which will give him unseen wings. He doesn’t need alcohol as his spirits would lead him. He can see the moon and the stars although there is just a glimmer. This is because he is lifted above the trees along with the nightingale. In the fifth stanza, although the poet loses his sight but he can sense life into everything as he can smell, taste and hear a new world around him. It seems to him as if he has entered a totally new paradise.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker confesses that he is “half in love” with the idea of dying and believes that Death is soft. He wants an easeful death and enter a new world with the nightingale. He wants to experience that richness from a new height. But he soon realizes that the life of imagination and reality is different and if he would die, the nightingale would continue to sing but he would “have ears in vain” and be no longer able to hear.

In the following lines, the speaker tells the nightingale that it is immortal that it was not “born for death.” Nightingale’s song is eternal and its voice has always been heard by people from the past i.e. by ancient emperors and clowns, by homesick Ruth, whose reference we can find in the Old Testament also heard it. And it can be heard in the present times and would continue to be heard in future. The song has often charmed open magic windows. In the final stanza, the word forlorn tolls like a bell to restore the speaker from his preoccupation with the nightingale and back into him. The realization of the actual world makes him disheartened as the imaginary world is now shattered. As the nightingale flies away, he wakes up from his dream. He realizes that it was his imagination or maybe he has come out from his sleep. But he also realizes that what he was thinking is not possible and that he should come back to his senses.

Thus, here we find one of the main themes of the poem where he is conflicting between reality and the ideal. In this poem we can see that Keats has allowed his thought to have wings and be free and get rid from the life of frustration. One though leads to another but finally he comes back to reality and realizes the truth of life.

15.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life and works of John Keats and examined two of his poems. Both of them are romantic poems addressing things of beauty in nature and in the creation of man. You should now be able to examine, appreciate and discuss Keats's poetry in general and these two poems in particular effectively.

15.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Now that you have read the poems carefully, try to answer the following questions. And thus you would discuss the poems

- a) Talk about the life and important works of Keats.

Ans: Refer to section 15.1 and 15.2

- b) What do you think Keats mean by a Sylvan historian in the first stanza of Ode on a Grecian Urn?

Ans: Refer to the second paragraph of Section 15.3.3.

- c) Discuss how the poet defines art to be eternal?

Ans: Refer to the fourth, fifth and final paragraph of Section 15.3.3.

- d) How will the poet follow the Nightingale when it flies away in the poem *Ode to a Nightingale*?

Ans: Refer to the second paragraph of the section 15.4.3

- e) Why does the poet become disheartened in the poem Ode to Nightingale?

Ans: Refer to the second last paragraphs of Sections 15.4.4

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Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

IV

The Victorian Poets

Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy, D.H.Lawrence,
G. M. Hopkins



School of Humanities
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Block

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THE GREAT VICTORIAN POETS

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 4

THE VICTORIAN POETS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the last block we read some of the Romantic poets; the poetry of an age of revolutions. ‘The formal doctrines of the Romanticists’ wrote Legouis and Cazamian, ‘had never been officially recognized; to the end, they had been opposed by conservative opinion, and their disputed triumph was rather a question of fact than of rights.’ In this block you are going to read a selection of the poetry of the British Isles at the height of its imperial glory. This age has been named after Queen Victoria who sat on the throne of England from 1837 to 1901. She was the sixth and the last monarch of the House of Hanover. Victoria was succeeded by Edward VII (1901- 10) of the House of Saxe-Coburg and George V (1910 - 36) of the House of Windsor. Accordingly some historians of English literature talk about the Victorian, the Edwardian and, the Georgian periods in English literature.

Funny as it may appear, the Victorian period symbolises growth and stability on the one hand, poverty, ugliness, squalor and injustice, especially among the urban industrial workers, on the other. Benjamin Disraeli (1804 - 81) a British politician, prime minister and novelist contrasted the conditions of the rich and the poor in his trilogy, especially the second novel in the series: *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847). This divide in the society which saw prosperity and progress on the one hand and poverty and ugliness on the other, moralism and philanthropy on the one hand and capitalistic greed and corruption on the other is often referred to as ‘**Victorian Compromise**’. We can observe the social divide in the novels also of Charles Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, George Meredith, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, Thomas Hardy and, Mary Ann Evans who wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot.

The period 1901 – 14 is often called the **Edwardian age**. It is commonly used to contrast with the Victorian period. This was the age of H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennet and John Galsworthy. It is said that Queen Victoria sat on the throne like a great paper-weight and after her death things blew all over the place. The image gives expression to the sense of freedom going hand in hand with the lack of direction that characterizes the age. The other aspect of the Edwardian age is the cheering prosperity and quiet confidence that the empire gave to the English people, especially as it preceded the First World War (1914 - 18).

Georgian Poetry was a series of five volumes of poems edited by Edward Marsh. The project was conceived as a harbinger of a new age of nature poetry like those of the Romantic period. Some of the poets who found their poems published in the early volumes were W. H. Davies, John Masefield, D. H. Lawrence, Walter de la Mare, Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley and John Drinkwater. Among the poets in the later volumes were poets such as Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Isaac Rosenberg. However, on the whole, **Georgian poetry** acquired the image of work of an escapist nature.

When we talk about Victorian poetry we generally think of the poetries of Alfred Tennyson and Matthew Arnold who were in some ways part of the English

establishment. Tennyson succeeded William Wordsworth as the poet laureate at the latter's death in 1850 and Matthew Arnold became inspector of schools in 1851 in which capacity he served for 35 years. Besides, he was son of Thomas Arnold headmaster of Rugby.

In 1848 a group of artists – J.E.Millais, D.G.Rossetti, W. Holman Hunt - met as a group in appreciation of the Italian quattrocento and in defiance of Raphael as a master of 19th century English painting. William Michael and Christina Georgiana Rossetti brother and sister respectively of Dante Gabriel Rossetti were also important members of the group to which Walter Pater and William Morris were later roped in. Their outlook was coloured by nostalgia for the Middle Ages. The group known as **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** was strongly literary and their paintings were influenced by poets like Keats, Tennyson, Shakespeare and Dante.

Poets such as Browning and Hopkins are justifiably seen as **pre-modernists**. Late in the eighties we discover the poets of the **Aesthetic Movement**, members of the Rhymers' Club, such as Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. They are also termed *fin de siècle*, i.e. characteristic of end of the nineteenth century. The aesthetes were influenced by the slogan *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) which became popular in France in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in the writings of Théophile Gautier. While the aesthetes believed in art for art's sake **the imperialists** such as Rudyard Kipling (he was born in Mumbai, the then-Bombay, in 1865), W. E. Henley and John Davidson believed in art for the sake of the British empire. They wrote jingoistic verse of which a few lines from Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), 'Gunga Din' are quoted below:

Now in Injia's sunny clime,
Where I used to spend my time
A-servin' of 'Er Majesty the Queen,
Of all them blackfaced crew
The finest man I knew
Was our regimental bhisti, Gunga Din,
He was 'Din! Din! Din!
'You limp in' lump o' brick-dust, Gunga Din!
'Hi! Slippy *hitherao*
'Water, get it! *Panee lao*,
'You squidgy-nosed old idol, Gunga Din.'

Gunga Din is finally portrayed as a hero in contrast to the British soldier that killed him:

Though I've belted you and flayed you,
By the livin' Gawd that made you,
You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

'The Decadents' is another name given to the aesthetes and the imperialists.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 16 ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
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- 16.2 The Victorian Age
- 16.3 Tennyson: Life and Works
- 16.4 The Splendour Falls
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 - 16.6.4 Appreciation
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16.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall discuss two lyrics and one long poem of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. After you have read this unit you should be able to:

- understand Tennyson's relationship with the Victorian age;
- have an idea of Tennyson as a lyric writer;
- discuss the poetic techniques of Tennyson

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Lord Tennyson is called a representative poet of the Victorian age. When we say this we mean that he is one poet in whose works the basic nature of the age – its achievements, doubts and fears – are best reflected.

As a matter of fact, the Victorian age was an age of great progress and of the consolidation of the powers of England. Naturally, a poet of this age is expected to be full of optimism. But Tennyson could see beyond the political and economic achievements of his time. He was studiously following the advances of contemporary science which moved Victorian men and women to scrutinize the

Biblical story of the origin of the creation on a rational basis. This instilled first doubts in the realm of religion.

Tennyson felt the emotional tremors of the people of his age. His poems document their anxiety; but Tennyson could also instil faith as he himself mastered a personal crisis and remained devoted to creativity. This balance is characteristic of his poetry and is also a great contribution to the Victorian age.

16.2 THE VICTORIAN AGE

Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 and introduced such economic and political measures, with the aid of her astute ministers that England was at the zenith of development. She did not hesitate in ending the monopoly of merchants – the old *laissez – faire* policy was replaced by just intervention and close scrutiny of market trends by state.

The major industries of coal, iron, textiles and railway building continued to flourish. There were other European competitors like Germany, France and Belgium. But England left them far behind. Many new machines and gadgets were either invented by British scientists or perfected by them. Bicycle, camera, electric light and telephone not only made life comfortable for Britishers; they gave rise to new industries that considerably enhanced British exports and income.

The rise of Limited Liability Companies was a new thing. It ended the monopoly of one-family firms; on the other hand, it gave birth to a new era of capitalism in which the British middle class had a definite share. These companies were managed by Board of Directors; but any individual might become a shareholder. Common people cultivated the habit of investing in industrial stock and a few depended entirely on the dividends from industry.

The picture did not remain so bright for long. A series of conflicts jeopardized the Victorian peace and prosperity – there were troubles in Canada and India. However, Queen Victoria emerged stronger and her policies proved to be a mixture of toughness and liberality. The Sepoy Mutiny in India in 1857 compelled the queen to be sensitive to the demands of justice and trust. She rose to the challenge and in her proclamation in 1858 promised “It is our further will that so far as may be, our subjects of whatever class or creed, be fully and freely admitted to any offices the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, abilities and integrity duly to discharge.”

The assertion of her independence and fairness is evident in this. The presence of such a wise queen together with long strides in commerce and industry made the Victorian age one of the best ages for the English people. They enjoyed peace at home, their children got the best of education and they had a healthy social life. They worked hard; they had a grasp of the affairs of the world; they were constantly modifying technology for better communication and facilities. And they remained deeply religious.

Yet the most serious crisis of the Victorian times occurred in the realm of religion. So far science had not disturbed their faith. But the publication of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*, 1830 and of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, 1859 altered the scene.

Charles Lyell only studied the fossils and spoke of the great antiquity of Creation; Darwin accepted it and accounted on its basis for the differentiation of animal species by theory of Natural Selection. This was in direct conflict with the story of creation given in *The Book of Genesis*.

A storm rose and shook Christianity by roots. The Victorian intellectuals and writers, poets and novelists could not ignore the scientific basis of the theory of evolution propounded by Darwin. Faith was tinged with doubt; an attitudinal change had occurred, best expressed by Tennyson –

There remains more faith in honest doubt
Believe me than in half the creeds.

In view of such a spiritual crisis it would not be easy to sum up the Victorian age in a neat phrase. It was an age of prosperity, but also an age of gloomy forebodings; it was an age of imperial expansion, but also an age of colonial uprisings; above all, it was an age of peace, but there was an undercurrent of ‘sick hurry and divided aims.’

16.3 TENNYSON: LIFE AND WORKS

Alfred Tennyson was born in August 1809 in Lincolnshire where his father was a rector. It is said that the rectory had an enchanting landscape that moulded the aesthetic taste of Tennyson. Not only did he take in the beautiful topography of his birth place, he tried to compose lines that could match the sights and the sounds that he experienced as a child and as a young man.

Tennyson’s father had an academic bent of mind. He made the young boy learn Latin and Greek classics seriously. So when Tennyson came to Cambridge University in 1828 he had sufficient intellectual training to cope with the studies and other challenges of the legendary educational institution.

In Cambridge Tennyson became intimate with Arthur Hallam, the son of the eminent historian. Later on Mr. Hallam was engaged to Tennyson’s sister; he died, however, in Vienna on a trip with his father. Tennyson had already written poems that won distinction. But the death of Arthur Hallam shattered him. For some time he was dumb with grief and melancholy. Yet in this period he found poetic composition as a means of psychic relief. He composed short lyrics as his moods dictated him. This continued for a couple of years and the result was *In Memoriam*, a great elegiac poem. The poem is supposed to reflect not only the intense personal sorrow of the poet, but also to represent the chief conflict of the Victorian age – the conflict between science and religion.

The fact that Tennyson could transcend his personal losses and think in a systematic way about the larger concerns and issues of his age is of singular importance. It gives Tennyson’s poetry a lasting appeal.

The classical training that his father imparted to him remained a principal stimulus to Tennyson’s poetic life. He is one poet who chose a number of medieval and Greek legends as subjects for his works. But in all his works he tried to interpret the life of his times. In other words, the sense of historical continuity gives his perception of modern issues a sharper edge. His poetry makes the readers feel that there exists a sure fusion between the past and the present.

In 1850 Tennyson succeeded as the Poet Laureate and continued to publish poems some of which have political themes. Extensive travels in England and Europe – Holland, Belgium and Switzerland and – further sharpened his vision. He was able to think in a practical manner since he had first-hand experience of social, political and economic changes.

After a fulfilled life of a prolific poet he died in 1892 at the age of 83.

Major Works

Poems, Chiefly Lyrical 1830

The Lady of Shallott and other poems 1832

The Princess 1847

In Memoriam 1847

Maud and other Poems 1855

Enoch Arden 1864

Locksley Hall Sixty Years After 1886

The Idylls of the King 1888

16.4 THE SPLENDOUR FALLS

The two lyrics prescribed for you are extracts from *The Princess*, a poem that Tennyson wrote in his mature years when British political and social issues began to interest him seriously. It is said that *The Princess* covers a number of prominent issues related to women their status, their field of action, their educational and political rights, legal rights of marriage and property. The protagonist of the poem is Ida, a princess who holds extreme feminist views. She has raised an academy for training of women.

Tennyson's characterization of Ida gives a clue to his attitude towards women. Ida is independent minded but in her zeal she has developed attitudes and a temper that make her unfit for reforms that she wishes to carry.

These two lyrics occur at dramatic moments in the narrative and were added by Tennyson in a subsequent edition. Actually, these two lyrics are supreme achievements of Tennyson and can be enjoyed independently.

The first lyric *The Splendour Falls* is a song that occurs after the narrator and others have had a magnificent view of the palace that the princess has shown them. The narrator is simply charmed by this view.

The second lyric is sung by a maid who is specifically ordered to entertain by the princess.

Then she, 'Let someone sing to us: lighter more
The minutes fledged with music': and a maid
of those beside her, smote her harp, and sang

But the aftermath is quite ironic. In a fit of vanity the princess dismisses the tranquillizing effect of song:

She ended with such passion that the tear / she sang of, shook and fell, an erring
pearl / lost in her bosom: but with some disdain / Answered the princess, 'If
indeed there haunt / About the moulder's lodges of the past so sweet a voice and
vague, fatal to men / well needs it we should cram our ears with wool.

This declamation on the part of the princess is spontaneous, of course. But the conviction with which she attacks melodious associations with the past is clear indication of her prejudices and haughtiness. All tenderness is anathema to her as it would interfere with her plans for women's emancipation.

16.4.1 The Poem

The Splendour Falls

The **splendour** falls on castle walls
 And snowy summits old in story:
 The long light shakes across the lakes,
 And the wild **cataract** leaps in glory.
 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
 And thinner, clearer, farther going!
 O sweet and far from cliff and scar
 The horns of **Elfland** faintly blowing!
 Blow, let us hear the purple **glens** replying:
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in your rich sky,
 They faint on hill or field or river:
 Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
 And grow for ever and for ever.
 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
 And answer, echoes answer, dying, dying, dying.

16.4.2 Glossary

- Splendour** : grand and impressive beauty
Cataract : large steep waterfall
Elfland : an imaginary country where elves – small creatures with magical powers – are supposed to live
Glen : narrow valley

16.4.3 Discussion

The lyric is an essay in landscape painting. The scene is that of sunset transforming a castle and its surroundings. The speaker notices not only the fall of sunlight but also of a fall of splendour, of a glorious hue, on the walls of the castle. This initial perception is in itself a cause of ecstasy. But this is not all. Each moment that succeeds brings in bright vistas of everything around. The bright light makes the snowy towers of the castle shine gloriously and then travels to the lakes and the cataracts in course of which its dynamism is revealed. It shakes the waters of the lakes and makes the cataract leap in joy. So happy is the speaker in the enjoyment of this scene that he wants the bugle to be sounded, allowing a synchronization of light and sound to follow.

The important thing, you should notice, is the impact of this scene on the speaker. We see not only the light adding beauty and glory to the castle but also creating absolute cheerfulness. It is this cheerfulness that sharpens observation and stirs the speaker for further activity.

The second stanza hints at the presence of someone else who is asked to hear by the speaker the faintly blowing horns of the Elfland. The sounds are at first thin and clear, then thinner and clearer whose echoes can be heard in the fields lying across. There is apparently nothing to suggest time – interval. But the thin sound and the elfland point to the onset of twilight – the light is there still, but like sounds it is also dying, taking leave of the world.

The identity of the listener is finally revealed in the third stanza – the speaker is addressing his beloved. He asks her now to enjoy the fainting sound of the echoes. But he also asks her to observe how the echoes move not only from hill to field or to river, but from soul to soul where they grow eternally. This is a unique experience of something transient acquiring eternity by sheer beauty.

16.4.4 Appreciation

The world of Nature maintains a course of life which is quite independent of an individual’s way of life and experiences. And yet at times there may be an identity between the two. Tennyson captures such moments in his lyrics beautifully. A number of his lyrics are good examples of pathetic fallacy, of the world of Nature reflecting the moods of the poet or the persona.

You must take note of the role of the dynamic verbs which Tennyson uses to describe the moment-to-moment changes in the scene – falls, shakes, leaps, flying, dying, blowing, replying, flying. The light and the sounds are not static. They have their own natural movement which, in turn, affects the objects within their range. But more important is the impact they have on the speaker.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Describe the scene of the poem in your words.

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2) Identify three lines of the poem in which there is use of alliteration.

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16.5 TEARS, IDLE TEARS

The popularity of this lyric is the proof of the value of its content. Though occurring in a dramatic context and sung by the maid of the princess as a routine duty it dwells on man’s feeling of loss which is the cause of the flow of tears. Tears express a feeling that may be spontaneous; but they may emerge from a powerful emotion that lies suppressed in humdrum life. Any touching sight can however bring it on the surface of consciousness and make us cry.

In *The Princess* the maid's song is surprisingly occasioned by the enchanting view of the palace. It must have created a feeling of awe and wonder in the maid also. But instead of bursting into a song that could express the shock of her delight, she chooses to sing a mournful song. The simplicity with which she touches on death and separation drawn not only a kindred feeling from the listeners; it makes them think of suffering as a vital fact of life.

16.5.1 Poem

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy **Autumn**-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam **glittering** on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the **underworld**,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The **casement** slowly grows a **glimmering** square
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy, feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret,
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

16.5.2 Glossary

Autumn fields	:	fields full of ripening corn in autumn.
glittering	:	shining brightly
the underworld	:	the place under the earth where people are believed to go when they die
glimmering	:	shining with a faint light
casement	:	a window

Similes

- fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail
- sad as the last which reddens over one
- sad and strange as in dark dawns
- Dear as remembered kisses after death

All these similes are quite unusual – they do not compare like objects; there is comparison between a state of mind and a natural phenomenon or a scene. Fresh, sad, strange, dear are adjectives which have been concretized in this way.

16.5.3 Discussion

The most arresting phrase in this lyric is divine despair, a paradoxical expression. Normally, despair cannot be linked with anything divine. To do so is to clearly refer to human limitation and this is what Tennyson does. The past cannot be recaptured. The tears that come to eyes spring from the realization that the happy days cannot be brought back.

Sadness became a part of Tennyson's life after the death of Arthur Hallam; but Tennyson was not lugubrious poet. He was reflective in nature, a person who took interest in philosophy and science. Naturally, every emotion to him was a subject of not only feeling but of study also. "I know not what they mean" – this line is indicative of the rational tendency that was always active in him. He makes therefore the speaker to understand the emotion behind the tears.

You should also notice that the tears have originated from a sight of the happy autumn fields, that is, of a seasonal movement that helps crops ripen and grow. It is this scene of richness and abundance that reminds of the like days that have slipped away. Happiness is locked only in memory now, lingering, of course, as a permanent feeling over which time have no control.

Do you notice a touch of irony in the phrase – idle tears? It can be a common sense version of becoming sentimental. But the things that are supposed to cause tears are not so insignificant. This creates a tension which adds to the merit of the poem. Why? Simply because the intellectual effort that is required to understand it makes the sentiment valuable.

After the tone has been set, the speaker goes on elaborating the qualities of the happy days which she is reminiscing. In the first place, they appear to be as fresh as the first sun rays falling on a ship. The freshness of the morning scene on a ship appears to Tennyson – from personal experience of voyages – to be more memorable. Memory alone helps a man bring back his friends from the underworld. But it is not only fresh, there is overwhelming sadness when the moment of loss is recaptured in totality.

There is abrupt change in the scene in the last two stanzas where the speaker alters the persona from a living person to that of one who is awaiting death. A dying person's sensitiveness to the music of the birds of the dawn is not lost, but the music seems to have become strange. The consciousness of leaving the world it is that makes the faculty of sight and hearing rather keener – to the dying eyes the big windows of the room seem to have become a glimmering square.

The perspective of death continues in the last stanza. The hint that the speaker is thinking not only of days that are no more, but also of a beloved who is no more is clear now – the kisses, the tokens of love, become painfully sweet; all fancies connected with love acquire a poignancy now. This what is Death in life – the condition of hopeless separation.

16.5.4 Appreciation

About popular pieces of creative writing it can be said that they touch universal chord. Being in a state of tears is quite normal for a person when he is separated from his love. And when this separation has been caused by death it is difficult to

seek consolation. Tennyson takes up this very situation in this lyric in which he develops this very idea of being inconsolable, the idea of being in incurable unhappiness.

What sustains this short poem is a unique blend of argument and feeling. The feeling is justified by argument, by parallels also between the state of mind of the speaker and the immediate surroundings. The autumn fields, the beam glittering on a sail, the half-awakened birds constitute the immediate world of the speaker. They provoke the feelings of loss and stimulate the memory.

The cadence is created by simple, familiar monosyllabic words – so sad, so strange, so fresh, thinking, glimmering, glittering are not exactly alliterative, but they weave a pattern of evanescence which is part of the theme.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Explain with reference to the context the following lines:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes
In looking on the happy autumn fields
And thinking of the days that are no more

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2) Write a short note on the mood of the speaker.

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3) Has the speaker justified his attitude? Give arguments in support of your answer.

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16.6 ULYSSES

Ulysses is also known as Odysseus. He was a king of Ithaca and he participated in the Greek war against Troy. After the siege of Troy he was returning home along with a number of soldiers in a ship. But he had angered Poseidon who, in turn, caused tempests and many obstructions that forced Ulysses to wander to many places. His wife Penelope and his son Telemachus were anxiously waiting for his arrival. In fact, Telemachus had already left home in search of his father.

The poem tells us that Ulysses is close to Ithaca. In spite of being so close to his home he is not happy. His wanderings have been quite fruitful as he came into contact with people of different countries from whom he gathered a lot of knowledge. He has now a feeling that he should continue this pursuit of knowledge. To lead a peaceful life at home would be quite a dull thing. He is also worried about his subjects who love only pleasure and care for material things.

Ulysses however hopes that his son can be taught to handle the political affairs and give a new orientation to his people. And after his son is ready, Ulysses will have time for more wanderings in order to have more knowledge.

This love for knowledge in a king who has suffered a lot not only makes the character of Ulysses distinguished; it gives a philosophical edge to the poem and takes us to a glorious aspect of Greek civilization. There is a grandeur in this quest for knowledge which touches us.

16.6.1 Poem

Ulysses

IT little profits that an idle king,
 By this still hearth, among these **barren crags**,
 Match'd with an aged wife, **I mete and dole**
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
 I cannot rest from travel: **I will drink**
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
 Thro' **scudding drifts** the rainy **Hyades** 10
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour's of them all;
 And drunk delight of battle with my **peers**,
 Far on the **ringing plains of windy Troy**.
 I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an **arch** wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades 20
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust **unburnish'd**, not to shine in use!
 As tho' to breath were life. Life piled on life

Were all too little, and of one to me
 Little remains: but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this grey spirit yearning in desire 30
 To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
 This is my son, mine own **Telemachus**,
 To whom I leave the **sceptre** and the isle
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail 40
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
 There lies the port: the **vessel puffs her sail**:
 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads-you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil; 50
 Death closes all: but something are the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order **smite**
 The **sounding furrows**; for my purpose holds
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
 It may be we shall touch the **Happy Isles**
 And see the great **Achilles**, whom we knew.
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

16.6.2 Glossary

- mete and dole** : to distribute
I will drink life to the lees : I will experience life to its full extent

scudding drifts	: drifting waves
Hyades	: nymphs forming a group of seven stars in the head of Taurus
Sceptre	: a staff which is the symbol of royal authority
sounding furrows	: loud stormy waves
Achilles	: the greatest of Greek heroes

16.6.3 Discussion

The poem begins with the early formulations of thoughts of Ulysses as he nears Ithaca. His memory of his wife, country and his people is clearer – he sees his wife now as an old woman; his own country not so flourishing as he left; and he is quite unhappy with his subjects whose life is centered in physical and material pleasures. He cannot imagine himself now becoming part of this listless scene in his country. It is true that he has suffered; but what he has seen by way of people and civilizations has filled him with great curiosity – he has learnt much that has transformed him from a mere king and a fighter to a man who wishes to understand the forces of this creation. He has met all classes of beings, peculiar men, gods and goddesses and this experience has already enriched him. He cannot think of being settled in a place and taking care of mundane things. He fondly remembers the things that he has seen and thinks of his personality as being moulded by them all. Has he seen all? He is convinced that this universe does not allow any body to see all – it is so constructed that only a part of the vast universe can come to a man's view.

He visualizes his ideas in the form of similes and metaphors – all experience is an arch, to follow knowledge, like a sinking star. The horizon is symbolized in the arch, the visible junction of the earth and the sky. There is a definite hint that this small view is not the full view; its imperfection is quite perceptible. And the sinking star is Ulysses himself, battered by war, age and sundry worries of the world. Yet the task of gathering more and more knowledge seems to him the only proper goal of life. There is a nobility in this craving that sets Ulysses quite apart not only from his subjects but also from other kings who have been interested in mere territorial conquests.

Had it been merely a wish it would not have been of any importance. But the thoughts of Ulysses are backed by determination – he has made up his mind to hand over the rule of the kingdom to his son, Telemachus, in whose abilities he has full confidence; he has also a hope that his subjects may be subdued by Telemachus in due course and their energies could be channelized in the right direction. He is also certain that Telemachus would be fulfilling all religious duties after his death.

Finally, he addresses his fellow mariners who have given their best to all his undertakings and exhorts them to seek a newer world. That is, he wants them not to be satisfied with a dull domestic life, but to explore new worlds that would broaden their view of life. He knows very well that they are also getting old like him. But it is better to end this life in the pursuit of greater knowledge than of material happiness.

16.6.4 Appreciation

It is a wonderful poem in which Tennyson makes a historical speaker touch upon issues of contemporary life. It is a fact that Ulysses was a legendary wanderer, an adventurous, fearless person who was forced by circumstances to go to strange places and meet strange people.

Tennyson therefore sees in him the prototype of the modern researcher or explorer. The scientific developments of his time were a thing of serious interest to him, and in his poetry he has paid tribute to the spirit of scientists and researchers who were expanding the area of human knowledge. In Ulysses, Tennyson sees such a figure who is willing to devote the whole of his life to exploration.

The poem has a dramatic structure – the development of the speech of Ulysses is entirely guided by the progress of his thoughts in course of his journey to Ithaca. The first point is the coming of the landmarks of Ithaca into his sight which stirs his memory; the second point is the rise of a conflict in his mind between his kingly duties and his appetite for knowledge which he acquired in the course of his wanderings; the third forms his decision in the fulfillment of which he seeks cooperation from his mariners.

As far as possible Tennyson tries to recapture the Homeric idiom– simple similes, a vigorous narrative style with appropriate pauses and shifts of mood and characterization through a long speech. A lot of associations are there in the poem with the ship and the voyages – shore, scudding drifts, vessel, sail, dark broad seas, sounding furrows, gulfs. They form the register of an accomplished voyager, ringing with authenticity of experience.

The command of blank verse is an important feature of the poem. It helps Tennyson follow every movement of the feelings and thoughts of Ulysses in a dramatic manner.

<p>Self-check Exercise III</p> <p>1) Write a short note on Ulysses, the king of Ithaca.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2) What does Ulysses say of his adventures?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

3) Do you see any reference to the contemporary scene of Tennyson's lines in the poem? Quote the relevant lines from the poem.

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16.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied:

- the salient features of the Victorian age
- the life and works of Alfred Lord Tennyson
- the lyrical extracts from *The Princess*
- the poem *Ulysses* which has a historical background but a relevant message for the modern man.

16.8 SUGGESTED READING

For detailed study of the works of Tennyson you can turn to the following works:

Elaine Jordan, *Alfred Tennyson*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988

John D. Jump (ed.), *Tennyson, The Critical Heritage*, Routledge, 1967

F.B. Pinion, *A Tennyson Companion*, Macmillan, London, 1984

Robert Hoof, *Tennyson 1809-1892, A Centenary Celebration*, The Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere, 1992

16.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Go through the discussion of the poem.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Go through the discussion, especially the first two paragraphs.
- 2) Take help of the parts of the discussion in which the speaker's mood has been referred to.
- 3) Read Appreciation section carefully on the basis of which you can answer the question.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) See the introduction of the poem.
- 2) Read the first two paragraphs of Discussion.
- 3) Read Appreciation, the first two paragraphs. See the last parts of the poem.

UNIT 17 ROBERT BROWNING

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Robert Browning: Life and Works
- 17.3 Poem: Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister
 - 17.3.1 Glossary
 - 17.3.2 Discussion
 - 17.3.3 Appreciation
- 17.4 Poem: Andrea del Sarto
 - 17.4.1 Glossary
 - 17.4.2 Discussion
 - 17.4.3 Appreciation
- 17.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.6 Suggested Reading
- 17.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

17.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be reading two well-known poems of Robert Browning. These poems will give you an understanding of Browning's poetry which holds a distinguished place because of its optimistic note.

On reading this Unit you will be able to:

- appreciate the distinctive qualities of Browning's poetry and art;
- understand dramatic monologue which Browning exploited to portray the tensions within a character's psyche;
- understand the differences between Tennyson and Browning, the poets who were products of the same age.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning was only three years younger than Tennyson. And yet the differences between the two poets are so big that they seem to be writing in two different ages.

Tennyson, you must have seen, is basically an emotional poet, responding to the beauty and pain of life. His involvement with the polemics of his times was also deep: he was as much concerned with politics of democracy as with scientific researches of his time that had begun to instil doubts into the minds of the people. Robert Browning's concerns were never so comprehensive. An intense personal life made him inclined to study characters belonging to aristocracy, the priestly and the artistic classes in whom he noticed contradictions and paradoxes but also a zest for life.

He wrote a few lyrics in which you will notice the argumentative tone of John Donne. But he is chiefly famous for his dramatic monologues, a few too long to

be read in one sitting. These poems are generally about Italian figures from different classes of the society. Their passions, adventures and tensions create a lot of interest: they do touch upon issues of morality and psychology but Browning takes them in his stride and does not let us feel disturbed. This cheerful spirit of Browning has endeared him to modern poets though his poems are considered to be difficult on account of wide-ranging allusions.

17.2 ROBERT BROWNING: LIFE AND WORKS

Robert Browning was born in 1812. His father worked in the Bank of England and was a man of literary interests. He had a vast collection of books in his personal library. Robert Browning’s mother was a nice musician. It was natural for Robert Browning to be interested in literature and music. Before he entered University College, London he had acquired proficiency in French, Italian, Greek and Latin. However, he left the college without a degree.

In his youth Browning was greatly influenced by Shelley – his poetry and his atheism. He did not remain an atheist for long but he continued to be a radical like Shelley. In 1845, Browning met Elizabeth Barrett in London. When her father objected to their marriage, they eloped to Italy, the country that fascinated Browning.

Browning had started writing quite early. His first published work was a long poem – **Pauline** in which he tried to imitate Shelley’s style. He attracted critical attention by **Men and Women** in 1855. **The Ring and The Book** is an ambitious poem of his in which he justified the ways of God through extended blank verse monologues. These were greatly admired by Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

His dramatic monologues portray a great variety of characters speaking to a silent listener about themselves at some important moment in their lives. It is not actually what they say that is important, more important are the things which they do not speak of directly but which are revealed through their tone and the implications of what they think and do. Browning died in 1889 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Major Works

Pauline	1833
Parcelsus	1835
Men and women	1855
Dramatic Personae	1864
The Ring and The Book	1869
Asolando	1889

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) What impression of Robert Browning do you have after learning the facts of his life?

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2) How is dramatic monologue different from a lyric?

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3) Name three important works of Robert Browning.

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17.3 POEM: SOLILOQUY OF ‘THE SPANISH CLOISTER’

1

Gr-r-r – there go, my heart’s **abhorrence!**
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
 God’s blood, would not mine kill you!
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
 Oh, that rose has prior claims –
 Need its leaden vase filled brimming?
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

2

At the meal we sit together
Salve tibi! I must hear
 Wise talk of the kind of weather,
 Sort of season, time of year:
 Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
 Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
 What’s the Latin name for ‘**parsley**’?
 What’s the Greek name for Swine’s Snout?

3

Whew! We’ll have our platter **burnished**,
 Laid with care on our own shelf!
 With a fire-new spoon we’re furnished,
 And a goblet for ourself,
 Rinsed like something sacrificial
 Ere ’tis fit to touch our chaps –
 Marked with L for our initial!
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

4

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
 Squats outside the Convent bank
 With Sanchicha, telling stories,
 Steeping tresses in the tank,
 Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs
 - Can't I see his dead eye glow,
 Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
 (That is, if he'd let it show!)

5

When he finishes **refection**,
 Knife and fork he never lays
 Cross-wise, to my recollection,
 As do I, in Jesu's praise
 I the **Trinity** illustrate,
 Drinking watered orange-pulp –
 In three sips the **Arian** frustrate;
 While he drains his at one gulp.

6

Oh, those melons? If he's able
 We're to have a feast! so nice!
 One goes to the Abbot's table,
 All of us get each a slice.
 How go on your flowers? None double?
 Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
 Strange! – And I, too, at such trouble,
 Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

7

There's a great text in **Galatians**,
 Once you trip on it, entails
 Twenty-nine distinct **damnations**,
 One sure, if another fails.
 If I trip him just a-dying,
 Sure of heaven as sure can be,
 Spin him round and send him flying
 Off to hell, a **Manichee**?

8

Or, my scrofulous French novel
 On grey paper with blunt type!
 Simply glance at it, you grovel
 Hand and foot in Belial's gripe:
 If I double down its pages
 At the woeful sixteenth print,
 When he gathers his greengages,
 Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

Or, there's Satan! – one might venture
 Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
 Such a flaw in the **indenture**
 As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
 Blasted lay that rose-acacia
 We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine ...
 'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia
 Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r – you swine!

17.3.1 Glossary

Cloister	:	a monastery, one who leads a monastic life
Abhorrence	:	hatred
Salve tibi	:	a toast, literally <i>Your Health</i> in Latin
Parsley	:	a herb used in cooking
Burnished	:	highly polished metal
Refection	:	a light meal
The Trinity	:	One God known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
The Arian	:	a sect of Christians who believed that Jesus was of a similar nature and substance as God
Galatians	:	a book of the New Testament
Damnations	:	State of being in hell
Manichee	:	a sect of Christians who attribute evil to some adversary to God
Belial	:	a fallen angel
Indenture	:	a type of contract that forced a servant to work for the employer for a particular period of time
Plena gratia	:	full of grace

17.3.2 Discussion

The portraiture of ecclesiastical figures in a comic and satiric light has been in vogue in English literature since Chaucer who, through his prioress and monk, drew attention to their inadequacies, their virtual unsuitability for such duties because of their indulgence in material pursuits and luxurious living.

Robert Browning also observed the life of many persons working in the church. He found it in direct conflict with the principles and the code of conduct of the church. And yet as was his wont he expressed his disapproval in a gentle and humorous manner, taking misdemeanour in quite a light way.

In this poem the anonymous Spanish monk's attempt to denigrate his fellow monk, Lawrence, is a successful exercise in dramatic irony, the many allegations of the speaker reflecting actually his own flawed character. The speaker, in a bitter upsurge of jealousy, tries to tear apart Lawrence through the details of his routine activities – gardening, dining habits, conversation, love affairs and

Christian duties. But anger and envy are in themselves unchristian feelings, exposing the character of the speaker himself. Lawrence is portrayed as a glutton and as a person of loose morals, carrying out a clandestine affair with one or two local women. But the very tone in which these allegations are made point to the lapses of the speaker in all these areas.

In the last two stanzas the speaker declares his intention of further damning the soul of Lawrence. This is again an unchristian desire. A true Christian must try for salvation of individuals: he is not to do anything that leads to damnation. Moreover, the means that the cloister speaks of – the French novels – suggest that he is himself hooked on to such reading to satisfy his vicarious urges.

A sort of progress of the evil thoughts of the cloister is discernible in this poem of nine stanzas. In the first stanza he speaks of the healthy gardening activities of Lawrence that provoke him into a spiteful mood – *Hell dry you up with its flames*. This is quite unwarranted as Lawrence is shown doing his work with great care. Then follows the lunch-time scene in which Lawrence is shown as a glutton but also as a skilled conversationalist. In fact, a glutton rarely shows interest in conversation while he is gorging on food. There is thus a discrepancy between facts and cloister's reporting that catches our attention. The reference to Dolores and Sanchicha, the two local women, shows that the speaker is himself enamoured of their '*tresses blue black lustrous*'. The details of theological debates in the course of drinking fruit-juices are amusing. And more damning are the plans of trapping Lawrence by inciting him to read French novels. Finally, in the last stanza, there is direct invocation of Satan, an act that is against Christian faith.

17.3.3 Appreciation

The poem reminds of the personal satires written by Dryden and Pope. But Robert Browning takes one step further in making the speaker an object of satire. This is possible because of the dramatic monologue form where the speaker's tone yields an insight into his own character. Technically speaking, this poem is not a dramatic monologue as there is no listener here. It is a soliloquy. But the variation of tone and mood resembles the style of dramatic monologue, and there is a focus on the temperament and the character of the speaker.

A more significant thing, you should notice, is the use of Lawrence's voice also, creating a dramatic interval within the poem, enabling us to compare the two voices, that is, of the Spanish cloister and of Lawrence.

The use of colloquial phrases – *there go, my heart's abhorrence, oh, that rose has prior claims, oh, those melons!* – help the reader recreate every movement of the scene from the garden to the dining table. They also provide a glimpse into the changing mood of the speaker from anger to mirthful jest. They are a means of striking communication with the reader at an informal level.

There are high sounding words and phrases also – *Jesus praise, the Trinity, Arian, Galatians, Manichee* – connected with the Bible and the theological debates of the Victorian age. They make only pompous statement, a show on the part of the speaker of his acquaintance with controversies of his time. A monk who joined the church to enjoy the pleasures of life without honest work had to justify his position by these tricks.

Anyway, the poem is an entertaining piece – a triumph of poetic art that could present something ridiculous in style.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Describe Lawrence’s conversation as presented by the speaker.

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2) What plan is the speaker making regarding damnation of Lawrence?

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3) Why is the Spanish cloister so angry with Lawrence? Can you guess?

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4) What light does the poem throw on the personality of Lawrence?

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5) What impression do you have of the Spanish cloister?

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17.4 POEM: ANDREA DEL SARTO

Andrea del Sarto

(Called 'The Faultless Painter')

But do not let us quarrel any more,
 No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
 I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
 Treat his own subject after his own way,
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
 And shut the money into this small hand
 When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
 Oh, I'll content him, – but to-morrow, Love!
 I often am much **wearier** than you think,
 This evening more than usual, and it seems
 As if – forgive now – should you let me sit
 Here by the window with your hand in mine
 And look a half-hour forth on **Fiesole**,
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,
 I might get up to-morrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
 To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
 Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
 And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
 Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
 For each of the five pictures we require:
 It saves a model. So! keep looking so –
 My **serpentine** beauty, rounds on rounds!
 – How could you ever prick those perfect ears.
 Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet –
 My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
 Which everybody looks on and calls his,
 And, I suppose, is looked by in turn,
 While she looks – no one's: very dear, no less.
 You smile? why, there's my picture read made,
 There's what we painters call our harmony!
 A common greyness silvers everything –
 All in a twilight, you and I alike
 – You, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know), – but I, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To younder sober pleasant Fiesole.
 There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
 That length of convent-wall across the way
 Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
 The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
 And autumn grows, autumn in every-thing.
 Eh? the who'e seems to fall into a shape

As if I saw alike my work and self
 And all that I was born to be and do,
 A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
 How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
 So free we seem, so **fettered** fast we are!
 I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
 This chamber for example – turn your head –
 All that's behind us! You don't understand
 Nor care to understand about my art,
 But you can hear at least when people speak:
 And that cartoon, the second from the door
 – It is the thing, Love! so such things should be –
 Behold **Madonna!** – I am bold to say
 I can do with my pencil what I know,
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep –
 Do easily, too – when I say, perfectly,
 I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
 Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
 And just as much they used to say in France.
 At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
 No sketches first, no studies, that's long post:
 I do what many dream of, all their lives,
 – Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
 And fail in doing, I could count twenty such
 On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
 Who strive – you don't know how the others strive
 To paint a little thing like that you smeared
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat, –
 Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
 (I know his name, no matter) – so much less!
 Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
 There burns a truer light of God in them,
 In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
 Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
 This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
 Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
 Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
 Enter and take their place there sure enough,
 Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
 My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
 The sudden blood of these men! at a word –
 Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
 I, painting from myself and to myself,
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
 Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
 Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
 His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
 Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
 Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp.

Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
 Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
 I know both what I want and what might gain,
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
 'Had I been two, another and myself,
 'Our head would have overlooked the world!' No doubt.
 Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
 The Urbinate who died five years ago.
 ('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
 Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
 Above and through his art – for it gives way;
 That arm is wrongly put – and there again –
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's line,
 Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
 He means right – that, a child may understand.
 Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
 But all the play, the insight and the stretch –
 Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
 Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
 We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
 Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think –
 More than I merit, yes, by many times.
 But had you – oh, with the same perfect brow,
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare –
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
 Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
 'God and the glory! never care for gain.
 'The present by the future, what is that?
 'Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
 'Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!
 'I might have done it for you. So it seems:
 Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
 Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
 What wife had Rafael, or has **Agnolo**?
 In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive: Yet the will's somewhat – somewhat,
 too, the power –
 And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
 God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
 'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
 That I am something underrated here,
 Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
 I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
 For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
 The best is when they pass and look aside;
 But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.

Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
 And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
 I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
 Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
 In that humane great monarch's golden look, –
 One finger in his beard or twisted curl
 Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
 I painting proudly with his breath on me,
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts, –
 And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
 This in the background, waiting on my work,
 To crown the issue with a last reward!
 A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
 And had you not grown restless but I know
 'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
 How could it end in any other way?
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.
 The triumph was – to reach and stay there; since
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
 Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
 'Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
 'The Roman's is the better when you pray,
 'But still the other's Virgin was his wife –
 Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
 Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
 To Rafael I have known it all these years
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
 Too lifted up in heart because of it)
 'Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
 'Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
 'Who, were he set to plan and execute
 'As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
 'Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!
 'To Rafael's! – And indeed the arm is wrong.
 I hardly dare yet, only you to see,
 Give that chalk here – quick, thus the line should go!
 Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
 (What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?

Do you forget already words like those?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost, –
Is, whether you're – not grateful – but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love, – come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you – you, and not with me?
Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out, Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more – the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them – that is, Michel Agnolo –
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth,
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand – there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scrudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?
I am grown peaceful as old age tonight.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis! – it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.

Well, had I riches of my own? you see
 How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
 They were born poor, lived poor and poor they died:
 And I have laboured somewhat in my time
 And not been paid profusely. Some good son
 Paint my two hundred pictures let him try!
 No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
 You loved me quite enough, it seems tonight.
 This must suffice me here. What would one have?
 In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance –
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
 To cover – the three first without a wife,
 While I have mine! So – still they over-come
 Because there's still Lucrezia, – as I choose.
 Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

17.4.1 Glossary

- Wearier** : more tired
- Fiesole** : a beautiful town in the north of Florence where Andrea del Sarto is settled
- Serpentining** : like a coiled serpent, also very glossy
- Fettered** : bound by chains, not in a position to move freely
- Madonna** : a statue or painting of Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus
- Agnolo** : Michael Angelo, the Renaissance Italian painter

17.4.2 Discussion

Andrea del Sarto, called the faultless painter for his technical perfection, was the court painter of king Francis of France, in the sixteenth century. The king sent him with large funds to Italy to purchase Italian works of art. But Andrea del Sarto settled in a comfortable house in Florence with that money and never returned to France. Although Michael Angelo and Raphael were legendary painters of Italy at this time, Andrea del Sarto earned distinction for his minute attention to details. He was therefore called the faultless painter, that is a painter in whose work everything was in perfect order.

The long poem is an example of dramatic monologue. On an evening when Andrea del Sarto is with his wife, Lucrezia, he turns introspective, thinks of his successful career, his betrayal of the French king and, basically, of a serious drawback of his that does not let him have a higher inspiration inspite of technical superiority. And he concludes that his mercenary outlook and his anxiety to keep his wife satisfied are the reasons behind his being at this low level in the world of art. A tone that alters between elation over achievement and then of frustration over a major failure dramatizes the mental conflict of Andrea del Sarto and lays bare several layers of his consciousness.

The pathetic appeal – *do not let us quarrel any more* – with which the poem begins is an index of Andrea del Sarto's state of mind. He further requests

Lucrezia to come closer to him so that he could watch Fiesole from the window of his house in a posture of intimacy and wake up the next day cheerful and fresh and finish a painting exactly according to the terms of the commission. It would be a great satisfaction for Andrea del Sarto to put '*the money into this small hand*'. While art has been a means of livelihood for many, Andrea del Sarto knows very well that he built up his career by fraud: he took money from Francis in the name of purchasing paintings but he used it to construct a house for himself and to fulfil the needs of his wife.

This knowledge or this feeling of guilt has brought no perceptible change in the outlook of Andrea del Sarto. To save a little money on a model he can use Lucrezia to whom his attachment is almost slavish.

For a moment, as he looks out of the window, at the beauty of Fiesole, he hears the last bells of the church and feels the chill of autumn in the wind. He can see lucidly '*autumn in everything*', that is, an inevitable decay of powers, faculties and creativity. In this moment he can view all his work as being '*a twilight piece*', that is, lacking brightness and splendour. This is to suggest that this specific moment is the articulation of an experience that has been with him for a long time. He has been living with this sense of failure for long and it is only now that he finds a release in these terms.

Andrea never forgets the supreme worth of the paintings of Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and Michaelangelo simply for the reason that their works were inspired from an inner source. That source has dried up in Andrea del Sarto. He can very carefully draw something, making it exact and accurate. But the insight that leads to production of great work of art is out of his grasp. To be acutely conscious of this lapse comes from an understanding of art. And it is quite pathetic to note that an artist, in spite of being conscious of this flaw in him, can never overcome it.

To add to this note of pathos there is the infidelity of his wife who has fallen for a cousin, waiting to give a slip to her husband, come out and meet him. Andrea cannot have any restraining influence over his wife. So he has to come to terms with this also and he would rather let his wife enjoy this affair than quarrel openly with her. His degradation is complete. He may take satisfaction in being called a faultless painter, but his life is in a shambles.

17.4.3 Appreciation

As a poet Robert Browning possessed a keen insight in every aspect of art – the devotion that an artist should have towards his work, the mastery over the craft and a moral outlook. Without these three elements the work of an artist would be lacking in vitality and purpose. But his long association with poets, painters and musicians, which Italy had in abundance, gave him acquaintance with the shady side of artistic business also. He must have learnt with pain that an artist could perform for sheer mercenary motives and nothing else. The success could be valuable in terms of monetary gain and fame, but in the process the artist destroyed himself. It is this experience of the moral failure of the artist which is central to the poem.

The poem is a confession on the part of Andrea del Sarto who had great artistic promise. But he was ruined by one basic flaw – he could not devote himself to art. He further compromised his integrity by cheating King Francis and by

attaching himself to a woman to whom money and pleasure counted above everything.

Andrea del Sarto admits to have sold himself to keep Lucrezia satisfied. But is she satisfied? The betrayal to art and to the patron king haunts him back now not only in the sense of failure as an artist, but as a failure in life as a whole. An artist has his life in art – it is art alone that is his controlling destiny. To forget art and to lose oneself in materialistic pursuits is to move towards death.

Apart from presenting a case-study of Andrea del Sarto in such self-deprecating terms the poem is a verdict on a class of artists who allow themselves to be trapped either by sensual pleasures or material ambitions. Art is simply incompatible with physicality or materialism. Beyond the details of craft, art has a spiritual centre, a view of life of man and nature. This view remains open only to those artists who remain committed to the principle of art, to its spirituality.

Appearing to be comic, ironical and light-hearted, the poem is vindication of this doctrine of art. Robert Browning’s mastery of poetic voice is evidently of a moral nature only disguised in banter and ridicule. Many words and phrases – *serpentinaing, I am judged, a truer light of God, nearer heaven* – have a biblical ring. They suggest Andrea’s religious background which has been obliterated by his own acts. There is the memory of Dr. Faustus in his last moment realization – *Love, we are in God’s hand/ so free we seem, so fettered fast we are.*

Self-check Exercise III

1) Write a note on the personality of Andrea del Sarto.

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2) Why did Andrea del Sarto betray King Francis?

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3) How are now the relations between Andrea del Sarto and his wife?

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4) What view of art does Browning present through this poem?
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5) Do you think Andrea del Sarto is a faultless painter?
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6) How is Browning different from Tennyson?
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17.5 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit we studied:
- the life and works of Robert Browning, noting the dramatic monologue that he developed.
 - the two poems in which Robert Browning’s contribution to dramatic monologue is well-represented.

17.6 SUGGESTED READING

For further studies in Robert Browning you can refer to the following works: -
W.C. De Vane, *A Browning Hand Book*, John Murray, 1955
Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, Chatto, 1957
Ian Jack, *Browning’s Major Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 1973
J. Briston, *Robert Browning*, Harvester, 1991

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Go through the second stanza of the poem. The topics of conversation are mentioned; on the basis of that develop your own idea. A part of it is continued in the sixth stanza also.
- 2) The details of various food-items and drinks are given in the fifth and the sixth stanzas.
- 3) Take help of the last part of Discussion.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Andrea del Sarto is presented as an artist who has sacrificed art for commercial success. At the root of this is, however, his passion for Lucrezia, his wife, to whom only pleasure and fashionable living matter. It is to keep her happy that Andrea pocketed the money give to him by King Francis; he constructed a house in Fiesole with this money and turned to a style of painting that could bring him quick success. He creates demand by working hard and maintaining a high level of accuracy in matters of form. The formal perfection appeals immediately to the public who acclaim him for being technically perfect.

But Andrea had good training. At this height of his career he comes to realize that his so-called perfection is a ruse to cheat the people. It is not an outcome of following the artistic principle. There is thus a great sense of honesty in his admission. Moreover, his references to Michaelangelo and other great painters reveal the understanding of spiritual foundation of art.

Andrea is, therefore, filled with remorse, guilt and a painful realization of truth together with a very frustrating sense of complete incapacity. His submission to the fancies and adventures of his wife makes him a farcical figure, though his sense of guilt does elevate him a little.

- 2) See the early parts of Discussion.
- 4) Consult Appreciation.
- 6) Browning is basically different from Tennyson in retaining an optimistic view of life, in developing dramatic monologue, in the range of his characters, and in keeping himself untouched by the religious-political issues that were being hotly debated in England.

Quote lines from poems.

UNIT 18 MATTHEW ARNOLD

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Matthew Arnold
- 18.3 The Strayed Reveller
 - 18.3.1 Background of the Poem
 - 18.3.2 The Text
 - 18.3.3 A Discussion
- 18.4 The Scholar-Gypsy
 - 18.4.1 Background of the Poem
 - 18.4.2 The Text
 - 18.4.3 A Discussion
- 18.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Write about Matthew Arnold's life and work;
- Discuss Matthew Arnold's poetry in detail with special reference to:
 - i) The Strayed Reveller
 - ii) The Scholar-Gypsy

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we have discussed Arnold's life in brief as in case of any individual the experience of life certainly shapes the nature of his or her work at least to a certain extent. The two poems discussed here are two of Arnold's choicest creations.

The first poem, though it exhibits a good deal of poetical power, and occasionally depth of thought is often criticised for having either no subject, or being obscure in its subject. It sometimes reads in large part as a versified essay in criticism. It contains much commentary on poets and poetry.

The second poem, "The scholar Gypsy" is considered to be a poem that was based on Joseph Glanvill's recount of 'The Vanity of Dogmatizing'. It opens up on an afternoon in the month of August with the poet recounting his usual chores. It's a lovely poem that showcases the beauty of pastoral chores and life during this century.

18.2 MATTHEW ARNOLD

Matthew Arnold was a writer of many activities, but it is chiefly as a poet and a critic that he now holds his place in English literature. He was the son of the

famous head master of rugby, and was educated at Winchester, Rugby and at Balliol College, Oxford, where he gained the Newdigate prize for poetry. Subsequently he became a Fellow of Oriel College (1845). In 1851 he was appointed an inspector of schools, and proved to be a capable official. In 1857 he was elected professor of poetry at Oxford. His life was busily uneventful, and in 1883, he resigned, receiving a pension from the government. Less than five years afterwards he died suddenly of heart disease at Liverpool.

His poetical works are not very bulky. *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems* (1849) appear under the *nom de plume* of 'A' as did *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* (1852). Then followed *Poems* (1853), with its famous critical preface, and *New Poems* (1863). None of these volumes is of large size, though much of the content is of a high quality. For subject, Arnold is very fond of classical themes, to which he gives a meditative and even melancholy cast common in modern compositions. The nature of his poetry is didactic.

His prose work is large in bulk and wide in range. Of them all his critical essays are probably of the highest value. *Essays in Criticism* (1865 and 1889) contains the best of his critical work, which is marked by wide reading and careful thought. His judgments, usually sane and measured, are sometimes distorted a little by his views on life and politics. Hence it can be said that Arnold is a more commanding figure and has exercised a wider influence as a prose writer. His earlier life is preoccupied with verse and his later life with prose.

A lot has been said and discussed about all sorts of 'conflicts', 'ambivalences', and 'dichotomies' in Arnold's mind and soul. His early letters to Arthur Hugh Clough, reveal his serious moral engrossment in his thinking about poetry. According to Gottfried, he was deeply troubled about the problems of the viability of the spirit and imagination in a world that was based on utilitarian standards of human behavior. One of the most dominant faiths that he had was that man could find salvation, which according to Arnold meant wholeness and harmony, only through poetry. A very important remark about Arnold is that critical effort and moral passion was employed in writing even in the earliest of his poetry and one should be aware of this fact to understand it properly.

18.3 THE STRAYED REVELLER

18.3.1 Background of the Poem

The Strayed Reveller is an unrhymed lyric poem written in irregular metre, was originally published in Matthew Arnold's first volume of verse, *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems*. This poem has received a very little attention, although it was very important for Arnold who gave it the place of honour in his first volume. It is often regarded as an investigation of the creative process of a poet. The poem is remarkable for its detailed descriptive passages. The poet hero of the Strayed Reveller chose the dangerous world of "natural magic" because he thinks that the god is indifferent and the human life is useless. The Strayed Reveller is an important document in the long argument between Arnold the romantic and Arnold the classicist. It also shows how Arnold's ideas about poetry interconnect with his ideas about God, nature and human life. At the core of the poem is a comparison between divine detachment and true poetic empathy as ways of seeing human life. The best recent critique of the poem finding in it

chiefly an analysis of the romantic mode of vision, disagree both about which part of the poem embody the romantic mode and about whether the poem rejects or celebrates it.

18.3.2 The Text

The Strayed Reveller

The Youth

Faster, faster,
O Circe, Goddess,
Let the wild, thronging train
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul!
Thou standest, smiling
Down on me! thy right arm,
Lean'd up against the column there,
Props thy soft cheek;
Thy left holds, hanging loosely,
The deep cup, ivy-cinctured,
I held but now.
Is it, then, evening
So soon? I see, the night-dews,
Cluster'd in thick beads, dim
The agate brooch-stones
On thy white shoulder;
The cool night-wind, too,
Blows through the portico,
Stirs thy hair, Goddess,
Waves thy white robe!

Circe.

Whence art thou, sleeper?

The Youth.

When the white dawn first
Through the rough fir-planks
Of my hut, by the chestnuts,
Up at the valley-head,
Came breaking, Goddess!
I sprang up, I threw round me
My dappled fawn-skin;
Passing out, from the wet turf,
Where they lay, by the hut door,
I snatch'd up my vine-crown, my fir-staff,
All drench'd in dew-

Came swift down to join
 The rout early gather'd
 In the town, round the temple,
 Iacchus' white fane
 On yonder hill.
 Quick I pass'd, following
 The wood-cutters' cart-track
 Down the dark valley;-I saw
 On my left, through the beeches,
 Thy palace, Goddess,
 Smokeless, empty!
 Trembling, I enter'd; beheld
 The court all silent,
 The lions sleeping,
 On the altar this bowl.
 I drank, Goddess!
 And sank down here, sleeping,
 On the steps of thy portico.

Circe.

Foolish boy! Why tremblest thou?
 Thou lovest it, then, my wine?
 Wouldst more of it? See, how glows,
 Through the delicate, flush'd marble,
 The red, creaming liquor,
 Strown with dark seeds!
 Drink, thee! I chide thee not,
 Deny thee not my bowl.
 Come, stretch forth thy hand, thee-so!
 Drink-drink again!

The Youth.

Thanks, gracious one!
 Ah, the sweet fumes again!
 More soft, ah me,
 More subtle-winding
 Than Pan's flute-music!
 Faint-faint! Ah me,
 Again the sweet sleep!
 Circe.

Hist! Thou-within there!
 Come forth, Ulysses!
 Art tired with hunting?
 While we range the woodland,
 See what the day brings.

Ulysses.

Ever new magic!
Hast thou then lured hither,
Wonderful Goddess, by thy art,
The young, languid-eyed Ampelus,
Iacchus' darling-
Or some youth beloved of Pan,
Of Pan and the Nymphs?
That he sits, bending downward
His white, delicate neck
To the ivy-wreathed marge
Of thy cup; the bright, glancing vine-leaves
That crown his hair,
Falling forward, mingling
With the dark ivy-plants—
His fawn-skin, half untied,
Smear'd with red wine-stains? Who is he,
That he sits, overweigh'd
By fumes of wine and sleep,
So late, in thy portico?
What youth, Goddess,-what guest
Of Gods or mortals?

Circe.

Hist! he wakes!
I lured him not hither, Ulysses.
Nay, ask him!

The Youth.

Who speaks' Ah, who comes forth
To thy side, Goddess, from within?
How shall I name him?
This spare, dark-featured,
Quick-eyed stranger?
Ah, and I see too
His sailor's bonnet,
His short coat, travel-tarnish'd,
With one arm bare!—
Art thou not he, whom fame
This long time rumours
The favour'd guest of Circe, brought by the waves?
Art thou he, stranger?
The wise Ulysses,
Laertes' son?

Ulysses.
 I am Ulysses.
 And thou, too, sleeper?
 Thy voice is sweet.
 It may be thou hast follow'd
 Through the islands some divine bard,
 By age taught many things,
 Age and the Muses;
 And heard him delighting
 The chiefs and people
 In the banquet, and learn'd his songs.
 Of Gods and Heroes,
 Of war and arts,
 And peopled cities,
 Inland, or built
 By the gray sea.—If so, then hail!
 I honour and welcome thee.

The Youth.

The Gods are happy.
 They turn on all sides
 Their shining eyes,
 And see below them
 The earth and men.
 They see Tiresias
 Sitting, staff in hand,
 On the warm, grassy
 Asopus bank,
 His robe drawn over
 His old sightless head,
 Revolving inly
 The doom of Thebes.
 They see the Centaurs
 In the upper glens
 Of Pelion, in the streams,
 Where red-berried ashes fringe
 The clear-brown shallow pools,
 With streaming flanks, and heads
 Rear'd proudly, snuffing
 The mountain wind.
 They see the Indian
 Drifting, knife in hand,
 His frail boat moor'd to
 A floating isle thick-matted
 With large-leaved, low-creeping melon-plants
 And the dark cucumber.
 He reaps, and stows them,
 Drifting—drifting;—round him,
 Round his green harvest-plot,
 Flow the cool lake-waves,

The mountains ring them.
They see the Scythian
On the wide stepp, unharnessing
His wheel'd house at noon.
He tethers his beast down, and makes his meal—
Mares' milk, and bread
Baked on the embers;—all around
The boundless, waving grass-plains stretch, thick-starr'd
With saffron and the yellow hollyhock
And flag-leaved iris-flowers.
Sitting in his cart
He makes his meal; before him, for long miles,
Alive with bright green lizards,
And the springing bustard-fowl,
The track, a straight black line,
Furrows the rich soil; here and there
Cluster of lonely mounds
Topp'd with rough-hewn,
Gray, rain-blear'd statues, overpeer
The sunny waste.
They see the ferry
On the broad, clay-laden
Lone Chorasmian stream;—thereon,
With snort and strain,
Two horses, strongly swimming, tow
The ferry-boat, with woven ropes
To either bow
Firm harness'd by the mane; a chief
With shout and shaken spear,
Stands at the prow, and guides them; but astern
The cowering merchants, in long robes,
Sit pale beside their wealth
Of silk-bales and of balsam-drops,
Of gold and ivory,
Of turquoise-earth and amethyst,
Jasper and chalcedony,
And milk-barred onyx-stones.
The loaded boat swings groaning
In the yellow eddies;
The Gods behold him.
They see the Heroes
Sitting in the dark ship
On the foamless, long-heaving
Violet sea.
At sunset nearing
The Happy Islands.
These things, Ulysses,
The wise bards, also
Behold and sing.
But oh, what labour!
O prince, what pain!

They too can see
Tiresias;—but the Gods,
Who give them vision,
Added this law:
That they should bear too
His groping blindness,
His dark foreboding,
His scorn'd white hairs;
Bear Hera's anger
Through a life lengthen'd
To seven ages.
They see the Centaurs
On Pelion:—then they feel,
They too, the maddening wine
Swell their large veins to bursting; in wild pain
They feel the biting spears
Of the grim Lapithæ, and Theseus, drive,
Drive crashing through their bones; they feel
High on a jutting rock in the red stream
Alcmena's dreadful son
Ply his bow;—such a price
The Gods exact for song:
To become what we sing.
They see the Indian
On his mountain lake; but squalls
Make their skiff reel, and worms
In the unkind spring have gnawn
Their melon-harvest to the heart.—They see
The Scythian: but long frosts
Parch them in winter-time on the bare stepp,
Till they too fade like grass; they crawl
Like shadows forth in spring.
They see the merchants
On the Oxus stream;—but care
Must visit first them too, and make them pale.
Whether, through whirling sand,
A cloud of desert robber-horse have burst
Upon their caravan; or greedy kings,
In the wall'd cities the way passes through,
Crush'd them with tolls; or fever-airs,
On some great river's marge,
Mown them down, far from home.
They see the Heroes
Near harbour;—but they share
Their lives, and former violent toil in Thebes,
Seven-gated Thebes, or Troy;
Or where the echoing oars
Of Argo first
Startled the unknown sea.
The old Silenus
Came, lolling in the sunshine,

From the dewy forest-coverts,
This way at noon.
Sitting by me, while his Fauns
Down at the water-side
Sprinkled and smoothed
His drooping garland,
He told me these things.
But I, Ulysses,
Sitting on the warm steps,
Looking over the valley,
All day long, have seen,
Without pain, without labour,
Sometimes a wild-hair'd Mænad—
Sometimes a Faun with torches—
And sometimes, for a moment,
Passing through the dark stems
Flowing-robed, the beloved,
The desired, the divine,
Beloved Iacchus.
Ah, cool night-wind, tremulous stars!
Ah, glimmering water,
Fitful earth-murmur,
Dreaming woods!
Ah, golden-haired, strangely smiling Goddess,
And thou, proved, much enduring,
Wave-toss'd Wanderer!
Who can stand still?
Ye fade, ye swim, ye waver before me—
The cup again!
Faster, faster,
O Circe, Goddess.
Let the wild, thronging train,
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul!

Matthew Arnold

Glossary

- Circe** : In Greek mythology Circe is a goddess who turned Odysseus's men temporarily into swine but later gave him directions for their journey home.
- Ulysses** : Ulysses is derived from *Ulixes*, the Latin name for Odysseus, a character in ancient Greek literature. He is known to be a legendary Greek king of Ithaca and a hero of Homer's *Odyssey* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_poetry
- The Youth** : The aspiring poet the transformation of whom forms the central part of the poem.

The transformation of a young man into a poet is the account that is at the core of this poem, though the story does not appear to dominate the whole poem at any point of its narrative flow. The poem is in form of a dialogue. It's a dialogue between a youth and Circe. The young man enters in the world of poetic creation and holds the cup of wine with a trembling hand. Goddess Circe welcomes him to take deep plunge in the sea of lyrical design.

The poem deals with the nature of the poet, incorporating two themes that were very common in nineteenth-century romanticism: the pinnacle of the artist and the agony of the artist. It is assumed that when Arnold wrote the speeches of the youth, he must have had a poet like Keats in mind. This is because Arnold at some point of time had observed to Clough in his letters that Keats was 'consumed' by the desire for 'movement and fullness', which was the same desire chanted by the intoxicated reveller.

The youth implores the Goddess to sweep his soul with the wild and bright procession of "eddying form". Arnold has also brought in the famous character of Ulysses in course of their dialogue. The subsequent stanza gives long colorful portrayal of the world of transition by the youth in course of his self-narrative. For Arnold the question how the poet sees is never separated from what he sees.

On the whole however the poem remains unclear. A major problem with the poem is the fact that it seems to violate the critical principles which Arnold was trying to develop at the time he was composing it. Although the poem has been written in dramatic form, it is marked with slight central action and is heavily overlaid with decoration. Similar is the case with the descriptive passages that are supposed to represent examples of the variety of human existence but become elements of digression because of their length and sensuous elaboration.

The reveller almost describes poetry as 'a true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history'. Arnold was himself against this view. According to him if a poet became what he sang, then he sang himself in allegorical representation.

All these factors force us to think as to why Arnold, who himself was considered to be a reformer as far as poetry was concerned chose a poem with evident flaws as the title poem of his first volume of poetry. However we can also think that he was very well aware of what he was doing and chose the indirect means of irony and allegory rather than 'thinking aloud' in verse to which he objected.

The use of his legend of Circe has also often been questioned. According to Gottfried, although this is modern Circe who is refined, she still remains the dangerous seducer. So the reveller who was a youthful poet earlier, driven by his naturally ardent nature, went astray and willingly submitted to the Circean influence. The accusing questions of Ulysses further in the poem make it clear that the effect of Circe on the young poet was evil. She even denies that she led him astray. Towards the end of the poem, the reveller, does nothing but cries for more wine.

18.4 THE SCHOLAR-GYPSY

18.4.1 Background of the poem

‘The Scholar Gypsy’ is based on a story about a scholar who abandoned academic life to join a band of gypsies. The various places and landmarks mentioned in the poem are all actual ones situated around Oxford. The Shepherd is summoned to the hills to untie the wattle cotes: sheepfolds built of wattles or interwoven twigs; neither to leave his wistful flock unfed nor let his bawling fellows rack their throats nor allow the cropped grasses shoot another head. However, when the fields are calm and still and tired men and dogs all gone to rest, one can see only the white sheep cross the strips of the moon blanch’d green, the Shepherd must again renew the quest; the search for the Scholar Gypsy who is believed to be still haunting the vicinity.

18.4.2 The Text

The Scholar-Gypsy

Go, for they call you, shepherd, from the hill;
 Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes!
 No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,
 Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,
 Nor the cropp’d herbage shoot another head.
 But when the fields are still,
 And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,
 And only the white sheep are sometimes seen
 Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch’d green.
 Come, shepherd, and again begin the quest!

Here, where the reaper was at work of late—
 In this high field’s dark corner, where he leaves
 His coat, his basket, and his earthen cruse,
 And in the sun all morning binds the sheaves,
 Then here, at noon, comes back his stores to use—
 Here will I sit and wait,
 While to my ear from uplands far away
 The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,
 With distant cries of reapers in the corn—
 All the live murmur of a summer’s day.

Screen’d is this nook o’er the high, half-reap’d field,
 And here till sun-down, shepherd! will I be.
 Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,
 And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
 Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;
 And air-swept lindens yield
 Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers
 Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
 And bower me from the August sun with shade;
 And the eye travels down to Oxford’s towers.

And near me on the grass lies Glanvil's book—
 Come, let me read the oft-read tale again!
 The story of the Oxford scholar poor,
 Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,
 Who, tired of knocking at preferment's door,
 One summer-morn forsook
 His friends, and went to learn the Gypsy-lore,
 And roam'd the world with that wild brotherhood,
 And came, as most men deem'd, to little good,
 But came to Oxford and his friends no more.

But once, years after, in the country-lanes,
 Two scholars, whom at college erst he knew,
 Met him, and of his way of life enquired;
 Whereat he answer'd, that the Gypsy-crew,
 His mates, had arts to rule as they desired
 The workings of men's brains,
 And they can bind them to what thoughts they will.
 'And I,' he said, 'the secret of their art,
 When fully learn'd, will to the world impart;
 But it needs heaven-sent moments for this skill.'

This said, he left them, and return'd no more.—
 But rumours hung about the country-side,
 That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,
 Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,
 In hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,
 The same the gipsies wore.
 Shepherds had met him on the Hurst in spring;
 At some lone alehouse in the Berkshire moors,
 On the warm ingle-bench, the smock-frock'd boors
 Had found him seated at their entering,

But, 'mid their drink and clatter, he would fly.
 And I myself seem half to know thy looks,
 And put the shepherds, wanderer! on thy trace;
 And boys who in lone wheatfields scare the rooks
 I ask if thou hast pass'd their quiet place;
 Or in my boat I lie
 Moor'd to the cool bank in the summer-heats,
 'Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine fills,
 And watch the warm, green-muffled Cumner hills,
 And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats.

For most, I know, thou lov'st retired ground!
 Thee at the ferry Oxford riders blithe,
 Returning home on summer-nights, have met
 Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe,
 Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,
 As the punt's rope chops round;
 And leaning backward in a pensive dream,

And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers
Pluck'd in shy fields and distant Wychwood bowers,
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream.

And then they land, and thou art seen no more!—
Maidens, who from the distant hamlets come
To dance around the Fyfield elm in May,
Oft through the darkening fields have seen thee roam,
Or cross a stile into the public way.
Oft thou hast given them store
Of flowers—the frail-leaf'd, white anemony,
Dark bluebells drench'd with dew of summer eves,
And purple orchises with spotted leaves—
But none hath words she can report of thee.

And, above Godstow Bridge, when hay-time's here
In June, and many a scythe in sunshine flames,
Men who through those wide fields of breezy grass
Where black-wing'd swallows haunt the glittering Thames,
To bathe in the abandon'd lasher pass,
Have often pass'd thee near
Sitting upon the river bank o'ergrown;
Mark'd thine outlandish garb, thy figure spare,
Thy dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted air—
But, when they came from bathing, thou wast gone!

At some lone homestead in the Cumner hills,
Where at her open door the housewife darns,
Thou hast been seen, or hanging on a gate
To watch the threshers in the mossy barns.
Children, who early range these slopes and late
For cresses from the rills,
Have known thee eyeing, all an April-day,
The springing pasture and the feeding kine;
And mark'd thee, when the stars come out and shine,
Through the long dewy grass move slow away.

In autumn, on the skirts of Bagley Wood—
Where most the gipsies by the turf-edged way
Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush you see
With scarlet patches tagg'd and shreds of grey,
Above the forest-ground called Thessaly—
The blackbird, picking food,
Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all;
So often has he known thee past him stray,
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a wither'd spray,
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill
Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers go,
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge,

Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,
 Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?
 And thou has climb'd the hill,
 And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner range;
 Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,
 The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall—
 Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd grange.

But what—I dream! Two hundred years are flown
 Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,
 And the grave Glanvil did the tale inscribe
 That thou wert wander'd from the studious walls
 To learn strange arts, and join a Gypsy-tribe;
 And thou from earth art gone
 Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid—
 Some country-nook, where o'er thy unknown grave
 Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave,
 Under a dark, red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

—No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours!
 For what wears out the life of mortal men?
 'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
 'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
 Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
 And numb the elastic powers.
 Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,
 And tired upon a thousand schemes our wit,
 To the just-pausing Genius we remit
 Our worn-out life, and are—what we have been.

Thou hast not lived, why should'st thou perish, so?
 Thou hadst one aim, one business, one desire;
 Else wert thou long since number'd with the dead!
 Else hadst thou spent, like other men, thy fire!
 The generations of thy peers are fled,
 And we ourselves shall go;
 But thou possessest an immortal lot,
 And we imagine thee exempt from age
 And living as thou liv'st on Glanvil's page,
 Because thou hadst—what we, alas! have not.

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
 Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
 Firm to their mark, not spent on other things;
 Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
 Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.
 O life unlike to ours!
 Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
 Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
 And each half lives a hundred different lives;
 Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

Thou waitest for the spark from heaven! and we,
Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
Whose vague resolves never have been fulfill'd;
For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day—
Ah! do not we, wanderer! await it too?

Yes, we await it!—but it still delays,
And then we suffer! and amongst us one,
Who most has suffer'd, takes dejectedly
His seat upon the intellectual throne;
And all his store of sad experience he
Lays bare of wretched days;
Tells us his misery's birth and growth and signs,
And how the dying spark of hope was fed,
And how the breast was soothed, and how the head,
And all his hourly varied anodynes.

This for our wisest! and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear;
With close-lipp'd patience for our only friend,
Sad patience, too near neighbour to despair—
But none has hope like thine!
Thou through the fields and through the woods dost stray,
Roaming the country-side, a truant boy,
Nursing thy project in unclouded joy,
And every doubt long blown by time away.

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife—
Fly hence, our contact fear!
Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!
Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,
Wave us away, and keep thy solitude!

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade,
With a free, onward impulse brushing through,
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—
Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,
On some mild pastoral slope
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales

Freshen thy flowers as in former years
 With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
 From the dark dingles, to the nightingales!

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
 For strong the infection of our mental strife,
 Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
 And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
 Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
 Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
 Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,
 And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;
 And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
 Fade and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
 —As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
 Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
 Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
 The fringes of a southward-facing brow
 Among the Ægæan Isles;
 And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
 Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
 Green, bursting figs, and tunniessteep'd in brine—
 And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
 And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail;
 And day and night held on indignantly
 O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
 Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
 To where the Atlantic raves
 Outside the western straits; and unbent sails
 There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
 Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
 And on the beach undid his corded bales.

Matthew Arnold

Glossary

- Wattled cotes** : The poet here urges to free the flock of sheep from its shed and let be liberated. This symbolism of liberation from any sort of binding is there from the beginning in the poem.
- Glanvil's Book** : Ranulf de Glanvill (sometimes written Glanvil was Chief justice of England during the reign of King Henry II and reputed author of a book on English law
- Oxford Scholar poor** : *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* by Glanvil was a reaction to scholasticism, the rigid analytical methodology then in vogue in universities across Europe, and it features a poverty-stricken scholar.

Godstowbridge : Godstow Bridge is a road bridge across the river Thames in England at Godstow near Oxford. The poem is replete with such details about the landscape around the university. For example references to landmarks like **Cummer Hills** or **Bagley Wood**:

Spark from Heaven : Arnold imagines the scholar Gypsy as a shadowy figure who can even now be glimpsed in the Berkshire and Oxfordshire countryside, waiting for the spark from Heaven, or some theological piece of knowledge to be revealed to him by God, and claims to have once seen him himself.

Matthew Arnold

18.4.3 A discussion

“The Scholar Gypsy” is often known as one of the best and most popular poems of Arnold. A poor Oxford university student constitutes the central character of “The Scholar Gypsy” who abandoned his studies to learn about the supernatural powers of the Gypsy people. Arnold begins the poem in pastoral mode, invoking an unnamed shepherd and describing the beautiful rural scene, with Oxford in the distance. The very first stanza of the poem suggests that something is amiss because the speaker imagines the sheep at night on a “moon blanched green” and then persuades the shepherd to “again begin the quest.” The moon acts like a symbol for the power of imagination and the word ‘quest’ appears to be a very loaded term for the rustic job of a shepherd. The pastoralism of the poem leads immediately to several themes. Most generally it represents, as it does for many poets, an escape from the intolerable world of court or affairs. He then repeats the gist of Glanvill’s story, but extends it with an account of rumors that the scholar Gypsy was again seen from time to time by shepherds, country boys, young girls and reapers etc. around Oxford. Arnold thinks of him as a shadowy figure who can even now be seen from time to time in the Berkshire and Oxfordshire countryside, “waiting for the spark from Heaven to fall”, and claims to have once seen him himself. Arnold certainly romanticizes the Oxford countryside, attributing to it his happiest days. Against this romantic background, then, Arnold places the quest for and of the scholar-Gypsy, which gives added significance to the background. This major English pastoral elegy has been written in a ten-line stanzaic pattern, constituting a total of 250 lines.

Arnold was not sure whether the scholar Gypsy was still alive after two centuries, but then ruled out the thought of his death. He cannot have died like a normal man. Having renounced such a life, he is hence free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt. The sick hurry and divided aims characterize modern life. The poet implores the scholar Gypsy to avoid all who suffer from it, in case he too should be infected and die. Arnold ends with an extended simile of a Tyrian merchant seaman who flees from the eruption of Greek competitors to seek a new world in Iberia. Since for Arnold Christianity was dead, and nothing seemed to occupy its place that could give meaning to life. This situation resulted in a constant search, loneliness and a void in life. In other words it can be said that it was the confrontation between the wisdom of the heart and the wisdom of head. The head is aware of the real condition of the modern world, but the heart is invariably drawn to the simpler life represented by the scholar and Oxford.

As a poet Arnold at times used to give a record of the sick society in his poems. “The Scholar Gypsy” is also one such poem. In this poem the attitude of Arnold towards the Gypsy is similar to the attitude of an adult towards a child. Arnold appreciates the innocence of the Gypsy and envies it at the same time but finally realises that he could not return to such a stage of innocence. Arnold believed that a child lost its innocence not due to some sin but simply by gaining experience and developing into an adult. The Gypsy similarly was the manifestation of a good that was lost. When Arnold juxtaposes the Gypsy’s composure with the problems of his own age, he is not lampooning the nineteenth century but is rather exploring its spiritual and emotional losses.

At the end it can be said that The Scholar Gypsy is a great modern melancholy and widened and spiritualized into a spirit of mystery and dreams.

18.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life and works of Matthew Arnold and examined two of his poems. You should now be able to examine appreciate and discuss Matthew Arnold’s poems in general and these two poems **The Strayed Reveller** and **The Scholar Gypsy** in particular effectively.

18.6 ANSWER TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Now that you have read the poems carefully, try to answer the following questions.

- a) Discuss the central idea of the poem “The Strayed Reveller”.
Ans: Refer to the paragraph in section 18.3.3.
- b) Briefly discuss Arnold’s usage of the legend of Circe in his poem “The Strayed Reveller”.
Ans: Refer to the paragraph in section 18.3.3.
- c) Elaborate upon the theme of the poem “The Scholar Gypsy”.
Ans: Refer to the paragraph in section 18.4.3.
- d) Do you think the Oxford countryside is romanticized in the poem The Scholar Gypsy?
Ans: Refer to the paragraph in section 18.4.3.

References:

A Critical History of English Literature by David Daiches. Volume four.

A History of English Literature by Arthur Compton-Rickett.

History of English Literature by Edward Albert.

Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Strayed Reveller’ by Leon A. Gottfried.

The Two Worlds in Arnold’s ‘The Strayed Reveller’ by Dorothy M. Mermin.

UNIT 19 GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Gerard Manley Hopkins
- 19.3 Notes
 - 19.3.1 A Note on Sprung Rhythm
 - 19.3.2 A Note on Inscap
- 19.4 Pied Beauty (1877) (p. 1918)
 - 19.4.1 Introduction
 - 19.4.2 The Text & Glossary
 - 19.4.3 Analysis of the Poem
- 19.5 The Windhover (1877) (p.1918)
 - 19.5.1 Introduction
 - 19.5.2 The Text, Glossary & Synopsis
 - 19.5.3 Discussion
 - 19.5.4 Comments
- 19.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

19.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Gerard Manley Hopkins the poet, his life and work.
- Appreciate Hopkins' poem 'Pied Beauty'
- Analyze the thematic as well as technical aspects of 'The Windhover'

19.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, which is said to occupy two worlds. Hopkins was a poet who lived during the latter half of the Victorian period, but whose poetry was published only in 1918, posthumously. He is considered to be a herald of modernist poetry, because of his daring innovations and experimentations in poetic language, technique, and style. Subject wise, he is predominantly the product of his times. He praises the beauty and grandeur of God's creations, explores his spiritual tensions and investigates his relationship with God.

Hopkins uses unusual prosody, compound words, archaic words and complex images in his poems. He also bases his poems on a personal philosophy he had evolved as a part of his religious vocation. The radical nature of his poetry makes it a bit difficult to understand him at a single reading. We have to get introduced to the special features and intricacies of this writer. But once the shell is broken, the kernel is sweet and tasty. Effort has been made in this unit to help you appreciate such intricate poetry.

We have included additional notes which would give you an idea about Hopkins' practice of sprung rhythm and his concepts of inscape and instress. Knowledge of this is a prerequisite in understanding and appreciating Hopkins.

The first poem 'Pied Beauty' which was written in 1887 is a curtal sonnet, which means it is shorter than the traditional sonnet. The poem glorifies God who has created 'Pied Beauty': natural beauty with spots, blotches, dots and speckles. Hopkins is different from the rest of the Nature poets as one who loves things for their unusual quirks, personal oddities and individual qualities.

The second poem 'The Windhover' is another sonnet, but in the traditional mould. The poem gives a magnificent word picture of a falcon or a kestrel in midflight, before it swoops down majestically. Like in most of his poems, Hopkins moves from the creature to the creator, wondering how much more glorious would be God's beauty.

We have adopted different strategies in examining the poems which have been selected for detailed study. The analysis provided along with the first poem in 19.4 will serve as a guide to help you analyse poems on your own during examination. In 19.5 we have adopted a different method which will help you comprehend the text better and learn to appreciate Hopkins' poetry for its technical skill and beauty of images. Read through the unit section by section and do the exercises as you read. Hope you enjoy your journey of discovering Hopkins.

19.2 GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

(b. 28 July, 1844 Essex, England – d. 8 June, 1889 Dublin, Ireland)



Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born at Stratford, Essex, England, as the eldest of nine children to Manley Hopkins and Catherine Smith, a prosperous and artistic couple. His father was by turn, the proprietor of a marine insurance firm, the British Consul General in Hawaii, Church Warden, and a published writer and reviewer. His mother was greatly fond of music and reading. They were deeply religious High Church Anglicans and Hopkins was inclined towards asceticism from his boyhood.

Hopkins' maternal aunt Maria Smith Giberne taught him to sketch. His talent was promoted by many and his first ambition was to be a painter. His early

training in visual arts later helped him when Hopkins became a poet. While he was studying at the Highgate boarding school, he composed his first poem, ‘The Escorial’, at the age of ten, inspired by John Keats.

Hopkins attended the Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied Classics. He won a ‘Double First’ in the subject and was awarded the title, ‘The Star of Balliol’. He forged a lifelong friendship with Robert Bridges at Balliol, which later resulted in Hopkins’ posthumous fame. At Balliol, Hopkins was greatly impressed by the work of Christina Rossetti, befriended writer and critic Walter Pater and became a follower of Edward Pusey, member of the Oxford Movement – all these proved to be seminal influences.

In 1864 he first read John Henry Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* [A Defence of My Life] which is the classic defense by Newman of his religious views and his conversion to Catholicism. Cardinal Newman was a prominent figure in the Oxford Movement which had led to the establishment of Anglo-Catholicism. Two years later in 1866, Hopkins was received into the Catholic Church and within a short while he resolved to join priesthood. His conversion estranged him from his family. As the first step towards his religious life, Hopkins burnt all his poems because he felt that poetry would prevent him from total devotion to his faith. He later reconciled to the idea of a poetic vocation for a priest, on reading the philosophy of Duns Scotus, the medieval theologian. Hopkins joined the Society of Jesus to become a Jesuit father.

Hopkins went to learn theology at St. Beuno’s Jesuit House in North Wales, which had a lasting influence on his creativity. There he came across Welsh poetry from which he fashioned his unique ‘sprung rhythm’. At the encouragement of his superior Hopkins broke his silence of seven years to write ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ which praised the heroic self sacrifice of a group of Franciscan nuns whose ship sank in a storm. Though conventional in theme, the poem was daringly experimental, where he realized “the echo of a new rhythm” which he named “sprung rhythm”.

The frown of his face
 Before me, the hurtle of hell
 Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?
 I whirled out wings that spell
 And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.
 My heart, but you were dovewinged, I can tell,
 Carrier-witted, I am bold to boast,
 To flash from the flame to the flame then, tower from the grace to the grace
Stanza 3 ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’

You will notice the uneven lines, rhythmic and verbal effects and unusual word combinations. However, the poem was not published, as it was rejected by the Jesuit magazine.

He continued to write poetry but these were read only in manuscript form by his friends. After working as a parish priest, teacher and preacher in several churches and institutions, Hopkins was appointed Professor of Greek Literature at University College, Dublin. He found the environment uncongenial and he was unhappy and overworked. In 1885, he started writing a series of sonnets

beginning with “Carrion Comfort” that mirror his anguish, desolation and frustration and are known as “terrible sonnets”. They showcase the great dilemma he felt in reconciling his immense fascination for the sensuous world and the equally powerful devotion to religious vocation.

Hopkins died of typhoid fever in 1889 with the last words on his lips, “I am happy, so happy” and is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. In 1918, Robert Bridges, his friend who was the poet laureate of Britain at the time, published a collection of his poems. These original, subtle and vibrant verses, with rich aural patterning, displaying imaginative and intellectual depths had a marked influence on the major 20th century poets like T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas and many others.

Do you find Hopkins’ life interesting? If you wish to know more about his life which has inspired a great deal of critical research, which has whetted curiosity about his great self-denial and his friendships, so much so that some have found evidences of homo-eroticism, you can either refer to the Encyclopaedia or browse online for scholarly articles.

Now try out these questions in Exercise I and find out how well you have followed the biographical note.

Self-check Exercise I

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Check your answers with the answer key provided in [19.7] after doing the exercise.

- 1) Which was the poem written by Hopkins under the influence of John Keats? At what age did he write it?

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.....

.....

.....

- 2) Who was John Henry Newman? What work is he known for?

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.....

- 3) What was the immediate reason for the writing of the Wreck of the Deutschland?

.....

.....

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19.3 NOTES

19.3.1 A Note on Sprung Rhythm

To enjoy and appreciate Hopkins, it is necessary to understand the concept of sprung rhythm. ‘Sprung rhythm’ is the term coined by Hopkins to denote a complex system of metrics which he derived partly from his knowledge of Welsh poetry. Hopkins was inspired by the Welsh prosodic feature called ‘*cynganedd*’ [Pron. k??°haneð] which uses a concept of sound arrangement within one line, using stress, alliteration and rhyme.

Sprung rhythm is opposed specifically to ‘running’ or ‘common’ rhythm, such as the iambic meter, and provides for feet of varying lengths. In running/regular rhythm, stressed and unstressed syllables will alternate in pattern. In sprung rhythm, stressed syllables will occur at regular intervals but the unstressed or slack syllables may vary from one to four.

For instance, in the following line, which is written in iambic meter, you will notice that the first word in each foot is unstressed or slack while the second one is stressed or accented.

[Each foot is separated with the ‘slash’ [/] sign. The unstressed syllables are indicated in normal font while **stressed** ones are denoted marking them in **bold and underlining** them.]

The cur/few tolls/ the knell/ of part/ing day [From Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’]

Whereas this example of sprung rhythm given beneath will give you an idea how slack syllables vary in number:

Margaret are you/ grieving

Over Goldengrove/ unleaving [From Hopkins’ poem ‘Spring and Fall’]

Sprung rhythm gave Hopkins’ poetry a masculine vigour which renders it muscular, flexible, vibrant and organic. It reflects the dynamic quality and variations of common speech and creates more acoustic possibilities. Sprung rhythm in many ways anticipates free verse [*vers libre*] of modern times.

Other features of Hopkins’ poetry:

Hopkins energized language greatly. He dug up archaic and dialectal words and also coined new words. Hopkins was influenced by not only Welsh but also Anglo-Saxon or Old English poetry. Alliterations and Compound terms were features of Anglo Saxon Poetry. Hopkins uses these liberally in his poems.

- 1) **Alliteration** [repetition of initial consonant sounds in near lying words]:
e.g.: “king/**d**om of **d**aylight’s **d**auphin/**d**apple-**d**awn-**d**rawn falcon...”; “**h**ear**t** in **h**iding” etc],
- 2) **Assonance** [repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming]:
e.g.: **r**ose-**m**oles, **f**inches **w**ings, **w**impling **w**ing etc
- 3) **Compound words** e.g.: ‘couple-colour’, ‘dapple-dawn-drawn’ ‘blue-bleak’ etc.

19.3.2 A Note on Inscape

Hopkins believed that all phenomena in the world possess a unique quality or design. This design is a dynamic one. Thus a tree differed from another tree, a stone from a stone, and a blade of grass from another. This special individualizing quality which he perceived in every single thing, he calls **Inscape**. Hopkins was influenced by the philosophical concepts of the medieval schoolman, the theologian Duns Scotus. Duns Scotus has used a Latin term '*haecceitas*' which denotes the discrete qualities that make it a particular thing – which Hopkins translates as '*thisness*'. It is 'thisness' which is prevalent in everything that gives it its special quiddity or essence. The recognition of this inscape in other things is termed **Instress**. It can be defined as the apprehension of an object in an intense thrust of energy which enables one to realize its specific distinctiveness. Hopkins tries to capture this inscape in his poems. Thus he shows us how "Kingfishers catch fire and dragonflies draw flame": through their special vibrant colours that nature has endowed them, kingfishers and dragon flies enthrall us with their swift movements, and it impresses upon our mind in an instant. Our receipt of their unique quality or inscape into our minds is the instress that occurs in this case. Anybody who has eaten a plum knows how the juice flows into the mouth, at the instant of biting it, suffusing the whole mouth and being with sweetness or sourness. The perception of inscape is just like that! Hopkins' inscape is very much like Wordsworth's 'spots of time,' Emerson's 'moments,' and James Joyce's concept of the 'Epiphany', though Hopkins' concept is fundamentally religious.

Hope you have understood these very important concepts. Now shall we try answering a few questions to see whether you have grasped the 'inscape' of Hopkins' ideas?

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Write down briefly about the features of sprung rhythm.

.....

- 2) "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
 As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
 Stones ring"

Identify alliteration and assonance in the above mentioned lines.

.....

- 3) Who is the medieval philosopher who influenced Hopkins in his concept of Inscape? What was the term that he used to signify the distinct quality in each being?

.....

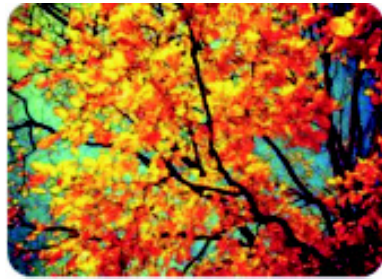
(You may now cross check your answers with those in 19.7)

19.4 PIED BEAUTY (1877)

19.4.1 Introduction

Beauty is of all sorts. Some may see beauty in the curve of a lady's brow, in the innocence of a baby's face, in the red, red rose that blooms on a thorny plant, in placid lakes or mountain slopes. Hopkins sees beauty in spots, speckles, dots and blotches. In a world where we spend lots of money and time to remove spots from our faces, Hopkins' vision emerges as one of a kind, and helps us see beauty even in motley!

Hopkins wrote this poem in 1877, the year he was ordained as a Jesuit priest. It is a curial sonnet, which means that it is shorter than the usual sonnet, which as you know is 14 lines long. 'Pied Beauty' is 11 lines, the last line, but a stub. Did you know that Shakespeare too has written curial sonnets? But Hopkins's curial sonnets follow a specific pattern based on the Petrarchan sonnet. The octave which is usually eight lines is truncated to six [two tercets each, rhyming ABC] and the sestet is shortened from six lines to a quatrain [four line stanza] and an additional tail piece. This alteration of the sonnet form is quite fitting for a poem advocating originality and contrariness. Let us read the poem and find out what it means. First read the poem aloud that you get a feel of it. Then go through the poem again, slowly this time, reading with the help of the glossary. Don't get intimidated. The analysis will help you to discover the beauty and sense of 'Pied Beauty'.



19.4.2 The Text

PIED BEAUTY

Glory be to God for dappled things —
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow, and plough;
 And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise him.

Glossary

dappled	: spotted, speckled, pied, multi-coloured
couple-colour	: two colours
brinded	: also brindled; brownish yellow or gray coat with spots or streaks of darker colour
rose-moles	: reddish spots on the skin
stipple	: pattern of spots; a device in painting which marks a surface with numerous dots or specks
trout	: a fish related to salmon



finch	: a small bird
fallow	: uncultivated land
tackle	: equipment or gear for fishing
trim	: equipment
“counter, original, spare or strange”	: things which are unconventional and strange
adazzle	: dazzling (Hopkins’ coinage)
fathers-forth	: creates, begets

19.4.3 Analysis of the Poem

‘Pied Beauty’ which is one of Hopkins’ happy poems, is a hymn of creation that praises the creator by praising the created world. It glorifies all the things on this earth that are either ‘pied’ or spotted. The poet thinks that it is a manifestation of God’s creativity. With the eye of a painter, Hopkins vividly sketches in kaleidoscopic variety, all the objects and patterns which provide an example of this kind of beauty.

Hopkins starts with a eulogy of Lord the creator: “Glory be to God for dappled things”. This is followed by an inventory of things which are dappled or spotted. He includes in this list, the sky that is dappled at dawn, with blotches of blue colour splashed against pale white, the contrast described as ‘couple-colour’ by Hopkins. It reminds him of “brinded cow” or ‘brindled’ or ‘piebald’ cow, whose

hide is again a contrast of brown against white. Then he describes the trout fish which swims, that has its body painted [stippled] with rose coloured moles. The next image, a complex one, is of a chestnut, the meaty interior cradled within its hard shell falling out, hiding its smouldering brilliance like coals in a fire, black on the outside, but glowing within as it splits and falls. The tiny birds, finches, are multicoloured usually with specks on their wings; and the landscape of a farmland, enclosed in patches, forms a pattern according to the way in which it is cultivated or left fallow or freshly ploughed. The last example in the octave is taken from the world of man, where the tools and equipments of his trade, make a dappled pattern in their variety. Hopkins places man in his context – he is only a part of the extensive natural world. And even human achievements such as trade, gear, tackle and trim, can be seen only as a part of the larger scheme of things.

In the final five lines, Hopkins goes beyond the physical characteristics of the things he has described, and delves into their natures or moral qualities. Thus all things, highly original, unconventional and strange, whether they are freckled or fickle, with all their attributes of swiftness or slowness, sweetness or sourness, brightness or dimness, come from him, the creator. In their multiplicity, the creatures affirm the permanence and immutability of God the father, and inspire the world to “Praise Him.”

Hopkins follows the adulatory style of the Psalmist in the Old Testament in the opening line. Interestingly, he also ends on a note of veneration: “Praise him!” These opening and closing lines with their parallelism, rework the mottoes of Jesuits, “to the greater Glory of God” and “praise to God always”, making the poem akin to a ritual observance, thus giving it a traditional flavour. This tempers the unorthodoxy of the appreciation – the poets’ fascination for dappled or spotted things. The parallelism in the first and the last lines, correspond to the larger symmetry of the poem: the octave, starting with praise, moves on to a laudatory inventory of creatures; the sestet, starts with a description of the characteristics of creatures and ends by praising the creator.

The poem runs on like an extended sentence, the long **predicate** that resembles a list, at last yields to a striking **verb** of creation in the penultimate sentence – “fathers-forth” – which is the *volta** of the sonnet, leading the reader to acknowledge the ultimate **subject**, God the creator. It takes the theological position that the great variety in the created world is a testimony to the infinite power of the Creator. It also takes a polemic/political stance against the uniformity and standardization which was a feature of Victorian society, by appreciating differences summed up in “fickle, freckled”. Neither is Hopkins’ appreciation merely an aesthetic one. By juxtaposing ‘fickle’ with ‘freckled’, Hopkins introduces a moral tenor, which imbues a mere physical description with a deeper and denser significance. It calls for an acceptance of unsightly and quirky things as beautiful creations of God. That their particular individualizing attributes are of mysterious derivation is brought to attention by Hopkins in the parenthetical musing: “(who knows how?)”, hinting at its divine origin. Thus Hopkins deviates from conventional romanticism which sees beauty only in conventionally beautiful things.

* *Volta*: In sonnets, the *volta*, or turn, is a rhetorical shift or dramatic change in thought and/or emotion.

Hopkins' sprung rhythm adds vitality and vigour to the poem, which races down the list of dappled things. Alliteration sprinkled abundantly in lines such as "Glory be to God", "Fresh firecoal chestnut-falls, finches' wings", "plotted and pieced", "fold, fallow", "tackle and trim", "fickle, freckled" "swift, slow, sweet, sour", and assonance resonating within expressions like "rose-moles", and "finches' wings", impart a great aural felicity to the poem. The poet's boldness in coining new compound expressions like "couple-colour", "fresh-firecoal", adds vividness to the verbal pictures. Hopkins' linguistic experimentations are not mere embellishments. They go beyond their decorative capacity to structurally augment the thematic elements of the poem. Hopkins effectively conveys the inscape of dappled and spotted things through these rich and dense expressions.

Self-check Exercise III

1) What are various dappled things that Hopkins describes in the first stanza of his poem?

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2) Which is the verb used by Hopkins on which the meaning of the whole poem hinges?

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3) Write down two examples each of a) alliteration b) assonance c) compound terms that are used in the poem.

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4) Look up a dictionary or an encyclopaedia for the meaning of 'parallelism' and record it below.

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19.5 THE WINDHOVER (1877)

19.5.1 Introduction

Have you seen an eagle or a falcon soaring high up in the sky? It is a majestic sight. What differentiates the bird of this family is its capacity to stay immobile in the air for a while without moving its wings, before it suddenly swoops down on to the earth, may be, to catch its prey! It is the hovering of the bird in midair that caught Hopkins' attention which came out as this much anthologized magnificent poem.

The Windhover was written on 30 May, 1877, the same year as 'Pied Beauty', but published only 1918. On rising early one morning, Hopkins happened to see a common kestrel which is also called Windhover because of its tendency to hover. Struck by the majesty of the bird, Hopkins was inspired to write a poem. But as is usual with Hopkins, the creature is but a pretext to perceive the majesty of the creator. Hopkins has used the subtitle *To Christ, Our Lord*, by which he wishes to call our attention to the greater splendour of God.

Like 'Pied Beauty', 'The Windhover' apotheosizes the glory of creation. If there is a list of images in the first poem, the latter one has a single image of a falcon or a kestrel. But Hopkins presents two facets of this bird, in *statis* and *kinesis*, i.e. in stationary position and movement. Written in the Petrarchan mode, the sonnet describes the bird in the octave and then moves on to compare the bird with the greater majesty of Christ, the Lord, in the sestet. Hopkins' devotion to God pours out in passionate words which culminate in two vivid images of self-effacement and self-sacrifice in the last tercet of the sestet.

Hopkins considered 'The Windhover', "the best thing [he] ever wrote". Hopkins avoids the 'same and tame' cadence of conventional poetry which he calls, Parnassian poetry*, and writes in sprung rhythm making his poem come fierce and alive. The poem with its vivid and condensed images, its words twisted out of present day meanings, to accommodate archaic ones, lends itself to several interpretations. We will read more about them when we discuss the poem in detail.

Eagles have fascinated poets before. Here is a short poem by Alfred Tennyson, another Victorian poet, titled 'The Eagle'.

"He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls."

It would be good for you to read it and compare it with Hopkins' poem 'The Windhover', after you have read the poem, which is given below. Read the poem carefully, not once but two or three times, with the help of the glossary given beneath.

* Competent Poetry written without much inspiration. As from the heights of Parnassus, mountain sacred to the Muses according to Greek mythology

THE WINDHOVER

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
 dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
 Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
 High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
 As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
 Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
 Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
 Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plód makes plough down sillion
 Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
 Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Glossary

- minion** : darling, favourite
- dauphin** : [pron: /d??fæn/] crown prince or heir to the throne of France
- Falcon** : is a raptor [bird of prey], belonging to the family of *falco*, with sharp talons and curved beak. The kestrel which belongs to this family has brown coloured plumage. Falcons are used for the hunting game called falconry [pron: /f?k?nr?/] with the help of a trained bird of prey. There is a covert reference to the game in the poem.
- wimpling** : with folds, like in a wimple [a gathered headdress for nuns]
- buckle** : 1) to fasten; 2) to give way under strain
- chevalier** : a knight; a chivalrous man; a cavalier
- sillion** : furrow; soil turned over by a plough; “sillion” is a medieval term for the small strip of land granted to monasteries to farm.
- vermillion** : a brilliant scarlet red colour

Synopsis: [A synopsis is included here to help you read the poem and understand it better.]

The narrative persona, 'I', captures the image of a falcon in his eye/mind, who is the darling of morning, the crown prince of the kingdom of daylight, who is intensely drawn towards dappled dawn [early morning with streaks of red in the sky], as he rides the air. He looks as if he is riding the thermal* [rolling air], by pulling his wimpling [folding] wings back, like a horseback rider reins in his horse by pulling at it. And then, from his static position, he suddenly swoops down smoothly, gliding like a skater skating in a rink, manoeuvring a curve, hurling himself against the big wind. The heart of the persona, hidden within him, yearned to be like the bird, to achieve its mastery over the elements.

The bird which encapsulates brute beauty, bravery and action with its air [manner], pride, plume [feather], buckles [fastens itself to the greater beauty of God /or/ gives away before the greater beauty of God]. The poet tells Christ, whom he addresses as chevalier, that the fire that breaks at this act of buckling, is a million times lovelier and more dangerous. For, Christ's supreme sacrifice on the cross for the whole of humanity is definitely more glorious than the hunting bird's terrestrial exploits.

But that is not a matter to wonder. For, sheer hard work makes the ploughshare dragged within the sillion [furrows in the farm] shine brightly. Or it may be that even the furrows shine when the plow turns up the dull clods of earth and the new earth glints with minerals. And ash covered embers [blue-bleak], when they break open, they reveal in the gash, their heart of smouldering fire [gold-vermilion].

19.5.3 Discussion

Now that you have read the poem carefully, try to answer the following questions, so that we can discuss the poem.

- a) Record briefly the images that suggest the majesty and grandeur of the Windhover.

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[Read the octave: The sight of the kestrel in the mid air, which is majestic like the dauphin, rides like an accomplished horseman, which shows tremendous mastery of movement and fights the big wind, like a cavalier. Then it swoops down in a majestic sweeping motion, showing its mastery over the air.]

*Thermal: an upward current of warm air, used by gliders, balloonists, and birds to gain height.

- b) How does the poet establish the supremacy of Christ over the kestrel?

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[Kestrel is a majestic bird. In stasis and movement, it shows its majesty and command. The creature is magnificent indeed. But the beauty of the creator is a million times told lovelier. The kestrel is a bird of prey, a raptor, hence dangerous. In its bright plumage, in its command of the situation, in its haughty demeanour, it wins the hearts of the onlookers, who aspire to be like it. But the beauty of Christ is multi-fold, when compared to the kestrel. Christ, who died on the cross, comes across as more dangerous and lovelier through his sacrifice for the whole of mankind. His bravery is one of a kind. Not the physical bravery of the bird, but spiritual bravery, which wins over the soul. If the bird is like a cavalier soldier, fighting the wind, Christ is the chevalier of human hearts.]

- 3) Do you think that the sonnet form has helped Hopkins to convey his ideas better?

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[The sonnet form of the poem is the perfect vehicle for thoughts. The poet is able to convey ideas and paint word pictures in a condensed manner. The structural virtuosity of the Petrarchan mode with its octave and the sestet, works perfectly to convey the images of the Windhover and Christ. The movement from the kestrel to Christ is beautifully executed, with the Volta coming in the sestet. The tercets in the sestet too balance the image of Christ with the two metaphorical images revelatory of his sacrifice.]

19.5.4 Comments

- The 'I' mentioned in the poem can be the poet himself, or the persona of the poet.
- The poem is mimetic and visual. The poet tries to capture the movement of the falcon through a series of verbal shots – montages*.
- The word 'caught' is extremely significant. The poet does not use tame words like 'saw' or 'beheld'. 'Caught' is in keeping with the image of falcon, which catches the prey. It is an epiphanic moment, when the inscape of the bird is 'caught' in the mind of the writer, with all its permutations, in a split second.

* Montage is a cinematic term; it is a device in editing, which combines different shots to create a scene.

- The first line is an **enjambment** – a run on line – which spills over from the first to the second.
- The soundscapes of Hopkins’ poem help us to ‘catch’ the inscape of the bird.
- Notice the alliterative repetition of /d/ sounds in the second line, they sound like a drum roll, accompanying the entry of a king, in this case, the dauphin.
- Also notice the repetition of sibilants in the line: “off forth on swing /As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend”. Can you hear the sound of the skates cutting through the ice, as it glides over it?
- The bird by rebuffing the wind achieves or masters something in his successful negotiation. It is this act that fascinates the poet, whose heart comes out of hiding. But stepping out of one’s ego and inhabiting another creature, as the poet does here, grants one sacramental joy of being alive.
- Hopkins uses synaesthetic images. The **visual**, **auditory** and **tactile** images are very effectively evoked. We can **see**, **hear**, and **touch** very vividly and clearly.
- The poem captures in detail, words and images of **medieval chivalric culture**: minion, dauphin, dappled, falcon, wimple, chevalier and sillion.
- Wimple – folded cloth – is part of a nun’s headdress, which presses against her temples and keeps her hair back. In other words, the bird is exulting not only in the freedom of the air, but also in the resistance or the friction offered by it.
- In the line: “Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume”, in order to make sense, you have to connect ‘brute beauty’ to ‘plume’ [the reddish-brown plumage of kestrel which conveys its brute beauty; ‘valour’ to ‘air’ [air of bravery] and ‘act’ to ‘pride’ [proud act].
- The sonnet is in the Petrarchan mode. Though the sprung rhythm and enjambments used make it appear rather alien to us. The octave presents the bird’s flight. The sestet is an open avowal of the greater majesty of Christ, the chevalier.
- The rhyme scheme is strange and unusual – the octave has one only one rhyme – ‘A’ – since each line ends in ‘-ing’. Though these are not gerund in all the instances [as in ‘king-’, thing etc], the stanza gives us a feeling of continued action. The sestet which consists of two tercets rhymes ‘BCB-CBC’, interlocking the latter idea with the previous one.
- The Volta [turn] of the poem comes with the word “Buckle”.
- The poem is thematically, structurally and syntactically very challenging to the reader. But rewarding too.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Identify the words taken from medieval chivalric culture used in the poem.

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- 2) What are the terms used by Hopkins to describe the Windhover?

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- 3) Which are the two images used at the end of the poem, to denote self-effacement and sacrifice?

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19.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and examined two poems written by him. Both the poems are sonnets, but the first one is a curtal sonnet, while the second is written in the Petrarchan mode. We hope that you will be able to distinguish the features of both. You have also learnt about Hopkins' innovation in prosody, the sprung rhythm. It would be good to analyse the advantages of using sprung rhythm instead of conventional English meters like the iambic. You have also come into touch with Hopkins' concept of Inscape, which we are sure, will make you look at the objects around in a different light, which is the ultimate goal of learning literature: it widens the horizons of the mind.

We also hope that reading these poems has whetted your curiosity and appetite for more of Hopkins' poems. You will find them in anthologies or collections of poems or you can browse the net to read them as they are all available online.

19.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) The Escorial; at the age of ten.
- 2) Cardinal Newman, one of the major figures of the Oxford movement or the Tractarianism, which resulted in the rise of Anglo-Catholicism; *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*
- 3) The sinking of the ship Deutschland, which resulted in the martyrdom Five Franciscan Nuns, who sacrificed their lives to save others; and the urging of Hopkins' superior to write a poem to commemorate the event.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) See the Note on Sprung rhythm; second Para, third sentence.
- 2) Alliteration: kingfishers catch [k/ sound repeated]
dragonflies draw
rim in roundy wells
Assonance: dragonflies draw; tumbled over rim in roundy...; stones ring;
- 3) Duns Scotus; 'Haecceitas' or thisness

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Read Stanza 1 of the poem; Check paragraph 2 in the Analysis of the poem
- 2) Fathers-forth
- 3) Any of the examples in the last paragraph of the Analysis.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Minion, dauphin, falcon, wimpling, chevalier, sillion
- 2) Morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn falcon
- 3) The ploughshare which shines due to friction when it cuts deep into the sillion; the ash-covered ember that glows gold-vermilion when it falls and breaks.

UNIT 20 THOMAS HARDY AND D.H. LAWRENCE

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Historical Background
- 20.3 THOMAS HARDY
- 20.4 To An Unborn Pauper Child (p.19)
 - 20.4.1 Introduction
 - 20.4.2 The Text
 - 20.4.3 An Analysis of the Poem
- 20.5 Great Things 1964 (p. 19)
 - 20.5.1 Introduction
 - 20.5.2 The Text
 - 20.5.3 Discussion
 - 20.5.4 Comments
- 20.6 D.H. LAWRENCE
- 20.7 Bavarian Gentians (p. 19)
 - 20.7.1 Introduction
 - 20.7.2 The Text
 - 20.7.3 Analysis
- 20.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.9 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

20.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Hardy the poet, his life and work.
- Appreciate his poems ‘To an Unborn Pauper Child’ and ‘Great Things’
- Understand and analyse D.H. Lawrence, the poet.
- Analyse the thematic as well as formal aspects of ‘Bavarian Gentians’

20.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence, two major writers at the turn of the twentieth century. They were novelists of great repute, but their contributions to the world of poetry are equally seminal and individual. But unfortunately, their reputation as poets was subsumed within their status as novelists. Hardy had made his presence felt by the end of the Victorian era, while D. H. Lawrence who was his younger contemporary started writing at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both wrote novels which created great controversies because they lived in an age that was still in the grip of rigid Victorian moral attitudes. Both wrote poems which are noted for their distinctive voice and idiosyncratic treatment of subjects.

We will be reading about the two poets in detail in the separate introductions to each. Though there is a gap of forty five years between them, we are struck by certain similarities in their disposition and outlook. Both Hardy and Lawrence struggled against Victorian hypocrisy and prudery*. Both had to face censorship for their frank treatment of sex and immorality, though in varying degrees. Both immortalized the counties they came from, in their novels: Hardy made the county of Dorset and nearby lands famous as Wessex, while Lawrence wrote about the Mining town of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire in his novels. Lawrence was greatly influenced by Hardy, and published a study on him. Both died in the third decade of the twentieth century. Hardy in 1928 and Lawrence in 1930 – though Hardy was eighty seven years old and Lawrence just forty four.

In this unit, we will acquaint you with two poems of Thomas Hardy: ‘To an Unborn Pauper child’ and ‘Great Things’. You will notice how Hardy’s philosophies of fatalism and pessimism are deeply mirrored in the first. The second, a breezy little poem – rather uncharacteristic – offers a nice balance, and speaks about the small things that make the poet happy. The poem by D. H. Lawrence that you will read in this unit is ‘Bavarian Gentians’ – a sombre poem, full of beautiful and dense images and mythological allusions. By the end of the unit, you will be able to read, critically assess and appreciate these poems.

To read and understand Hardy and Lawrence one needs to know about the backgrounds from which they hailed. As writers who were influenced by the *zeitgeist* (the spirit of the times), it is necessary for us to delve into the Victorian age and the early twentieth century, the periods spanning their lifetimes. The next section will offer you an insightful peek into the historical background of the age in which these writers lived – glancing at the political, social and ideological upheavals of the times.

Different strategies have been adopted in examining the poems which have been selected for detailed study. The analysis provided along with the poems will serve as a guide to help you analyse poems on your own during examination. They will also help you comprehend the text better and learn to appreciate Hardy’s and Lawrence’s poetry for their metrical patterns and beauty of images. Read through the unit section by section, pause till you digest what you have read, and do the exercises as you read. Hope you enjoy your journey of discovering the poetic side of these literary giants.

20.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Now get ready for a swift tour of the Victorian age and the early Twentieth century. Victorian age, the period signifying the reign of Queen Victoria from her accession in 1837 to her death in 1901, was an age of contradictions. On the one hand, it was a period of incredible economic expansion and rapid change. Britain had become the mistress of sea and land, and its capital London had become the first urban capital of the world, the first metropolis. An urban economy based on manufacturing, international trade and financial institutions boomed, and the lay

* Victorian hypocrisy and prudery: Pretention of having higher moral standards and excessive, affected modesty, which is considered to be a characteristic of Victorian age.

of land changed with a rapidly enlarging city. Transport and communication facilities improved tremendously and distances shrank. England had become the workshop of the world, the world's banker as well as the world's policeman. But on the other hand, it was also an age of paradoxes and uncertainties. The success of the nation reached its pinnacle and then began to wane. By the end of the 19th century, the euphoria, optimism and positivism of the earlier decades started dwindling to be replaced by doubts, scepticism and even pessimism. The gulf between the haves and the have-nots had widened. The traditional villages and towns observed a depletion of population as London and other industrial cities burst at the seams with people gathering there from all over. The phenomenon resulted in the emergence of a new suburbia, with slums and rookeries*. Crime rate accelerated. A series of social reforms were initiated trying to address the problems and issues.

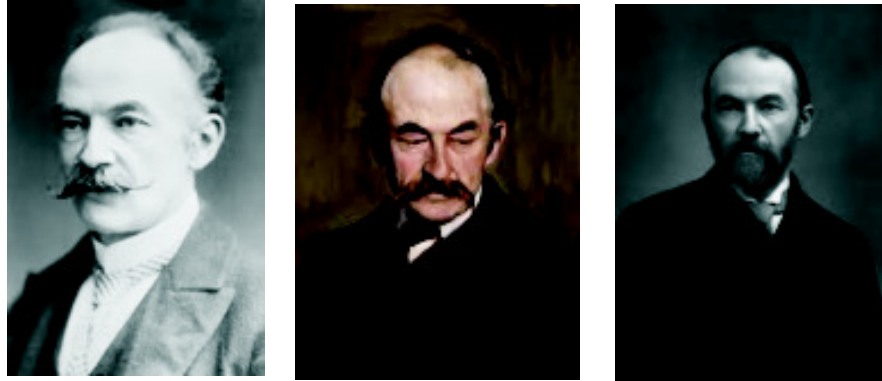
Ideologically too Victorian age sent contradictory signals. While religious and philanthropic movements gathered momentum, the very basis of belief systems crumbled. The concept of creation was questioned following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. While family values were lauded and practiced, Queen Victoria herself towering as the emblem of customary domestic values, a bohemian life style started making its presence felt towards the end of the 19th century. These changes are apparent when we survey the literature of the times. Browning, one of the preeminent poets of the Victorian era had deemed that "God's in his Heaven/All's right with the world!" at the heyday of the Victorian period; but pangs of doubt trouble a pessimistic Matthew Arnold three decades later, who sees the present world as "a darkling plain /Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night." World was slowly turning rudderless, with doubt and despair climaxing in the literature of the times.

This is the world inhabited by Hardy. By the turn of the century, decadence had set in. Psychology was recognised as a science after the publication of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretations of Dreams* in 1901. Old moral values which had signified the Victorian era eroded as they were held up to question. Victorian age gave place to the Georgian era, an age that witnessed the rapid degeneration of the British Empire after the Boer War in Africa and the emergence of new predicaments which had worldwide repercussions. Russian revolution had taken place and England witnessed the rapid rise of a labour class into power. In the second decade of the century, the World War I erupted when Hardy was in his seventies and Lawrence at the peak of his career. Modernism had dawned and existential philosophies had gained ground in the philosophical realm. The world had truly passed into the chaotic ethos of the twentieth century.

* Rookeries: overcrowded slums of London were known by this name in the 18th and 19th centuries and were the haunt of criminals and prostitutes. (As they were living like crows or rooks, nesting together and filling the surroundings with their hoarse cries)

20.3 THOMAS HARDY

[b. 1840 Upper Bockhampton, Dorset - d.1928 Max Gate, England]



Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June, 1840 in the village of Higher Bockhampton in the county of Dorset, one of the poorest and backward rural counties of England remaining unchanged for centuries. His father, also named Thomas, was a stonemason, builder and a fiddler who used to play in the local parish choir. His mother Jemima was the true guiding star of his life, who though, was a housemaid and a cook before her marriage, was an avid reader of literary books. Hardy inherited his musicality from his father and his love for books from his mother. It is said that Hardy loved solitude and drew his impulses from the natural world around him. He received his schooling first from National school in Bockhampton and later at Mr. Last's Academy in Dorchester, a non-conformist school. Though he showed great academic potential, his formal education came to an end at the age of 16, when he was apprenticed to a local architect, John Hicks.

During his tenure there he came across the Dorchester poet William Barnes who influenced him to write nature poems and Horace Moule, a scholar who encouraged him to read Greek tragedies and contemporary English literature. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* had a profound influence on him. In 1862 Hardy moved to London and worked as an assistant architect to Arthur Blomfield who restored and designed churches. He won prizes from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Architectural Association. Hardy was appointed to oversee the disinterment of graves in the churchyard of St. Pancras Old Church. This event had a great influence on him and he later wrote his 'grave' poems based on this experience. Hardy was drawn into the cultural life of London. He visited museums, galleries, attended plays and operas. He read avidly and started writing poetry. Though the first poems were rejected by publishers, one finally published in the Chambers Journal won him a prize. His poems highlighted his concerns which he had gleaned from reading and observation, and foreshadowed the themes of his later prose fiction. Disillusioned with traditional Christianity, Hardy became more and more aware of human misery and loneliness. His fatalism stemmed from the hard realisation of an uncaring universe and the role of chance in human life.

Disenchanted by London, Hardy returned to his native Bockhampton in 1867, worked for a while as an architect and then gave up his job to pursue a full time career as a writer. His first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* was not published, and the next one *Desperate Remedies* was published anonymously. *Under the*

Greenwood Tree, which followed, was favourably received, as was *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. *Far From the Madding Crowd* gained public notice and brought him financial success which was repeated by *The Return of the Native*.

Thomas Hardy and D.H.
Lawrence

In the meanwhile, Hardy who had experienced several rejections from women, fell in love with Emma Lavinia Gifford, a Cornish lady, and married her. It is believed that *A Pair of Blue Eyes* was inspired largely by their courtship. They settled at Max Gate, a large Mid-Victorian villa, which Hardy had designed himself, which he considered his ‘country retreat’ – and this became his permanent abode (*see image*).



Max Gate



Hardy's Map of Wessex



A view of Dorset

Though the couple had a happy and contented life, and shared several passions like travelling and cycling, as years passed, Emma grew estranged from her husband mainly due to the content of his fictional writings and his romantic attachments to artistic young ladies. Lack of offspring might have also be a reason for this. Though *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders* and other novels had gathered popular as well as critical acclaim, Hardy's last and greatest fictional works *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) shocked, dismayed and outraged the Victorian public with their subject matter. Considered too pessimistic, they accused Hardy of being too preoccupied with sex. Decried as ‘Jude the Obscene’ the hue and cry created by his last novel disturbed Hardy and made him give up writing novels altogether and return to his first love, poetry. Hardy considered poetry to be, “the heart of literature”. In 1898 he published the *Wessex Poems*.



WESSEX COUNTRY



Wessex is Hardy's fictional universe. (See pictures). Strongly identifying himself and his work with Dorset, Hardy borrowed the name of the old Anglo-Saxon kingdom, coined the names of villages and towns to represent actual places and even provided a map of the area (see images above). His novels were called *Wessex novels* and turning to poetry, he continued in the same vein. He was fascinated with other features of southern England especially the Stonehenge, the ancient druid rocks (see below), which interest is reflected in his poems like 'The Shadow of the Stone'.



Hardy's poetry wears a pessimistic, fatalistic and existential outlook evoking the dark, rugged landscape of Dorset. It laments the bleakness of human condition. He is one who "holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst", as he states in his poem '*In Tenebris II*'. Even the term '*In Tenebris*', meaning 'in the darkness', which forms the title of a series of lyrics, highlights the bleak, doomstruck human world. His poems are haunted by a pervasive sense of the forlorn. There are instances in which Hardy's tragic view of life makes him refer to humans as 'Time's Laughingstocks', and point out to 'Life's Little Ironies'. Among Hardy's poems we will be able to identify a number of recurring themes and images. These overarching themes can be divided into three central categories of ghosts, grave and afterlife; God, nature and rural life; passage of time; love and war. His love poems are not traditional romantic love poems – but starker and darker poems of loss, ghosts and transience.

Hardy was inspired by the great panorama of Napoleonic Wars and wrote an epic drama in blank verse titled *The Dynasts*, published in three parts over five years. It presents Hardy's idea of "evolutionary meliorism", a belief in the power of humankind and a hope in the eventual amendment of the world through human actions. He also wrote lyric poetry which is considered to be his best. He forged a modern and original style combining colloquial diction and rough-hewn rhythms which nevertheless closely followed conventional techniques, paying attention to the musical aspects of language. His greatest poems were written after the sudden death of his wife Emma in 1912. They are considered to be the "finest and strangest celebrations of the dead in English poetry", according to the Hardy biographer Claire Tomalin. Shortly after Emma's death, Hardy married Florence

Dugdale, his secretary, who was forty years his junior. But he remained remorseful of Emma's death.

By this time, Hardy's literary authority was acknowledged beyond dispute. A very prolific writer, he has written 14 novels, two plays, more than 40 short stories and over 900 poems. The major collections of his poems include: *Wessex Poems*, *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901), *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses* (1909), *Moments of Vision* (1917), *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), *Collected Poems* (1919) etc. The University of Aberdeen awarded him an honorary degree and in 1910, King George V conferred the Order of Merit on him. In 1912, the Royal Society of Literature awarded him a gold medal. Hardy was visited by several writers at Max Gate and he exercised tremendous influence on writers like James Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, G B Shaw, Virginia Woolf and many others. During the World War I he took active part in campaigns, visiting military hospitals and POW (Prisoner/s of War) camps. His poems on war, with their visceral imagery influenced the War poets like Siegfried Sassoon. After his 87th birthday, Hardy grew weaker and he became ill with pleurisy. He died on 11 January, 1928 and had two simultaneous funerals. His body was cremated and ashes deposited in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, while his heart was buried alongside Emma in Stinsford Churchyard in Dorchester.

Did you find Hardy's life interesting? If you wish to know more about this fascinating man, his life and times and his novels and poetry, you can either refer to the Encyclopaedia or browse the net. The following sites may be helpful: *The Thomas Hardy Website* and the *Victorian Web*. Now try to answer these questions in Exercise I and check how well you have grasped the biographical details.

Self-check Exercise I

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Check your answers with the answer key provided in (20.9) after doing the exercise.

- 1) What was Thomas Hardy's profession before he became a full time writer? What stands as a major testimony to that profession?

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- 2) What is the imaginary fictional world created by Hardy? What is it named after?

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3) Which were the works that brought notoriety to Hardy?
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4) Mention two volumes of poetry written by Thomas Hardy.
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5) What is the name of the epic drama written by Hardy? What is it based on?
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6) What is the major philosophical tone of Hardy’s poems?
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20.4 TO AN UNBORN PAUPER CHILD

20.4.1 Introduction

The poem ‘To an Unborn Pauper Child’ is taken from the collection, *Poems of the Past and the Present: Poems of Pilgrimage*, published in 1901. In the preface to the collection Hardy noted: “the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomenon as they are forced upon us by chance and change.” It is believed that the poem was inspired by an incident that occurred in the Dorchester Magistrate’s Court, which he chanced upon. Hardy read of a pauper woman in the records of the court of petty sessions which said that “she must go to the Union-house to have her baby”, and this occasioned the poem.

Hardy’s poems convincingly convey the sadness of life and mirror the pathos encapsulated in Virgil’s dictum: *Sunt lacrimae rerum* – “There are tears in things”. There is nothing hopeful about earthly life. In this poem, Hardy adopts an anti-natal stance. He stands with the Greek dramatist Sophocles who said in *Oedipus at Colonus*, that, “*Not to be born is, beyond all estimation, best; but when a man has seen the light of day, this is next best by far, that with utmost*

speed he should go back from where he came.” Because what is life but “*Envy, factions, strife, battles, and murders*”. And in the end comes the pitiful lot of the old: “*blamed, weak, unsociable, friendless, wherein dwells every misery among miseries.*” “To an Unborn Pauper Child” is a dark poem which is meant to be a warning to the yet-to-be born child. It bids the child to stop breathing while still in its mother’s womb and bid good bye to the world. The world is a dark, dreary one full of ‘travails and teens’ - difficulties and sorrows, with nothing alleviating about it. So it is better to sleep the eternal sleep.

There are several other pieces on the birth of young children in English poetry. Hardy’s poem is comparable to William Blake’s ‘Infant Sorrow’ in which the infant says: “Into the dangerous world I leapt”, or Louis MacNeice’s ‘Prayer before Birth’. Yet there are other poems in which we may detect a more optimistic outlook, as in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight’ and W.B. Yeats’ ‘A Prayer for My Daughter’.

Now let’s read the poem and get a hang of the cadences. Written in the traditional rhythmic mode, the poem consists of six stanzas of six lines each, rhyming aabbcc. The first, the second and the fifth lines in each stanza are cast in iambic tetrameter; the third and the fourth in iambic dimeter and the sixth, which is the last line, is fashioned in iambic pentameter, which gives the effect of a grand statement. Iambic is a traditional meter in English language composed of two syllables of which the first syllable unstressed or unaccented and the second one stressed or accented. The last three lines of the first stanza have been scanned for you, which would give you an idea about the three different feet or meter used here. Please note that the end of each foot or meter is indicated with a slash (/) mark. The stressed syllable is highlighted and underlined while the unstressed is indicated in ordinary font.

*The **Doom** /sters **heap*** (2) – Iambic dimeter

*Travails / and **teens** / **around** / us **here**,* (4) – Iambic tetrameter

*And **Time** /-Wraiths **turn** /our **song** / **singsings** / to **fear**.* (5) – Iambic pentameter

If you read the poem aloud, you will get feel of the meter as it jolts over the evenly bumpy path of iambic. Use the glossary given beneath the text to understand unfamiliar words.

20.4. 2 The Text

To an Unborn Pauper Child

Breathe not, hid Heart: cease silently,
And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,
Sleep the long sleep:
The Doomsters heap
Travails and teens around us here,
And Time-Wraiths turn our songsings to fear.

Hark, how the peoples surge and sigh,
And laughters fail, and greetings die;
Hopes dwindle; yea,
Faiths waste away,
Affections and enthusiasms numb:
Thou canst not mend these things if thou dost come.

Had I the ear of wombed souls
Ere their terrestrial chart unrolls,
And thou wert free
To cease, or be,
Then would I tell thee all I know,
And put it to thee: Wilt thou take Life so?

Vain vow! No hint of mine may hence
To theeward fly: to thy locked sense
Explain none can
Life's pending plan:
Thou wilt thy ignorant entry make
Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake.

Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not
One tear, one qualm,
Should break the calm.
But I am weak as thou and bare;
No man can change the common lot to rare.

Must come and bide. And such are we —
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary —
That I can hope
Health, love, friends, scope
In full for thee; can dream thou'lt find
Joys seldom yet attained by humankind!

Glossary

Doomsters	: fate; deities presiding over fate
Travails	: oppressive labour
Teens	: woes, pains, inflicted harms
Wraiths	: spectre of the dead
Hark	: Listen! (interjection)
Ere	: Before
Terrestrial	: relating to the earth and its inhabitants



Terrestrial chart	:	the life span on earth
Vain	:	useless
Pending	:	not yet settled or decided
Fain	:	happily, gladly
Wold	:	a tract or large area of open land
Qualm	:	an uneasy feeling about the rightness of a chosen course
Lot	:	destiny, fate
Bide	:	wait, tarry
Sanguine	:	cheerfully confident, optimistic
Visionary	:	characterized by foresight
Scope	:	possibilities

20.4. 3 An Analysis of the Poem

The poem 'To an Unborn Pauper Child' begins with a shocking injunction. The poet bids the pauper child in his mother's womb not to breathe, but to cease or die silently. To sleep the eternal sleep though its hour of birth is approaching near. The poet warns the child that doomsters or deities of fate are heaping hard times of pain and woe on human life. The spectres of time are turning the spontaneously happy moments (songsingings) to fearful ones. He asks the child to listen to the sighs of countless people. In this world, laughter fails, greetings die in the throat. Hope diminishes; faiths lose their impact and cease to be. Affections freeze and enthusiasms abate. By being born on earth, the child cannot redress these pitiful things.

Hardy says that if he had the attention of the babies in the womb before their time on earth started, and if they in turn had the choice to decide whether they should live or die, he would describe to them the conditions of the earth and ask whether they were willing to be born under these circumstances. But this is a futile desire, as his warning would never reach the baby that is locked away in its mother's womb. None would be able to describe the plan that life has in store for them. And so the baby will be born ignorant of what awaits it in this world, even though earth shattering things are occurring here.

The poet says that he would gladly find some enclosed plot in the wide expanse of the earth, where the child would remain without a tear or disquietude. But the poet admits his incapacity to do this, as he is as weak as the baby. He cannot change the common destiny to a rare one. So, since he is unable to change the fate of the baby or to give warning of what is in store for it, he asks the child to come and dwell on the earth. And because humans are by nature happily optimistic, visionary and not given to reason, he can hope and wish that the baby, once it is born, will live in love, good health, friendship and possibilities galore. He dreams that the child will attain joys which are rarely attained by mankind.

Hardy's fatalism and pessimism is indisputably evident in the poem. The poet begins in utmost despair and speaks in a doom-filled voice that nothing is pleasant or promising for the yet-to-be-born child. But in the last stanza there is resignation in his tone and the poem ends by expressing a fervent prayer that things may be better for the child. Time is perceived as an enemy of man in

Hardy’s writings. Curious notions of Fate as Doomsters and of Time as Wraiths which haunt, lend it a note of ominous determinism. Time erodes all such natural positive values as “laughter”, “hopes”, “faiths”, “affections” and “enthusiasms”. While pitted against these positive nouns stand negative verbs: “sigh”, “fail”, “die”, “dwindle”, “waste” and “numb”, which highlight the withering process. Though the poem addresses the unborn ‘pauper’ child specifically, the terrible things he attributes to the world may be applicable to any child born into the world, even though it may be said that without the support systems needed to exist on earth, the lot of a pauper child may be all the more pitiable. Hardy has witnessed several disruptive events in the world, and had seen the various modes of fighting and the aftermath of World War I – and the line “Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake” might be a reference to the aerial warfare and blitzkrieg* during the World War.

The poem is addressed to the child. It is an ‘apostrophe’: a rhetorical device in the form of an address to someone not present. Many of the stanzas begin with injunctions and interjections: “Breathe not, hid Heart: cease silently”, “Hark!” “Vain vow!” “Must come and bide”. Written in traditional meter and stanzaic pattern, the poem effectively makes use of alliterations such as, “hid Heart”, “cease silently”, “birth-hour beckons”, “Travails and teens” “surge and sigh”, “pending plan”, “wide wold” etc. Personification of Time as Time-wraiths conveys the vagaries of time as well as the tormenting and obsessive nature of the phenomena on human psyche. Provincialisms and archaisms such as ‘teens’, ‘wold’ and ‘fain’ which mean ‘harms’ ‘open land’ and ‘gladly’ respectively lend quaintness of the old world to the poem. There are strange coinages like ‘theeward’, which sound unfamiliar and rather awkward. The rhythm of the iambic meter imparts a rhythmic tone to the poem, similar to the rocking of a cradle. For Hardy, poetry was “emotion put into measure” where “the emotion must come by nature”, but measure must be “acquired by art”. ‘To an Unborn Pauper Child’ is a perfect synthesis of emotion and measure; a splendid blend of nature and art.

Self-check Exercise II

1) What is Hardy’s injunction to the unborn pauper child in the first stanza.

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2) What condition of the world makes it an undesirable place to be born?

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* German: Lightning War

3) What is the “vow” that Hardy is unable to fulfil?

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4) What are the tones conveyed in the poem?

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5) What is the wish that the poet has for the about-to-be-born child?

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20.5 GREAT THINGS (1964)

20.5.1 Introduction

This poem is different from the previous one, and is one of Hardy’s sunnier, springier and simpler poems. Highly nostalgic, the poem speaks about Hardy’s self-indulgent love for things like cider, dance and love, which he labels as “great things”. The poem ‘Great Things’ was included in the collection, *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses*, published in 1917. The theme of *Moments of Vision*, states Hardy, was to “mortify the human sense of self-importance by showing or suggesting, that human beings are of no matter or appreciable value in this nonchalant universe.” But as is often the case, Hardy’s poems within a collection, though often arranged under headings, may divert from their stated purpose.

Here we may see the young Hardy, footloose and fancy-free, or one who is very much in love with the merry aspects of life. He is one who is not torn apart or depressed by the “travails and teens” of life, but flinging into its mirth and gaiety with wholehearted gusto. A very simple poem, it itemizes and states what the

things he consider ‘Great’ are! It gives us a glimpse of Hardy country with its references to Weymouth and Ridgeway. We encounter the same sort of simplicity and ebullience that we find in the Scotch poet Robert Burns’ poems like “Auld Lang Syne”. Hardy was a lover of Omar Khayyam and the last book that was read to him just before his death was Edward Fitzgerald’s English translation of it. The hedonistic love that one finds in *Rubaiyat* comprising wine, women, verse and music is easily observable in ‘Great things’:

“A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!” (*Rubaiyat*)

The poem consists of four stanzas of eight lines each. The refrain at the end of each stanza is a repetition of the opening statement of each, a slight difference being made by appending ‘O’ in front of the refrain. But the last stanza is an exception, where the stanza begins in a question mode and ends with an emphatic ascertainment of the same. So we can state that the poet has made use of incremental repetition, which is considered to be one of the features of the ballad stanza. The first and fifth lines rhyme (e.g.: thing – summoning; things – flings) as do every second alternate lines in each stanza, (e.g.: me – thirstily – hostelry – me; me – silently – tree – me) lending it a euphonic congruence and cohesion. There are a couple of provincialisms that Hardy uses in the poem. Make a note of them.

Now read the poem, preferably aloud to get a feel of the sounds and the jiggly, toe-tapping rhythm. Read it again with the use of the glossary to understand the meanings and allusions.

20.5.2 The Text



Cider/Cyder



Dance

Great Things

Sweet cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
Spinning down to Weymouth town
By Ridgway thirstily,
And maid and mistress summoning
Who tend the hostelry:
O cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

The dance it is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
With candles lit and partners fit
For night-long revelry;
And going home when day-dawning
Peeps pale upon the lea:
O dancing is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

Love is, yea, a great thing,
A great thing to me,
When, having drawn across the lawn
In darkness silently,
A figure flits like one a-wing
Out from the nearest tree:
O love is, yes, a great thing,
A great thing to me!

Will these be always great things,
Great things to me? . . .
Let it befall that One will call,
“Soul, I have need of thee”:
What then? Joy-jabouts, impassioned flings,
Love, and its ecstasy,
Will always have been great things,
Great things to me!

Glossary

Cyder	:	or cider drink taken from apple
Weymouth	:	town in Dorset, England
Hostelry	:	an inn, pub or a hotel
Revelry	:	merrymaking; lively and noisy festivities
Lea	:	an open area of grassy or arable land
One	:	God, considered as the One.
Jaunts	:	a short excursion or journey made for pleasure
Impassioned	:	emotional, exciting
Flings	:	unrestrained pursuit of one’s emotions or desires



Weymouth



Ridgeway



Hostelry

20.5.3 Discussion

Now that you have read the poem carefully, try to answer the following questions, so that we can discuss the poem.

- 1) Why does the poet consider 'sweet cyder' a great thing?

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- 2) What are the elements of dance that makes the poet like it?

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- 3) What are the romantic components of love that the poet identifies which makes it precious and great?

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- 4) What philosophy of life do you perceive in the final stanza of the poem?

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[1. The poet states that sweet cider is a great thing to him. As he passes by Weymouth and Ridgeway feeling thirsty, the mistress and the maid who run the hostelry or the inn, invite him to drink cider. A thing that assuages thirst and is sweet and pleasurable in addition, is definitely a great thing.]

[2. The poet likes dance because it happens in an atmosphere of mirth, gaiety and romance. In candle-lit ambience, with the most suitable partner, one may settle

down to night-long celebrations, and return only when the day starts dawning. These pleasurable moments make dance a great thing to him.]

[3. Love is beautiful for assignations and stolen moments in the dark. The lover moves across the lawn in darkness waiting for his partner. The lady love flits to her lover silently like the silent bird flying out of the tree. These secret meetings and trysts add to the romance and mystery of love, and make it a great thing.]

[4. The poet speaks about the inevitable death which would summon all people, one day. So when the final call comes and we are forced to make an exit, all the things that one found joy in when alive, such as joyous travels, impassioned dances and ecstatic love, will become things of the past, but nevertheless would remain precious and great. This philosophy ties it up closely to hedonism, Epicureanism and the concept of ‘carpe diem’ or ‘seize the day’.]

20.5.4 Comments

- It is a ‘feel good’ poem, written in a gay mood. It has the structure, feel and rhythm of a folk song.
- There are elements of hedonism, which is the philosophy or doctrine that states that pleasure or happiness is the highest good.
- The poet describes the pleasure of drinking sweet cider, partaking in dance and being in love.
- These activities have been identified as the sweetest by people in several lands. Omar Khayyam has glorified it. ‘Halavadi’ poets in Hindi Literature have done it. The poets who advocate ‘carpe diem’ or the philosophy of ‘seize the day’ have considered it the highest good.
- The poet imparts a local flavour to the practice of imbibing cider. Drinking cider and ale is an activity that is indulged in by country people. They visit the local pub or hostelry to drink. They are tended by the mistress of the pub or by the bar-maid. These characters impart a local flavour to the poem. The poet roots this activity in the reality of Dorchester by making references to Weymouth and Ridgeway, two important places in Dorset and Hardy world. The verb ‘spinning down’ instils a spirit of jaunty happiness and conveys a mood of tipsiness.
- Dance is the art of passion. Dancing with a partner is one of the happy activities that the people of the west indulge in. Often dances are all night festivities, where one takes turns dancing with various partners. With fast and slow dances such as a tango or a waltz, mood sets in. Candle-lit dances are romantic affairs. The dancers return home only when the day starts breaking. Hardy very poetically describes the day break. Dawn is a party-wrecker who peeps in to spy on the dancers.
- Dorset and whereabouts are always a part of Hardy’s world. References to the local places and terrain sprinkle the poem. The reference to ‘lea’ or open tract of land draws our attention to one of the physical features of Dorset.
- Love is a great thing because of its secretive and romantic nature. Lovers have a clandestine assignation at night in the garden, which is one of the thrills of being in love. The lover waits for his beloved in the darkness and

sees the joyous sight of his lady love flitting across the lawn to where he stands with the swiftness of bird which swoops silently from the tree nearby. The poet beautifully invokes the impatience of waiting and the rapture of the meeting. He also conjures up the atmosphere of darkness and secretiveness in which the impatient lovers meet furtively.

- The final stanza brings the reader down to ground realities. Life on earth is transient and death will come inevitably. The poet imagines Death calling out to him when his time is up. But even then, the joy jaunts to drink at pubs, passionate dances and secret meetings of love will always have been great things to him.
- In the last stanza the poem slides from simple present to future perfect, emphasizing the perennial quality of his likes. Whatever happens, these things would always remain great things for him. He wishes that it may be so forever.
- The fifth line of each stanza ends in ‘-ing’, (‘summoning’, ‘dawning’, ‘a-wing’) lending it a sensation of continued activity, that his love for these things is something perennially lasting. In the last stanza this line ends in the plural – ‘flings’ – in tune with the summing up that is being done in that stanza.

Self-check Exercise III

a) Read the first stanza and indicate the rhyme scheme.

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b) What does the presence of the mistress and the maiden in the hostelry convey to the reader?

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c) Why does Hardy consider dance as a great thing?

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d) What is so special about love that it makes it a great thing?

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e) What in essence does the final stanza of the poem say?

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20.6 D. H. LAWRENCE

(b. 11 September, 1885, Eastwood, Nottinghamshire – d. 2 March, 1930, Vence, France)



Introduction:

D.H. Lawrence was an iconoclastic writer who revolutionized fiction writing at the beginning of the 20th century with his frank portrayal of sensuality and earned notoriety while he lived. He was a versatile genius who was a novelist, poet, short-story writer, translator, essayist, critic and a painter. Born as the fourth child of Arthur John Lawrence, a barely literate miner and Lydia, a former teacher who passed on her sensitivity and intelligence to her children, Lawrence's formative years were spent in the mining town of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire. This land he called, "the country of my heart" and formed the background of much of his writings. The tensions latent in his family life, especially between his crude father and his sensitive and educated mother, informed his works. He attended the Beauvale Board School and won a scholarship to Nottingham High School.

He worked as a junior clerk in a factory for a few months, but left it after he contracted pneumonia. His friendship with Jessie Chambers burgeoned at this time, as both of them shared a love for books. He also started writing poems and short stories during this period. In 1907 he won a prize in the short story competition in the Nottingham Guardian, the earliest recognition of his talents. In 1908 he received a teaching certificate from the University College, Nottingham.

He left for London to teach at Davidson Road School, Croydon. His talent as a writer was recognized by Ford Madox Ford and he was commissioned to write a story for *The English Review*, titled the *Odour of Chrysanthemums*. In 1910 Lawrence's mother, with whom he had a very close relationship, died of cancer, leaving him devastated. During this time, his first novel *The White Peacock* was completed, and soon he started working on his celebrated novel, *Sons and Lovers*, which was closely autobiographical in nature. He had broken off his engagement to his childhood friend Louie Burrows in the meanwhile, and decided to become a full time writer.

Lawrence met Frieda Weekley, the wife of his modern languages professor and the mother of three children, and promptly fell in love with her. Frieda was six years older than him and of German parentage. Their elopement created a furore. They first settled in Metz, where the political tensions during the First World War had Lawrence arrested as a British spy. He was released at the intervention of his father-in-law and they left for Italy across the Alps. During their stay in Italy, Lawrence completed *Sons and Lovers*.

The couple returned to England and Lawrence soon became friends with writers and critics including John Middleton Murray, Katherine Mansfield and the Welsh poet W.H. Davies. They kept on shuttling between the continent and the British Isles. In July 1914, they got married and settled in Zennor, Cornwall. But the local government considered the presence of a controversial writer and his German wife so near the coast to be a war time security threat and banished him from Cornwall. Lawrence was forced to leave Cornwall at three days' notice under the terms of DORA – Defence of the Realm Act. He lived in Derbyshire for a while, shifting from address to address, due to poverty. This wrote his celebrated short story *The White Peacock* while living there.

Lawrence wrote and completed *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. The former was suppressed after an investigation into its alleged obscenity. All throughout his life Lawrence had to face censorship. *The Rainbow* was published only in 1920, and is now considered one of the major English novels with great intellectual subtlety.

After the war, during which he had to suffer trauma at the hand of local authorities, Lawrence began his voluntary self exile – which he terms his 'savage pilgrimage'. He returned to Britain only twice and went travelling all over the world, bitten by wanderlust and writing extensively. His novel *Kangaroo* relates some of his experiences in Australia as well as his wartime experiences in Cornwall. In 1922, Lawrence settled in a utopian community at Kiowa Ranch, near Taos in New Mexico, where he wrote some of his noted critical articles on American Literature. When his health deteriorated, they were forced to leave New Mexico for Italy. Lawrence completed *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his last major novel, which reinforced his notoriety as a writer of pornography. Lawrence

defended himself in two of his collections of satirical poems *Pansies* and *Nettles* and also in his tract on *Pornography and Obscenity*.

Lawrence was a great advocate of the bodily instinct. He believed that European civilisation gave too much emphasis to the intellect. In his famous ‘belief in the blood’ speech, Lawrence says: “My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle.” In a letter to Ernest Collings, Lawrence writes: “I conceive a man’s body as a kind of flame, like a candle flame, forever upright and yet flowing; and the intellect is just the light that is shed on to the things around.” He is concerned with the mystery of the flame forever flowing, which comes out of practically nowhere, and being itself, it lights up whatever there is around it.

In the final years of his life, Lawrence was exceptionally active, writing poems, essays, reviews as well as producing oil painting. His last important work was *Apocalypse*, a reflection on the Book of Revelation. He died due to complications of tuberculosis at the Villa Robermond in Vence, France.

Lawrence legacy is vast and varied. Though best known for his novels and short stories, he was also a prolific poet, writing about 800 poems. Though in the beginning, his style is Georgian with well-worn poetic tropes and archaic language, it changed dramatically after the World War I. Influenced by Walt Whitman, Lawrence adopted free verse as his medium, ridding himself of stereotyped movements. Lawrence believed in writing poetry that was “stark, immediate and true to the mysterious inner force which motivated it”. His best known collections are *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and *Tortoises*, in which he deals with nature and natural subjects. ‘Snake’ is one of his most anthologized poems. He also wrote several love poems in the anthology, *Look, We have come through!* Many of his later poems are in the modernist tradition, though he is different from other modernists. His collections *Pansies* as well as *Nettles* contain bitter satires on the moral climate of England. The poems written during the final days were printed posthumously as *Last Poems and More Pansies*, and contain Lawrence’s most celebrated poems on death, ‘Bavarian Gentians’ and ‘The Ship of Death’.

Self-check Exercise IV

1) Which place does Lawrence call “the country of my heart”?

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2) Which is the most autobiographical of Lawrence’s works?

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3) Which novel of Lawrence was based on his experiences in Cornwall?

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4) What does Lawrence refer to his self exile as?

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5) Which poet influenced Lawrence to write in free verse?

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6) What does Lawrence speak about in his celebrated 'belief in the blood speech'?

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7) Which anthology contains love poems by Lawrence?

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8) Which poetic collections contain satires ridiculing the moral climate of England?

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9) Which are the famous poems on death written by Lawrence?

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Now read the poem 'Bavarian Gentians' to get a taste of Lawrence's poetic style. Please make use of the glossary to understand the terms and the various mythological allusions in the poem. Read several times to grasp the poem wholly and make a special note of the inherent, informal music of the poem.

20.7 BAVARIAN GENTIANAS



20.7.1 Introduction

The poem 'Bavarian Gentians' is included in the collection *Last Poems and More Pansies*. For Lawrence, the phenomenal world of flora and fauna held a mystical aura, often teaching human beings the higher moral values of life. The subject, be it a bird, beast, plant or a flower, stands as a symbol of various facets of human nature. 'Bavarian Gentians' is a poem of death and eternal life. There are two versions of the poem with the texts differing in the latter half.

Written during his last days on earth, the poem stems from the interminable long-suffering wait of D.H. Lawrence as a tuberculosis patient for death to descend on him. The movement towards death is slow and sure. John Keats, another poet whose tragic life was cut off in its prime, bemoans the plight of the world in his poem 'Ode to the Nightingale': "Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies", referring to the sad end of his brother who was a tuberculosis patient. Thomas Mann at the end of his novel *The Magic Mountain* says to his protagonist about the ravages of TB and its almost inevitable excruciating end, "The wicked dance in which you are caught up will last many a sinful year yet, and we would not wager much that you will come out whole." Lawrence too must have felt that he was caught up in its wicked dance. And the only way was to wait to descend into death. Lawrence's poem seduces the reader with the slow dance with blue death using the symbols of the Bavarian gentians.

Bavarian gentians are a rarity. These dark blue flowers are outdoor plants often found in rocky terrain. By taking something decorative and incidental as a flower and turning it into a strong personal symbol which encompasses Lawrencian duality, is a remarkable poetic feat and a triumph of genius. Lawrence is famous for presenting different sides of a single image – he yokes contraries together as metaphysical poets do. Here the Bavarian Gentians symbolize Pluto's gloom of death and darkness and yet they are torches that shed bright blue light of life as a torch, showing the way to death.

"The poem itself is a complex web, a trance like dream that suggests both a gravitation toward death and a transcendence beyond it", says Ferris. The cadence of the poem is haunting in its ruminant mood, made possible by repetition of words and phrases, and its spiraling motion suggesting descent into death. Written in *vers libre* or free verse, with a liberal use of *enjambement* or run-on lines, and extended sentences with appended clauses, the poem captures in its stylistic peculiarities, the slow and inexorable movement towards death.

Now read the poem with the help of the glossary, and see whether you are able to capture the sadly entrancing mood of the poem.

20.7.2 The Text

Bavarian Gentians

Not every man has gentians in his house
in Soft September, at slow, Sad Michaelmas.

Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark
darkening the daytime torchlike with the smoking blueness of Pluto's
gloom,
ribbed and torchlike, with their blaze of darkness spread blue
down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of white day
torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze,
black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue,
giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps give off
light,
lead me then, lead me the way.

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness.
even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September
to the sightless realm where darkness was awake upon the dark
and Persephone herself is but a voice
or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,
among the splendor of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on the
lost bride and groom.

Glossary:

- Bavarian Gentian** : is a blue tubular flower. It is a typical, personal Lawrencean symbol. [See picture above]
- Michaelmas** : [pron. /mik^hlms/] is a Christian feast that celebrates the Archangel Michael, and is held on September 29th. It is associated with the coming of autumn.
- Pluto** : The Roman God of the underworld. In Greek mythology he is called Hades which is also a name for the underworld.

Hades was Zeus' brother. He abducted and forcibly wedded his niece Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the Goddess of Harvest and Grain. Demeter was devastated and searched for her daughter high and low. But when Demeter finally succeeded in finding Persephone, it was found that she had eaten some pomegranate seeds, the food of the deceased. Hence she was forced to return to the underworld for one third of every year. It is believed that Demeter mourns her separation from her daughter during this time which is considered the reason for autumn and winter on earth. So, in the poem, September, which is the advent of autumnal season, is the time of the descent of Persephone into hell, into the arms of waiting death.

(Persephone is Proserpina in Roman and Demeter is Ceres; while Pluto is Hades in Greek – it is not clear why Lawrence has mixed up the Roman and Greek mythological names.)

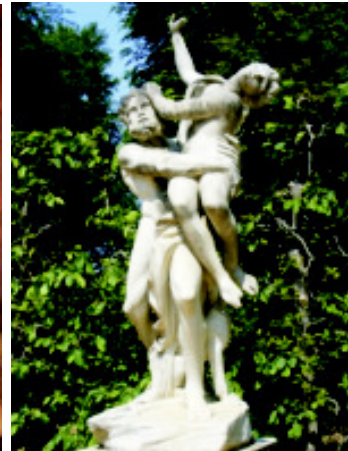
- Ribbed** : with something resembling a rib supporting or strengthening a part; ridged. In this case, the petals are ridged.



Demeter



Demeter- Persephone & Hermes



Pluto & Persephone

- Demeter** : Also called Ceres. Goddess of harvest and grain. Fertility Goddess.
- Dis** : Another name for Hades.
- Persephone** : Also called Kore, daughter of Demeter; Proserpina in Roman mythology, abducted by Pluto or Hades.

20.7.3 Analysis

‘Bavarian Gentians’ is a deep and dense poem invoking darkness of death, loaded with personal symbolism and interwoven with mythological allusions. Lawrence makes use of an extraordinary symbol – that of Bavarian Gentians; one which embodies and reinforces Lawrencian duality of death and life, darkness and light.

The poem begins with a casual yet unusual two line statement by the poet who comments upon the rarity of the flower. It is not found in every house at Michaelmas during ‘soft September’. Michaelmas which falls on the 29th of that month heralds the coming of the autumnal season. The poet defines Michaelmas as slow and sad, underscoring the relentless advent of chilly frost of September as determined as death making steady progress on him. His use of “frosted September” later in the poem testifies to the chill. The adjectives “soft”, “slow” and “sad” that the poet uses in the line, beautifully and poignantly convey the feeling of the silent, inexorable and dismal creeping of death.

Gentians are big and dark. Their blue darkness is brilliant like torchlight, evoking the blueness of Pluto’s darkness. Contrarily, their intense blue darkens the daytime during which they flower. Lawrence uses an oxymoron ‘blaze of darkness’ to convey this contradictory nature. His sharp powers of observation capture every single feature of the flower, from its ribbed, tubular torchlike shape, to its blue petals flattened to a point, making it blaze forth like a torch, spreading blue darkness, invoking the trance of Pluto’s underworld. He calls them black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue, which contrary to Demeter’s pale lamps of the day, give off only darkness. It is then that the poet openly states about the journey he himself is about to undertake into Pluto’s dark realms. All these minutely detailed descriptions from the beginning were leading to this imperative “Lead me then, lead me the way” making clear the function of the Bavarian Gentians for him. The task of the gentian is to show him the way, blazing forth as a torch, lighting his descent to the halls of Dis.

The poet clearly equates the gentian with a torch. He wants to be guided by this blue forked torch down the dark stairs, getting darker still as he descends. Just as Persephone goes to visit her bridegroom in the Hades at the advent of autumn, after spending her time on the earth during spring and summer seasons, he is ready to make his fated journey during the “first-frosted September”, which is a phrase that Lawrence uses in another version of the poem. He wants to go into those dismal and sightless realms where darkness is awake upon the dark. Like Persephone, the lost bride, who is nothing but a voice in the darkness, is enveloped and pierced with the passion of dense gloom by Pluto, Lord of the underworld and the king of darkness, lying awake and waiting to enfold her in his strong arms and celebrate their nuptials in the chamber lit with torches of darkness, the poet too envisages being enveloped in the eternal arms of darkness.

Death turns celebratory. While life on the earth is painful, eternal repose in the enveloping darkness of death is like being in the hands of one's lover. Lawrence's identity fuses with that of Persephone who celebrates her nuptials with her eternal lover. Lawrence seems to say that we are all brides to death, virgins to be pierced with the passion of dense gloom, to be enveloped in "the arms Plutonic". Using the symbolism of the phantasmal underworld of classic mythology, Lawrence invokes the transcendental nature of death. The blue gentian is the body of man, lit with living flame. It is with the help of this flame that one can seek eternal repose in the arms of death. And the reason why everyone has not "gentians in his house in soft September" is because not everyone knows how to be truly alive in the flesh.

Written in free verse, the continuous enjambement or run-on lines spilling from one to another, to the end of each stanza, invokes the feel of a meandering and spiraling movement of a descent downwards, keeping in tune with the motif of a journey. As Milton describes it in *Paradise Lost*, Bavarian Gentians makes "darkness visible". Lawrence has been able to capture the intensity and density of a palpable darkness through the reiteration of words "blue" and "blueness" and "dark" and "darkness" throughout the poem. The use of soft sibilants and liquid sounds creates a feel of being lovingly cocooned in the "embalmed darkness". Heavily alliterative and reiterative, the poem is able to conjure up a trance-like mood, slowly and hypnotically gravitating towards the vortex of death. The pathos of the final line inherent in the expression "the lost bride" is reverted by the reference of her conjoining with her groom. Though Persephone is lost to the earth, as man is at death, she reaches the safe haven of the arms of her Plutonic lover, suggesting that 'heaven' lies in the warm embrace of death for man too, thus emphasizing the transcendental nature of death.

Self-check Exercise V

- 1) What is the significance of the statement that "not every man has gentians in his house"?

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- 2) Why does the poet refer to "slow, sad Michaelmas"?

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3) Why does the poet compare Bavarian gentians to a torch?
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4) What does the poet wish to do with the gentian?
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5) Describe the nuptial imagery in the poem.
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6) What are the stylistic beauties of the poem?
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20.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you were introduced to two poets – Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence – both of them remarkable and controversial novelists, but consummate poets nonetheless.

Two poems of Hardy, both as different from each other as chalk and cheese, introduced you to the varied moods and themes of this great poet. The first one pessimistic, tender, exhortatory, fatalistic and brooding, speaks to an unborn pauper child, while the next one celebrates and glorifies pleasurable activities

such as drinking cider, candle-lit dancing and amorous trysts, as great things. The poem by Lawrence uses the symbol of Bavarian Gentians and the classical mythology of Pluto and Persephone to convey the duality of life and death. You were introduced to the stylistic features of each poem and were taught to analyse them critically. The introductory notes on the age as well as the poets, we hope, must have given you an exhaustive background knowledge as well as whetted your appetite to learn more about them. You may refer to encyclopaedias and critical works available in your study centres and local libraries as well as check out for on-line reference material available.

20.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) That of an Architect. His home Max Gate.
- 2) Wessex. After the old Anglo-Saxon kingdom.
- 3) *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.
- 4) *Wessex Poems*
Poems of the Past and the Present
Moments of Vision or any others mentioned in the Introduction
- 5) *The Dynasts*. The Napoleonic Wars.
- 6) Fatalism & Pessimism

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Not to breathe, cease silently, sleep the long sleep, though the birth hour is near.
- 2) The doomsters heap troubles and pains, time-wraiths turn pleasant moments to fearful ones. It is a world where laughter fails, greetings die, hope dwindles, faiths waste away, affections and enthusiasms numb.
- 3) The vow that if he had the capacity to reach out to souls still in their mothers' wombs, that he would inform them of all the trouble that awaits them in this world, which is "Life's pending plan".
- 4) The poem wavers between sympathy, despair and hopelessness and ends on a note of resignation and hope.
- 5) Since the child will be born contrary to the poet's wishes, he should come and live on this earth. And being happy and optimistic in disposition, he hopes that the child attains full health, love, friends and possibilities on earth and finds joys which are seldom attained by mankind.

Self-check Exercise III

- a) abcbabab
- b) The presence of these ladies conveys a local flavour and creates a feel of the English pub atmosphere.

- c) It is a great thing because it is night-long revelry with suitable partners in candle-lit ambience, returning only at daybreak.
- d) Love is full of romantic interludes in the darkness, where the lover clandestinely awaits his lady-love in the garden, when she flits towards his side silently like a bird.
- e) The final stanza posits the question whether the things mentioned in the previous stanza such as cider, dance and love would remain great things to him. He says that when the inevitable Death calls upon him, these things would still have remained great things to him.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) The mining town of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire
- 2) *Sons and Lovers*
- 3) *Kangaroo*
- 4) 'The Savage Pilgrimage'
- 5) Walt Whitman, the American Poet
- 6) He says that, the flesh is wiser than the intellect. We may go wrong in our minds, but what the blood feels, believes and says, is true.
- 7) *Look, We have come through!*
- 8) *Pansies and Nettles*
- 9) 'Bavarian Gentians' and 'The Ship of Death'

Self-check Exercise V

- 1) It means that not everyone knows how to be truly alive in the flesh
- 2) Michaelmas refers to the advent of the autumnal season, and symbolically points out to the commencement of man's slow journey towards death.
- 3) Because of their shape of the flower and its petals and also its colour. The dark blue blaze of the flattened petals, converging to a point like a flame of the torch, the tubular shape of the flower, reminiscent of a torch, and the dark blue colour of the flowers make this imagery apt.
- 4) He wishes to use the flower as a torch to guide him and lead him down to the netherworld of darkness, to show him the way taken by Persephone to reach her dismal lover.
- 5) Persephone descends to the sightless world of the dark into the enveloping arms of her lover who is waiting for her in the chambers lit with the splendour of torches of darkness to celebrate the nuptials and be pierced with the passion of dense gloom.
- 6) *Enjambement*, use of sibilants and liquid sounds, alliteration and reiteration etc. (refer to the last paragraph of the analysis)



Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

V

High Modernist, Postmodernist and Recent Poets

W.B.Yeats, T.S.Eliot, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney



**School of Humanities
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi**

Block

5

THE HIGH MODERNIST, POSTMODENIST AND RECENT POETS

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William Butler Yeats 9

UNIT 22

T.S. Eliot 31

UNIT 23

Philip Larkin 55

UNIT 24

Ted Hughes 77

UNIT 25

Seamus Heaney 95

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 5

MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first half of the twentieth century in English literature was dominated by 'Modernism'. It was a break away from the Victorian and Edwardian style of narration, description and rational exposition in prose and poetry in favour of a stream-of-consciousness portrayal of personality, dependence on imagery as a means of communication and an eclectic use of mythology from European and sometimes also Indian culture in the structures of works of art. There were local factors such as the concentration of population in the megapolises like London, Birmingham and Leeds and the consequent problems associated with over population but the immediate intellectual influence came via France of the Symbolists and the Surrealists.

The **Symbolist Movement** in French literature refers to the period c 1880 – 95. It came as a reaction against the Realism and Naturalism of Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and Zola who valued 'sincerity' above the Romantic love for 'liberty'. The Realists and the Naturalists both shared the belief that the middle and lower classes of their time provided subjects for literary treatment. The Symbolist Movement refers primarily to works of the poets Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud and, Laforgue, the dramatists Villiers de L'Isle Adam and Maurice Maeterlinck and, the novelists Joris-Karl Huysmans and Édouard Dujardin. In poetry the Symbolists reacted against the Parnassians, led by Leconte de Lisle, who valued restraint, descriptive precision and objectivity as against the extravagance of the Romantics. The Symbolists were influenced by the mystical writings of Swedenborg, the poetry of Baudelaire, the plays of Wagner and the tales of Edgar Allan Poe. The symbolists opted for suggestions and evocations in the place of direct description and explicit comparisons. Arthur William Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) was a major attempt by an Englishman to introduce the Movement in England.

One of the most prominent characteristics of **Modernism** is its bold experimentation in different areas of culture. The French 'Avant-garde' - that is advance guard, fore guard or vanguard - is often considered as the hallmark of modernism. **Avant-garde** traces its history back to **Dada** and the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Switzerland where in 1916 a group of artists from war torn Europe assembled to demonstrate their art. Dada - in French 'hobby-horse' and in German 'Goodbye' and, 'get off my back' – apparently was a one off name suggested for an experimental art the chief quality of which was its newness. Dada was born out of a reaction to World War I. It rejected reason and logic and opted for nonsense, irrationality and intuition. This is evident also in **Cubism** in which, for instance, we are



expected to appreciate a collage of newspaper cuttings, buttons and knives stuck upon a canvas. Guillaume Apollinaire, the French poet, critic and calligrammetist was an ardent supporter of Dada in poetry and painting. But Dada came under attack from all corners. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer at the Frankfurt School attacked it in their essay 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (1944). So did Walter Benjamin in his influential essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) berated 'modernism'. 'Their poems are' wrote Benjamin, "'word salad" containing obscenities and every imaginable waste product of language. The same is true of their paintings, on which they mounted buttons and tickets.' Regarding Dada Benjamin went on, 'One requirement was foremost: to outrage the public.'

Surrealism founded in Paris in 1924 stood on less contested grounds. 'I have always been amazed' wrote André Breton in his first *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), 'at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams . . . the dream finds itself reduced to a mere parenthesis, as is the night'. He went on, 'I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession'. Surrealistic art is about the depths of human psyche and thus of human personality. In 1929 Salvador Dali joined this movement introducing illusionistic 'dream' imagery indebted to Freud. Breton in his *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1929 tried to reconcile Freud and Marx. Among those who joined the group in the late thirties were Herbert Read and Hugh Sykes Davies.

Strange as it may sound, scientific theories and literary creeds of a given period show some kind of family resemblance. Donne's poetry in the seventeenth century expresses the doubt and confusion of the Astronomical Revolution led by Nicolaus Copernicus, Johann Kepler, Tycho Brahe and, Galileo Galilee. Newtonian physics and the confidence and certainty about our knowledge of the universe and the euphoria evident in the arts in the Long Eighteenth Century - the Age of Reason, neoclassicism and the Enlightenment - are in tune with the spirit of the age. Modernism - Dada, Cubism and, Surrealism - in art and the works of Albert Einstein and Max Planck who gave respectively the Theories of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics together reflect the *Zeitgeist* of the age. From the Theories of Relativity we gained the ideas of spacetime continuum, time dilation, length contraction, universal speed limit and mass-energy equivalence. We learnt from Planck that particles are discrete packets of energy with wave-like properties. The word 'quantum' derives from Latin, meaning 'how great' or 'how much'. There is a family resemblance between Breton's surrealism and the tilt in modern physics from the solid facts of 'nature's laws' in classical physics towards, for the common people, often confusing facts such as spacetime continuum or particles as discreet quanta of energy. The works of Planck, Paul Dirac, Enrico Fermi, Erwin Schrodinger and Satyendranath Bose made not only a scientific but also a cultural impact immediately on the West but gradually on the East as well. We cannot go into the details of these comparisons of the arts and the sciences in this brief introductory note. Nonetheless these are a few seeds of ideas that will germinate and grow within you in course of time.

The late fifties of the twentieth century saw the birth of new fields of enquiry in physics in America which influenced the West – 1. the Communication or Information Theory of Claude Shannon, a mathematician and electronic engineer and, 2. the Chaos Theory of the mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz. Later in the mid-seventies, came Fractal Geometry of the French mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. These have made Western culture profoundly different from that of the first half of the twentieth century. The advent of the Information Age and the Knowledge Society about which we hear so often was initiated by scientists such as Shannon and the English Alan Turing. Influence of Fractal Geometry on our culture remains to be seen in times to come.

The winds of change in the late fifties of the last century were felt in the United States which was recorded by Daniel J Boorstin, an American historian, in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961). Pseudo-events are activities that serve little or no purpose. The Italian Umberto Eco saw in Western culture a tendency for fabricating false reality or hyperreality which is to be consumed as real. This is the art of a consumerist culture. Brand X shows that one is fashionable.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) Jean-François Lyotard (1924 -98) opines thus:

Our working hypothesis is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age.

‘This transition’ Lyotard goes on, ‘has been underway since at least the end of the 1950s, which for Europe marks the completion of reconstruction.’ Lyotard is thinking about the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War (1939 - 45). Lyotard points out at the ‘merchantilisation of knowledge’ knowledge as an ‘informational commodity’ as it is now, as never before, indispensable to worldwide competition for power. This new feature of our culture has led us to a paralogy – a movement against an established way of reasoning. We witness in our culture today a distrust of metanarratives or grand narratives, a comprehensive explanation of historical meaning, experience or knowledge that promises a society legitimation through the expected completion of that idea.

Fredric Jameson’s (b. 1934) *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) is a landmark study of Western culture in the sixties and thereafter. He points out that postmodernist art is marked by depthlessness. He illustrates his point by comparing Van Gogh’s ‘A Pair of Shoes’ with Andy Warhol’s ‘Diamond Dust Shoes’. While the former invites interpretation, a construction of the peasant world and their difficult life the latter does not offer anything beyond what we see. A modern work such as Edvard Munch’s ‘The Scream’ reifies the modern experience of angst and alienation whereas in postmodern works of art feelings wane, there is ‘the waning of affect’.

It would be a good idea to bear these general directions of thought while reading the literature of the twentieth century.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 21 WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 W.B. Yeats (13 June 1865- 28 January 1939)
- 21.3 To a Shade (1913)
 - 21.3.1 Introduction
 - 21.3.2 The Text
 - 21.3.3 Analysis
- 21.4 No Second Troy (1910)
 - 21.4.1 Introduction
 - 21.4.2 The Text
 - 21.4.3 Analysis
- 21.5 The Second Coming (1920)
 - 21.5.1 Introduction
 - 21.5.2 The Text
 - 21.5.3 Analysis
- 21.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have read this unit, you will be able to:

- Critically respond to W.B.Yeats’s life and works.
- Understand Yeats’s poetry in relation to Irish politics and history of his time.
- Appreciate the relationship between form and content of his poetry.
- To examine Yeats’s contribution to poetic modernism.
- Examine the poems “To a Shade,” “No Second Troy,” and “The Second Coming.”

21.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will have first look at W.B.Yeats’s life and works. Yeats lived a long and eventful life. There was a direct connection between his social, and political life and the kind of literature he wrote. Therefore understanding his life may hold some key to comprehending his poetry.

The first poem in this unit is “To a Shade,” which Yeats wrote to commemorate the great Irish nationalist Charles Stuart Parnell. As a nationalist Yeats was greatly influenced by this revolutionary leader, and his passion for the

independence of Ireland. Let us see by reading this poem what kind of tribute does the poet pay to this revered leader.

The second poem is titled “No Second Troy.” As the title suggests, the poem makes a reference to the Greek epic *Iliad* that celebrates the war of Troy. The poem is, however, not about Iliad but Ireland of Yeats’s times. Yeats compares his beloved Maud of Gonne to the mythical Helen of Troy. Read the poem to find out why Yeats does so.

The third poem in this unit is “The Second Coming.” It is one of the most anthologized of Yeats’s poems. It presents the Yeatsian theory of history through his symbol of gyre. It has Christian connotations. Instead of the second coming of the Christ, the poem announces the coming of a monstrous figure with the body of the lion and head of a man as an anti-Christ.

You are advised to read the poems before you read other sections of the unit.

21.2 WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939)

W.B. Yeats will go down in history as perhaps the greatest Irish writer ever. He was more than a poet; he wrote plays as well as prose, worked as an anthropologist and folklorist, was one of the theatre-managers at Abbey Theatre that he founded along with Lady Gregory, organized political meetings and lectures for the Irish movement for independence. However, with all his other accomplishments, he would be remembered mostly for his poetry that runs into numerous volumes. In his interview to *The Paris Review* in 1994, Seamus Heaney talks about the impossibility of ignoring Yeats in any assessment Irish poetry, and that he had to be included in his acceptance speech of the Noble Prize. Yeats both observed and influenced the political and literary history of Ireland, since the 1890s to his death. Working as a nationalist poet for almost half a century from the 1889 to 1939, he either took part or closely watched critical developments of that era such as the formation of the Irish National Theatre Society (later named as the Abbey Theatre), Irish Home Rule Movement, Easter Rising of 1916, and the Irish War of Independence, also called the Anglo-Irish War, that was fought between 21 January 1919 and 11 July 1921. Though, Yeats was averse to political violence, and never took part in any violent struggle against the British colonial forces, he tirelessly worked for cultural nationalism, reviving the oral and folk tradition of Ireland, as well as writing plays and poetry on nationalistic themes. The ambivalent streak in his poetry and personality is evident in the following lines from his poem “Man and Echo,” in which he painfully wonders if his play, *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, inspired young Irish men and women to violence and death in the Easter Uprising of 1916:

All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.
Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?

So, Yeats’s influence on Irish politics remains undeniable. Paying tribute to the key role the poet played in securing the independence of Ireland, Oliver St John

Gogarty said, and “If it had not been for W.B. Yeats, there would be no Irish Free State!” He was appointed to the first Irish senate in 1921. He also served a second term in 1925.

Yeats was a major force in the English poetic tradition. Though remaining astutely Irish in outlook, he wrote in the tradition that he inherited from Blake and Shelley calling himself “the last romantic.” However, in the second decade of the 20th century, he along with T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound radically transformed English poetry, making it suggestive and symbolist. In the process, he made himself a key figure in the European Modernism.

In his search for poetic truth, Yeats also came under the influence of Indian philosophy and poetry, especially through the *Upanishads* and the poems of Rabindranath Tagore.

Now let us look at his life in more detail.

W.B. Yeats was born in Dublin, now the capital of Ireland, on June 13, 1865. His father, John Butler Yeats, was a painter of modest success, and belonged to a respected family line of Protestant aristocrats and clergymen. Yeats, the poet, was named after his grandfather William Butler Yeats, who was a rector at Tullyish. Yeats’s mother, Susan Yeats, belonged to a family of business men in County Sligo on the west coast of Ireland. Though qualified as a barrister, the poet’s father decided to move to London with a hope to become a painter. However, Susan Yeats, unhappy with her husband’s decision, chose to live for some months every year from 1867 to 1873 at Sligo. Living with his grandparents and uncles at seaside Sligo, and with his father in London, Yeats and his five siblings came into contact with two completely different worlds- urban and the center of colonial Britain, London, and the typical Irish rural world, that evoked his postcolonial imagination quite early in life.

In his early lyrics, composed in the 1890s, Sligo inspired Yeats to write about the Irish landscape filled by lakes, hills, clouds and streams, which was a counterfoil to the colonial, urban, and metropolitan culture represented by London. In the most famous lyric from this phase of Yeats’ oeuvre, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” the poet says,

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.

The beautiful island of Innisfree, with a lovely stretch of woodland, was in Lough Gill, about three miles away from Sligo. To the north of Sligo, a few miles away, was Ben Bulbin, the mountain with a waterfall. Under this mountain lay the Drumcliff Churchyard, which the poet wished to be the place of his burial. He expressed this wish in his poem *Under Ben Bullben* (1939)

Under bare Ben Bulbin’s head
In Drumcliff Churchyard, Yeats is laid

In London, the young Yeats came across artists and intellectuals who came to visit his father, and who talked about philosophy, religion, and arts, whereas at Sligo, Yeats came to know the Pollexfens and Middletons, the loving uncles,

aunts and cousins, who introduced him to the world of intense feeling, practical living amidst Irish nature, and folktales and fairies. The poet's father would say: "By marriage with the Pollexfens, I have given a tongue to the sea cliffs." Yeats would, for the rest of his life, remember Sligo as attached with childhood bliss, Irish family traditions, and folk and oral traditions of Ireland.

In 1881, financial hardships forced the family to return to Ireland. They took a cottage in Howth, a village on the sea shore, some 10 miles northeast of Dublin. The young Yeats accompanied his father daily to London by train, where in his studio; the father read aloud poems of Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Yeats grew fascinated with Blake, Shelley and Byron, as the romantic wielded great influence on his poetic sensibility early on. He wrote in their imitation. As a boy, he was captivated by Shelley's *Alastor*, a poem about the idealist and passionately romantic as well as visionary hero, also a poet, who turns his back upon the world completely disillusioned with it.

Yeats's romantic tendencies, his belief in imagination, and his belief in poetry and literature as the truest form of self-expression led him to regard himself as the most authentic voice of Irish renaissance or the Irish Literary Revival. His reading of the romantics and the Irish oral folklore had produced in him a strong belief in spiritual self as against the intellect, the former he identified with Ireland and the latter with Britain.

Yeats's first collection of verse *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889) announced the arrival of a truly original poet, of exceptional imagination that could transform Irish myths and legends into contemporary narratives. He adopted myths, ballads, and folktales, and used their diction and rhythm in his poems. Oisín, the warrior poet from Irish mythology, ultimately sees through the mystery of the three islands that tempt in him in the beginning, and he returns to Ireland, "in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast."

Yeats's primary interest in the 1890s lay in starting a cultural revolution in Ireland that could inspire and support the political revolution against Britain. In 1896, he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and began organizing conferences, delivering speeches and writing articles about the future of Ireland. In 1897, he met Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn, and formalized a manifesto of the Irish Literary Theatre, which was renamed as Irish National Theatre in 1901, and finally the National Theatre Society (also the Abbey Theatre) in 1904. Yeats not only wrote for this theatre, but also served as its managing director along with Gregory and Synge. He saw the theatre as a movement to foster culture nationalism, as the manifesto, *Our Irish Theatre*, says,

We propose to have performed in Dublin...certain Celtic and Irish plays...to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.

In the collection of poems published as *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), Yeats continued to explore the contraries and antithesis as the central trope of his poems, which would in fact remain so throughout his career. The quotidian and the ideal, dreams and reality, soul and intellect, mythology and contemporary Ireland return as subjects of his poems.

Yeats met Maud Gonne in 1889 and fell in love with her, but his love remained unrequited all his life. Maud Gonne was a fiery nationalist, who played an active role in the struggle for independence. She was also a fine actress, and played the role of the Cathleen, the old woman and the symbol of Ireland herself, in Yeats's postcolonial play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. But she chose John MacBride, the revolutionary who was executed for his role in the Easter uprising, over Yeats. In his poem *Easter 1916*, Yeats commemorated the death of MacBride and other revolutionaries in the Easter uprising, while also denouncing the use of violence for securing the independence of Ireland.

Yeats wrote some wonderful love lyrics to remember his love for Maud Gonne. For example, in "Adam's Curse," he says

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

With *In the Seven Woods* (1904), there are indications of a shift in Yeats's style, as he begins advancing towards a modernist poetics. But it is only after meeting Ezra Pound that a radical change in his poems; they come across as less ornamental, and become suggestive, sparse, and symbolist. Yeats had always been a symbolist. As early as 1900, in his essay, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," he writes:

It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings besides the one or two the writer lays emphasis upon, or the half-score he knows of, that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness and shallowness of a too conscious arrangement, into the abundance and depth of Nature.

However, it was his meeting with Ezra Pound that brought a change into Yeats's poetry from a romantic use of symbols to the very texture of the poems becoming elusive, concrete and suggestive. He stayed with Pound during winters from 1913-1916. They shared a cottage in Sussex, and Pound read and edited his poems. Through Pound's research, Yeats also came to know about the Japanese Noh drama, and learned from it the obscure and symbolist style that rejected naturalism. From now on, Yeats wrote poems that used concrete images, which were sparse and associative. He employed words and objects that resonated with suggestive meanings. He could do this by avoiding abstract words and traditional metaphors. The collection *Responsibilities* (1914) demonstrated these developments in his poetry. His subsequent volumes of verse *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), and *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921) further revealed the maturity of Yeats's style, suggestive a rich blending of passionate speech and symbolist energy.

Yeats was bestowed the Noble Prize for Literature in 1923. However, some of his best poems were yet to be written. For all his life, Yeats had been working on a system of thought, a metaphysical framework that was antithetical to the reason-dominated modern Western thought. He found no solace in Christianity, and hence ruminated Neo-Platonism, occultism, theosophy, kabalistic thought, Rosicrucian systems, mysticism, Indian philosophy etc, for an alternate system

that would symbols to his poetry. He also learnt spiritualism from Mohini Chatterjee, the Indian theosophist. With Madame Blavatsky, he experimented in occultism, particularly the telepathic connections with the immortal Tibetan saints. Yeats had already learnt a great deal from Indian philosophy. He had read the *Upanishads* as well as Patanjali's *Yoga-sutra-s* with his Indian guru, Purohit Swami. Yeats wrote 'Preface' to the former, and 'Introduction' to the latter, when his guru translated these works. It was his interest in the Indian philosophical traditions that had inspired him to receive Tagore's *Gitanjali* with great excitement in 1912-13.

Yeats passionate pursued the esoteric systems of thought as an answer to the modern, rationalist and mechanized intellectual frameworks. He articulated this philosophical system in his prose work *A Vision* (1925), which provided the themes, personalities, and symbols, and geometrical diagrams of the cycles of history, that he in his later poetry. *The Tower* (1928) contained some of his most famous poems: "Sailing to Byzantium," "Among School Children," "Leda and the Swan," and the title poem.

Having read about the life and works of W.B. Yeats, answer the following questions

Self-check Exercise I

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers after doing the exercise.

1) Who was W.B. Yeats's father and what did he do?

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2) How did living with his maternal grandparents and uncles influence Yeats as a person and as a poet?

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3) Who were the poets who influenced Yeats?

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4) What role did Yeats play in the Irish struggle for independence?

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5) What made Yeats a modernist poet?

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6) How was Yeats influenced by the Indian traditions?

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21.3 TO A SHADE (1913)

21.3.1 Introduction

The poem “To a Shade” appeared in the collection *Responsibilities* (1914). It commemorates Charles Stewart Parnell, a radical Protestant leader, inarguably the most influential Irish politician of the 19th century. He founded the Irish Parliamentary Party, and led various movements against British colonialism, inside and outside the parliament, most significant of which were the Home rule movement, and the land reform agitation. However, his adulterous affair with Katherine O’Shea, wife of Captain William O’Shea, which came to light when the husband sought divorce, shocked both England and the Catholic dominated Ireland. Most of the members of his party shunned him, which brought a sudden downfall of his illustrious political career in December 1890. He died on October 6, 1891, merely a little more than a three months of his marriage with Katherine. However, Parnell continued to be remembered as the greatest Irish leader of his era.

The poem rues the ingratitude of the Dubliners towards Parnell. For all his great sacrifice and service rendered to Ireland, he is a forgotten figure of the past. The Parnell monument, and the sea, as well as the sea gulls and the bleak Dublin houses might respond to a visit by the leader’s spirit, but for the people of Dublin, the leader, who once inspired generations of Irish people, is an obsolete figure, whom some of them brought to disgrace.

The poem also indicts Dubliner's lack of loyalty and respect for Hugh Lane, a painter, and an Irish nationalist of great esteem.

21.3.2 The Text

IF you have revisited the town, thin Shade,
Whether to look upon your monument
(I wonder if the builder has been paid)
Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent
To drink of that salt breath out of the sea
When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
And the gaunt houses put on majesty:
Let these content you and be gone again;
For they are at their old tricks yet.

A man
Of your own passionate serving kind who had brought
In his full hands what, had they only known,
Had given their children's children loftier thought,
Sweeter emotion, working in their veins
Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,
And insult heaped upon him for his pains,
And for his open-handedness, disgrace;
Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set
The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear,
The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come;
You had enough of sorrow before death—
Away, away! You are safer in the tomb.

Glossary

Shade : a ghost

Glasnevin : Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin, where Parnell is buried

Simile : a figure of speech that compares a thing with another thing unlike it, with an intention to make the description more clear as well as beautiful.

Read the poem and its analysis all over again, and answer the following questions.

21.3.3 Analysis

The poem is addressed to the ghost of Parnell in three stanzas of unequal length. The first stanza has 9 lines, the second 10, while the third contains 7 lines. This corresponds to the uneven progress of the thought of the poem, and the tonal undulation through it. The first stanza concerns Parnell, the second stanza remembers Hugh Lane, while the third moves back to Parnell.

The first stanza begins with a conditional clause, which determines the structure the rest of the stanza. The poet tells the ghost that if it has come back to Dublin merely to a look at his monument, or to enjoy the evening sea breeze, or to watch the sea gulls flutter, or the bleak Dublin houses looking beautiful, it should be satisfied. If not, or if it expects more, it should get back to its tomb, because the Dubliners are still the same crafty, mercantile, and distrustful people, busy at their intrigues.

In the second stanza, the poet alludes to Hugh Lane, the contemporary painter, who was devoted to the well being of Ireland, being close to the Irish nationalists. Like Parnell, he could have inspired generations of Irish children with great thoughts. If he was allowed to pursue his dreams for Ireland, he could have instilled sweet emotions in them through his art, but his efforts too were met with insults and injury by resentful characters such as William Martin Murphy.

In the third stanza, the poet advises the ghost to depart unnoticed covering his head with a bedspread, for the people of Dublin would only insult him, as they had before he died. The poet asks him to return to his tomb, a safer place for him to be in.

Written on 29 September 1913, “To a Shade” compares well with another poem written in the year titled “September 1913.” In both poems, Yeats attacks the self-serving nature of the Dublin middle class, mercantile and selfish, with no sensitivity to the sacrifices of the great leaders of the Irish nationalist movement. In September 1913, while disparaging the present Irish people, he exalts the memory of John O’Leary, a 19th century nationalist and member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who was arrested in Britain for his involvement in the anti-colonial activities:

Romantic Ireland is dead and gone
It’s with O’Leary in the grave

“To a Shade” begins in the manner of a talk, a style that Yeats had mastered; it gave him great possibilities to unravel the antithesis and contraries running through the speaker’s mind. In a 1913 letter to his father, he wrote:

I have tried to make my work convincing with a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling.

The opening line contains mild accents, and a caesura, which creates a rhythmic break in speech, to help the speaker express a feeling of dejection and suppressed anger. The parenthesis in the third line is a colloquial speech:

(I wonder if the builder has been paid)

It works as an aside, giving a sense of actual talk. The use of personal pronouns “you” and “I” reinforces the effect of the speaking in conversations with the spirit of Parnell, while being heard by the readers. The poet ironically mocks the false and pretentious respect shown to the memory of Parnell in the form of the monument constructed on O’Connell Street. Addressing Parnell’s spirit as “thin Shade,” the poet, however, suggests him that if it chose to visit Dublin again, it might be content still with the look of the monument, a symbol of the Dubliner’s

hypocrisy. With the help of concrete nature images such as the “salt breath out of the sea,” the grey gulls,” and “the gaunt houses,” the poet presents nature as an antithesis to the town. Parnell’s spirit might find solace in the natural sights, but it might be for utter dejection if it wants to visit the Dubliners, as they are back at the old habits of scheming against the Irish heroes.

Yeats associates the memory of Parnell with another major nationalist figure from the 19th century, Hugh Lane, who sought to contribute to Ireland through his art, as Parnell did through his political activism. The painter was Yeats’s hero, because for the poet the cultural revival of Ireland was critical for its independence from the colonial rule. Like Parnell, Lane would have engendered great thoughts and sweet emotions in the future generations of his country. Lane worked so that a gallery of contemporary art could be established in Dublin. He wanted to put for exhibition some of his impressionistic paintings, but his efforts were thwarted and he was not allowed permission to put them in the city gallery. Moreover, his wish to work as a curator of the National History Museum of Ireland was also opposed and defeated. The poet singles out William Martin Murphy, the owner of the newspaper, *The Irish Independent* as the sort of people who defamed a national hero like Lane, and the kind of people who brought disgrace to Parnell. Therefore, he appropriately snubs Murphy as

An old foul mouth that had slandered you had set
The pack upon him

Parnell is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin. The poet implores his spirit to return to his tomb. The poet imagines the spirit in the person of Parnell, and advises it to wear a Glasnevin bedspread around his head, because, if identified, the people would show no respect or hospitality to him. As the Dubliners do not yet have “gentle blood” flowing in their veins, which these two heroes could have made possible, it is not yet time for Parnell to even enjoy the taste of the sea breeze or visit his neglected monument.

The form of the poem sustains its theme. It is through alliteration such as “grey gulls,” and “salt breath out of the sea,” that the poet conveys concrete imageries. Assonance is also used to similar effects. For example in the following line, where the ‘o’ sound is repeated in musical pattern:

Whether to look upon your monument

The poet uses a simile to convey the great contribution of Irish heroes like Hugh Lane to the Irish society:

Sweeter emotion, working in their veins
Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,

The simile “like gentle blood” communicates how the cultural revival augmented by artists like Lane transformed the very character of Irish future generation by instilling true values in them.

The rhyme and rhythm of the poem is rather irregular. The first two stanzas follow a set rhyme scheme, but the third is completely uneven. An irregular rhythmic pattern is used to suggest the tone of the poem which is cynical, angry, and even bitter. It almost forces the reader to pause and think about the ingratitude of the Dubliners towards their national heroes.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Who are the figures addressed or referred to in the poem? How does the poet relate to them?

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2) Why Parnell and Lane are still ignored in Ireland? What has been Ireland’s loss because of their absence?

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3) Why does the poet urge the ghost of Parnell to return to its tomb with its head covered?

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4) Comment on the style of the poet? What poetic devices has the poet used to convey the meaning of the poem?

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21.4 NO SECOND TROY (1910)

21.4.1 Introduction

The poem “No Second Troy” was published in the collection *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910). The subject of the poem is the unrequited love of the poet for Maud Gonne, the beautiful and Irish nationalist firebrand, who he met in 1889, and instantly fell in love with. Though she was Yeats’s friend, and

collaborated with him as actor in the Irish plays the writer produced at the Abbey Theatre, and Yeats would often visit her and show her his poems, she never returned his love. However, Yeats remained fascinated by her beauty and personality all his life. After her husband Major John McBride's death in the 1916 Easter uprising, Yeats again proposed to Gonne, hoping that she might accept his love, but she again turned down his proposal. There upon, he proposed to her daughter, but was to be disappointed yet again.

In "No Second Troy," Yeats works admits his infatuation for Gonne, while successfully coming out of the provocation to blame her for causing him emotional misery by refusing his love. In order to express the extraordinary beauty of Gonne, Yeats invokes a comparison with Helen of Troy, the most beautiful and controversial woman of the classical world, who was the cause behind the Trojan War, as sung in Homer's *Iliad*.

However, the poet goes beyond his romantic attraction towards Gonne. In his elevation of the beauty of Gonne and his 'misery, even as he brings Helen in the context, the poet snubs the middle class Irish people, who lack the ability and resolution to understand her extraordinary character and personality, and rise to her expectations. The age itself does not deserve Maud Gonne, who is so much like the Helen of Troy.

21.4.2 The Text

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

21.4.3 Analysis

The poem is structured by four rhetorical questions. Grammatically, it is grouped into two sections of five lines each, followed by two lines. In the first five lines, using the first rhetorical question, the poet absolves Maud Gonne from blame of being the cause of his misery, as well as for exciting the unworthy men to chaotic violence. In the second group of five lines, posing the second rhetorical question, the poet ironically states that the middle class Irish people, had no moral strength to equal their 'desire' of a free Ireland, and wonders how a woman of such noble and tranquil mind as well as exceptional character and beauty as Maud Gonne could find peace in an age so mean. In the last two lines, containing the third and fourth rhetorical questions, the poet makes explicit her comparison with Helen of Troy, but regrets metaphorically that Ireland was no Troy to burn for Gonne, as Troy had done for Helen.

The poem comes across as Yeats's attempt to reconcile with the rejection by Maud Gonne by overcoming the consternation caused by his unrequited love to blame her. In the same imaginative sweep, however, he also sees an opportunity to resent finds the Sinn Fein men, the rabble that found the better of Maud Gonne as was their leader, and wife of John MacBride, the Irish nationalist was executed for his role in the Easter Uprising. Yeats no doubt disliked MacBride; even in the poem "Easter 1916" written on the Uprising, Yeats could not hide his jealousy and dislike for MacBride:

This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart
Yet I number him in the song

To Yeats, the coarse and plebian mob that Gonne led in different revolutionary activities, and who she chose over the love of Yeats hardly deserved a royal mind and classic beauty that she embodied:

, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?

The juxtaposition of the images "little street" and "the great" confirms Yeats's faith in the aristocratic lineage, and his enthusiasm for the traditional Irish society under the protection of the aristocratic lords. The agents of nationalism therefore for him should have been noble and valiant men of the upper class rather than the "ignorant men," who have no physical or moral "courage equal to desire."

The poet employs two similes to suggest the nobility of Gonne's mind and her extraordinary beauty:

What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,

It is the exalted nature of her mind, as pure "as fire," as well as her physical "beauty like a tightened bow" that that gives her superiority over the crowd, and makes her presence out of place "in an age like this." In the simile "beauty like a tightened bow," the word/object "bow" transforms into a symbol of sternness and grace, a mix of austerity and passionate action, restraint and violence.

In the final movement of the poem, Yeats wonders what would Maud Gonne do knowing what she is, as there was no another Troy to burn for her.

The poem is in the form of a sonnet, with an exception. It does not have the couplet that ends a sonnet. It has 12 lines, whereas a sonnet has 14 lines. Shakespeare's sonnet no. 126 only has 12 lines rather than 14. Unlike grammatically, the rhyme scheme structures the poem into three quatrains of 4 lines each: *abab, cdcd, efef*. The metre employed, as in a sonnet, is that of iambic

pentameter, in which five stressed syllables each follow an unstressed syllable. In other words, an iambic pentameter line would contain 10 syllables set in a pattern in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable:

What could have made her peace-ful with a mind

Now that you have read the poem and its analysis, answer the following questions.

Self- check Exercise III

1) Who was the Helen of Troy alluded to in the poem?

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2) What is the significance of the title “No Second Troy”?

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3) Why does the poet consider the people of his era and time not deserving Maud Gonne?

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21.5 THE SECOND COMING (1920)

21.5.1 Introduction

In Christianity, the phrase ‘the Second Coming,’ refers to the Second Coming of Christ, his return to the earth as prophesied in the gospels. It is believed that in ‘end of the world’ or apocalypse, withhis coming, the Messianic Age of peace and happiness will be established.

The poem is, however, based on a vision of the poet about the coming of an anti-Christ. This prophetic event suggests the advent of a civilization opposite to the present Christian civilization. The present civilization has lasted for 2000 years,

and is now coming to an end as signaled by widespread violence, bloodshed, and a period of great anarchy.

In “The Second Coming,” Yeats integrates mythology and history into an organic whole. He abstracts a mythological system out of history, as well as reads history in terms of myth. While Yeats borrowed widely from Greek and Irish mythology, he had long been working on his personal mythology, an imaginative system to comprehend history and civilization, as well as the modern reality dominated by violence and bloodshed during the World War I, and the Anglo-Irish war. His efforts materialized in a prose work called *A Vision*, which was published in 1925. However, in his numerous poems prior to his publication of *A Vision*, Yeats had already expressed many of his ideas and images. The poem “The Second Coming” is one such poem, which employs the concept of a cyclic creation and destruction of the world, as an alternative to Christian doctrines about creation and the dissolution of the world. As an expression of the Yeatsian apocalypse, it announces the coming of the anti-Christ, and in the process, subverts the Christian notion of revelation. In his earlier poems such as “Easter 1916,” Yeats had already expressed a revelatory vision antithetical to the Christian doctrines:

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

“The Second Coming” was written in 1919. It was first published in *The Dial*, an American magazine, in November 1920. In same year, it appeared in the collection of Yeats’s verse called *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*.

21.5.2 The Text

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Glossary

- Gyre** : a spiral or cone. In the Yeatsian system, the rotation of a gyre represents the movement of both history and the human mind.
- Spiritus Mundi** : a “spirit world,” or a storehouse of images and symbols that creative people share, according to Yeats.
- Bethlehem** : a Palestinian city, located near Jerusalem. According to the *New Testament*, it is the birthplace of Jesus Christ.
- Apocalypse** : a prophetic or visionary revelation about events of great devastation and violence, such as described in the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation in The Bible.

Having read the poem and its analysis, now answer the following questions.

21.5.3 Analysis

The poem is written in 21 stanzas, divided into two stanzas. The first stanza contains 8 lines; while the second has 14 lines. It is unconventional in structure. However, its structure compliments the development of its theme. The two stanzas divide the poem into two parts: the first part being an intense reflection on the violence and disorder of the society is shorter, and give way to the fuller projection of the nightmarish vision in the second part, which is as long as sonnet. The first stanza presents interconnected images of a fragmented world living in the midst of confusion, anarchy, and violence. Through the image of the falcon flying free out of the control of the falconer, who may be taken as a symbol of a unifying being, the God, poet presents an impression of a murderous world let loose without control. The spiral movement of the gyre upon reaching its end at its widest expanse is occasioned by mindless violence. It acts as a symbol for ‘the end of world’ phase of human history characterized by anarchy and bloodshed. The innocence of the world is overtaken by violence. The people with quality and ability who could bring some order to the society are apathetic, while the worst are driven by frenzy, escalating social disorder and violence.

The second stanza separates from the first stanza by the images abruptly forming in the mind of speaker-poet as he reflects upon the panorama of violence and chaos. The massive scale of destruction makes him predict and utter that certainly the return of the Christ, his “Second Coming” is imminent. It here that the speaker has an extremely disturbing vision of grotesque figure, “the rough beast” emerging out of “Spiritus Mundi,” the creative unconscious shared by the poets and visionaries. This repulsive figure, the anti-Christ, with a lion body and a human head, is spotted in a desert scene. Its eyes are remorseless and blank, as indifferent as that of the sun, unlike the benevolent eyes of the Christ. It is a stark and nightmarish vision. As this figure moves its beastly things, the desert birds of prey hover about it, even as darkness descends on him. The poet infers that this horrendous figure, the signaler of the new history, had been lying dormant as if in “a stony sleep” for the last “twenty centuries” when the Christian civilization lasted. As this civilization ends with enormous violence and chaotic scenes all around, it’s time for this creature to come out of its “rocking cradle,” and walk towards Bethlehem, where Christ was born, to be born and inaugurate the new civilization.

The meaning, images, and symbols of the poem are based on the geometrical figures that lie in the background. The first line refers to the expanding gyre:

Turning and turning the widening gyre

Yeats imagines a pair of antithetical gyres, locked into each other, as constituting opposite progress of human history. One of the gyres or cones is widening, while the other is tapering. He associates the widening gyre with the elevating flight of the falcon:

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Yeats had used the flight of the bird as an image of the widening gyre of history in his earlier poems as well, such as “The Wild Swans at Coole”:

I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

The widening gyre represents the historical progress of 2000 years that had begins with the birth of the Christ. It is at this point, that the world order is all well, as the ‘falcon’ is well within the control of the falconer, stationed at the pointed base of this gyre. But as this gyre moves ahead and up, widening further and higher, the ‘falcon’ soars higher and higher and loses the control of the ‘falconer’. What this image symbolizes is breakdown of the social order, the destruction of all institutions and moral values that the Christian civilization stood for:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

As the widening gyre widens the contracting gyres narrows up, the widened end of the first gyre is met with the narrowest point of the second gyre, antithetical to the first. The second gyre, also in progress antithetically to the first, is therefore spoken by the poet lying in “twenty centuries of stony sleep.” It is at this point that the second gyre or cycle of history will begin its widening movement producing values antithetical to the Christian civilization. The Western civilization at the contemporary moment, at the widest opening of its historical gyre is the worst where,

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

These lines and the sentiments they convey bring to our mind the poem “No Second Troy” that we have already analyzed:

or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?

The tone of the lines in this stanza is somber as well as cynical. Though tirelessly working for the Irish independence, Yeats detested the violence perpetuated by the radical nationalist groups. By the “best” who “lacked conviction” the poet obviously means the middle class Irish people, who had turned away from the nobility of character represented by the aristocracy, and busying themselves in mercantile activities, had turned a blind eye to the chaos and disorder in Ireland. By the “worst” that are “full of passionate intensity” he refers to the mob driven by frenzy and irrational passion that turned themselves against the true heroes of Irish nationalism like Charles Stewart Parnell, J.M.Synge, and Yeats himself. These lines also present a picture of the World War Europe, of massive violence, bloodshed, and loss of hope in humanity.

The tone of the lines is somber as well. “The blood-dimmed tide” is an intense image symbolizing horrific violence as well as opacity of scene that submerges and overwhelms all innocence of human kind.

In Yeats’s philosophy, these figures do not simply represent movements of history. They also symbolize the subjective and objective forces within the individual. The widening gyre stands for the objective or ‘primary’ force or attribute of an individual as well as civilization. The new world order, which is imminent, would represent the subjective or the ‘antithetical’ force governing the individual or the civilization. The widening spiral of history, as also the individual existing in this history, is scientific, rational, democratic, and mechanical, while values antithetical to these will be associated with the second pattern of history and the individual living in it. Yeats says in his *A Vision*:

After an age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science,
democracy, abstraction, peace, comes an age of freedom, fiction, evil,
kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war.

The second stanza sets off an escalation in the tone, as well as takes the theme to a visionary level. It takes the readers to a desert scene to stage the “Second Coming,” not of Christ but of the anti-Christ. This figure symbolizes paganism, destruction, irrationality, passion, evil- in short values that would destroy modernity, or the modern civilization ruined by excessive use of reason and rationality. The term “*Spiritus Mundi*” is a technical coinage in Yeats’s esoteric philosophy. It refers to the “world spirit.” In a description found in “An Image from a Past Life,” Yeats calls the “*Spiritus Mundi*” “a general storehouse of images which has ceased to be a property of any personality or spirit.” In the poem, it refers to the inner eye or the creative unconscious out of which evolves the desert scene in which appears that

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs...

The poet presents a nightmarish spectacle as the horrific man-beast walks its animal thighs slowly towards Bethlehem to herald the onset of the new history and civilization. As it walks above it sway “the indignant desert birds.” This image connects these lines with the first stanza. The solitary falconer, who is noble and gracious, has been replaced by a group of desert birds of prey.

In the final lines, the poem mixes the dark and nightmarish vision of the beast with the Christian myth of the Second Coming of the Christ. As if like Christ, the grotesque beast “its hour come round at last” moves towards Bethlehem to be born. But whereas Christ’s Second Coming is associated with the beginning of the Messianic Age of happiness and peace, the rough beast signals the continuation of violent history and civilization.

The poem has been composed in blank verse. The metre is not regular throughout the poem; however, generally, the poem in iambic pentameter.

Self-check Exercise IV

1) What is the significance of the title “The Second Coming”?

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2) What makes the poet predict the Apocalypse?

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3) Discuss a few images that the poet has used to indicate the world associated with the coming of the anti-Christ.

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4) Discuss a metaphor from the poem to suggest Yeats as a modernist.

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21.6 LET US SUM UP

Yeats's life and works represent valuable interfaces between poetry and politics, poetry and mythology, tradition and modernity, life and literature, history, literature and nationhood, as well some specific concerns of the poet living in Ireland at a very crucial juncture of history, especially his cultural politics. We hope that you will read more poems by the poet from anthologies and his collections of verse some of which have been mentioned in this unit.

21.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise 1

- 1) W.B. Yeats's father was John Butler Yeats. He was a painter of meager success in Dublin and London.
- 2) Living with his maternal grandparents and uncles in County Sligo on the West coast of Ireland, Yeats's personal as well as poetic personality was shaped by his perceptions of the Irish landscape, and the rural life animated by folklore. His early attachment with the Irish country side, and his reception of the folktales in the Irish cottages influenced the formation of his postcolonial sensibility.
- 3) In early part of his career, Yeats was influenced by the British romantic poets, especially William Blake, and P.B. Shelley. He later became associated with Ezra Pound as his poetry turned modernist in style.
- 4) Yeats strongly believed in the strengths of cultural nationalism as an anti-colonial movement. He was instrument in the establishment of Irish Literary Theatre (1897) with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn, which later became the Abbey Theatre. It staged plays on nationalistic themes. He also organized public meetings, gave lectures, and wrote pamphlets against the colonial government.
- 5) By 1912, Yeats's poetry had entered the modernist phase, and it coincided with his meeting with Ezra Pound in 1913. His poems became suggestive, and complex with esoteric symbols and concrete imageries. His diction became precise, simple, clear and sparse. In short, his poetry became elusive and indirect.
- 6) Yeats was drawn towards the Indian philosophy and poetry. He had studied Patanjali's *Yogasutra-s*, and the *Upanishads* with the help of his mentor Purohit Swami. He also greatly admired *The Geetanjali* of Rabindranath Tagore. In the Indian philosophy, he found an alternative to the mechanized, commercialized, and rationalist Western civilization.

Self-check Exercise 2

- 1) The poem is addressed to the ghost of Charles Stewart Parnell, the most prominent Irish politician of the later 19th century. Another Irish hero referred to in the second stanza is Hugh Lane, a painter, and a nationalist, who made efforts to establish Dublin's Municipal Gallery of Modern Art. Both these personalities earned great respect for Yeats for their contribution to Irish nationalism.

- 2) It is the selfishness of the middle class Dubliners and their ingratitude that is responsible for the neglect of the memory of these two illustrious Irish heroes. In their lifetime, they become the target of the scheming and intriguing people around them. Parnell met his downfall in the aftermath of the exposure of his affair with a married woman, who had not yet taken divorce. Hugh Lane, on the other hand, who could have inspired generations of Irish children by his art work, fell due to intrigues of certain individuals like William Martin Murphy. If Parnell had continued as a leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, he could have served Ireland far longer.
- 3) The poet advises the ghost of Parnell to cover his head while returning to its tomb, to save itself from the embarrassment caused by the lack of regard and respect from the people, even when they recognize him.
- 4) The poem is rendered in a colloquial style. It is characteristic of the Yeatsian talk, a mode Yeats mastered, whereby he would present the speaker in conversation with a persona. Naturally, therefore, the diction is simple and clear. He uses poetic devices such as personification, simile, and alliteration. The phrase “salt breath out of the sea” is an instance of personification. He uses alliteration when he, for example, sets up a repeated pattern of ‘g’ and ‘s.’ His use of simile in the phrase ““like gentle blood” intensifies the poet’s feeling for Hugh Lane.

Self-check Exercise 3

- 1) Helen of Troy was daughter of the Greek god Zeus, and Leda, wife of Tyndareus, the king of Sparta. The seduction of Leda by Zeus in the form of a swan is the subject of Yeats’s poem “Leda and Swan.” Helen was abducted by Paris, the Prince of Troy, which resulted in the Trojan War fought between the Greek states and Troy.
- 2) The title gives a unity to the thought of the poem. The poem is a comment on the fallen values of the time. Even as Ireland desperately needs a cultural and political revolution against the colonial occupation of Britain, the middle class is too engrossed in its mechanical routine and mercantile ambitions to worry about the country. Comparing Maud Gonne with Helen, Yeats says though she is equally beautiful and noble, Ireland is not the place she deserved, as it would not be truly inspired as Troy was by Helen. There would be ‘no second Troy.’
- 3) The poet reprimands the Irish people of his age to be a violent mob, lacking the nobility of mind that Gonne possesses; they lack courage and conviction, and are driven by desires. Therefore, the poet says, Maud Gonne is born with a physical beauty and mental nobility “not natural in this age.”

Self-check Exercise 4

- 1) The title suggests the theme of the poem, the “Second Coming” of the not Christ to announce the beginning of a Messianic Age, but of an anti-Christ, the rough beast, to herald a new world of violence, primitiveness and irrationalism.
- 2) The all-round violence and anarchy, the wiping out of innocence by bloodshed, the unrestrained fury of the mob, whereas the silence of the people holding positions, have given the poet enough evidence that the end of the world is soon.

- 3) In the Christian context, the image of the rough beast, human head with the body of a lion, is a grotesque image. This harbinger of the new age walks slowly towards Bethlehem, while the desert birds of prey hover over his head. These images are used as symbols to suggest the grotesqueness and the violence associated with the new world that is about to begin.
- 4) For example, Yeats's use of the 'falconer' is full of concrete suggestion. Unlike the traditional metaphor, its meaning is not limited merely to a controlling agent, say God. By mixing the image of flying falcon with the spiraling gyre, Yeats could make the metaphor more concrete as well as compressed with associative meanings. the flight of the falcon, symbolize the anarchy of the world, its breaking apart, its loss of spiritual core, while at the same time announcing the end of the world.

UNIT 22 T.S. ELIOT

Structure

- 22.1 Objectives
- 22.2 Introduction
- 22.3 Thomas Stearns Eliot
 - 22.3.1 Life and Work
 - 22.3.2 T.S. Eliot's Poetry
- 22.4 The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock
 - 22.4.1 Introduction
 - 22.4.2 The Text
 - 22.4.3 Analysis
 - 22.4.4 Style in the Poem
- 22.5 Gerontion
 - 22.5.1 Introduction
 - 22.5.2 The Text
 - 22.5.3 Analysis
 - 22.5.4 Style and Theme
- 22.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

22.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- write about T.S. Eliot's life and work
- understand T.S. Eliot's poetry with special reference to two of his poems:
 - a) The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and
 - b) Gerontion.

22.2 INTRODUCTION

T.S. Eliot is one of the most important poets of 20th century. Born on 25th September 1888 in the United States, he died in London on 4th January 1965. His journey between the United States and England was not only a physical movement but also represents his journey of ideas in many ways. His studies at Harvard University can be divided in two phases. In the first phase between 1906 and 1910, he studied languages and literatures of continental Europe along with English literature. This introduced T.S. Eliot to classics of European literature and also to the various literary trends and movements of 19th century French and German literature. The experiments and literary evolution produced by these trends and movements influenced the literary creativity of T.S. Eliot. He was greatly influenced by many French symbolists who evolved a 'new language for

poetry'. To some extent, it can be said that under this influence T.S. Eliot's poetry became a poetry of suggestions using evocative and alluding images and symbols.

In the second phase at Harvard (1911 to 1913), he studied philosophy and also did courses of Sanskrit studies. This further increased the canvas of his poetic suggestions and imagery for creating a poetry with various layers of meaning. In this unit we will try to understand the poetry of T.S. Eliot (with the help of two selected poems) while studying his poetic style and processes of creation of meaning. For a better understanding of his poetry, we will first go for a general overview of T.S. Eliot's life and works. Then we will study one of his early poems entitled 'Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. After this we will study 'Gerontion' which was written a few years after the 'Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. We hope we will be able to understand & discover the poetic genius of T.S. Eliot in the next few pages.

22.3 THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT

He was a great poet of the English language. We will first study about his life and work.

22.3.1 Life and Work

As mentioned earlier T.S. Eliot was an American citizen by birth who died as an English citizen. He was a brilliant student in school and won a gold medal for Latin. He studied at a boarding school in St. Louis and then at Harvard till 1910. During his studies at Harvard he was influenced by lectures of Irving Babbit and George Santayana. He also studied Arthur Symon's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. This introduced him to the new poetic sensibilities of 19th century Europe. With all these ideas in mind he travelled to Paris and studied for some time at Sorbonne University, Paris in 1910-11. He studied many French poets in France and was so influenced by the French poetic movements that he often wrote French in his poems. Two of his famous poems written in French are – (i) "Lune de Miel" and (ii) "Dans le Restaurant". In his poetic ideas and imagery T.S. Eliot draws heavily from the two famous French poets Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue. In these two French poems of T.S. Eliot the influences of the new language and poetic imagery can be clearly seen.

T.S. Eliot returned to Harvard in 1911 and pursued courses on philosophy. While studying philosophy, he was introduced to the Upanishads of India. This influence can be clearly seen in "the Waste Land" where he uses the 'datta, dayadhvam, damyata' concept borrowed from the *Brhadaranyak Upanisad*. Thus T.S. Eliot had a large canvas on which he drew from original sources in German, French, Italian, Latin, English, Sanskrit and from Greek Classics.

Towards the beginning of the first World War in 1914, T.S. Eliot settled down in London and further studied philosophy in Oxford. By this time he received the intellectual company and patronage of Ezra Pound who recognised his talents and helped him establish as a poet and critic. The poems written before 1912 were already published and Eliot was entering into a different phase of creativity. His earlier poems were published in 1917 in a collection entitled *Prufrock and other Observations*. "The Waste Land" was published in 1922 in the magazine

The Criterion which was being edited by T.S. Eliot himself. In 1925 the Collected Poems of T.S. Eliot was published. He continued editing *The Criterion* till 1939 which closed down due to the beginning of second World War. During his stay in England he was drawn to the Anglican church and wrote a lot drawing ideas from Christianity. His poems like “Journey of the Magi” “Ash Wednesday” etc. fall in this category. In 1939 he published *Idea of a Christian Society* which was an essay in prose depicting many of the ideas represented in his poems and plays. He received the Noble Prize for literature in 1948.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Which European literary movements influenced T.S. Eliot the most?

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2) Works written in which languages are sources from where T.S. Eliot draws ideas and inspiration? Which are the works source of T.S. Eliot’s ideas and inspiration and in which languages are they written?

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3) Which poem of T.S.Eliot is influenced by a story in *Brhadaranyak Upanisad*?

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4) Which magazine/journal was edited by T.S.Eliot and why did he stop that magazine/journal?

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5) Who helped T.S.Eliot in getting established as an important poet?
6) Which book of T.S.Eliot was published in 1939 which reflected the ideas most depicted in his poetry.

22.3.2 T.S. Eliot’s Poetry

Though T.S. Eliot’s poetry evolved over the years, we find some striking features in his poetic style. We always find an epigraph in the beginning of the poems. These epigraphs can be interpreted variously according to the theme and nature of the poem. Mostly these epigraphs provide a context for the poem which helps us understand the poetic idiom and context of the poem. For example, the epigraph of “The Hollow Men” is “Mistah Kurtz he dead/penny for the Old guy”.In this epigraph there are many historical and literary references along with the poetic idiom Eliot wants to create. Mistah Kurtz is a character of “Heart of Darkness” by Joseph Conrad, and the first line of the epigraph refers to that character. In the second line of the epigraph, Eliot (i) refers to a historical event and also to a (ii) popular tradition in England. This is a line often cried out loudly by children on Guy Fawkes Day which falls on November 5. ‘Old guy’ refers to Fawkes who had conspired to blow up both houses of English Parliament in 1605. This event was known as ‘gunpowder’ plot which had failed. So the second line of the epigraph refers the historical event of 1605 and at the same time uses a popular expression from Guy Fawkes Day celebrations.

Another important feature of Eliot’s poetry is the dramatic nature and portrayal of characters in his poetry. We often find Eliot choosing a character like Prufrock, Sweeney, Gerontion and portraying the character with such idiom and diction that he unravels what lies behind the action and beneath the appearance. Eliot enters into the minds and feelings thus creating various layers of meaning in his poems. For this he alludes to many historical and cultural events and characters. Intertextual allusions are often used to achieve a historical sense and for entering into the realm of feelings. For example, in “Love song of J.Alfred Prufrock”, Eliot makes references to Dante, the Bible and Shakespeare among many others. Similarly, you can see “The Waste Land” making allusions and intertextual references to several sources across cultures.

Just like the Symbolist poets of 19th century Europe, T.S. Eliot uses elements of language and nature as symbols and creates special effects often by juxtaposing the grotesque and the normal.

For example look at these lines from “The Hollow Men”:

“The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley.
This broken jaw of our lost kingdom.”

In the first two lines we find a babbling and repetition of sounds as the lines begin with the similar sounds of ‘The eyes’ and ‘These are’ and then both the lines convey almost similar ideas in such a way as if someone is babbling. This imitation of sound is a feature of symbolists which we find in T.S. Eliot’s poetry.

Then the image of grotesque is created in expression “The broken Jaw” and juxtaposed along with normal poetic expression.

These were some features of T.S. Eliot’s poetry in general. There are some exclusive features of his writing style also. For example, he writes using words and expressions from various languages and literatures and uses them as if they all naturally belong to the English language.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Fill in the blanks:
 - i) In the beginning of T.S.Eliot’s poems there is always antaken from some historical or literary sources.
 - ii) Dramatic nature and character portrayal are two important features of T.S.Eliot’s
 - iii) T.S. Eliot alludes to many..... in order to achieve a historical sense and for entering into the realm of feelings.
 - iv) T.S. Eliot usesas symbols and creates special effects often by juxtaposing the grotesque and the normal.
 - v) Babbling and repetition of sounds are important features of T.S. Eliot’s poetry which shows the influence of

22.4 THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

This is a poem written by T.S. Eliot early in his life.

22.4.1 Introduction

This is a poem of about 132 lines and an epigraph of 6 lines taken from the “Inferno” section of Divine Comedy written by the great Italian poet Dante. This is also referred only as “Prufrock” and is one of the earliest poems of T.S. Eliot by which his poetic talent was widely recognised. It was first published in 1915 and is often described as a “drama of literary anguish”. The poem was most probably written in 1910 and 1911.

22.4.2 The Text

The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats 5
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question.... 10
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, 15
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys, 20
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window panes; 25
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate; 30
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go 35
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
 Time to turn back and descend the stair, 40
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!") 45

Do I dare
 Disturb the universe?
 In a minute there is time
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.
 For I have known them all already, known them all:
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, 50
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall
 Beneath the music from a farther room.
 So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all— 55
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
 And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
 When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
 Then how should I begin
 To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? 60
 And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
 Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
 (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
 Is it perfume from a dress 65
 That makes me so digress?
 Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
 And should I then presume?
 And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets 70
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! 75
 Smoothed by long fingers,
 Asleep ... tiredor it malingers,
 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? 80

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a
platter,
I am no prophet – and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, 85
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while, 90
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"-
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while, 100
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor-
And this, and so much more? -
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen: 105
Would it have been worth while

If one, setting a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use, 115
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old.... I grow old..... 120
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

125

T.S. Eliot

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

130

22.4.3 Analysis

The title of the poem has two parts “The love song of” and “Prufrock”. The first part “The love Song of “has apparently come from Rudyard Kipling’s poem entitled “The Love Song of Hardyal”.

“Prufrock” comes from the name of company of furniture “Prufrock-Litton company” which existed in the area where Eliot lived during early years of his life. “J” and “Alfred” in the title are inventions of the poet. With these inputs the full name “J. Alfred Prufrock” appears to be an attempt to mimick his own name which he spelt in his initial years as T. Stearns Eliot. If we understand the title in this way then to some extent the poem would appear a biographical poem in which T.S. Eliot expresses his own feelings about the “love” or more specifically about the “lack of love” in his own life during the years when he was composing this poem. The use of the words “Love song” in the title is appropriate as a refrain, which has rhymes and particular rhythm. There is a refrain in the poem:

“In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo”

Also just like “Love song”, this is a narrative poem in the form of a dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue is a discourse in which the narrator or the speaker intentionally or unintentionally reveals personal information and feelings. As we have seen earlier, this is a typical feature of T.S. Eliot’s poems.

The epigraph of the poem, originally written by Dante in Italian, can be translated as follows: “If I thought that my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy”. (translation taken from SOUTHAM, B.C., 1965, Fourth Edn. 1981, A students’ guide to the selected Poems of T.S. Eliot, Faber & Falws. London-Bost)

In these lines there is pessimism that the narrator will not be able to come out of his present state and in fact is able to speak only because he feels that he can confide in the listener with no fear of being shamed. And then the poet speaks in the style of a dramatic monologue. The mood of pessimism follows in the ensuing lines of the poem. The first two lines create a lovely atmosphere but the third line destroys it with the grotesque imagery of a “patient etherized upon a table”.

Then the poet goes through the town passing by shabby and unkempt streets and hotels. The streets are as lonely as the evening was lifeless. And this is a long drawn situation which continues like an unending argument presented with

unhealthy intentions. In this hopeless situation, the poet does not even question anything. He simply tries to move ahead. But all that he could see further is the aimless movement of women who talk of someone far away in history though very important with his contributions in painting and architecture. This is the refrain in the poem. This refrain refers directly to the lines by Jules Laforgue whose related French lines can be roughly translated as:

“In the room the women go and come
While talking of the masters of Sienne”
[The original French lines are:
“Dans la piece les femmes vont et viennent
En parlant des maitres de Sienne”]

Sienna is a place in Italy known for its contribution to art and architecture. It is worth noting here that Michelangelo was also an Italian painter and artist. In the lines from 15 to 22 we again find “yellow fog” and “yellow smoke” created as an image to express the hopelessness in the life around him which is stifled in the din and bustle of an industrialised city. It is worth recalling here that T.S. Eliot spent his childhood in an industrial suburban town of St. Louis. This imagery of ‘yellow fog’ and ‘yellow smoke’ behaving like a timid cat finally sleeping outside the house is very much like the symbolists of French literature and further enhances the pessimistic feelings in the poem. In the next stanza (lines from 22 to 34), Prufrock assures himself that there will be time to sit and talk with his beloved but the possibility of this meeting is further postponed as the hope for this time is in future. This is expressed by the use of ‘will’ in the verses. Also the time is for “indecisions”, “visions” and revisions which all delay the meeting. And when there is time, it will be for “murder and create”. So there is simultaneously pessimism and hope.

In these lines there appear to be two allusions also, ‘There will be time’ alludes to the poem “To his Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvell (a poet of 17th century) but the situation is completely different. While in Andrew Marvell’s poem the speaker asks his beloved not to be shy, Eliot’s Prufrock delays the meeting with combination of hope and despair.

The other allusion is “works and days” (line 29) which is a poem of Hesiod, a Greek poet of 7th century B.C. Hesiod uses these words in order to emphasise hard work, righteous living and being guarded against moral decay. Eliot also appears to use them with the same purpose but in a gloomy mood with pessimistic feelings.

The refrain comes again and this repetition is suggestive of the dullness and repetitive nature of events in life.

Then again in the next stanza Prufrock becomes unsure of himself as contrasted to the faith in future of the previous stanza. Prufrock is not sure if he may dare to approach a woman and if at all he dares to do so, he is unsure and afraid of the consequences.

In the ensuing three stanzas Prufrock again emphasizes on the dull and boring situation. He says that he knows all of them; they are the same people with the same decor and demeanour. And in this boring and dull situation, should he take any initiatives? Even the time which appears to be passing in terms of evenings,

mornings and afternoons is all measured as one unit in the coffee spoons (which are very small in size). Here T.S. Eliot appears to allude to the philosophy of French thinker Henry Bergson (1859-1941) who proposes that though time is calculated in series of measurable units, actually our consciousness perceives them in a continuum without any succession of measurable duration. Thus past and present are equally real and the entire life of Prufrock is one continuum not consisted of disjoint time units. His past, present and future are real before him.

Another allusion in line 52 is “dying fall” which refers to Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

Shakespeare writes:

“If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surferting,
The appetite may sicken and so die.
That strain again! It had a **dying fall**.
O, it came over my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour!

T.S. Eliot alludes to the above in the following two lines:

“I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.”

The gloomy mood in Shakespeare’s line, “The appetite may sicken, and so die” reverberates in the above two lines of T.S. Eliot.

In the line 70 to 73, there is a description of people who resemble Prufrock in terms of dullness and boredom in life. This is further depicted in lines 74 & 75 as he feels like a “pair of ragged claws” sunken in the sea.

In the lines from 75 to 80, the time passes peacefully and then Prufrock becomes unsure of himself again as he questions “Should I Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis”.

In lines 80 to 85, there is an allusion to John the Baptist by “head brought in upon a platter”. Prufrock imagines that he has lived to a mature age and grown bald and his life remains dull. Then he is dead and that is again of no consequence because he is not a prophet like John the Baptist.

The use of the word “Footman” alludes to death as “Footman” is supposed to be a servant who helps us in the afterlife.

T.S. Eliot continues in the same style depicting the gloominess and dullness in the life of Prufrock whose love song will never be sung as there will hardly be any love in his life. The title of the poem is very satirical in this way and T.S. Eliot continues to describe the life of Prufrock in a style which is characteristically typical to his poetry. We also may draw our attention to the music and babbling in “And how should I presume “(line 61) and “And should I then presume? And how should I begin?” (line 68 & 69). It appears as if the narrator of the dramatic monologue is muttering and babbling to himself. We notice, thus, that in the very first significant poem of his career T.S. Eliot exhibits the stylistic maturity and depth of content which continue to be prominent features of his later poems.

In the stanza lines 87 to 98, the poet questions whether it would be worth interacting with the women of his choice. In the process he again alludes to Marvell's poem "To his coy Mistress" in the line 92 – "To have squeezed the universe into a ball". The second allusion is in line 94. The poet mentions Lazarus who according to the story of the Bible, had come back from the dead. There are two Biblical references alluded here. First, from the Gospel of John chapter 11- according to this Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus. The other Biblical reference is from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 16. According to this, Lazarus, a leprous beggar, went to the heaven after his death whereas Dives, a rich man, was taken to hell. Dives requested that Lazarus be sent to the earth to tell his brothers about the horror of hell and the consequences of their deeds. The request of Dives was denied. Eliot alludes to the Biblical story and conveys his uncertainties in the situation.

The next stanza (line 99 to 110) conveys the same uncertainties while describing the settings around and the movements of women. Then farther in the next stanza, the poet alludes to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to convey Prufrock's coyness and uncertainties and indecisiveness. Prufrock is afraid of being considered a 'Fool' – here 'F' is in capital as the poet means a 'court jester' by this word. Prufrock is compared to the character in *Hamlet* named Polonius who speaks high language. Prufrock, by using similar language, may be considered a joker like the 'Fool' of the English royal court.

In the lines 120 to 132, the poet expresses the realization of the character Prufrock that he is growing old and accordingly there will be changes in his life. There is an allusion to Homer's *Odyssey* in which Odysseus heard the songs of Sirens who are not singing to him. By this allusion again Eliot refers to Prufrock's situation in which he hears the women and pays attention to them but the women are not talking to him. Towards the end, the poet refers to the satire in the title. The 'Love Song' is being sung but not for Prufrock. This meaning is conveyed by alluding to the Sirens (the mythical women who sing to the sailors in the Greek mythology) who are singing but not for Prufrock.

22.4.4 Style in the Poem

Throughout the poem Eliot uses the conversational language with variation in the length of verses and a lot of repetitions. There are continuous shifts in the train of thoughts, with the help of allusions and varied expressions of feelings. The metaphors used are often novel and show the influence of symbolists.

Glossary

- i) Etherized (in line 3): The old way of putting a patient on anesthesia was called 'etherization'. 'Etherized' means a person who has been made unconscious by this method.
- ii) Tedious (argument) (in line 9): 'Tedious' is used for something which is not interesting and continues for long.
- iii) Insidious (intent) (in line 10): It is an adjective which means something which spreads gradually and causes great harm.
- iv) Sprinkled streets (in line 101): refers to a practice of sprinkling the streets so that the dust of the streets remains settled down.

- v) Sea girls (in line 130): refers to Sirens who, according to the Greek mythology, are women living on mysterious islands singing to lure the sailors.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Identify the important stylistic features of T.S.Eliot’s poetry by giving examples from “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”.

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- 2) Identify 5 references from the poem studied above taken from various sources in history and literature.

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- 3) In which year was published the poem above? Do you think it is important information for understanding the poem above.

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- 4) Identify one example of grotesque in the poem.

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- 5) What is the main theme of the poem studied above.

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22.5 GERONTION

It is an important poem of T.S. Eliot representing his feelings and the contemporary disgust over World War I.

22.5.1 Introduction

Gerontion is a poem by T.S. Eliot written with the background of the first World War. This poem was first published in 1920. This is a dramatic monologue of an elderly man through which Eliot views the first World War in the perspective of the 19th century and other developments before World War-I in 20th century. The Title 'Gerontion' comes from a Greek word which means 'a little old man'. Like Prufrock in the poem discussed earlier, Gerontion is a character. Through this character, the poet reveals the psychological dilemma of being unable to make efforts towards change for betterment. The last line of the poem aptly sums up this dilemma of the apparent futility of our existence and struggle for existence. This feeling represents the hopelessness of the World War years and their aftermath.

22.5.2 The Text

Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.

HERE I am, an old man in a day month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass, 5
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house,
And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London. 10
The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.

I an old man, 15
A dull head among windy spaces.
Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign":
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvenescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger 20

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges

Who walked all night in the next room; 25
 By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
 By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
 Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
 Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. Vacant shuttles
 Weave the wind. I have no ghosts, 30
 An old man in a draughty house
 Under a windy knob.
 After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
 History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
 And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions, 35
 Guides us by vanities, Think now
 She gives when our attention is distracted
 And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
 That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
 What's not believed in, or if still believed, 40
 In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
 Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
 Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
 Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
 Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues 45
 Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
 These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.
 The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
 We have not reached conclusion, when I
 Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last 50
 I have not made this show purposelessly
 And it is not by any concitation
 Of the backward devils
 I would meet you upon this honestly.
 I that was near your heart was removed therefrom 55
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?
 I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
 How should I use it for your closer contact? 60
 These with a thousand small deliberations
 Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
 Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
 With pungent sauces, multiply variety
 In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do, 65
 Suspend its operations, will the weevil
 Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mr. Cammel, whirled
 Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
 In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
 Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn, 70
 White feathers in the snow, The Gulf claims,
 And an old man driven by the Trades
 To a sleepy corner.
 Tenants of the house,
 Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season. 75

22.5.3 Analysis

Typical to T.S. Eliot's style the poem begins with an epigraph taken from Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure*, Act III, Scene I:

“Thou hast no youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both”.

The Duke speaks these lines to **Claudio** who is a young man sentenced to death. The Duke advises **Claudio** not to value life highly because life is only conflict, insecurity and cowardice. Eliot uses these lines to describe the feelings of disgust due to the World War. Gerontion exists in a civilisation which is bereft of all human values and is constituted only by conflict and valueless rationalism. The world around Gerontion has no sense of community and is spiritually dry. And death is only a sleep after dinner which will rejuvenate us.

The first two lines of the poem depict the stage of Gerontion. These lines are supposed to have been taken from A.C. Benson's biography of Edward **Fitzgerald**. The third line refers to 'hot gates' which is a literal translation of the name of a place in ancient Greece-Thermopylae. This place was a strategically important place in ancient Greece which was the scene of many battles. This is a reference to the World War again and till line six, the warlike situation has been described.

The disgust over the contemporary situation in Europe continues in the following lines as the poet talks of the "decayed house" and talks of the important towns of Belgium and England. Brussels and Antwerp are two important towns which had trade relation with London. '**Estaminet**' is a French word for café –used in English by soldiers who came back from France and Belgium during the first World War.

The poet describes the life during the War years and expresses his disgust again through words like '**peevish gutter**' (lines 11 to 15). 'Gutter' is a splattering fire-this imagery evokes the situation of war.

In the lines 17 -20 there is a reference to the Bible. In **Matthew XII, 38, Phariss**es cry to Jesus Christ, "Master, we would see a sign from thee" and Jesus Christ replies, "An evil and adulterous generation **seeketh** after a sign". The poet says that only in 'the present evil situation, "Signs are taken for wonders". Here 'signs' means 'miracles' as found in the Biblical story and Eliot uses the word 'wonders' with the same meaning. He wishes in these lines that religious humane values prevailed in society. Compare the lines 18 & 19 with the following text from the Bible: "And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger....."

The use of the 'word' in the line 18 is also in reference to the Biblical use of 'word' which means 'logos'. This is a logocentric world and yet there is no 'word' to represent God. The Bible says: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God".

In the lines 21-25, the poet expresses the degradation of human values in society. 'Depraved' means corrupted. 'May' represents the resurgence of life as happens after the winter. The 'dogwood' and 'chestnut' are flowers which convey the idea

of sensuality. 'Judas' is a name of plant which has the same name as the Biblical character Judas who is known for 'treachery'. So the expression 'flowering Judas' **symbolises** the increased treacherous situation in society. Thus the line 21 expresses that in the civilisation created as a consequence of Renaissance (represented by 'May'), there is only corruption and treachery. Here the idea of 'Renaissance' is evoked in order to express the disgust for the Renaissance and Modernist ideas which resulted in the World War.

In the lines 22 and 22, we have to first take the following:

'To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk

Among whispers;'

The words which follow in the 22rd line are 'by Mr. Silvero'. These three words will have to be read with the next line till the end of line 25 which ends with a semi-colon.

Line 22 along with half of line 22 alludes to the Christian ceremony of Eucharist in which the people at the ceremony eat pieces of bread which symbolise Christ's body and drink wine which symbolises Christ's blood. Thus people are supposed to draw nourishment from Christ. In the context of the poem, people in contemporary society are taking nourishment from the corruption and treachery in society.

Mr. Silvero is an imagined man from the surroundings who gets nourishment from vulgarity and treachery in society. Even if Mr. Silvero **visits** a place like **Limoges**, a French town known for its porcelain ware, enamels on copper and oak barrels for the production of cognac, he fails to appreciate the beauty and with his 'caressing hands' only feels the sensuality of the objects around.

In the line 26, there is another imagined foreign figure named Hakagawa who is amidst the Titians. Here the word 'Titians' refers to an Italian painter. Titian is a famous Italian painter who is known for his 'idealised portraits' of beautiful women. Thus Titian symbolises the portrayal of sensual beauty and Hakagawa is among the likes of Titian (the plural form of 'Titians' would symbolise the 'likes of Titian'). Hakagawa is among those who portray beauty but Hakagawa seems only to **bow** to them thus socialising with them without any appreciation for the beauty and its portrayal.

Madame de Tornquist is another imagined character in the line 26. She is only shifting candles in the dark room thus not getting anything from the 'illumination' of the candle light nor getting involved in a churchlike religious surrounding where one lights and places the candles for receiving the Grace (lines 26-27). In the line 27, Fraulein von Kulp is another imagined female character with a Germanic name who rejects faith. 'Who turned in the hall' in the line 22 represents turning away from the faith of religion. Further, 'vacant shuttles weave the wind' means that nothing productive is happening and there is no substance in anything that is happening around.

In line 30 the words 'I have no ghosts' signify the disbelief in everything that is supernatural. It symbolises the establishment of rationalism with no space for religious faith and values. But this situation leaves Gerontion in a 'house' with no protection as the poet describes in the lines 31-32. 'Draught' means here 'a gust of wind' and the 'draughty house' is the one that is exposed to the 'gust of wind'.

And even the knob of the door is 'windy', that means, the door also is exposed and does not stop the **rushing** wind.

In the lines from 21 to 31, four characters are introduced Mr. Silvero appears to be a man from **Portuguese** or Spanish or Italian descent. Hakagawa may be a man or a woman from Japanese origin- certainly a foreigner. Madame de Tornquist appears to be a woman of **French** origin according to the name. And **Fraulien** Von Kulp is a woman from Germanic origins. All these characters of foreign origin represent an isolated identity and appear to be inheritors of desolation. All these characters are stuck in such a social and historical situation in which they have nothing to communicate and they seem to be vulnerable like Gerontion who is living in a house which has no protection from the winds. These four characters from various lands appear to symbolise the isolation and desolation in the American land where people from various origins live. They have lost their faith and tradition. And they have no protection from values and tradition in a society which is rational but so bereft of values that the entire rationalism resulted in the World War. And then in the line 33 the poet questions the rationalism and all the knowledge gained in the process by saying , "After such knowledge what forgiveness?". And with all this rationalist knowledge, man has turned away from God and so cannot expect any mercy. And the poet mocks at the knowledge gained from history as history is nothing but a record of all that guides our vanities. The poet expresses these ideas in the lines 33 to 36. Then in the line 36 the poet again starts expressing his disbelief in the knowledge given to us by history. Finally history leaves us in a confused state starving for solutions to our problems. The word 'she' in the line 38 stands for history. This disgust for the rationalist knowledge gained through historical processes and their study continues all through till line 46. In the line 47, the poet alludes to the tree from which Adam and Eve ate an apple by the words 'the wrath bearing tree'. As a consequence of eating the apple, Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise. So the attempt to get knowledge is similar to that attempt to eat fruit from that tree. Knowledge results in tears, wars and suffering.

In the line 48, the poet hopes that 'Christ the tiger' will come and devour us all, as all of us are sinners. Gerontion further says in the lines 49 to 54 that he has not yet completed his understanding of the situation while living in the 'rented accommodation' owned by the Jew. Earlier in line 8, the poet has informed about it through the words, "And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner"". And the poet, through Gerontion, continues to question the contemporary knowledge and historical processes through which we have got this knowledge which has led to the decay of faith and loss of fear to God. This feeling continues till the line 59 and then in the line 60, the poet expresses his uncertainty over the use of all this knowledge to establish faith and the order of Christ. In the lines 61 to 66 and till the first word of the line 67, the poet, through various images, expresses that there appears to be no way out of this disgusting situation. The pessimism seems to have engulfed us world wide- and that is the pessimism which was a consequence of the World War. The proper names used in the line 67 represent the world - almost in the same way as happened earlier in the poem between the lines 21 to 30. And the same pessimistic feeling continues from lines 67 till 73 as the poet refers to various geographical places which contributed a lot in world history since the times of the Great Discoveries by the Europeans. But finally Gerontion, as an old man representing faith and human values, is driven to a corner and lies there in a sleepy **sombre** state. In the line

74, Gerontion is put along with all the tenants of the 'house' i.e. the world. And in the last line, the poet, through Gerontion expresses his pessimism as the 'thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season'.

22.5.4 Style and Theme

Characteristic to his style, Eliot begins with an epigraph and continues in free verse which has rhythm. He keeps alluding to various thoughts and writings that appeared earlier in his writings. In Gerontion, we can easily identify all the characteristics of Eliot's poetic style as we have studied earlier in this unit.

The central theme of the poem is the pessimism arising out of the World War which happened as a consequence of all the knowledge man acquired since the Renaissance period. In the context the poet desires that the humane religious faith and values which have been lost in historical process of acquiring material wealth and mundane knowledge be established again.

Glossary

- 1) hot gates: symbolises the Greek place Thermopylae. The name of this city literally means 'hot gates'. Many wars were fought in this place.
- 2) cutlass: a small sword
- 3) spawned: conceived and born
- 4) estaminet: a word of French language meaning a café
- 5) stonecrop: a moss-like plant (supposed to evoke disgust)
- 6) Merds: a French word which means 'human or animal excreta'
- 7) Gutter: Spluttering fire
- 8) Depraved: Morally unacceptable; Evil
- 9) Dogwood: Name of a flower
- 10) Chestnut: Name of a flower (also a tree known for its tasty nuts)
- 11) Judas: Name of a flower and also a character in the Bible
- 12) Draughty: 'Draught' is a gust of wind. 'Draughty' is the adjective from this word.
- 13) Weevil: An insect which damages the crops
- 14) Bear: Here it means a constellation of stars also known as The Great Bear
- 15) gull: Name of a sea-bird
- 16) Belle Isle: Name of an island in North Atlantic
- 17) Horn: refers to Cape Horn or Horn of Africa.
- 18) Gulf: A system of currents in the North Atlantic
- 19) Trades: Trade winds

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Identify some important stylistic features of T.S.Eliot’s poetry by giving examples from “Gerontion”.

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- 2) Identify 5 references from the poem studied above taken from various sources in history and literature.

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- 3) Study the significance of the title of the poem above.

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- 4) Identify one example of babbling in the poem.

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- 5) What is the central theme of the poem studied above.

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22.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have read about an important poet in the English language who was born in the U.S. and died in England. He is equally an American and English poet who evolved his own poetic style while amalgamating stylistic features, thoughts and imagery from various sources in French, German, English, Indian and Greek among many others.

We studied two of his poems entitled “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “Gerontion” and have identified the stylistic and the thematic characteristics of Eliot’s poetry in these two poems. This has helped us understand the work and contribution of T.S. Eliot in the English literature with concrete references and examples. We should be now able to study and appreciate Eliot’s poetry in general in terms of theme and style very specific to Eliot’s poetic canvass.

22.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise 1

- 1) Symbolism
- 2) German, French, Italian, Latin, English, Sanskrit and from Greek Classics.
- 3) The Waste Land
- 4) The Criterion. This journal was closed down in 1939 by T.S.Eliot himself due to the problems created by the Second World War.
- 5) Ezra Pound
- 6) Idea of a Christian Society

Self-check Exercise 2

- 1) Epigraph
- 2) Poetry
- 3) Historical and cultural events and characters
- 4) Elements of language and nature
- 5) French Symbolists

Self-check Exercise 3

(Kindly note that the answers provided here are merely points for the sake of better comprehension. You can elaborate each point and add upon them on the basis of the Analysis of the poem and your own reading of the poem. Discuss your points during the Counselling sessions.):

- 1) Identify the important stylistic features of T.S.Eliot’s poetry by giving examples from “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”.

Answer: Characteristic to the style of T.S.Eliot, in this poem there is:

- i) an Epigraph taken from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.
- ii) Allusions from various historical and literary sources.
- iii) The use of metaphors and imagery which help explain the feelings of the character of Prufrock.

- iv) Selection of a character, Prufrock, for describing the feelings of the poet. This is the dramatic style of narration in the poetry of T.S. Eliot.
 - v) A sequence of events in the narration but there is no time sequence in the narration of events.
 - vi) Use of irony in the poem for depicting the pessimism of the theme.
 - vii) Uncertainty of action amidst the mood of hope and despair.
- 2) Identify 5 references from the poem studied above taken from various sources in history and literature. We can identify the following five references in the poem:
- i) The epigraph is from Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
 - ii) The refrain is taken from Jule Laforgue.
 - iii) Michelangelo is an important painter from Italy who is mentioned in the poem. This is a reference from history.
 - iv) "There will be time" (between lines 24 to 30) alludes to Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress".
 - v) "Dying fall" in line 52 alludes to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.
- 3) In which year was the poem above published? Do you think it is important information for understanding the poem above.

The poem entitled "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was first published in a *Poetry* magazine in 1915 and then later in a collection of his poems *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917.

This date is important as by this we know this poem was written in the formative years of the poet and thus describes his feelings during his growing years. This helps us understand the feelings and imagery in the poem. Even the word "Prufrock" in the title represents a company in the surroundings of the poet. So, the date of the poem helps us locate the poem in specific contexts thus helping us understand the feelings in the poem.

- 4) Identify one example of grotesque in the poem.
- The third line 'like a patient etherized upon the table' for an 'evening spread out against the sky' is an example of the grotesque imagery which describes the disgust in the poem.
- 5) What is the main theme of the poem studied above.
- The main themes of the poem are as follows:
- i) Feeling of loneliness and alienation from the surroundings
 - ii) Indecision, uncertainty in the mind of Prufrock and disgust
 - iii) Pessimism (Prufrock can only see the negative aspect of himself as well of others around him)

Self-check Exercise 4

(Kindly note that the answers provided here are merely points for the sake of better comprehension. You can elaborate each point and add upon them on the basis of the Analysis and your own reading of the poem. Discuss your points during the Counselling sessions.) :

- 1) Identify some important stylistic features of T.S. Eliot's poetry by giving examples from "Gerontion".

Answer: We can identify:

- i) Epigraph of Gerontion. We have seen that this type of epigraph which has been taken from Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* is typical in T.S. Eliot's style.
 - ii) Use of French words like 'estaminet' and 'merds'. T.S. Eliot often uses words from foreign origin, especially French, in his poems. There are many names of foreign origin in the poem.
 - iii) Lots of references from historical sources, though these references have been used often in an obscure way. As for example, 'hot gates' refers to Thermopylae. [There are many other references of this type as explained while analysing this poem. Kindly collect them here and present them in a systematic manner.] There are many references from texts like the Bible. This is also very typical of T.S. Eliot's style as he alludes to the historical and literary sources to convey his ideas and feelings.
 - iv) The blank verse which is taken from the earlier writings of European and English poets. He often breaks the flow of ideas in the line by putting semi-colons. For example, in the line 28, we can see that the semi-colon breaks the verse in the line. [Find out similar other examples in the text – in lines 41, 43, 44, 45 and many others]. Discuss this technique during your counselling sessions.
 - v) The flow of language through the obscure imageries and intertextual imagery in a narrative to describe the feelings of Gerontion in the poem.
- 2) Identify 5 references from the poem studied above taken from various sources in history and literature. Collect information on the following references and systematically present them:
- i) Hot gates
 - ii) Estaminet of Antwerp
 - iii) 'We would see a sign'
 - iv) Judas
 - v) Wrath-bearing tree

[There are many such references. Study them systematically.]

- 3) Study the significance of the title of the above poem.

The title 'Gerontion' is a Greek word which literally means 'a little old man'. The title signifies the main theme of the poem. The poem describes the disgust in Europe after World War I through the eyes of an old man who symbolises the knowledge acquired through centuries since the Renaissance.

- 4) Identify one example of babbling in the poem.

Look at this line (line no. 40): 'What's not believed in, or if still believed'. There is an expression of uncertainty and confusion in this line. This is an example of the kind of 'babbling' which is typical in T.S. Eliot's style.

- 5) What is the central theme of the poem studied above?

The central theme of the poem is the description of the pessimism resulting from the situation created by the first World War. The entire story of scientific and rationalist growth since the Renaissance period in Europe has resulted in this valueless society which has resulted in the inhuman World War. The poet expresses his feelings of disgust, pessimism and cynicism through the narrative of Gerontion in the poem. [You can find many examples in the poem to elaborate these ideas. Elaborate these ideas by citing appropriate examples from the text of 'Gerontion'. Discuss them during your Counselling sessions with your peers.]

UNIT 23 PHILIP LARKIN

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Philip Larkin
 - 23.2.1 The Movement
- 23.3 Church Going (1954) (p.1955)
 - 23.3.1 Introduction
 - 23.3.2 The Text
 - 23.3.3 Analysis of the Poem
- 23.4 The Whitsun Weddings (1964) (p.1967)
 - 23.4.1 Introduction
 - 23.4.2 The Text
 - 23.4.3 A Discussion
- 23.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Philip Larkin the poet, his life and work.
- Situate Larkin, the poet, within the poetic group called Movement.
- Appreciate Larkin's poem 'Church Going'
- Analyze the thematic as well as technical aspects of 'Whitsun Weddings'

23.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be introduced to Philip Larkin, one of the major British poets of the post war era. Larkin was one of the most prominent poets of a group called the Movement. In the previous units you were introduced to Modernism and the Modernist poets like T.S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and W. H. Auden. You have also tasted the complex, obscure, ironic and highly allusive poetry that is intellectually stimulating, which is the hallmark of modernism.

In this unit we will see that the poets who emerged during the 1950s deliberately broke away from the experimental poetry of this tradition, and tried to resurrect a poetry that had traditional cadences and formal features of native British poetry. Instead of the cosmopolitan concerns and metaphysical philosophies which governed the writers of the early 20th century, the poets of the fifties and sixties brought in more parochial issues and themes and accessible meaning of everyday experience of middle class England into their poetry.

We will introduce you to the group called the Movement which determined the aesthetics as well as the bend of thematic content of British poetry in the 50s and

60s decades. We will situate Larkin in this larger context and also point out his special characteristics and contributions. We have included two poems of Larkin, 'Church Going' and 'Whitsun Weddings' for detailed study and analysis. Both poems reveal Larkin at his best: ironic and sardonic, yet basically humane.

The first poem 'Church Going' is a monologue written in 1954 which refers to the erosion of the church as an institution. Written in an unsentimental, anti-romantic tone, the poem reveals the agnostic bend of Larkin's mind. 'Whitsun Weddings', written in 1964, is the second poem chosen for intensive study. It describes a train journey undertaken by the poet, during which he comes across boisterous marriage parties whom he observes in a detached and somewhat disdainful manner, but becoming rather meditative towards the end.

It would help you to read through the unit section by section. Do the exercises as you finish reading. After finishing a major chunk, give yourself a break, before you tackle the next part.

23.2 PHILIP LARKIN

[b. 9 August 1922 Coventry, Warwickshire - d. 2 December 1985 Hull, Humberside, England]



Philip Larkin (1922-85) was the most eminent writer of post-war Britain, whose capabilities ranged into the spheres of poetry, novel and criticism. His influence was so strong that he was referred to as "England's *other* Poet Laureate", a position which he had turned down when it was offered to him at the demise of John Betjeman, who was then, the poet laureate. Critic Alan Brownjohn notes in his book *Philip Larkin* that he produced "the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful, profoundly disturbing yet appealing and approachable, body of verse" and was considered an "artist of the first rank" by reviewer John Press.

Philip Larkin was born in Coventry into a middle class family, as the younger of two children. His father, Sydney Larkin, was a lover of literature and a Nazi sympathizer, while his mother Eva Emily Day, to whom he was 'claustrophobically attached', was a nervous woman dominated by her husband. His sister Catherine, known as Kitty, was 10 years older than he was. His father, who was the Coventry City Treasurer, instilled a love for books and poems in him from an early age, by introducing poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and W.B. Yeats to him. Poor eyesight and stuttering plagued Larkin as a youth; he retreated into solitude, read widely, and began to write poetry as a nightly routine. He was educated at home till the age of eight – these early days

are described as ‘unspent’ and ‘boring’ – and then joined King Henry VIII Junior School at Coventry, where he made long standing friendships. His love for jazz music was fostered by his parents and this grooming helped him at a later age to contribute extensively to *The Daily Telegraph* as its jazz critic, which were compiled in the book *All That Jazz: A Record Diary 1961–71* (1985).

After his School Certificate Examination from King Henry VIII Senior School, he joined St. John’s College, Oxford to read English and at the completion of the course was awarded a First Class Honours Degree. During the colourful period at Oxford, a vital stage in his personal and literary development, Larkin commenced his lifelong friendship with Kingsley Amis and John Wain, other important members of the Movement, a relationship that proved intensely symbiotic to them.

Larkin took up the position of librarian in the small Shropshire town of Wellington after his graduation, where he wrote his two novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947) and published his first volume of poetry, *The North Ship* (1945). As a qualified librarian, he worked in several libraries. This became his wage-earning career for the rest of his life, taking him to university libraries in Leicester, Belfast and finally Hull, where he stayed on for thirty years, creating settings for his poetic meditations. In the post-war years, the University of Hull underwent significant expansion and a new university library named *Brynmor Jones Library* was established, of which Larkin was the chief librarian. He was a significant figure in post-war British librarianship, making major structural emendations, computerizing the library stock and automating the circulation system.

Though Larkin had first written novels, he switched over to poetry as the muse of novel failed him later. Larkin’s first poetic influences were modernists like T. S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, but he shed these off as he evolved a more individual tone. Larkin’s first collection of poetry *The North Ship* shows remarkable influence of W.B. Yeats, but does not yet present the voice for which he later became famous.

His next collection, *The Less Deceived* (1955), containing poems like ‘Church Going’ and ‘Toads’, came a decade later, and bears the stamp of his mature genius: that of the detached, sometimes mournful, sometimes tender observer of “ordinary people doing ordinary things”. Coinciding with this development of a mature poetic identity was his increasing fascination for the poetry of Thomas Hardy. When Larkin was invited to edit the 1973 volume of *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, he used to opportunity to reevaluate and reinstate Hardy as a major contributor to English Poetry. Hardy with his provincial and pessimistic outlook and traditional style suited Larkin better than his earlier contemporaries had. He disparaged poems that relied on shared classical and literary allusions. In a statement he made to D. J. Enright, Larkin stated that he had “no belief in ‘tradition’ or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets”.

Larkin’s poetry has been characterized as combining “an ordinary, colloquial style, clarity, a quiet, reflective tone, ironic understatement and a direct engagement with commonplace experiences”. His publisher and long time friend Jean Hartley summed his style up as a “piquant mixture of lyricism and

discontent". According to the critic Terence Hawkes, Larkin's poetry revolves around two losses: the Loss of Modernism and the Loss of England. The latter is best observed in the famous poem "Going Going".

"And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres."

The collection *The Whitsun Weddings*, published in 1964, contains his very popular poems like 'An Arundel Tomb', 'Here' and the titular poem, which cemented his reputation as one of Britain's most eminent living poets. He was awarded a Fellowship of Royal Society of Literature, soon after. In the years that followed, he wrote some of his major poems like the 'Aubade', which were collected and published in the volume *High Windows* (1974). The poems had turned more stark, gloomy and fatalistic. The dwindling of the mighty empire of Britain into a third rate power, his preoccupation with death, are all mirrored in these.

Larkin remained a bachelor throughout his life, despite longstanding relationships with several women, most of them inspiring enough for him to write poetry. He also preferred to keep a low profile, turning down most of the titles and honours including that of OBE (Order of the British Empire) and the Poet Laureateship that came his way. Nevertheless he later accepted the titles of CBE (*Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire*) and CE (*Companion of Honour*) and FRSL (*Fellow of Royal Society of Literature*). The public persona of Philip Larkin is that of a dour, non-nonsense Englishman, reserved and private, turning down fame, and viewing the world with gloomy and critical spectacles.

In 1985, at the age of 63, Larkin was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer, and died after hospitalization. He was buried at the Cottingham Municipal Cemetery near Hull.

Let us now take a look at the movement poetry of which Larkin was the leading spirit.

The Movement was a term coined in 1954 by Jay D. Scott, literary editor of *The Spectator*, to describe a group of writers essentially English in character. They included Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, and Robert Conquest. They were a group of like-minded English poets, loosely associated together in the mid-1950s. Movement poetry was a journey back to the purity of English verse, which manifested a preference for provincial values and importance to ordinary objects and experiences. Two anthologies, *Poets of the 1950s* (1955) edited by D. J. Enright and *New Lines* (1956) by Robert Conquest, are considered to be the polemic volumes that established the reputation of the group. Of the poets, Philip Larkin emerged as the most popular. His poetry did a good deal to re-engage poetry with a more popular audience. The Movement poets were considered anti-romantic, but we find many romantic elements in Larkin and Hughes. We may

call *The Movement*, the revival of the importance of form. To these poets, good poetry means simple, sensuous content, traditional, conventional and dignified form. Once the Movement was accepted into the mainstream, the group became less exclusive. Many of the group were academics, and their critical writings helped shape the course of British literature for the next two decades.

Now that you have been introduced to the life and times of Philip Larkin, try doing these exercises. After doing them, you may check the answers with the Answer Key given at the back of the unit.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Which are the four anthologies of poems written by Philip Larkin?

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2) Where did Larkin spend the greater part of his life as librarian?

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3) Which poet exerted the biggest singular influence on Larkin?

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4) Which book contains the articles written by Larkin on jazz music?

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5) Which anthology by Robert Conquest helped launch the Movement?

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23.3 CHURCH GOING (1954)

Outside of a Church



Interior of the church with pews



23.3.1 Introduction

‘Church Going’ is a poem from the anthology, *The Less Deceived*. The title of the anthology inversely mirrors the remark made by Ophelia in the play *Hamlet* by Shakespeare: “I was the more deceived”. Larkin chose this title to impress upon the reader that one should be less deceived by the reality of life. ‘Church Going’ is one of the most read and most anthologized poems by Larkin, in which he tries to make us less deceived regarding the present state of the church and its influence in the lives of the people.

In India, we may never envisage a religious institution going derelict. But in the western world, after the two World Wars, and after the spread of existentialist philosophies, there was a widespread prevalence of atheistic and agnostic attitudes and a rapid decline of belief in any religion. As a result, the attendance in churches dwindled sharply. Many of the churches remained empty shells of their former glory. ‘Church Going’ is a monologue which discusses the futility as well as utility of going to the church.

The great American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson has remarked in his essay, ‘Self Reliance’: “I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching.” The beginning of the poem makes us sharply recall these words as the poet enters the old church which is silent and vacant. The poet ponders about the future of churches and wonders about the reason for people still gravitating to the church. The poem refers both to the erosion of the Church as an institution and to the perpetuation of some kind of ritual observance.

Now let us read the poem. You will see that the nine-lined poem, containing seven stanzas, is rhythmic, as Larkin is giving due importance to form. The poet uses the traditional iambic pentameter lines, where unstressed and stressed syllables alternate: e.g.: “*For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff*” (the stressed syllables are highlighted). It also rhymes ababcadcd. Read the poem once and then read it yet again with the help of the glossary given after the poem. It will be also good to read the poem aloud and feel the cadence of the lines.

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
 I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
 Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
 And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
 For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
 Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
 And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
 Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
 My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
 From where I stand, the roof looks almost new -
 Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
 Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
 Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
 'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
 The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
 I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
 Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
 And always end much at a loss like this,
 Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
 When churches will fall completely out of use
 What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
 A few cathedrals chronically on show,
 Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
 And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
 Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
 To make their children touch a particular stone;
 Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
 Advised night see walking a dead one?
 Power of some sort will go on
 In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
 But superstition, like belief, must die,
 And what remains when disbelief has gone?
 Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognisable each week,
 A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
 Will be the last, the very last, to seek
 This place for what it was; one of the crew
 That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
 Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
 Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
 Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
 Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these - for which was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

Glossary

- “Another church”** : A statement emanating from boredom little books: books of verses or scriptural readings kept in the pews brass: may be church artifacts like the chalice, pyx, candelabra and so on; can also be monumental brass found in English churches, used for sepulchral memorial
- Organ** : Also called pipe organ is a musical instrument used in churches (see picture)
- musty** : stale and dank smell
- cycle-clips** : These are worn around pants to keep them from catching in a bicycle chain. (see picture)
- font** : stone basin containing holy water to baptize people. (see picture)
- lectern** : decorated podium or stand used by the priest to place the bible and deliver the sermon (see picture)
- peruse** : read carefully
- hectoring** : talk in a bullying way
- large-scale** : verses printed in large sizes
- here endeth** : the last lines which usually signify the ending of the sermon or the mass. Here it may ironically refer to the ending of the church.
- snigger** : laugh in a half-suppressed, scornful way
- Irish six pence** : a small coin of Ireland; here it is a useless donation because it is foreign currency as well as small change (see picture)
- parchment** : writing material made of animal skin (see picture)



plate : metal plate made of precious metal, which is used to pass to collect donation in the church. Also called Collection Plate (see picture)

pyx : a small round container used in the Catholic and Anglican Churches to carry the consecrated host. (see picture)

Let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep: Church falling to disuse and ruin that it leaks when it rains and becomes a shelter to wandering sheep. Irony lies in the fact that believers are considered to be the sheep and the priest, the shepherd.

dubious women : an ambiguous expression. 1. May refer to women who are doubtful of church and its benefits and yet are lured by a possibility of cure. 2. May refer to women of questionable character

simples : medicinal herbs collected to cure an ailment

walking a dead one: seeing a ghost haunting the place

brambles : weeds; prickly scrambling shrub of the rose family, especially a blackberry (see picture)



Buttress : a structure of stone or brick built against a wall to strengthen or support it (see picture)

Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky: Notice the manner in which Larkin starts from the ground and moves skywards.

taps and jots : reference to the crew who opens the cask of wine and writes down the amount of wine sold

rood-lofts : a gallery on top of the rood screen of a church. Rood is a crucifix, especially over the entrance. (see picture)

ruin-bibber : one who loves or is addicted to ruins [a bibber is a one who is addicted to drinks]

randy : excited, [often sexually]; here, excited to possess antiques

Christmas addict : one who loves Christmas celebrations

counting on a whiff . . . : counting on a small amount of joy obtainable through Christmas celebrations with gowns, bands, organ pipes and myrrh

myrrh : aromatic resin used as incense in church (see picture)

silt : fine sand or clay deposited as sediment

scrub : a growth of stunted vegetation

accoutred : adorned, decorated

frowsty : warm, stuffy, close

blent : blended (archaic)



Rood loft



Cycle Clips



Parchment



Myrrh



Scrub



Barn

23.3.3 Analysis of the Poem

'Church Going' is a poem in which the speaker analyses the *raison d'être* (the reason for the existence) of the church. He wants to examine the futility and the utility of churches. The discussion is half-mocking and half-serious. The speaker scoffs at the church and its equipment; and he scoffs at church-going, though at the end of the poem he finds that the churches, or at least some of them, would continue to render some service to the people even after they have ceased to be places of worship. According to the speaker, a time is coming when people would stop going to churches altogether, because they would have lost their faith in God and in divine worship. Then a time is also coming when people's disbelief in God and their superstitions would come to an end too. Eventually, however, some people might still visit the decayed and disused church buildings on account of some inner compulsion or to derive some wisdom from the sight of the many graves in the churchyard.

At the outset, the speaker, the persona of the poet, enters the vacant church after first ensuring that it is unoccupied. He is a casual wayfarer, who is drawn to the silent building on one of his various cycling trips. He closes the door with a thud, which gesture speaks of his brashness and irreverence. The words which are

uttered next, “Another church, matting, seats and stone, / And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut / For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff / Up at the holy end . . .” sound like an inventory of church artifacts and are dipped in impiety and callous disregard. The holy scriptures become ‘little books’ and the glorious candelabra, chalice and other articles used in the tabernacle during the holy mass become ‘brass and stuff’. The atmosphere is permeated with mustiness which is a result of its dereliction. The flippant observation about silence “brewed God knows how long” continues in the same vein of irreverence. Unfamiliar with the ways of the church, he makes an allowance to the hallowed ground by removing the bicycle clips in ‘awkward reverence’.

Then comes the gingery fiddling with things. He runs his hand around the font, inspects the roof and pronounces that it looks new or restored; he mounts the pulpit and peruses a few overawing verses printed in large-scale font, and then mimicking a priest, pronounces ‘here endeth’ with greater vehemence than he intended. The sounds echo his sniggering. On the way back he signs the register and donates a useless Irish sixpence, and thinks that the place was not worth stopping for.

Then comes the admission that in spite of this disregard for churches, he often stops to look at one. He wonders what would be done, when churches fall into disuse. Whether they would be turned into museums, with all their precious articles like parchment, plate and pyx displayed in locked cases, or would they fall into ruin, letting the place vacant for rain and sheep. He asks whether we would avoid them as unlucky places.

He wonders whether women, not sure about the sanctity of the church, would come with their children to pray at the grave of a dear departed soul or pick herbs to cure cancer from the churchyard. Would they see the church being haunted by ghosts on special nights? Power of this sort would go on in games and riddles, creating stories about the church. But ultimately, like belief, superstition must also die. And when both belief and superstition die, nothing will remain but a tottering edifice, with grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress and sky.

In this stanza the narrator is isolated and meditative, and appears to be less deceived by religion. The church becomes more and more unrecognizable each week as the trees and plants overtake the structure. The building’s original purpose and the purpose for visiting it has become more and more obscure as well. Larkin wonders how many will come seeking the church for the purpose it was erected. Some will come to tap and jot and find out the condition of the rood-loft under which the sacred space in the church rests. Or they may be visited by a person with a love for antiques and ruins; or a person addicted to Christmas festivities, who loves the song, spectacle and smell. Or will he be a representative of the poet, who despite being bored and uninformed, comes back again and yet again through the suburban woods to this cross of ground – the church, because it had held unspilt and sanctified, for so long and equably, those relationships – marriage, birth and death – which are now found only in separation. Church which is now an empty shell was originally built for the rites which sanctified these life processes. He does not know what this barn is worth, but it nevertheless pleases him to stand in silence there.

He considers the church a serious house on this serious earth. All human compulsions meet in the blended air of the church, which are recognised and

robed as destinies. And as long as this purpose would never become outdated, persons wishing to be serious would keep on coming there to grow wise, especially with so many dead people lying around, for only those who are dead know the truth about whether there is a heaven or not.

The poem starts as an agnostic's or even an atheist's take on church. But the end shows some sort of change which leaves him ambivalent regarding the spiritual significance of the church. The title itself retains the ambiguity and can be interpreted in several ways: the act of going to church, the customs that keep the church alive, visiting the church as one would a theatre, and the disappearance of the church. The pronouncing of "here endeth" in the poem underscores the irony. It may be that in the narrator's opinion, religion is on a decline; so when he says "here endeth" he is not only talking about his sermon ending, he is also talking about religion ending; he may be also hinting that he will be the last person to recite those words in that church. Certain critics have seen Church Going presenting the binaries of inside-outside. Church and what it represents within with all the trappings of the church are manmade, which is slowly being claimed by Nature. Larkin often makes a sharp distinction between Nature outside and man's enclosure inside a building, a scene which dramatizes man's separation from Nature. The poet begins his encounter with the church building by describing the contents of the building; but the distinctions between what is outside in Nature, and what is inside in man's architectural dominion, begin to blur. The building is seen by the poet as surrounded by the forces of Nature and perhaps soon to be merged with them. He imagines the decaying edifice being eventually let "rent-free to rain and sheep"; thus Nature itself will enter the church and become part of it, or will simply take over the church completely. The destructive forces of Nature are even now merging with the elements of the building: "grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky"—all these coalesce.

The language of the poem is conversational, and the narrator poses many interrogatives (questions). Larkin uses a lot of religious imagery and words, some are used as they are intended, but others are used in a blasphemous way. The subtle movement from the first person singular (I) to the first person plural (we or our) is a characteristic device in Larkin's poetry, and one which is predicated upon the assent of its readers. Larkin uses this strategy in 'Whitsun Weddings' too.

The poem is not a veiled message in support of Christianity, but it shrewdly and accurately defines the multiple sides of the dilemma of redundant churches and what they represent, namely a religious tradition in decline. There is seriousness, wisdom, and comfort to be derived or not from an empty church building. The church's main function as a place for worship is long gone, though it still has its value as a historical relic.

<p>Self-check Exercise II</p> <p>1) What does the poet do on his entry into the church?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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2) How would you describe the narrator's attitude towards the church?

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3) What future does the poet envisage for the church?

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4) What is the ambiguity in the title 'Church Going'?

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23.4 WHITSUN WEDDINGS (1964)

23.4.1 Introduction

'The Whitsun Weddings' appeared in the anthology of the same name, in 1964. It is a poem inspired by a train journey from the Paragon station at Kinston-upon-Hull in the North of England to Petersborough, London in the South, on a Whitsun Saturday, in 1955. A quarter of a century later, Larkin recalled the genesis of the poem:

"I caught a very slow train that stopped at every station and I hadn't realised that, of course, this was the train that all the wedding couples would get on and go to London for their honeymoon: it was an eye-opener to me. Every part was different but the same somehow. They all looked different but they were all doing the same things and sort of feeling the same things. I suppose the train stopped at about four, five, six stations between Hull and London and there was a sense of gathering emotional momentum. Every time you stopped fresh emotion climbed aboard. And finally between Peterborough and London when you hurtle on, you felt the whole thing was being aimed like a bullet - at the heart of things, you know. All this fresh, open life. Incredible experience. I've never forgotten it."

Whitsun being the marriage season, the train and the railway stations were thronged by gay, boisterous wedding parties. Larkin, the bachelor, leans back as the placid observer, viewing the newlyweds board the train for their honeymoon, making droll comments which are at times witty and humorous, at times acrid and pungent. The poem is considered the finest example of Larkin's temper, tone and technique.

'The Whitsun Weddings' consists of eight verses, each ten lines long making it one of his longest poems and rhyming a b a b c d e c d e a rhyme scheme used in various of Keats' odes. This rhyme pattern captures the rhythmic sound of a steam-engine as it gathers momentum every time it leaves a station. The truncated second line in each stanza adds to the special rhythm of poem. The use of *enjambement* or run-on lines and run-on verses creates a sense of relentless, onward movement as the train with several linked carriages makes its way southward by a 'slow and stopping curve'. 'The Whitsun Weddings' is Larkin's longest poem, narrated in a slow, unhurried, leisurely fashion which re-enacts a sense of the long, leisurely train journey from Hull to London. In literature a journey frequently functions as a metaphor for life itself. Larkin uses the unifying frame of a train-journey to observe the young couples who, as a result of a 'frail Travelling coincidence' briefly share one hour at a similar point in their lives before they alight from the train at its destination and continue separately on the longer journey which will take up the remainder of their lives.

23.4.2 The Text

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:
Not till about
One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday
Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,
All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense
Of being in a hurry gone. We ran
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street
Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence
The river's level drifting breadth began,
Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
For miles inland,
A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.
Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and
Canals with floatings of industrial froth;
A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
Until the next town, new and nondescript,
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
The weddings made
Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys

The interest of what's happening in the shade,
 And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls
 I took for porters larking with the mails,
 And went on reading. Once we started, though,
 We passed them, grinning and pomaded, girls
 In parodies of fashion, heels and veils,
 All posed irresolutely, watching us go,

As if out on the end of an event
 Waving goodbye
 To something that survived it. Struck, I leant
 More promptly out next time, more curiously,
 And saw it all again in different terms:
 The fathers with broad belts under their suits
 And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;
 An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,
 The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,
 The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.
 Yes, from cafés
 And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed
 Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days
 Were coming to an end. All down the line
 Fresh couples climbed aboard: the rest stood round;
 The last confetti and advice were thrown,
 And, as we moved, each face seemed to define
 Just what it saw departing: children frowned
 At something dull; fathers had never known

Success so huge and wholly farcical;
 The women shared
 The secret like a happy funeral;
 While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared
 At a religious wounding. Free at last,
 And loaded with the sum of all they saw,
 We hurried towards London, shuffling gouts of steam.
 Now fields were building-plots, and poplars cast
 Long shadows over major roads, and for
 Some fifty minutes, that in time would seem

Just long enough to settle hats and say
I nearly died,
 A dozen marriages got under way.
 They watched the landscape, sitting side by side
 —An Odeon went past, a cooling tower,
 And someone running up to bowl—and none
 Thought of the others they would never meet
 Or how their lives would all contain this hour.
 I thought of London spread out in the sun,
 Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat:

There we were aimed. And as we raced across
Bright knots of rail
Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss
Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
Travelling coincidence; and what it held
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
That being changed can give. We slowed again,
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Glossary

- Whitsun** : (White Sunday). Also called Whitsunday or Whitsuntide is the feast of the Pentecost, which falls on the 7th day after Easter, commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles of Christ. In England it was mixed up with pagan festivities celebrating the summer's day. Considered to be very auspicious for weddings. During the 50s it was a favoured time for marriage and honeymoon due to the long weekend. Whit Saturday is the Saturday before it. The following day is also a holiday, called Whit Monday.
- blinding windscreens** : refers to the cars waiting at the level crossing in the scorching heat
- fish-dock** : harbours or piers for fishing (see picture)
- Lincolnshire** : historic county in the east of England
- A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept:** the consistent curve of the railway as the train moves southwards and stops at stations.
- short shadowed cattle** : the cattle cast short shadows due to the time of the day, probably early afternoon.
- industrial froth** : layer of dirt or scum spread on top of the canal, due to the industrial effluents cast from the factories nearby.
- Canals of industrial: froth**: Larkin points out at the deleterious effect of technological advancement on the urban areas. Demonstrative of his powers of observation. In the poem *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot had made a similar remark: "River sweats/Oil and tar."
- Hothouse** : a heated building used for growing plants. (see picture)
- reek** : (n) smell
- nondescript** : lacking distinctive characteristics
- dismantle** : take to pieces, pull down
- skirl** : a shrill cry or shriek (Scots dialect)
- whoops and skirls** : shouts and shrieks
- larking** : cavorting; enjoy oneself by behaving in a playful and mischievous way.

pomaded : wearing scented hair-dressing

irresolutely : hesitantly



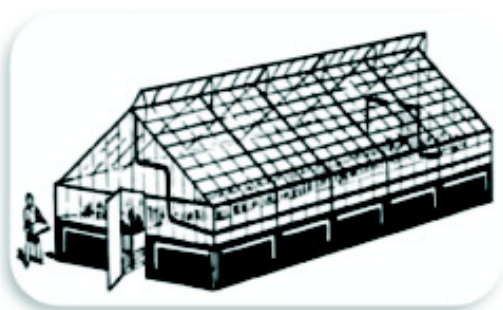
Confetti



Fish Dock



Perm



Hothouse

seamy : sordid, disreputable, sleazy

smut : obscenity; here the uncle is cracking indecent jokes at the expense of the newlyweds.

perms : a term in hair dressing; permanent wave (see picture)

lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres : different colours or shades; mostly pastels. Lemon is yellow, mauve is light violet or purple and olives are green and ochres are brick red.

Bunting dressed : dressed with cloth flags, drapery or streamers for festive decoration (see picture)

confetti : small pieces of coloured paper traditionally thrown over a bride and bridegroom by their wedding guests after the marriage ceremony has taken place (see picture)

confetti and advice were thrown : a figure of speech named 'zeugma' or 'syllepsis' is used here, in which one single phrase or word joins different parts of a sentence, which may actually befit only one part. Zeugma means 'yoking'.

farcical : extremely ludicrous

happy funeral : is an oxymoron, where contraries are yoked together to describe the indescribable. Ironic comment about marriage which may begin in joy and happiness but may end in tears and sorrow.

religious wounding: the tense girls cannot make out their mothers laughing at a shared secret. The ritual of marriage seems to be

sanctioning a ‘deflowering’ of the virgins, ratified by the society.

- hurried towards London** : notice the shift in the scenery as they near urban habitation.
- shuffling gouts of steam** : the steam pouring from the spout of the engine (see picture)
- Poplar** : A tall tree found in the North Temperate Zone. It is called Chinar in North India (see picture)
- Odeon** : a movie theatre chain, popular in Britain (see picture)
- Cooling Tower** : heat removal devices used to transfer process waste heat to the atmosphere (see picture)
- Pullman** : a railway carriage with special amenities, designed by George M. Pullman of America. During Larkin’s times, these had gone out of fashion. The image adds to the poem’s sense of an idyllic, static Old England (see picture)
- This frail travelling: coincidence** : being co-travellers in a journey. ‘Coincidenza’ in Italian, is a transfer station in railroad travel. Larkin’s “coincidence” may be an interlingual pun. Like both “frail” and “traveling,” it may just be a way of naming the brief encounter that the poem stages, between the speaker and those he observes.
- There swelled / A sense of falling, like an arrow** : Larkin passes on from the particular to the universal; loaded with meanings and significations. Falling is a sensation that accompanies when the brake is applied to a moving train. Sense of falling may be ‘Felix Culpa’, a happy fall – a reference to the married couples’ future life. Larkin creates a complex symbolic image into which we might read overtones of fertility, aggression, joy, sadness, and delayed consequences—all things often associated with marriage. Highly sexualized image.



Cooling Tower



Gouts of Steam



Odeon



Pullman



Bunting



Poplars

23.4.3 A Discussion

The poem begins in a conversational mode by the poem's narrator, by commenting about his late start. He describes the scenery and smells of the countryside and towns through which the largely empty train passes. The first stanza is rich in alliteration used in phrases like sunlit Saturday, behind the backs of houses etc. Images of excessive heat and smell also can be seen throughout. The heat of the sultry afternoon is personified

“All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
For miles inland,
A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.”

In the second verse the train keeps a slow rhythmical movement towards the South and inland; and the rural landscape of Lincolnshire is vividly described: “Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle.” The adjective ‘short-shadowed’ subtly reminds us that it is still early afternoon and the sun is high in the sky. By contrast the man-made polluted waterways are described in terms of disgust: “Canals with floatings of industrial froth”. There is a further contrast between the euphony of the ‘smell of grass’ and the cacophony of the ‘reek of buttoned carriage cloth’. The train now reaches the outskirts of the town where it will make its first stop. It is one of the ‘new’ towns built in post-war England. Larkin dismisses it contemptuously as ‘nondescript’. Man’s pollution of the rural environment is again harshly described in the phrase: “acres of dismantled cars”.

The train’s windows are open because of the heat, and he gradually becomes aware of bustle on the platforms at each station, eventually realising that this is the noise and actions of wedding parties that are seeing off couples who are boarding the train.

The narrator seems almost irritated the wedding parties have interrupted his quiet train journey through provincial England. “Wide farms went by, short shadowed cattle and canals with floatings of industrial froth; a hothouse flashed uniquely”. The wedding participants are described crudely whereas the passing urban landscape is admired much more. At different stations different newly-weds board the train dressed in wedding attire. They are waved off by well wishers.

Larkin is the detached observer who is at times sneering and mocking, especially at the lurid and garish display of the wedding parties. He is initially scornful of the wedding guests in their loud costumes; “girls in parodies of fashion”; he lampoons the typical family; “mothers loud and fat and uncles shouting smut”. He seems to itemize these sights to make them seem ridiculous and pitiable. The cynical attitude of the poet is visible in the almost unkind description of the young women. As a bachelor, he does not show any enthusiasm in the costume and the colour scheme; he finds it rather offensive.

Telling phrases hint at his attitude to marriage calling it; “success so huge and wholly farcical”; where ‘wholly’ could be substituted phonetically for “holy” and this is perhaps deliberate. Oxymoronic phrases like “happy funeral” and “religious wounding” support this idea.

Larkin offsets this view of landscape with the couples, fresh from their dramatic day. They too contemplate the lives and the places they are soon to inhabit. It is

as if Larkin can't decide whether he loves the landscape or fears its crushing blandness, and this must be what the couples are thinking too. This *leit motif* manipulates the reader's view of the marriages.

At the end of the poem he sums up his thoughts on the newly married couples, the "frail travelling coincidence and what it held stood ready to be loosed with all the power being changed can give." He gives a sense of impending destiny. He seems to think that this day is the sum total of the glory of marriage, by imposing his own world view on what has been missed out. This is backed by the regrets he invokes against marriage: "the others they never meet", or "how their lives would all contain this hour."

The poem climaxes with a powerful enigmatic image: "a sense of falling, like an arrow shower; sent out of sight somewhere becoming rain". There is a twin motif about love at work here, with the image of Cupid's arrows contrasted against the battleground of arrows being fired against Love itself. The rain belongs to London and the hints at the bland reality of day to day life; it may also be a symbol of fertility too.

The poem is bound to the here and now while longing for transcendent release. There is a real paradox between the reality presented by the landscape and the ideals represented by the couples and the final image. Larkin longs for the abstraction of romance and perfect love, but he sees around him the oncoming city splurge which counters the romanticism of the train environment he is experiencing. The climax at the end seems to work against the surface cynicism of Larkin's tone as he experiences a tug for something more due to the mesmerising occasion he witnesses.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Do you think that Larkin is critical about the appearance of the wedding parties? Substantiate your answer.
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- 2) Describe the English landscape as Larkin describes it.
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- 3) Technical brilliance of Philip Larkin in 'Whitsun Weddings'.
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23.5 LET US SUM UP

So in this unit we have discussed Philip Larkin and two of his poems, 'Church Going' and 'Whitsun Weddings'. We have situated Philip Larkin as a representative of postwar British society and also as an exponent of Movement Poetry. We have seen how his poetry eschews the vagueness and complexities of earlier Modernist writings and espouses rhythmic cadence and clarity of traditional provincial poetry. We have seen his attitudes towards Church and marriage as institutions. Larkin's poems teach us the necessity of looking at things not through rosy glasses of romanticism, but with wide open eyes of realism. It tells us to be 'less deceived'. It will be good for you to look around and identify dead conventions which need to be eradicated from the society. After all, the ultimate purpose of reading literature is to observe and be aware of our surroundings. It will be good to read other poems of Larkin, which are easily available as they are anthologized extensively in several volumes of poetry; they are also available on the web. Recordings of Larkin's readings of his poems are available on the YouTube, and are a pleasure to listen to.

23.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) *The North Ship; The Less Deceived; Whitsun Weddings; High Windows.*
- 2) *At the Brynmor Jones Library in the University of Hull.*
- 3) Thomas Hardy
- 4) *All That Jazz: A Record Diary 1961–71*
- 5) *New Lines Anthology (1956)*

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) He lets the door thud shut, looks around, takes off the cycle-clips in awkward reverence, runs the hand around the font, mounts the lectern and reads from the scriptures and pronounces 'here endeth' louder than he intended; signs the book and donates an Irish sixpence and reflects that the place is not worth stopping for.
- 2) Narrator's attitude is one of irreverence and scepticism. He does not understand the allure of the church. He is bored and disinterested at times. He is questioning, blasphemous, and mocks at certain practices. He is unimpressed and ignorant.
- 3) He sees a rather bleak future for church. "A shape less recognisable each week. A purpose more obscure." The people who seek church in future might be those who come for maintenance, or people who love ruins and antiques, or Christmas addicts who love a season of gaiety and mirth. Or they will be like the poet himself, bored or uninformed, coming there because of their curiosity and because the silence of the place renders them solace.
- 4) The title is ambiguous and can be interpreted in several ways: the act of going to church, the customs that keep the church alive, visiting the church as one would a theatre, and the disappearance of the church.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Yes, Larkin is critical about the appearance of the wedding parties. The references to the grinning pomaded girls in parodies of fashion, heels and veils; fathers with seamy foreheads wearing broad belts under their suits; mothers loud and fat, uncle shouting smut, perms, nylon gloves and jewellery substitutes which indicate the tawdry cheapness of the affair, the lemons, mauves and olive-ochres, presenting jarring colour schemes, all substantiate this.
- 2) Larkin describes both urban and rural landscapes and contrasts the sordid with the idyllic. The backs of houses, blinding windscreens, smelly fish-docks, canals floating with industrial froth, new and nondescript next town, acres of dismantled cars, fields with building plots and Odeons are contrasted with the river's level drifting, wide farms, short-shadowed cattle, uniquely flashing hothouse, hedges dipped with rose, smell of grass, and poplars.
- 3) 'The Whitsun Weddings' is an ode consisting of eight verses, each ten lines long making it one of his longest poems and rhyming a b a b c d e c d e. This rhyme pattern captures the rhythmic sound of a steam-engine as it gathers momentum every time it leaves a station. The truncated second line in each stanza adds to the special rhythm of poem. The use of *enjambement* or run-on lines and run-on verses creates a sense of relentless, onward movement as the train with several linked carriages makes its way southward by a 'slow and stopping curve'.

UNIT 24 TED HUGHES

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Ted Hughes (17 August 1930- 28 October 1998)
- 24.3 The Thought-Fox
 - 24.3.1 Introduction
 - 24.3.2 The Text
 - 24.3.3 Analysis
- 24.4 Hawk Roosting
 - 24.4.1 Introduction
 - 24.4.2 The Text
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 - 24.5.1 Introduction
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 - 24.5.4 Analysis
- 24.6 Let Us Sump Up
- 24.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

Having read the units you will be able to:

- discuss Ted Hughes the poet
- demonstrate how Hughes is a nature poet of a different kind than the romantic poets
- examine “Hawk Roosting”
- analyze “The Thought-Fox”
- analyze “How to Paint a Water Lily”

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we will discuss Ted Hughes’s life in short, because Hughes’s life experiences particularly his association with nature and world of animals and birds in the rural England shaped his poetic sensibility. We will examine to what extent this claim could find evidence in his poems.

The first poem is “Hawk Roosting.” It is a dramatic monologue spoken by the hawk. The speaking voice uses precise imagery and a deliberate arrangement of sounds to convey a sense of absolute dominion that bird of prey holds over the world. You may read the poem slowly to discover the connection between the words, imagery, sound and the consciousness of the speaking voice.

The second poem is the celebrated “The Thought-Fox.” It is a poem about the writing of a poem. The poet imagines a fox in the darkness of a cold night outside, which becomes a metaphor for the poetic stirrings in the poet’s imagination. You will discover in the poem the poet’s great felicity with creating a moving image of the fox, and to leave an impression that the poem moves towards its finality as the fox moves inside the mind of the poet. You will also discover in this poem the exactness of imagery, and the relationship between the movement of the thoughts and the movement of sound pattern.

The third poem in this Unit is “How to Paint a Water lily.” The poem is about the painting of water lily although on the page of poetry. In this poem again, you will discover the contrary aspects of nature symbolized by the water lily.

It is advised that you read the poems first, and then read the parts of the Unit.

24.2 TED HUGHES (17 AUGUST 1930- 28 OCTOBER 1998)

Edward James Ted Hughes was one of the most influential English poets of the second half of the 20th century. He remained the poet laureate of England from 1984 till his death. He was also a writer of the books for children.

Ted Hughes was born on August 17, 1930 in Mytholmroyd, a small mill town in West Yorkshire. For the first seven years of his life, he lived on the moorland of that county. His early experiences of wind, rain, and hard stony hills shaped his impressions about a harsh world of nature. From a very early age, he was drawn to animals, and related to them. He observed in them tendencies of both being a predator and a prey, and it is in this respect that he used animals as symbols in his poems such as “The Hawk Roosting.” He viewed birds and animals as having unscrupulous instincts and menacing nature. In his poems, he associated the human nature with the ferocious nature of animals and predatory birds.

Hughes’s father, who was a carpenter and a shopkeeper, had been a soldier in the First World War. The memories of the war remained vivid to the poet since his early life. His experience of Yorkshire was also governed by his consciousness of the war, as he would later say that it was never possible for him to “escape the impression that the whole region is in mourning for the First World War.”

Hughes studied English literature, Archaeology, and Anthropology at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and graduated in 1954.

He had been writing poetry since his school days, but the university years came as a long period of hibernation in his creative life. In 1955 though he came across a Penguin book of contemporary American poets that left him greatly influenced, and inspired to write verse seriously. In this anthology he admired the works of John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Lowell among others. Some of his early influences were Yeats, Hopkins, T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas.

In 1956, he came across Sylvia Plath who was studying at Cambridge on a Fulbright scholarship. She fell in love with him, and thus began a very critical fellowship in poetry between the two distinguished poets. They shared their works, and encouraged each other. Soon they got married. In the same year, his

finished composing *The Hawk in the Rain* that Plath sent to a contest, the prize was publication by Harper. The judges were W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Marianne Moore. Hughes won the first prize, and the manuscript was published in 1957.

Hughes and Plath moved to the United States, and lived there for the next two years. They involved themselves in teaching and writing. In 1959, they returned to London. Their daughter Frieda was born on 1 April 1960. Their son Nicholas was born in January 1962. In June 1962, Plath met with a car accident, which was one of the many suicide attempts she tried, as she had been suffering from severe depression. The couple separated in 1962 over Hughes affair with Assia Wevill. In 1963, Plath committed suicide.

Hughes devoted himself to writing for children in different genres, translations, short stories, as well as poems.

Hughes published *Wodwo* in 1967. The poems were conspicuous for their precise and simple diction, and his use of free verse. *Crow* got published in 1970. The poems in this collection present a violent and a bloodier aspects of nature and animal life. The poems produce a surreal impression of the wildness of the predatory world of birds and animals in a language that is remarkably simple and direct. Hughes later said that the poems were resulted from his thoughts about the style of singing by a crow. He wondered that if a crow had to sing a song, its song will be without any music, it would be purely simple and starkly ugly. The poems present a world in which the moral universe has been subverted. The express physical pain, torture and suffering as a result of the murderous instinct inherent in the animals portrayed. But there is no moral dilemma. The murderousness of the world is accepted as a bare fact, as something necessary and responsive to basic instincts.

Moortown (1979) continue his poetic obsession with describing the life of animals in their true physical aspects. The poem “Birth of a Rainbow,” for example delineates the birth of a calf on a cold ridge in “razorish” wind. There is a hail storm, and the poor calf suffers the cold while draped in the blood of afterbirth.

Ted Hughes continued to describe the harsh and violent nature in his later volumes.

<p>Self-check Exercise I</p> <p>1) How did Hughes’s childhood in West Yorkshire shape his poetry?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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2) Who were the American poets that influenced Hughes’s poetry?
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3) Who was Sylvia Plath? What role did she play in the making of Hughes as a poet?
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4) Apart from poetry, what else did Hughes write?
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24.3 THE THOUGHT-FOX

24.3.1 Introduction

“The Thought-Fox” appeared in the first collection of verse by Ted Hughes *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957). The poems in this collection were typed by Sylvia Plath, who thereafter entered the poems in a contest. The judges were W.H. Auden, Stephan Spender, and Marianne Moore. Hughes’s manuscript won the award, and the poet attained instant acclaim as the most original and exciting young voice in contemporary British poetry. “The Thought-Fox”, however, has been the most anthologized of not only the poems of this collection but of all his poems. The poem’s success lies in the simplicity of voice, imagery and diction, with which it unravels the secrets of poetic creation. In a brief moment of the creative process, the poem tracks the movement of the imaginary fox from nature into the mind of the poet, and then its impression on the printed page as a poem. In its unification of the human and animal, the poem presents the oneness of man and nature, human and animal, ferociousness and tenderness.

24.3.2 The Text

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
 Something else is alive
 Beside the clock's loneliness
 And this blank page where my fingers move

Through the window I see no star:
 Something more near
 Though deeper within darkness
 Is entering loneliness

Cold, delicately as the dark snow
 A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
 Two eyes serve a movement, that now
 And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
 Between tress, and warily a lame
 Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
 Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
 A widening deepening greenness
 Brilliantly, concentratedly
 Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
 It enters the dark hole of the head
 The window is starless still; the clock ticks
 The page is printed.

24.3.3 Analysis

The setting of the poem is a room, and the time is midnight. The poet sits at his writing desk by the open window; outside lies the starless and dark night. The poet looks into the darkness into the forest beyond the clearings. This act of looking into the external darkness propels the dark interiors of his imagination, which in degrees of imaginative clarity fashions forth a fox. It is as sensual, instinctual and bodily alive as the real fox. The fox of his mind, 'the thought-fox,' finally appears as the poem itself. The poem is about the writing of the poem itself.

In a 1961 BBC broadcast, Hughes talks about the writing process as "the special kind of excitement, the slightly mesmerized and quite involuntary concentration with which you make out the stirrings of a new poem in your mind.... This is hunting and the poem is a new species of creature, a new specimen of life outside your own." In this poem, it is the fox that the poet pursues; he starts with a vague apprehension of its presence, but gradually there arrives clearer perceptions of its figure and movements, till it transfers itself as a whole creature into the mind of the poet, and appears on the page of the poem.

The poem opens in darkness on a “midnight’s moment.” There is utmost silence and loneliness all around, and is enhanced by the clock’s ticking. The poet sits moving his fingers on a blank piece of paper searching for a poem in his mind. The setting presents two contrary spaces. The poet sits inside his room, while outside his window lies the forest defined by darkness. The darkness symbolizes the inactivity of imagination before the beginning of the creative process. The poetic creation takes its root in the natural landscape outside the mind of the poet, somewhere in the forest, where the poet feels something is present.

However, as it becomes subsequently clear in the poem, the fox takes its shape and movement inside the mind of the poet.

In the second stanza, the poet sees no star in the sky, the traditional symbol of heavenly guidance:

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Entering loneliness

The poet has to search inwards for appropriate words to clearly realize the figure and movement of being still unidentified in the poem. However, there is more clarity compared to the first stanza. From “something else is alive” in the first stanza, the speaker notes the imagined animal as “something more near.” The word “something” in the two stanzas connotes both creative inspiration as well as the imagined animal. The unclear movement of the animal that the poet visualizes in the outside works as correlative of the vague stirrings of a poem not yet clearly formed. The poet avoids naming the animal at this stage, as wants to retain the vagueness of the inspiration, until a true discovery of the poetic form.

In the third stanza, the figure of the fox is still not clearly seen. Its presence is, however, more acutely felt:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow
A fox’s nose touches twig, leaf;

The simile contains a visual and kinesthetic image. The poet has only see its dark nose touching the twig and the leaf as snow looking dark in darkness of the night falls touching them on the ground. The sense of coldness contained in this image suggests metaphoric coldness of the world of nature and animal. Next the poet sees the two eyes of the animal, now little clearer. The third and the fourth stanzas are syntactically joined by the eye movements of the fox that make the body of the fox appear more distinct:

Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between tress, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

The appearance of the two eyes within the deep darkness of the snow and trees communicate an eerie feeling. The image serves to suddenly unfold the scary reality of the animal lurking in darkness. The vagueness about it is turning into

exactness of a fox. The last two lines of the third stanza and the first line of the fourth stanza convey through rapidness of rhythm the nervous movements of the fox, and sudden excitement felt by the poet as he perceives the fox setting its paw's prints on the snow in between the trees. There is sudden twist to the rhyme, rhythm and sound pattern to convey the discovery of the fox. The word 'now' appears twice as end rhyme suggests an attainment of clarity in the poet's consciousness about the fox. It also serves to introduce an element of surprise involved in discovery the first true signs of the fox. The repetition of the phrase "and now" provides speed to the rhythm of the poem as the poet almost correctly the animal. The poet is almost certain of its figure as it lurks there in darkness. The line

Sets neat prints into the snow

suggests by its short half-rhyming sounds of the first three words a suspense that achieves clarity as the line settles finally in the vowel prominent sound of "snow." The phrase "lame shadow" in the next line provides the first fuller picture of the fox, and "bold to come" suggests that the fox is lurking on the outer edges of the forest ready to leap inside.

The phrase "across clearing" in the first line of the fifth stanza serves as a definite breaking point in the poem as well as the scene outside imagined by the poet. The fox breaks through to full realization with its leap and descends on the imagination of the poet as well as the reader:

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness
Brilliantly, concentratedly
Coming about its own business

The lengthening of diction "widening, deepening, greenness" suggests how close the fox stands to the poet and the reader. The two eyes of the previous stanzas have merged into single "greenness" that has grown wider and deeper as the fox comes near us as well as the poet.

The last stanza presents such close perception of the fox. It appears so close that we along with the poet can smell its "sudden sharp stink." Its sensuality is so fully realized in us; its smell affects our consciousness. The fox almost literally enters the head of the poet as if it was entering its den. And thereafter appears on the page as poem. The fox is the poem. The long line of the poem finally finds a full stop in the last line, as the picture of the fox becomes real in the page of the poem.

The poem is about poetry, how the perception of the fox attained with powerful immediacy attains its language, its form. The fox is in the mind of the poet rather than outside it. The gap between the external and internal dissolves in the consciousness of the poet. Ted Hughes wrote about this poem, "...long after I am gone, as long as a copy of the poem exists, every time any one reads it, the fox will get up somewhere out of the darkness, and come walking towards them" (*Poetry in the Making* 1967)

Self-check Exercise II

1) What does the fox symbolize in this poem?

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2) What does the darkness of the forest stand for in this poem?

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3) What is the theme of the poem “Thought-fox”?

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4) How would assess Hughes’s poetic technique in this poem?

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24.4 HAWK ROOSTING

24.4.1 Introduction

The poem is a dramatic monologue delivered by the hawk, a bird of prey, who remorselessly reveals its violent instinct and character in an arrogant tone. A dramatic monologue is a form of poetry, in which a single speaker, who is not the poet, presents the whole poem in the form of his speech. He speaks in a specific context at a critical moment. The person who is spoken to in the poem is not revealed. The reader can infer the responses of the listener from the speech of the single speaker. The main interest of the poem lies in the fact that during the course of his speech, the speaker reveals his character, behavior and attitude

almost unwittingly. The best practitioner of dramatic monologue in English poetry was the Victorian poet, Robert Browning, who wrote some memorable poems in this form such as “My Last Duchess,” “Fra Lippo Lippi,” “Porphyria’s Lover” etc.

“Hawk Roosting” is one of the most celebrated poems of Ted Hughes, in which the poet has used dramatic monologue to expose a despotic and murderous nature symbolized by the hawk. The poem was first published in 1960. It is from the volume *Lupercal* (1960).

24.4.2 The Text

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air’s buoyancy and the sun’s ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth’s face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads -

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

24.4.3 Analysis

As you will observe in the all three poems by Hughes, the experience contained in the poems is spoken with a directness that surprises due to morally complex nature of the content. In this poem, the hawk expresses no guilt about its murderous instinct. It is proudly rapacious. Given its superior physical abilities, it kills at will.

The first stanza begins the Hawk’s monologue in a plain voice. He is perched on the top of the forest feeling self-possessed with his eyes closed in contemplation of his absolute control of the world of birds and animals he preys upon. The

punctuation in the second line conveys a directness of tone that runs till the fourth line of the stanza, and conveys an unfazed murderous intent:

Inaction, no falsifying dream
.....
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat

The hawk indulges in no false dream; it kills with precision and at will and eats his prey. The visual imagery in the third line links the precision to kill which is inherent in the instinct of the hawk with the precise make up of his body that makes it possible to transform the instinct into murderous action:

..... no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

The use of the words “head” and “feet” makes personification implicit in the poem, and so the poem may also be read as reflecting the guiltless murderous instinct in the humans. The hawk uses its “hooked head and hooked feet”

In the second stanza, the hawk speaks about his firm grip over the earth; it can choose to kill at will, as it possesses both the advantage of the height of the trees as well as its natural power of menacing flight that can utilize both the “air’s buoyancy” and “the sun’s ray” to glide down and kill its victims. The stanza uses a polysyllabic word in each line: “convenience,” “buoyancy,” “advantage,” and “inspection.” As an abstract diction, these words convey ruthless ferocity of the hawk beyond rational and moral constraint. He symbolizes nature in its full nakedness of an urge to kill. The words also convey a militaristic attitude, as the hawk exudes:

And the earth’s face upward for my inspection

The pride of the hawk attains its apotheosis in the third stanza, as it feels godlike control over the earth. The first line of this stanza still presents the hawk perched the tree like the first lines of the previous stanzas. The power of its “hooked feet” is evident in their ability to be “locked upon the rough bark.” There is a rhetorical declaration of supremacy, as the hawk declares:

It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

The hawk exudes with pride at being a special creation of Nature. In its coming to being, in the making of its “foot” and “feather,” as if the whole “Creation” participated. There is no hyperbole intended in this assertion of the hawk. There is no ambiguity in its voice that it holds the Creation under subjection.

In stanzas fourth and fifth, the most pernicious aspect its power is unfolded. It holds its sway over all creation, and kills at will, because all its own. There is no refinement, not hint of civilization about the body and the behavior of the hawk:

There is no sophistry in my body
My manners are tearing off heads

The two stanzas are syntactically linked. The physical brutishness expressed in the last line of the fourth stanza “tearing off heads” settles with the godlike

decision of fate of the victim uttered in the first line of the fifth stanza:

The allotment of death

The last three lines of the fifth stanza complete the merciless killing instinct of the hawk:

For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The hawk is beyond the arguments of reason or moral law. It lives a life of predation, and symbolizes the Darwinian law. It lives by killing in the most brutal fashion.

The sixth stanza shifts the scene from the brutal killing to that of self-definition, although the whole poem can be read as long self-definition. However, the last stanza brings back the calm declarative tone of the first stanza. The sun is reduced to play the background to the hawk. It rules the world with scary calmness that hides its menacing and death-giving instinct. Since its creation, it has not hold of the creation through the power of its ‘eye’:

Nothing has changed since I began.
My eyes has permitted no change.
I am going to keep thing like this.

The poem uses the same vocabulary as that of a typical nature poem. It contains references to ‘wood,’ ‘trees,’ ‘air,’ ‘sun’ etc. It also refers to God, the creator of nature. However, the poem is anything but a nature poem you can associate with a romantic poet like Wordsworth or Keats. The poem presents a world of nature shockingly antithetical to the benign image of nature expected in such a poem. It’s a nature ruled over by the predatory power of the hawk, whose chief instinct is to brutally kill and eat its prey, while subduing each aspect of nature to its design as a God, although a god who allots death.

Self-check Exercise III

1) What does the hawk symbolize in this poem?

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2) What is the form of the poem?

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3) How is Hughes’s “Hawk Roosting” a nature poem?
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4) Write some of the features of the hawk as described by Hughe in this poem?
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24.5 HOW TO PAINT A WATER LILY

24.5.1 Introduction

The poem “How to Paint a Water Lily” was published in the year 1960. It is also titled as “To Paint a Water Lily.” Both the titles express an artist’s struggle to transmute nature, natural objects, birds and animals on to the page of a poem. This struggle is central to so many of Hughes’s poem, such as the poem “The Thought-Fox” that you have already read in this unit. The first title “How to Paint a Water Lily,” the title that we have retained, reads as if the poet is advising “how to pant a water lily.”

24.5.2 The Text

A green level of lily leaves
Roofs the pond’s chamber and paves

The flies’ furious arena: study
These, the two minds of this lady.

First observe the air’s dragonfly
That eats meat, that bullets by

Or stands in space to take aim;
Others as dangerous comb the hum

Under the trees. There are battle-shouts
And death-cries everywhere hereabouts

But inaudible, so the eyes praise
To see the colours of these flies

Rainbow their arcs, spark, or settle
Cooling like beads of molten metal

Through the spectrum. Think what worse
Is the pond-bed's matter of course;

Prehistoric bedragoned times
Crawl that darkness with Latin names,

Have evolved no improvements there,
Jaws for heads, the set stare,

Ignorant of age as of hour-
Now paint the long-necked lily-flower

Which, deep in both worlds, can be still
As a painting, trembling hardly at all

Though the dragonfly alight,
Whatever horror nudge her root.

24.5.3 Glossary

Spectrum : rays of color such as seen in a rainbow, but produced by separating the components of light by their different degrees of refraction determined by wavelength.

24.5.4 Analysis

The poem presents a set of pictures that evoke the beauty of nature both in its violent activity and in calmness. Hughes's main philosophy as a poet is not simply to describe the outer beauty of nature, not even to uncover its life within that corresponds with the human feelings, as the romantic poets such as Wordsworth do in their poems. For him nature is as complex in its possession of both beauty and terror, as a human being is deep within, and he seeks to portray this essential duality of existence in his poems.

The speaking voice in the poem attempts to capture the visual image of a water lily on a canvas, even as he encounters the wildness and violence of nature surrounding the lily in the form of swift and warring flights and activities of the dragonfly and other flies. The water lily suggests two contrary aspects of nature- the surface of the pond on which a cluster of lily flower floats appears quiet, soothing and peaceful, but beneath this quietness lie the disturbing activities of nature symbolized by the battling flies. This duality of the nature is shown by the division between the life associated with the lily flowers, and the strife involving the flies surrounding them as well as under the water surface of the pond.

The poet is an artist, and is charmed about the beauty and serenity symbolized by the water lily. However, his mind is distracted by the striking complexities and 'war-like' situation making the atmosphere that surround the water lily.

The poem contains thirteen two line-stanzas with irregular rhymes. The shortness of stanzas suggests that the poem is a record of momentous thoughts as the poet

observes the water lily and the ambience around it. The irregularity of the rhyme suggests the diversity of experience marked by beauty and violence seen in nature.

The poem begins with a precise visual image so characteristic of the style of Hughes. The precision of the image produces a painting-like effect:

A green level of lily leaves
Roofs the pond's chamber and paves

The flies' furious arena: study
These, the two minds of this lady.

In these two stanzas, the poet perceives the water lily in splendor and beauty, however soon intervened by observation of the "flies' furious arena." The poet is so arrested by the beauty of a cluster of lily flowers that he sees them as one "green level" roofing the surface of the pond, as if they were sheltering "the pond's chamber." The water lily in itself symbolizes nature in its beautiful and nurturing aspect. However, the mention of the 'furious arena' of the flies that the water lilies help build introduce the terrifying aspect of nature that the poet will develop subsequently.

What is remarkable here is the use of personification. The fourth line of the poem personifies the water lily as a 'lady' with two minds. These "two minds" refer to the two opposite aspects of nature as a creator as well as a destroyer.

The third stanza justifies the title of the poem. The use of the imperative "first observe" serves as a direction for a painter:

First observe the air's dragonfly
That eats meat, that bullets by
Or stands in space to take aim;

There is a similar direction suggesting "how to paint a water lily" in the eighth stanza:

Think what worse
Is the pond-bed's matter of course;

Though the poet is writing a verse and not making a painting; his poetry is known for translating the images from the world of nature directly on to the page of poetry. It is the complexity of nature that would make it extremely challenging to achieve that end.

The next three stanzas make clearer why painting the water lily is going to be a difficult task. The darker side of nature becomes more evident, and poses the challenging of presenting a simple picture of nature as that of human beings. Naturally, the abrupt change in thought is accompanied by a change in the tone of the poem. The poet leaves behind the serene and gentle images of lilies, and turns to the violent pictures of the dragonfly which "eats meat" and aims at insects to kill them for its food. Like the hawk in the poem "Hawk Roosting," the dragonfly is a predator targeting victims. In these stanzas there is no description of the water lily. The poem focuses entirely on war like activities of nature. Violence is

aply suggested by the poem's diction. The poet's brilliant use of the compound words such as death-cries', 'battle-shout' as well as the use of nouns as verb such as "bullets by" suggest rapid action of the battle-fields and the horror that they evoke.

The cries and shouts of the battlefield of flies may be inaudible, yet the heightened sensibility of the poet is able to perceive the activity produced by and producing the violence prevalent in nature. Again, as if advising a painter, he recommends seeing the changing colors of the flies forming the rainbow arcs and sparkling- actions suggestive of violent activity. The poet employs juxtaposition of images reminiscent of the metaphysical poets like Donne in the following simile:

...or settle
Cooling like beads of molten metal

The juxtaposition of 'molten' and 'metal', fluid and hard metal again symbolizes the dual aspects of nature- soothing and harsh.

The poet next suggests the even more sinister aspect of nature by indicating the ruthless violence that takes place below the surface of the pond, which gets linked to the mindless killings and wars across human history right from the prehistoric times, marked by the Roman times, and continuing up to the present moment in history- violence has been universal.

Prehistoric bedragoned times
Crawl that darkness with Latin names,

Have evolved no improvements there,
Jaws for heads, the set stare,

However, as art itself, the water lily has been oblivious of the moral distinction between good and evil, the benign and malevolent. It exists symbolizing both aspects of existence across time and history:

Ignorant of age as of hour-
Now paint the long-necked lily-flower

Which, deep in both worlds, can be still
As a painting, trembling hardly at all

The use of hyphenation in 'long-necked lily-flower' is suggestive of coexistence of the two worlds-the world of beauty and fragility and that of violence. As nature exists in its timelessness, so the water lily will exist in poem without any fear of 'trembling'.

The poem ends in duality as it had begun.

As you must have observed during your reading of the poem, and this analysis, the poem makes good use of visual and auditory images. The sound pattern is very rhythmic throughout, though there are necessary variations. The contrast inherent in the very essence of the nature is very thoughtfully and imaginatively captured by the poet in the image of the water lily, and presented in his arrangement of words and sounds in the poem.

Self-check Exercise IV

1) How does the poet describe nature in its simplicity and calmness?

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2) How does the poet depict nature in its violence?

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3) How does the poet portray the two worlds of the water lily?

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4) How do you find the language and the structure of the poem?

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24.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you read about the life and works of Ted Hughes, and analyzed three of his poems. All the three poems, “Thought-Fox,” “Hawk Roosting,” and “How to Paint a Water Lily” suggest a definite break in the post-World War English poetry. They suggest a return to nature and the rural life as subjects of poetry. But they also introduce a new perspective. They present nature as violent, merciless, and destructive echoing the baseness of human instincts. They also introduce simplicity and directness to English poetry.

We hope you will more of Ted Hughes from anthologies of modern poetry or the various collections of his poetry.

24.7 ANSWER TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Growing up in the rural Yorkshire, as a young boy Hughes was fascinated with the birds, animals, and the natural landscape, which shaped his poetic sensibility. He was drawn towards the wild and predatory habits and instincts of the animals, and the poet saw in them a reflection of the deeper psychic realities of the human beings.
- 2) Among the American poets to influence to Ted Hughes were John Crowe Ransom and Robert Lowell.
- 3) Sylvia Plath was a major American poet, who was married to Ted Hughes. She played a major role in the making of Ted Hughes, especially in his formative years. She typed the poems of his first collection *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), and made useful suggestions to improve his verse. She was also instrumental in getting this work published.
- 4) Ted Hughes wrote literature for children, radio plays, as well as some translations.

Self-Check Exercise II

- 1) The fox symbolizes the poem itself. It takes birth as a formless intuition in the consciousness of the poet, but this consciousness is reflected in the darkness of the night in the forest outside his room. Initially, the thought or the idea of the fox appears formless and vague, but as the poem proceeds it slowly starts taking shape and structure, and attains full and immediate clarity in the last stanza.
- 2) The darkness of the forest outside the room of the poet stands for the inactive state of the poetic imagination, just before the beginning of the creative process. It suggests the potential stage of creative imagination.
- 3) The theme of the poem is coming into being of a poem itself. The poem captures the moments of creative process by suggesting an analogy of the 'thought-fox' - the idea of fox that stirs in the mind of the poet reflected in the dark night outside the room of the poet. As the fox becomes clear in the forest outside, the poem attains clarity in the poet's mind, till it is finally printed on the paper. The dark world outside and the poet's room suggest a connection between nature and man.
- 4) The poem is composed in a simple diction with directness of tone. The poet has used common words such as 'room', 'paper', 'forest', 'fox', 'tree' etc., but they generate evocative meanings. The images are sharp and precise, for example, the fox taking shape in the darkness, and the 'eyes' of the fox staring in the dark that suggest beauty and terror at the same time.

Self-Check Exercise III

- 1) The hawk symbolizes nature in its savagery and brutality. The hawk is an animal which is known for its predatory instinct. The hawk is proud of his control over the lives of its preys, which makes him very superior and arrogant.

- 2) The poem is written in the form of a dramatic monologue. The use of this poetic form coheres well with the subject of the poem, which is to show the authoritative and self-centered attitude of the hawk. Since dramatic monologue is narrated by a single speaker, it gives the power of control to the speaker who holds full command over his thoughts and ideas, as well as the silent listener.
- 3) “Hawk Roosting” is a nature poem. The poem is full of natural imagery and diction. Use of words like, ‘wood’, ‘tree’, ‘earth’, ‘sky’, ‘perch’, ‘air’, ‘god’, ‘creation’ all convey the naturalistic diction, tone and mood of the poem. However, the poem is about nature in a very different way than the romantic poems of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It portrays nature in its savagery and violence.
- 4) Hughes portrays the hawk as arrogant, self-centered, and proud. Expressions such as “I hold creation in my food”, “allotment of death”, “my eyes has permitted no change” convey the despotic attitude of the Hawk. It is violent, brutal, and merciless.

Self-Check Exercise IV

- 1) The poet describes the nature in its simplicity and calmness in the very first stanza of the poem in the image of the ‘green lily leaves’ that provide shade to the open surface of the pond’s water. The very use of the color ‘green’ indicates the nurturing and productive aspect of the nature.
- 2) The violent aspect of the nature is portrayed in the image of the dragonfly as a predator running after its victims. The use of phrases such as ‘bullets by’, ‘battle-shouts’, and ‘death-cries’ shows nature as a battleground- very gloomy, dark and furious.
- 3) The two worlds of the water lily is portrayed by the poet in the form of the life above and below the water surface of the pond in which the water lily grows, as well as the atmosphere surrounding it. On the surface everything appears very quiet and calm, suggesting the outward simplicity of the nature at first sight. On the other hand, beneath the water surface, as well as in area around the flowers, things are very chaotic and menacing, suggesting the destructive aspect of the nature.
- 4) The language as well as the structure of the poem reflects its content. Hughes’s language is very sensitive in terms of its auditory and visual effect. The use of new linguistic devices and punctuations brilliantly sets the tone and the mood of the poem. Flooded with evocative images, symbols and metaphors, the poem conveys the duality of nature in a very appealing and thoughtful way. As far as the structure is concerned, the poem consists of 13 couplets with a regular rhyme, though with some exceptions to introduce variations in meaning in tandem with the variation in the rhythm of the poem.

UNIT 25 SEAMUS HEANEY

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Seamus Heaney (13 April 1939- 30 August 2013)
- 25.3 Death of a Naturalist
 - 25.3.1 Introduction
 - 25.3.2 The Text
 - 25.3.3 Analysis
- 25.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.5 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

25.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have read this unit, you will be able to:

- Critically respond to Seamus Heaney's life and works
- Understand the Irish contexts of his poetry
- Examine the poem 'Death of a Naturalist' - its artistic blending of form and theme, word/sound and meaning.
- Write about blank verse
- Appreciate poetic devices such as personification, pathetic fallacy, assonance, oxymoron alliteration, onomatopoeia etc.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will read about the life and works of Seamus Heaney. Heaney's reputation as a contemporary poet far exceeds any other poet. As an Irish poet, he is regarded as the most able inheritor of W.B. Yeats. Reading about his life and works, you would be able to appreciate his growth as a poet.

The poem we are reading in this unit is the title poem from Heaney's first collection called *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). The poet expresses a disillusionment with nature felt by a young school boy, who had a scientific interest in nature prior to the experience described in the poem.

Read the poem carefully, and then read the other sections.

25.2 SEAMUS HEANEY (13 APRIL 1939- 30 AUGUST 2013)

Seamus Heaney was a translator, academician and a prose writer of great merit, but he is chiefly known for his poetry, which ranks among the best in the contemporary era. Heaney was born in 1939 into a Roman Catholic farming

family in Mossbawn, County Derry in Northern Ireland. Being a Roman Catholic in Northern Ireland meant living on the wrong side of the political divide. Ireland had been colonized since the 12th century by Britain. However, in 1800 by the Act of Union passed by the parliament in Westminster, Ireland was legally annexed by Britain and made a part of the United Kingdom. This resulted into a series of anti-colonial struggles mostly violent such as the one commemorated by W.B. Yeats in his poem "Easter Rising" (1916). Ireland got independence in 1922, but, like India, it was partitioned on religious grounds. Northern Ireland, which consisted of the province of Ulster, had a majority Protestant population, and chose to remain with the United Kingdom, because historically the Protestants descended from the Nobility, who were planted from Britain to control the Irish land and trade. Religiously, they had affinity with Britain, and therefore, they were not in favour of an independent Ireland fearing the dominance of the Catholic population, who were the majority people taken as a whole. The Republic of Ireland which was dominated by the Catholics attained freedom.

Born in a Catholic family in Northern Ireland made Heaney a member of the minority community, a fact that molded his poetic sensibility to a great extent. Though he came from a peasant's family, Heaney was bright in studies from childhood and was destined for intellectual and creative vocation. However, his rural roots shaped his poetry with as much intensity as his Catholic faith. In his poem 'Digging,' the first poem in his first collection *Death of a Naturalist* he recalls his father digging potatoes, and his grandfather cutting "more turf in a day," and then says

But I've no spade to follow men like them
Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Having won a scholarship to Queen's University, Belfast, Heaney left Derry for higher studies. He pursued degree in English language and literature, and graduated with a First class in 1961. Philip Hobsbaum, one of the teachers at the university arranged regular workshops for poets and critics. Some of the students who came to participate in these workshops were those who later became leading Irish poets such as Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, and Heaney himself. These poets were casually referred to as the Group, and wrote poetry generally in imitation of the Movement poets of England like Philip Larkin, though Heaney would admit other influences as well such as those of Yeats, Hopkins, and Hughes. Like the poems of the Movement group, their poetry also followed the traditional forms and modes, and depicted usual and routine events in casual, matter-of-fact manner. Heaney's first collection of verse was published in 1966, and it was called *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). The poems in this collection bear the imprint of the Group, and are composed in the traditional modes.

Death of a Naturalist (1966), as well as his second volume of poetry *Door into the Dark* (1969), consists of poems that present Heaney's childhood experiences in his village, those related to the life of the farmers. The poem resounds with sensitive and colorful images of the nature blended with poet's narrative about certain experiences. It is his vivid and sensuous description of nature that got Heaney the title of a "bucolic poet" in the early part of his career. However, nature and natural objects in these poems appear more like they do in the poetry

of Ted Hughes, whose influence is clearly evident. Nature comes in these poems as the objective other, often a stranger, though with a powerful presence, often targeted as also targeting the human observer.

Apart from “Death of a Naturalist” that you will read in detail later, another poem from his first collection which became very popular was “Mid-Term Break,” a poem he wrote remembering the death of his four year old brother. The title derives from the fact that he was called back home in the middle of the term from his school to be present at the funeral of his brother:

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,
He lay in the four foot box as in his cot.
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

The year 1966 was remarkable in Heaney’s life for another reason. He accepted a teaching position at the School of English at Queen’s University, and remained there till 1972.

In late 1960s violence erupted in Northern Ireland, which was to last for three decades, the 1970s being most violent. In 1972 came his third collection of poetry called *Wintering Out* (1972), which expressed his calm and considered response to the conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics in Northern Ireland. He dealt with the subject from a distance, often suggesting that animosity and violence was pointless, no matter which faction one belonged to.

The Troubles, as the ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland came to be called, made the life of the Catholic minority extremely oppressive. Heaney and his family decided to move to the Republic of Ireland, when an offer came their way of a house in County Wicklow. His next volume of poetry called *North* (1975) was published in 1975, which chose for its subject the countless people murdered in Ireland over the ages as a result of the colonial invasion of Britain. In poems such as “The Tollund Man,” with brilliant imagination he envisions bodies taken out of the bogs, bodies that were murdered, their throat slit or strangulated. He had read in a book called *Bog People* (1969) by P.V.Glob about the archaeological finding of the Iron Age bodies in Denmark, which were subsequently preserved. Heaney associates the ancient ritual sacrifices of the Iron Age with the political murder and martyrdom of the Irish people for centuries. In another poem from this collection, “Act of Union” Heaney does a brilliant interlocking of the geographical and political positions of England and Ireland through a narrative of sexual invasion and control. He presents Ireland as feminine, and England as masculine, and shows how the masculine England had encircled and sexually invaded and assaulted the feminine Ireland.

Over the decades, Heaney continued to publish numerous collections of poetry including *Field Work* (1979), *Sweeny Astray* (1984), *Station Island* (1985), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996), *District and Circle* (2006), and *Human Chain* (2010). Each of his collections received great acclaim and appreciation from contemporary writers and critics.

In 1981, Heaney was invited by the English department of Harvard University, and he remained associated with the university till 1996, spending his time

between Boston and Dublin. He was elected the Oxford Professor of Poetry in 1989, and in 1995 he was conferred the Noble Prize for literature. These awards and recognitions suggest the towering influence of Heaney as a poet in the second half of the twentieth century. He has wielded a great influence among the public, and his opinion on the political events in Ireland has been constantly sought by both national and international media. His status as a public poet had considerably influenced his poetry. There is always a consciousness running through his poems that they might be taken as statements on the political developments in Ireland, especially the factional strife and the violent struggle between the British forces and the Irish revolutionaries. However, for Heaney, a poem is not a political propaganda; it uses the political experiences to perfect the artistic purpose rather than being exploited by a particular ideology. It is for this reason that the Irish nationalists nursed a grudge against him for not directly voicing the atrocities committed by the British forces on the Catholic minority of Northern Ireland.

Seamus Heaney died at the age of 74 on 30 August 2013.

As you have read this note on the life and works of Seamus Heaney, evaluate your understanding of the poet by answering the questions given below as part of the first exercise of this unit.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Where was Seamus Heaney born, and to which nationality did he belong?

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2) What did his father and grandfather do for living? How did it shape Heaney’s poetic sensibility?

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3) When Ireland was made a part of the United Kingdom? How did Ireland’s colonization by England affect Heaney as a person and as a poet?

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4) Why did Seamus Heaney move from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland?

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5) What came to be called Troubles about Northern Ireland?

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6) How did Heaney respond in his poetry to the violence in Northern Ireland?

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7) When Heaney was awarded the Noble Prize for literature?

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8) Who were the poets who influenced Seamus Heaney?

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25.3 DEATH OF A NATURALIST

25.3.1 Introduction

A naturalist is a person who studies nature, especially plants and animals in the natural surroundings. The poem that you are about to read is about the metaphorical death of the naturalist in the young speaker of the poem, a school boy, presumably the poet himself in his young age. The poem presents in two stanzas an experience on a particular hot day with the frogspawn, tadpoles, and the frogs at a flax-dam, which resulted into the death of the naturalist in him. However, the poem also recollects that phase of innocent naturalist in him, which made him perceive, collect, and observe the frogspawn break into tadpoles in the jar at home and school. The poem explores an event and young naturalist's response to it that changed him from being a naturalist to somebody who developed revulsion towards naturalism. The poem also connotes a trespass committed by the innocent boy by taking away the frogspawn from the male frogs. In the second stanza, you will get a sense of impending punishment coming the young poet's way. The atmospheres of "the flax-dam" gets threatening as the male frogs become warring contingents, and make the place noisy with their angry croaking; the spawn seem to be preparing to clutch his hands, as the poet escapes.

25.3.2 The Text

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
Of the townland; green and heavy headed
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.
Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.
There were dragon-flies, spotted butterflies,
But best of all was the warm thick slobber
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water
In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring
I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied
Specks to range on window-sills at home,
On shelves at school, and wait and watch until
The fattening dots burst into nimble-
Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how
The daddy frog was called a bullfrog
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was
Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too
For they were yellow in the sun and brown
In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank
With coddling in the grass the angry frogs
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.
Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked

On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
 The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
 Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
 I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
 Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
 That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

Glossary

flax	: a plant having blue flowers.
flax-dam	: not a dam, but a pool or natural pond in Northern Ireland. In order to extract fiber out of flax to be used in cloth making, bunches of flax are kept for a few weeks so that their stems become soft. As they gradually decompose, the flax give a very unpleasant smell as is evident in the poem.
fester	: to become decay or rot.
townland	: a small administrative region in Ireland.
sod	: turf or grassy ground.
swelter	: to sweat or suffer from extreme heat.
slobber	: to drop saliva from the mouth
frogspawn	: frog egg covered by translucent jelly
plop	: to drop with a sound similarly produced when an object falls into water

25.3.3 Analysis

The title of the poem is an ironic exaggeration. As a scientist, a naturalist would not be bothered about the “coarse croaking” of the “angry frogs.” But it provides the much needed humour to the poem; the young poet’s initial fascination with the frogspawn and the frogs is described as that of a naturalist. However, he does collect and observe the frogspawn in a jar; so the poet would like to makes us believe that the boy was a naturalist in the making, and the incident on “one hot day,” which holds the key to the thematic and tonal transformation of the poem results in the death of the naturalist in him.

The poem is composed in a blank verse. A blank verse consists of unrhymed iambic pentameter lines. An *iambic* is an arrangement of sound in poetry, in which an unaccented or unstressed syllable is followed by an accented or stressed one. The word *pentameter* suggests a rhythmic pattern in poetry in which there are five stressed syllables in a line. So, in other words, the poem is composed in unrhymed lines that create a certain rhythm due to having five unstressed syllable each followed by five stressed syllables. The following extract from the poem illustrate the blank verse:

Then one hot day when fields were rank
 With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
 Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
 To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
 Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus

The poem is arranged into two stanzas of unequal length. The first stanza consists of 21 lines, whereas the second stanza has only 12 lines. The first stanza takes a much longer space, because it has to develop the setting, mood, atmosphere, and set the tone of the poem. It has also to introduce the speaking voice of the poem, a young boy, still innocent, but eager to know the natural phenomenon, who regularly visits “the flax-dam” with inquisitive amusement, and a genuine interest bordering on pleasure and knowledge about the natural objects, especially frogspawn, and frogs in this case.

The setting of the poem is “the flax-dam.” Since it constitutes the defining experience of the poem, its setting is developed elaborately till the 10th line of the poem. The young poet understandably visits this place quite often, and “every spring” he “would fill jam-potfuls” of the frogspawn to keep at home and school. The poem adopts a neutral tone even though a sense of decaying atmosphere of “flax-dam” is being conveyed, which is appropriate of course considering the fact that the young poet is a naturalist, a biologist, a detached observer till the first stanza of the poem. Yet this neutrality is not an absolute one, as that of an adult but is interspersed with the inquisitiveness of a child.

As the poem concentrates on the setting, Heaney’s talent with creating sensuous description becomes evident. The poem is descriptive no doubt in this part, but words and sounds are so chosen to lend music to the description of the pool, the natural beings and objects living in and around it. The first line itself presents an interlocking of assonance and alliteration in the phrase “the flax-dam festered in the heart:” and so does the second line: “green and heavy-headed.” It is an excellent demonstration of how alliterative and assonant sound patterns are used to suggest the decaying state of the place. It takes only three words, all verbs, in a space of three lines, to suggest decay and decomposition. The words “festered” and “rotted,” and “weighted produce an alliterative resonance to suggest this decaying atmosphere:

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
Of the townland; green and heavy headed
Flax had rotted there,

Bunches of flax are traditionally kept in a pool in Northern Ireland to soften their stems so that fiber could be extracted from them. The young poet visits this pool all through the year, and observes the decaying flax under the weight of the “huge sods.” It rots and “festers” in the water of the pool, and then becomes hot in the extreme heat of the sun. The poet uses personification and pathetic fallacy, as he gives human attributes to both the flax as well as the sun:

Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun

Another poetic device that blends sound and sense in the poem is onomatopoeia. Among the developments in the pool, including the presence and the sounds of various kinds of flies such as “bluebottles,” “dragon-flies,” and “spotted butterflies,” the one that catches the attention of the young poet most is the drooling saliva of the frogspawn:

But best of all was the warm thick slobber
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water
In the shade of the banks.

The sounds produced by “warm thick slobber” suggests repulsive feel of the object if touched, so does the sound “clotted water,” the bed of the frogspawn. The fact such a sight only increases the curiosity of the young poet for “jellied specks” confirms his claim to the status of a budding naturalist.

Another figure of speech which suggests the sense of repulsion and decay about the place is oxymoron, which occurs in the phrase “Bubbles gargles delicately.” The gargling of the festering bubbles cannot be “delicate” in a normal perception; its use here again connotes the curiosity and inquisitiveness of the young naturalist. The young poet watches with curiosity jellied frogspawn develop into “fattening dots” in the jar, and then into “swimming tadpoles.” The structure of the last 7 lines of the poem conveys the innocence of the young boy, especially in the use of “and” to relate every fact about “the daddy frog” and the “mammy frog.” The tone of the poem becomes mild, suggestive of the innocent curiosity of the poet. The teacher at school uses the language of the children:

The daddy frog was called a bullfrog
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was
Frogspawn.

The fact that one could forecast the weather by looking whether the frogs were yellow or brown is also related to suggest the innocence as well as the confident curiosity of the young boy.

The first phrase of the second stanza introduces an abrupt break in thought with the expression “The one hot day,” suggesting a radical reversal of the condition. Hereafter, the poem follows an entirely different movement. The frogs in the pool gear for revenge against the young poet for intrusion and forceful evacuation of the frogspawn.

The young naturalist, by filling “jampotfuls of the jellied/Specks to range of window-sills at home, /On shelves at school” intruded in the territory of the frogs, and forced a separation of the frogspawn from the frogs. The setting in the second stanza has transformed into that of a battlefield:

Then one hot day when fields were rank
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
Invaded the flax-dam;

The frogs assume a menacing posture with their “coarse croaking” which the poet had not been used to. As an inferior enemy, the poet “ducked through the hedges.” The place smelled unpleasant, of the cow dung, and the croaking sounded coarse as well. The poet uses the language of metaphor followed by a simile to suggest the sense of disgusting sound, and sight of the place as well as the frogs.

The air was thick with a bass chorus
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...; their loose necks pulsed like sails.

The poet again uses onomatopoeia to communicate the young boy’s perception of the immediate threat from the frogs. The sounds ‘slap’ and ‘plop’ in the 8th line of

the second stanza suggest a sense of assault from the frogs. The poet experiences fear as well as repulsion. His observation of the “gross-bellied frogs” whose “loose necks pulsed like sails” do not suggest the objective response of a naturalist but the disgust experienced by a fearful boy. The frogs pose threats as they “sat/Poised like mud grenades,” but they also fill him with loathing, as he sees “their blunt heads farting.” The poet is overcome by a sense of nausea; he turns away from “the fax-dam” and runs knowing that the frogs, “the great slime kings” had invaded the place, and wanted revenge for his intrusion. The same spawn that he so earnestly held up in his hand to put into his jar seem to be ready to “clutch” his hand if he “dipped” it in the spawn.

The poem is so typical of the early poems of Seamus Heaney, as it vividly captures an experience of the natural world with immediacy of sounds, sights, and smells. One of the greatest qualities of the poet has been his ability to let meaning emerge from sounds, and he has successfully demonstrated that in this poem, as in all of his poems.

Glossary

- assonance** : repetition of similar vowel sounds in adjacent words.
- alliteration** : repetition of similar sounds, especially consonantal, at the beginning of the words or in a pattern of stressed syllables.
- personification** : a figure of speech wherein inanimate objects or abstractions are addressed as human beings.
- pathetic fallacy** : a literary device whereby human feelings are attributed to inanimate objects or nature.
- onomatopoeia** : words so formed or used that their sounds relate to the object or meaning they refer to.
- oxymoron** : a figure of speech in which obviously contradictory terms appear together.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Who is the speaker of the poem? How does his voice change through the poem?
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- 2) With reference to an image each from the first and the second stanza describe Heaney’s style as a nature poet. How different is he from William Wordsworth?
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3) What does the title “Death of a Naturalist” imply?

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4) In the first stanza, the poet uses synesthesia, or a poetic device whereby the poet associates impressions produced by one sense with the ones produced by another sense. Discuss the lines where it occurs.

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5) How does the poem create associative patterns of sound and sense?

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25.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the Irish poet Seamus Heaney. You were given a brief biographical note about his life as well as his works. Thereafter, we read his poem “Death of a Naturalist,” as well as its analysis. You also answered the questions put to you in Exercise 1 and Exercise 2. Now you should be able to form a critical judgment on the Seamus Heaney and his early poetry, as well as develop a perspective on his later poetry that you may yourself like to read.

25.5 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercises I

- 1) Seamus Heaney was born in County Derry in Northern Ireland, which is a part of United Kingdom. In 1972, however, he moved Glanmore, County Wicklow, in the Republic of Ireland. Heaney always maintained that he was an Irish by nationality, and not British though he was born in Northern Ireland.
- 2) Heaney’s grandfather and father were farmers. His early childhood at his farms and his experience of rural life amidst natural surroundings influenced

the poetic sensibility of the poet. It gave him themes, images, characters, situations, as well as a certain music that resulted by blending the Irish and English speech rhythms.

- 3) Ireland was forcefully made part of the United Kingdom by an act passed by the colonial parliament in Westminster in 1800 called the Act of Union. Heaney wrote his poetry with a deep sense of Irishness in him. Several of his poems such as “Act of Union” deal with Britain’s colonization of Ireland. The poems invoke the physical suffering and mutilation as well as mental trauma faced by the Irish, as well as their anti-colonial struggles.
- 4) Seamus Heaney moved from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland, because of the Troubles, the ethnic conflict which ravaged Northern Ireland from late 1960s to the 1990s.
- 5) The Troubles refers to the political conflict between the Protestant and Catholics in Northern Ireland, though it was a national conflict rather than religious. The Protestants who were the majority population in the region were called the loyalists or unionists, because they wanted Northern Ireland to be a part of the United Kingdom, whereas the Catholics demanded freedom of Northern Ireland from the British and its merger with the Republic of Ireland. This contentious issue spilled over into three decades of violence since the late 1960s.
- 6) Heaney responded to the violence in Northern in an oblique and restrained manner. Though he lamented the loss of the innocent Irish at the hands of the British colonial forces, he also avoided speaking for the violent Irish revolutionaries, the member of the IRA.
- 7) Heaney won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1995.
- 8) The poets who influenced Heaney were Ted Hughes, W.B. Yeats, Robert Lowell and W.B. Yeats.

Self-check Exercises II

- 1) The speaker of the poem is a young boy. His voice in the poem undergoes a change as the poem moves from the first stanza to the second stanza. The innocent curiosity and inquisitive delight in the boy while observing “the flax-dam,” the plants, flies and frogspawn is related in a relaxed, neutral, as well positive tone. In the second stanza, however, the speaker becomes fearful, circumspect, and disgusted, as the frogs invade the pool, and threaten him with the “coarse croaking.” The tone, therefore, becomes grave and serious.
- 2) Heaney as a nature poet is different from Wordsworth in his observation of natural objects. Unlike in Wordsworth’s poetry, the speaker or poet’s inner feelings do not influence the character of the objects that are observed in their full strangeness from the speaker. The image “the flax-dam festered” in the first stanza or “the slap and plop” in the second stanza communicates almost an unemotional portrayal of nature, which, however, grows upon the minds of the readers with its alien intensity.

- 3) The title of the poem implies a radical transformation in the young speaker's attitude to nature and natural beings. From being an ardent lover and student of the nature in the first stanza, in the second stanza he undergoes a complete loss of naturalism. His intrusion and forceful removal of the frogspawn in the first stanza provoke the frogs to invade "the flax-dam" in the second and croak hoarsely in unison as if to militarily threaten the boy with punishment. This experience produces an altered perception in the boy as he now finds the pool with frogs and frogspawn sickening and repulsive. That is the death of a naturalist in him.
- 4) The lines "... bluebottles/ Wove a strong gauze of sound around smell" is an instance of synaesthesia. The poet blends the sense of sound and smell to enhance the feeling of decaying atmosphere of the pool.
- 5) The poem creates associative patterns of sound and sense by using poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia.



**The High Modernist, Postmodernist
and Recent Poets**

5

Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

VI

The American Poets-I

(The Nineteenth Century)

**R.W.Emerson, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, H. W.
Longfellow, and Emily Dickinson**



School of Humanities
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Block

6

THE AMERICAN POETS-I

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK VI

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: AMERICAN POETRY IN THE COLONIAL ERA, THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Dear Students, you must have got used to reading the short essays in the Introductions to the blocks providing you perspectives on the period of literary history required to understand the poets and their works in the blocks better. In the present and the next block you will be reading the poetry of the United States of America. Read this essay with a pencil, rubber and sharpner ready at hand. I'm sure you would not forget to keep a good dictionary nearby. Make notes in the margin of the page so that you may be able later to revise more easily in a short span of time. Be ready to answer a few questions based on this 'Introduction' in Unit 31. So, let's start.

Late in the fifteenth century Columbus discovered America for the Spaniards and the Spanish people discovered gold mines there. In 1607 some hundred Englishmen and boys reached what they called Jamestown in present day Virginia. They were allured by the Spanish success but what they discovered was a hostile environment and if it had not been for the resourcefulness of John Smith (1580 - 1631) the colony at Jamestown would have perished. As president of Jamestown colony he oversaw its expansion. However, an injury forced him to return to England in 1609. Smith was keen to explore further in the New World and so he contacted the Plymouth Company and with their help sailed in 1614 to the area he named New England. Smith mapped the coast and wrote about Virginia and New England which inspired others to rediscover these areas for themselves.

William Bradford (1590 – 1651) a Yorkshire man was a member of the **Separatist** movement within puritanism. In 1609 he left England and went to Holland in search of religious freedom. However, there were few economic opportunities for his people there. So in 1620 he organized an expedition of around 100 pilgrims to the New World. He helped draft the Mayflower compact aboard the ship and served as governor of the Plymouth Colony for all but five years from 1621 to 1656.

Among the original inhabitants of the present day United States were the Oneida, Powhatan, Pocahontas the Iroquois and many other tribes with their distinct identities. They had oral literature in the form of folk songs sung in ritual prayers and dance but little of all those have survived.

The earliest in the history of American poetry is that of the **Colonial** period written by the English migrants such as Bradford. A sample from his verse shows how his piety found expression in his poetry:

From my years young in days of youth,
God did make known to me his truth,
And call'd me from his native place
For to enjoy the means of grace.
In wilderness he did me guide,
And in strange lands for me provide.

William Bradford appears to have written these lines in old age for later in the poem he bids farewell to his people:

Farewell, dear children, whom I love,
Your better Father is above;
When I am gone, he can supply;
To him I leave you when I die.

He admonished his people in Plymouth colony to lead a life of piety.

The characteristic feature of American literature in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century was spiritual. **Anne Bradstreet** (1612 – 72) was one of the first poets of the American colony. She came at the age of 18 to Massachusetts Bay from England with her parents and husband along with other puritans. She bore eight children and wrote her poems while rearing them. Her poems were published in 1650 in England without her knowledge with the assistance of her brother-in-law John Woodbridge. The short title of the book was *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*. It was the first volume of poetry written by a settler in the English colonies. Bradstreet called it an ‘ill-formed offspring’. She revised her early works and wrote new poems which were published posthumously in 1678. ‘The Author to her Book’ is passionate but controlled in sentiments:

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth didst by my side remain,
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,
Who thee abroad, exposed to public view,

Bradstreet called her work ‘My rambling brat (in print)’:

My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;
Yet being my own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:

Bradstreet wrote in the manner of the English poet Francis Quarles (1592 – 1633) and the French Du Bartas (1544 – 90). Her ‘Contemplations’ is a long poem by an accomplished artist and her place as a poet remained unchallenged till the appearance of Emily Dickinson in the nineteenth century.

Michael Wigglesworth (1631 – 1705) was born in Yorkshire, England into a nonconformist family. When he was not yet seven his parents came to New England and settled on a farm in Connecticut. In 1653 Wigglesworth had a dream in which he saw God seated on His throne on the ‘dreadful day of judgment’ separating the saved from the damned. It changed the course of his life as he decided to become a preacher. He wrote three influential poems: *The Day of Doom*, *Meat out of the Eater* and *God’s controversy with New England*. Wigglesworth made literary history with the first work and its popularity was exceeded only by The Bible and Roger Williams’s (c. 1603 – 83) *The New England Primer* (1683).

Edward Taylor (1642? – 1729), the most accomplished of the puritan poets, was like Bradstreet and Wigglesworth born in England. He grew up during the Puritan Commonwealth and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell (1599 – 1653 – 1658). Taylor emigrated to Massachusetts in 1688 and entered Harvard College from where he graduated in 1671. He served as pastor of the church at Westfield, 100 miles west of Boston. He spent 58 years of his life on the edge of a ‘vast and roaring wilderness’ both as minister and physician. Taylor was largely unknown to his contemporaries as a poet. He did not let his poems get published for he feared that they would be considered too sensual for a clergyman. As a result he

remained forgotten until his manuscripts were discovered in the Yale University Library and finally published in the 1930's.

Taylor had read the Metaphysical poets such as John Donne and George Herbert who influenced his poetry. In his famous 'Huswifery' the spinning wheel is used as a metaphor for his desire to submit to god's will:

Make me, O Lord, Thy Spinning Wheel complete,
Thy Holy word my Distaff make for me.
Make mine Affections Thy Swift Flyers neat
And make my Soul Thy holy Spool to be.

Taylor's poems were closely connected to his office of a pastor. From 1682 to 1725 he wrote 217 *Preparatory Meditations*, poems that helped him prepare for the Lord's Supper and the sermon he had to deliver on that occasion. By common consent Taylor was the best poet of colonial America. Mention may also be made of Urian Oakes (c.1631 - 81) and her 'Elegy upon the Death of Reverend Mr Thomas', Kathleen Phillips and her 'Matchless Orinda' and Samuel Danforth's 'puzzle poems' (1647-9) among the poets of the Colonial period.

Seventeenth century American literature was pervaded by the spirits of puritanism and Calvinism and the triumphs and tribulations of the new habitation but in England it was the age of prose and reason, Sir Isaac Newton (1643 – 1727) and John Locke (1632 – 1704). Newton's *Principia Mathematica or Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) demonstrated that the universe is not a mysterious toy in the hands of an inscrutable God but a mechanism working on rational principles that could be understood by any person. Locke influenced by the scientific spirit of the age pointed out that 'morality is capable of demonstration as well as mathematics.' The Calvinist belief in the innate depravity of man as a result of the original sin came under increasing attack. Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) called predestination and total depravity as religious fiction. He held that the human being at birth was a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate. It was man's experience of the world that made him good or bad. This scientific spirit found expression in the works and writings of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

Thomas Jefferson (1743 -1826) was governor of Virginia (1779 – 81) and became the third president (1801 - 09) of the U.S. He was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, of the 13 colonies, from Britain in 1776. In 1785 he succeeded Franklin as US minister in France and from 1797 to 1815 he was the president of the American Philosophical Society.

Benjamin Franklin (1706 – 90) was not only a statesman but also a scientist and technologist, an inventor of the stove named after him, bifocal spectacles and the lightning rod. Franklin advocated the 'reasonable science of virtue'.

Another important figure in eighteenth century America was Thomas Paine (1737 – 1809). He immigrated to America from England in 1774 on the advice of Franklin and in 1776 wrote *Common Sense* a 50-page pamphlet eloquently advocating independence for the British colonies in America. Franklin, Jefferson and Paine were called 'Reasoning unbelievers'. They doubted miracles and scriptural revelations. Men now turned from theism - belief in an omnipresent God of the Puritans – to a deistic god who appeared to have designed the universe according to scientific laws and then withdrawn from intervention in human affairs. God, according to the intellectuals of this age, was a great cosmic mechanic.

The poets of eighteenth century America took their inspiration from the poetries of John Dryden (1631 – 1700) and Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744), the most prominent of the neo-classical poets, who wrote in imitation of ancient writers of Greece and Rome. American authors of the eighteenth century wished to recreate in America not a new Jerusalem or a new Eden but a new Athens and a new Rome. The theology of this age was as propounded by Pope in his *Essay on Man* (1732 - 34):

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.

The *Zeitgeist* of the age of **Enlightenment** imbued the American poets such as Ebenezer Cooke, Philip Freneau and, Joel Barlow.

Ebenezer Cooke (c. 1665 – c.1732) was son of Andrew Cooke, a London merchant, and his wife Anne Bowyer. They had a daughter Anna. Ebenezer was born in England and went up to Cambridge. Andrew had landed property in Maryland and Ebenezer came to the New World to claim his inheritance. Ebenezer Cooke wrote, among other satirical pieces, *The Sot-weed Factor* published in London in 1708. A revised version was published in Annapolis in 1731. While the former is a scalding invective against the people in Maryland the latter shows much more understanding and sympathy for them. A couple of citations from the two texts will illustrate the point:

This cruel this Inhospitable Shoar;
But left abandon'd by the World to starve,
May they sustain the Fate they well deserve;
May they turn Savage, or as Indians Wild,
From Trade, converse, and Happiness exil'd;
Recreant to Heaven, may they adore the Sun,
And into Pagan Superstitions run
For Vengeance ripe —————
May Wrath Divine then Lay those Regions wast
Where no Man's Faithful, nor a Woman chaste.

In place of this scurrility we read Cooke's unctuous words in the 1731 version;

And may that Land where Hospitality,
Is every Planter's darling Quality,
Be by each Trader kindly us'd
And may no trader be abus'd;
Then each of them shall deal with Pleasure,
And each encrease the other's Treasure.

It appears that the first version of *The Sot-weed Factor* is that of a haughty young man gone back from Maryland. The second version was written by a person who has come back to live in Maryland and make it his home, sobered down by the vicissitudes of fortune keen to befriend his fellow compatriots.

The Dutch in 1619 were the first to bring African slaves to the American colony of Jamestown, Virginia where they were employed in the production of such lucrative crops as tobacco. **Phillis Wheateley** (1754? – 84) was picked by slave traders from her home in Africa when she was seven years of age and sold in the Boston slave market. There she was bought by one John Wheatley, a tailor, for his wife Susannah. She was given the name Phillis Wheatley and treated kindly at the Wheatley home. Under the tutoring of the Wheatley daughters Phillis learned to read and write. She read the Bible and began to write verse at the age of 13. She also read history, geography and astronomy. She read the classical

authors in the original and in translation but her favourite author was Terence (Publius Terentius Afer (born c. 195, Carthage - died 159 BCE in Greece at sea) a Roman comic dramatist born a slave.

In 1773 she accompanied one of the Wheatleys on a trip to England where her collection of 39 poems was published as *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). It earned her great popularity in London where she was called the 'Sable Muse'. America's colonial agent in Britain, Benjamin Franklin, came to visit her. She gained the attention of even Voltaire who praised her poems as 'very good English verse'. Phillis was freed soon after her return to America where she married John Peters, another free Negro. Her last days were marred by family disruptions, disease and deaths of her children. She died in Boston in obscurity at the early age of thirty.

Phillis Wheatley was the first important Afro-American poet remarkable for her poetry in an age when few women were educated, let alone an African American. She wrote about her blackness:

Remember, *Christians*, *Negroes* black as *Cain*,
May be refin'd and join th' angelic train.

Wheatley, well versed in the Bible, used Biblical Illusions quite frequently. Cain was the slayer of Abel (Genesis 4: 1-15) and sometimes seen as the origin of the Negro.

In 'On being brought from Africa to America' (1773) she said that her bringing over to America was a boon:

'T was mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.

However, she bemoaned,

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic dye."

Wheatley wrote in heroic couplet in the eighteenth century on varied subjects. Her poems include 'On imagination', 'To his Excellency George Washington', 'On Virtue', 'To the University of Cambridge in New England', 'An Hymn to Evening' and, 'An hymn to Morning'. She consoled a fellow negro slave painter in Boston with prospects in Heaven:

But when these shades of time are chased away,
And dankness ends in everlasting day,
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
And view the landscapes in the realms above?

Wheatley reassures Moorhead the black painter,

There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,
And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow;
No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs;
Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes,
For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,
And purer language on th' ethereal plain.

Wheatley's poetry is full of classical allusions. Here she alludes to 'Damon', a singer in the *Eclogues* of Virgil (70 – 19 BCE) and, 'Aurora' the Roman goddess of dawn.

Philip Freneau (1752 – 1832), unlike Cooke and Wheatley, was born into a family of French Protestants – Huguenots – in New York. He was the eldest of the five children of Pierre Fresnau and his Scottish wife. Philip entered the college of New Jersey, now Princeton University, as a sophomore in 1768 where James Madison (1751 – 1836) the fourth president of the U.S. was his friend and roommate. Madison soon recognized Freneau as a formidable adversary and wielder of pen on the battlefields of the printed word. Freneau earned the title of the ‘Poet of the Revolution’ and is widely regarded even today as the ‘Father of American Literature’.

Freneau distrusted politics but he wrote satires against the British in 1775 out of sheer patriotism. Next year he set sail for the West Indies where he learnt navigation and wrote on the beauty of nature. Then in 1778 all of sudden he returned to New Jersey and joined the militia and sailed the Atlantic as a captain. He was captured by the British and imprisoned for six weeks on ‘The scorpion’ a British prison- ship. He was released in an exchange of prisoners. After his release Freneau headed for Philadelphia. There he wrote scathing satires for the *Freeman’s Journal* against the British sympathisers of the royalty.

Freneau’s literary works are a fusion of neoclassicism and romanticism. On the one hand he used the diction, and poetic forms and deistic thought of the eighteenth century and on the other the sensuous imagery, adulation of nature and primitivism that became the hallmarks of American romanticism in the nineteenth century. ‘The Power of Fancy’ was written when Freneau was an undergraduate at Princeton. ‘The House of Night, (1779) describes the death of ‘Death’ the last enemy according to the I Corinthians 15:26. The satirical vein in ‘The House of Night’ reminds us of Lord Byron’s lampoon on George the third (1760 – 1815) in his *The Vision of Judgment*. Death in ‘The House of Night’ avows to leave the world to the care of George III:

“Blame not on me the ravage to be made;
Proclaim, - even Death abhors such woe to see;
I’ll quit the world, while decently I can,
And leave the work to George my deputy.” (ll. 69-72)

Byron too later pierced his jibe in George III’s side;

‘He ever warr’d with freedom and the free:
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,
So that the utter’d the word liberty’.

Found George the Third their first opponent. (ll. 353 – 356)

Both, Philip Freneau’s and Byron’s poems borrow their character from the Spanish Francisco de Quevedo Y Villegas’ (1580 – 1645) principal poem *Los Suenos* (i.e. the visions). All three consist of morbid and grotesque hell-scenes.

There are many references in Freneau’s poetry to personages connected with the American War of Independence. He celebrated Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man* (1791) in his verse:

Roused by the REASON of his manly page,
Once more shall PAINE a listening world engage;
From Reason’s source, a bold reform he brings,
In raising up mankind, he pulls down kings

(On Mr Paine’s Rights of man, ll. 11 – 14)

And also wrote an elegy 'On the Death of Dr. Benjamin Franklin':

When monarchs tumble to the ground,
Successors easily are found:
But matchless FRANKLIN! What a few
Can hope to rival such as YOU,
Who seized from kings their sceptered pride
And turned the lightning darts aside.

Besides being a poet of the American Revolution Freneau wrote many poems on the sensuous aspects of nature such as 'The Wild Honey Suckle' (1786) 'The Hurricane' and 'On a Honey Bee drinking from a glass of wine and drowned therein' (1809).

Philip Freneau also wrote an epic poem called *The Rising Glory of America* (1772) which like Timothy Dwight's *Greenfield Hill* (1794) and Joel Barlow's *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) later revised as *The Columbiad* (1807) celebrated the future of America unlike traditional epics that celebrate the past of a nation.

Joel Barlow (1754 – 1812) remembered today for 'The Hasty Pudding' (1793) was son of a Connecticut farmer. He went up to Yale College from where he graduated in 1778. Along with David Humphreys and John Trumbull and others, known as **Connecticut Wits** or **Hartford Wits**, Barlow wrote *The Anarchiad* (1786 – 87) a mock-epic poem that warned against the chaos that would ensue if a strong central government, as advocated by the Federalists such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay in the 85 essays on the proposed constitution of the United States published in 1787 – 88, was formed. The Connecticut Wits used the British model of the mock epic as a tool to satirize British culture and policies in the United States.

Officially the Revolutionary War against England ended in 1783 and from 1784 until 1865, when the Civil War (1861–'65) ended, the period is known as the **Antebellum** period. 'Ante' in Latin means 'before' and 'Bellum' is 'War'.

The most prominent of The American poets to succeed Philip Freneau was *William Cullen Bryant* (1794 –1878). Bryant's ancestors on both sides came to Massachusetts in the Mayflower. He was born at Cummington, Massachusetts and after receiving his early education at Williams College he went on to study law at Worthington and Bridgewater. He was admitted to the bar in 1815. Bryant was interested in poetry since his childhood and his first book of verse *The Embargo* (1808) was published when Bryant was only fourteen years of age. His most critically acclaimed, long poem was 'Thanatopsis' (1817). It had appeared in the *North American Review*. Some of his frequently anthologized poems are 'Lines to a Waterfowl', 'The Rivulet', 'The West Wind', 'The Forest Hymn' and 'The Fringed Gentian'.

Bryant moved to New York, soon after his marriage, where he began working for *New York Review* and the *New York Evening Post*. Bryant became editor of the latter in 1829 and remained in the post until his death, i.e. for five decades. Bryant wrote poetry throughout his life but James Russell Lowell remembered him 'as quiet, as cool, and as dignified./ As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignified'.

The poets who dominated American poetry till the end of the nineteenth century were in the familiar company of William Cullen Bryant. They were called, the '**Fireside** or '**Schoolroom**' poets. The most prominent of the fireside poets **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's** (1807 – 82) *The Seaside and the Fireside* (1850) gave the school its name. Longfellow's popularity rested on his short

lyrical poems such as ‘The Psalm of Life’ (1838) and ‘The Jewish Cemetery at New Port’ (1854) and his long, and grandiloquent narratives *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* (1847) and above all *Hiawatha* (1855). The latter is based on an Ojibwa myth. Fifty thousand copies of the latter sold in two years. *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858) was even more successful and sold hugely in England. Longfellow was the first American poet to have been honoured with a bust in the Poet’s Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Longfellow belonged to the distinguished circle of New England’s **Brahmins** – a name derived from the priestly caste of the Hindus - to which also belonged **Oliver Wendell Holmes** (1809 – 94) and **James Russel Lowell** (1819 – 91). All three were professors at Harvard. Holmes was Professor of Anatomy. He gained national attention at twentyone as the author of ‘Old Ironsides’ the poem that saved the US frigate *Constitution* from demolition. It had defeated the British *Guerrière* in the War of 1812. The poem opens ironically:

Ay, tear the tattered ensign down
Long has it waved on high, to see
And many an eye has danced
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon’s roar; -
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more,

Holmes was the first to apply the name ‘Brahmin’ to Upper-class New Englanders as the epitome of accomplishment and good taste.

James Russell Lowell, poet essayist and literary critic succeeded Longfellow as professor of literature at Harvard. He was the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and also of the *North American Review*. His rhymed satire crackled with witty comments on the follies of his age. ‘There comes Poe’ wrote Lowell, ‘with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge’ – an allusion to Dickens’s character who owned a raven – ‘Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge’, Lowell inveighed in the same vein against Poe:

Who has written some things quite the best of their kind,
But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind,

Most of the poetry of the **Fireside** poets was refined, civilized and, limited. George Santayna (1863 – 1952), a Spanish born US philosopher, in an article called ‘Genteel American Poetry’, printed in *The New Republic* (III, No. 30, May 29, 1915), succinctly pointed out its merits and limitations:

It [the Poetry] modulated in obvious ways the honorable conventions of the society in which it arose. It was a simple, sweet, humane Protestant literature, grandmotherly in that sedate spectacled wonder with which it gazed at this terrible world and said how beautiful and how interesting it all was.

The greatest American poets of the nineteenth century were, of course, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson whom you will read in this block.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 26 RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Emerson: A Biographical Sketch
- 26.3 The Snow Storm
 - 26.3.1 Introduction
 - 26.3.2 The Text
 - 26.3.3 An Appreciation
- 26.4 Hamatreya
 - 26.4.1 Introduction
 - 26.4.2 The Text
 - 26.4.3 An Appreciation
- 26.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- critically analyse Emerson's life and work,
- explain Emerson's poetry against his cultural background,
- comment upon 'The Snow Storm' and
- appreciate the Importance of Indian scriptures in the study of a poem such as 'Hamatreya'.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to this block you read about the various poets writing in America in the Colonial, Enlightenment and the Antebellum periods of American Literature. You must have noticed that the earliest settlers in America were the Puritans and Calvinists, profoundly influenced by the Christian faith. As time passed by they got influenced by neo-classicism on the one hand and reason and commonsense on the other of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century European culture. Late in the eighteenth century the American colonies began to dislike their colonial status and on the continent the French rebelled against the *ancien regime*. In England poets such as William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge were writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They were later called the romantic poets. Romanticism began to influence poets in the United States also. However, no poet in America before Emerson had quite an international repute. Emerson's is a distinctly American voice. While reading this unit you should try to explore the uniqueness of Emerson's mind and art. Emerson was a world famous essayist. One of his essays 'The American Scholar' is appended to this block. You may like to read it.

26.2 EMERSON: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emerson is foremost among the architects of American culture and a great influence on many of his contemporaries and leading later thinkers and poets in the US and Europe. He was born into a family of clergymen in the parsonage of the First Church on Summer Street in Boston, Massachusetts on May 25, 1803. His father Reverend William Emerson (1769 - 1811) was a Unitarian minister of the First Church and mother Ruth Haskins Emerson (1768 – 1853) was daughter of John Haskins Communicant of King’s Chapel, Boston. Haskins came from a family of Anglicans, i.e. members of the Church of England. It was through his mother and her family that Anglican writers and thinkers such as Ralph Cudworth (1617 – ‘88), Robert Leighton, Jeremy Taylor (1613 – ‘67) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 - 1834) came to exercise much influence on him.

A few months before John Haskins, Reverend William Emerson died on May 12, 1811, leaving Emerson to the care of Mary Moody Emerson (1774 - 1863), the latter’s spinster sister. Emerson’s mother and aunt took care of Ralph, the fourth and one of the eight children of Reverend Emerson and Ruth and one of only five to survive to maturity. Ruth later married Ezra Ripley. Mary, a religiously stern but lively person had her bed built in the shape of a coffin to remind her of her mortality. She took her duties seriously and declared that her brother’s children ‘were born to be educated’. In 1812 Emerson got admitted to the Boston Public Latin School and in 1817 entered Harvard College. He began writing his journals at Harvard. The *Journals* are considered the most remarkable account of moral and intellectual progress to appear in the US. Emerson did not distinguish himself as a student at Harvard, graduating thirtieth in a class of fifty-nine. After his graduation in 1821 he began teaching school while preparing for part-time study at the Harvard Divinity School to which he was admitted in 1825. In 1826 he was licensed to preach in the Unitarian community but his strenuous regime and incipient lung disease necessitated his stay in the warm south – Georgia and Florida – and he was ordained three years later in the Unitarian ministry of the Second Church, of Increase (1639 - 1723) and Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) fame, in Boston in 1829.

In the same year, i.e. 1829, he got married to Ellen Louisa Tucker and had the most vital emotional experience of his life. This marriage was short lived as Ellen died of tuberculosis on February 8, 1831. Her death shook him emotionally and Emerson began to look for support among the Methodists, Quakers and Swedenborgians in Boston. He also meditated in the White Mountains and wrote a hymn called ‘Gnothi Seauton’, Greek for ‘Know thyself’, an inscription over the door of the temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece. At the end of ‘Gnothi Seauton’ Emerson pointed out at the witness of the oversoul in the heart of man:

Shall I ask wealth or power of God, who gave
An image of himself to be my soul?
As might swilling ocean ask a wave,
Or the starred firmament a dying coal,
For that which is in me lives in the whole.

In the wake of his long introspection after his wife’s death Emerson’s attitude towards Unitarianism changed. In his sermon of September 9, 1832 he pointed out at the anachronism of the Lord’s Supper, an admission hated by his laity. It was drawn from Quaker sources. Emerson made his apostasy an excuse for his resignation from the ministry.

On the surface, Emerson’s life was eventless. ‘[L]etters surely were the texture of [Emerson’s] history’ wrote Henry James (1843-1916) somewhat ironically. ‘Passions, alternations, affairs, adventures had absolutely no part in it.’ He went on,

It stretched itself out in enviable quiet – a quiet in which we hear the jotting of the pencil in the notebook. It is a life for literature ... fifty years of residence in the home of one’s forefathers, pervaded by reading, by walking in the woods and the daily addition of sentence to sentence.

Emerson’s Journal was the depository of his daily observations. From it came material for his lectures, poems and essays. Emerson earned his living by giving lectures at lyceums or community education centres in America. He made three lecture tours abroad. According to Ronald A Bosco Emerson delivered around fifteen hundred lectures between the mid-thirties to the 1870’s. Later he wrote his essays based on these lectures. ‘The American Scholar’ which Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809 – ‘94) called ‘our intellectual Declaration of Independence’ was originally an address delivered under the aegis of Phi Beta Kappa. ‘The logical English train a scholar as they train an engineer. Oxford is a Greek factory, as Wilton mills weave carpet and Sheffield grinds steel.’ ‘We have listened too long’ Emerson said, ‘to the courtly muses of Europe.’ Emerson assured the American scholar ‘if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.’

Emerson’s major contributions to poetry were *Poems* (1846) and *May-Day* (1867). The first volume served as his visiting card on his lecture tour in England in 1846-47. Emerson’s poems are gnomic or orphic just as his essays are aphoristic, full of world transforming insights and revelations but not connected by logic and reasoning. We may say that in his writings Emerson cared less for the logical development of his ideas and more for communicating the glimpses of revelations made to him in his encounters with nature. Emerson confessed in ‘Each and All’,

Over me soared the eternal sky,
Full of light and of deity;
Again I saw again I heard,
The rolling river the morning bird;
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

Poetry, Emerson believed, helps us ‘come out of a cave or cellar into open air.’ Man is part of nature and truth and beauty when properly understood are not different entities.

Now that you have read a little bit about Emerson and his writings try to answer the questions in the following exercise. Some of the questions are based on the introduction to this block.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Write the names of three American poets under each category below:

a) The Colonial Poets

.....

26.3.1 Introduction

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Although Emerson wanted the American scholar to write about the American experience, its land and seasons, flora and fauna, and its people, paradoxically, he himself was profoundly under the influence of his English and European forbears. He remembered them in 'May-Day':

There is no bard in all the choir,
Not Homer's self, the poet sire,
Wise Milton's odes of pensive pleasure,
Or Shakspeare, whom no mind can measure,
Nor Collins' verse of tender pain,
Nor Byron's clarion of disdain,
Scott, the delight of generous boys,
Or Wordsworth, Pan's recording voice,—
Not one of all can put in verse,
Or to this presence could rehearse,
The sights and voices ravishing
The boy knew on the hills in Spring,

It is noticeable that Emerson wrote 'Shakespeare' without the medial 'e'. No matter how felicitous the European and English poets may have been, Emerson says, they did not know the ecstasy the 'boy knew on the hills in Spring.' 'Colleges and books' Emerson said, 'only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.'

Emerson was akin to Wordsworth in seeing nature as a guide and philosopher. Wordsworth felt that nature, especially river Derwent, took care of him like a nurse. Derwent, he wrote in the first book of *The Prelude*,

loved

To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dream?

Wordsworth went on,

For this, didst thou,

O Derwent! Winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That nature breathes among the hills and groves.

Nature did not only impart sweet murmurs and 'softness' but also 'fear':

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:

Nature used its ministry of 'fear' when he stole the eggs of a raven, or took someone else's boat on Ullswater - an 'act of stealth'. A 'huge peak, ... Upreared its head' and the 'grim shape / Towered up between [young Wordsworth] and the stars' and 'strode after [him]'.

In 'History' the first essay in the *First Series* of essays, Emerson pointed out that man's 'body and ... mind are invigorated by habits of conversation with nature.'

‘The humble-bee and the pine warbler’ he recorded in his *Journal*, ‘seem to me proper objects of attention in these disastrous times.’ Edward, Emerson’s brother met an untimely death in Puerto Rico where he had gone in search of warmer climate in hope of his recovery from tuberculosis. Three years later, in 1837, Emerson recalled it in the opening lines of ‘The Humble-Bee’:

Burly dozing humblebee!
Where thou art is clime for me.
Let them sail for Porto Rique,
Far-off heats through seas to seek,
I will follow thee alone,
Thou animated torrid zone!

Emerson tells himself that he need not seek a warmer climate to alleviate his mood for the bumble-bee is the ‘torrid zone’ for him. He calls the bee,

Zig-zag steerer, desert-cheerer,
Let me chase thy waving lines,
Keep me nearer, me thy hearer,
Singing over shrubs and vines.

Emerson beckons the bumble-bee to allow him to come within the ear-shot of its hum because to live away from it is like death to him:

Voyager of light and noon,
Epicurean of June,
Wait I prithee, till I come
Within ear-shot of thy hum,—
All without is martyrdom.

Following the bumble-bee in its zig-zag course and listening to the humming of the bumble-bee soothes Emerson’s troubled mind and alleviates him in his hours of despondency and depression,

When the fierce north-western blast
Cools sea and land so far and fast,
Thou already slumberest deep,—
Woe and want thou canst out-sleep,—
Want and woe which torture us,
Thy sleep makes ridiculous.

Emerson draws a lesson for himself from the bumble-bee’s slumber. The bumble-bee hibernates when the weather is inclement for it. Emerson must also passively accept the loss of his brother Edward. Emerson and Wordsworth, although significantly different, show a remarkable degree of similarity in their attitude towards nature. Now let’s read the text of ‘The Snow Storm’.

26.3.2 The Text

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o’er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farmhouse at the garden’s end.
The sled and traveler stopped, the courier’s feet

Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit
 Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
 In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind's masonry.
 Out of an unseen quarry evermore
 Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
 Curves his white bastions with projected roof
 Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
 Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
 So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
 For number or proportion. Mockingly,
 On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
 A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
 Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
 Maugre the farmer's sighs; and, at the gate,
 A tapering turret overtops the work.
 And when his hours are numbered, and the world
 Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
 Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
 To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
 Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
 The frolic architecture of the snow.

26.3.3 An Appreciation

Along with 'The Rhodora', 'Days' and, the witty 'Fable' – 'The mountain and the squirrel' – 'The Snow Storm' is one of Emerson's most prominent nature poems. 'The Rhodora' was subtitled 'On Being Asked, Whence is the Flower?' R. A. Yoder, an Emerson critic, has suggested that 'The Snow Storm' should also have been subtitled 'On Being Asked, Wherefore is the Storm?' The point is that Emerson has a keen didactic purpose if not an overtly religious motif in his nature poems as well. 'The Snow Storm' combines with its love for nature his organic philosophy of art as he does in 'The Problem' and even that sprawling poem 'May-Day'.

'The Snow Storm' is a poem in two stanzas. The first describes the arrival of the storm, 'Announced by all the trumpets of the sky' and the blowing of the storm at high speed against trees and houses. The snow storm is in all its fury 'driving o'er the fields' appearing to stop nowhere. After allowing us to savour the audial and tactile images of the storm the poet goes on to present the vivid visual image,

the whited air
 Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
 And veils the farmhouse at the garden's end.

The snow storm is like an invading army under whose sway even the sledge stops as does the traveller and the busy courier. The force of the conqueror stops all; the friends are shut out. Human life comes to a stand still. However, the description of the devastating storm is closed off with an oxymoron – the figure of speech that effectively reconciles a seeming contradiction - in the image of the inmates of a house sitting in apprehensive peace around the 'radiant fireplace, enclosed / In a *tumultuous privacy* of storm' (emphasis added). Emerson's picture in words here reminds us of some of Rembrandt's pictures in colour. Horace (65 – 8 BCE), the Roman lyricist and author of *Ars Poetica* (8th BCE) held that a poem

Opal hues and purple dye;
Azaleas flush the island floors,
And the tints of heaven reply.

In his monumental works of art such as the Parthenon in Athens and the Pyramids at Giza man joins Nature as an artist. 'Earth proudly wears the Parthenon' and Morning opens her eyes, opines Emerson in 'The Problem' and 'To gaze upon the Pyramids'. Nature gave them, Emerson believed, the same status as she gave to the Andes and the Ararat:

And nature gladly gave them place,
Adopted them into her race,
And granted them an equal date
With Andes and with Ararat.

Ararat comprises two peaks on the Armenian plateau on which according to the Genesis (viii, 4) Noah's ark rested after the flood. The Andes are the mountain system running from north to south on the Pacific coast of South America. Emerson's choice of the mountains is significant. Both would be familiar to his nineteenth century American readers. The Parthenon and the Pyramid are equated with the Andes and the Ararat. However, Emerson believes,

These temples grew as grows the grass;
Art might obey but not surpass.

The long second stanza of 'The Snow Storm' states Emerson's this organic aesthetic in a more elaborate and forceful fashion.

With an opening end-stopped line – 'Come see the north wind's masonry.' - Emerson announces the subject of the second stanza in no uncertain terms. From a description of the fury of the snow storm in the first stanza Emerson now shifts his focus to the 'masonry' of the north wind. The poet presents before our eyes the work of the 'myriad-handed' 'fierce artificer' that brought 'tiles' from an unknown quarry and curved 'his white bastions with projected roof'. The bastion suggests a fortress. The bastion is an irregular pentagon shaped mass of brick- or stone-faced earthwork. The human work-man has to work slowly taking into account measure and proportion but the north wind's work is 'savage' and yet 'fanciful'. '[N]ought cares he / For number or proportion.' As if to mock at human vanity it, the north wind, not only adorns the bastions of the powerful but goes beyond it in covering the abodes of house birds and beasts – here dogs – 'coop or kennel' – with exotic wreaths sculpted from the marble quarried on the Greek island of Paros. Similarly the Hawthorn receives the gift of a 'swan-like form'. Emerson here appears to be in league with Wordsworth who in the 'Preface' of 1800 to the *Lyrical Ballads* had claimed to 'look steadily at [his] subject' but with a sense of the unity of creation and communion with nature. However, John Ruskin (1819-1900) in *Modern Painters* (1856) saw this habit of ascribing human emotions to nature as a kind of morbidity, a **pathetic fallacy**. Referring to Wordsworth's primrose in *Peter Bell* (written 1798, published 1819) Ruskin pointed out that he preferred the 'very plain and leafy fact' of the plant to those for whom 'the primrose is anything else than a primrose'.

After the middle of the second stanza and after having given us a feel of the fury Emerson prepares the reader for a slow-down by presenting before us the picture of the farmer's lane being snow carpeted despite 'the farmer's sigh'. Emerson resumes the picture of the force of the storm by presenting a picture of a 'turret' instead of a 'bastion'. But now the snow storm's work is over and when the sun

appears man witnesses the 'astonished art' of the snow storm and copies it in 'slow structures, stone by stone' which was, the 'mad wind's night-work, / The frolic architecture of the snow.' The last line is in iambic pentameter, the standard speech rhythm of English. It gently resolves the poem and brings us back to normal life after a 'Uriel' like vision. 'The highest art' said Abraham Lincoln (1809 – '65), 'is always the most religious, and the greatest artist is always the most devout person.' He could have been thinking about his compatriot, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Self-check Exercise II

1) How does Emerson portray God as an artist in 'The Snow Storm'?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What is an end stopped line in a poem? Give an example of an end-stopped line in 'The Snow Storm'.

.....
.....
.....
.....

26.4 HAMATREYA

Generations of Indians have read 'Hamatreya' with engaging interest. You are familiar now with Emerson's life, thought and also poetry. Let's now engage with this poem 'Hamatreya' .

26.4.1 Introduction

Emerson, as we have seen, came from a family of pastors on both sides of his parents. But he was eclectic in temperament and in the course of his life evolved into a transcendentalist or free thinker or nature worshipper whichever way we wish to think of him. We can have a peep into his mind through 'The Bohemian Hymn':

In many forms we try
To utter God's infinity,
But the boundless hath no form,
And the universal Friend
Doth as far transcend
An angel as a worm.

The great Idea baffles wit,
Language falters under it,
It leaves the learned in the lurch;
Nor art, nor power, nor toil can find
The measure of the eternal Mind,
Nor hymn, nor prayer, nor church.

He was most unorthodox in his taste and did not hesitate to acquaint himself with

the world of Islam and Hinduism. He read Persian literature in German and the Hindu scriptures in English translation. The impact of the former can be seen in his poems such as 'From the Persian of Hafiz' in two parts and a long poem called 'Saadi' in which he proclaimed,

Saadi ! so far thy words shall reach;
Suns rise and set in Saadi's speech.

Emerson saw Allah opening innumerable doors before Saadi's eyes through which He poured upon him:

Nor scour the seas, nor sift mankind,
A poet or a friend to find;
Behold, He watches at the door,
Behold His shadow on the floor
Open innumerable doors.
The heaven where unveiled Allah pours
The flood of truth, the flood of good,
The seraph's and the cherub's food;
Those doors are men; the pariah kind
Admits thee to the perfect Mind.

Emerson was always ready to drink the nectar of spiritual enlightenment at whichever fount he could get it.

According to a note in his *Journal* in 1845 'Hamatreya' is based on a passage in the Vishnu Puran. 'Earth laughs' Emerson recorded, 'to behold her kings unable to effect the subjugation of themselves.' The poem was first published in his poetry collection entitled *Poems* (1847). The title of the poem 'Hamatreya' appears to be a compound of the 'hamadryad' of Greek mythology and Maitreya in several ancient Indian texts. Hamadryad is a nymph living and dying with the tree she inhabited. Maitreya, an interlocutor in Vishnu and Bhagvat Puranas was a rishi or sage, son of Kusarav and disciple of Parasar. Parasar's hymns are anthologized in the Rg-Ved. According to Yask's *Nirukt* Parasar was son of Vasistha. Parasar received the *Vishnu Puran* from Pulastya and taught it to Maitreya. Now let's read the text of Emerson's 'Hamatreya'.

26.4.2 The Text

Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint,
Possessed the land which rendered to their toil
Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool, and wood.
Each of these landlords walked amidst his farm,
Saying, "'Tis mine, my children's and my name's.
How sweet the west wind sounds in my own trees!
How graceful climb those shadows on my hill!
I fancy these pure waters and the flags
Know me, as does my dog: we sympathize;
And, I affirm, my actions smack of the soil."

Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds:
And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plough.
Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;
Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet

Clear of the grave.
They added ridge to valley, brook to pond,
And sighed for all that bounded their domain;
“This suits me for a pasture; that’s my park;

We must have clay, lime, gravel, granite-ledge,
And misty lowland, where to go for peat.
The land is well,—lies fairly to the south.
’Tis good, when you have crossed the sea and back,
To find the sitfast acres where you left them.”
Ah! the hot owner sees not Death, who adds
Him to his land, a lump of mould the more.
Hear what the Earth say:—

EARTH-SONG

“Mine and yours;
Mine, not yours.
Earth endures;
Stars abide—
Shine down in the old sea;
Old are the shores;
But where are old men?
I who have seen much,
Such have I never seen.

“The lawyer’s deed
Ran sure,
In tail,
To them and to their heirs
Who shall succeed,
Without fail,
Forevermore.

“Here is the land,
Shaggy with wood,
With its old valley,
Mound and flood.
But the heritors?—
Fled like the flood’s foam.
The lawyer and the laws,
And the kingdom,
Clean swept herefrom.

“They called me theirs,
Who so controlled me;
Yet every one
Wished to stay, and is gone.
How am I theirs,
If they cannot hold me,
But I hold them?”

When I heard the Earth-song

I was no longer brave;
 My avarice cooled
 Like lust in the chill of the grave.

26.4.3 An Appreciation

The centenary edition of Emerson's *Works* (1904) was edited by Emerson's son Edward Waldo Emerson. In the annotation to the poem Edward erroneously pointed out that 'Hamatreya' was an adaptation of a dialogue between Vishnu and Maitreya in the fourth book of *Vishnu Puran*. There Vishnu tells Maitreya that the kings who mistakenly considered themselves possessors of the earth had disappeared while the earth remained. Vishnu then chants the earth-song in which he laughs at the shortsightedness of the kings who were blind to their mortality. The conversation took place between Parashar the teacher and his disciple Maitreya. Also, it is not Vishnu but the Earth herself who preaches at the end of the fourth book in *Vishnu Puran*. In Tulsi Das's *Ramcharitmanas* the earth goes to Brahma in the form of a cow to complain against the iniquities on earth. In 'Hamatreya' in a familiar and usual conclusion to the narrative it is claimed that the listeners of the song would overcome their greed and ambition and attain peace and enlightenment. Ralph Waldo Emerson took this episode in the *Vishnu Puran* as a model and on its analogy wrote a poem on Yankee acquisitiveness and land greed.

'Hamatreya' has three parts, each in a distinct metre. The first part in 27 lines divided into three verse paragraphs of varying lengths loosely in iambic pentameter describes the vaunt and greed of the early Concord settlers. The second part, i.e. the 'Earth-Song', a counterpoint to the materialism of the previous section is somber in tone, unidentifiable in terms of traditional metre and irregular in rhyme scheme. It can be seen as an early example of free verse. The third part, a submissive admission by the disciple, is in iambic heptameter or lines of seven feet, as usual subdivided into stanzas of four and three feet lines. In the brief third part Emerson follows the convention in giving variety to his verse by introducing trochaic inversions, in the second foot of the first and the third foot of the third lines.

If 'Hamatreya' is read in the light of Indian scriptures such as the *Bhagvad Gita* we can understand it better. However, while the *Gita*, is a song in 700 *sloks* divided into eighteen chapters 'Hamatreya' is a brief lyric. Yet we notice that the latter begins by recalling the early land holders of Concord, Massachusetts:

Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint

as it reads in the *Selected Poems* of 1876 or, as it read originally in 1846,

Minott, Lee, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint[.]

This reminds us of the litany of names in the early lines of the first chapter in the *Gita*. Duryodhan, son of Dhritrashtra and the heir apparent to the throne, goes to Guru Dron and wants him to look at the army of their enemy, the Pandavs, arranged by Dhrstadyumna, son of Drupad, king of Panchal. The chief among them are Yuyudhan, Virat, Dhrstketu, Cekitan, Purujit, Kuntibhoj, Saibya, Yudhamanyu, Uttamauja and Abhimanyu. Thereafter Duryodhan recounts the luminaries in their own army apart from the guru himself: Bhism, Karn, Krp, Asvatthama, Vikarn and Somdatti. According to Sanjay's narration of the event to his monarch, Bhism blew his conchshell after this introduction by Duryodhan and the ritual was followed by other generals on both sides.

Emerson called a poet 'the sayer, the namer.' They 'are natural sayers, sent into the world to the end of expression.' Neither in the *Gita* nor in 'Hamatreya' is the inventory of names without value. For instance Duryodhan calls his men skilled in war and armed with many kinds of weapons:

nanasastraprahanah sarve yuddhavisardah

So does Emerson introduce his characters as possessors of the land which yielded to their toil

Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool and wood.

Peter Bulkeley was Emerson's ancestor who helped establish the church at Concord. Incidentally, his third brother was called Robert Bulkeley (1807 – '59) and more often by his second name. Emerson did not decry the work of his ancestors. Emerson held that the poet 'stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth' ('The Poet'). While mentioning the names of the earliest settlers of Concord Emerson was speaking like the national poet of America as when he wrote 'The Concord Hymn' on the occasion of the dedication of the monument commemorating the American Revolutionary War battles of Lexington and Concord:

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When like our sires, our sons are gone.

Emerson reminds his compatriots of the 'embattled farmers' who 'fired the shots heard round the world' but combines it even in an epideictic poem the *ubi sunt* and *memento mori* motifs. The pride of the ancestors on their land is justified and appropriate just like the pride of kings who were men of action. The west wind sound in the trees growing on the farmer's land, the ascending shadows on his hill, the wild lilies, i.e. flags, looking towards him like his pet are just rewards for their hard work. Emerson not ironically but supportively quotes their words, 'I affirm, my actions smack [or taste] of the soil.' 'Action is with the scholar' said Emerson, 'subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth.' ('The American Scholar').

Emerson was drawn towards, what he called, the 'organic aesthetic' of the American sculptor Horatio Greenough whose studio in Rome he visited in 1833. He believed like Greenough that we are all connected to one another and to nature at large without necessarily perceiving it and this sense of the whole is necessary to our sense of the beautiful and the good. 'All are needed by each one' wrote Emerson, 'Nothing is fair or good alone.' 'Each and All' is a poem about this organic aesthetic:

Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown,
Of thee from the hill-top looking down;
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm;
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
Deems not that great Napoleon
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;
Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent.
All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone.

Emerson believed that beauty is a product of the whole and not of the unit. The sparrow's note is best appreciated when its song is heard in its own place in nature:

I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
He sings the song, but it pleases not now,
For I did not bring home the river and sky; —
He sang to my ear, — they sang to my eye.

In the poem that stands at the head of his essay on 'Wealth' in *The Conduct of Life* Emerson went beyond the natural setting. He meditated upon the enormous canvas of time, of aeon, that produced nature. He wrote,

And well the primal pioneer
Knew the strong task to it assigned
Patient through Heaven's enormous year
To build in matter home for mind.

Emerson wants us to appreciate from different angles and perspectives the work of nature of which man is a part.

Emerson goes on adding concrete visual details to the expanding canvas of his ancestors in Concord. He gives us an inventory now of the wealth that they possess: clay, lime, gravel, granite and peat. The memorable image of the land remaining secure in their hand even during their absence is a telling and unforgettable image with which the first part nearly ends:

"Tis good, when you have crossed the sea and back,
To find the sitfast acres where you left them."

The American colonizers came from Europe where they went frequently. So, this is a typically American image. Historians of American literature affirm that it was with Emerson and his contemporaries that Americans began to write a literature not in imitation of their European ancestors but the literature of a democratic America. The poet gives voice to the ethos of his nation. According to Emerson 'the poet is representative'. 'He stands among partial men for the complete man' and he went on, 'and apprises us not of his wealth, but the commonwealth.'

The anticlimax of the pageant of the deeds of the ancestors in the first part of 'Hamatreya' comes in the last lines.

Ah! The hot owner sees not Death, who adds
Him to his land, a lump of mold the more.

Emerson was more eclectic in his sources of knowledge but American literature stems from European literature and, he believed that 'The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future.' In the couple of lines we notice the influence of European culture. Tertullian, the Christian apologist and polemicist against heresy and the father of Latin Christianity gives an account of a slave in his *Apologeticus*, who standing behind his master in the victory parade is tasked to remind his master 'remember that you will die' - '*memento mori*'. Emerson must also have been familiar with his seventeenth century compatriot Thomas Smith, a puritan painter who did a portrait of himself on the theme of *memento mori* and

the paintings of the French contemporary Eugène Delacroix (1798 - 1863) on the grave diggers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

There is yet another variant on the theme often called *ubi sunt* - 'where are ...[they]'. The Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Romanized Britain discovered elaborate Celtic stone works and asked themselves *ubi nunc* (where now). The *ubi sunt* motif can be found in Anglo-Saxon works such as *The Ruin*, *The Seafarer*, *Deor*, and *The Wanderer*, all part of the *Exeter Book*, the largest surviving collection of Old English literature. *Ubi sunt* motif pervades even *Beowulf*.

In the kindred motif of *Et in Arcadia Ego* which means 'Even in Arcadia there am I'. The Latin 'Ego' or 'I' refers to 'death'. It has its origin in Greek antiquity. Arcadia was a town in the middle of Peloponnese far away from the Greek cities that were close to the Mediterranean. Arcadia represented pure, rural, idyllic life far from the city. The Latin phrase most famously appears as the title of two of Nicolas Poussin's (1594 - 1665) paintings in one of which the Arcadian shepherds discover a tomb on which falls their shadow. In another one two shepherds discover a skull. Emerson may have been influenced by these examples even though the immediate influence could have been Parashar and the Earth's, precepts to Maitreya.

Although the 'Earth-Song' comes at the end and as an extension of the narrative of the first section it is more energetic and vivacious in its staccato beats, omission of particles – those short words in a sentence that are not as important as the nouns, verbs and adjectives – oblique rhymes and use of rhetorical devices. The continuity of rhyme in the third line as in the first two somewhat camouflages the epanaphora or repetition and epanorthosis or correction in the first two lines. We are reminded of President Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address' and Pandit Nehru's address to the nation on All India Radio after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on the 30th of January, 1948. Let's first take up 'The Gettysburg Address'. 'We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place' early in his speech says Lincoln and later goes on and emphatically asserts, 'But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate – we can not hallow – this ground. The Brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.' In the same way Pandit Nehru opened his short speech with the words, 'the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.' Soon Nehru corrected himself: 'The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light...' The Earth like a character in a play opens its speech in the spirit of modesty but soon corrects itself: "Mine and yours; / Mine not yours." The 'Earth-Song' in 'Hamatreya' is cast in the form of a Western rhetorical discourse.

The permanence of nature, - the earth, the stars and the shores - lends grandeur to the Earth's speech. The flickering reflection of the stars 'shining down in the old sea' brings peace to the mind by providing it an image of stability in a world assailed by doubt and despair. Emerson's contemporary in England Matthew Arnold (1822 – '88) sought certitude in the cliffs at Dover Beach 'Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.' But the *ubi sunt* motif appears in the line 'But where are old men?' along with *percontatio* – a question asked in the spirit of amazement. Emerson superimposes *rogatio* – a question that is answered by the speaker himself – in the concluding lines of the first stanza of 'Earth-Song',

I who have seen much,
Such have I never seen.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The institution of 'Law' gives stability to the society just as money does as a store of value, unit of account and medium of exchange. But inflation undermines our confidence in money just as the lawyer's deed can settle an estate on one line of heirs rather than another. W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and the Protestant Anglo-Irish thought that English institutions gave prosperity and stability to Ireland. But the native Irish Catholics did not share the optimism of the Anglo-Irish. Yeats powerfully expressed the ambiguity regarding the army and the legal institutions established by the English in Ireland in his 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'. Yeats' portrait of the Irish judiciary as a 'pretty toy':

We too had many pretty toys when young:
A law indifferent to blame or praise;
To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;

Yeats goes on to point out that the corrupt practices of the government did not go. His hopes were 'fine thoughts' because the 'rogues and rascals' had not died out:

Public opinion ripening for so long
We thought it would outlive all future days.
O what fine thought we had because we thought
That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.

The Earth's boastful 'Forevermore' in 'Hamatreya' is ambiguous, rather punctured like Yeats's assertions about the benign English government of Ireland.

The third stanza of the 'Earth-Song' reminds us of Lord Krishn's transfiguration in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*. Sanjay tells the blind Dhritrashtra,

Darsayam asa parthaya parmam rupam aisvaram

'The great lord then revealed to Parth or Arjun, his Supreme and Divine form.' Such instances can be found in other Hindu, Islamic and Christian scriptures also. The Earth ostensibly says,

Here is the land,
Shaggy with wood,
With its old valley,
Mound and flood.

The earth goes on to ask – 'But the heritors?'. The lawyer, the laws, the owner of the properties have all been swept away.

The Earth in 'Hamatreya' wonders where all the boastful "owners" and controllers of the earth have gone. They wished to stay but had to go. They are now part of the earth. So the Earth asks a question for the last time in the poem,

How am I theirs,
If they cannot hold me,
But I hold them?

'Earth-Song' is at once rhetorical and spiritual, rhetorical in form but spiritual in its quest just like the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*.

Arjun in *Bhagvad Gita* is shocked by the fact that on the battle field of Kurukshetr he will have to kill his revered teachers, elders and kinsmen. When the war is about to begin he lays down his bow (Gandeev) and takes a back seat on the chariot. Then Krishn tells him that after having come to the battlefield he cannot run away from it. His enemies, the Kauravas would not spare him. It would be a most ignominious defeat, bestower neither of fame on this earth nor of Heaven on the other side of death. Krishn’s precepts and revelations open Arjun’s eyes and he says,

Nasto mohah, smrtir labdha tvatprasadan maya ‘cyuta
Sthito ‘smi gatasamdehah karisye vacanam tava

Arjun says, ‘O! Krishn, your words have dispelled my delusion and restored my recognition. Now I have overcome my doubt. I will do as you wish.’ The last lines of ‘Hamatreya’ remind us of such passages in Hindu scriptures with some of which such as the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *Vishnu Puran*, we know from his journals that Emerson had read:

When I heard the Earth-song
I was no longer brave;
My avarice cooled
Like lust in the chill of the grave.

Self-check Exercise III

1) What influence did Persian literature have on Emerson?

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2) How did Hindu scriptures influence Emerson?

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26.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you recalled,

- a) the predecessors of Emerson in the history of American Poetry,
- b) understood the making of the mind and art of Emerson with special reference to 'The Snow Storm' and 'Hamatreya' and
- c) evaluated Emerson's interest in world literature.

26.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Re-read the introduction to the block and see if you can improve upon your answers.
- 2) Oliver Wendell Holmes, Professor of Anatomy at Harvard called 'The American Scholar' declaration of independence of American letters from the tutelage of British Literature.
- 3) Reread the biographical account of Emerson if necessary. You will notice that Emerson's forbears and in-laws were related to the church.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Emerson in 'May-Day' calls god 'The million-handed sculptor'.
- 2) 'Come see the north wind's masonry:'
Contrast this with lines 'so fanciful, so savage...Mockingly' in which the first line is a run-on line.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Emerson read Persian Literature in German translation. He specially like Hafiz and Saadi.
- 2) Emerson read Hindu scriptures originally in Sanskrit in English translation: 'Hamatreya' is a testimony of his interest in Hindu classics.

UNIT 27 WALT WHITMAN

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Walt Whitman
- 27.3 Passage to India
 - 27.3.1 Exposé
 - 27.3.2 The Text
 - 27.3.3 Analysis
- 27.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.5 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After a study of this unit you will be able to:

- Narrate some of the main events in the life of Whitman;
- Describe his importance in the tradition of American Poetry,
- Explain the influence of Emerson on Whitman, and
- Appreciate Whitman’s ‘Passage to India’

27.1 INTRODUCTION

Whitman is not only the most important poet in nineteenth century America but quintessentially an American poet who embodies the aspiration and ethos of his nation, while reading this unit you should try to understand the significance of Whitman for his culture as much as him as an expression of it.

The brief account of Whitman’s life will enable you to look at him in his iterations with the society in which he lived and how his people looked at him in his time.

‘Passage to India’ is a long poem. You may first read the poem aloud a couple of times then read the expose and the analysis provided in the unit.

Students have asked me if they may consult material on the internet. I have used the material on the internet and I would encourage them to do so. However, remember that you must not get carried away and spend too much time on one poet or poem to the neglect of others.

For students who do not have access to the internet or good libraries I have appended a couple of poems by Whitman to this block. Read them if you wish to. No questions would be asked based on the essay and the poems for supplementary reading.

27.2 WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman, christened Walter at his birth on May 31, 1819, was the second of the nine children of Walter and Louisa Van Velsor Whitman. Three of Walt’s brothers were named after American politicians – Andrew Jackson, George

Washington and Thomas Jefferson – the eldest was named Jesse and the youngest Edward. One of the brothers died unnamed at the age of six months. Walter Whitman, Sr. was a carpenter and farmer at West Hills, Long Island. Owing to his failure to eke a living there the family moved to Brooklyn in 1823. There also he was financially not very successful with the result that Walt had formal schooling only for five years - from 1825 to 1830. In order to augment his family income Walt became an office boy for two lawyers and an apprentice to the Long Island weekly *The Patriot*. In 1835 he became a journeyman printer, i.e. a qualified printer working for an employer. Next year he became a teacher and in 1838 edited the *Long Islander*, a weekly published in Huntington. In 1840 presidential campaign he worked for Martin van Buren. Later he taught for a while and from 1842 to 1844 edited the *Aurora*, a daily newspaper and, the *Evening Tattler*. He returned to Brooklyn in 1845 and wrote for the *Long Island Star*. Thereafter he edited the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1846 – ‘48) and the *Brooklyn Weekly Freeman* (1848 – ‘49). For four months in 1848 he worked in New Orleans for the *Crescent*. From 1850 to ’54 he as a carpenter built houses, speculated in real estate and also ran a printing office and a stationery store.

Whitman appears to have been leading a precarious existence spending his time loafing, walking around Long Island and New York doing whatever appeared to have been of interest to him. However, he was watching the plays of Shakespeare in the theatre and also developed a love for music, especially the opera. He read Homer, the Bible, Tom Paine, the plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Coleridge, the novels of Sir Walter Scott and, Macpherson’s Ossianic poems. He also read Emerson’s essays which inspired him to write. Whitman later confessed, ‘I was simmering, simmering, simmering, Emerson brought me to a boil.’

Self-check Exercise I

1) What did young Whitman do for a living?

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2) What did Whitman like to read?

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27.3 PASSAGE TO INDIA

You are now familiar with Whitman’s life. Let’s now read one of his most well known poems, ‘Passage to India’.

27.3.1 Exposé

The immediate occasion for the writing of ‘Passage to India’ (1871) was to celebrate three feats of contemporary technology. In the first place was the Suez Canal joining the Mediterranean and Red seas. Work on the project began in April 1859 and completed in 1867 and formally opened by Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, on November 17, 1869. In the second place, in the United States the Union Pacific and Central Pacific transcontinental railways were joined at Promontory, Utah on May 10, 1869. The third achievement was the laying of the Atlantic and Pacific cables in 1866. Whitman celebrated these events not only for their own sake but because they strengthened the unity of mankind. Whitman went still further; he saw in this unification a spiritual realization symbolized by India and the venturing of the soul to Godliness.

27.3.2 The Text

SINGING my days, 1
 Singing the great achievements of the present,
 Singing the strong, light works of engineers,
 Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven¹ outvied,)
 In the Old World, the east, the Suez canal, 5
 The New by its mighty railroad spann’d,
 The seas inlaid with eloquent, gentle wires,
 I sound, to commence, the cry, with thee, O soul,
 The Past! the Past! the Past!

The Past! the dark, unfathom’d retrospect! 10
 The teeming gulf! the sleepers and the shadows!
 The past! the infinite greatness of the past!

For what is the present, after all, but a growth out of the past?
 (As a projectile, form’d, impell’d, passing a certain line, still keeps on,
 So the present, utterly form’d, impell’d by the past.) 15

2

Passage, O soul, to India!
 Eclaircise² the myths Asiatic—the primitive fables.
 Not you alone, proud truths of the world!
 Nor you alone, ye facts of modern science!
 But myths and fables of eld³ —Asia’s, Africa’s fables! 20
 The far-darting beams of the spirit!—the unloos’d dreams!
 The deep diving bibles and legends;
 The daring plots of the poets—the elder religions;
 —O you temples fairer than lilies, pour’d over by the rising sun!
 O you fables, spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known,
 mounting to heaven! 25
 You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish’d with gold!

Towers of fables immortal, fashion’d from mortal dreams!
 You too I welcome, and fully, the same as the rest;
 You too with joy I sing.

Passage to India! 30

Lo, soul! seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
 The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work,
 The people to become brothers and sisters,
 The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
 The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near, 35
 The lands to be welded together.

A worship new, I sing;
 You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours!
 You engineers! you architects, machinists, your!
 You, not for trade or transportation only, 40
 But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.

3

Passage to India!
 Lo, soul, for thee, of tableaux twain,
 I see, in one, the Suez canal initiated, open'd,
 I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's leading the van; 45
 I mark, from on deck, the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in
 the distance;
 I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather'd,
 The gigantic dredging machines,
 In one, again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same,)
 I see over my own continent the Pacific Railroad⁴, surmounting every barrier; 50
 I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte, carrying freight and passengers;
 I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-whistle,
 I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world;
 I cross the Laramie plains—I note the rocks in grotesque shapes—the buttes;
 I see the plentiful larkspur and wild onions—the barren, colorless, sage-deserts; 55
 I see in glimpses afar, or towering immediately above me, the great mountains—I
 see the Wind River and the Wahsatch mountains;
 I see the Monument mountain and the Eagle's Nest—I pass the Promontory—I
 ascend the Nevadas;
 I scan the noble Elk mountain, and wind around its base;
 I see the Humboldt range—I thread the valley and cross the river,
 I see the clear waters of Lake Tahoe—I see forests of majestic pines, 60
 Or, crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold enchanting mirages of
 waters and meadows;
 Marking through these, and after all, in duplicate slender lines,
 Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,
 Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,
 The road between Europe and Asia. 65

(Ah Genoese⁵, thy dream! thy dream!
 Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,
 The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream!)

4

Passage to India!
 Struggles of many a captain—tales of many a sailor dead! 70
 Over my mood, stealing and spreading they come,
 Like clouds and cloudlets in the unreach'd sky.

Along all history, down the slopes,
 As a rivulet running, sinking now, and now again to the surface rising,
 A ceaseless thought, a varied train—Lo, soul! to thee, thy sight, they rise, 75
 The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions:
 Again Vasco de Gama⁶ sails forth;
 Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariner's compass,
 Lands found, and nations born—thou born, America, (a hemisphere unborn,)
 For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd, 80
 Thou, rondure⁷ of the world, at last accomplish'd.

5

O, vast Rondure, swimming in space!
 Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty!
 Alternate light and day, and the teeming, spiritual darkness;
 Unspeakable, high processions of sun and moon, and countless stars, above; 85
 Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees;
 With inscrutable⁸ purpose—some hidden, prophetic intention;
 Now, first, it seems, my thought begins to span thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia, descending, radiating,
 Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them, 90
 Wandering, yearning, curious—with restless explorations,
 With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish—with never-happy hearts,

With that sad, incessant refrain, *Wherefore, unsatisfied Soul? and Whither, O
 mocking Life?*

Ah, who shall soothe these feverish children?
 Who justify these restless explorations? 95
 Who speak the secret of impassive⁹ Earth?
 Who bind it to us? What is this separate Nature, so unnatural?
 What is this Earth, to our affections? (unloving earth, without a throb to answer
 ours;
 Cold earth, the place of graves.)

Yet, soul, be sure the first intent remains—and shall be carried out; 100
 (Perhaps even now the time has arrived.)

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)
 After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,
 After the noble inventors—after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist,
 ethnologist,
 Finally shall come the Poet, worthy that name; 105
 The true son of God shall come, singing his songs.

Then, not your deeds only, O voyagers, O scientists and inventors, shall be justified,
 All these hearts, as of fretted children, shall be sooth'd,
 All affection shall be fully responded to—the secret shall be told;
 All these separations and gaps shall be taken up, and hook'd and link'd together;
 110

The whole Earth—this cold, impassive, voiceless Earth, shall be completely
 justified;
 Trinitas¹⁰ divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by the son of
 God, the poet,

(He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains,
 He shall double the Cape of Good Hope to some purpose;) 115
 Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,
 The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

6

Year at whose open'd, wide-flung door I sing!
 Year of the purpose accomplish'd!
 Year of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans!
 (No mere Doge of Venice¹¹ now, wedding the Adriatic;) 120
 I see, O year, in you, the vast terraqueous¹² globe, given, and giving all,
 Europe to Asia, Africa join'd, and they to the New World;
 The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a festival garland,
 As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand.

Passage to India! 125
 Cooling airs from Caucasus¹³ far, soothing cradle of man,
 The river Euphrates¹⁴ flowing, the past lit up again.

Lo, soul, the retrospect, brought forward;
 The old, most populous, wealthiest of Earth's lands,
 The streams of the Indus and the Ganges, and their many affluents¹⁵; 130
 (I, my shores of America walking to-day, behold, resuming all,)
 The tale of Alexander¹⁶, on his warlike marches, suddenly dying,
 On one side China, and on the other side Persia and Arabia,
 To the south the great seas, and the Bay of Bengal;
 The flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes, 135
 Old occult Brahma, interminably far back—the tender and junior Buddha,

Central and southern empires, and all their belongings, possessors,
 The wars of Tamerlane¹⁷, the reign of Aurungzebe¹⁸,
 The traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians, Byzantium, the Arabs,
 Portuguese,
 The first travelers, famous yet, Marco Polo¹⁹, Batouta²⁰ the Moor, 140
 Doubts to be solv'd, the map incognita, blanks to be fill'd,
 The foot of man unstay'd, the hands never at rest,
 Thyself, O soul, that will not brook a challenge.

The medieval navigators rise before me,
 The world of 1492, with its awaken'd enterprise; 145
 Something swelling in humanity now like the sap of the earth in spring,

The sunset splendor of chivalry declining.

And who art thou, sad shade?
 Gigantic, visionary, thyself a visionary,
 With majestic limbs, and pious, beaming eyes, 150
 Spreading around, with every look of thine, a golden world,
 Enhuing it with gorgeous hues.

As the chief histrion²¹,
 Down to the footlights walks, in some great scena²²,
 Dominating the rest, I see the Admiral²³ himself, 155
 (History's type of courage, action, faith;)

Behold him sail from Palos²⁴, leading his little fleet;
His voyage behold—his return—his great fame,
His misfortunes, calumniators—behold him a prisoner, chain'd,
Behold his dejection, poverty, death. 160

(Curious, in time, I stand, noting the efforts of heroes;
Is the deferment long? bitter the slander, poverty, death?
Lies the seed unreck'd²⁵ for centuries in the ground? Lo! to God's due occasion,

Uprising in the night, it sprouts, blooms,
And fills the earth with use and beauty.) 165

7

Passage indeed, O soul, to primal thought!
Not lands and seas alone—thy own clear freshness,
The young maturity of brood and bloom;
To realms of budding bibles.

O soul, repressless, I with thee, and thou with me, 170
Thy circumnavigation of the world begin;
Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,
To reason's early paradise,
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
Again with fair creation. 175

8

O we can wait no longer!
We too take ship, O soul!
Joyous, we too launch out on trackless seas!
Fearless, for unknown shores, on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O soul,) 180
Caroling free—singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

With laugh, and many a kiss,
(Let others deprecate—let others weep for sin, remorse, humiliation;)
O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee. 185

Ah, more than any priest, O soul, we too believe in God;
But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.

O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee;
Sailing these seas, or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time, and Space, and Death, like waters flowing,
190

Bear me, indeed, as through the regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear—lave²⁶ me all over;
Bathe me, O God, in thee—mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O Thou transcendant! 195
Nameless—the fibre and the breath!
Light of the light—shedding forth universes—thou centre of them!

Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving!
 Thou moral, spiritual fountain! affection's source! thou reservoir!
 (O pensive soul of me! O thirst unsatisfied! waitest not there? 200
 Waitest not haply for us, somewhere there, the Comrade perfect?)
 Thou pulse! thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
 That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,
 Athwart²⁷ the shapeless vastnesses of space!

How should I think—how breathe a single breath—how speak—if, out of myself,
 205
 I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel²⁸ at the thought of God,
 At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
 But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me,
 And lo! thou gently masterest the orbs, 210
 Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
 And fillest, swellest full, the vastnesses of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,
 Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth;
 —What love, than thine and ours could wider amplify? 215
 What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours, O soul?
 What dreams of the ideal? what plans of purity, perfection, strength?
 What cheerful willingness, for others' sake, to give up all?
 For others' sake to suffer all?

Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd, 220
 (The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,)
 Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
 As, fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
 The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

9

Passage to more than India! 225
 Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?
 O Soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like these?
 Disportest thou on waters such as these?
 Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?
 Then have thy bent²⁹ unleash'd. 230

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!
 Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling problems!
 You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living, never reach'd you.

Passage to more than India!
 O secret of the earth and sky! 235
 Of you, O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!
 Of you, O woods and fields! Of you, strong mountains of my land!
 Of you, O prairies³⁰! Of you, gray rocks!
 O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows!
 O day and night, passage to you! 240

O sun and moon, and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter³¹!
 Passage to you!

Passage—immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!
 Away, O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
 Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail! 245
 Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?
 Have we not grovell'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?

Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long enough?

Sail forth! steer for the deep waters only!
 Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me; 250
 For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
 And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!
 O farther, farther sail!
 O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God? 255
 O farther, farther, farther sail!

Annotation:

1. Seven: this is a reference to the Seven Wonders of the World in ancient times among which were the pyramids of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon the statue of Zeus at Olympia and the light house at Alexandria.
2. Eclaircise: explain, clarify
3. Eld: antiquity
4. Railroad: lines 49-63 describe the railway from Omaha to San Francisco.
5. Genoese: This is a reference to Christopher Columbus
6. Correctly: Vasco da Gama who in 1497 – 98 found the sea route to India by navigating around Cape of Good Hope in South Africa
7. Rondure: encirclement, circumnavigation
8. Inscrutable: (of people and their acts) whose meaning is hidden or hard to find out; mysterious
9. Impassive: (sometimes derogatory, of people) showing or having no feeling, unusually calm
10. Trinitas: The Holy Trinity of Christian faith. In order to symbolize the union of Venice with the sea
11. Doge of Venice: the chief magistrate of the city state of Venice (697 – 1797), performed the annual ritual of throwing a gold ring into the Adriatic
12. Terraqueous: consisting or formed of land and water, as the earth
13. Caucasus: The region between the Bland and The Caspian seas, home to the Caucasus mountains.
14. Euphrates: River flowing from Turkey to the Persian gulf. Its valley is according to tradition, the cradle of Western Civilization. It is also associated with Noah's flood.
15. Affluent: Tributaries
16. Alexander: He died in 323 BCE his way back from India.
17. Tamerlane: Taimur (1336? – 1405) 'Prince of Destruction' led wars of conquest in Turkey, Persia, India and Russia.
18. Aurungzebe: The last great Mughal emperor of India who ruled from 1618 to 1707.
19. Marco Polo: (1254 - 1324) famous Venetian traveller
20. Batouta: Ibn Batouta (1303 - 1377) Moroccan Traveller
21. Histrion: actor
22. Scena: scene
23. Admiral: Columbus
24. Palos: The Spanish seaport from which Columbus sailed in 1492.

25. Unreck'd: unnoticed
26. Leve: to flow softly along or against
27. Athwart: in a sloping position
28. Shrivell: to (cause to) dry out and become smaller by twisting into small folds
29. Bent: force, energy
30. Prairie: A type of grassland with very few trees, in North America

27.3.3 Analysis

'Passage to India' begins by celebrating three technological feats of Whitman's time. The first was the digging of the Suez Canal which made intercourse of Europe with India easier. In Whitman's eyes it also joined Europe with Asia and Africa. The Suez Canal in the West and the rail roads across the US joined the Atlantic with the Pacific which connected Europe and Africa with Asia via the United States. Lastly the laying of the Atlantic and Pacific cables – 'The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires' – made communication with the people on the globe easier and faster. Whitman expanded upon the first two events in the 'tableaus twain' in third section of the poem but made no further reference to the third technological event in any succeeding section of the 'Passage'.

'Passage to India' is not a song in praise of the technological achievements of the latter half of the nineteenth century but a hymn in praise of 'God's purpose from the first':

The earth to be spann'd Connected by net-work
 The people to become brothers and sisters
 The races, neighbours, to marry and be given in marriage,
 The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
 The lands to be welded together. (ll 31 – 35)

Whitman believed that the captains such as Columbus and Vasco da Gama, the voyagers, explorers, the engineers, architects and machinists while facilitating material betterment trade and 'transportation' were unbeknown to themselves fulfilling God's design of building world fraternity and sorority.

E.M. Forster took the cue for his most famous novel *A Passage to India* (1924) from Whitman. Forster used the title somewhat ironically as in the second part of the novel *Aziz*, the central character organizes a visit of Adela Quested, fiancée of Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate, to the Marabar caves where a contretemps brings about a conflict between the British ruling class and Indians but it led to a Hindu-Muslim entente. Whitman foresaw that the path to Globalization would not be a smooth process, as suggested by the image of a rivulet, 'a ceaseless thought, a varied train':

As a rivulet running, sinking now and now again to the surface rising.

Whitman also recalled that the agents of change would not necessarily be rewarded.

Christopher Columbus (c. 1445 – 1506) was born in Geneva, Italy. Once while on a voyage to England, his vessel was attacked by pirates and he found safety in Lisbon where he returned after the completion of his mission. It was in Lisbon that in 1478 he married the daughter of a seasoned navigator. Columbus consulted his father-in-law's charts and maps that helped him form an idea of westward approach to India. After failing to persuade King John II of Portugal to subsidize his voyage he turned to the Spanish King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella for support.

On August 3, 1492 Columbus set sail with three small ships – the Santa Maria which he commanded, the Nina and the Pinta – and eighty-eight men to India. Columbus held to his West-ward course but his men lost faith in his project and grew mutinous. On October 12 they landed at an island in the Bahamas. Columbus named it San Salvador and claimed it for Spain.

Columbus made three more voyages to the New World but he was victimized by intrigue and harassed by disputes among the colonists and his life was assailed by bitterness and discouragement. On his second trip he discovered Trinidad and the mainland of what is now Brazil. From this trip he returned home in chains, victim of scheming perjurers. Whitman refers to Columbus, as ‘the Admiral himself’ in section 6 of the ‘Passage’. Columbus was the prime actor or histrion’.

As the chief histrion,
Down to the footlights walks, in some great scena,
Dominating the rest, I see the Admiral himself,
(History’s type of courage, action, faith;)
Behold him sail from Palos, leading his little fleet;
His voyage behold—his return—his great fame,
His misfortunes, calumniators—behold him a prisoner, chain’d,
Behold his dejection, poverty, death.

Whitman’s reference to Columbus’s ‘misfortunes, calumniators’ and his portrait as a prisoner in chains, in ‘dejection, poverty and death’ remind us of Samuel Johnson:

This mournful truth is everywhere confessed,
SLOW RISES WORTH BY POVERTY DEPRESSED (II 176 - 77)

in *London* (1738). Both poets gave vent to their own life’s bitter experiences. Columbus, after his release from prison in 1502 made one more visit to cape Honduras and Puerto Bello. He returned home on November 7, 1502 to stay, broken in health, impoverished and betrayed. He died at Valladolid on May 20, 1506 believing till his last day that he had reached India.

Columbus may have held India as a land of wealth and prosperity but for Whitman it was not only a land of wealth but also of wisdom and spirituality – ‘realms of budding bibles’ – land of ‘wisdom’s birth’ and ‘innocent intuitions’. ‘Passage’ in this poem means transition from one state into another. So passage to India is transition from a worldly to a spiritual life, a life of wisdom and gnosis. India is the land of ‘elder religions’ of ‘Sanskrit and the Vedas’, of ‘temples fairer than lilies, pour’d over by the rising sun’, and of ‘Old occult Brahma, interminably far back – the tender and junior Buddha’.

However, Whitman wished to go beyond the geographical or physical India to more than India, to union with god. In the last two sections Whitman sounds like Kabir the mystic – ‘O we can wait no longer!’

Singing our song of God
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

And again,

Lave me all over
Bathe me O god, in thee – mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

And yet again,

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, time and Space and Death
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual me.

This is Whitman’s ‘Passage to more than India’. Whitman says, ‘For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go / And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.’

Whitman identified himself with his soul and the soul with God. In the *Song of Myself* he wrote: “Divine and I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from.” Whitman sprawls far beyond his lines. His poetry can be understood only against the backdrop of his aspirations.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Briefly state the three events celebrated by Whitman in ‘Passage to India’.

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2) What does ‘ponderous Seven’ in the poem refer to?

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3) Comment briefly on ‘India’ as a symbol in Whitman’s poem.

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27.4 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit you became familiar with Whitman’s life and the times in which he lived.
- Thereafter you read one of Whitman’s great poems ‘Passage to India’ and tried to understand his symbolism.

27.5 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

It would be a good idea to re-read the writeup on Walt Whitman after answering the questions in Exercise I and reading the poem and the analysis of it once again after writing the answers to questions in Exercise II.

UNIT 28 EDGAR ALLAN POE

Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction
- 28.2 Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
- 28.3 The Raven
 - 28.3.1 The Background of the Poem
 - 28.3.2 The Text
 - 28.3.3 Stanza Form and Sound Pattern
 - 28.3.4 A Discussion
- 28.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.5 Suggested Activity
- 28.6 Suggested Reading
- 28.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

28.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Poe the poet
- Acquire ideas about the structure and meaning of “The Raven”
- Appreciate the unique sound patterns of Poe’s poem

28.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit focuses on a well-known poem in American literary history, a poem that is read by countless Americans at the middle school, high school and university levels. “The Raven”, published in 1845, was immensely popular and made the author famous. The musicality of the poem, its melancholy and quaint atmosphere, became an instant hit with readers. The poem gained acceptance not only in America but was received enthusiastically in England and France. It was translated into a number of European languages and went on to influence the French symbolist poets like Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Baudelaire. For Poe this poem marks a turning point in his career and a critical success which he was not able to repeat in any subsequent poetical work. The poem has generated many imitations, parodies and adaptations. It is safe to say that “The Raven” is part of the cultural baggage that most Americans carry and by now, has travelled to many other countries either in its original English form or in a translated avatar.

28.2 EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809-1849)

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, second child to David and Elizabeth Poe, professional actors in a theatrical company, on January 19, 1809. He lost his mother when he was two and half years old. He, along with his older brother and young sister, became orphans because the father had deserted the family earlier. All Poe children got separated thereafter. Edgar was taken into the Allan family from Richmond, Virginia without getting legally adopted and was renamed Edgar

Allan Poe. His foster father John Allan was a prosperous tobacco merchant and he ensured proper education for his ward.

When the Allans moved to Scotland in 1815 (and later to London) young Edgar accompanied them. He spent five years abroad enrolled in private academies as a student. Later, the Allan family returned to Richmond in July 1820 where Edgar continued his school education showing aptitude in Latin and amateur theatricals. It was during this phase Edgar was attracted to one Jane Stannard, mother of a schoolboy friend who inspired in the young admirer a sense of ideal love. (She is the inspiration behind Poe's famous 1831 lyric "To Helen".) Poe started displaying his talent for versification as a schoolboy. In 1825 his foster father acquired a legacy after the death of a rich uncle boosting the fortunes of the Allan family which moved into better accommodation.

In February 1826 Poe joined the newly-established University of Virginia and enrolled himself for ancient and modern languages. But from this point onwards Poe's relation with his foster father became strained and his life got subjected to prolonged spells of financial insecurity. Allan did not take kindly to the young man's poetic aspirations and dissolute ways. Moreover, Poe incurred a gambling debt of \$2000 which made Allan furious. The young man had already aggravated matters by getting engaged to his childhood sweetheart Elmira Royster despite objections from both families. Poe's university career was interrupted soon after and he returned to Richmond to find his engagement with Elmira quashed by her parents.

Hereafter, Poe struggled to establish himself as a writer and gain a minimum of financial security without depending on his estranged foster father. As it turned out, he found it difficult to attain financial stability and success although these adverse material conditions did not prevent him from producing a number of poems, tales and critical essays in the pages of American magazines with which he got sporadically associated. In March 1827 Poe left the Allan household despite foster mother Frances's efforts to patch up differences. Edgar's next stop was Boston where he enlisted in the US Army under the name Edgar A. Perry. The same year he published his first collection of verse, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* which was scarcely noticed by critics. Within a year Poe was promoted to sergeant-major and with John Allan's conciliatory help entered US Military Academy at West Point later.

But events piled up in a way that triggered a final split between Edgar and his foster father who remarried after the death of his wife in February in 1829. Meanwhile, Poe joined his relatives in Baltimore – his paternal aunt Maria Clemm, her eight-year old daughter Virginia, older brother Henry and grandmother Elizabeth Cairnes Poe. A publisher in Baltimore printed his second book, *Aaraaf, Taamerlane and Minor Poems*, a revised and expanded edition of his first collection. Subsequently, a third volume entitled *Poems: Second Edition* was brought out by a New York publisher in 1831 after Poe had obtained release from the West Point Academy. The next decade and a half of Poe's life was distributed among five Eastern cities – Boston, Baltimore, Richmond, Philadelphia and New York. The events that influenced his personal life in this phase included the death of his brother William Henry and his marriage with cousin Virginia Clemm (age thirteen) at the age of twenty-seven.

Professionally, this period saw the growth of Poe as a writer through regular contributions to different magazines although the money he received for his efforts was never sufficient to meet his family obligations and the concurrent

habit of drinking and gambling. It is difficult to say – and Poe biographers do not agree on this point – whether his singularly tragic and insecure life pushed him into developing wrong kind of habits. But the fact remains that Poe never stuck to one job or place for long and he moved from one editorial position to another in different magazines, never succeeding in consolidating his professional clout in the literary marketplace despite making a name for himself both inside and outside America.

In 1832 Poe submitted five tales to a contest sponsored by to the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* which published all five. In October 1833 he won the first prize of \$50 from the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* for his story “MS. Found in a Bottle”. In 1835 Poe was hired by the *Southern Literary Messenger* in an editorial capacity and contributed a number reviews, essays and stories which introduced him a nationwide audience. Poe’s resignation from the *Messenger* two years later took him to New York to seek employment without any success. He was forced to relocate his family to Philadelphia where he got associated with *Burton’s Gentlemen’s Magazine* and *Graham’s* magazine. In June 1843 his tale “The Gold-Bug” won a \$100 prize from the Philadelphia *Dollar Newspaper*. Moving to New York in 1844 Poe obtained employment with the *New York Evening Mirror* which published a number of his tales. It was in the January 1845 issue of *Evening Mirror* that “The Raven” first appeared which created a sensation.

Poe went on to join the *Broadway Journal* which saw the publication of many of his late stories. Meanwhile, he gave public lectures and readings. In 1847 he lost his wife Virginia after prolonged sickness. On a trip to Richmond two years later he became engaged to Elmira, now a widow. But in the course of travel connected to wedding preparations he was discovered in a delirious and semi-conscious state in Baltimore succumbing to “congestion of the brains” a few days later on October 7,1849.

Self-check Exercise I

Do the following exercises in the space provided:

i) Mention the place and year of Poe’s birth.

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ii) Who was Poe’s foster father and what was he?

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iii) What led to Poe’s break-up with his foster father?

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iv) Mention three important persons who died in the course of the poet's life.

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v) Name a prize winning story by Poe.

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vi) In which American city did Poe die?

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28.3 THE RAVEN

28.3.1 The Background of the Poem

“The Raven” is Poe’s most famous poem. It first appeared in the January 29, 1845 issue of the New York *Evening Mirror*. It was reprinted a month later in the February 1845 issue of the *American Whig Review*. Many critics have attempted to recreate the circumstances behind the composition of the poem which brought instant fame to its author. A few have suggested that Poe had contemplated introducing an owl or a parrot before finalizing the raven. Poe himself wrote an essay a year later in 1846 entitled “The Philosophy of Composition” where he mentioned the parrot as the predecessor of the raven in the history of composition and dwelt at length on the deliberate artistry involved in the creation of the poem. In the same essay he mentioned that he wrote the segment of third to last stanza first and then retraced his plot to the beginning of the poem. He was aiming at the unity of effect and wanted to give readers a reading experience that could be completed in a single sitting. One possible source for the raven’s presence could be Charles Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* which was reviewed by Poe in 1841 and 1842. Poe had commented on the prophetic role of the bird in Dickens’s narrative. He must have pondered over a more fitting use of the bird in another aesthetic situation which led him to harness its symbolic potential in the poem he was to produce. Of course, in Poe’s poem the bird undergoes a unique transformation in keeping with the demands of his theme and setting. The thematic focus of “The Raven” is the loss of a loved one and the interminable sorrow that follows. Poe had experienced death in his immediate family in the case of his mother, brother and later, his wife. In between other figures representing the ideal of feminine love such as his friend’s mother and foster mother died. He lost his childhood sweetheart to marriage. And three years

before the composition of “The Raven” his wife Virginia was diagnosed with tuberculosis to which she ultimately succumbed in early 1847. Loss and mourning was integral to Poe’s life experience and he indicated in the essay cited above that the raven stood for “Mournful and never-ending Remembrance”.

28.3.2 The Text

The Raven

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary
 Over many a quaint* and curious volume of forgotten lore —
 While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
 As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
 “‘T is some visiter, “ I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door— 5
 Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
 And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
 Eagerly I wished the morrow; — vainly I had sought to borrow
 From my books surcease* of sorrow — sorrow for the lost Lenore— 10
 For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
 Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
 Thrilled me — filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating 15
 “‘T is some visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door—
 Some late visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
 That it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
 “Sir, “ said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore; 20
 But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
 And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
 That I scarce was sure I heard you”— here I opened wide the door;—
 Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into the darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, 25
 Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
 But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
 And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore!”
 This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word “Lenore!”—
 Merely this and nothing more. 28

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
 Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
 “Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;
 Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—
 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;— 35
 ‘T is the wind an nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
 In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
 Not the least obeisance* made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
 But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door— 40
 Perched upon a bust of Pallas* just above my chamber door—

Perched, and sat, and nothing more.
 Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
 By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
 "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven*, 45
 Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
 Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!*"

 Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
 Though its answer little meaning — little relevancy bore; 50
 For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
 Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
 Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
 With such name as "Nevermore."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only 55
 That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
 Nothing farther then he uttered, not a feather then he fluttered—
 Till I scarcely more then muttered "Other friends have flown before —
 On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."
 Then the bird said, "Nevermore." 60

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
 "Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore —
 Till the dirges of his Hope the melancholy burden bore 65
 Of 'Never -- nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
 Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
 Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore— 70
 What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt*, and ominous* bird of yore
 Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
 To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
 This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining 75
 On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er
 But whose velvet violet lining with lamp-light gloating o'er
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
 Swung by Seraphim* whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted* floor. 80
 "Wretch," I cried, "thy God has lent thee — by these angels he hath sent thee
 Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
 Quaff, oh, quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
 Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or devil! 85
 Whether Tempter* sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
 Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted —
 On this home by Horror haunted — tell me truly, I implore —
 Is there — *is* there balm in Gilead*? — tell me — tell me, I implore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

90

Edgar Allan Poe

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us — by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn*,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore —
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore." 95
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting —
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! — quit the bust above my door! 100
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid* bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, 105
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted — nevermore!

Glossary:

- Quaint** : attractively unusual and old-fashioned
- Surcease** : relief
- Obeisance** : deferential respect
- Pallas** : Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, scholarship and enlightenment
- Craven** : A cowardly knight sometimes had his shaved as a sign of his disgrace
- Night's Plutonian shore** : related to Pluto, the god of the underworld, associated with night and darkness
- Gaunt** : lean and haggard
- Ominous** : giving the impression that something bad is going to happen
- Seraphim** : angels
- Tufted** : carpeted
- Nepenthe** : a legendary drink supposed to soothe the bereaved
- Quaff** : drink
- Tempter** : Satan, embodiment of evil
- Gilead** : allusion to the Bible – "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of my daughter of my people recovered?"[Jeremiah 8:22]. Also, there was a commercial pain balm in Poe's days called "Balm in Gilead".
- Aidenn** : Arabic word for Eden, meaning heaven or paradise
- pallid** : pale

28.3.3 Stanza Form and Sound Pattern

Much of the poem’s popular success can be attributed to its rhythm which makes it eminently worthy of reading aloud. Generations of readers have attested to the spell of its incantatory rhythm. In his lifetime Poe gave repeated readings in which lights were dimmed when he came onstage and he recreated the sad and mysterious atmosphere inside the poem through a dramatic rendering. This is how a local magazine editor John M Daniel summarized the poet’s last recitation at Exchange Hotel in Richmond, Virginia on 24 September 1849: “It is stamped with the image of true genius – and genius in its happiest hour. It is one of those things an author never does but once.”

Poe borrowed the metrical model from Elizabeth Barrett’s (subsequently wife of the famous Robert Browning) poem “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship”. In Poe’s poem the form achieves a rare excellence which even Barrett commended later.

“The Raven” consists of 18 stanzas, each stanza a six-line unit. The rhyme scheme is ABCBBB. Poe introduces variation with the help of internal rhyme which helps generate an echo effect in the general march of the verse. When the internal rhyme is counted the scheme turns out to be AA,B,CC,CB,B,B. The meter is trochaic octameter – eight trochaic feet per line, with each foot having one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable. The sixth line in each stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. Mostly, the first and third lines of each stanza have an internal rhyme but other lines do as well. For example, in the first stanza ‘dreary’ and ‘weary’ in the first line and ‘napping’ and ‘tapping’ in the third line rhyme. Moreover, the second, fourth, fifth and sixth lines of each stanza rhyme. Another interesting pattern is the repetition of identical words/phrases at the end of the fourth and fifth lines of each stanza, as for instance, ‘at my chamber door’ in the first and third stanzas and ‘Lenore’ in second and fifth stanzas. Such a brief account of the form of the poem shows the careful planning that went into versification in this case.

Poe’s mastery of technique in this poem is best seen in versatile use of other sound devices to create the required atmosphere. Alliteration, assonance, auxesis, repetition and onomatopoeia can be teased out in a rhetorical analysis of the poem. The overall effect of sound contributes to the sense. More specifically, it enhances the sense of gloom in the lyric.

Self-check Exercise II

The following are examples of phrases/lines using rhetorical devices used in “The Raven”. Specify the device in the space provided.

- i) “weak and weary”; “nearly napping”
- ii) “the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain”
- iii) “faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door”
- iv) “Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.”
- v) “a stately raven of saintly days”

28.3.4 A Discussion

“The Raven” begins with a variation of fairy tale opening – “Once upon a midnight dreary...” which is further specified as “in the bleak December” in the

second stanza and plunges directly into the experience of the narrator in that melancholy December midnight. The language, the atmosphere and the situation progressively heighten a keen sense of the exotic and the mysterious. But the plotline is simple and centres round a common literary theme, the death of a beloved and the unrelieved gloom of bereavement. The success of the poem lies in the evocation of a paranormal feeling and outlook growing out of the repetition and accumulation of unusual details in ordinary circumstances. What lends urgency to the little piece of action is the first person report of a curious encounter.

Stanzas 1 to 3 function as a false cue to lure the reader into the narrative. The dramatic speaker remembers his predicament in the late hours of a fateful December night when half dozing in his chamber after poring over arcane books he thinks he hears gentle tapping sound at the door. He goes on to say that he has been engaged, without any success, in a diversionary act of reading books so that he could get over his sorrow for the loss of Lenore, “the rare and radiant maiden”. Admittedly he is very sad and confused. He surmises that someone is knocking at his door to gain entry. Although he has been paralysed in his somnolent state with “fantastic terrors” by any movement or noise he musters courage. Half talking to himself and addressing “Sir...or Madam” purportedly present outside he throws open the door. But he finds nothing except darkness. He is transfixed in a state of fear and doubt for some time before whispering the word Lenore, which comes back to him in an unsettling echo. The whole experience embarrasses him as he finds his complacent assumptions about the causes of “rapping” completely unfounded. But as soon as he steps back into the chamber the tapping sound is repeated, this time a little louder and at the window. For the narrator the mystery deepens and he steels his nerves to open the window.

The opening of the window in stanza 7 introduces the second character into the situation. It is “a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore”. This raven - no ordinary bird, the stuff of myths and legends- majestically flutters into the room, settles on a bust of Pallas above the chamber door. This is the beginning of a curious exchange between the bereaved lover and the “ebony bird” in which the narrator moves from an initial bemused state of tolerant scorn for the bird to a final cry of enraged despair. Immersed as he is in the sorrow of losing his beloved the student treats the bird playfully, to start with. Imagining the visitor to have arrived from the infernal world of death and darkness the narrator seeks to know the name of the intruder. This allows the poet to introduce a well-known refrain in the poem – Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore”. In a tone of ominous irony the narrator speculates on the meaning of that answer, Nevermore, understood as the name of the bird. While as a name it is meaningless it acquires some meaning when one takes it to be the only rote word the raven has learnt from the previous master. In his agitated state the speaker imagines the bird’s owner dogged by misfortunes, given to muttering a melancholy “nevermore”, which is picked up by the pet bird.

But matters do not stop there in the poem. The narrator, having decided to indulge in his fancies, seats himself on a cushion in front the bird, with the lamplight streaming over him. This naturally rekindles the memory of the lost beloved who was associated with the same cushioned seat and the lamplight. While the “fiery eyes” of the bird offer no consoling answer, the narrator imagines a changed atmosphere in the chamber induced by censor-wielding angels. He assumes that the bird is there at God’s behest and that the whole visit

is meant as a palliative for his intense mourning. He imagines the whole experience as a relief from the tormenting memories of Lenore which persist unabated. But strangely enough, the bird's single word of utterance, Nevermore, runs counter to the narrator's desire for forgetfulness. As the poem progresses, the bird's repeated word of negation assumes the dimension of an ominous prophesy. The narrator, in rising frenzy, blurts out two questions to the bird. The first one demands to know some balm or cure for his festering sorrow. The second one probes the possibility of a reunion with Lenore in some future paradise. To both these impassioned but desperate queries the bird's response is "Nevermore".

The last two stanzas bring the narrator's emotions to a crescendo dramatizing the irrevocability of lost love. At the same time, the bird acquires a strong symbolic significance in relation to the unresolved sorrow of the speaker. When the narrator cries out in the penultimate stanza, "Take thy beak from out my heart", he has converted the accidental visitor to his chamber, dumb but for one devastatingly uttered appropriate word, into a fiendish presence of negation. In the opening stanzas, a word that appears repeatedly is "Lenore", radiating love's promised bliss. In the progress of the narrative right up to the climax the recurring word is "Nevermore", caught up in images of darkness and death. Not only do these two words rhyme but joined together as in "Lenore nevermore" they underline the impossible hopes of bereavement and the frail, transient nature of human love. Poe's poetic performance has succeeded in matching sound with sense in a profoundly original way. That, in part, accounts for the poem's critical success in his time and its continued popularity now.

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe offers a deceptively simple description of the dramatic action of the poem: "A raven, having learnt by rote a single word 'Nevermore,' and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams – the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased." But this bare-bones summary hardly does justice to the finished poem as we have it. The finished poem, with its archaic, allusive and rhythmic language, is a rare blend of well-crafted narration and mysterious evocation.

Self-check Exercise III

i) How does the poem open and where?

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ii) Who is the speaker in the poem? Is he different from the poet?

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iii) What does the narrator presume when he opens his chamber door?

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iv) How does the raven behave after he gains entry into the student's chamber?

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v) How does the narrator explain the bird's repetition of the word "nevermore" in stanza 11?

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vi) Why is the speaker not sure whether bird is an ordinary bird or devil?

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vii) Comment on the last two stanzas of the poem.

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28.4 LET US SUM UP

“The Raven”, published in January 1845, is Poe’s most famous poem. Poe borrowed the six-line stanza form from Elizabeth Barrett but used his own cultural experience and poetic skills to produce a critically acclaimed poem. Poe’s use of the trochaic meter is suited to the exotic language and theme of the poem.

The theme of the poem is the loss of a beautiful maiden and its impact on the bereaved lover. By a careful manipulation of the sound pattern in the verse Poe succeeds in investing a simple narrative with a lot of suggestive mystery. The details and the setting are deliberately archaic to trigger in the reader a fitting sense of anticipation and mystery. There are allusions to myths and the Bible.

28.5 SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

You are advised to use web resources to help you understand Poe’s well-known poem better. A few suggestions:

- a) Visit the website of The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore at www.eapoe.org. It contains a lot of useful material
- b) Two recitations of “The Raven” are very good. i) by Christopher Lee at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BefliMIEzZ8> and ii) by Basil Rathbone at <http://www.npr.org/ramfiles/me/20020114.raven.rathbone.ram> . These two excellent renderings available online will give you access to the sound pattern of the poem.
- c) Poe’s famous poem has occasioned a number of parodies, imitations and jokes. For an anonymous parody, see “The End of the Raven” at <http://www.jokeindex.com/joke.asp?Joke=319>

28.6 SUGGESTED READING

A companion piece for an understanding of the poem is Poe’s essay “The Philosophy of Composition” available at The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore website. In addition, the following articles are helpful:

Kopley, Richard and Kevin J Hayes. “Two verse masterworks: ‘The Raven’ and ‘Ulalume’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Hayes.

Cambridge: Cambridge UP,2002. 191- 204.

Richards,Eliza. “Outsourcing ‘The Raven’: Retroactive Origins” *Victorian Poetry* 43.2(Summer 2005):205-221.

28.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- i) Boston, 1809
- ii) John Allan, a tobacco merchant
- iii) His interest in writing as a profession and his drinking as well as gambling alienated Poe from his foster father.

- iv) Poe's mother, Poe's brother and Poe's wife
- v) "MS. Found in a Bottle" or "The Gold-Bug"
- vi) Baltimore

Self-check Exercise II

- i) alliteration ii) onomatopoeia iii) repetition iv) auxesis v) assonance

Self-check Exercise III

- i) It has a fairytale-like opening . It opens in a bleak December midnight inside a student's chamber.
- ii) The speaker of the poem is a student poring over an ancient volume in the late hours of a December night. He is not to be confused with Poe the poet although the poem begins with a subject speaking in the first person singular.
- iii) The speaker thinks that there is a late-night visitor seeking permission to enter into his chamber.
- iv) As perceived by the narrator the raven behaves in a majestic way without paying attention to the human presence. Moreover, to all queries the bird has one answer, "nevermore".
- v) The narrator thinks that the raven has picked up the word "nevermore" from its owner who may have repeated it often in a life marked by a series of misfortunes.
- vi) The mental state of narrator is fluctuating between lucidity and frenzy. So he sees the bird in two different dimensions.
- vii) In spite of all that is reported the narrator is unable to find relief from the gloom induced by the loss of his beloved. In the last two stanzas his disintegration is near total.

UNIT 29 HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- 29.3 A Psalm of Life
 - 29.3.1 Background of the Poem
 - 29.3.2 The Text
 - 29.3.3 Analysis
- 29.4 From The Song of Hiawatha
 - 29.4.1 Background of the Poem
 - 29.4.2 The Text
 - 29.4.3 Analysis
- 29.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.6 Suggested Reading
- 29.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

29.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Know and tell about H.W. Longfellow as a poet
- Appreciate ‘A Psalm of Life’ and
- From ‘The Song of Hiawatha’

29.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we have discussed H.W. Longfellow’s life and his poetic career in brief so that his poems which are prescribed here may be analyzed, understood and enjoyed properly.

The first poem ‘A Psalm of Life’ is a religious lyric and didactic in tone. There are eight stanzas, each containing four lines and the first line rhymes with the third and the second with the fourth line. The poem has been critically analyzed to make the message of the poet clear.

The second poem ‘Hiawatha’s Childhood’ is from Longfellow’s ‘The Song of Hiawatha’, a long episodic poem arranged in twenty-three cantos. It tells of the triumphs and sorrows of Hiawatha of the Ojibway, a tribe of Indians living along the Lake Superior shoreline in what is now Michigan. Here only a small portion of second Canto entitled ‘Hiawatha’s Childhood’ has been discussed and analysed. However, a brief detail of the plot and major characters is given below for your attentive reading which will help in understanding the prescribed extract in more effective manner.

‘The Song of Hiawatha’ is a long poem arranged in twenty-three cantos. It tells of the triumphs and sorrows of Hiawatha of the Ojibway, a tribe of Indians living

along the Lake Superior shoreline in what is now Michigan. Hiawatha's coming is foretold by Gitche Manito, the mighty spirit who gathers his people together and tells them a peacekeeper will be born who will bring wisdom to the warring tribes and stop their fighting.

Hiawatha is born to the virgin Wenonah, who is made pregnant by the west-wind god, Mudjekeewis. But when Mudjekeewis abandons her, Wenonah dies and young Hiawatha is brought up by his grandmother, Nokomis. Nokomis and the animals of the woods educate Hiawatha, who grows up to be a great hunter. One day, Nokomis tells Hiawatha of his father and how his mother died. Angered, Hiawatha seeks revenge, but is unable to kill his father, who is an immortal god. Mudjekeewis is nonetheless both impressed by and proud of his son, and tells Hiawatha to return to his people and become a great leader, promising that when it is time for Hiawatha to die, he will become the ruler of the northwest wind.

Hiawatha goes on to perform many great deeds: he wrestles and kills the Corn Spirit, Mondamin, and is rewarded with the gift of corn, which he presents to his hungry people; he defeats the King of Fishes, Nahma, with the help of some seagulls, and receives the fish's oil as a trophy; and he defeats the magician Pearl-Feather, who had brought disease to the people, and takes his shirt of wampum, a symbol of wealth and strength, as a reward. Hiawatha's thoughts then turn to Minnehaha, the young maid whom he first saw in the land of the Dakotahs. Against Nokomis's advice, Hiawatha goes to Minnehaha's family and requests her hand in marriage, proposing that their union would unify the Dakotah and Ojibway tribes. Minnehaha consents to be his wife.

Hiawatha teaches his people the virtues of kindness, wisdom, and strength. He also shows them the art of picture writing, so that their ancestors' histories can be recorded and not forgotten. When his friend Chibiabos the singer drowns, Hiawatha becomes sick with grief, but is healed by the priests and medicine men; afterwards, Hiawatha is able to go forth and instruct people in the art of healing.

Hiawatha's final episodic adventure tells of the coming of the white people to the Ojibways. However, rather than fearing and fighting the white priest who soon arrives, Hiawatha welcomes him as a sign of things to come and is not troubled by the visions he has had of the native tribes being scattered to the West. He welcomes the change, bidding his people farewell as he departs to the land of the northwest-wind that his father has promised him.

29.2 HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born on February 27, 1807 in Portland, to Stephen and Zillah Wadsworth Longfellow. His ancestors had come to America in 1676 from Yorkshire, England and settled there. His father was a famous lawyer while his mother's father was a general in the Revolutionary War. At the time of his birth, the Longfellows were staying with Stephen's sister in a three-story, Federal style house on the corner of Fore and Hancock Streets while her husband, Captain Samuel Stephenson, was at sea. Several months later they moved into Zillah's father's house on Congress Street. Longfellow spent his childhood there, and returned to the Congress Street home where he spent most of his life.

Longfellow was the second child in what was soon to be a family of eight children. The children remembered the order of their births with a rhyme. All

who knew him found Henry to have a “lively imagination” as well as a thirst for learning. At three he was already well on his way to learning the alphabet. When he was five, his parents sent him to the Portland Academy, a private institution where his elder brother, Stephen, was also enrolled. As was the custom for the time, the two brothers focused most of their studies on languages and literature. Always a writer at heart, when Henry was not in school he and his childhood friend, William Browne, planned elaborate writing projects.

He did not take much interest in schoolwork as his brother Samuel wrote, “In truth he was a very lively and merry boy, though of refined and quiet tastes. He did not like the ‘rough and tumble’ to which some of his schoolmates were given. But he joined in the ball games, kite-flying, swimming in summer; snowballing, coasting, and skating in winter.” He also enjoyed visiting his paternal grandparents at their farm in Gorham, and his maternal grandparents at their farm in Hiram.

Longfellow was very young when the War of 1812 devastated Portland’s economy, but the war affected him in ways both immediate and long lasting. In 1814 he wrote to his father, who was in the state Legislature in Boston, asking for a Bible for his sister and a drum for himself. Stephen Longfellow found his son “a very pretty drum, with an eagle painted on it” that cost two dollars. However, he was not able to ship it, as “They do not let any vessels go from Boston to Portland now.” Many years later, in his poem “My Lost Youth” (1858), Longfellow recalls a battle that took place off the coast of Maine in 1813 between the British ship *Boxer* and the American *Enterprise*. Although the Americans were the victors, the young captains of both ships died and were buried in Portland’s Eastern Cemetery, just up the street from Longfellow’s house.

At 13 Longfellow published his first poem in the “Portland Gazette,” signing it simply “HENRY.” The poem, “The Battle of Lovell’s Pond,” was a heroic tale of battle between colonists and Indians; it appeared on the front page of the “Gazette.” There was no praise forthcoming, for no one in the family (except his sister Anne with whom he had shared his secret) realized that their Henry had written the poem. Later that evening while at a friend’s house, he overheard the father say to another friend how terrible the poem was. Young Henry was devastated but it did not put a stop to his literary aspirations.

He was a bright child and was drawn to writing and sounds of words even during his schooling at Portland Academy. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825 and was immediately recommended to join the chair of modern languages. This proved an adventurous beginning of his highly successful career and he travelled in the year to come including Spain, Italy, France, Germany and England. He became a popular teacher and was known in almost every country of Europe and America. Due to his distinguished career and hardworking nature, he was appointed as Professor of modern languages at Harvard University in 1834 and was later associated with the University of Cambridge. He resigned from Harvard in 1854 in order to embrace writing as his full time career.

Longfellow enjoyed very happy family life though it was not without a tragedy. His romantic spirit was always the flavor of his handsome personality; he was rightly tempted by the beauty of Mary Store Potter (his school classmate) when he saw her at church after his return to Portland in 1829 and married her. But their happy married life came to an abrupt end when she died in 1834 during their Europe tour. The lonely Longfellow once again devoted himself to his scholarly

work and rented the Craigie House situated on the Charles River. Later on, the house passed on into the possessions of Nathan Appleton who gifted it to him when he married his daughter Francis Appleton in 1843. For seventeen years, Longfellow led a happy family life with five children but tragedy knocked him out again when Francis died of severe burns she received while she was sealing her children's curls with matches and wax in 1861. Longfellow's great success as a poet was tarnished by the death of his wife Fanny in a fire at Craigie House in 1861. His last years, however, were serene. He received honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1869. Between 1867 and 1869, he translated Dante's *Da Divina Commedia* (c. 1320, *The Divine Comedy*, 1802), although he did not write many new or important poems. He died in Cambridge in 1882.

He was the first American writer to be honoured in the poets' corner of Westminster Abbey in London. His best known poems are "A Psalm of Life" (1838), "Voices of the Night" (1839) "Excelsior" (1841 "The Wreck of the Hesperus" (1842), "Evangeline" (1847), "The Song of Hiawatha" (1855), "The Courtship of Miles Standish" (1858), "The Sermon of St. Francis" (1858), "The Children's Hour" (1860), "Paul Revere's Ride" (1860), "The Saga of King Olaf" (1863), *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863) and "Christmas Bells" (1864).

Self-check Exercise I

a) When and where was H.W. Longfellow born? Who were his parents?

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b) How many children were in the family Longfellow spent his childhood?

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c) Which poem did the poet write when he was only 13 years?

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d) What sort of boy Henry was when he was in school?
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e) Who was his school classmate? when did he marry her?
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f) Name any four poems composed by H.W. Longfellow.
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29.3 A PSALM OF LIFE

29.3.1 Background of the Poem

‘A Psalm of Life’, a religious lyric, was published in October of 1838. It is contained in Longfellow’s first volume of poems entitled “Voices of the Night” (1839). A ‘psalm’ is a sacred song, an invocation to mankind to follow the path of righteousness. The poet encourages his readers not to waste their time because life is very short and is going to end soon. The poem highlights the views of the poet about how to live a meaningful life as there is only one life and, therefore, we should make a good use of it. In this didactic poem, the poet presents a noble idea before the youth of the nation.

29.3.2 Text

Tell me not, in mournful **numbers**,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is **real!** Life is earnest!
And the **grave** is not its goal;
Dust **thou** art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not **enjoyment**, and not **sorrow**,
Is our **destined** end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the **bivouac** of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the **strife!**

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, — act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives **sublime**,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's **solemn main**,
A **forlorn** and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still **achieving**, still **pursuing**,
Learn to labor and **to wait.**

Glossary:

Numbers	:	verse
Real	:	meaningful
Earnest	:	sincere
Grave	:	death
Goal	:	aim
Dust	:	useless
Thou	:	you
Enjoyment	:	pleasure
Sorrow	:	grief
Destined	:	fated
Aim	:	target
Broad	:	vast

Bivouac	:	Temporary encampment of any army
Dumb	:	speechless
Strife	:	struggle
Achieving	:	obtaining
Pursuing	:	keeping busy in work
To wait	:	have patience

29.3.3 Analysis

The poem consists of nine stanzas, each containing four lines. The poet begins the poem by asking us not to tell him in sorrowful verses that life is an empty, meaningless dream. According to Longfellow, a person who spends his life in sleeping is already dead. Such a worthless life misguides other human beings as well. In fact, irresponsibility does not represent the true human nature.

The second stanza begins with two phrases, 'Life is real! Life is earnest!' The poet uses an encouraging tone to say that life is real and serious. Life should not be treated lightly. Moreover, the poet says that death is not the ultimate goal; life does not end with death. "Dust thou art, to dust returnest" is not applicable to the soul, this is applicable only to the body.

The third stanza is about the way of living. The poet tells us that our way of living should be based on enjoyment, not on mourning. The aim of life is to act wisely each day so that we can make a better future.

The stanza four is about the work assigned to us and about the time which is flying. "Art is long, and Time is fleeting" means that the work given to us is too vast and time-consuming. The poet encourages that under such situations, our hearts still remain stout and brave and are beating funeral marches to the grave, like the drums covered with cloth. The message that the poet wants to convey through this stanza is that one should not lose courage under any circumstance.

In the fifth stanza, the poet compares the world to a battlefield as well as a temporary camp for troops. The humans are compared with troops. He asks all the people to live and fight their battles within the given period of time. The poet asks us not to be like the dumb cattle which are driven by others because of their lack of direction and determination.

The poet asks us not to trust on the future even if it seems pleasant in the sixth stanza. The past incidents must be forgotten away. The aim in life should be to act courageously at present and not to lose faith in God.

Lives of great men remind us that we can make our own lives noble and elevated that is we can reach great heights. Finally when we die, we can leave behind us our footprints (noble deeds) for others to follow our path.

The noble deeds which we leave behind should be such that an unhappy and shipwrecked man, sailing over the sea of life, would be confident and take courage, following our example.

In the final stanza of the poem the poet asks us to begin at once with courage without thinking about the consequences of the actions. He asks us to achieve our aim and learn to work hard and wait patiently for rewards.

Comments

The poem opens on an optimistic note and it inspires us to act and shun the myth that life is nothing more than an empty dream. The poet appeals to accept life as the real battlefield to achieve our goals before meeting its ultimate end—death. The mission of life should not be lost either in a lot of enjoyment or even in the heavy clouds of pain because the road of life leads us beyond the limits of pain and pleasure. Every new day should bring a new success and should add glory to our life. In such a fast life, a man has to travel very fast and he should be dynamic enough to face the odds of life bravely and boldly. It is no use sitting idle in the battlefield and to be led anywhere like a lost cattle. He should set ‘the direction’ in a well-defined manner to become a hero at last. He should not live on the glory of the past and should not rely on the dreamy hopes of future. He should carve out his ‘present’ worth living with dedication and hard work. Even the lives of great heroes give us the same message and remind weak and lost people to put up a brave front against all unfavourable circumstances. They should be prepared to face any misfortune so that they could pursue their goals upto the last breathe of life with courage and patience. Thus, the poet gives a message of hope and victory on account of hard work and devotion. The poet says that life is not an empty dream. It is real and eventful. Life is full of ups and downs. We should work hard to achieve our aim of life. We should not care for any remuneration. Work is its own reward.

Self-check Exercise II

Answer the following questions given below:

a) Do you think life is an empty dream? What’s the poet’s opinion about it?

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b) What is the significance of great men’s lives ?

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c) Explain the meaning in the line “footprints on the sands of time”.

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d) Who are referred to as 'dumb driven cattle' in the poem?

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e) What does the poet mean by saying 'Life is real, life is earnest'?

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f) What should be the real aim of life?

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g) How should we behave on the battlefield of life?

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h) Which words in the fourth stanza rhyme?

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29.4 FROM THE SONG OF HIAWATHA: HIAWATHA'S CHILDHOOD

29.4.1 Background of the Poem

Set along the Southern shores of Lake Superior in the years before the arrival of European colonists, a time and place completely unfamiliar to Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) draws largely on the stories of native tribes recorded and compiled by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft in his *Algonic Researches* (1836). Longfellow also gained from the travel accounts of George Caitlin, who wished to record the ways of Indian life before they disappeared, and the work of John Heckewelder, a missionary whose writings about the Delaware and Huron tribes inspired James Fenimore Cooper. The name 'Hiawatha' is actually derived from a historical Indian chief who helped form the Iroquois Confederacy; but other than sharing the same name, Longfellow's Hiawatha is unrelated. Instead, he is patterned after a legendary figure known among the Iroquois as Tarenyawago, and among the Algonquin as Manabazho. Utilizing both tribal legend and imaginative storytelling, Longfellow used trochaic tetrameter, after the Finnish's *Kalevala*, and created an epic poem.

29.4.2 The Text

HIAWATHA'S CHILDHOOD

Downward through the evening twilight,
 In the days that are forgotten,
 In the **unremembered** ages,
 From the full moon fell Nokomis,
 Fell the beautiful Nokomis,
 She a wife, but not a mother.
 She was **sporting** with her women,
 Swinging in a swing of grape-vines,
 When her rival, the rejected,
 Full of jealousy and hatred,
 Cut the leafy swing **asunder**,
 Cut in twain the twisted grape-vines,
 And Nokomis fell **affrighted**

Downward through the evening twilight,
 On the Muskoday, the meadow,
 On the **prairie** full of blossoms.
 "See! a star falls!" said the people;
 "From the sky a star is falling!"
 There among the ferns and mosses,
 There among the prairie lilies,
 On the Muskoday, the **meadow**,
 In the moonlight and the starlight,
 Fair Nokomis bore a daughter.
 And she called her name Wenonah,
 As the first-born of her daughters.
 And the daughter of Nokomis
 Grew up like the prairie lilies,
 Grew a tall and **slender** maiden,
 With the beauty of the moonlight,
 With the beauty of the starlight.

And Nokomis warned her often,
Saying oft, and oft repeating,
"Oh, beware of Mudjekeewis,
Of the West-Wind, Mudjekeewis;
Listen not to what he tells you;
Lie not down upon the meadow,
Stoop not down among the lilies,
Lest the West-Wind come and harm you!"

But she heeded not the warning,
Heeded not those words of wisdom,
And the West-Wind came at evening,
Walking lightly o'er the prairie,
Whispering to the leaves and blossoms,
Bending low the flowers and grasses,
Found the beautiful Wenonah,
Lying there among the lilies,
Wooped her with his words of sweetness,
Wooped her with his soft caresses,
Till she bore a son in sorrow,
Bore a son of love and sorrow.
Thus was born my Hiawatha,
Thus was born the child of wonder;
But the daughter of Nokomis,
Hiawatha's gentle mother,
In her **anguish** died deserted.

Glossary:

Unremembered	: forgotten
Sporting	: entertaining, enjoying
Asunder	: to put things apart
Affrighted	: feeling of fear
Prairie	: wide area of flat land without trees
Meadow	: field with grass and often wild flowers
Slender	: thin and delicate
Stoop	: to bend the top half of the body forward and down
Heeded	: paying attention
Wooped	: to win somebody's heart by persuasion
Anguish	: extreme unhappiness caused by physical or mental suffering

29.4.3 Analysis

Nokomis was the daughter of the Moon. She was a wife, but had not yet given birth to her child. One day a jealous rival cut the grapevine on which she was swinging. Nokomis fell from the full moon, plunged downward, and landed on the prairie. People thought it was a meteor.

On the prairie, she gave birth to a daughter named Wenonah. As she grew, she developed into a beautiful maiden. Nokomis warned Wenonah to beware of Mudjekeewis, the West Wind. He told her not to lie down on the prairie, lest she

suffer harm. Wenonah did not heed her mother's warning. Mudjekeewis saw her lying among the lilies. He wooed her with sweet words and soft caresses, till she bore a son in sorrow. Wenonah died, deserted by the West Wind.

Nokomis took care of Hiawatha, Wenonah's child, in her wigwam, which was situated on the shores of Gitche Gumeo (Lake Superior). She taught him many things, showing him Ishkoodah, the comet, and the death-dance of the spirits, which we know as the Aurora Borealis, and the pathway of the ghosts, which we call the Milky Way.

Hiawatha was an inquisitive child. He asked Nokomis why there were spots on the moon. Nokomis replied that it was the body of a woman who had been thrown up there by her angry grandson. Hiawatha noticed a rainbow and wondered what it was. Nokomis said that they were flowers. She said that when the lilies on the prairie fade and perish, they blossom in the heavens above. As Hiawatha matured, he learnt the languages of all the birds and other animals. He became thoroughly acquainted with them and learnt all their secrets.

Self-check Questions

a) Who was Nokomis?

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b) Who was Hiawatha's mother? How did she die?

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c) Who was Hiawatha brought up by?

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d) What type of child Hiawatha was?

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e) What did Hiawatha learn during his childhood from Nokomis?

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29.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have read about H.W. Longfellow as a man and poet .We also gone through his two pieces of poetry namely A *Psalm of Life* and *Hiawatha's Childhood*. Now you should be able to examine, appreciate and discuss Longfellow's poetry in general and the two poems in particular. We hope you will read some more poems of H.W. Longfellow.

29.6 SUGGESTED READING

'The Song of Hiawatha' (1855)

29.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- a) See first paragraph of 29.2
- b) See the second paragraph of 29.2
- c) 'Portland Gazette'
- d) See third paragraph of 29.2
- e) Mary Store Potter was his school classmate. He married her in 1829.
- f) See last paragraph of 29.2

Self-check Exercise II

- a) See first paragraph of 29.3.2
- b) See eighth paragraph of 29.3.2
- c) Noble deeds being done by great men and women.
- d) See fifth paragraph of 29.3.2
- e) See second paragraph of 29.3.2
- f) 'Fleeting' rhymes with 'beating' and 'brave' with 'grave'

Self-check Exercise III

- a) See first paragraph of 29.4.2
- b) Wenonah was Hiawatha's mother and she died while giving birth to him.
- c) Hiawatha was brought up by Nokomis, his grandmother.
- d) Hiawatha was an inquisitive child.
- e) See the last paragraph of 29.4.2

UNIT 30 EMILY DICKINSON

Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
- 30.3 Because I could not Stop for Death
 - 30.3.1 Introduction
 - 30.3.2 The Text
 - 30.3.3 Glossary
 - 30.3.4 A Critical Appreciation
 - 30.3.5 Themes/ Questions for Discussion
- 30.4 A Thought Went up My Mind Today
 - 30.4.1 Introduction
 - 30.4.2 The Text
 - 30.4.3 An Analysis of the Poem
 - 30.4.4 Themes/ Questions for Discussion
- 30.5 Death Sets a Thing Significant
 - 30.5.1 Introduction
 - 30.5.2 The Text
 - 30.5.3 Glossary
 - 30.5.3 A Critical Evaluation of the Poem
 - 30.5.4 Themes/Questions for Discussion
- 30.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

30.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- write about Emily Dickinson's life and work
- critically evaluate Dickinson's poetry in detail with reference to:
 - i) Because I could not Stop for Death
 - ii) A Thought Went up my Mind
 - iii) Death Sets a Thing Significant

30.1 INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson is a remarkably singular American poet. Her favourite themes include love, death, immortality, friendship and nature. Her poems are noted for her terse style and deft use of symbols and images. She published only seven poems during her life time, that too, anonymously. However, she attained widespread popularity and an ever increasing acceptance among critics. Her unconventional use of the mechanics of language like the frequent use of dashes, ungrammatical phrasing, strange and stunning images, and, aphoristic wit have influenced many of the 20th century poets.

As one of the foremost women writers of the 19th century America too, Dickinson gains significance. But she didn't associate with the simmering feminist ideals

and struggles. She led a life of solitude and kept away from the society as far as possible. Feminist critics read in her poems the feelings and frustrations of a typical ‘caged’ nineteenth century woman writer for whom poetry was an outlet for suppressed emotions. You would see more about her almost reclusive life in the next section where her biographical details are given.

30.2 EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

Emily Dickinson was born on 10th December 1830 at Amherst, Massachusetts. Her father, Edward Dickinson was a respected state legislator, Congressman and judge. We know very little of her early life. Most of her lifetime was spent in Amherst itself except for a few brief visits to Boston, Philadelphia and Washington. She spent a few years at a primary school and later attended Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Even in childhood she used to withdraw from the world outside her home. This tendency became more evident as she grew up and in her youth she became a total recluse who never left her parental house and garden. It is said that she was reluctant to receive visitors, stopped attending church services, and dressed in white clothes alone.

Nevertheless, she managed to keep her friendship with many through her correspondence. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* published in 1958 is the source of her biographical details. The letters also delineate her emotional and aesthetic life, though in a rather veiled manner. We may assume from the letters she wrote to someone whom she addressed as ‘Master’ that she went through several emotional crises in her twenties. In the poems written during this period she gives vent to her frustrated hopes and transitory delights. Her poetic output during 1862 was prolific writing about three hundred and fifty poems. They reveal a desperate soul’s poignant attempts to seek meaning in a steadily shrinking personal world.

The same year she sent some of her poems to the critic, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Despite his positive response, the poems didn’t get published. By the time of her death on 15th May 1886, she wrote about 1775 poems which assured her posthumous reputation as a poet of rare charm. After her death, her sister Lavinia found her manuscript in her room. The first collection of Dickinson’s poems, edited by Higginson and Mabel L. Todd was published in 1890. Six more volumes of her poems were published in between 1914 and 1937 and they were edited by Dickinson’s niece, Martha Dickinson Binachi and Alfred L. Hampson.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Where did Emily Dickinson spend most of her life?

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2) What is peculiar about the poet’s life?

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3) What is the source of Emily Dickinson’s biographical details?

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4) Was Dickinson famous as a poet during her lifetime?

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5) Who edited the first collection of Dickinson’s poems?

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30.3 BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH

30.3.1 Introduction

Have you ever read a poem or short story dealing with death? How is death usually presented in folklore and literature? Isn’t death often pictured as something grave, somber, painful or formidable? Well, here is a poem that looks at death from a different angle.

The poem deals with death and immortality in a manner that is quite singular. It is often referred to as “The Chariot,” a title that evokes its central image of the chariot ride with death, the amiable gentleman caller who comes to take the poet out on a ride. The poem presents the coming of Death as a casual event. It begins rather abruptly, calling attention to the unexpected arrival of death personified as a polite gentleman. There is one more traveller, Immortality. Since the soul is immortal it may be regarded as a journey towards eternity.

Now read the poem and refer to the glossary.

30.3.2 The Text

Because I could not stop for Death–
 He kindly stopped for me–
 The carriage held just ourselves
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove – he knew no haste 5
 And I had put away
 My labour and my leisure too,
 For his civility–

We passed the school, where children strove 10
 At recess in the ring–
 We passed the fields of gazing grain–
 We passed the setting sun–

Or rather– he passed us–
 The dews grew quivering and chill–
 For only gossamer, my gown 15
 My tippet– only tulle–

We paused before a house that seemed
 A swelling of the ground–
 The roof was scarcely visible–
 The cornice– in the ground– 20

Since then– ‘tis centuries– and yet
 Feels shorter than a day
 I first surmised the horses’ heads
 Were toward eternity–

30.3.3 Glossary

Line 6 *put away*: given up

7 labour and leisure encompass all her worldly interests and activities she abandons for Death

8 *civility*: polite behaviour

9 *strove*: (here) played

10 at *recess*: during leisure time

ring: open space

15 *gossamer*: transparent thin fabric

16 *tippet*: scarf

tulle: soft fine cloth made of silk or nylon used especially for making veils

20 *cornice*: a decorative border around the top of the walls in a room or on the outside walls of a building

23 *surmised*: guessed

Self-check Exercise II

Now see if you can answer these questions briefly.

1) Who are the travellers in the carriage?

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2) What is the figure of speech employed in the first stanza?

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3) How is death presented in the poem?

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4) Why did the chariot move slowly?

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5) Why had she given up her labour and leisure?

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6) What do the school, the gazing grain and the setting sun signify?
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7) Where did the chariot stop?
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8) Why does the house seem to be a swelling of the ground?
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9) Why does the poet feel that the centuries seem shorter than the day?
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10) What was the destination of the chariot?
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You must have answered most of the questions. Read the next section carefully and see if you need to modify your answers. The next section is followed by a few more questions which should be answered in detail.

30.3.4 A Critical Appreciation

“Because I could not Stop for Death”, as Allen Tate calls it, is “one of the perfect and greatest poems in the English language.” The poem deals with Death and Immortality, two recurring themes in Emily Dickinson’s poetry. The poem conceives of death in terms of routine life, not as something alien and sublime. The poet has a clear perception which manifests in the precision of images chosen by her.

Death is presented as a gentleman who has kindly stopped to take the poet out on a drive in his carriage. The word “kindly” (line 2) defines the sort of relationship between the poet and death. The loneliness of the journey with Death is dispelled by the presence of Immortality, the companion of Death. It also brings in a religious element since death is the gateway to immortality in religious thought. However, the terror of Death is diminished by presenting it as a kind gentleman suitor taking a lady out for a ride. He has the compassionate mission of taking her out of the woes of the world.

The relationship between the poet and Death is further defined in the second stanza. It is a smooth, unstrained relationship. Death is in no hurry; the poet affirms that he “knew no haste” (line 5). Death shows an easy familiar intimacy that is reassuring for the poet. The poet bids farewell to the world. Though too preoccupied with life like most human beings to wait for death she leaves her labour and leisure, that is, her worldly interests and possessions. The unhurried movement the carriage also hints at the slow-paced hearse heading on to the burial ground.

The third stanza presents the poet’s intensely conscious leave taking of the world. Dickinson renders it through a fine economy of words. The poet presents three images: playing school children, fields of grain and the setting sun. They seem to represent the three stages in human life, childhood, maturity and old age. The labour and leisure of the second stanza are made concrete in the joyous activity of the children at play. And it is contrasted with the passivity of nature (the gazing grain). The indifference of nature to the death of human beings is highlighted by transferring the final stare in the dead traveller’s eyes to the gazing grain. The setting sun brings in the eternal darkness associated with death. The sequence of images can also be explained as the natural route of a funeral procession, passing the school, the outlying cornfields of the village and moving on to the remote cemetery.

When the poet says that the carriage passed the setting sun she has not come to terms with the unknown realms into which she has now entered. But soon she realises her mistake and comprehends that she is out of the bounds human time. Eternity is a world of boundless time and so she corrects herself by saying that the sun passed them. Sun, the assured mark of the passage of time for life on earth is no longer valid for the poet. She speaks of the bitter cold she experienced in the fourth stanza. As the dews descent “quivering and chill” she realises what it feels to come to rest in the cold damp ground. The gown and scarf she wore were so thin and could not protect her from cold. According to some critics gossamer and tippet are the common funeral dress of women. Moreover, Death is traditionally associated with chillness and cold.

The carriage stops at a house that seems “a swelling of the ground.” Evidently it is suggestive of the mound over a grave. Moreover the roof of the house was too low to be easily visible. Besides, its cornice is in the ground. Such details of her

description of the house identify it with the grave. But the tomb's horror is alleviated by the fact that the journey has not ended there. They are merely pausing there as though it is a hospice form where the journey will resume.

The final stanza of the poem seems to project the last sensations before her world fades out. She refers to a single visible object, the horses' heads, recalled in a flash of memory. That was the first object on which her eyes were fixed throughout the journey with death. Moreover the reference to the horses' heads brings to our mind the carriage in the opening stanza. The chariot reaches the limits of mortality when it stops at the house of death. It is not her real destination. The poet says that centuries have passed. It shows the transition from time to eternity. Yet she feels it to be shorter than a day. Human dimension of time is irrelevant in the timeless world of eternity.

The poem is flawless in employing precise and discrete images which enhance the central image of the chariot ride with Death. But the chariot relentlessly moves on to the mysterious world of eternity. By civilizing death and by familiarising herself with it, it is made tolerable. Throughout the poem Death is viewed from diverse perspectives. It is a welcome relief from life's tension and so the poet is ready for a calm ride with it. It heightens one's satisfaction with life and so the poet is ready to discard her labour and leisure. It leads one to a finer world beyond the temporal devoid of the trials and tribulations of everyday existence. Thus the poet portrays death as a solemn guide that leads man to immortality.

30.3.5 Themes/Questions for Discussion

- 1) What is the central theme of the poem?
- 2) How does Dickinson portray death?
- 3) What symbols does the poet employ?
- 4) The role of Immortality in the poem.
- 5) Is there a central image in the poem? How does it unify the thematic and structural elements in the poem?

30.4 A THOUGHT WENT UP MY MIND TODAY

30.4.1 Introduction

Isn't it quite usual for all of us to have recurring thoughts? What have you felt when a thought or recollection comes to your mind unexpectedly after an interval of time? Do such thoughts trouble you? Or do you just ignore them as irrelevant? Well, a poet's response to such things which we think as trivial may lead to significant ideas and insight into life. Even shapeless ideas can lead to something worthwhile.

Read this short poem by Emily Dickinson and try to make sense of it.

30.4.2 The Text

A thought went up my mind today
That I have had before,
But did not finish,—some way back,
I could not fix the year,

Nor where it went, nor why it came
The second time to me,
Nor definitely what it was,
Have I the art to say.

But somewhere in my soul, I know
I've met the thing before;
It just reminded me—'t was all—
And came my way no more.

Self-check Exercise III

Now that you have read the poem try to answer the following questions:

1) Was it the first time that the thought occurred to the poet?

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2) Was the thought a clearly defined one?

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3) Does the poet specify when she had the thought before?

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4) Does the poet say why it is repeated?

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5) Why does the poet keep the nature of the thought a mystery?

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Now read the analysis of the poem in the next section and try to have a deeper understanding of the poem

30.4.4 An Analysis of the Poem

On the surface level the poem is quite simple though what the poet says about is rather vague. She thought of something on a day that she hadn't thought of for a long time. She doesn't know why she stopped thinking about it back then. Also, she cannot say why she thought about it again, after so long. In fact, she couldn't even say for sure what the thought was. All she knows is that the thought gave her a brief moment of realization and then disappeared. Thus at the centre of the poem is a paradox as the poet is describing something which she cannot clearly define.

The poem begins by referring to a very commonplace occurrence. A thought props up in the poet's mind. It is a thought that she had had before. But then the thought was not a finished, clearly defined one. She does not remember how long before she had this thought first. She cannot remember the exact time of its previous occurrence. So the description is rather vague. But the poet is not telling us about something concrete, which registers through the senses. The poet is attempting to convey something – a thought – which is abstract. Therefore, the vague description suits the theme of the poem. Furthermore thoughts spring from the mind which too, cannot be defined in concrete terms.

The poet cannot remember where the thought went to or why such a thought occurred to her. That is, the occasion of the thought or the source which inspired it is also kept in the dark. Why it recurred too, is unknown. The poet says in clear terms that she cannot say definitely what it was, thus emphasizing its shapeless and elusive nature. The poet says that she lacks the skill to describe it in specific clear cut terms. Despite the fact that the poet is unable to say precisely what the thought is, it is not totally unknown to her. Deep within her soul she knows that it is familiar to her. That is why she is able to realise that it has occurred to her in the past. The reappearance of the thought was just a reminder and it never comes to the poet again.

The poet is unable to give a precise expression to the thought. But a thought exists when we can say what it is. An author can express any thought that crosses her mind, at least approximately. The poet insists on keeping us in the dark about the nature and reason behind the thought. Therefore, it is obvious that thought itself does not form the subject matter of the poem. The thought becomes a metaphor for the mysteries of human existence. It may allude to life itself which we cannot define in precise terms in spite of the fact that we have an awareness about it. Again, the inexpressibility of the thought may also refer to the mysterious working of the human mind. The working of the mind is as unpredictable as the appearance and vanishing of the thought and is as

indescribable as the elusive thought that defies explanation in specific terms. It may also refer to the creation of art. A work of art emanates from the creative mind of an artist but how it evolves or why it came into being remains a mystery. Thus Emily Dickinson looks into the many mysteries that hover over our existence which elude exact description even though we are conscious of them.

30.4.5 Themes/Questions for Discussion

- 1) How do you account for the characteristic vagueness of the poem?
- 2) What does the poet say about the thought she had?
- 3) The possible metaphorical dimensions of the mysterious thought.

30.5 DEATH SETS A THING SIGNIFICANT

30.5.1 Introduction

Doesn't an insignificant thing become valuable when it is given to you by someone dear to you? Don't you prize little things that someone beloved gave you? This common experience of humanity forms the background of this poem which discusses how death transforms things that we regard too commonplace to take notice of, things we usually take for granted. Dickinson thinks over the effect of death on commonplace things of little relevance. For all of us little things become significant for their emotional value.

This is true of artifacts too. Artifacts are valued more after the death of the person who made them. That is, Death endows them with an emotional value. Last works are often valued as memorials of the departed. Commonplace and insignificant things are prized especially for the reason that they are souvenirs of our loved ones.

Now read on the poem carefully and try to answer the questions that follow

30.5.2 The Text

Death sets a thing significant
The eye had hurried by,
Except a perished creature
Entreat us tenderly

To ponder little workmanships 5
In crayon or in wool,
With "This was last her fingers did,"
Industrious until

The thimble weighed too heavy,
The stitches stopped themselves, 10
And then't was put among the dust
Upon the closet shelves.

A book I have, a friend gave,
Whose pencil, here and there,
Had notched the place that pleased him, — 15
At rest his fingers are.

Now, when I read, I read not,
For interrupting tears
Obliterate the etchings
Too costly for repairs.

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30.5.3 Glossary

Line 3 *a perished creature*: some dear departed

Line 5 *workmanships*: skilled works of art or craft

Line 8 *Industrious*: hardworking; making too much effort

Line 9 *thimble*: a small metal or plastic object you wear on your finger to protect it when sewing

Line 15 *notched*: made markings

Self-check Exercise IV

1) What does the poet mean by the phrase “Death sets a thing significant”?

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2) How do we usually regard commonplace things?

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3) What change does death bring in our perception of ordinary little things?

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4) Why do we find little things significant after the death of a dear one?

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5) What is special about the book the poet's friend gave her?

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6) Why does the poet say that her fingers are at rest?

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7) Why does the poet find it difficult to read the book?

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30.5.4 A Critical Evaluation of the Poem

The poem opens with a statement of its theme, which is that death makes things more significant. We usually overlook things that are part of our day-to-day life and the little things that belong to or made by our dear ones. The poet goes on to describe finding a friend's writing and sketches- things which "the eye had hurried by" previously that have now become meaningful after the death of the friend.

In the second stanza Dickinson evokes a common feeling experienced after the loss of a dear one: the desire to think over the traces left by the dear departed. Now the trivial "workmanships" in crayon or wool are strangely transformed. They become almost as significant as the person who died. They gain importance and become valuable as the things in which the beloved was last engaged in. They are the things that our loved ones created last and as they are now dead their selves seem to be ingrained in what they have left behind.

The industrious work of the departed must have been put to a sudden halt by death. The last work of the poet's friend had the same fate as her life. Her work continued until her body could no longer function and the sewing stopped. So the thimble weighted too heavy for her fingers and the stitches automatically stopped. Her work was "put among the dust; upon the closet shelves" just as her body was buried in the grave.

Then the poet speaks about a book her friend gave her. There are markings in pencil inside the book. But the fingers that made those marks are at rest now. Her

friend's etchings in the pages of the book are insignificant as such. But they become invaluable as they remind a dear friend who has passed away. As she attempts to read the book now it becomes impossible to continue reading. Tears fill her eyes and blur her sight. Teardrops may fall on the pages and obliterate the markings made by the friend which are invaluable and too costly for repairs. Dickinson narrates how insignificant things become unique and precious after the death of a dear one.

30.5.5 Themes/Questions for Discussion

- 1) How does death transform insignificant things?
- 2) The novelty of Dickinson's perspective on death.
- 3) What aspect of death does the poet highlight in the poem?

30.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about one of the most significant American women poets, Emily Dickinson. You read about her strange life, and the features of her poetry that make her poems uniquely attractive. Finally you studied three of her lyrics in detail. You should now be able to appreciate, analyse and discuss Dickinson's poetry in general and the three poems in depth.

30.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) In her native town of Amherst.
- 2) She withdrew from the outside world and became a recluse. Practically, she never left her parental house.
- 3) *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*
- 4) No. She gained reputation as a poet posthumously.
- 5) Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel L. Todd

Self-Check Exercise II

- 1) Death, Immortality and the Poet are the travellers in the carriage.
- 2) Personification.
- 3) Death is presented as a gentleman who has kindly stopped to take the poet out on a drive in the carriage.
- 4) Death is in no hurry. So they drove slowly. Moreover, a funeral procession usually moves in a slow pace.
- 5) The poet had given up her labour and leisure as a sign of politeness to Death. She had to give up her worldly interests and pleasures to accompany Death.
- 6) They represent the three stages in human life. The school, the gazing grain and the setting sun symbolise childhood, maturity and old age respectively.
- 7) The chariot stopped before a house that seemed a swelling of the ground, that is, the grave.
- 8) The house where they reach is the grave itself. The phrase 'a swelling of the ground' is suggestive of the mound of earth over a grave.

- 9) Death has taken the poet to the world of eternity where the human notion of time is irrelevant. So the poet feels that though centuries have passed it is shorter than a day.
- 10) The destination of the chariot was eternity. Thought it stopped at the grave, the chariot of Death leads the poet into the world of immortality.

Self-Check Exercise III

- 1) No, the thought has occurred to the poet before.
- 2) No, it was rather a vague thought. She cannot say exactly what the thought was.
- 3) The poet does not specify when she had the thought before. She cannot remember how long before it occurred to her. But she knows that it is recurring now.
- 4) The poet does not know why the thought is repeating. She is unaware of the occasion or the source of inspiration for such a repetitive thought.
- 5) The poet is trying to convey something that is abstract. So she keeps the nature of the thought a mystery. The thought is shapeless and elusive as it is a metaphor for the mystery of human existence.

Self-Check Exercise IV

- 1) The poet refers to the strange power of death to make commonplace things significant and valuable.
- 2) We usually overlook things that are part of our everyday life. We ignore commonplace things that belong to or made by our dear ones.
- 3) After the death of our dear ones we regard the ordinary little things that belong to them precious and significant.
- 4) The little things become almost as significant as the person who died. They gain importance and become valuable as things that belonged to the dear departed.
- 5) Inside the book there are markings in pencil made by the friend. They are the last markings the dear friend made and so they are precious.
- 6) The poet says that her fingers are at rest because the friend is dead.
- 7) The poet finds it difficult to read the book because it reminds her of the dead friend. Tears fill her eyes and blur her sight. So it is difficult for her to continue reading.

Supplementary Reading

The American Scholar

Ralph Waldo Emerson

An Oration delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

I greet you on the re-commencement of our literary year. Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough of labor. We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science, like our cotemporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such, it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt, that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?

In this hope, I accept the topic which not only usage, but the nature of our association, seem to prescribe to this day, — the AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Year by year, we come up hither to read one more chapter of his biography. Let us inquire what light new days and events have thrown on his character, and his hopes.

It is one of those fables, which, out of an unknown antiquity, convey an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man, — present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the *divided* or social state, these functions are parcelled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters, — a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the

true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship.

In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.

In this view of him, as Man Thinking, the theory of his office is contained. Him nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory pictures; him the past instructs; him the future invites. Is not, indeed, every man a student, and do not all things exist for the student's behoof? And, finally, is not the true scholar the only true master? But the old oracle said, 'All things have two handles: beware of the wrong one.' In life, too often, the scholar errs with mankind and forfeits his privilege. Let us see him in his school, and consider him in reference to the main influences he receives.

- I. The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find, — so entire, so boundless. Far, too, as her splendors shine, system on system shooting like rays, upward, downward, without centre, without circumference, — in the mass and in the particle, nature hastens to render account of herself to the mind. Classification begins. To the young mind, every thing is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things, and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground, whereby contrary and remote things cohere, and flower out from one stem. It presently learns, that, since the dawn of history, there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another, reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on for ever to animate the last fibre of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Thus to him, to this school-boy under the bending dome of day, is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that Root? Is not that the soul of his soul? — A thought too bold, — a dream too wild. Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures, — when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand, he shall look forward to

an ever expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator. He shall see, that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.

- II. The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar, is, the mind of the Past, — in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed. Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth, — learn the amount of this influence more conveniently, — by considering their value alone.

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts. It came to him, business; it went from him, poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

Or, I might say, it depends on how far the process had gone, of transmuting life into truth. In proportion to the completeness of the distillation, so will the purity and imperishableness of the product be. But none is quite perfect. As no air-pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought, that shall be as efficient, in all respects, to a remote posterity, as to cotemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, — the act of thought, — is transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry, if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul. Hence, the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although, in almost all men, obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence, it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, — let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; — cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery, and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must, — when the sun is hid, and the stars withdraw their shining, — we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig tree, looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful."

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction, that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy, — with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all *time* from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had wellnigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preestablished harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. We all know, that, as the human body can be nourished on any food, though it were boiled grass and the broth of shoes, so the human mind can be fed by any knowledge. And great and heroic men

have existed, who had almost no other information than by the printed page. I only would say, that it needs a strong head to bear that diet. One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, "He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry out the wealth of the Indies." There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. We then see, what is always true, that, as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the least part of his volume. The discerning will read, in his Plato or Shakspeare, only that least part, — only the authentic utterances of the oracle; — all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakspeare's.

Of course, there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History and exact science he must learn by laborious reading. Colleges, in like manner, have their indispensable office, — to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and, by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pretension avail nothing. Gowns, and pecuniary foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit. Forget this, and our American colleges will recede in their public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.

- III. There goes in the world a notion, that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian, — as unfit for any handiwork or public labor, as a penknife for an axe. The so-called 'practical men' sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or *see*, they could do nothing. I have heard it said that the clergy, — who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day, — are addressed as women; that the rough, spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech. They are often virtually disfranchised; and, indeed, there are advocates for their celibacy. As far as this is true of the studious classes, it is not just and wise. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth. Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty. Inaction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not.

The world, — this shadow of the soul, or *other me*, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct, that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and

rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power.

It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products. A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours.

The actions and events of our childhood and youth, are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions, — with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it, than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life, — remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption. Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. Observe, too, the impossibility of antedating this act. In its grub state, it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. Cradle and infancy, school and playground, the fear of boys, and dogs, and ferules, the love of little maids and berries, and many another fact that once filled the whole sky, are gone already; friend and relative, profession and party, town and country, nation and world, must also soar and sing.

Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom. I will not shut myself out of this globe of action, and transplant an oak into a flower-pot, there to hunger and pine; nor trust the revenue of some single faculty, and exhaust one vein of thought, much like those Savoyards, who, getting their livelihood by carving shepherds, shepherdesses, and smoking Dutchmen, for all Europe, went out one day to the mountain to find stock, and discovered that they had whittled up the last of their pine-trees. Authors we have, in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers, to replenish their merchantable stock.

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town, — in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

But the final value of action, like that of books, and better than books, is, that it is a resource. That great principle of Undulation in nature, that shows itself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath; in desire and satiety; in the

ebb and flow of the sea; in day and night; in heat and cold; and as yet more deeply ingrained in every atom and every fluid, is known to us under the name of Polarity, — these “fits of easy transmission and reflection,” as Newton called them, are the law of nature because they are the law of spirit.

The mind now thinks; now acts; and each fit reproduces the other. When the artist has exhausted his materials, when the fancy no longer paints, when thoughts are no longer apprehended, and books are a weariness, — he has always the resource *to live*. Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs. Let the beauty of affection cheer his lowly roof. Those ‘far from fame,’ who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day better than it can be measured by any public and designed display. Time shall teach him, that the scholar loses no hour which the man lives. Herein he unfolds the sacred germ of his instinct, screened from influence. What is lost in seemliness is gained in strength. Not out of those, on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture, comes the helpful giant to destroy the old or to build the new, but out of unhand-sold savage nature, out of terrible Druids and Berserkirs, come at last Alfred and Shakspeare.

I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands. And labor is everywhere welcome; always we are invited to work; only be this limitation observed, that a man shall not for the sake of wider activity sacrifice any opinion to the popular judgments and modes of action.

I have now spoken of the education of the scholar by nature, by books, and by action. It remains to say somewhat of his duties.

They are such as become Man Thinking. They may all be comprised in self-trust. The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation. Flamsteed and Herschel, in their glazed observatories, may catalogue the stars with the praise of all men, and, the results being splendid and useful, honor is sure. But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human mind, which as yet no man has thought of as such, — watching days and months, sometimes, for a few facts; correcting still his old records; — must relinquish display and immediate fame. In the long period of his preparation, he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. Long he must stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept, — how often! poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society. For all this loss and scorn, what offset? He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one, who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world’s eye. He is the world’s heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that

retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history. Whatsoever oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions, — these he shall receive and impart. And whatsoever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day, — this he shall hear and promulgate.

These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great decorum, some fetish of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy. Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom. In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach; and bide his own time, — happy enough, if he can satisfy himself alone, that this day he has seen something truly. Success treads on every right step. For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that, which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, — his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, — until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers; — that they drink his words because he fulfils for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself.

In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be, — free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, “without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.” Brave; for fear is a thing, which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance. It is a shame to him if his tranquillity, amid dangerous times, arise from the presumption, that, like children and women, his is a protected class; or if he seek a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes, peeping into microscopes, and turning rhymes, as a boy whistles to keep his courage up. So is the danger a danger still; so is the fear worse. Manlike let him turn and face it. Let him look into its eye and search its nature, inspect its origin, — see the whelping of this lion, — which lies no great way back; he will then find in himself a perfect comprehension of its nature and extent; he will have made his hands meet on the other side, and can henceforth defy it, and pass on superior. The world is his, who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold, is there only by sufferance, — by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow.

Yes, we are the cowed, — we the trustless. It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world

was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin, it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has any thing in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind. They are the kings of the world who give the color of their present thought to all nature and all art, and persuade men by the cheerful serenity of their carrying the matter, that this thing which they do, is the apple which the ages have desired to pluck, now at last ripe, and inviting nations to the harvest. The great man makes the great thing. Wherever Macdonald sits, there is the head of the table. Linnaeus makes botany the most alluring of studies, and wins it from the farmer and the herb-woman; Davy, chemistry; and Cuvier, fossils. The day is always his, who works in it with serenity and great aims. The unstable estimates of men crowd to him whose mind is filled with a truth, as the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon.

For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathomed, — darker than can be enlightened. I might not carry with me the feeling of my audience in stating my own belief. But I have already shown the ground of my hope, in adverting to the doctrine that man is one. I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has almost lost the light, that can lead him back to his prerogatives. Men are become of no account. Men in history, men in the world of to-day are bugs, are spawn, and are called ‘the mass’ and ‘the herd.’ In a century, in a millennium, one or two men; that is to say, — one or two approximations to the right state of every man. All the rest behold in the hero or the poet their own green and crude being, — ripened; yes, and are content to be less, so *that* may attain to its full stature. What a testimony, — full of grandeur, full of pity, is borne to the demands of his own nature, by the poor clansman, the poor partisan, who rejoices in the glory of his chief. The poor and the low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which it is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified. They sun themselves in the great man’s light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make that great heart beat, those giant sinews combat and conquer. He lives for us, and we live in him.

Men such as they are, very naturally seek money or power; and power because it is as good as money, — the “spoils,” so called, “of office.” And why not? for they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them, and they shall quit the false good, and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strown along the ground. The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, — more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men. Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself. The books which once we valued more than the apple of the eye, we have quite exhausted. What is that but saying, that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on. First, one; then, another; we drain all cisterns, and, waxing greater by all these supplies, we crave a better and more abundant food. The man has never

lived that can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person, who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire, which, flaming now out of the lips of Etna, lightens the capes of Sicily; and, now out of the throat of Vesuvius, illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.

But I have dwelt perhaps tediously upon this abstraction of the Scholar. I ought not to delay longer to add what I have to say, of nearer reference to the time and to this country.

Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated of the oneness or the identity of the mind through all individuals, I do not much dwell on these differences. In fact, I believe each individual passes through all three. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective. I deny not, however, that a revolution in the leading idea may be distinctly enough traced.

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical; we are embarrassed with second thoughts; we cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness, — "Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Is it so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? I look upon the discontent of the literary class, as a mere announcement of the fact, that they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers, and regret the coming state as untried; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim. If there is any period one would desire to be born in, — is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old, can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.

I read with joy some of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state.

One of these signs is the fact, that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state, assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful; the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That, which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign, — is it not? of new vigor, when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provençal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The

meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body; — show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law; and the shop, the plough, and the leger, referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing; — and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order; there is no trifle; there is no puzzle; but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

This idea has inspired the genius of Goldsmith, Burns, Cowper, and, in a newer time, of Goethe, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. This idea they have differently followed and with various success. In contrast with their writing, the style of Pope, of Johnson, of Gibbon, looks cold and pedantic. This writing is blood-warm. Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. This perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful in discoveries. Goethe, in this very thing the most modern of the moderns, has shown us, as none ever did, the genius of the ancients.

There is one man of genius, who has done much for this philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly estimated; — I mean Emanuel Swedenborg. The most imaginative of men, yet writing with the precision of a mathematician, he endeavored to engraft a purely philosophical Ethics on the popular Christianity of his time. Such an attempt, of course, must have difficulty, which no genius could surmount. But he saw and showed the connection between nature and the affections of the soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual character of the visible, audible, tangible world. Especially did his shade-loving muse hover over and interpret the lower parts of nature; he showed the mysterious bond that allies moral evil to the foul material forms, and has given in epical parables a theory of isanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is, the new importance given to the single person. Every thing that tends to insulate the individual, — to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state; — tends to true union as well as greatness. “I learned,” said the melancholy Pestalozzi, “that no man in God’s wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man.” Help must come from the bosom alone. The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find

the earth below not in unison with these, — but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, — some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience, — patience; — with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace, the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work, the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be an unit; — not to be reckoned one character; — not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends, — please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defence and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

A Child Said, What Is The Grass?

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we
may see and remark, and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child. . . .the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the
same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;
It may be you are from old people and from women, and
from offspring taken soon out of their mother's laps,
And here you are the mother's laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of
their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
What do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere;
The smallest sprouts show there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward. . . .and nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

Walt Whitman

Prayer of Columbus

IT was near the close of his indomitable and pious life—on his last voyage when nearly 70 years of age—that Columbus, to save his two remaining ships from foundering in the Caribbean Sea in a terrible storm, had to run them ashore on the Island of Jamaica—where, laid up for a long and miserable year—1503—he was taken very sick, had several relapses, his men revolted, and death seem'd daily imminent; though he was eventually rescued, and sent home to Spain to die, unrecognized, neglected and in want.....It is only ask'd, as preparation and atmosphere for the following lines, that the bare authentic facts be recall'd and realized, and nothing contributed by the fancy. See, the Antillean Island, with its florid skies and rich foliage and scenery, the waves beating the solitary sands, and the hulls of the ships in the distance. See, the figure of the great Admiral, walking the beach, as a stage, in this sublimest tragedy—for what tragedy, what poem, so piteous and majestic as the real scene?—and hear him uttering—as his mystical and religious soul surely utter'd, the ideas following—perhaps, in their equivalents, the very words.

A BATTER'D, wreck'd old man,
Thrown on this savage shore, far, far from home,
Pent by the sea, and dark rebellious brows, twelve dreary months,
Sore, stiff with many toils, sicken'd, and nigh to death,
I take my way along the island's edge,
Venting a heavy heart.

I am too full of woe!
Haply, I may not live another day;
I can not rest, O God—I can not eat or drink or sleep,
Till I put forth myself, my prayer, once more to Thee,
Breathe, bathe myself once more in Thee—commune with Thee,
Report myself once more to Thee.

Thou knowest my years entire, my life,
(My long and crowded life of active work—not adoration merely;)

Thou knowest the prayers and vigils of my youth;
 Thou knowest my manhood's solemn and visionary meditations;
 Thou knowest how, before I commenced, I devoted all to come to Thee;
 Thou knowest I have in age ratified all those vows, and strictly kept them;
 Thou knowest I have not once lost nor faith nor ecstasy in Thee;
 (In shackles, prison'd, in disgrace, repining not,
 Accepting all from Thee—as duly come from Thee.)

All my emprises have been fill'd with Thee,
 My speculations, plans, begun and carried on in thoughts of Thee,
 Sailing the deep, or journeying the land for Thee;
 Intentions, purports, aspirations mine—leaving results to Thee.

O I am sure they really come from Thee!
 The urge, the ardor, the unconquerable will,
 The potent, felt, interior command, stronger than words,
 A message from the Heavens, whispering to me even in sleep,
 These sped me on.

By me, and these, the work so far accomplish'd (for what has been,
 has been;)
 By me Earth's elder, cloy'd and stifled lands, uncloy'd, unloos'd;
 By me the hemispheres rounded and tied—the unknown to the known.

The end I know not—it is all in Thee;
 Or small, or great, I know not—haply, what broad fields, what lands;
 Haply, the brutish, measureless human undergrowth I know,
 Transplanted there, may rise to stature, knowledge worthy Thee;
 Haply the swords I know may there indeed be turn'd to reaping-tools;
 Haply the lifeless cross I know—Europe's dead cross—may bud and
 blossom there.

One effort more—my altar this bleak sand:
 That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,
 With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,
 (Light rare, untellable—lighting the very light!
 Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages!)
 For that, O God—be it my latest word—here on my knees,
 Old, poor, and paralyzed—I thank Thee.

My terminus near,
 The clouds already closing in upon me,
 The voyage balk'd—the course disputed, lost,
 I yield my ships to Thee.

Steersman unseen! henceforth the helms are Thine;
 Take Thou command—(what to my petty skill Thy navigation?)
 My hands, my limbs grow nerveless;
 My brain feels rack'd, bewilder'd; Let the old timbers part—I will not part!
 I will cling fast to Thee, O God, though the waves buffet me;
 Thee, Thee, at least, I know.

Is it the prophet's thought I speak, or am I raving?
 What do I know of life? what of myself?

The American Poets-I

I know not even my own work, past or present;
Dim, ever-shifting guesses of it spread before me,
Of newer, better worlds, their mighty parturition,
Mocking, perplexing me.

And these things I see suddenly—what mean they?
As if some miracle, some hand divine unseal'd my eyes,
Shadowy, vast shapes, smile through the air and sky,
And on the distant waves sail countless ships,
And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me.

Walt Whitman

Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

VII

The American Poets-II

(The Twentieth Century)

Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes,
Allen Ginsberg



School of Humanities

Indira Gandhi National Open University

Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

Block

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 7

AMERICAN POETRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Whitman's long lines derived from the metrics of King James Bible and his democratic inclusiveness combined with Dickinson's short lines and stanzas derived from Protestant hymn books and her laconicity and irony stamped the poetry of twentieth century America. The typical American idiom, 'VURRY Amur'k' 'n' as Pound called it, can be seen in varying ways in the poetries of Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935), Stephen Crane (1871–1900), Robert Frost (1874–1967) and Carl Sandburg (1878–1967).

Although Frost identified himself with New England, he was actually born in California and lived there in his early childhood. His father died when Frost was eleven and then the family moved to New England where his mother supported the family by teaching school. His very difficult circumstances made Frost very depressed when in 1912 he decided to make a new start by moving to England. There his first book *A Boy's Will* (1913) was published. It drew the attention of Ezra Pound and he introduced Frost to American editors and helped his second book *North of Boston* (1914) getting published. With this Frost's reputation as a poet was established not only in England but also in America.

Frost is often seen as an ideological descendant of the nineteenth century American Transcendentalists. But he is far less affirmative of the universe than them who discerned in nature a benign Creator. Frost saw, 'no expression, nothing to express'. Frost was no modernist like Pound. His contribution lies on the one hand in re-affirming the centrality of the pastoral myth of New England in the teeth of modernism and on the other his vision of the work of art as a momentary stay against confusion as we find for instance in Wallace Stevens's, 'The Idea of Order at Key West'.

Another New England poet, from Maine, was Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935). He was drawn to the bleak tragic vision of Thomas Hardy and the eighteenth-century English poet George Crabbe. These influences are distilled in his austere and gloomy verse of his second book. *The Children of the Night* (1897). *The Torrent* and *the Night Before* had been published the previous year. Robinson moved to New York around the turn of the century. Robinson's works appeared at a steady pace: *The Town Down the River* (1910), *The Man Against the Sky* (1916), *Avon's Harvest* and *Collected Poems* (both 1922). He got a Pulitzer Prize for his narrative poem *Tristram* (1927) but it represented, to a large extent, a belated recognition of his earlier poetry.

Regional tendencies in American Literature had been strong since the Civil War. The voice of the Mid-West can be heard in the *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) edited by Edgar Lee Masters (1868 - 1950), in which a picture of life in a fictional town in Illinois emerges from the monologues of the dead in a cemetery. The *Anthology* was an immediate success but Masters' subsequent publications never achieved the popularity of the *Spoon River Anthology* though it contributed significantly to the so-called **Chicago Renaissance**.

Chicago flowered artistically in the poetries of Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay (1879 - 1931). Sandburg's 'Chicago' (1914) and Lindsay's 'The Congo: A Study of the Negro Race' (1914) were instant success. While Sandburg hymned the geography of the United States Lindsay pointed out at the

contributions of African Americans to American life. Moreover 'The Congo' was noticed for its craft that was not unlike some of the art practices in contemporary Europe. A number of others such as Archibald McLeish (1892 - 1982), Kenneth Fearing (1902 - 61), Kenneth Rexroth (1905-82) and Kenneth Patchen (1911- 72) all of whom were born in the Mid-West and had some connection with Chicago published in the 1930's and the 1940's socially inspired poetry *a la* Whitman, Sandburg and , Lindsay. Later Rexroth and Patchen moved to California, developed an interest in Jazz poetry and influenced the Beats. Besides, Rexroth got involved in oriental, especially Japanese poetry, and Patchen in ecologism.

Chicago's major contributions were the literary magazines *Poetry* (1912 -) and *The Little Review* (1914 - 29) edited respectively by Harriet Monroe (1860-1936) and Margaret Anderson (1886 - 1973), Ezra Pound acting as foreign editor in London for the *Review* disseminated the works of modernist artists in Europe. Monroe introduced '**Imagism**' to the American readership.

A number of poets and critics in the 1920's gathered around the journal *The Fugitive* (1922 - 25) at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, who propagated southern regionalism. They were averse to, urbanization, industrialization and commercialization and like Frost advocated a return to agrarian America. The founder and leader of the group was John Crowe Ransom (1888 - 1974) and his two followers and collaborators were Allen Tate (1899 - 1979) and Robert Penn Warren (1905 - 89).

The extent of the '**Fugitives**', identification with their southern past can be gauged from Tate's 'Ode to the Confederate Dead' (1923 , 1937) and Warren's 'Founding Father, Nineteenth Century Style, Southeast USA' (1957). Tate largely also subscribed to T.S. Eliot's' conservative religious views.

Robinson Jeffers (1887 - 1962) was another regionalist but this time from **California**. He subscribed to the creed, as he called it, 'inhumanism' which for Robinson meant that man and his attainments were ineffectual and aimless when compared with the universe. He was successful both in his shorter lyrical pieces and longer narrative poems. *Room Stallion and Other Poems* (1925) brought him to the attention of the American reading public. In the title poem 'Roan Stallion' he wrote, 'humanity is the mold to break away from, the crust to break through, the coal to break into fire, the atom to be split'. Jeffers' writings, owing to their 'inhumanism', took a long time to be appreciated.

Robinson, Frost, the Chicago poets and, the Fugitives were all basically traditionalist. The poets who were called '**Modernists**' or '**High Modernists**' were the 'expatriates' Ezra Pound (1885 - 1972) and T.S. Eliot (1888 - 1965) on the one hand and William Carlos Williams (1883 - 1963) and Wallace Stevens (1879 - 1955) on the other who lived and worked in America. Their poetry was marked by various kinds of experimentations in theme, technique and setting of their poems. E.E. Cummings (1894 - 1962), Hart Crane (1899 - 1932) and Marianne Moore (1887 - 1972) also made important contributions to modernism but had less impact on succeeding generations.

Hilda Doolittle "H.D." (1886 - 1961), Elinor Wylie (1885 - 1928), Mina Loy (1882 - 1966) and Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892 - 1950) largely forgotten have been resurrected, thanks to the success of feminist studies.

A group of poets known as **the Objectivists** carried the torch of modernism into the 1930's. These included Louis Zukofsky (1904 - 1978), Charles Reznikoff

(1894 - 1976), George Oppen (1908 - 1984) and Carl Rakosi (1903 -2004) and later Lorine Niedecker (1903 - 1970). These poets came from urban communities of new immigrants. They brought new experience and enriched the American idiom with their language.

The American idiom got a distinctive hue at the hands of African Americans. Owing to World War I and its aftermath there was mass exodus of African Americans from the South to various cities in the North. Harlem in New York near the north of Central Park was a middle-class suburb which was taken over by the Blacks. Finally a Jamaican printer, journalist, orator and, politician called Marcus Garvey (1887 - 1940) who advocated pan-Africanism appeared on the scene. Garvey was a well travelled man by 1916 when he came to the US. He established a branch of the **Universal Negro Improvement Association** which he had founded in 1914 in Jamaica. Garvey exhorted African Americans to be proud of their ancestry and return to Africa, in particular to Liberia. Garvey was later accused of mail fraud and sentenced imprisonment for five years in 1923. In 1927 he was deported to Jamaica. He spent the later part of his life in London where he died in 1940.

White artists such as Picasso, Braque and Brancusi and American writers such as Eugene O' Neill and Sherwood Anderson also showed interest in the lives of Black people. However, White interest in black America peaked after the publication of *Nigger Heaven* (1926) a novel by Carl Van Vechten (1880 -1966) which shows appreciation for the vibrancy and spontaneity of the lives of the Blacks compared with those of the Whites. Van Vechten helped a number of **'Harlem Renaissance'** writers in getting published.

Alain Locke (1886 - 1954) played a major role in fostering the talents of the black people. *The New Negro* (1925) showcased a number of young black writers. All black writers did not live in Harlem so many a time the appellation 'New Negro' is preferred.

Claude McKay (1889 - 1948), another Jamaican, had made his debut on the literary stage with his *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* (both 1912) even before the advent of the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro. 'If we Must Die', a defiant poem, published in *The Liberator* run by Max Eastman (1883 - 1969) brought McKay into national prominence in 1919. He wrote,

If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O Kinsmen, we must meet the common foe!

McKay travelled to the Soviet Union in 1923. In the previous year he had published *Harlem Shadows* (1922) a collection of poems that ushered in the Harlem Renaissance. McKay was prevented from returning to the US until 1934 owing to his communist sympathies. McKay later got disenchanted with communism owing to Stalin's mass persecution of the 1930's, turned Catholic and moved to Chicago where he passed away in 1948. Now the soil was fertile for the appearance of works of poets such as Countee Cullen (1903 - 46), Langston Hughes (1902 - 67), Margaret Walker (1915 - 98), and Sterling Brown (1901-89).

World War II (1939 - 45) saw the emergence of poets who had the experience of active service: Karl Shapiro (1913 - 2000), Randall Jarrell (1914 -1965) and James Dickey (1923 - 97). Unlike their predecessors they wrote like Elizabeth Bishop (1911 – ‘79), Theodore Roethke (1908 – ‘63) and Delmore Schwartz (1913 - 1966) their contemporaries in traditional verse forms.

John Berryman (1914 – ‘72) and Robert Lowell (1917 – ‘77) gained eminence in the post-war years. They chose to explore their own experiences, subject matter and style in their poetry and came to be known as **Confessional** Poets. They had a strong influence on Sylvia Plath (1932- ‘63) and Anne Sexton (1928 –‘74).

As opposed to the Confessional poets, Jack Kerouac (1922 –‘69), Allen Ginsberg (1922 –‘97), Gary Snyder (b. 1930), Amiri Baraka (b. 1934) and, Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919) are distinctly raw. These **Beat Poets** pushed American idiom in the direction of demotic speech further than any others before them.

Along with the Beat Poets **Black Mountain Poets** (at Black Mountain College) were also exploring the open form in a much better manner than the Beat poets. Their leader was Charles Olson (1910 –‘70) and the prominent poets were Robert Creeley (1926 - 2005), Robert Duncan (1919-‘97) and, Denis Levertov (1923 – ‘97).

Under the influence of Kenneth Rexroth and Gleason San Francisco became the hub of experimental activity since the 1930’s. The Beats and some of the Black Mountain Poets contributed to the growth of the **San Francisco Renaissance** which produced poets such as Charles Bukowski (1920 - 94) and Jack Spicer (1925 –‘65).

On the East Coast, the **New York School** produced poetry of urbane wit and elegance in contrast with the work of their Beat contemporaries. The leading lights of the group are John Ashberry (b. 1927), Frank O’ Hara (1926 –‘66), Kenneth Koch (1925 - 2002), Ted Berrigan (1934 –‘83) and James Schuyler (1923 –‘91). Of these John Asberry has been acclaimed as the most prominent poet in the latter half of the twentieth century.

This note gives you an outline of the developments in poetry in the twentieth century in America. With this background you may read the poems in this block in perspective.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 31 ROBERT FROST

Structure

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Robert Frost
- 31.3 After Apple-Picking
 - 31.3.1 Introduction
 - 31.3.2 Text
 - 31.3.3 Glossary
 - 31.3.4 A Critical Appreciation
 - 31.3.5 Themes/ Questions for Discussion
- 31.4 A Boundless Moment
 - 31.4.1 Introduction
 - 31.4.2 Text
 - 31.4.3 An Evaluation of the Poem
 - 31.4.4 Themes/ Questions for Discussion
- 31.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.6 Answers to Self-check Exercises

31.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to enable you to:

- write about Robert Frost’s life and work
- discuss Frost’s poetry with special reference to:
 - i) “After Apple-Picking” and
 - ii) “A Boundless Moment”

31.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you learned any poem by Robert Frost during your school days? Perhaps you have studied “The Road Not Taken” or “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” It would be useful and delightful to read one of these poems before you start learning this unit whether you are familiar with these poems or not.

Robert Frost, one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, has a rare finesse to raise the commonplace to the level of the sublime. His poems have a unique charm. Many of his poems begin by referring to routine experiences of the village life but they always lead us to some profound philosophical truth that helps us to understand life beyond the surface. As the poet himself commented his poems begin in delight and end in wisdom. Frost’s style is often deceptively simple veiling the complexity of his thought. Realistic description frequently leads to a meditative attempt to explore the deeper meanings and complexities of human existence. Read the next section to know more about the poet and his poetry.

31.2 ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)

Robert Frost was born on 26th March 1874 in San Francisco, California. His father William Prescott Frost, Jr. was a journalist and his mother, Isabelle Moodie, a Scottish schoolteacher. The Frosts were originally based in from New England. Frost is often regarded as the greatest exponent of New England life and culture. When Frost was about ten years old his father died, and so the family had to move to Lawrence, Massachusetts and lived there with the support of the poet's paternal grandfather. Frost began to write poems early and had his first poem published in the student magazine of Lawrence High School. He joined Dartmouth College but left after a few months. Then he tried a hand at various jobs, including delivering newspapers, working in a factory, and editing the local newspaper. In 1895 Frost married Elinor Miriam White, a former schoolmate. In 1897 he entered Harvard but left studies before obtaining a degree. For the next few years he lived in a small farm in New Hampshire. During this period he wrote many of his famous poems. At the same time he led a farmer's life.

Frost worked as an English teacher at Pinkerton Academy and the New Hampshire Normal School from 1906-1912. In 1912, Frost sold the farm and moved to England with his family. In England Frost became acquainted to poets such as Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, and Ezra Pound. He published his first collection of poems, *A Boy's Will*, in 1913. But it was *North of Boston*, published in 1914, that assured his status as a great poet. *North of Boston* included many of his famous and widely anthologised poems such as "Mending Wall," "The Death of the Hired Man," and "After Apple-Picking."

The outbreak of World War I compelled Frost to return to America with his family. As a reputed poet he embarked on a career of writing, teaching, and lecturing. He was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1916, the year in which his third collection of poems *Mountain Interval* was published. It included poems like "The Road Not Taken" and "Birches." The same year Frost also began to teach English at Amherst College. In 1921 Frost was given a teaching fellowship at the University of Michigan. Frost's later publications include *New Hampshire* (1923), *From Snow to Snow* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942) and *Steeple Bush* (1947). His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1951.

Robert Frost is perhaps the most honoured and beloved American poet. He received the Pulitzer Prize four times (1924, 1931, 1937, and 1943) and honorary degrees from a number of universities including the Oxford and Cambridge. He was an honoured guest at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and was invited to travel to the Soviet Union as a member of a goodwill group in 1962. Frost died on 20th January 1963.

Frost envisioned poetry as a mode of survival in a world of chaos, "a momentary stay against confusion." For him the humdrum everyday aspects of life in New England are a staple to come to terms with the philosophical issues that troubled him. It is quite natural that the peasant life is a composite imagery for the poet to discuss the hard realities and baffling complexities of life. The colloquial idiom of Frost's poems deftly creates a rapport with the reader. It has been said that he "turned the living speech of men and women into poetry." Many of his poems take the form of monologues or dialogues that lay bare the inner feelings and thoughts of the narrative voice.

In “Education by Poetry” Frost remarks that “Poetry begins in trivial metaphors, pretty metaphors, and goes on to the profoundest thinking that we have. Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another.” Nature and human activities associated with nature often become metaphors that evoke deeper realities of life in Frost’s poems. Imagery becomes a vehicle to convey philosophical insights into life. In the process fact and fancy mingle in his poems into a delightful harmony revealing the ultimate truths about human life.

Self-check Exercise I

1) What is Frost’s own comment on his poems?

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2) Whom did Frost meet while he stayed in England?

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3) Which are the early collections of Frost’s poems?

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4) Why did Frost return to America?

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I got from looking through a pane of glass 10
 I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
 And held against the world of hoary grass.
 It melted, and I let it fall and break.
 But I was well
 Upon my way to sleep before it fell, 15
 And I could tell
 What form my dreaming was about to take.
 Magnified apples appear and disappear,
 Stem end and blossom end,
 And every fleck of russet showing clear. 20
 My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
 It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
 I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
 And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
 The rumbling sound 25
 Of load on load of apples coming in.
 For I have had too much
 Of apple-picking: I am overtired
 Of the great harvest I myself desired.
 There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch, 30
 Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
 For all
 That struck the earth,
 No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
 Went sure to the cider-apple heap 35
 As of no worth.
 One can see what will trouble
 This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
 Were he not gone,
 The woodchuck could say whether it's like his 40
 Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
 Or just some human sleep.

31.3.3 Glossary

- Line 11 *skimmed*: picked up
- Line 12 *hoary grass*: white grass covered with snow
- Line 18 *Magnified apples*: In the dream apples appear larger, an indication that reality gets transformed in dreams.
- Line 20 *fleck of russet*: tiny patches of deep reddish brown
- Line 21 *instep arch*: The arched middle part of the human foot between the toes and the ankle.
- Line 22 *ladder-round*: the rung of the ladder; presumably the rungs of the ladder are rounded in shape
- Line 24 *cellar*: basement or vault; a room below ground level in a house, often used for storing wine

Line 35 *cider-apple*: apples for making cider, i. e., a fermented alcoholic beverage made from apple juice

Line 40 *woodchuck*: A common rodent of North America, having a short-legged, heavy-set body and grizzled brownish fur. It is also called groundhog. It burrows in the ground and hibernates

Line 41 *Long sleep*: In case of the woodchuck it refers to its hibernation in winter. With human beings it implies death, the long sleep that puts an end to life.

Self-check Exercise 1

Now see if you can answer the following questions briefly.

1) Has the speaker finished apple-picking?

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2) Is there any hint in the initial lines that suggest that the apple-picking is not finished?

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3) Is this a poem about apple-picking? If yes, why is it entitled 'After Apple-Picking'?

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4) What experience of the morning does the speaker refer to?

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5) Describe the speaker's dream?

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6) Why does the speaker feel that he is overtired of the great harvest?

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7) Explain the line: "This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is."

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8) What does the woodchuck's long sleep imply?

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9) What is the difference between the woodchuck's long sleep and "some human sleep"?

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Could you answer the questions? The next section provides a critical evaluation of the poem. It would help you to have a better understanding of the poem. After reading it you may go back to the Self-Check Exercise again and modify your answers if necessary.

31.3.4 A Critical Appreciation

Frost sets the poem on a late autumn season. The harvest is almost over and the signs of winter are very much evident. At the end of a long day's apple picking, the speaker is overcome by fatigue. He is feeling sleepy and seems to have been out of touch with reality since early morning. The trance like state induced by fatigue and sleep is foreshadowed in the morning when he looked at the apple trees through a filmy sheet of ice that he lifted from the drinking trough. From the reality of the farm he gradually slips into the world of dream. But even in his sleep, in the dream, apples are an integral part. In his vision he sees apples grow from blossoms, fall off trees, and pile up in the cellar. As sleep overcomes him, he wonders if it is the normal sleep of a tired man or the deep winter sleep of death.

The opening lines seem to suggest that the speaker is still picking apples, but the title emphasizes that the poet focuses on what happens after apple-picking. However his job is not yet finished. At the foot of the tree a barrel remains half filled and there are apples still on the boughs. Thus he stops harvesting apples half way. The speaker says that his ladder still points 'toward heaven.' The ladder pointing toward heaven gives the poem religious overtones. It alludes to Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28:10-19. Jacob dreams of a ladder up to heaven that angels climb. God stands at the top of the ladder and tells Jacob that he and his descendants will be blessed.

The speaker feels that the essence of winter sleep fills the night air. It is gradually approaching him, and is like the fragrance of apples and is sleep inducing. He feels too drowsy that it is impossible for him now to remain awake. As he slips into the unreal world of sleep and dream he remembers a strange sight of the morning. At the drinking trough the top layer of water was frozen. He picked up a thin sheet of ice and looked through it. He saw the frost-covered, hoary grass, distorted by the vision through the filmy ice which was like a pane of glass. But as the ice began to melt, he let it fall and break thus freeing himself from the unreal vision of the world. But now as he is drowsy he can once again enter the world of dream reigned by unreality. The morning vision through the pane of glassy ice was strange. The speaker has not been able to get rid of this sense of strangeness all day. He tried to rub it from his sight, like rubbing sleep out of your eyes in the morning, but in vain.

The poet introduces what seems to be a delicate time shift. The speaker says that he was upon his "way to sleep" before the sheet of ice fell down and broke. In his drowsy state the speaker associates the image from the morning into his dream. Memory and dream coalesce to confuse our sense of time. After a long day's toil the speaker seems to be asleep on his bed. And before he sinks into sleep he guesses what he is about to dream. In his dream he partially relives his daytime activity. In the dream apples appear larger, an indication that reality gets transformed in dreams. As the apples in his mind's vision are magnified he can see every speck of reddish brown on them. His dream about apple-picking is realistic as well. In the dream his feet feel the pain of sanding on the ladder for a long time. He can even feel the pressure on his feet as the ladder sways round as

the branches of the apple tree bend under his weight. That is, in the dream he feels he is still upon the ladder picking apples. Frost conveys the dream of the speaker with an immediacy of appeal. The sights and sounds the speaker experiences are also felt by the reader. He hears the other apple pickers unloading barrels of apples in the cellar.

The speaker is tired of picking apples for so long. Now he is sick of the great harvest he wished for. He elaborates why he is tired of harvesting apples. The initial excitement of harvest gives way to the monotony of picking and putting apples into the barrel again and again. Moreover it has to be done very carefully. The apples that fall on the ground would be considered worthless even if they are without bruises or stubble. Such apples would become part of the cider-heap. Frost brings in again the image of falling, suggesting the Fall of Man. The apples would be fine if they remain on the branches, or put into the barrels carefully. Or they may remain in the unreal world of dreams. But they seem to be “of no worth” if they touch the earth.

The poet returns to sleep again. To be more specific the speaker is puzzled about nature of his sleep. He says that he can realise what is going to trouble his sleep. It implies that the images in the dream are haunting him, making him restless even in sleep. The speaker seems to be uncertain about the sort of sleep he is going to have. He wonders if his sleep is the normal everyday sleep of human beings or the long sleep of a hibernating woodchuck. The woodchuck is an expert in hibernation, so it could say whether the speaker is about to go into hibernation. Unfortunately, the woodchuck has already gone to sleep for the winter, so the speaker’s question will remain unanswered.

Frost employs visual, tactile and auditory images to convey the feeling of the harvest and its reflection in the dream. Accordingly, he focuses on the sights, sensation, and sounds. He sees magnified apples in the dream and every spot of reddish hue is clearly visible. The pain and pressure that his feet experienced after standing on the ladder for a long time continue to be felt in the dream. In the dream he can hear the rumbling of apples being unloaded in the cellar. Frost evokes the scent of apples in the air.

Metrically the poem appears rather strange. But there is a curious association between meter and theme. Of the forty-two lines about twenty-five are in iambic pentameter. The intermingling of uneven lines corresponds to the speaker’s consciousness as it journeys in and out of dream, gliding between wakefulness and dream at irregular intervals. Just like the varying meter and rhyme there is a confusion of the tenses in the poem. It is evident when the speaker says that he was “well upon my way to sleep” before the sheet of ice fell from his hands. This heightens the dream-like ambience of the poem.

In a way the poem is simply about apple picking. Even after a hard day of apple picking, the exhausted speaker cannot be out his toil. In his mind he continues picking apples. Apples continue to appear and disappear in his mind’s eye, the pain and pressure of standing on the ladder is still felt on his feet, and he is concerned about the apples that fall upon the ground which are fated to go into the cider press. But the title implies that the poem focuses on what happens after apple picking. On a deeper level, the speaker is exhausted by the hardships of life and longs for a relief from them. He wants to escape from reality and enter into a dream-like world through sleep. For Frost, the routine of picking apples during the harvest becomes a metaphor for dealing with deeper issues – of seasonal change and death. It is evident that it is the fag end of autumn. Signs of winter

are too evident to go unnoticed. The 'hoary' grass, the frozen surface of the water trough and the essence of winter sleep that pervades the air bear witness to the onslaught of winter. For the natural world death is approaching. The poet is doubtful if the human world would be renewed in spring like nature.

From another perspective the poem can be seen as the rambling thoughts a man who is about to die. The descriptions and thoughts, and dreams about apple-picking may be his hallucinations. Apple-picking becomes a metaphor for life itself or of human obligations and duties. The speaker has finished his vocation and is "done with apple-picking now." For a farmer like him harvest season is a time of fulfilment but he is now "overtired / Of the great harvest I myself desired." As he falls asleep or loses consciousness, he is unable to ascertain if he is dying or merely sleeping. He is not sure if he is falling into the normal everyday sleep or the long sleep from which there is no return unlike the hibernating animals. Sleep is a common metaphor for death that Frost has employed in many poems; cf. "Miles to go before I sleep" (Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening). But as it is beyond human powers to foretell the advent of death it may just be some human sleep and nothing more.

In *Robert Frost: The People, Places, and Stories Behind his New English Poetry*, Lea Newman comments: "The reference to the woodchuck and his long sleep in the concluding lines of the poem has confused many readers. Frost probably found the idea of comparing humans to woodchucks in Emerson's essay "Nature," where readers are told, "let us be men instead of woodchucks." A discussion of hibernation in another Emerson essay, "Fate," may have been the source for the term "the long sleep." In terms of the dream-ridden and exhausted state of the speaker in Frost's poem, he could be seeking the dreamless sleep of an animal or the month-long sleep of hibernation."

Apple-picking is employed as a metaphor for life and death. In a hard, tiresome life, things remain undone like the unpicked apples on the branches. The unpicked apples represent the things in the speaker's life that he has not completed. While crossing the threshold of death many things remain unaccomplished like the barrel that the speaker didn't fill. But the speaker is overtired and is "done with apple-picking now." He yearns for sleep or death as a way of escape from the trials and tribulations of life. So "After Apple-Picking," is not merely a poem about a man longing for rest after a hard day's work of picking apples though he knows that his sleep will be troubled because his work remains unfinished. In his overtired state the speaker wants a sleep corresponding to the hibernation of a woodchuck rather than a "human sleep." But his sleep will be human precisely because it will be disturbed by dreams in which reality is magnified and distorted. It differs from animal sleep as it is troubled by memories

31.3.5 Themes/ Questions for Discussion

- 1) Justify the title of the poem.
- 2) How does reality transform in the speaker's dream?
- 3) The Imagery in the poem
- 4) The metaphor of sleep
- 5) Critically evaluate the poem commenting on the interrelations among the metaphorical, metrical and thematic elements.

31.4 A BOUNDLESS MOMENT

31.4.1 Introduction

Have you ever come across a beautiful sight that captivated your attention? How long did you watch it? Did it interrupt your work in any way? Why did you turn your attention from it and resume what you had been engaged in? What if the sight that captured your attention was just an illusion, a creation of your imagination?

Well, here is a poem by Frost which presents such a situation. A sudden distraction created by a sight takes the speaker and his companion into a world of unreality. But they come back to reality soon. What lesson do they learn from an incident that seems not so significant?

Read on this short poem to answer these questions. But more importantly there are a few more questions in the next section which you have to answer after reading the poem a few times.

31.4.2 Text

He halted in the wind, and – what was that
Far in the maples, pale, but not a ghost?
He stood there bringing March against his thought,
And yet too ready to believe the most.

“Oh, that’s the Paradise-in-bloom,” I said;
And truly it was fair enough for flowers
Had we but in us to assume in March
Such white luxuriance of May for ours.

We stood a moment so in a strange world,
Myself as one his own pretense deceives;
And then I said the truth (and we moved on).
A young beech clinging to its last year’s leaves.

Self-check Exercise 2

1) Why does the poet’s companion suddenly halt?

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2) What is the significance of the reference to March?
3) Why does the speaker say that it is the paradise in bloom?
4) What does the strange world refer to?
5) What in truth was the sight that captivated their attention?

Now you may read the next section which is a critical evaluation of the poem. It would help you if you had any difficulty in answering the above questions.

31.4.3 An Evaluation of the Poem

The poem opens rather abruptly. The poet and his companion seem to be taking a leisurely walk. Suddenly something moving faraway among the maple trees arrests their attention. The wind seems to be carrying something pale but it is not a ghost. The poem’s dramatic opening line switches the reader’s attention to the unknown. The reader faces a question (“what was that / Far in the Maples, pale but not a ghost?”), and it disrupts the train of thought. It seems a spring vision of beauty, of flowering trees. But the fact that it is the month of March brings a jarring note. Still he is ready to accept the beautiful vision.

The speaker too, is enamoured by the beautiful distant vision. In his excitement he compares the vision of spring flowers to paradise in bloom. The pale hue in the distance is fair enough to be blooming white flowers. The unexpected delight that the distant sight evokes brings into their mind the luxuriant beauty of spring. The poet and his friend are so captivated by the beautiful vision so that they assume the lush beauty of May much in advance, that is, in March when signs of spring are merely incipient. Human beings long for momentary moods of happiness and sights of beauty in life. Sometimes we immerse ourselves in such fleeting moments of beauty mistaking such moments to be boundless.

Thus the speaker and his companion remain rapt in that strange world of beauty for a moment before reality rushes in. Both of them are deceived by the unreal image of beauty that imagination creates. Then truth dawns in the speaker's mind. They realise that what captured their attention was only a tree holding last year's leaves. It was a young beech tree retaining last year's dry leaves. They accept reality and come out of the momentary vision. Once they accept the truth they move on.

The poem employs the cycle of seasons to hint at the irrevocable cycle of life. Each May the bloom comes out and brings life to the death of winter. The poem is about a single moment when the characters see that life has changed. The phrase "and we moved on" marks the end of the moment that seemed boundless. It also suggests the disappointment in being out of the blissful moment of imagination and the return to everyday reality. There is a tension in the poem between movement and stopping. At the very beginning of the poem the companions stop walking. At the end of the poem, when the truth is revealed they resume their walk. In between they were in a boundless moment when they seek out the meaning of the distant sight. But it lays bare before them a truth about life as well. Captivating illusions and distractions abound in life. They are delightful but the reality of life, though dark and dismal, is something we cannot shun for long.

"A Boundless Moment" begins by referring to a sight that unexpectedly captures attention. But it leads the reader to look into the relation of human beings to nature. It pries into the mysteries of nature, especially the cycle of seasons. Nature's mood changes enigmatically. Along with it the colours of the fabric of nature transform proclaiming new seasons and hopes. But all the beauty and change in nature underlines the impermanence that is associated with nature and life as well. The poem gives an image of beauty, but this image is nothing more than an illusion. The two men think that they see flowers. But in fact they are only dead leaves clinging to a beech. So what captured their attention was only an illusion. When they realise this truth they turn again to the routine of life. The incident hints at the inherent limitations of human imagination. The ideal visions of imagination cannot persist for long as they are bound to encounter the truth of hard reality. Human desire and imagination can create visions for what seems a "boundless moment." But the unreal nature of such moments will be soon revealed, and it becomes a ceaseless moment of revelation about the hard realities of life. Such moments of realization are not tragic but they are dignified moments that provide insight into life. The vanishing of a vision of beauty evokes sadness but we are endowed with the truthfulness to accept reality. The speaker's bold acceptance of truth, even though it is harsh and disappointing, reveals the dauntless human spirit that faces reality.

31.4.4 Themes/ Questions for Discussion

- 1) Describe the strange experience of the speaker and his companion.
- 2) What revelation does the experience lead to?
- 3) The Implications of the title ‘A Boundless Moment.’

31.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life and work of Robert Frost and about the unique features of his poetry, focusing on two of his poems. The discussion of Frost's concept and vision of poetry would have been helpful to you in understanding the poems. The first poem “After Apple Picking” is based on Frost's experiences as a New England farmer. From the routine event of the harvest season the poet takes you to the deeper philosophical realities about human life. The second short lyric “A Boundless Moment” too, takes you to a common experience and gives a deeper insight into life. We hope you enjoyed the poems and will read more of Frost's poems.

31.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise 1

- 1) Frost has remarked that his poems begin in delight and end in wisdom.
- 2) He met poets like Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves and Ezra Pound.
- 3) *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*
- 4) The outbreak of World War I in 1914 compelled him to return to his native land.
- 5) Frost received the Pulitzer Prize four times and honorary degrees from a number of universities including the Oxford and Cambridge. He was an honoured guest at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and was invited to travel to the Soviet Union as a member of a goodwill group in 1962.
- 6) For him poetry was a way of survival in the chaotic world. In his poems everyday aspects of life become a tool to discuss philosophical issues and complexities of life. So nature and human activities become metaphors to understand the deeper realities of life.

Self-Check Exercise 1

- 1) No He has not finished apple-picking.
- 2) Yes. The barrel of apples at the foot of the tree is only half filled. Unpicked apples are still there on the boughs.
- 3) The poem is not merely about apple-picking. The title implies that the poem focuses on what happens after apple-picking. The routine of apple-picking during harvest leads to deeper issues of seasonal change, renewal of life and death. Apple-picking become a metaphor for life itself, or for human obligations.
- 4) In the morning the speaker saw that the top layer of water was frozen in the drinking trough. He picked up a thin sheet of ice and looked through it. He

saw the frost-covered, hoary grass, distorted by the vision through the filmy ice. As the ice began to melt, he let it fall and break thus freeing himself from the unreal vision of the world.

- 5) In his dream the apples appear larger, an indication that reality gets transformed in dreams. As the apples in his mind's vision are magnified he can see every speck of reddish brown on them. In the dream his feet feel the pain of standing on the ladder for a long time. He can even feel the pressure on his feet as the ladder sways round as the branches of the apple tree bend under his weight.
- 6) For a farmer the harvest season is a time of fulfillment. But the speaker is overtired of the great harvest. He is on the threshold of death and so the harvest of life or human achievements are insignificant.
- 7) As he falls asleep or loses consciousness, he is unable to determine if he is dying or merely sleeping. He is not sure if he is falling into the normal everyday sleep or the long sleep from which there is no return unlike the hibernating animals. Sleep is a common metaphor for death that Frost has employed in many of his poems. But as it is beyond human powers to foretell the advent of death it may just be some human sleep and nothing more.
- 8) The woodchuck's long sleep refers to hibernation in winter. It implies a contrast between the natural and human world.
- 9) The woodchuck's long sleep is just hibernation in winter. It is untroubled and assures regaining normal life in spring. With human beings it implies death, the long sleep that puts an end to life.

Self-Check Exercise 2

- 1) The poet's companion sees something faraway among the maples. It was a captivating sight and so he halts suddenly.
- 2) It is impossible to see the beauty of spring in the month of March. So the reference to March hints that the beautiful vision that attracted their attention is unreal.
- 3) The speaker is enamoured by the beautiful distant vision. He thinks it to be spring flowers and compares its exquisite beauty to paradise in bloom.
- 4) The strange world refers to the world of beauty that is unreal. It is a world that imagination creates but is a source of delight and escape from harsh realities.
- 5) The sight that captivated their attention was only a beech tree still retaining last year's dry leaves.

UNIT 32 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Structure

- 32.0 Objectives
- 32.1 Introduction
- 32.2 William Carlos Williams
 - 32.2.1 A Note on Imagism
- 32.3 Spring and All
 - 32.3.1 Introduction
 - 32.3.2 Text
 - 32.3.3 Analysis
 - 32.3.4 Comprehension Questions
- 32.4 A Widow's Lament in Springtime
 - 32.4.1 Introduction
 - 32.4.2 Text
 - 32.4.3 Discussion
 - 32.4.4 Comprehension Questions
- 32.5 The Dead Baby
 - 32.5.1 Introduction
 - 32.5.2 Text
 - 32.5.3 Discussion
 - 32.5.4 Comprehension Questions
- 32.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 32.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

32.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Write about William Carlos Williams' life, work and style.
- Discuss Williams' 'Spring and All', 'A Widow's Lament in Springtime' and 'The Dead Baby' in detail
- Understand 'Spring and All' and 'A Widow's Lament in Springtime' as two poems that treat the motif of spring differently.
- Understand 'A Widow's Lament in Springtime' and 'The Dead Baby' as two poems that treat death and its effects on the people around.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to William Carlos Williams' life, works and his influences briefly. A note on Imagism will inform you of the basic ideas of imagism as a literary and artistic movement and how Williams himself is an exemplary of the same.

The poem 'Spring and All' will show how the speaker uses specific images to develop one single image of the arrival and spread of spring after winter. The idea of transition is central to the reading here.

On the other hand, ‘A Widow’s Lament in Springtime’ shows the contrast in the season around the speaker and her own emotions and feelings. The juxtaposition of two stark ideas will be explored in this section.

Finally, ‘The Dead Baby’ will explore how the family of a baby awaits the arrival of the body of their child and how the mother and the father react differently to this event. The difficulty of coming to terms with the death of newborn child for causes unknown will be central to the ideas in this poem.

We hope you enjoy reading the unit.

32.2 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

William Carlos Williams was born in Rutherford, in 1883. A doctor by profession, Williams was serious about his medical career, while at the same time making immense contribution to the scene of avant-garde poetry. Born to a British father and a Puerto Rican mother, Williams was always someone who celebrated his mixed ancestry. At the age of 19, Williams entered the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Medicine in Philadelphia. While at medical school, Williams met and befriended both Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle. Pound played a crucial role in the development of Williams’ career as a poet.

He married Florence who was instrumental in sending some of his poems to *Poetry*, the Chicago magazine managed by Pound. Pound was impressed by the growth of Williams as a poet that he arranged for the publication of Williams’ *The Tempers* in 1913. His second book *Spring and All* contains several of his anthologized poems. On reading his most famous ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’ Robert Warren and Cleanth Brooks remarked: “reading this poem is like peering at an ordinary object through a pin prick in a piece of cardboard. The fact that the tiny hole arbitrarily frames the object endows it with an exciting freshness that seems to hover on the verge of revelation.”

Williams was always known to be an innovator and experiments with his poetry. Most of his contemporaries including Pound were expatriates, but Williams remained in America, treating the patients of the Rutherford working class for most of his life. His verse is deeply influenced by his environment, both professional and otherwise. In joining the company of Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle, Williams went on to become an integral part of the Imagist Movement in poetry.

32.2.1 A Note on Imagism

Imagism was literary movement of the early twentieth century that initiated the ideas of literary Modernism. Imagist poetry is characterised by a ‘direct treatment of the thing’ without any ornate rendering of the idea. It favoured precision over description and thus encouraged the use of precise images. Pound described an image as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”. In the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*, Pound, along with an essay on Imagism, Pound penned “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” which included:

- Direct treatment of the “thing”, whether subjective or objective
- To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
- To compose in a rhythm that reflects the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of metronome (fixed, regular rhythm).

This movement influenced most of Williams’ work. His treatment of images in the poem to be discussed in this unit should invite close attention to understand how his images work towards reading something like a still-life painting of sorts.

Self-check Exercise I

1) What is imagism?

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2) What do Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren say about Williams’ poetry?

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32.3 SPRING AND ALL

32.3.1 Introduction

In this section we shall take a close look at how the speaker in Williams’ ‘Spring and All’ characterises the spring in the midst of a fading winter. As you read pay attention to the manner in which Williams uses images in the poem and the visual effect it creates that connects it to the larger theme of the poem, which is that change and transition are the only constants.

32.3.2 Text

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast-a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them leafless vines-

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches-

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind-

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined-
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance-Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken

Self-check Exercise 2

1) Identify the visual images in this poem

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2) Do you think you end up with one visual made of several objects at the end of the poem? If so, how?

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32.3.3 Analysis

‘Spring and All’ is a classic poem by Williams from a collection by the same title. The poem is made up of several simple images that culminate in one image that stands sharply and quite brightly. The poem chronicles the transition period between the end of winter and the birth of Spring. It shows how the birth of life in Spring is not sudden but a process whose beauty is in the very aspect of growth and change inherent to the season. Written in 1921, the poem is also metaphorical of the near end of the World War I and the birth of a new moment in history.

On reading the poem, one can easily visualize the speaker having stopped by a hospital treating contagious diseases, to savour the landscape characterised by

the cold wind and the clouds sailing above in the sky. The contrast between the hospital (which stands for death, due to the nature of the contagious disease) and the birth of spring (which stands for new life) is indeed a sharp one. Yet another contrast is between the closed nature of the hospital and the openness that characterises the environment outside. The seasonal change described here is not a complete transformation from one to another, but remnants of Winter still persist, through which Spring makes its presence felt, quite slowly. The line “sluggish,/ dazed spring approaches” makes this image quite evident. Spring is not arriving with full of vigour and life, but quite dazed; its pace is sluggish, too. With the movement of time, each of these new things will begin to take better shape and defined outlines, almost as if waking from a deep slumber and straightening themselves.

The speaker sets the scene for the reader quite quickly enabling the reader to imagine a space just by the road close to the hospital. However, the reader is more likely to predict that the rest of the narrative is to chronicle the ‘contagiousness’ of the hospital. In fact, the word ‘contagious’ captures the whole mood of the poem quite aptly. What is indeed contagious the spread of spring in the landscape, although not at the moment when the speaker is looking around the space. While one might expect the disease to spread into the roads, a contrasting image is brought to the fore: that of clouds and blowing wind. However, notice how the cloud is not sailing but are surged by the wind. The opening lines therefore do not set a happy, cheerful and colourful setting, but a bleak one with a contagious hospital and clouds in the sky surged by the winds.

On looking downward, the speaker notices how the plants have dried, the leaves have fallen on the ground. These are, as the speaker suggests, a waste of dried weeds and trees are merely standing tall with nearly no leaves. In the stanza beginning with the lines “All along the road. . .” the speaker portrays how the landscape is characterised by a lack of life and vigour. However, with the lines “Lifeless in appearance, sluggish/ dazed spring approaches”, the poem shifts from a scene of lifelessness to the birth of new life.

The speaker notices the arrival of the season of new life, the first sign of life is seen the personified birth of the new leaves. This slow process begins to speed up . The use of the word ‘quicken’ to qualify the spring that was referred to as ‘sluggish’ and ‘dazed’ is to be carefully noted here. However, it is only a beginning. The new life is only peeping out but not yet fully overpowering the scene. The lines “Now the grass, tomorrow / the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf / One by one objects are defined “ make this idea clear. The change is happening in their roots, underground and they are slowly beginning to awake.

The poem can be read simply as a metaphor for change, transition and perhaps even the birth of a revolutionary idea, thought or moment in history.

32.3.4 Comprehension Questions

1) How does the speaker chronicle the birth of spring?
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2) Examine the use of contrasts by Williams to bring the central image of the poem.

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32.4 A WIDOW’S LAMENT OF IN SPRINGTIME

32.4.1 Introduction

Yet another poem placed in the springtime, the speaker here is not one who observes the birth of spring but a widow who no longer can associate herself with the beauty that spring brings with it.

32.4.2 Text

Sorrow is my own yard
where the new grass
flames as it has flamed
often before, but not
with the cold fire
that closes round me this year.
Thirty-five years
I lived with my husband.
The plum tree is white today
with masses of flowers.
Masses of flowers
load the cherry branches
and color some bushes
yellow and some red,
but the grief in my heart
is stronger than they,
for though they were my joy
formerly, today I notice them
and turn away forgetting.
Today my son told me
that in the meadows,
at the edge of the heavy woods
in the distance, he saw
trees of white flowers.
I feel that I would like
to go there
and fall into those flowers
and sink into the marsh near them.

32.4.3 Discussion

The tone of the poem here is established by the very opening word of the poem. This poem, too, like “Spring and All” uses several contrasts to establish the mood and tone of the poem. The speaker here is a widow who is grieving the loss of her husband and describing her sad state of mind. The title of the poem itself gives this idea. She recognises that the spring is a time of new growth, quite like the speaker in the previous poem. However, the difference lies in how the widow here is noticing how the same season of growth and life means something very different post her husband’s passing. While the season is characterised by several bright colours, the speaker notices how her feeling of grief is stronger than the colours that she no longer takes any joy in them. The title itself makes the contrast in the poem evident. The widow’s lament in springtime is cold, painful and morose. Thus the very renewal of spring has death built into its frame.

The poem opens with the lines “Sorrow is my own yard. . .” The metaphor here describes how she does not just feel the sorrow. It has now become so vast that it is indeed her yard. She sees the absent presence of her husband in her yard and metaphorically remarks that the yard no longer represents any life for her, but mere grief, sorrow and death. She notices the birth of new grass, which until now was filled with potential for growth and life, is characterised by a cold fire. The paradox here adds to the emotions felt by the widow. She remarks how, with the death of her husband, she feels the sorrow engulfing her completely and making her numb to the growth of life and vigour around her this time around.

Having lived for thirty-five years with her husband, the speaker is unable to fathom an existence without him. Hence, everything around her looks depressing despite the brightness in colour and light. Even though the plum tree is filled with flowers and the cherry blossoms brighten up other bushes, the speaker cannot relate to this new birth of life because of the death of her husband. It is this contrast that is brought out throughout the poem. She remarks that “the grief in my heart/ is stronger than they”. She also maintains that these were precisely the tiny little joys of her family that no longer excite her. One could easily imagine the husband and wife, perhaps enjoying their morning tea in the yard talking about the plums and cherry blossoms. Today, she’d rather forget those memories as they do not bring her happiness but only accentuate her grief.

She remarks that her son’s mention of the meadows with white flowers are where she would like to be, not to enjoy the landscape but to sink into the marsh land quite like the flowers that wither from those trees.

A closer look at the images in the poem shows how Williams treats contrasts and paradoxes effectively to be able to bring out the mood of the speaker in opposition to the surroundings. The use of white flowers against the red plums is an image that one cannot miss. The contrast is one that adds beauty to the image and makes the presence of both the colours felt. Similarly, the use of yellow and red also brings out the bright and light contrast of the flowers very clearly. However, this brightness of the flowers does not appeal to the speaker any longer as she has already mentioned how her whole yard has transformed itself into a space of sorrow. Despite the fact that her son is still with her, the tone of the poem suggests that the widow feels lonely in her yard, showing how she feels isolated in the outside world.

32.4.4 Comprehension Questions

1) How is the representation of spring different in both the poems discussed above?

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2) What ideas of spring are contrasted in “A Widow’s Lament in Springtime”?

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3) Examine the contrasting images and the effect it produces to the tone of the poem in “A Widow’s Lament in Springtime”.

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32.5 THE DEAD BABY

32.5.1 Introduction

“The Dead Baby” is yet another poem that deals with the theme of death. Quite like “The Widow’s lament in Springtime”, the speaker in this poem characterises the mind of the family facing the death of their son. A parallel reading of Robert Frost’s “Home Burial” would prove to be useful in understanding two American poets’ treatment death by both the mother and father differently.

32.5.2 Text

Sweep the house
under the feet of the curious
holiday seekers—
sweep under the table and the bed
the baby is dead—

The mother's eye's where she sits
by the window, unconsoled—
have purple bags under them
the father—
tall, wellspoken, pitiful
is the abler of these two—

Sweep the house clean
here is one who has gone up
(unproblematically)
to heaven, blindly
by force of the facts—
a clean sweep
is one way of expressing it—

Hurry up! any minute
they will be bringing it
from the hospital—
a white model of our lives
a curiosity
surrounded by fresh flowers.

32.5.3 Discussion

“The Dead Baby” is not so much about the dead baby but the effect the baby’s passing has had on the parents. The poem begins with an assertion to “sweep the house clean” for all the guests who have arrived to grieve the little child’s death as well as the arrival of the dead body of the child too. The speaker is neither the mother nor the father of the child, but perhaps a relative, a close friend. This speaker observes a stark difference in the way both the mother and the father deal with their loss. The speaker’s description of the mother’s grief helps us visualize a deeply grieving mother sitting by the window, reminiscing the memories of her child. The lines “The mother’s eye’s where she sits/ by the window, unconsoled— / have purple bags under them . . .” show that the mother deals with her loss emotionally. The father, however, is more practical and knows that things have to go on, including making arrangements for the arrival of the mourners. He is, in our speaker’s eyes, “tall, wellspoken, pitiful / and abler of the two”.

But what exactly does the act of sweeping signify? Especially under the bed and under the table? The speaker here wants to sweep not just the house clean, but of the reminders of death itself. A symbolic way of moving on from the loss is described through a mindless act of sweeping. What makes the loss all the more difficult to fathom is that the baby has died without any complications, suggested by the word “unproblematically”. The parents merely have a set of facts to comprehend their child’s sudden death. Just like how the medical discourse sweeps the death of the child “by force of the facts”, the parents are also expected to sweep the house of any markers that remind them of the lack of causality in the child’s death. This only goes on to show how both the parents are in denial of their loss in the face of harsh reality and the terrors of life. The very act of sweeping shows how the event has affected the parents emotionally, although the father may not express it overtly.

Now that you have been given some ideas about the poem, reflect on the following questions.

32.5.4 Comprehension Questions

- 1) Reflect on how the theme of death is treated in “A Widow’s Lament” and “The Dead Baby”?

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- 2) In both “A Widow’s Lament” as well as “The Dead Baby”, the dead subject is not within the narrative of the poem but lies outside it. What do you think is the reason for this?

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- 3) What is the significance of the constant reference to the action of sweeping in the poem?

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32.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have introduced you to one of the key figures of Modernist American Literature, William Carlos Williams. Here, we have examined how in all three poems, Williams uses situations, places and people that are realistic and that all of us find easy to relate to. Through this, you must be able to read and understand how Williams uses many images towards working towards establishing one single image that speaks like a painting.

32.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise 1

- 1) An artistic and literary movement that developed in Europe and America, modelled on the art movements in Europe at the time. Several key figures including Pound and H.D. contributed to strengthening this movement both through their poetry as well as critical reflections.
- 2) They both reflect on how Williams' "Red Wheel Barrow" is like looking at an object through a small pin prick on a cardboard.

Self-check Exercise 2

- 1) Look at those images that stir the sense of sight: the hospital, the surroundings, the sky, the landscape and the traces of spring in the midst of a fading winter.
- 2) Yes, all the images together set up the image of a fading winter and the birth of spring that brings with it freshness and life.

Self-check Exercise 3

- 1) Spring not as a sudden season that brings with it new life, but a slow and sleepy season that slowly picks up speed to change the face of the landscape.
- 2) Winter-spring; hospital-landscape outside; sluggishness- quickens

Self-check Exercise 4

- 1) "Spring and All" chronicles the birth of spring in the eyes of the speaker; "A Widow's Lament in Springtime" shows how the speaker is unable to associate with the mood of the season due to her husband's death.
- 2) Spring as a season of life; here represents death for the speaker.
- 3) Bright colours on the trees and the lack of life and cheerful emotions in the speaker; spring as engulfing a cold feeling in a season of brightness and warmth.

Self-check Exercise 5

- 1) Both poems look at death of a family member; denial in both the poems as far as accepting death of the loved one is concerned; death as life-altering.
- 2) Both poems look at the effect the death has had on the immediate family and not much to the dead person itself; shows what the dead person meant for both the family members.
- 3) Sweeping as cleaning the reminders of death, escapism and therefore denial of death itself.

UNIT 33 WALLACE STEVENS

Structure

- 33.0 Objectives
- 33.1 Introduction
- 33.2 Wallace Stevens
 - 33.2.1 Style
- 33.3 The Snow Man
 - 33.3.1 Introduction
 - 33.3.2 Text
 - 33.3.3 Analysis
 - 33.3.4 Comprehension Questions
- 33.4 The Emperor of Ice-Cream
 - 33.4.1 Text
 - 33.4.2 Discussion
 - 33.4.3 Comprehension Questions
- 33.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 33.6 Answers to Self-check Exercises

33.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Write about Wallace Stevens' life, work and style.
- Discuss Steven's 'Snow Man' and 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' in detail.

33.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we briefly introduce you to Wallace Stevens' life and work and discuss two select poems: 'The Snow Man' and 'Emperor of Ice-Cream'. We suggest that you through the unit section by section as exercises that will aid your comprehension of the poem are part of the reading.

In 'The Snow Man', we show how Stevens, although a modernist, is greatly influenced by the Romantics and hence shows Romantic tendencies in the treatment of his subject matter. Unlike other modernist poets, say the Imagists, Stevens deals with his subject through abstraction.

In 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' we see how the speaker urges one not to treat death with all the bleakness associated with it, but instead accept its inevitability with cheer. We also see how Stevens treats the female subject in this poem and understand how Stevens' gendered reading opens up crucial questions about the representation of female subjects in his poetry.

We hope you enjoy the unit.

33.2 WALLACE STEVENS

Wallace Stevens is one of the most prominent figures of Modernist poetry in America. Most readers find Stevens difficult to understand Wallace Stevens was

born and in Reading, Pennsylvania. He completed his high school from Reading and then entered Harvard from where he studied French and German, read philosophy and wrote several poems. He went on to edit Harvard Advocate, a magazine in which T. S. Eliot later published his early poems. Stevens also met several important figures in Modern American poetry including Witter Bynner and George Santayana. In fact, Santayana’s combined interest in poetry and philosophy resembled Stevens’ own preoccupation with poetry and philosophy. Taking after his lawyer father, he even completed a law degree and worked with several law firms. In 1916, he joined the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. He was employed there for the rest of his career.

Stevens began publishing his poems in Poetry and other magazines. But it was not until 1923 that he completed his volume of poetry *Harmonium*. It is in this collection that many of his famous lyrics are found.

33.2.1 Style

Modernist poetry, especially of the Imagist kind of Williams and Pound tries to present reality through images, as they are. But Wallace Stevens’ form of modernist poetry instead changed representation to things of the imagination that played a chord with reality. Although a modernist, Stevens exhibits aspects of Post-Romantic lyricism in most of his poetry. This is because his most common cited influences apart from the Romantics have been the transcendentalist tradition of Emerson and Walt Whitman, and the French symbolist tradition of Baudelaire, Mallarme, and Valery. Thus, his style is largely eclectic and lacks an agenda for poetry as that of the Imagists. In fact one clearly can notice how Stevens presents his lyricism with a modernist innovation. It is this feature of his poetry that enables one to distinguish his style from many other modernists of his time like Pound, Eliot, Williams among others.

Most of his poems explore the relationship between the self and the external world and the mind as attempting to order and shape the world. Christopher Beach remarks: “A central philosophical theme which runs in various permutations throughout Steven’s poetry is that of the tension, opposition or interplay between reality and the imagination”.

Stevens’ poetry is also a significant move away from the Imagist tradition. This is because Stevens’ poetry does not articulate the objectivity and lack of sentimentality of the Imagists but one that invokes rather abstract modes of poetry and thought. His belief was that the theory of poetry is the theory of life. This makes the art of writing poetry in itself into a very grand enterprise. It is because Stevens believed that everything around us is a construct and that reality itself is a fiction of the mind that most of his poetry is an articulation of philosophical abstractions that the mind engages in, making his poetry often too difficult to comprehend in one reading. Now, take a look at the following questions based on Stevens’ style.

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) What are some of the ways in which Stevens may be distinguished from other Modernists of his time?

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33.3 THE SNOW MAN

33.3.1 Introduction

‘The Snow Man’ is one of the many poems of Wallace Stevens’ which looks at the season of winter. The common notions of winter are that it is cold, bleak, lifeless and gloomy. The speaker of Snow Man urges one to transform into a snowman himself to be able to see the beauty of the wintry surroundings. Let us now turn to a reading of the poem. We suggest that you read the poem aloud to be able to sense the tone and mood of the speaker.

33.3.2 Text

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Self-check Exercise 2

- 1) Pick out the visual and auditory images from the poem.

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- 2) Identify words in the poem that give an idea of nothingness.

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3) If you were to visualize this poem, how would you characterise the settings, the people and things around the speaker?

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33.3.3 Analysis

The speaker here dramatizes how the mind works in ordering and understanding reality. Before we can delve into the poem, let us ask ourselves: Who or what is a snowman? A snowman is an inanimate figure often made in snow. (Notice that this word is a compound, unhyphenated word as opposed to the word in the title of the poem). However, the snow man referred to in Stevens’ poem refers to a person with a ‘mind of winter’. At the outset, one might notice a detachment in the voice of the speaker. But, on closer reading, intensity in feeling the reality around is visible.

Observe how the whole poem is one single sentence that articulates a seemingly simplistic idea: “One must have a mind of winter” to behold “Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is”. The syntax of the poem is symptomatic of the various logical and philosophical turns that human mind takes to comprehend reality. In this one sentence, a movement from the sensory experience of sight to that of sound to ultimately ‘behold’ a ‘nothingness’ is significant.

“The Snow Man” is a record of a man who comprehends winter by feeling the bareness and the absence of flowers and leaves that is winter. All the branches of the trees around only manifest themselves in the images of winter and snow: “One must have a mind of winter”/ says the speaker of Snow Man, “To regard the frost and boughs/ Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;” For Stevens, it requires a snowman, made of snow, resting in snow to understand the reality that a land of leafy trees and sunny warmth is not permanent and thus one must live in the present. The snowman must now quell his desire of yearning the warmth and for this, he must acquire a mind of winter and not dwell in the misery of winter. He must arrive at a time when he can call winter beautiful and it would indeed be a long time but this comes at a cost: an annihilation of his present self, thus rendering “nothing himself”. The “Nothing that is not there” is the absence of the warmth of leafy trees and sunlight; and “the nothing that is” is the winter, which is beautiful as it is – in its nothingness. It is indeed this kind of an abstraction that poets like Pound, Eliot and others avoided in their modernist poetry.

If one were to attempt a simplistic, reductive reading of the poem, we may get this: To be able to overcome the loss of all that the season of summer gives – the bright shiny days, the warmth, the leafy trees and plants –and all that the winter is – snowy days, snow crusted pines, coldness in the wind and the body – one must turn oneself into a snowman who, by being an inanimate object in the

wintry surroundings, is able to nullify the effects of the absences / nothings that characterize the winter and dispel the misery associated with the absence. The evolution of the one in the beginning of the poem to a snowman who watches the dazzle of the snow crusts in the January sun or mutely listens to the cold air all alone is an important development that Stevens makes. Stevens himself has described this poem in one of his letters as “an example of the necessity of identifying oneself with the reality in order to understand it and enjoy it”. However, such an enjoyment comes at price of effacing the human and becoming a snowman.

In several poems on winter, Stevens often posits the notion of nothingness-as-something. Here, too, in becoming a snowman, in possessing a mind of winter, the absence of things (nothings like no warmth, no leaves; and no-things) is transformed into something perceptible by turning into a snowman with no ears to not hear the misery in the coldness of the wind. It is in dispelling misery and pain and coldness by turning into something like snow itself that winter can be enjoyed.

George S. Lensing in “Stevens’ seasonal cycles” comments about the final irony of human effacement and nothingness menaing something as “an arrival at pure being that allows for no consciousness of its cleanest efficacy”. Thus, one can imagine a solitary man standing in wintry surroundings and becoming one with the reality around him by becoming the very nothing that had given him misery and bleakness. He may not be in the company of the human but his misery becomes one with and isin the company of the snowy reality that surrounds him.

33.3.4 Comprehension Questions

- 1) Examine how “The Snow Man” moves from concreteness to abstraction that is still located in the concrete.
- 2) Why do you think the speaker uses the nothingness of the winter to qualify the nothingness of the snowman?
- 3) What must one become to be able to enjoy the wintry surroundings? How can one remain unaffected by the misery associated with the absence of warmth in winter?

33.4 THE EMPEROR OF ICE-CREAM

33.4.1 Text

Call the roller of big cigars,
 The muscular one, and bid him whip
 In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
 Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
 As they are used to wear, and let the boys
 Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers.
 Let be be finale of seem.
 The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
 Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
 On which she embroidered fantails once

And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Glossary:

- Whip** : to move fast and quick in a specified direction; often done with curds and cream.
- Concupiscent** : lustful, sexual desire
- Wenches** : young girls, prostitutes
- Dawdle** : waste time, be slow

33.4.2 Discussion

‘The Emperor of Ice-cream’ is one among Stevens’ many obscure poems. The poem provides a thematic contrast between joys and pleasures of life on the one hand and death on the other. The poem is structured into two stanzas. Notice how the first stanza is characterized by life, celebration and mirth while the second is characterized by death, stillness and is devoid of activity.

Let us now begin to look at the poem closely. As mentioned earlier, the poem is divided into two distinct stanzas in terms of ideas. The first is characterized by a set of assertions and commands leading to celebration and mirth while the second is a complete opposite of the first. We see that the whole poem is almost like a set of commands given by a person of authority. From the last line of the two stanzas, one deduces that the authority is indeed an emperor, a king. However, the emperor is not any emperor but one who rules over the kingdom of ice-cream. While this can sound trivial, the emperor himself makes frivolous commands: he commands the muscular man to whip curds in the kitchen. This is incongruous with his physical appearance. Besides, the speaker also introduces a lustful desire with this image of whipping curds through the word ‘concupiscent’. The reader now knows that the kitchen is not merely an space where food is cooked but also several worldly desires. We encounter a scene where young girls are flirting with boys and wasting their time; young boys are at the scene with flowers in old newspapers: this is a scene of a party called by the emperor of ice cream.

In the second stanza the celebration is contrasted with a corpse lying in a room. The emperor commands the corpse be covered with a sheet. The sheet is not a shroud that is usually used to cover corpses but one taken from the dressing table of the woman herself. While the table has no knobs and needs fixing, the sheet is one on which the dad woman had once embroidered fan tails. However, the sheet is not long enough to cover the woman completely—her feet protrude but are cold and establishes her death. The woman subject here is mute, dead and ‘cold and dumb’ thus rendering her voiceless to celebrate the kingdom of the ice cream and its emperor.

The emperor suggests that between life and death, between that which is present and that which is not, one must choose the former. It is reality and not appearance that rules the world, materiality (life, lust, desire) over lack of materiality (death), impermanence (life, mortality and even the ice cream) over permanence (inevitability of death) hence the lines ‘Let be be finale of seem’.

‘Be’ here refers to reality and ‘seem’ refers to appearance. The only emperor, therefore, is the emperor of ice cream who even commands the spotlight to be on him as he asserts “Let the lamp affix its beam,/ The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.” (Even if it is the cold emperor of life, sensuality and appetite.)

To make for an easier understanding of the poem, Helen Vendler has tried to provide a first person narrative of the poem.:

“For purposes of experiment, I have put the details the poem gives us into the form of a first-person narrative; I see the poem as a rewritten form of this *ur*-narrative, in which the narrative has been changed into an impersonal form, and the linear temporal structure of narrative form has been replaced by a strict geometric spatial construction – two rooms juxtaposed. Here (with apologies) is my conjectural narrative *ur*-form of the poem, constructed purely as an explanatory device:

I went, as a neighbor, to a house to help lay out the corpse of an old woman who had died alone; I was helping to prepare for the home wake. I entered, familiarly, not by the front door but by the kitchen door. I was shocked and repelled as I went into the kitchen by the disorderly festival going on inside: a big muscular neighbor who worked at the cigar-factory had been called in to crank the ice-cream machine, various neighbors had sent over their scullery-girls to help out and their yard-boys bearing newspaper-wrapped flowers from their yards to decorate the house and the bier: the scullery-girls were taking advantage of the occasion to dawdle around the kitchen and flirt with the yard-boys, and they were all waiting around to have a taste of the ice cream when it was finished. It all seemed to me crude and boisterous and squalid and unfeeling in the house of the dead – all that appetite, all that concupiscence.

Then I left the sexuality and gluttony of the kitchen, and went in to the death in the bedroom. The corpse of the old woman was lying exposed on the bed. My first impulse was to find a sheet to cover the corpse; I went to the cheap old pine dresser, but it was hard to get the sheet out of it because each of the three drawers was lacking a drawer-pull; she must have been too infirm to get to the store to get new glass knobs. But I got a sheet out, noticing that she had hand-embroidered a fantail border on it; she wanted to make it beautiful, even though she was so poor that she made her own sheets, and cut them as minimally as she could so as to get as many as possible out of a length of cloth. She cut them so short, in fact, that when I pulled the sheet up far enough to cover her face, it was too short to cover her feet. It was almost worse to have to look at her old calloused feet than to look at her face; somehow her feet were more dead, more mute, than her face had been

She is dead, and the fact cannot be hidden by any sheet. What remains after death, in the cold light of reality, is life – all of that life, with its coarse muscularity and crude hunger and greedy concupiscence, that is going on in the kitchen. The only god of this world is the cold god of persistent life and appetite; and I must look steadily at this repellent but true tableau – the animal life in the kitchen, the corpse in the back bedroom. Life offers no other tableaux of reality, once we pierce beneath appearances. (p 50-51, Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire*).

The point that the speaker of ‘Ice-cream’ then makes is that one can either choose to be cold or join the sensuality and appetite in the kitchen, for, the only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. This is a poem that brings the simultaneous cohabitation of both life and death on the same plane.

Self-check Exercise 3

- 1) Look at how the poem begins with concrete images of winter which are all used to qualify a nothingness – a lack of life – that winter is. It is this contradiction / paradox that gives the poem its central meaning.
- 2) Look at how the speaker is equating a real snowman with no ears and eyes to a man who must become like the snow man who turns a deaf ear and blind eye to harsh reality of winter and become one with the nothingness of winter to enjoy it.
- 3) Look at how the speaker urges an effacement of the human and absorb one's self with the surroundings outside completely to be able enjoy the beauty of winter.

Self-check Exercise 4

- 1) Pay attention to the tone of the poem. The emperor is authoritative, assertive yet appears frivolous and trivial with his commands. However he is espousing a larger philosophy of being happy about reality than appearance.
- 2) First stanza deals with life and the second with death. The contrast makes the central philosophy of the poem clear.

UNIT 34 LANGSTON HUGHES

Structure

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34.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- discuss Langston Hughes' life, career, major works, poetics and his association with various movements
- analyse and appreciate the poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"
- analyse and appreciate the poem "Young Gal's Blues"
- analyse and appreciate the poem "Mother to Son"
- discuss the use of African-American dialect of English in the poems

34.1 INTRODUCTION

According to R. Baxter Miller, Langston Hughes "was perhaps the most wide-ranging and persistent black American writer in the twentieth century." Miller's view means that Hughes was not merely a poet; he was, in addition, a fiction writer, dramatist, librettist, writer of Broadway musicals, essayist, children's

author, lyricist, radio and television teleplay writer, columnist, editor, public speaker and reviewer. To quote Baxter again, “He wrote for and beyond his time.”

Hughes’ career spanned over a period of fifty years. He was a product of the socio-cultural milieu of the African-Americans [Nowadays, we do not use the terms *blacks*, *Negroes*, etc., to denote the descendants of the Africans in America. However, you may find them used in some quotations in this Unit] between the 1920s and 60s. He was associated with the Harlem Renaissance of the 20s and the Black Arts Movement of the 60s. The cultural events of each decade kept on shaping him as a writer and, to some extent, as an African-American activist. In the 1920s he began his career writing blues and jazz poetry. In the next decade, the decade of the Great Depression and communism in America, he was passionately grappling with the issue of the Afro-Americans’ equality in a white society. In the forties, he published some of his finest lyrics “as artistic relief to the racial lynching at the time.” Some of his best short stories appeared in the 50s. The Black Arts Movement of the next decade gave him the opportunity to project himself as a social activist.

Hughes was a benefactor in more ways than one. With his help many young African-American writers could publish their literary pieces in major periodicals. He was instrumental in liberating American literature from the plantation traditions, which mostly presented the submissive and suffering Afro-American. He wrote with the purpose of unifying the African-Americans with the white Americans even as “He helped charm the American audience to the future of ethnic quality and pluralism.”

In the following section we shall know more about the life and works of Hughes.

34.2 LANGSTON HUGHES (1902-1967): A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

James Langston Hughes was born on 1 February 1902 in Joplin, Missouri (America). His father was James Nathaniel Hughes and his mother’s name was Carrie Langston Hughes. The poet’s maternal grandfather, Charles Howard Langston, had a special liking for literature and Hughes inherited this liking. Charles’ brother, John Mercer Langston, was an autobiographer; he published his life history in *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capital (1894)*. Carry Hughes, too, wrote poetry and she used to deliver monologues in costume. You must have noticed from the short description of Hughes parental lineage that he grew up in a literary environment.

James Hughes, the poet’s father, studied law through the distance mode, like you. He wanted to take the Oklahoma territory bar examination but was denied permission by an examining board consisting of only white people. So in 1889 he moved onto Joplin with his wife. They lost their first child there in 1900. Langston Hughes was born two years later. Faced with poverty and the burden of supporting 18-month old Langston Hughes, James Hughes left the US for Mexico in 1903. He could earn money there and thus support his wife and son who were still in the U.S. Carry did not go with her husband. Because she could not get a regular Job, she moved from city to city seeking some work. She would take the young Langston Hughes with her only occasionally. For about nine years Carrie left him with her mother, Mary Leary Langston, who lived in Lawrence.

However, little Langston visited his mother briefly at Topeka or Colorado and even accompanied her to Mexico in 1908 to visit his father.

While young Hughes lived a hard life with his grandmother, his cousins lived in luxury in Washington D.C. Unlike the other women in Lawrence, Mary Langston did not do domestic service to earn money. She rented the rooms of her house to the students of Kansas University and sometimes she rented out her entire house while she stayed with a friend.

In 1907 Carry took Langston Hughes to a library in Topeka where he fell in love with books. One of the reasons for the sudden liking was that one could borrow books there without paying money. Years later, Hughes wrote about the impact of books on him: "Even before I was six, books began to happen to me, so that after a while there came a time when I believed in books more than in people which, of course, was wrong."

When he lost his grandmother in April 1915, Hughes lived with his mother briefly. By then Carrie had married Homer Clark. When Clark moved on seeking a job, Carrie left Hughes with Auntie Reed, her friend, and her husband.

When Hughes was in the seventh grade, he secured his first regular job which involved cleaning the lobby and toilets in an old hostel near his school. This job experience later helped him write the poem "Brass Spittoons." In 1916, while living with his mother, stepfather and stepbrother, he entered the Central High school at Cleveland. During the 4 successful years there, he wrote poems for the student magazine, *The Belfry Owl*.

Hughes was with his father in Mexico in the summer of 1919. There he realized that he disliked his father's materialistic outlook. He was depressed most of the time and even thought of suicide. In July 1920, he visited his father again and stayed with him till September 1921. His father wanted him to join a European university but he preferred Columbia University, where he enrolled in 1921 as a student with his father's permission. However, quite contrary to his expectations, the environment and the teaching at the University did not impress him at all. So he missed classes to attend Broadway shows. He couldn't go on like that for long; he dropped out of Columbia and took up various odd jobs. He also began to be attracted towards the African-American literary and cultural revival called the Harlem Renaissance (We will know more about the renaissance in a subsection of this biography).

By 1921, Hughes had started publishing literary pieces in major literary magazines. The January 1921 issue of *The Brownie's Book* carried two of his poems. Similarly, its July issue contained *The Gold Piece*, Hughes' one act play for children. Let us recall that he was still a teenager while publishing them. A poem that he wrote in 1923, "The Weary Blues", was a significant one, for it was written in the pattern of blues, a kind of folk song. (In another subsection we will learn more about blues). The title of the poem was soon to become the title of his first collection of poems.

In 1923, Hughes undertook a sea travel to Africa by working in the ship by which he was sailing. On board the ship, he threw a box of books into the sea. The books, according to Buxter Miller, "reminded him of the hardships of his past: attics and basements in Cleveland, lonely nights in Toluca dormitories at Columbia, and furnished rooms in Harlem." Hughes' first reaction on seeing Africa was "My Africa, Motherland of the Negro." He returned to the US late that year. Next year he visited Paris and Italy.

In 1924, Hughes met Arna Bontemps. They admired each other and collaboratively produced books and anthologies. While working as a busboy at Wardman Park hotel he met the American poet Vachel Lindsay. After reading some of the poems by Hughes, Lindsay published a favourable article on him in a newspaper.

When Hughes won a poetry prize in 1925, Carl Van Vechten got some of Hughes' poems published in the form of an anthology (*The Weary Blues*) from Alfred A. Knopp in 1926. Hughes met Arthur Spingarn, a lawyer, and his sister-in-law Amy Spingarn. His friendship with them, initiated through Vechten, lasted for many decades. *The Weary Blues* evoked mixed responses from critics. To Alain Locke, Hughes appeared to be "the spokesman for the black masses."

In February 1926 he joined Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, as a student. While being at the University he wrote one of his finest poems "Mullato" and it appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. The poem, according to Hughes, dealt with the "White fathers and Negro mothers in the South." Hughes also began to write and publish short stories, like "The Childhood of Jimmy", during this time. He graduated from Lincoln University in June 1929.

Hughes' meeting Charlotte Mason, an elderly white lady, in 1927 proved beneficial to him. With her support as literary patron he began to work on his first novel *Not without Laughter* and it was published in 1930. However, towards the end of the year, the relationship between the patron and the poet became strained because of their divergent views on political philosophy and race.

When he was almost 30, Hughes took the decision to earn his livelihood from writing. In 1931 he received a 1000-dollar grant from the Rosenwald Fund. With the money he went on a trip to the Afro-American colleges in the South. The tour, Baxter Miller says, "deepened Hughes' commitment to racial justice and literary expression." The trip also deepened his social commitment. After this tour, in 1932, Hughes visited Russia where he met the Hungarian-born British writer Arthur Koestler. Their discussions on emotion and creativity were beneficial to Hughes and their meeting, to quote Miller again, "renewed his [Hughes'] leftist inclinations." Similarly, a meeting with Marie Seton also reinforced his leftist thinking. In the 1930's, keeping oneself away from the leftist ideology was difficult in America. The Great Depression of the decade drove many writers and intellectuals to the communist fold. However, Hughes was never a member of the Communist party. Significantly, *The Ways of White Folks*, his first collection of short stories, appeared in 1934.

Between 1932 and 1934, Hughes earned much money through his enormous literary output. He sent a substantial part of the money to his mother, who was physically unwell then. On 22nd October 1934 his father died in Mexico but he could not attend the funeral because he got the news of the death late.

When the Spanish Civil War was on, in 1937, Hughes joined the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a daily, as a correspondent. While reporting the war he happened to meet many white American writers, like Hemingway and the critic Malcolm Cowley, who were visiting Spain. He also met the French novelist Andre' Malraux and the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda.

"Hughes' work continued to earn public recognition from 1938 to 1967, the year of his death", says Miller. That means, he was actively involved in socio-political and literary activities till his death. In 1939 he founded the New Negro Theater in

Los Angeles. In 1940 he was able to publish the first part of his autobiography *The Big Sea*. Its second part, entitled *I Wonder as I Wander*, came out in 1956. He founded the Skyloft Players and produced his musical *The Sun Do Move* (1942). He wrote a weekly column in the *Chicago Defender* in which he published “the tales of Jesse B. Semple, later called Jesse B. Simple — a folk philosopher who would capture the hearts of thousands of readers.” In 1946 he won a medal and a prize of 1000 dollars from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Next year he was visiting professor of creative writing at Chicago University. In 1951 he published his book-length poem, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. On March 26, 1953, Hughes was questioned by Senator Joseph’s subcommittees for “subversive activities.” The questions were on his radical past. In the early 1960’s Hughes visited Africa and Europe again. *Ask your Mama* (1961), “Hughes’ crowning achievement”, was a satirical response to the anger of the 1960’s against all kinds of inequality that prevailed in American society. He was also a part of the Black Arts Movement and the Civil Right movement in the decade.

On 6 May 1967, Hughes admitted himself to the Polyclinic Hospital in New York with an infection of the prostate gland and a heart condition. In order not to receive any special consideration as a writer, at the hospital he registered his name as James Hughes. Later, an African-American orderly informed the hospital authorities that Hughes was suffering because of poor emergency care. Proper care came when it was too late. On 22 May he died. As Miller points out, “The African American folk poet died by the theory he had lived by.” During his long writing career, Hughes dealt with a large number of themes including free speech, transitoriness, and assimilation; nationalism, racism, integration, and poverty.”

In the following subsections let us briefly learn about some movements with which Hughes was associated, his interest in Afro-American folk music and his aesthetic views.

34.2.1 The Harlem Renaissance

The period of the Harlem Renaissance was, roughly, from 1919 to early or mid-1930s. According to some, the publication of *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* marked its beginning and the stock market crash of 1929 marked its end. The Renaissance was originally called the New Negro Movement. The place Harlem, in New York City, was an Afro-American neighbourhood, with a large number of them settling there as migrants from the American South. Here they were not victims of racism whereas in the South slavery was an accepted practice. For the uneducated, Harlem offered jobs while the educated class made it the centre of Afro-American literature and culture. A white American writer, Ridgely Torrence, staged his *Three Plays for the Negro Theatre* which “featured African-American actors conveying complex human emotions and yearnings.” The same year saw the founding of the Liberty League and the newspaper *The Voice* by Hubert Harrison. According to the Wikipedia, “Contributing factors leading to the Harlem Renaissance were the Great Migration of African Americans to northern cities, which concentrated ambitious people in places where they could encourage each other, and the First World War, which had created new industrial work opportunities for tens of thousands of people. Factors leading to the decline of this era include the Great Depression.”

Langston Hughes is considered to be an important thinker and writer of the Harlem Renaissance. He lived in Harlem for long and his literary outlook was influenced by the Afro-American life and culture there. With a strong sense of racial pride, he made significant contributions to the shaping of the political and literary basis of the Renaissance. It was he who published the Manifesto-essay of the movement, namely, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1927), in the journal *Nation*. The Manifesto “skillfully argued the need for both race pride and artistic independence.” His entire literary and non-literary output underlines the importance of equality, condemnation of racism and injustice and the celebration of African-American culture, humour and spirituality. For example, the first two volumes of his poetry—*The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927)—contain poems that effectively blend Afro-American jazz and blues.

34.2.2 Hughes and African Folk Music

Hughes was deeply interested in African folk music. His love for the music was natural because of his African ancestry and lineage. Of the many forms of the music, the blues was a type that he used in his poetry. The blues has its origin in Africa and in the 20th century America, it has been associated with the work songs of labourers like stevedores, field hollers and with the shouts of slaves. The blues do not share common characteristics. “The earliest blues-like music was a ‘functional expression, rendered in a call-and-response style without accompaniment or harmony and unbounded by the formality of any particular music structure.’”

Many American writers have attempted to mix the essence of this musical form in to their works. Langston Hughes was one such writer. According to Edward Waldron, “In his blues poetry Langston Hughes captures the mood, the feel and the spirit of the blues; his poems gave the rhythm and the impact of the musical form they incorporate. Indeed, the blues poems of Langston Hughes are blues as well as poetry.”

Waldron has quoted Simon Campbell’s definition of the blues which goes thus: “The blues are simple, elemental. They have the profound depths of feeling that is found in any race that has known slavery, and the American Negro is no stranger to suffering.” Adding to this definition, a blues marker Clarence Williams says: “. . . blues, as we know them today were always written about love, someone’s baby leaving them, hard luck dogging one’s tail, and the ‘misery roun yo door’” The religious counterpart of the blues is the spirituals. Both forms are means for the slaves to give vent to their pent up feelings against their white masters. In that sense both are necessary releases for them.

You may recall that the first poetry collection of Hughes was *The Weary Blues* (1923). The title poem is an example of Hughes early use of blues in his poetry. The poem deals with a piano player in Harlem and the poem captures the essence of night life, people and folk forms. The poem has the typical call and response pattern of the blues. The speaker of the poem, the piano player, is alone but the piano talks back to him. The theme of his song is his troubles. The playing and singing, assuming the piano’s response, releases his dammed up anger against the white oppressors and thus he attains peace of mind. The poem evokes the African- American ethos in lines like these:

Sweet Blues!
Coming from a Black man's soul
O blues!

Hughes has included a set of blues poems, "Blues for Men", in his poetry collection entitled *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942). In the poem "In a Troubled Key", Hughes underscores the necessity for the Afro-American to release his pent-up emotions. The singer of the poem, who has been badly treated by his woman, sings:

Still I can't help lovin' you,
Even though you do me wrong.
Says I can't help lovin you
Though you do me wrong—
But my love might turn into a knife
Instead of to a song.

His suppressed anger and despair at the ill-treatment has been transformed into a song so that he does not indulge in any violent act.

Walder has explained the mood and the purpose of using the blues in poetry: ". . . the mood of the blues is often one step away from death—either murder or suicide—and that the presence of the blues form makes it possible for the anguished one to direct his sorrow inward into song and find happiness in the release." [On the **YouTube** you can listen to African-American singers singing blues songs.]

34.2.3 Hughes and the Black Arts Movement

The Black Arts Movement (BAM), also called the Black Aesthetics Movement was the aesthetic branch of the Black Power movement. It was called a sixties Movement. LeRoi Jones, the well-known African-American writer, started it in Harlem. According to the *Time* magazine, the Movement has been the "single most controversial moment in the history of African-American literature – possibly in American literature as a whole." Drawing inspiration from the Movement, African-Americans began to establish their own publishing houses, magazines, journals and art institutions. Universities started courses in African-American studies. The prominent figures associated with the movement include Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Maya Angelou, Hoyt W. Fuller, and Rosa Guy.

One of the important achievements of the Movement was that it revolutionized literature by bringing in the voices of the oppressed people. Before it, "the literary canon lacked diversity, and the ability to express ideas from the point of view of racial and ethnic minorities was not valued by the mainstream." Theatre groups, poetry performances, music and dance were received greater attention during the time of the Movement. Through these mediums they were able to educate the people the value of the art of the minorities, like the African Americans themselves. For propagating the worth of their literature and culture, the representatives of the Movement travelled extensively reading poetry.

James Smethurst, an Afro-American scholar, thinks that Hughes played some role in shaping the BAM. Smethurst says: "If one looks to uncover linkages between the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and the 1970s and the earlier radicalisms of the 1930s and 1940s, the work of Langston Hughes as a writer,

editor and cultural catalyst during the 1950s and 1960s is a good place to start. Not only was his writing a crucial forerunner of Black Arts poetry, drama, essays, and short fiction, but Hughes tirelessly promoted the careers of the young (and sometimes not so young) militant black arts then, providing practical, moral, and emotional support and encouragement.”

34.2.4 Hughes’ Poetic Theory

Like the poet Allen Ginsberg, about whom are you going to study in the next Unit, Langston Hughes was also influenced by some of his literary predecessors. The writers who influenced him in shaping his own theory of writing, according to Steven C. Tracy, are Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe and WEB Du Bois. Tracy argues that these writers “sought to bring to bear upon their art a humanity and a sense of freedom and justice that Hughes recognized and with which he identified and that he sought to incorporate into his twentieth-century vision of art.”

You might have noticed that one of the striking features of Hughes’ poetry is its simplicity. It is a striking point to be noted because he was a poet who lived through the High Modernist period. You might remember, perhaps, that one of the characteristics of Modernist poetry is its obscurity (consider, for e.g., the poems of TS Eliot). In spite of being an active writer in the 1920’s and 30’s, he did not make his writing difficult to understand. According to Tracy, Hughes inherited the plain style that has been there in American Literature since the publication of *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640). The style, Tracy argues, “has been synonymous with guilelessness and directness.” The tradition of plain writing continued through some of the writers who influenced Hughes. He admired Whitman for the latter’s “open and democratic” writing. The older writers included the lower classes and their dialects in their writing. Hughes was very early impressed by Mark Twain’s *Adventures of the Huckleberry Finn*, for it presented in a plain style the superiority of the African Americans as human beings in comparison with the white Americans. Twain’s use of the African-American dialect also impressed Hughes. In his works, to quote Tracy again, “Twain was experimenting with the social and linguistic resonance of dialects, as well”.

Harriet Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) also dealt with Afro-Americans’ life of bondage in America. The moral implications of the novel appealed to Hughes. “In Stowe, Hughes recognized an artist of courage and symbol who placed morality at the centre of her art and attempted to use her writing to serve the broader interests of mankind.” What drew Hughes to Du Bois was the latter’s intellect and education, integrity and commitment.

When we examine Hughes’ works, including his poems, we notice that he has derived much from these writers’ plain style and themes. But at the same time there were other influences as well. His Afro-American origin and his firsthand knowledge of the prejudice and discrimination against the black community had a part to play in the shaping of his aesthetics. His interest in the leftist ideology further contributed to his creative outlook. Again, Hughes’ interest in African-American folk culture and music was partially instrumental in shaping his art. He used his aesthetics with a purpose: to speak for the voices that have been silenced. However, his concept of literary art does not advocate hate for or violence against the white population. But it certainly argued for the unity of the racially marginalized. Steven Tracy argues: “Exploring and affirming the pan-

American component of the human experience, particularly the African American dimension of the American experiment: this was the aim Hughes's entire artistic harvest. Implicit in that affirmation was a rejection of the social and literary pretensions that divided the African American lower and upper classes, emphasizing a commonality of colonized experience that united—or should have united—darker peoples in America and around the world.”

As has already been mentioned, Hughes was a prolific writer. For your reference a select list of the important works of Langston Hughes is given below (Source: Wikipedia):

Poetry collections

[On **YouTube**, you can watch Langston Hughes reading some of his poems. For example you can hear him reading the poem “Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “Mother to Son”]

The Weary Blues (1926); *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927); *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations* (1931); *Dear Lovely Death* (1931); *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (1932); *Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play* (1932); *Let America Be America Again* (1938); *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942); *Freedom's Plow* (1943); *Fields of Wonder* (1947); *One-Way Ticket* (1949); *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951); *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1958); *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961); *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times* (1967); *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1994)

Novels and short story collections

Not Without Laughter (1930); *The Ways of White Folks* (1934); *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950); *Laughing to Keep from Crying* (1952); *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953); *Simple Stakes a Claim* (1957); *Tambourines to Glory* (1958); *The Best of Simple* (1961); *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965); *Something in Common and Other Stories* (1963)

Non-fiction books

The Big Sea (1940); *Famous American Negroes* (1954); *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956); *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*, with Milton Meltzer (1956); *Famous Negro Heroes of America* (1958); *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP* (1962)

Major plays

Mule Bone, with Zora Neale Hurston (1931); *Mulatto* 1935 (renamed *The Barrier, an opera*, in 1950); *Troubled Island*, with William Grant Still (1936); *Little Ham* (1936); *Emperor of Haiti* (1936); *Don't You Want to be Free?* (1938); *Street Scene*, contributed lyrics (1947); *Black Nativity* (1961); *Five Plays by Langston Hughes* (1963); *Jericho-Jim Crow* (1964)

Books for children

Popo and Fifina, with Arna Bontemps (1932); *The First Book of the Negroes* (1952); *The First Book of Jazz* (1954); *Marian Anderson: Famous Concert Singer*, with Steven C. Tracy (1954); *The First Book of Rhythms* (1954); *The First Book of the West Indies* (1956); *First Book of Africa* (1964)

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Read the biography of Langston Hughes given in Wikipedia and collect more information about his political views.

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- 2) Do you find any similarities between the life of Langston Hughes and the life of Alan Ginsberg? What are they?

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- 3) Do you think that the use of blues helped Hughes to write a different kind of poetry?

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34.3 THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

34.3.1 Introduction

This poem is one of the most anthologized poems of Langston Hughes. In July 1920, Hughes visited his father in Mexico. The train by which he was travelling was crossing the Mississippi River and going to St.Louis. The noisy movement of the train, the muddy water in the river and the summer clouds touched his heart in a special way. They evoked many ideas in his mind, concerning beauty and death, hope and despair. They also stirred his heart to think about the history of the Afro-Americans from its earliest times to the 19th and 20th centuries. As he travelled, Arnold Rampersad says, “A phrase came to him, then a sentence. Drawing an envelope from his pocket, he began to scribble. In a few minutes Langston had finished a poem.”Remember, he was only 17 years old when he wrote this poem. The poem was dedicated to WEB Du Bois and it first appeared in the journal *Crisis* in 1921.

The poem contains references to four rivers with which the African-American history is tied up. The rivers also evoke in the poet memories of slave trade. As

Miller points out, “The muddy Mississippi made Hughes think of the roles in human history played by the Congo, the Niger and the Nile, down whose water the early slaves once were sold. The poem also alludes to Abraham Lincoln’s historic journey down the Mississippi which was instrumental in shaping his anti-slavery attitude. Thus the poem, while expressing the Afro-Americans’ disturbing memory about their days of slavery, underscores the antiquity of their race and the depth that the Afro-American’s character attained through varied experiences over centuries. The poem may also be considered as a critique of dominant cultures that have been insensitive to human suffering.

34.3.2 The Text

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Glossary:

- The Euphrates** : It is the longest and one of the most historically important rivers of Western Asia. Together with the Tigris, it is one of the two defining rivers of Mesopotamia. Originating in eastern Turkey, the Euphrates flows through Syria and Iraq to join the Tigris in the Shatt al-Arab, which empties into the Persian Gulf.
- dawns** : here, civilizations
- the Congo** : It is a river in Africa and the world’s deepest river with measured depths in excess of 220 m (720 ft). It is the second largest river in the world by volume of water discharged. Additionally, its overall length of 4,700 km (2,920 mi) makes it the ninth longest river.
- lulled** : caused to feel sleepy
- the Nile** : is a major north-flowing river in northeastern Africa, generally regarded as the longest river in the world. It is 6,853 km (4,258 miles) long. The Nile is an “international” river as its water resources are shared by eleven countries, namely, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt.^[3] In particular, the Nile is the primary water resource and life artery for Egypt and Sudan.

- the Mississippi** : a river flowing entirely through the USA. Its length is 4070 Kms
- Abe Lincoln** : Abraham Lincoln, the American President who abolished slavery
- New Orleans** : In 1828, a teenaged Abraham Lincoln guided a flatboat down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. The adventure marked his first visit to a major city and exposed him to the nation's largest slave marketplace. It also nearly cost him his life, in a nighttime attack in the Louisiana plantation country. That trip, and a second one in 1831, would form the two longest journeys of Lincoln's life, his only visits to the Deep South, and his foremost experience in a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse urban environment.
- dusky** : dark in colour

[Explanation for references to Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile and New Orleans are partial quotations from the Wikipedia and other sources on the Internet. You can get more interesting information about them from the sources.]

34.3.3 Analysis of the Poem

The poem is a first person (singular) narrative. If the speaker 'I' in the poem is Langston Hughes himself, then the pronoun can stand for any Afro-American who shares the poet's views. The poem appears to be a proud proclamation of his race's close connection with the evolution of human history and civilization. But at the same time it hides in it the atrocities that the African race had to face over centuries.

There are references to four rivers in the poem and three of them flow through the dark/African continent. When the speaker says "I have known rivers", he is stressing the fact that the Afro-American's knowledge of rivers is different from that of any others because his life has always been closely associated with them. He doesn't say 'I know rivers' but 'have known' them. The present perfect tense indicates the Africans' long and close association with rivers. Further, the word "known" indicates his deep and firsthand knowledge of them; he does not simply know 'about' them. And these rivers, because they originated with the earth, are older than human beings ("older than the/ flow of human blood in human veins.")

The rivers mentioned in the poem are deep. But the depth can also refer to their long history of continuous flowing. The soul of the African, who too has a long history, is deep like the river; the history of his existence has been made complex through colonial experiences, dislocations and hardships.

The speaker goes on to talk about the antiquity of his race: "I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young." As you might know, Mesopotamia is considered to be the cradle of all western civilizations and it was located between the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris. The speaker of the poem argues that his ancestors existed on the banks of Euphrates, thereby implying that the African's origins can be traced back to the origins of the earliest civilizations ("dawns"). Next, the speaker refers to his race's peaceful existence on the banks of the Congo river: "I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep." The river

is presented, as Rachel DuPlessis says, “as a pastoral, nourishing, maternal setting.” For the African, the sound of the flowing river was like a lullaby.

The next river is the Nile whose name is closely associated with the history of Egyptian civilization. Egypt is also known for the Pyramids. But the Pyramids hide beneath them the toil of the Africans. The speaker subtly suggests that his people were also involved in the building of the ancient pyramids, may be as slaves or as peasants. For the monumental work granite had to be transported through the Nile and the Africans were supposedly helpful in doing the work and thus, as the speaker implies, they “raised the pyramids above it [the Nile].”

By mentioning the river Mississippi, an American river, the speaker is turning the history of the Africans to the recent times, that is, the 19th and 20th centuries. The river, unlike the previous ones, is described as “muddy.” The quiet existence of the African was disturbed when colonization and slave trade began, when his people were transported to the US by the Mississippi River. Slavery was legally accepted until, at the end of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln abolished it through his Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. His visit to New Orleans as a young man had given him a dreadful firsthand knowledge of slavery. The speaker closes the poem by asserting once again that he has known rivers and that his knowledge of them, like his experience, is deep.

34.3.4 An Appreciation

This short seemingly simple poem is a fine representation of the complex history of the African-Americans. The poet has effectively connected the history with 4 rivers. At the creation of man, the river Euphrates was one of the headwaters of the main river that flowed from the garden of Eden (Genesis 2: 10-14). While Euphrates connects the Africans to the beginning of the world and civilisation, the Nile and the pyramids suggest their not so pleasant and arduous advancement with civilization. Finally, the Mississippi connects them with the recent past in American history and their existence in the new continent as slaves till the 20th century. Over the centuries, the African has seen the rise and fall of civilizations and his surviving spirit has continued even in the US, despite colonisations and the consequent racial discrimination.

The ‘I’ in the poem is not a complaining individual but, like the ‘I’ in Whitman’s poems, a pleasant speaker for his race. He narrates the Africans’ common past. The changing of the Mississippi’s colour into golden yellow in the sunset perhaps alludes to the slaves’ freedom gained through Lincoln’s proclamation. But centuries of slavery has left indelible scars in his memory. Thus he repeats the line “My soul has grown deep like the rivers” to suggest that “he is no longer the same man who ‘bathed in the Euphrates’” or “built [his] hut near the Congo”; he is now a black man who has toiled for the building up of civilizations and has experienced the pain of slavery and racism. The imprint of these experiences in his soul has made his character deep.

It is significant that the speaker does not explicitly talk about Africans’ slavery or the pains of racism; the poem has a pleasant surface. Thus bathing in Euphrates or building the hut near the Congo can be considered as normal human activities and they indicate undisturbed life. But raising the pyramids evokes images of the African slaves’ hard work in building them (some scholars believe that Africans were made to work as slaves in the erection of the pyramids, while some do not). And the references to Abraham Lincoln and New Orleans bring to mind

American Civil War and slavery. When the poem ends, he repeats that his soul is deep, also perhaps as a result of the wisdom he has gained through his suffering.

The poet uses many poetic devices in this short poem. For instance, we notice the use of simile in the line “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.” Similarly, if we consider the speaker’s lines in their literal sense, then many of them will appear hyperbolic (“I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young” or “I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln/went down to New Orleans”). Again, the lines “I have known rivers” and “My soul has grown deep like the rivers” are used as refrains.

Self-check Exercise 2

1) Write a note on the theme of the poem.

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2) How does the poet link the history of the speaker’s race with the rivers in the poem?

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3) How is the language of the poem different from that of the other two poems?

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34.4 YOUNG GAL’S BLUES

34.4.1 Introduction

This poem has death, aging and loneliness as its themes. One cannot escape death. It evokes feelings of sadness and grief. It can also lead to the (in)significance of human existence. In this poem a young girl, after witnessing death and loneliness, is considering death as a desirable option in a world devoid

of love; she prefers death to growing old. This might sound unusual because for a young person life is full of hope and expectations. So when a young girl desires death, the cause of the desire has to be justified. This is what Hughes tries to do in this poem. Whether he is serious about the justification is something that we are going to see shortly.

34.4.2 The Text

I'm gonna walk to the graveyard
'Hind ma friend Miss Cora Lee.
Gonna walk to the graveyard
'Hind ma dear friend Cora Lee.
Cause when I'm dead some
Body'll have to walk behind me.

I'm goin' to the po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
Goin' to the po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew
When I'm old an' ugly
I'll want to see somebody too.

De po' house is lonely
An' de grave is cold.
O, de po' house is lonely,
De graveyard grave is cold.
But I'd rather be dead than
To be ugly an' old.

When love is gone what
Can a young gal do?
When love is gone, O.
What can a young gal do?
Keep on a-lovin' me, daddy,
Cause I don't wanna be blue.

Glossary:

gal	: girl
gonna	: going to
Hind	: behind
de	: the
po	: poor
gravel	: small rounded stones, often mixed with sand
wanna	: want to
blue	: feeling sadness

34.4.3 Analysis of the Poem

The opening of the poem itself is striking for it evokes thoughts about death. The young girl, the speaker of the poem, begins her song thus: "I'm gonna walk to the graveyard." At the outset the reader gets the hint that the theme of the poem could be death. She seems to be accompanying the funeral cortege of her friend

Miss Cora Lee. The reason why she is walking to the graveyard is, "...when I'm dead some/Body'll have to walk behind me."

She also says that she is visiting old Aunt Chew at the latter's poor house. Like the reason for going to the graveyard, there is a reason for visiting the old aunt: "When I'm old an' ugly/ I'll want to see somebody too."

In the third stanza we again get references to old age and death. She says Aunt Chew is lonely in her poor house and Cora lies cold in her grave. Comparing death and old age she says: "But I'd rather be dead than/To be ugly an' old." Being old means being ugly and lonely, so death is preferable.

Why does she prefer death? Perhaps because she does not seem to receive love, "love is gone". She underscores the fact that it is difficult to live without love. So she requests her dad to keep on loving her because she does not want to be sad.

34.4.4 An Appreciation

We have already seen that Langston Hughes was deeply interested in African-American folk music, especially the blues. You must have noticed that the poem we have just analysed has the word 'blues' in it. The word can mean 'feelings of sadness' but the structure and lines of the poem remind us of the folk music form called the blues. Interestingly, this poem is included in the collection *Fine Clothes to the Jews*, which contains many of Hughes blues poems.

The speaker of the poem should be an African-American woman. In order to make this clear, the poet has used certain spellings, forms of pronunciation and colloquial words typical of the African-American dialect of English. For example, look at the spellings 'ma' (my), 'de' (the) and 'Hind' (behind); similarly, note the pronunciations 'po' (poor) and 'goin' ' (going). Again, words like 'gal' and 'gonna' are examples of informal words used in speech only. Although these unusual linguistic features underline her African-American identity and dialect, her grammar is not faulty.

Let us now briefly examine how Hughes makes use of the blues in this poem. Remember, bringing the effect of blues in poetry is no easy task. According to Paul Oliver, an authority on folk music, "Blues is for singing. It is not a form of folk song that stands up particularly well when written down." So what poets do is to poetise the blues. But then there is another problem: Oliver adds, "... blues made literary read not like refined folk song but like bad poetry." Your study of the poem might have convinced you that Hughes' "Young Gal's Blues" is not a bad poem. If so, how does he succeed in blending the elements of the blues in the poem?

In David Chinitz's opinion, Hughes was interested in the blues because the music was "an expression of the resilience and tragedy of the African-American lower class." In the poem, the girl is talking of death aging and absence of love. She might be thinking of the racial discrimination practice by the white man against her people which indicates cruelty and lack of love. Death and racism are tragic subjects. However, we cannot be sure whether she is resilient.

Quoting Hughes' own words, Chinitz says: "The blues were 'sad songs' because they manifested the 'hopeless weariness' of an oppressed people; they were 'gay songs because you had to be gay or die'". The themes of "Young Gal's Blues" are really sad, for she is talking of the love that she longs to receive. In a sense, she is

representing her class of African-American girls who have suffered racial injustice and discrimination.

The structural pattern of the poem resembles that of the blues. In his “Note on Blues”, Hughes says: “The Blues . . . have a strict poetic pattern: one long line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes the second line in repetition is slightly changed and sometimes, but very seldom, it is omitted.” In order to give the shape of poetry to his blues poems he alters this pattern; he breaks the first two lines into two lines each and also divides the final line so that a stanza will have six lines. Notice that the poem we are studying has six-line stanzas. However, let us not think that all poets will compose their blues poetry in this way; each one modifies the pattern according to his poetic sensibility.

Further, Chinitz points out that many of Hughes blues poems in *Fine Clothes* are sung by women. The speaker of our poem, for example, is a girl. And the humorous element present in blues is visible in the present poem, too. The young girl talks of old age and death in the first three stanzas and in the last stanza she is lamenting the absence of love in the world. This appears humorous because she is too young and has not suffered enough to be tired of life. Yet the lines reflect the hopelessness that creeps into the mind of the young Afro-American.

This is how Langston Hughes uses the blues music in the poem. He was so careful to blend the blues elements in such a way that the poetic qualities essential to a poem are not sacrificed.

Self-check Exercise 3

1) Write a note on the language of the poem.

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2) Why does the young girl desire death?

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3) Pick out the lines repeated in the poem. Why are they repeated?

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34.5 MOTHER TO SON

34.5.1 Introduction

This is another simple poem written by Langston Hughes. It was published in his first collection of poems, *The Weary Blues*. He was only 21 when he wrote it. Here, too, Hughes uses the language of the uneducated African-American but, as Baxter Miller points out, by using it he “shows how dialect can be used with dignity.”

The title might suggest that it is a dialogue between a mother and her son. However, critics like Baxter Miller and Aidan Wasley consider it as a dramatic monologue. As in the case of the other two poems we have just studied, the speaker of this poem also is a representative figure, an Afro-American woman/mother who has struggled hard in life. The poem reveals the woman’s (Hughes’, too) optimism and her acceptance of the fact that life is a struggle and that one should not give up on life even when it is full of difficulties. Hughes passes on this idea using a striking metaphor that has significance throughout the poem.

34.5.2 The Text

Well, son, I’ll tell you:
 Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.
 It’s had tacks in it,
 And splinters,
 And boards torn up,
 And places with no carpet on the floor—
 Bare.
 But all the time
 I’ve been a-climbin’ on,
 And reachin’ landin’s,
 And turnin’ corners,
 And sometimes goin’ in the dark
 Where there ain’t been no light.
 So, boy, don’t you turn back.
 Don’t you set down on the steps.
 ’Cause you finds it’s kinder hard.
 Don’t you fall now—
 For I’ve still goin’, honey,
 I’ve still climbin’,
 And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.

Glossary:

ain’t	: am not/ is not/are not/ has not
tacks	: small sharp nails with a flat end
splinters	: small sharp broken pieces of wood, glass, etc.
landin’s	: landings; areas of floor or passage
honey	: an address showing endearment; a pleasant person
set	: sit
kinder /kinda	: kind of (a common expression in the Afro-American dialect, meaning ‘slightly’, ‘in some ways’)

34.5.3 Analysis of the Poem

The poem opens with a mother's address to her son. As mentioned earlier, the son is an imagined listener rather than one who is actually present. This imagined listener/audience makes the poem a dramatic monologue. She tells her son that (as an African-American woman), life was not easy for her; it was not a crystal stair with strong smooth steps. During her life's journey, she had to walk on sharp nails, broken and pointed substances which lay scattered on the stairs. She means to say that she had to bear experiences that pierced her heart and hurt her like sharp objects. Similarly, sometimes her walk was dangerous since the steps on the stairs were broken. She had to stop and think about ways of going ahead and her barefooted walk on the rough steps ("with no carpet") only caused pain and suffering.

After narrating these painful experiences she underwent, the mother explains how she faced them. She says they could not stop her from climbing the stairs ("I'se been a-climbin' on"), that is, from going ahead in life. There were landings for her but there were corners, too, which seemed to block her way ahead; there were occasions when she was totally without light ("And sometimes goin' in the dark"), meaning there were times she had lost all hope and future lay dark before her. But she did not stop her walk and came thus far overcoming all obstructions that were in store for her.

Having faced a tough life she is capable of advising her son:

So, boy, don't you turn back
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you find it's kinder hard

She is advising her son not to give up on life or stop going ahead just because it appears slightly hard. She encourages the son by giving her own example: even after suffering so much over the years, her struggle has not ended: she is still climbing the remaining steps of her life arduously: "And life for me ain't been no crystal stair."

34.5.4 An Appreciation

"Mother to Son" is a dramatic monologue which takes its readers to different levels of meaning. Its structure and content appears simple but it has something to tell everyone and it, probably, throws light on Hughes' apprehensions about his prospective career as a young Afro-American.

We do not know why the African-American mother is narrating her woes to her son. Perhaps the son asked her to narrate them to him; or, he must have complained about life at a frustrating moment. So the mother begins: "Well, son, I'll tell you" and begins her story of struggles. Life for her was no crystal stair, she says repeatedly.

When Hughes wrote this poem he was just beginning his career as a poet and he was an educated man, too. So he may not speak English the way the mother in the poem speaks. Then the question is, why does he make an elderly (African-American) woman his narrator? According to Aidan Wasley, "we can see the speaker of 'Mother to Son' as representing a kind of collective voice, the voice of the generations of African-Americans whose troubled history . . . 'ain't been no crystal stair.'"

That means the speaker-mother, by narrating her own story of hard struggle, is narrating the story of her race beginning from their homelands and ending in America where it still has not ended (“And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair). The African-Americans had to walk on tacks, splinters, torn up boards, etc. In the United States they had to live in narrow dirty tenement houses and fight poverty. Yet, the mother and thousands like her climbed on their difficult stairs. Their future, she tells the son and by extension to countless young African-Americans, depends on this willingness to struggle; they should not “set down on the steps” accepting defeat. Because they still have to climb, they need to be inspired by their traditional spiritual, “We shall overcome someday.” Here, it is quite desirable for the readers of the poem to take the mother’s advice for themselves.

Hughes has very effectively planted the story of the woman within a central image—the crystal stair. Wasley equates this stair with the stairway/ladder that Jacob, the Old Testament patriarch, had seen in a dream. Jacob had to run away from home to his uncle’s house to save himself from the anger of his brother, Esau, whom he had cheated. On his way, Jacob reached a place in the evening and because it was dark he slept at that place keeping a stone as pillow under his head. While sleeping he had a dream in which he saw a stairway/ladder with its foot on the earth and the top touching heaven. He also saw God’s angels walking up and down the stairs. Standing at the top God spoke to Jacob: “I am the Lord, the God . . . I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out” in all the four directions (This event in Jacob’s life is described in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, chapter 28 and verses from 10 to 15).

How can this event in Jacob’s life be related to the poem we are studying? Jacob’s descendants are the Israelites (Jews). They had to be captives in Egypt and the Pharaohs put them under slavery for many centuries. While suffering in Egypt they all the time longed for the land that God had promised Jacob. This story of Jacob was very popular among the African-Americans when they toiled in the Southern plantations before the Civil War. Like the Israelites, they were also yearning for freedom and a peaceful life in the promised land of America. As Wasley points out, “The heavenly stairway became a powerful image of liberation and salvation, attainable only through suffering and faith in God.” Wasley guesses that Hughes might “have been very familiar with the associations of Jacob’s ladder with the struggle for freedom and equality of blacks in America.” It is significant to note that one of their best-known traditional spiritual songs was “We are climbing Jacob’s ladder.” The song “speaks of climbing ‘higher and higher’ to become ‘soldiers of the Lord’” and it also exhorts the singers to “Keep on climbing, we will make it.” It ends with the question, “Children do you want your freedom?” In the context of these details, the mother in the poem attains larger significance. She is a wise woman advising her people, scattered across Northern America, to keep climbing and not to sit on the steps. The image of the crystal stair, thus, evokes “simultaneously the painful history of blacks in America while pointing to the tradition of faith and hope that has sustained them through it all.”

As mentioned earlier, we may identify the son in the poem with the poet himself. When Hughes wrote this poem he was a very young poet struggling to formulate the basis of his art. He might have been wondering whether he should write about his own people, their struggles and longing for absolute freedom in America or ignore his African roots. These problems were not easy to solve and if we read “Mother to Son” keeping in mind these issues the poet faced, then we discover

that “the poem suggests that the son’s frustration and despair is that of the poet, [who is]faced with the impossible task of writing poetry that truly speaks to and for the African-American experience.” The mother’s exhortation in the poem then attains another level of meaning. As an African-American poet, Hughes is advised to boldly accept his status as an African-American and sing of his race’s history drawing extensively from their art forms—spirituals, blues, jazz, etc. Also, see how the mother’s advice is apt to solve the poet’s dilemma: “So, boy, don’t you turn back/ Don’t you set down on the steps/’Cause you find it’s kinder hard.” She knows that his task is not easy and his poetry cannot be about a smooth crystal stair.

Again, in a very general sense we can consider the son as anybody who is tired of life’s hardships. The mother’s advice to him/her is not to accept defeat but to keep on going in the face of stiff oppositions and adverse circumstances.

In this poem, too, as in “Young Gal’s Blues”, we find the use of the African-American dialect. Words and expressions like *ain’t a-climbin’, reachin’, set down, kinder, I’s*, etc., illustrate this fact. They also point to the mother’s lack of education and her son’s difference in terms of education. The influence of the blues also is visible. Thus the poem has heavy rhythmic beats, repeating lines and the narration of the African-Americans’ sad struggle. While distinguishing the blues from the spirituals, Hughes says: “Unlike the Spirituals, the Blues are not group songs . . . they are usually sung by one man or one woman alone.” He goes on to point out that “the Blues are songs about being in the midst of trouble, friendless, hungry, disappointed in love, right here on earth.” This poem is also sung by a woman and it talks of hardships and unfavourable circumstances.

Self-check Exercise 4

- 1) What features of the dramatic monologue do you find in the poem?

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- 2) Comment on the significance of the crystal stair as a metaphor in the poem.

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- 3) Is this a poem of hope?

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34.6 LET US SUM UP

We have studied three poems by Langston Hughes. They reflect his concern for and interest in the African-American race. The first poem, “Negro Speaks of Rivers”, is an assertion of the historical antiquity of the race. The poem, through the speaker, briefly but pointedly narrates the history of the Afro-Americans from the dawn of civilizations to the 20th century. The progress of the race is associated with four rivers and it subtly reveals the losses the race had to suffer because of its dislocation from its original places.

In “Young Gal’s Blues” a young girl is discussing death, old age and the absence of love among people. Thoughts about these subjects lead her to express her desire to die rather than to live. We do not know whether Hughes wants us to take the girl seriously, for she appears to be too young to be tired of life or to think about death.

The third poem, “Mother Speaks to Son”, expresses the hope of an Afro-American woman who has suffered a lot in her life. She tells her son that life for her was not a crystal stair. The steps of the stair she had to climb during her life’s journey were not smooth. At each step she had to face some kind of hurting obstruction. But that did not deter her from going ahead in life. She is a direct contrast to the young girl in the previous poem. The present poem expresses no cynicism; it is a song of hope.

34.7 SUGGESTED READING

Some of the books on Hughes that you may refer to are:

- 1) Berry, Faith. 1983. *Langston Hughes, before and beyond Harlem*. Westport, Conn.: Hill.
- 2) Chinitz, David. 1996. “Literacy and Authenticity: The Blues Poems of Langston Hughes”, *Callaloo*, vol. 19 (1), pp. 192.
- 3) Emmanuel, James. 1967. *Langston Hughes*. New York: Twayne.
- 4) Mikolyzk, Thomas. 1990. *Langston Hughes: A Bio-Bibliography*. New York: Greenwood.
- 5) Miller, Baxter. 1989. *The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- 6) Rampersad, Arnold. 1986-1988. *The Life of Langston Hughes*. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 7) Tracy, Steven. 1988. *Langston Hughes and the Blues*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 8) Waldron, Edward. 1971. “The Blue Poetry of Langston Hughes”, *African American Review* vol. 5 (4), pp. 140-149.
- 9) Wasley, Aidan. 1998. “An Overview of ‘Mother to Son’”, in *Poetry for Students*.

34.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

All the answers given below are according to the serial numbers of the questions

Answers to the questions on Hughes' biography

- 1) This you can do on your own. Just Google 'Langston Hughes.'
- 2) The childhood of both the poets was unhappy. Hughes' mother could not take care of him properly. He did not get his father's attention. Ginsberg's mother was mentally unstable. His father was strict and traditional in outlook. Both the poets had enrolled at Columbia University and Hughes was a dropout. Both were prolific writers.
- 3) Writing poems in the pattern of the blues is not easy. Yet Hughes attempted it and could give a peculiar kind of structure and music to his blues poems. The section "Langston Huges and the blues" will help you complete this answer.

Answers to the questions on the poem "Negro Speaks of Rivers"

- 1) The poem deals with the history of the Afro-Americans in two parts and the history is skillfully linked with the names of rivers. The poem deals with the theme of the African-Americans' dislocation from their local habitats and their exploitation by the so-called advancing civilizations.
- 2) The Euphrates and the Congo rivers are associated with his peaceful life in the African continent. The Nile and the Mississippi bring in the theme of slavery and the dislocation of the African-Americans from their places of origin.
- 3) The language of the poem conforms to the spelling, grammar and usage of contemporary English. It is not written in the African-American dialect. We see the use of the dialect in the other two poems.

Answers to the questions on "Young Gal's Blues"

- 1) The poem contains spellings and words which are dialectal. For more details see the second paragraph of the section 'Analysis of the poem'.
- 2) She desires death because she is dejected by the sight of death, old age and the thought of loneliness.
- 3) The lines repeated are: 2, 7, 13, and the first two lines of the last stanza. This kind of repetition gives the poem the musical quality of a folk song in which repeating lines is a common feature. For more details, read the section on blues and the appreciation of the poem.

Answers to the questions on "Mother to Son"

- 1) A dramatic monologue appears as though there is a speaker and a listener or listeners, but there is no real listener. The speaker's words in the poem generally reveal his/her character and temperament. In Hughes' poem the son is only supposedly there and hence does not respond to his mother. So his is an imaginary presence. Also, the woman's words clearly reveal the resilience of her character.
- 2) The entire poem revolves round the metaphor of the crystal stair; we find its presence throughout the poem. It signifies life's progress, the hardships life brings and the need to climb up, rather than climb down, in the face of adversities.
- 3) Surely, this is a poem of hope. It enables one to keep hope about future even as one meets with adverse experiences in life.

UNIT 35 ALLEN GINSBERG

Structure

- 35.0 Objectives
- 35.1 Introduction
- 35.2 Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997): Biography
- 35.3 Text: ‘A Supermarket in California’
 - 35.3.1 Introduction
 - 35.3.2 The Text
 - 35.3.3 Analysis of the Poem
 - 35.3.4 Aspects of Technique
- 35.4 Text: ‘Sunflower Sutra’
 - 35.4.1 Introduction
 - 35.4.2 The Text
 - 35.4.3 Analysis of the Poem
 - 35.4.4 An Appreciation
- 35.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 35.6 Suggested Readings
- 35.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

35.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- discuss Allen Ginsberg’s life and poetics
- analyse the poem “A Supermarket in California”
- appreciate the poem “Sunflower Sutra”

35.1 INTRODUCTION

The attempt in this Unit is to give a general introduction to Allen Ginsberg—the poet, his life, poetics and important works. It helps you understand his characteristics as a man and poet. You will discover that Ginsberg’s life has a bearing on his poetry and that his career as a poet is shaped by other poets and movements. The Unit has also analysed two of this well-known poems selected from one of his earliest collections, *Howl and Other Poems*.

The first poem, “A supermarket in California”, gives a rather bleak picture of America. The speaker’s imaginary encounter with Walt Whitman in a supermarket is an event in the poem that enables him to make a critique of America and its values. The introduction of Whitman enables the speaker to think about and comment on an America that was more humane and value-based.

“Sunflower Sutra”, the second poem, gives a better vision of America and you will see in it the poet expressing his optimism about the inherent power and beauty of American society and culture. Indeed in the first half of the poem we come across the frightening vision of a thoroughly industrialized and polluted America but the horror of that vision is reversed in the latter half with a sermon of the speaker that is encouraging and edifying.

You may go through each section carefully and try to assimilate the ideas presented in it. This will help you do the exercises/tasks correctly.

35.2 ALLEN GINSBERG (1926-1997): BIOGRAPHY

Irwin Allen Ginsberg was born on 3rd June 1926 in Paterson, New Jersey. His father, Louis Ginsberg, was a high school teacher and an old fashioned and modestly successful poet. Very early in his life Ginsberg's father instructed him in writing poetry which was mostly old-fashioned. It took quite some time for Allen to get out of his father's poetic influence and start experimenting with techniques and themes. According to John Tytell, under Louis' influence, Ginsberg "was imitating Renaissance forms with an ornate, overstylized language that was often woodenly lifeless. When Louis Ginsberg criticized the inadequacies of these early attempts, he also discouraged any tendencies toward experimentation." The poetic qualities that Louis upheld included caution, reserve, moderation and pragmatic realism.

Right from her early adulthood, Ginsberg's mother, Naomi, was mentally unstable and had to be in psychiatric asylums frequently. She was a Russian émigré and a communist. Because of her frequent mental illness Ginsberg had to remain with her when he was supposed to be at school. She feared assassination and believed that her mother-in-law would poison her. Her schizophrenia drove her into such desperate hallucinations that she believed that President Roosevelt placed wires in the ceilings and even in her brain to spy her. There were occasions when she could not recognize her own son, Ginsberg. She died at the Pilgrim State Mental Hospital on Long Island in 1956. Paraphrasing John Clellon Holmes' opinion, Tytell says: ". . . Ginsberg's relationship with his mother was the source of his wound, the axis around which his madness, homosexuality, and poet-nature all revolved." Ginsberg's poem "Kaddish" is an elegy on the suffering of his mother as a mad woman and it was a bold thematic experiment in that it was not a complete eulogy; it revealed "Naomi's negative qualities" as well.

After his schooling in Paterson Ginsberg moved on to Columbia University to study law but was expelled for writing obscene lines on the dust accumulated on the window of his dormitory room. He was readmitted to Columbia University after a few months on producing a letter from a psychiatrist. He returned as an English Major student and graduated from the university in 1948. During this time at Columbia, Ginsberg was also making friends with people like Lucien Carr, Herbert Huncke, David Kramerer, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady and many others. After graduating from Columbia, Ginsberg did many jobs – dishwasher at Bickford's Cafeteria, Book reviewer for Newsweek Market research Consultant, reporter for a labour newspaper in New Ark.

As a young man who had lived through World War II, Ginsberg had his own ideas about history. He felt that till 1948 it was possible for his generation to think about God, country, war against Hitler, etc. But the terribly destructive War brought with it disillusionment and despair. America represented the 'System' where anarchy was the law. For young people like Ginsberg, Louis Simpson quotes him, the country was

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and
unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under
the stairways! Boys sobbing in arms! Old men
weeping in the parks.

Those who couldn't be one with the system turned "into hipsters, hopheads, and poets."

As mentioned earlier, Ginsberg had started writing poems very early in his life under his father's influence. His study of the New Critics at Columbia, however, did not help him evolve his own poetics. It took a long time for him to break away from influences and imitations and to discover his own poetic style. There were a couple of poets who influenced him in positive ways.

One of the earliest poetic influences on William Ginsberg was William Blake. In fact in 1948, he had a "Blake vision", says Thomas Merrill, "that oriented the spiritual and vocational direction of his life for the next fifteen years." The vision occurred when he was going through a sense of isolation and worthlessness. Tytell describes the experience thus:

One day he was relaxing in bed, reading Blake . . . and as he came he experienced a sweepingly blissful revelation. He saw "Ah-Sunflower" [Blake's poem], the poem over which he had been musing, as a manifestation of the universe freed from body, that is, as a psychospiritual transportation, a departure from corporeal awareness that allowed ineffably ecstatic energies to pervade his consciousness—something between what Buddhists might call Nirvana and the "terrible beauty" of Yeats' "Easter 1916". Simultaneously, he heard a deep, grave voice sounding like "tender rock" reciting "Ah!Sun-Flower," and a few moments later "The Sick Rose."Hearing these lyrics of mutability rendered through no apparent physical agency that Ginsberg could perceive shocked him out of his torpor, the lethargy caused by refusing to end a phase of his life. Catalyzed to the vitality of the universe, he would now see his own poetic attempts as part of a tradition of magic prophecy.

Ginsberg was careful enough to lead a normal life after this vision lest he should be branded as a mad man. Eventually, he understood the revelation in psychological terms. Tytell believes that Ginsberg's social concern in his life and poetry is an outcome of the Blake vision. As it was for Blake, for Ginsberg too poetry was a transforming power. In a poem like "September On Jessore Road" Ginsberg has used Blake's early metrical devices.

Another writer who strongly influenced Ginsberg was the American poet William Carlos Williams. Williams "had a long and abiding prosodic influence on Ginsberg", says Merrill. Some of the earlier poems of Ginsberg was corrected by Williams, especially those included in *The Gates of Wrath* and *Empty Mirror*. While still a student at Columbia, Ginsberg attended a poetry reading session of the poet at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. As a student Ginsberg had been imitating Marvel and the English Romantic poets. In New York he heard Williams ending his poem "The Clouds" in mid-sentence. That was a revealing experience for Ginsberg, for Williams was writing poems the way he [Williams] talked. For Ginsberg, Simpson quotes, Williams' reading of the poem "was like a revelation of absolute common sense in my entire universe of complete bullshit!" Later, Ginsberg sent some of his early poems (like "Ode to the Setting Sun", "Ode to Judgement", etc), to Williams which were all imitations of Marvel, Blake, etc. When he returned the poems, Williams made a comment: "In this mode, perfection is basic, and these are not perfect."

In the days to come, Ginsberg and Williams discussed metre and rhythm of poetry. According to Simpson, these discussions worked. Ginsberg now realized

that anything can be the subject of poetry. In “Paterson” (1949), we notice the emergence of the original Ginsberg:

What do I want in these rooms papered with vision of money?
 How much can I make by cutting my hair? If I put new heels on
 my shoes . . .
 what war I enter and for what a prize! The dead prick of
 commonplace obsession
 harridan vision of electricity at night and daylight misery of
 thumb-sucking rage. . . rage

The long lines clearly indicate that Ginsberg was not simply imitating Williams, who preferred short lines. The lines further show their affinity to those of Walt Whitman, who had been an early influence on Ginsberg. It was his high school teacher Francis Durbin who had introduced Whitman to him. At that point of time, Ginsberg says, “I . . . was lonesome; but I first read Whitman there.” For Ginsberg, Whitman was “a vast mountain so big . . .”

In his poetry collections *Planet news* (1968) and *The Fall of America* (1972) Ginsberg uses a travelogue style even as they contained descriptions of the American Continent. According to Helen Vendler, the collections constitute “the largest attempt since Whitman to encompass the enormous geographical and political reality of United States.”

Ginsberg and the Beat movement: Ginsberg’s name is often associated with the Beat movement, of which he too was a founder member, the others being Jack Kerouac, Lucien Carr, David Kammerer, William S. Burroughs, Hal Chase and Herbert Huncke. The origins of the Beat movement may be traced to Columbia University where it took shape in the meetings of the people mentioned above. It was in the summer of 1948 that Ginsberg, who was then living in an apartment in Harlem, was introduced to the word ‘beat’ by Huncke . The word meant “exhausted, out of it and therefore blessed.” The phrase ‘Beat Generation’ was coined by Kerouac. The beatniks became popular poets in the 1950’s and the common features that characterized them include rejection of commonly accepted standards, innovations in style, use of drugs, homosexual relationship, interest in Eastern religions, scorn for materialism and a direct treatment of the human condition.

The beatniks did not acknowledge any external social authority but obeyed an inner authority. The so-called ‘civilized’ life that modern society promoted, according to them, was an immense lie because of the gap existed in it between the self and neighbor. Dissociating themselves from such a society they tried to maintain an interpersonal fidelity.

Zen Buddhism was of particular interest to them because of the concept of holiness in it: “Every impulse of the soul, the psyche, and the heart was one of holiness. Everything was holy if understood as such” In Zen Buddhism, evil is not antithetical to good; they are two sides of the same coin. One has to accept both, rather than accepting one and denouncing the other. Human beings are called so because of the presence of good and evil in them. Zen supports ‘natural humanity’ which is often suppressed by an artificial ideal. What the Beat writers attempted in their works was to deal with this natural humanity. What society branded as immoral and vulgar were the true and intimate aspects of a human being’s life: “Many beat writers, especially Ginsberg, flaunt their most intimate acts and feelings—masturbation, sodomy, drug addiction, erotic dreams—in

aggressively explicit street language. . . . To the beats such expression is the denial of shame itself, a manifesto that nothing human or personal can be degrading.” Some of them, like Ginsberg and Kerouac, have claimed religious illumination.

A close study of Ginsberg’s life and poetic career will show that he was a typical member of the Beat group. He questioned accepted ideals; his poetic style, as we will see shortly, was different from that of the other writers of his time; he experimented with drugs because he felt drugs helped him get out of stereotype feelings and to closely identify with other human beings and with nature. Quoting Tytell, Louis Simpson says: “Generally . . . Ginsberg used drugs as an aid to ‘releasing blocked aspects of his consciousness which are expressed in his poetry, like the Moloch vision in “Howl”, which was induced by peyote, or “Kaddish”, written while using amphetamines.”” As we have already seen, Ginsberg was a homosexual and was deeply interested in Eastern religions (in the following section we will see more about this); he was not materialistic, for as late as 1980’s, Merrill says, he lived “in modest style in his \$260-a-month tenement apartment on the lower East Side of Manhattan.” He did not use flowery or highly figurative language in his poetry; rather, one finds themes being treated in a direct, raw manner. We shall see that, too, in another section.

Ginsberg and India: By 1961, Ginsberg’s reputation — notoriety, too, with the publication of *Howl*— as a poet had grown internationally and that year he visited many European and Eastern countries like India and Japan. His Buddhist belief became firmer during this visit to India and the visit has been documented in his *Indian Journals: March 1962-May 1963*. During his sojourn in India (with his homosexual friend Peter Orlovsky) he visited the sadhus in Benares and the Krittibas, young rebel poets of Calcutta led by Sunil Gangopadhyay, and funeral ghats where he meditated on life and death. Krittibas poets attracted Ginsberg’s attention because he found his own past in their outrageousness and genius. Ginsberg visited India again in 1971, especially West Bengal in the aftermath of a flood and famine there, which resulted in the writing of the long poem “September on Jessore Road.”

According to Thomas Merrill, the stay in India in 1961 “was a decisive point in Ginsberg’s spiritual development, for it marked his abandonment of the gods, devils and angels that had haunted his visions since the Harlem Blake Experience fifteen years before.” This giving up of the divine was indeed a great change because the conversion was from his theistic Judaeo-Christian belief to non-theistic Buddhism. About the effect of this spiritual conversion, Ginsberg said: “at present as Buddhist I see an awakened emptiness (*shunyata*) as the crucial term. No God, no Self, not even Whitman’s universal Self.” Ginsberg became a Buddhist formally in 1972.

Ginsberg’s poetics: When he began writing his poems, Ginsberg’s guide was his father. Then he was under the influence of Blake, William Carlos Williams and Walt Whitman. Although he liked the three renowned poets, it will be unfair to say that he was blindly imitating them. He might have displayed his interest in Whitman’s prose rhythm, but that has not affected the younger poet’s originality. It took him some time to develop his own writing style and his association with the Beat movement certainly helped him evolve his own poetics.

Unlike many of the poets of his and previous times, Ginsberg was skeptical of reason in poetry. Reason was often referred to as ‘tyrant’ in his writings. What he

has attempted to do in his poetry is to give a balanced view of modern human experience by minimizing the interference of reason. His attempt was to:

live
in the physical world
moment to moment
I must write down
every recurring thought
stop every beating second

The poet is represented here as a divine recorder, capturing with his sensory perceptions what is in front of him at the time of writing. Merrill summarises this process thus: “The physical world is the writer’s sounding board and his heartbeat strikes against it so as to produce recurring thought . . . what is suggested . . . is the concept of the poet as diarist . . . “ Let us remember that a diary note is not written according to any particular form. It is the recording of a train of thoughts or events that pass through the mind or before the eyes. Such dairy notes are frank, authentic and unpretentious.

For Ginsberg, form is “never more than an extension of content.” When poetry is written in this way it reflects reality itself, it is not a mere description of reality. Being self-conscious while depicting reality in poetry has its drawbacks. According to him, he writes in the *Indian Journals*, “the problem is to write Poetry . . . which sounds natural, not self conscious.”

Throughout his life Ginsberg was a champion of free speech and his open discussion of sexual themes in his poetry and elsewhere underlines this fact. He was a spokesperson for gay rights; he was a communist and visited communist countries like Russia and China. He lived dangerously clinging to the ideas he believed in. Ginsberg died on 5 April 1997 in New York. Some of his major works are:

Howl and Other Poems (1956); *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1961); *Empty Mirror: Early Poems* (1961); *Reality Sandwiches* (1963); *Planet News* (1971); *The Gates of Wrath: Rhymed Poems 1948-1951* (1972)

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Read the biography of Allen Ginsberg given in Wikipedia and collect more information about his poetic style and technique, his social and political activism and his final years.

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- 2) Do you think that Ginsberg would have been a more successful poet if he had followed his father’s advice one how to write poetry? Why?

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- 3) Can you write down the names of some poets (you have studied about) who were influenced by other poets?

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35.3 A SUPERMARKET IN CALIFORNIA

35.3.1 Introduction

Ginsberg wrote this poem in 1955 when he was residing in California. It appeared in his celebrated and controversial collection *Howl and Other Poems*. In this collection we find Ginsberg experimenting with long lines which may be called Whitmanesque. Quite significantly, Walt Whitman appears in this poem as the chief character. This experimentation with line has found its full expression in the title poem “Howl”. The poem manifests Ginsberg’s characteristic style of writing.

“A Supermarket in California” is an ode to Whitman while it also indicates the prospective themes that Ginsberg is to deal with in his poetry. Whitman was unconventional in life as well as in writing. He violated accepted notions of metered lines, structure and themes. Being influenced by the Romantics, Whitman had a special liking for nature and its innocence. Living in the 19th century he had witnessed nature’s slow destruction with the advancement of industrialization in America. He advocated freedom, both physical and spiritual. Consequently, they became two important themes in his poetry. What we find in Ginsberg’s poetry is a more advanced treatment of the themes, for he lived in the 20th century during which period Whitman’s anxieties about the ill-effects of industrialization had attained astounding proportions. False standards of morality also had become disgusting. When he published *Howl and Other Poems* in the 1950’s, he had to face ‘obscenity trial’. The imminent loss of essential American culture and society had been a major concern in Whitman’s poetry and it finds fuller expression in the writings of Ginsberg. In short, Whitman’s thematic and stylistic influence on Ginsberg’s poetry is significant, but this in no way means that the latter was not an original poet.

35.3.2 The Text

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for
I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache
self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went
into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families
shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the
avocados, babies in the tomatoes!—and you, Garcia Lorca, what
were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery
boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the
pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans
following you, and followed in my imagination by the store
detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our
solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen
delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in
an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the
supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The
trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be
lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love
past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher,
what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and
you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat
disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

Berkeley, 1955

Glossary:

fatigue	: a feeling of tiredness
penumbras	: areas of light shadows
avocados	: green pear-shaped fruit
artichokes	: round green vegetables that have fleshy leaves arranged like the petals of a flower. Each leaf can be removed and the fleshy bottom part of it eaten
odyssey	: a long exciting journey on which a lot of things happen
driveway	: a piece of hard ground that leads from the road to a person's garage or front door

35.3.3 Analysis of the Poem

Like an ode, the poem opens with an address in which the speaker (the speaker can be the poet himself. According to Thomas Merrill, "As with no other poet, Ginsberg's poems are his most comprehensive and intimate biography. Little is left out.") invokes the name of Walt Whitman. The speaker's mind has thoughts about Whitman and he is talking to the older poet (who died in 1892). At the beginning of the poem we see the speaker walking on a moonlit night down the

side streets of California. Physically he is uncomfortable; he is fatigued and has a headache. Psychologically, too, he seems to be downcast, for he is dreaming of Whitman's "enumerations" and is in search of "images." His search leads him to a "neon/ fruit supermarket." Let us recall that Whitman's poetry contains long lists (enumerations) of people, objects, events and phenomena.

The speaker to find something organic in the supermarket but the phrase 'neon (a chemical element that reacts with nothing) fruit supermarket' seems to invalidate the hope. In a sense the speaker is going back to the past, history represented in Whitman, seeking answers for the economic and social maladies the modern world has thrown up. As he enters the supermarket he is forced to exclaim, "What peaches and what penumbras!" 'Peach' is a fruit but 'penumbra' is an area of shadow. That is to say, although the fruit and vegetables displayed in the supermarket are organic and seem to symbolize nature and domestic life, beneath them lurk secrets (shadow); beneath the displays of nature and domesticity there are dark secrets which are the harsh realities that industrialization has brought with it. The speaker further refers to families — husbands, wives and babies — who are "shopping at night." The word "night" further deepens the meaning implied in the word 'penumbras.' The first stanza ends addressing Garcia Lorca, a Spanish leftist poet and an admirer of Whitman.

The speaker enters the supermarket with thoughts about Whitman but now, in the second stanza, we see his imaginary encounter with Whitman. He says: "I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking/among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys." Unlike the families described in the previous stanza, Whitman is alone and childless. The expressions 'poking among the meats' and 'eyeing the grocery boys' seem to have sexual connotations and sexual motifs were not unusual in Whitman's poetry. In fact, he allegedly had homosexual interests. Interestingly, Lorca too had similar interests. The questions that Whitman asks in the middle of the stanzas seem to denote the closeness and familiarity that existed between people during his time. In his time people could ask about the details of the food items they bought and the sellers could also answer questions like, "Who killed the pork chops?/ What price bananas?" However, in Ginsberg's supermarket such questions need not be asked and even if they are asked the storekeeper or salespersons don't seem to know the answers. The customers there mechanically collect their goods and exit. It is a place where human emotions of friendship, warmth and concern are totally absent. Another terrible outcome of industrialization! The supermarket is a society that is devoid of humanity.

Yet Whitman seems to offer the speaker the vision of a way of life that has beauty and that goes beyond the drabness of mass commodities. The speaker follows Whitman everywhere in the supermarket and in the company of the latter the former tastes "artichokes" and possesses "every frozen delicacy". The line "We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy" is significant in that the speaker and Whitman can form a company that is based on a sense freedom and love and bond, something the other customers in the supermarket are unable to enjoy. In other words, the poet and the speaker manifest their sense of freedom by secretly tasting the artichokes without paying for them, "never passing the cashier." It is a kind of life resembling the natural world which Whitman has always glorified in his poetry. The speaker and Whitman appear to be unaffected and are beyond the expectations of a highly commercialized supermarket where cash, payment, profit, loss, etc., are valued dearly.

However, the third and the final stanza breaks this brief moment of togetherness and freedom. The stanza begins with the speaker's question: "Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour." The speaker has to leave the supermarket before its doors are closed and with that, he realizes, his imaginary association with Whitman will end. The beautiful way of life that his imaginary company with Whitman provided him in the supermarket, the pleasure of unfettered/secret enjoyment, now appears unrealistic. What the speaker has to confront outside the supermarket is the modern world of mass culture, competition and commoditization of human beings. Everything is for sale and has a price to be paid. He now considers his 'odyssey' to the supermarket "absurd". Whitman's vision of a natural world/society and natural man seems to be impractical in the modern industrialized world. Their stroll through silent streets outside the supermarket will only lead them to loneliness. The stark realities of a highly industrialized modern society prevent them from dreaming of the lost America of love, where they could be happy in their silent cottage. The symbols of the consumer society — blue automobiles and driveways — will remind them of the strictly compartmentalized, conformist and coldly formal life of modern nuclear families. The members of these families cannot think of an experience with a dead poet who was a visionary. His America was based on love and it had not become totally consumerist.

In the last four lines of the poem the speaker compares America to Hades, the mythological land of the dead. In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman who would carry the dead in his boat across the river Styx to their final abode in the Underworld. The closing lines of the poem seem to imply that Whitman's journey to eternity in the boat was incomplete, for "Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a / smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of/ Lethe." (Lethe is one of the five rivers of Hades. If one drank its water one passes into total oblivion). The moderns, victims of capitalism and consumerism, about which Whitman had predicted long ago, have forgotten him. He is left stranded on a smoking bank and is a forgotten hero. The old world that the poet, "courage teacher", sang about has lost its significance in a consumerist society.

35.3.4 Aspects of Technique

Ginsberg is known for his use of the free verse form in his poetry. Often his lines resemble those of Walt Whitman for whom he had great admiration. As in the case of Whitman's poetry, Ginsberg's poetic works also do not conform to the structural forms of poetry like the sonnet or the ode. In other words, he is less concerned about pure metrical compositions.

"A Supermarket in California" begins with an apostrophe or a direct address (Whitman) which is a characteristic feature of an ode. However, it does not have all the properties of an ode, especially its metrical features and stanza form. Yet the poem has its own rhythmic pattern close to prose rhythms. The long lines in "Supermarket" remind one of Whitman's lines in such poems as "Song of Myself" or "A Passage to India". Whitman also dealt with unconventional themes and Ginsberg's poem is also unconventional with its liberal treatment of sexuality.

Whether the poem "A Supermarket in California" contains autobiographical elements or not may be debatable. However, it is a fact that Ginsberg stayed in Berkeley, California, for nearly two years and the two poems prescribed for you were written during that period. Like the New Critics we may say that the poet's

biography is rather irrelevant while studying a poem and in that sense the poem has a speaker and that may not be the poet. Yet one might find some resemblances between the speaker and the poet and hence one might find the point of view of the poem as the poet's as well. The fact that the speaker's companion in the poem is none other than Whitman points to Ginsberg's entry into it. Similarly, as already mentioned, the unconventional subject of his poem, a supermarket, underlines his predilection for Whitman. Whitman's style of enumerating objects and events is a characteristic feature of Ginsberg's writing, too. The appearance of Garcia Lorca in the poem and his involvement with communist ideology may be related to Ginsberg's leftist leanings which he inherited from his mother. Let us also recall that Whitman and Lorca were allegedly homosexuals while Ginsberg was explicitly so. In "Supermarket" we find Ginsberg using sexually-charged expressions while explicitly talking of Whitman.

At a glance, the supermarket may easily be identified as the poem's setting, yet as we finish reading the poem we notice that the poem begins and ends on the street. Inside the supermarket there are vegetables and people including families and they are seen under the glare of neon lights. Outside there is "the full moon", of course, but the reader cannot ignore the references to night and shade. The joy that people find under the artificial neon lights is transient, while outside the supermarket nights of uncertainties are awaiting (the series of questions beginning with, "Where are we going, Walt Whitman" and the image of Whitman stranded on a smoke bank illustrate this fact). It is also noteworthy that there are punctuations of wonder (exclamation marks) in the first stanza which become questions in the second and third stanzas. Proper punctuation marks to convey life's uncertainties!

As has already been noted, the immediate setting of the poem is the supermarket but its location is in California, a sprawling city. Further, towards the end, there occur thoughts about a lost America and the reader is made to travel with the speaker from the particular (the supermarket and California) to the general, thereby implying that the supermarket is a microcosm of the American consumerist society that has become "the lost America of love."

The speaker enters the supermarket not to buy anything, it appears, but to shop for images. Yes he suffers from "hungry fatigue" but his purpose is to be inspired by the supermarket which, he seems to think, has become a mini version of the consumerist American society. Indeed his visit appears to be successful, for the poem is full of images that adequately characterized Ginsberg's America. His imaginary encounter with Whitman provides him the occasion to think of the lost values of his country.

This is evident in the fact that inside the supermarket the speaker and Whitman form a society of their own which is in direct contrast with the discipline of that place which involves buying, paying bills, etc. With Whitman, the speaker is able to violate, briefly, of course, the norms of the supermarket society and celebrate their freedom: "We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy/ tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy and never passing the cashier." Further, Whitman's activities in the supermarket, with homosexual overtones ("eyeing the grocery boys", "poking among the meats", etc.), are man's natural instincts that are stifled by a society that pays only lip service to morality. Sexual freedom is something that the Beat poets valued and the poem is also an example of Ginsberg's Beat attitude.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Can you prepare list of the objects that Ginsberg gives in the poem?

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2) What is the main theme of the poem?

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3) What can you say about the stanza form of the poem?

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4) Pick out any two images/symbols from the poem and briefly state their significance

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35.4 SUNFLOWER SUTRA

35.4.1 Introduction

The poem is essentially the description of a sunflower which has withered in a very badly polluted locale. In it Ginsberg uses a number of words and phrases that describe the devastating encroachment of industrialization upon what is natural. The first part of the poems describes the destruction of the flower but the closing is a contrast; the flower, although withered, is not a symbol of helplessness or powerlessness. The poet wants his readers, along with the characters in the poems, to understand the fact that nothing/no individual is so

helpless as to be wiped out by destructive agencies. The essential spirit of all living things and beings has the power to withstand all forms of physical/materialistic onslaught

35.4.2 The Text

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and sat down under the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron pole, companion, we thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed, surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery.

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sank on top of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those mounts, just ourselves rheumy-eyed and hungover like old bums on the riverbank, tired and wily.

Look at the Sunflower, he said, there was a dead gray shadow against the sky, big as a man, sitting dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust—
—I rushed up enchanted—it was my first sunflower, memories of Blake—my visions—Harlem and Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes Greasy Sandwiches, dead baby carriages, black treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded, the poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel knives, nothing stainless, only the dank muck and the razor-sharp artifacts passing into the past—
and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset, crackly bleak and dusty with the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye—
corolla of bleary spikes pushed down and broken like a battered crown, seeds fallen out of its face, soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air, sunrays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried wire spiderweb,
leaves stuck out like arms out of the stem, gestures from the sawdust root, broke pieces of plaster fallen out of the black twigs, a dead fly in its ear, Unholy battered old thing you were, my sunflower O my soul, I loved you then!
The grime was no man's grime but death and human locomotives,
all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad skin, that smog of cheek, that eyelid of black mis'ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuberance of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—modern—all that civilization spotting your

crazy golden crown—
and those blear thoughts of death and dusty loveless
eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the
home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar
bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards
of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely
tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what
more could I name, the smoked ashes of some
cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the
milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs
& sphincters of dynamos—all these
entangled in your mummied roots—and you there
standing before me in the sunset, all your glory
in your form!

A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect excellent
lovely sunflower existence! a sweet natural eye
to the new hip moon, woke up alive and excited
grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden
monthly breeze!

How many flies buzzed round you innocent of your
grime, while you cursed the heavens of the
railroad and your flower soul?

Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a
flower? when did you look at your skin and
decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive?
the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and
shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?
You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a
sunflower!

And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me
not!

So I grabbed up the skeleton thick sunflower and stuck
it at my side like a scepter,
and deliver my sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul
too, and anyone who'll listen,
—We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread
bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all
beautiful golden sunflowers inside, we're blessed
by our own seed & golden hairy naked
accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black
formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our
eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive
riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening
sitdown vision.

Allen Ginsberg
Berkeley, 1955

Glossary:

- tincan** : a metal container in which food, drink or paint is put
box house : houses which look like boxes, without enough space inside
gnarled : twisted and oddly shaped
rheumy-eyed : having moist and watery eyes

- bums** : persons having no permanent home or job
- clanking** : producing a sound like the noise we hear when metal objects bang together
- treadless tires** : tyres without the pattern of grooves on it that stop them slipping
- unretreaded** : (of a tyre) which has not been given a new outer surface
- dank** : unpleasantly damp and cold
- muck** : dirt or unpleasant substance
- crackly** : making a lot of short harsh noises
- smut** : dirt such as soot which makes a dirty mark on something
- obliterated** : destroyed completely
- grime** : dirt which has collected on the surface of something
- phallus** : male sex organ
- protuberance** : a rounded part that sticks out from the surface of something
- innards** : here, the parts inside the car (the word means the organs inside the body of a person or animal)
- wheelbarrow** : a small cart with one wheel and handles that is used for carrying things in the garden, etc.
- sphincters** : rings of muscle that surround an opening to the body and that can tighten to close this opening
- hip** : bright red (from the word 'rosehip')
- specter/spectre (Br E)**: a ghost; something frightening
- scepter/scepter (Br E)**: an ornamental rod that a king/queen carries on ceremonial occasions as a symbol of power

35.4.3 Analysis of the Poem

Ginsberg wrote "Sunflower Sutra", too, at Berkeley, California. The poem contains some of his frequently dealt with themes. The devastation of the American landscape by the encroachments of modern industrialized society constitutes the central idea of the poem. However, while a poem like "America" ends on a pessimistic note, "Sunflower Sutra" ends on a positive note; it ends with the speaker's assertion that he will preach a sermon to himself, Kerouac and, significantly, to "anyone who'll listen."

When the poem opens we find its speaker (Ginsberg?) sitting "under the huge shade of a Southern/ Pacific locomotive." He is watching "the sunset /over the box house hills." The view should give him joy but watching it in the presence of an ugly urban landscape only makes him cry. The speaker is not all alone; Jack Kerouac also is sitting beside him. They are alike in their thoughts and feelings: "we thought the same thoughts/ of the soul, bleak and blue and sad eyed..."

They cannot enjoy the beauty of the sunset because they are surrounded by objects ("the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery") that are symbolic of ruthless urbanization. In Romantic poetry we come across sunset, hills, trees, etc. which are objects of pure beauty and joy, but here they have lost their charm in the context of an ugly urbanized landscape. The image of trees presented in lines

8-9 does not evoke any organic feeling in the readers; the image is presented to underline the ugly mechanization of America. The speaker and Kerouac, thus, are “surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of/ machinery.”

In the next lines the ill effects of industrialization is depicted. The water in the river has become oily, perhaps because of the industrial waste flushed into it. Fish cannot live in it. The mountains that overlook San Francisco cannot be the peaceful abode of a hermit who wants to cut himself off from the buzz of the city. Even the mountain landscape appears to have been encroached upon. The speaker and Kerouac watch this bleak landscape. They describe themselves as “rheumy-eyed and hungover like old bums/ on the river bank, tired and wily.” They don’t seem to have any escape from this terribly mechanized society; while hating it they have to be a part of it, too.

It is at this moment Kerouac tells the speaker, “Look at the Sunflower.” The speaker could not imagine the presence of a sunflower in that polluted environment. Unable to believe such a presence, he sees the flower as something unnatural,” a dead grey shadow . . . big as a man.” As he rushes up to see it, memories well up in him about his auditory vision of Blake (while reading the poem “Ah! Sunflower”) followed by his life in New York:

It was my first sunflower, memories of Blake. . . . past

The objects described in these lines are hideous symbols of urbanization, mechanization and industrialization and New York happens to be the most urbanized city.

The Sunflower that Kerouac shows, which should have revived the speaker’s spirit, has no charm since the vicious and polluted environment surrounding it has destroyed its beauty:

and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset,
crackly, bleak and dusty with the smut and smog
and smoke of olden locomotive in its eye.

In the subsequent description the personified flower is not presented as something beautiful but as something that has been destroyed chemically. It looks like a “battered crown”; the seeds in it have fallen off and the dried leaves of the plant stick out of the stem like arms. In short the flower, and the plant on which it stands, is not an object of beauty but an object made ugly and mercilessly devastated by industrial waste.

In the lines that follow (line 41 onwards) the speaker lists the pollutants that have caused the destruction of each part of the personified flower:

all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad
skin, that smog of cheek, that eyelid of black
mis’ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuberance
of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—
modern—all that civilization spotting your
crazy golden crown

In another listing of objects, with obvious sexual overtones, the speaker makes it clear that the plant has not been growing from a layer of natural soil but from the home-pile of sand and sawdust; its roots were entangled in the skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars, etc. Ginsberg uses

these sexual images to express, as a Beat poet, his anger at a mechanized urban society that has hardly any respect for what is beautiful and artistic.

Having described its pitiable and ugly existence, in the last thirty odd lines, the speaker expresses his admiration for the sunflower. He is rather reluctant to acknowledge that any kind of industrial invasion can destroy what is beautiful, organic, original and artistic:

and you there
 standing before me in the sunset, all your glory
 in your form!
 A perfect beauty of a sunflower! A perfect excellent
 lovely sunflower existence! A sweet natural eye
 to the new hip moon, woke up alive and excited
 grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden
 monthly breeze!

The speaker has reasons for refusing to accept the disfigurement of the flower. According to him, the flower has inherent beauty and strength that can withstand all attacks on it. Once again the personification of the flower is made prominent. Although the flower is covered with grime, “many flies buzzed round” it. The speaker’s objection is that the flower does not assert its beauty and strength as Sunflower; it has been cursing the destructive external force and itself:

How many flies buzzed round you innocent of your
 grime, while you cursed the heavens of the
 railroad and your flower soul?

The speaker exhorts it not to forget its original identity as a sunflower and not to consider itself a locomotive, the very cause of its, and America’s, destruction:

Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a
 flower? when did you look at your skin and
 decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive?
 the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and
 shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?

The frequent references to the ‘locomotive’ in the poem have special significance in American history. When it was first introduced, nobody thought that the industrialization process it signalled would have such terrible impact upon the American landscape. Thus even Whitman, an ideal poet for Ginsberg, sang in praise of its arrival in his “A Passage to India.” He thought it would connect people across America and would be a means to witness America’s varied landscape. So he sang:

I see over my own continent the Pacific Railroad, surmounting every
 barrier;
 I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte, carrying freight
 and passengers;
 I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-
 whistle,
 I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the
 world.. .
 Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel
 Tying the Eastern to the Western sea. . .

The destructive impact of the locomotive is now manifested in the crass industrialization and the all-encompassing pollution of the landscape. Thus, even Ginsberg's personified sunflower decides to think of itself as "an impotent dirty old locomotive/ or the ghost of a locomotive."

However, the speaker's present attempt is to revive the withered spirit of the flower and instilling in it enough faith to assert its beauty and power. With this intention he makes a clear distinction between what is beautiful and what is despicable:

You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a
sunflower!
And you locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not!

With this address he picks up the battered, "skeleton thick" sunflower and keeps it by his "side like a scepter"—a symbol of power.

The final section of the poem (the last 9 lines) is the speaker's sermon to himself, Kerouac "and anyone who'll listen." Once again the locomotive and sunflower are used as powerful symbols. The locomotive (industrialization), the speaker exhorts, certainly has had its annihilating impact on the sunflower (beauty/art), but the damage is only external; beneath the layers of grime the flower has its original beauty and strength that are inviolable. It is significant that the poet is using the second person (inclusive) pronoun 'we', giving his sermon a kind of universal significance in the whole of America, perhaps even outside it. The process of industrialization may take frightening proportions but the spirit of America handed down over centuries remains invincible:

We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread
bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all
beautiful golden sunflowers inside, we're blessed
by our own seed and golden hairy naked
accomplishment. . .

Human beings cannot be made up of industrial waste, the covetousness of the corporate world or the violence of war. The spirit of America and every American is a sunflower.

35.4.4 An Appreciation

The word 'Sutra' in the title of the poem is significant. 'Sutra' is a Buddhist form of literature. This kind of literature contains works whose contents are a string of aphorisms. An aphorism, as you may be aware, is a short phrase or line that says something true or wise; it is, according to MH Abrams, "a pithy and pointed statement of a serious maxim, opinion, or general truth." Ginsberg's poem is not merely aphoristic, it is much more complex but, as in the case of Sutra, the message it conveys is simple and truthful.

The sunflower as a symbol receives elaborate treatment in the poem, although it mainly stands for America and its indomitable spirit. Like the sunflower in the poem America has been tarnished and battered yet, the poem implies, it has in it inherent power to reconstruct and reinstate itself. Although outwardly it is battered, it still has its beauty within it. What is needed is people's understanding of the fact that America can regain its inherent beauty. America's beauty lies in its core values which include freedom of expression and progressive political and social thought. Like a romantic poet-seer, Ginsberg reveals this beauty to a country that has lost its core values.

The poem may be considered as a prophetic poem. A prophetic poem has its tradition in the prophetic literature of the bible. The Old Testament prophets, inspired by the Spirit of God, often warned the people of Israel, who turned unfaithful to God, against the wrath of God upon them. The poems “America” and some sections of “Howl” are prophetic in nature. However, in “Sunflower Sutra” one comes across Ginsberg’s vision of a Romantic society in which Industrial devastation is totally absent, a society which has the capability to return to its original beauty. The fact that the closing lines of the poem resemble a sermon further underscores this prophetic quality of the poem.

The poem, like many others by Ginsberg, has different kinds of long lines which do not essentially adhere to any specific metrical or rhythmic pattern. It has the rhythm of breath. Such lines help him pass on his message to his leaders clearly. Each Stanza contains a couple of lines that drive in a truth. This gives the poem the quality of a Sutra.

John Tytell finds some similarities between Blake’s sunflower in “Ah-Sunflower” and Ginsberg’s “Sunflower Sutra”. According to him, the latter poem “is an elegy of glorious optimism for a dead sunflower,” Both the poems deal with mutability and transience of living objects and the surety of death. The critic informs us that the sunflower that Ginsberg sees is the flower of industry and as such it looks ugly. It is, the poet says, “the flower of the world, worn, brittle, dry yellow—miracle of gravel life spring(ing) to the bud.” A poem like “Howl” has a repetitive base form (for e.g., the repetition of the pronoun ‘Who’). In “Sunflower Sutra”, without any such repetition, Ginsberg builds up a kind of increasing rhythmic tempo. What the poet attempts to do in the poem is to present, to quote Tytell again, “a paeon to the life-force within the heart of the wasteland, the sordid details of junk, treadles tires, used condoms, and abandoned tin cans and industrial grime, enveloping the dessicated sunflower in which Ginsberg chooses to believe, vigorously asserting his belief by seizing the skeleton stalk and holding it at his side like a scepter.”

The last part of the poem is a verse paragraph and it closely resembles Whitman’s verse. One of Whitman’s disciples, Dr. Richard Bucke, has recorded a mystical experience that his master had around 1853-54. This experience, like Ginsberg’s Blake vision, “resulted in an ecstatic sense of ineffable joy, a knowledge of the unity of the universe, of the bonds existing between men and all living things.” The impact of the experience is perceivable in Whitman’s celebration of life and fellow men. His poems revealed his ability to sympathetically identify with and love everything—living and non-living—in the universe. Whitman’s celebration of life everywhere and his ability to see beauty in everything is so intense and open that rational individuals might even find it sentimental. This celebration of life is visible in Ginsberg’s eulogy of the dead flower and the optimism that he develops out of it.

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Can you explain how “Sunflower Sutra” is different from “A Supermarket in California”?

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.....

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35.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

A lot of biographical and critical works/articles on Ginsberg are available. You may also get a long list of them if you Google 'Bibliography on Allen Ginsberg.' Some of the books you may refer to are:

- 1) Cargas, Harry, 1972. *Daniel Berrigan and contemporary protest poetry*. New Haven, Connecticut: College and University Press Services.
- 2) Merrill, Thomas, 1988. *Allen Ginsberg*, Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers.
- 3) Morgan, Bill, 2006. *I Celebrate myself: The somewhat private life of Allen Ginsberg*. New York: Viking/Penguin.
- 4) Protuges, Paul, 1978. *The visionary poetics of Allen Ginsberg. California: Ross-Erikson*.
- 5) Ruskin, Jonah. 2004. *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's howl and themaking of the beat generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 6) Simpson, Louis. 1978. *Studies of Dylan Thomas, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- 7) Tytell, John. 1976. *Naked angels: The lives and literature of the beat generation*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.

35.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self check exercise on Ginsberg's biography. All answers are according to the Serial numbers of the questions.

- 1) He had a poetic style of his own; used long free verse lines; in his techniques he resembled Walt Whitman (e.g., Cataloguing of objects, events, etc.)
- 2) Perhaps not, because Ginsberg's father wrote highly traditional poetry. Ginsberg's time, especially during the Modernist period and after World War II, was socially and culturally a very complex age in the history of America and it demanded a kind of new poetry that challenged all ideas of conventional poetry.
- 3) Think of the poets you have already read in this course. For e.g. you may think of the influence of the Metaphysical poets on TS Eliot's writing.

Answers to the questions on "A Supermarket in California".

- 1) For example, the last three lines of the first stanza contain a list; you may also make a list of the phrases that the poet uses to describe Whitman.
- 2) You will find the answer to this question in the section 'Analysis of the poem.'
- 3) The Stanzas resemble the stanzas written by Whitman; the number of lines in the stanzas varies; lines are long.
- 4) The Supermarket itself is a symbol (read the section 'Aspects of technique' Carefully); the 'blue automobile' in the third stanza can be considered as a symbol of the consumerist society.

Answers to the questions on “Sunflower Sutra”.

- 1) The first poem is less optimistic than the second one (Read the analyses of the two poems). The sermon in the second poem underlines the poet’s hope for America.
- 2) The poet refers to many objects that can cause environmental pollution. For example, ‘busted rusty iron’, ‘oily water’ and ‘dank muck’. You can find more such expressions in the poem.
- 3) Blake’s poem is given below. Both the poems are about flowers and their destruction. The destruction of the sunflower is caused by man but of the rose by nature (the worm); does Blake’s poem end on an optimistic note like Ginsberg’s?

The Sick Rose
by William Blake
O Rose, thou art sick:
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does they life destroy.

- 4) The sunflower itself is a symbol and tis symbolic value is described in the Analysis. The ‘locomotive’ and ‘scepter’ are also symbols.

Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

VIII

Indian English Poets

Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayant Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar, Agha Shahid Ali, Dilip Chitre and Keki N. Daruwala



School of Humanities

Indira Gandhi National Open University

Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

Block

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INDIAN ENGLISH POETS

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 8

A BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY OF MODERN INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Just as Urdu came into being because of the Turko-Afghan and Mughal rule over India for more than five hundred years, owing to British rule for about two centuries English became one of the languages of India. Not surprisingly, the first poet of English in India was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809 – 31) son of an Indo-Portuguese father and English mother. Before becoming lecturer at Hindu College he had worked as a clerk in Kolkata and on an indigo plantation at Bhagalpur. For sometime Derozio also tried his hand at journalism. At Hindu College he founded a debating club called the Academic Association and, *The Parthenon*, a magazine. Derozio profoundly influenced his students and their criticism of Hindu practices were disliked by the people. This compelled the college authorities to dismiss Derozio from service in 1831. Soon Derozio died of cholera.

Derozio had a poetic career of no more than five or six years in which he published *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and other Poems* (1828). Surprisingly, for a Eurasian, Derozio was a great patriot as reflected in his poems: 'To India - My Native Land', 'The Harp of India' and, 'To the Pupils of Hindu College'. *The Fakeer of Jungheera* recounts the story of Nuleeni a caste Hindu widow rescued from the funeral pyre of her husband by a robber-chief.

Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-73) contributed to Indian English poetry with his *The Shair or Minstrel and other Poems* (1803). Ghose had mastered English prosody. He also wrote on Indian themes such as 'The Boatman's Song to Ganga' but he did not have genuine poetic talent. Later in the day came Rajnarian Dutt (1824-89) with his *Osmyn: An Arabian Tale* (1841) in heroic couplet; Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1815-65), author of *Miscellaneous Poems* (1848) and Hur Chunder Dutt (1831-1901) whose *Fugitive Pieces* was published in 1851.

Another poet of this period was Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) better known for his writings in Bengali who nonetheless began his career as a poet in English. Apart from a few lyrics in English he wrote two long poems *The Captive Ladie* (1848) on the theme of abduction of Samyukta by Prithviraj Chouhan (1149 – 92) and the *Visions of the Past* (1848) on the Christian theme of the temptations of Adam and Eve by Satan. Dutt's works lack originality. While in the former Sir Walter Scott was Dutt's model; it was Milton in the latter. Dutt rightly abandoned English as a medium for his literary works and turned to Bengali in which he made a name for himself. The early period of Indian English poetry was marked by an appreciation of British rule but the Scpy Mutiny or the First War of Indian Independence in 1857 marked the end of the bonhomie between Indian intelligentsia and the British rulers.

'Indian English Literature' wrote M.K. Naik, 'really came of age after 1857, when India's rediscovery of her identity became a vigorous, all-absorbing quest and when she had learnt enough from the West to progress from imitations and assimilation to creation.' However, *The Dutt Family Album* (1870), the only

example of an anthology of poems of members of a family is devoid of originality. It is a collection of 187 poems of three Dutt brothers, namely Govin Chunder, Hur Chunder, and Greece (sic) Chunder and their cousin Omesh Chander. The Dutt were descendants of Rasmoy Dutt, a follower of Raja Rammohan Roy. Rasmoy had abjured Hinduism and become a Christian.

We begin to see originality in the poetry of Ram Sarma, pseudonym of Nobo Kissen Ghose (1837-1918). Ram Sarma was a Yogi who sometimes described his yogic experiences in his poems such as 'Music and Vision of the Anahat Chakram' but he also wrote occasional verse such as 'Ode in Commemorations of the Visit of Prince Albert to India in 1857' which has verve and authenticity. His major works are : *Willow Drops* (1873-74), *A Poem* (1886) and *Shiva Ratri, Bhagboti Gita and Miscellaneous Poems* (1903).

The most important Indian English poet after Henry Derozio was Tarulata Dutt (1857 – 77) better known as Toru Dutt, daughter of Govin Dutt, who converted along with his family to Christianity in 1862. In 1869 the family sailed to England. Toru and her sister Aru spent a year in France. They wrote English versions of 165 French poems by some 100 French poets as *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876). Published posthumously *Ancients Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) draws on Indian mythology: Sita and Savitri, Dhruv and Prahlad, Lakshman and Bharat. Toru Dutt also wrote two novels: the unfinished *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* published in Bengal in 1878 and the completed *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Avers* published in France in 1879. Toru Dutt died of tuberculosis at the age of 21.

Toru Dutt's cousin Romesh Chunder Dutt (1849 - 1909) was a member of the Indian Civil Service from which he took voluntary retirement at the age of 49. This was because he wanted to devote himself full time to writing. He wrote both in Bengali and English. His lasting achievement is his curtailed version of the Ramayan and the Mahabharat in English. He reduced their 48,000 and 200,000 lines respectively each to 8000. Dutt's works were published in the Temple Classics (1889-9) and later by the Everyman's Library (1910). They are classics of Indian Writing in English.

Rabindranath Tagore (1868 - 1941) was born only half-a-dozen years after Toru Dutt but he began writing intermittently in English when he was already 50. His translation of 103 of his poems published under the title *Gitanjali* (Song Offering) in 1912 earned for him world fame and admiration of the Anglo-Irish poet W.B. Yeats and the Noble prize for literature in 1913. Ezra Pound, the expatriate American poet in Europe considered Tagore's use of prose as a medium for his poetry as his greatest single contribution to world literature.

Manmohan Ghose (1869 - 1924) is a tragic figure in Indian English poetry. His mother lost her sanity and father a stern figure, 'so strangely unsentimental that He would vivisect [his son] if he thought that was [his] highest good' (*Collected Poems*, Vol I: Early Poems and Letters, ed. Lotika Ghose, P. 173). Ghose's father sent him to be educated in England when he was only 10 years old with the result that he never felt at home in his native Bengal. His *Songs of Love and Death* (1926) published posthumously is influenced by the *fin de siècle* culture. Ghose's wife died in 1918. In its wake he wrote *Orphic Mysteries and Immortal Eve*. They were published as late as 1974 in his *Collected Works*.

Ghose began writing his *Perseus, The Gorgon Slayer* in 1899 but he had to stop it under official pressure, suspected as it was, for being seditious in nature.

Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) better known as Sri Aurobindo, younger brother of Manmohan Ghose, was an Indian freedom fighter, teacher, philosopher, yogi and poet. He was sent to England for his education and Western upbringing along with his elder brother but on his return in 1893 he joined Baroda State Service (1893-1906) and quickly acquired Indian culture to the extent that he is seen as a modern seer in the great tradition of Ved Vyas and Valmiki. After having worked at Baroda for 13 years he went to Bengal to take part in the freedom struggle. He was fluent in a number of European languages, both classical and modern and after coming to India learnt Sanskrit so well that he could not only read the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Ramayan and the Mahabharat in the original but also use Sanskrit for his creative expressions. His early *Short Poems* (1809-1900) are like those of his elder brother, Classical in influence and *fin de siècle* in spirit but the call of mystic India can be heard in the 'Envoi' in which the poet hears Saraswati and the Ganges beckoning him. The mystic awareness becomes stronger in Aurobindo's poetry written in India: *Short Poems* 1902-1930 and 1930-1950. In 1910 Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry a French colony and set up his ashram in association with his disciple Mira Richard better known as the Mother. Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus* is *Savitri* (first definitive edition 1954) an epic in 23,813 lines (twelve books and forty nine cantos). It is based on an episode in the Mahabharat about Satyavan and his wife Savitri who rescued him from death.

Any account of Indian Poetry in English before independence cannot be complete without a mention of Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) née Chattopadhyay and her brother Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1898 - 1990). While the former became a leading figure during the independence movement the latter for some time dabbled in Mumbai Cinema. Sarojini Naidu went to England when she was sixteen and studied in London and Cambridge. There she met Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse.

Historians of Indian Literature in English have pointed out that Naidu came under the influence of the Rhymers Club which met since 1891 for two or three years at Cheshire Cheese, an eating house in Fleet Street, London. W.B. Yeats, Ernest Rhys, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Davidson and Arthur Symons were the members. Yeats remembered it in *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922) and in a poem called 'The Grey Rock' in *Responsibilities* (1914):

Poets with whom I learned my trade.
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese.

The club brought out two anthologies of verse in 1892 and 1894. Sarojini Naidu may have seen and read them as they were recent publications.

Symons found Naidu's early poems too English and advised her to turn to India for inspiration. She took the advice seriously and after returning to India in 1895 began to write on Indian subjects. *The Golden Threshold* (1905) received much acclaim in England. Two more works *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wings* (1917) record bitterness and pain in her personal life. Sarojini Naidu was a genuine poet unlike her brother who though more prolific lacked inspiration. Some of his collections of poems are *The Feast of Youth* (1918), *Virgins and Vineyards* (1922) and *Spring in Winter* (1955).

The Feast of Youth was praised by Sri Aurobindo. It is pervaded by mysticism. Sri Aurobindo can be observed in the poetries of Brajendranath Seal's *The Quest Eternal* (1936) Nirodbaran's *Sun Blossoms* (1947) – and K.D. Sethan's, *Artist Love* (1925). While on the one hand Aurobindonian mysticism influenced quite a few other poets of the pre-independence era Tagore and Sarojini Naidu found followers among poets such as G.K. Chettur, J.Vijayatunga, Amando Menezes, Manjiri Isvaran, V.N. Bhushan, Adi K. Sett, Humayun Kabir and Sabho Tagore.

World was II (1939-45) was a watershed in world history; Indian independence in 1947 in Indian history. They changed the sensibilities of people in Europe and also in India. Indian poetry in English now began to be influenced by the psychological realism of the modernist poets such as W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and, W.H. Auden as the earlier generations were influenced more generally by the Romantic poets and the Georgian Zeitgeist. Dom Moraes (1938-2004) son of the then Bombay based journalist Frank Moraes (1907-1974), a Goan Christian, used English as his mother tongue. He felt more at home in England than in India and became a British citizen in 1961. His early childhood experience of his mother's frequent bouts of insanity stamped his personality that influenced much of his poetry in *A Beginning* (1957), *Poems* (1960) and *John Nobody* (1968). His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1969.

'New Poetry' that made its appearance in India in the fifties found its greatest support from P. Lal (1929 - 2010) and his Writers Workshop founded in 1958 of which he was the proprietor. The same year he brought out with K. Raghavendra Rao the first modernist anthology *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry*. They defined the credo of 'New Poetry' with a condemnation of sentiments of Sri Aurobindo' and a declaration that 'the Phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu.' Writers Workshop published the early works of Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004), Pritish Nandy (b. 1951), Shiv K. Kumar (b. 1921), Adil Jussawalla Shashi Deshpande (b. 1938), Vikram Seth (b. 1952), Keki N. Daruwala (b. – 1937), and Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001). Some other great poets of this period are, Kamala Das, (1934 - 2009), Arvind Krishn Mehrotra (b. 1947) and A. K. Ramanujan (1929 - 1993).

With this brief account we come to the point from where you can start your reading of this block on Indian English poetry. We hope you will enjoy reading the poems selected for you.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 36 RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND SAROJINI NAIDU

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- 36.4 I Cast My Net into the Sea
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36.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- write about the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu;
- discuss their poems prescribed for you;
- write about images, symbols and other figures of speech used in the prescribed poems.

36.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall read two poems by Rabindranath Tagore and two by Sarojini Naidu. We shall briefly introduce you to the life and works of these two great poets from Bengal who brought in philosophy and spirituality in Indian poetry in English. Their best poetry was written in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth century. Their poetry is regarded as an important landmark in the history of Indian poetry in English.

Tagore was a multi-sided writer and thinker who wrote poetry, novels, short stories, plays and essays while Sarojini Naidu was primarily a poet who later joined the Indian National Movement for Independence and followed the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi. She was also famous for her oratory.

After reading about the poets, we shall discuss the prescribed poems. We shall try to interpret these poems and also learn to identify stylistic devices used in them.

36.3 RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore is perhaps the most widely-known Indian writer of the twentieth century. In 1913, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature being the first Indian, and also the first Asian, to win that prize. This event was partly responsible for the kindling of a new interest in Indian literature, especially in the West. He received the Nobel Prize for his *Gitanjali* (meaning ‘song-offerings’) which is a collection of devotional songs. *Gitanjali* was written originally in Bengali and was translated into English by the poet himself.

Tagore, however, was not only a poet. He was gifted with many talents and was obviously a very hardworking man considering the amount of writing he did. Apart from writing poems and songs in their thousands, he has written novels, short stories, plays and essays on various subjects. He was a thinker and philosopher of the first order and was also a painter and musician of no inconsiderable merit. But what makes him stand out as one of the most important Indians of the twentieth century is his contribution to Indian education. He not only wrote about the kind of education our children should receive but also put them into practice by establishing an educational institution at Shantiniketan in Bengal, which is now a central university called the Vishwa Bharati Univeristy.

You have read in the introduction above that Rabindranath Tagore introduced philosophy and an element of spirituality in Indian poetry in English. His poetry is often mystical and has a very prominent spiritual element in it. He was also a great worshipper of nature. His novels and short stories are often about different kinds of human relationships and also about the struggle a person goes through in life. One of his most well-known novels is *Gora*. You can find out the names of his other novels and try to read some of them. He wrote plays also. *Red Oleanders* and *The Mother’s Prayer* are some of his best known plays. Tagore wrote a large number of plays, 53 in all, 13 of which he translated into English.

In this unit you are going to read two poems by Rabindranath Tagore. These poems are typical of his poetry. They are profoundly mystical and you have to try to understand the symbolism in them. You will also find prominent elements of spirituality and philosophy in them.

36.4 I CAST MY NET INTO THE SEA

36.4.1 Introduction

The poem you are going to read has been taken from Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Gardner*, first published in 1913. You will notice that although it is a poem, it is not written in stanzas nor does it have any rhyming lines. It looks more like prose. Such a piece is sometimes called a prose-poem. It has all the elements of poetry—imagination, a strong appeal to emotion, sensuousness and use of metaphors and other figures of speech—but it does not have the formal structure

of a poem written in meter. When you read the poem you should pay special attention to the use of metaphors and symbols in the poem. A metaphor, as you know, is a word or phrase that we use to describe somebody or something in terms of something else in such a way that some common quality in them is highlighted. For example, when we say, 'He was a tiger in battle' we do not mean that he actually turned into a tiger but only that he displayed the same strength and ferocity that we associate with a tiger.

Similarly, you should see whether or not this poem has symbolism in it. A symbol can be an object or a person or even an event that stands for a more general quality or situation. For example, the Indian tricolour is an object but it stands for the very identity of India and Indians. Similarly, we can say that Nelson Mandela became a symbol of the anti-apartheid struggle everywhere in the world.

Now, read the poem.

36.4.2 The Text

I Cast My Net into The Sea

In the morning I cast my net into the sea.

I dragged up from the dark **abyss** things of strange **aspect** and strange beauty – some shone like a smile, some glistened like tears, and some were **flushed** like the cheeks of a bride.

When with the day's burden I went home, my love was sitting in the garden idly tearing the leaves of a flower.

I hesitated for a moment, and then placed at her feet all that I had **dragged up**, and stood silent.

She glanced at them and said, "What strange things are these? I know not of what use they are!"

I bowed my head in shame and thought, "I have not fought for these, I did not buy them in the market; they are not fit gifts for her."

Then the whole night through I flung them one by one into the street.

In the morning travellers came; they picked them up and carried them into far countries.

(From *The Gardner* by Rabindranath Tagore)

Glossary:

abyss : a very deep hole or wide space that seems to have no bottom.

aspect : appearance.

flushed : red with some strong emotion.

dragged up : caught.

36.4.3 Interpretation

The poem opens like a narrative in which the narrator describes an incident in his life. He says that when he cast his net into the sea he dragged up from 'the dark abyss' some very beautiful things. Since he considers these things beautiful and also rare he wants to share them with the person he loves. But his beloved, who was sitting in the garden 'idly tearing the leaves of a flower', rejects them. Dejected, he throws those things into the street. In the morning travellers from different places pass that way, pick those beautiful things up and carry them to

far-off places. As you finish reading the poem, you immediately realize that the story has another layer of meaning. Our interpretation of the poem will depend largely on what meanings we assign to the important nouns used in the poem, such as 'the sea', 'abyss', 'things', 'love' and 'travellers'.

We can now explore the symbolism in the poem. If we take the speaker's 'love' to represent his God, we can interpret the poem in terms of a contrast between this beautiful but transient world of material things and the world of spirituality. The 'sea' will then represent this phenomenal world of *maya* that is full of beautiful things. These things are merely sense-objects that people consider important and after which they run. We cannot reach our God (that is, grow spiritually) if we give importance to material things that the speaker in the poem mentions. They may be bright and beautiful but they do not stand for the ultimate reality. They look very attractive but have no value in spiritual terms. If they are offered to God, they will be rejected. In our lives, we have to reject them at some point ('fling' them into the street) to grow spiritually.

In the poem, the speaker is ashamed to realize that he tried to express his devotion to his God by offering Him things that belong to the physical, transient world. He says that he did not make an effort to acquire these things ('I have not fought for these') nor has he renounced anything for them ('I did not buy them in the market'). They have simply come to him as a part of being born in this physical world. Therefore they are not fit offerings to God. The implication is that what matters to God are the sentiments of true devotion and spirituality.

When the speaker discovers that what he considers beautiful are of no importance in his spiritual journey he throws them out of his window. Metaphorically, it suggests that he gave up the belief that the material world is the ultimate reality. But who are the people who pick up these things? They are those who are still caught in the web of *maya*, that is, in the senses and sense-objects. When you interpret the poem in this sense, you will realize that smiles, tears and passion mentioned in the first movement of the poem represent the various emotions that the physical objects and events in the physical world cause in us. One has to transcend these in order to realize God in one's life.

36.4.4 A Note on Form and Style

You will see that this poem is not divided into stanzas like an ordinary poem. It has paragraphs, something you find in prose. But when you read it, it sounds like a poem. Such a poem, as you know, is sometimes called a prose-poem.

You will find that in keeping with the style of a narrative, the poem has characters, incidents and dialogue. The language used here is simple but there are some very important metaphors used in the poem. You will see that without assigning meaning to these metaphors it is difficult for us to understand what the poet is talking about. The poet is obviously not talking about fishing. In the interpretation above, you have seen how these metaphors can be interpreted.

You find that the poem opens with three similes. When you compare two things it is known as a simile. For instance when we say 'white as snow' we are using a simile. Consider the three similes. The poet has used verbs 'shone', 'glistened' and 'flushed' for smiles, tears and the cheeks of a bride respectively. All these verbs suggest brightness. You will further notice that the verb 'glistened' suggests the presence of water which goes with tears while 'flushed' suggests colour also. When a bride blushes, her face takes on a reddish hue. The brightness of these things suggests that people find them very attractive.

Another thing that you should notice about the language used in the poem is its rhythm. Rhythm is a strong, regular repeated pattern of sound or movement. Notice how the rhythm in the lines tells you that it is a poem. When you read each movement, or paragraph, in the poem, you will notice that it comprises a single sentence. Each sentence has two pauses which balances the two ends of it. For instance, in the line 'In the morning travellers came; they picked them up and carried them into far countries', there is pause after 'came' and 'up'. You will notice the same feature in each line of the poem.

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Write in your own words the meaning of the similes used in the first movement of the poem.

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- 2) Write briefly how the poem shows the difference between important and unimportant things.

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- 3) Write a short note on the rhythm of the poem.

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36.5 WHEN I GO ALONE AT NIGHT

36.5.1 The Text

When I Go Alone At Night

When I go alone at night to my love-**tryst**, birds do not sing, the wind does not stir, the houses on both sides of the street stand silent.

It is my own anklets that grow loud at every step and I am ashamed.

When I sit on my balcony and listen for his footsteps, leaves do not rustle on the trees, and the water is **still** in the river like the sword on the knees of a sentry fallen asleep.

It is my own heart that beats wildly – I do not know how to quiet it.

When my love comes and sits by my side, when my body trembles and my eyelids droop, the night darkens, the wind blows out the lamp, and the clouds **draw veils over** the stars.

It is the jewel at my own breast that shines and gives light. I do not know how to hide it.

Glossary:

- tryst** : a secret meeting between lovers.
still : not moving.
draw veils over : cover.

36.5.2 A Critical Note on the Poem

Now that you have read the poem can you say what it is about? The poem appears to be about two lovers. One of them, probably the woman, is speaking these lines and is trying to describe how she feels when she goes to meet her lover, when she waits for him, and when he comes to her. But if you have read other similar poems by Tagore you will realize that the poem is not really about two lovers but about the relationship between man and God. In a great deal of devotional literature of our country God has been represented as a lover and the devotee as His beloved. You can think of the poems of Mirabai in which she described God as her lover. We have a similar symbolism in the present poem.

The opening movement describes how the devotee feels when he thinks of God. It is like a beloved going to meet her lover. There is silence all around. She goes alone; there are no birds singing, there is no sound of wind, and the houses on the two sides of the street she walks on are silent. There is only the sound of her anklets that disturbs the silence and she is scared that someone will hear her going to meet her lover. The sound of her anklets stands for the fact that it is the beloved herself who is disturbed. She is unable to calm her mind that is necessary if the devotee wants to realize the presence of God in her life.

The next movement presents the image of the beloved waiting for the lover to come to her. Again there is total silence. There is no rustling of leaves. The river flows quietly as if it were a sentry who has fallen asleep with his sword across his knees. But again, it is the furiously beating heart of the beloved that she does not know how to quiet. When understood in terms of a devotee trying to pray to God the poem suggests that the devotee needs to quiet his heart in order to be able to experience the presence of God in his life.

The third movement presents the image of the lover coming to the beloved. When it happens, her body trembles and her eyelids droop. The night becomes dark and the wind blows out the lamp. The clouds cover the stars and there is total darkness everywhere. This darkness represents the complete surrender of the devotee to the will of God. As in the earlier movements of the poem, it is only the jewel at her breast that shines and disturbs the darkness. The beloved does not know how to hide that brightness. Again, the brightness of her jewel represents the emotional disturbance in the devotee. The poem suggests that if a devotee is unable to become one with God, it is because he fails to get rid of his

petty self and his ego. The ego is represented by the sound of the beloved's anklets, the beating of her heart and the brightness of the jewel at her breast.

When you consider the images in the poem you will see that there is a contrast between complete silence symbolizing a total surrender to God's will and various sounds representing the emotional disturbance in the devotee. The poem says that a devotee should pray to God in a spirit of total surrender. As long as he is aware of himself as an entity separate from God, a complete communion with the divine is not possible.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Describe in your own words how the beloved feels when she goes to meet her lover in the dead of the night.

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- 2) What happens when the beloved is waiting for her lover on her balcony?

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- 3) How should a devotee pray to God?

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36.6 SAROJINI NAIDU (1879-1950)

Sarojini Naidu was a prominent Indian freedom fighter. She was also a poet who began to write poetry at a very early age. She was born in Hyderabad. She passed her matriculation at the age of twelve. At the age of thirteen, she composed a narrative poem of about 2000 lines. She went to England on a scholarship where she studied at King's College, London and then at Girton College, Cambridge. While in England, she came in contact with English scholars and critics like Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse. On her return from England she married Dr. Naidu and became Sarojini Naidu from Sarojini Chattopadhyaya. She joined the Indian National Congress. In 1906, she spoke at the Congress session and when

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the political mentor of Mahatma Gandhi, heard her, he said, 'You begin with a ripple and end in eternity'. The same thing can be said of her poetry.

Sarojini Naidu's first collection of poems was called *The Golden Threshold* and was published in 1905. About her first book *The Times Literary Supplement*, London wrote, 'Her poetry seems to sing itself as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves'. Her other poetic works are *The Bird of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917), *The Sceptred Flute* (1946) and *The Feather of the Dawn*, published posthumously in 1961.

Sarojini Naidu stands in the tradition of Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. From the very beginning she displayed in her poetry a very high level of technical excellence. Her images are very powerful and haunting and there is a spontaneous movement in her verse leading to a natural magnificence. Her poetry represents the best in Indian Renaissance. This Renaissance marked a revival of interest in the great philosophical, intellectual and literary tradition of India. She knew Bengali and Urdu and the resonance of the poetry in these two great literatures can be heard in her English poetry. The prominent elements in her poetry are spirituality, a love for nature and philosophy. Her poetry impressed poets and thinkers like Sri Aurobindo who said of her work, 'Some of her lyrical work is likely, I think, to survive among the lasting things in English literature.'

36.7 DAMAYANTI TO NALA IN THE HOUR OF EXILE

36.7.1 Background to the Poem

This poem is based on the mythological story of Nala and Damayanti. You will find this story in the *Mahabharata*. It is about the love of Damayanti, the princess of Vidarbha, and King Nala. Damayanti chose Nala as her husband at her *swayamvara* (an ancient ceremony to which prospective bridegrooms were invited out of whom the bride chose the one she liked the most). In Damayanti's *swayamvara* even gods like Indra, Varun and Agni participated but she chose Nala as her husband. After their marriage, the husband and wife face many hardships. We are told how Nala loses his kingdom in gambling, how he and Damayanti are exiled into a forest, how he abandons his sleeping wife in the forest and how, after many ups and downs, they are united. The story ends happily when Nala wins back his kingdom in gambling.

In the present poem Damayanti is trying to remind Nala of his greatness.

Now go through the poem.

36.7.2 The Text

Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile

Shalt thou be conquered of a human fate
My **liege**, my lover, whose imperial head
Hath never bent in sorrow of defeat?
Shalt thou be vanquished, whose imperial feet
Have shattered armies and stamped empires dead?
Who shall **unking** thee, husband of a queen?
Wear thou thy majesty **inviolate**.

Earth's glories flee of human eyes unseen,
Earth's kingdoms fade to a remembered dream,
But thine henceforth shall be a power supreme,

Dazzling command and rich dominion,
The winds thy heralds and thy **vassals** all
The silver-belted planets and the sun.
Where'er the radiance of thy coming fall,
Shall dawn for thee her saffron footcloths spread,
Sunset her purple canopies and red,
In **serried** splendour, and the night unfold
Her velvet darkness wrought with starry gold
For kingly **raiment**, soft as **cygnet-down**.
My hair shall braid thy temples like a crown
Of sapphires, and my kiss upon thy brows
Like **çithar-music** lull thee to repose,
Till the sun yield thee homage of his light.

O king, thy kingdom who from thee can wrest?
What fate shall dare uncrown thee from this breast,
O god-born lover, whom my love doth **gird**
And **armour** with impregnable delight
Of Hope's triumphant keen flame-carven sword?

(From *The Golden Threshold* by Sarojini Naidu)

Glossary

liege	: king or lord.
unking	: make you a commoner.
inviolable	: that has been, or must be respected and cannot be attacked or destroyed.
vassals	: subordinate to you.
serried	: standing or arranged closely together in rows or lines.
raiment	: clothing.
cygnet-down	: cygnet is a young swan, 'down' means very fine, soft feathers.
çithar-music	: music of sitar, a musical instrument.
gird	: to surround something with something.
armour	: protect.

36.7.3 Interpretation

As the title tells you, these words are spoken by Damayanti to her husband Nala who has lost his kingdom in gambling and the couple are now in exile in a forest. Damayanti is trying to inspire Nala who is feeling dejected. You will notice that the first three sentences in the poem are in the form of questions. But these are not real questions that need an answer; they are called rhetorical questions. In a rhetorical question the interrogative form is used to make a statement or to produce an effect rather than to get an answer. When someone says, 'Who does not love his country?' he is actually saying that everyone loves his country. By using rhetorical questions to open the poem the poet suggests that Damayanti is speaking with great emotion.

Damayanti says that Nala, whose ‘imperial head’ was never bent in ‘sorrow of defeat’, cannot be overcome by adversity that fate has brought for him. The adjective ‘imperial’ is repeated in the next sentence also. We are told about the prowess of Nala as a warrior. His ‘imperial’ feet have ‘shattered armies and stamped empires dead’. He is the husband of a queen and so will always remain a king. No one can ‘unking’ him.

The poem presents a contrast between the glories of this earth and the divine glory of Nala. Earth’s glories disappear and the kingdoms in this world fade away ‘to a remembered dream’. But Nala’s glory will last forever. The poet uses a hyperbole here. Damayanti says that winds, planets with rings around them and the sun, everything will obey Nala’s command. Wherever his radiance falls, it will be dawn spreading her saffron footcloth for him to walk on. Similarly, the sunset will raise her purple and red canopy for him. His kingly garment will be made of the velvet soft night wrought with ‘starry gold’. As the night sky is bright with golden stars, Nala’s garment will have designs made with golden thread. Such exaggeration as you find in this poem is quite common in poems dealing with mythological stories. In such stories the hero belongs to a world in which there is no distinction between the natural and the supernatural. These lines suggest that Nala is a very brave man who has the ability to win back his kingdom.

The image of Nala as a king continues in the next lines also. Damayanti says that her hair in braid will be like a crown of sapphire for Nala. This is the image of Damayanti kissing Nala’s face. When she does so, her braided hair will fall on his face and look like a crown. Her kisses will bring peace to him, as the music of sitar does to its listeners. Next morning, when Nala wakes up, the sun will pay homage to him with its light. These lines suggest that Damayanti will always be with Nala in the days of his adversity.

In the concluding lines of the poem you will see that rhetorical questions have been used again. They suggest that the speaker is speaking with great intensity of passion. Damayanti is certain that no one can keep Nala away from his kingdom for long. Then she uses ‘kingdom’ in a different sense. Nala has the kingdom of Damayanti’s love. This no one can take away from him. Her love protects him and arms him with the sword of hope that is always victorious. Here hope has been compared to a sharp sword on which flames have carved patterns.

36.7.4 A note on Form and Style

Although the poem was written only about a hundred years ago, you see that it has a kind of English that was used in much older poetry. You find expressions like ‘Shalt thou’, ‘Hath never bent’ in the poem. Why has the poet used such expressions? It is to give an old world ring to the poem.

When you read the poem you will notice it has an almost declamatory style. This is the kind of language you expect in an orator. Notice how the poem begins and ends with rhetorical questions. The words are meant to inspire Nala therefore an inspiring tone has been used.

You will also see that hyperbole (a way of saying something that makes a thing sound more exciting or more impressive than it actually is) is a characteristic figure of speech in this poem. You can find many lines in the poem where Nala has been described in cosmic terms. For instance, recall the lines which say that the winds, the planets and the sun obey his commands.

In the poem there is a frequent use of images suggesting brightness and light. You can point out words like 'dazzling command', 'radiance of thy coming', 'dawn', 'sunset', 'the sun yield thee homage of his light' that suggest brightness. These expressions are designed to convey to the reader the glory and grandeur of Nala.

Self-check Exercise III

1) How does Damayanti describe the glory of Nala?

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2) Pick out lines in the poem that describe Nala as someone bright and majestic.

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36.8 CRADLE SONG

36.8.1 Introduction

A cradle song is a lullaby that a person, usually the mother, sings to her child to make it go to sleep. Here in this poem it is probably a mother who is singing a cradle song to her child. She wishes her child to have beautiful dreams. She says that she has gathered many lovely things from various places so that all of them can combine into a beautiful dream for the child.

When you read the poem pay particular attention to the things mentioned in it. Ask yourself why those things are attractive. Try to imagine the kind of dream the child will have if all these lovely things are part of it.

36.8.2 The Text

Cradle Song

From groves of spice,
O'er fields of rice,
Athwart the lotus-stream,
I bring for you,
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream.

Sweet, shut your eyes,
The wild fire-fies

Dance through the fairy neem;
From the poppy-bole
For you I stole
A little lovely dream.

Dear eyes, good-night,
In golden light
The stars around you gleam;
On you I press
With soft caress
A little lovely dream.

36.8.3 Interpretation

This is a lullaby sung to a baby probably by its mother. She describes how she has picked up many lovely things from various places for a dream that the baby will have. She says that she has picked up from 'groves of spice' the fragrance that will pervade the dream world of the child. When she says that she has carried that fragrance over 'fields of rice' she adds the scent of rice fields and their bright green colour to the fragrance of spices like cardamom and cinnamon. She says that while bringing fragrance and colour for the dreams of her child she will cross bright streams full of lotus. From that world she will bring for her child a dream shining with dew drops. Thus you find that the poet has suggested the fragrance of spice groves, the sweet smell and bright green colour of rice fields, the sound of flowing streams and the white, red and pink colour of lotuses in the same image. This sensuous image represents the beautiful world of the child's dreams.

The next stanza depicts another beautiful dream. It is a scene in which there stands a neem tree with fairies in it. Glow-worms flit through the leaves of the tree making it a favourite place for the fairies. Then the mother says that she has stolen a dream from a poppy plant. Poppy from which opium is derived has a sleep inducing property. Thus the stanza suggests that the baby will sleep peacefully and see a beautiful dream.

In the last stanza the baby is probably asleep. Its mother wishes good night. The night sky is full of stars. Their light is golden. The mother kisses the baby's eyes and leaves a lovely dream there.

36.8.4 A Note on Imagery and Music

This is a poem that creates a world of fantasy. You see that when the poem opens we find many beautiful things mentioned. These are mentioned in such a way that we have the feeling of being in these places. The images of 'Groves of spice', 'fields of rice', 'lotus-streams' and 'dew' combine together to suggest beautiful nature from which the dreams of the child will be drawn. Similarly, in the next stanza, the mention of 'fairy' along with 'neem' introduces an element of magic into the scene. Thus you can say that the poem is full of images drawn from nature.

When you read the poem aloud and pay attention to the sound of words, you can experience the musical quality of the poem. The lines are very short, and follow the rhyme scheme: a b c c b. You will also notice alliteration used in the poem. Alliteration means the use of the same letter or sound at the beginning of words that are close together. In the second stanza you find word-clusters like 'fire-flies'

and 'little lovely' that are alliterative. You will also see that in lines that are close together a particular consonant is repeated. In the third stanza you find 'good-night', 'golden light', and 'gleam' that are also alliterative and sound pleasing together. All this gives a pleasant musical lilt to the poem.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Describe in your own words the kind of dream the mother wants her child to see.

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- 2) How does the poet introduce a note of fantasy in the poem?

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- 3) Comment on the music of the poem.

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36.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read two poems by Rabindranath Tagore and two by Sarojini Naidu. The text of the poems was explained and their implied meaning was also discussed. You also learnt how to discuss the form and style of the prescribed poems.

36.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) See the interpretation (36.4.3)
- 2) See the interpretation (36.4.3)
- 3) See 'A Note on Form and Style' (36.4.4)

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) See A Critical Note on the Poem (36.5.3)
- 2) See A Critical Note on the Poem (36.5.3)
- 3) See A Critical Note on the Poem (36.5.3)

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) See Interpretation (36.7.3)
- 2) See A Note on Form and Style (36.7.4)

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) See Interpretation (36.8.3)
- 2) See Interpretation (36.8.3)
- 3) See A Note on Imagery and Music (36.8.4)

36.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

A.N. Dwivedi: *Sarojini Naidu and Her Poetry*

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar: *Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction*

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar: *Indian Writing in English*

M.K. Naik: *Perspectives on Indian Poetry in English*

R.R. Bhatnagar, *Sarojini Naidu: The Poet of a Nation*

S. Ayyar. *Sarojini Devi*

UNIT 37 NISSIM EZEKIEL AND KAMALA DAS

Structure

- 37.0 Objectives
- 37.1 Introduction
- 37.2 Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)
- 37.3 Ganga
 - 37.3.1 Introduction
 - 37.3.2 The Text
 - 37.3.3 Analysis
- 37.4 A Poem of Dedication
 - 37.4.1 Introduction
 - 37.4.2 The Text
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- 37.5 Kamala Das (March 31, 1934- May 30, 2009)
- 37.6 An Introduction (1965)
 - 37.6.1 Introduction
 - 37.6.2 The Text
 - 37.6.3 Analysis
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 - 37.7.1 Introduction
 - 37.7.2 The Text
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- 37.8 A Hot Noon in Malabar
 - 37.8.1 Introduction
 - 37.8.2 The Text
 - 37.8.3 Critical Appreciation
- 37.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 37.10 Answer to Self-check Exercises

37.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall study two poets, Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das. After reading this unit we shall be able to:

- write about lives and works of these poets;
- discuss Ezekiel's poems (i) Ganga and (ii) A Poem of Dedication;
- discuss Kamala Das's poems (i) An Introduction (ii) The Dance of the Eunuchs and (iii) A Hot Noon in Malabar.

37.1 INTRODUCTION

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the pioneers of Modern English poetry in India. He not only guided other poets and set new standard for them; he also made poetry central to his life. However, his significance lies more in his personal

contribution as a poet. Bruce King rightly said, “Other wrote poems, he wrote poetry”. He is a poet who is morally and spiritually concerned with living in the modern world and made poetry out of his personal experience. Such modern characteristics as irony, multiplicity of tones and artistic distancing of emotions through a persona are among his contributions to Indian English poetry. Frequent use of dramatic mode in his poetry is perhaps due to his interest in theatre.

In the present unit we are going to discuss two poems by Nissim Ezekiel and three poems by Kamala Das. The two poems by Ezekiel are different from each other in theme and technique. This will give you a glimpse of the variety of his poems.

His first poem *Ganga* is written in an open form with no definite pattern of line-length, rhyme and metre. The second poem *A Poem of Dedication* will show you how the poet has used a definite rhyming scheme and how it expresses the poet’s quest for a happy, peaceful and integrated life. There is one marked similarity in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and in that of Kamala Das. Poetry, for both, becomes a media to come to terms with life.

Kamala Das is one of the foremost women poets of India writing in English. She was a revolutionary poet who started the trends towards frankness and candour in the treatment of a subject which was almost taboo and which women poets hesitated to deal with. Her poems are about adulterous love, loneliness and quest for fulfillment in love. Her poetry is different from those of the other Indian women poets not merely by the choice of her themes but also by her bold treatment of those themes. She used English in her poems without the concern for correctness and precision. She is an excellent poet with an excellent feeling for sound, rhythm, imagery, symbol, word-play and drama. Like Nissim Ezekiel her poetry too gradually became freer and looser in sense of form and versification. She is among the few women writers who have handled many literary genres with success in two distinct languages, English and Malayalam.

In this unit we are going to read her three poems. The first poem is *An Introduction*. In this poem we shall see how this poem is the poet’s self-portrait written in a condensed style.

37.2 NISSIM EZEKIEL (1924-2004)

Nissim Ezekiel belongs to a Bene-Israel family which generations ago had migrated and settled down in Bombay in India. Both of his parents were teacher. His father Moses Ezekiel was a Professor of Botany at Wilson College, Bombay and his mother principal of a school. Born a Jew and raised as a secular rationalist by his scientific father made him outsider to dominant Hindu-Muslim culture. It is his very outsidership and marginality which made him a representative voice of the urbanized western educated India.

Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Bombay and was educated at Antonia D’Souza High school and Wilson College, Bombay. He topped the list of MA English Examination of Bombay University in 1947 and from 1947 to 48 worked as a lecturer of English at Khalsa College, Bombay. It was during this period that some of his literary articles were published in various magazines and journals.

Next stage of his life came when he departed in November 1948 to England for his higher studies where he stayed for three and half years and studied

Philosophy and Psychology at Birbeck College, London under professor C.E.M.Joad. However, he showed greater inclination towards literature. It was during his stay in London that Fortune Press, London published his first poetic collection *A Time to Change* in 1952. The year 1952 is a remarkable date for him also because the same year he returned from London and married a Jewish girl Daisy Jacob. Similarly the year 1953 too was an important year in Ezekiel's life because the same year his second poetic collection *Sixty Poems* was published and he joined the well-known periodical *The Illustrated Weekly of India* as an assistant editor. For the next ten years, he broadcast articles on art and literature for All India Radio. From 1954 to 59 he worked as an advertising copywriter and general manager of Shilping advertising company.

His third collection of poems *The Third* was published in 1959 and the fourth *The Unfinished Man*, a year after. From 1961 to 1972, he headed the department of English of Mithibai College, Bombay. During this period his sixth poetic collection *The Exact Name* was published in 1965. He also worked as an art critic of *The Times of India* from 1966 to 67. For short period he also served as visiting professor at the University of Leeds (1964) and the university of Chicago (1964).

In 1976 he wrote *Hymns of Darkness* and also translated Marathi poems into English. His *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982) was selected for the *Sahitya Akademi Award of 1983*. He was also awarded the *Padma Shri* in 1988. He edited Indian *P.E.N*, *Quest*, *Imprint* and *Poetry India*.

Ezekiel has also written plays, art criticism and reviews. His play *Don't Call it Suicide* (1993) was published more than two decades after his *Three Plays* (1969). His selected prose edited by Adil Jussawalla in 1992 shows that he was not only a poet but also one of the best literary critics India has ever produced. Ezekiel's prose is a model of clarity and lucidity enlivened by touches of wit.

After a prolonged battle with a serious disease *Alzheimer*, Nissim Ezekiel finally passed away in Mumbai in January 9, 2004 at the age of seventy-nine.

Now find out for yourself how well you have read the biographical note on Nissim Ezekiel with the help of an exercise. In case you failed to locate the answers in the text read the whole text carefully again.

Self-check Exercise I

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (37.9.1) after doing the exercise.

- 1) In what sense was Nissim Ezekiel an Indian English poet?

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2) Who was the Nissim Ezekiel's father and what did he do?

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3) What made the poet a representative voice of the western educated India?

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4) Name the magazines and periodicals he edited?

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5) Was Ezekiel only a poet?

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6) Name his important Collections of Poems?

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7) What was the apparent cause of his death?

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37.3 GANGA

37.3.1 Introduction

Ganga, the poem you are going to read about, is a simple but pathetic story of a maidservant in every Indian household. The poem assumes significance also because it raises centuries old problem of master-servant relationship which has hardly been ever an issue. Through this poem, the poet tries to sensitise his readers towards this grave social problem. Through ironical mode of treatment, the poet brings to the fore the hypocrisy and indifference of the masters towards their servants. The poem shows how the trivial offerings like stale *chapati* and tea by the masters to their servants is considered by them a mark of generosity.

Though simple in theme, the poem is remarkable for its techniques. In the poem, the poet very beautifully turns the words into metaphor, images and symbols as the situation demands. The poem is satirical in tone and free from any rhyming scheme.

37.3.2 The Text

We pride ourselves
on generosity
to servants. The woman
who washes up, suspected
of prostitution,
is not dismissed.

she always gets
a cup of tea
preserved for her
from the previous evening,
and a *chapati*, stale
but in good condition.

Once a year, an old
Sari, and a blouse
for which we could
easily exchange a plate
or a cup and saucer.
Besides, she borrows
small coins for *paan*
or a sweet for her child,
she brings a smell with her
and leaves it behind her,
but we are used to it.
These people never learn.

Glossary

- Chapati** : a type of flat round Indian bread.
- Paan** : Astringent mixture of areca-nut, lime etc. wrapped in betel leaf for chewing.
- Sari** : Traditional dress of Indian women, long cloth to be wrapped over entire body.

37.3.3 Analysis

What strikes us first in the poem is its title *Ganga*. A cursory view of the poem reveals that the poem is about insensitive master-servant relationship in Indian households illustrated with reference to a maidservant. Then the question arises in our mind as to why the poem has been titled as *Ganga*. Whether or not *Ganga* is a name of the maidservant is not clear. In fact the interpretation of the poem hinges on the meaning of “Ganga”. This word has a vast symbolic potential. It may refer to the timeless river Ganges which has been a symbol of purification, a source of spiritual values and regeneration which unfortunately over the years have shown a trend of degeneration. The fate of maidservants is likened to the river Ganges in which the latter serves as an objective correlative for the former. Both the maidservants and the holy river have existed from the earliest ages of our civilization and are integral to it. Both of them have ironical fate of being ill-treated by those for whose cleanliness they exist.

The poem holds a faithful mirror to India that is shameless, hypocritical and merciless in her attitude to the poor. This is vented ironically in the very opening lines of the poem:

we pride ourselves
on generosity
to servants.

The Indian masters and mistresses falsely believe themselves to be generous towards their servants. The following lines better elaborate the theme of the poem: “women suspected of prostitution is not dismissed/she always gets a cup of tea/preserved for her/ from the previous evening/ and a chapati, stale/but in good condition”. The theme is developed in a series of such phrases which go on reinforcing the meaning further and further to make the issue more intense and pronounced. The everyday words are chosen to suit the theme of the poem. Furthermore, the words like tea, *chapati*, *paan* and *sari* create visual images along with those of taste and smell. The inverted use of adjectives *chapati*, ‘stale’, *sari* ‘old’, tea, ‘from previous evening’, creates a taste image which explodes the false pride of the masters. Besides, the poet is capable of turning words into metaphors, images and symbols as the situation demands. No character is named not even the maidservant because she is nameless woman working in every Indian household.

The mood of the poem is provocative and tone satiric. The poet’s choice of open form or no definite pattern of line, length and metre is suitable for the theme of the poem. Since the life of the maidservants is very precarious and scattered therefore no hope or rhythm. Though lighter in tone, the poem is no less effective than Gieve Patel’s ‘*Servants*’. Ezekiel’s poems are not merely a poem of pity but of anger as well. Ezekiel’s ‘*Ganga*’ and ‘*Servant*’ are two poems expressing two versions of the same theme. The situation of the girl of fourteen in ‘*servant*’ is no better than that of the woman who washes up in “*Ganga*”:

“At twelve or fourteen, married off
to the usual brute,
she has a child,
and tells my mother everytime
her husband beats her,
for the fun of it.”

The speaker's negative remark in the last line of the poem 'these people never learn' leaves a very lasting impression on the reader's mind. You may also note that this comment which ostensibly seems to be on servant is actually on their employers. From generations to generations, the relationship between the masters and the servants has continued to be one of the exploiters and the exploited and yet immune from any sensitivity.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Comment on the symbolic significance of the title of the poem Ganga.

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- 2) Comment on the phrase 'these people never learn'.

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37.4 A POEM OF DEDICATION

37.4.1 Introduction

A poem of dedication is from Ezekiel's *Sixty Poems*. Ezekiel published this poetic collection at the age of twenty nine. What he says about this collection also holds true for the poem you are going to read. Ezekiel said, "The only reason for publishing the book was he lacked courage to destroy it". His following explanation throws further light on each poem:

"There is in each poem a line or phrase, an idea or image which helps me to maintain some sort of continuity in my life".

"*A Poem of Dedication*" is one of the finest poems written by Ezekiel. He wrote this poem when he lived with one of his friends in a basement house in London. Broadly speaking the poem represents poet's search for the self and his struggles to come to terms with life. When for the poet, a thing becomes its symbol and 'facts' become suspect, this poem comes to console him: "I close my eyes to see with better sight". The poet becomes empowered to see the purpose of life: "I want a human balance humanly/Acquired".

Now Go through the poem

37.4.2 The Text

The view from basement rooms is rather small.
 A patch or two of green, a bit of sky,
 Children heard but never seen, an old wall,
 Two trees, a washing line between, windows
 With high curtains to block the outer eyes;
 It seems that nothing changes, nothing grows,
 But suddenly the mind is loosed of chains
 And purifies itself before the warm
 Mediterranean, which fills the veins,
 To make the body beautiful and light-
 Heaviness of limbs or soul can mimic calm-
 I closed the eyes to see with better sight.

There is a landscape certainly, the sea
 Among its broad realities, attracts,
 Because it is a symbol of the free
 Demonic life within,
 Hardly suggested by the surface facts,
 And rivers what a man can hope to win
 By simple flowing, learning how to flow,
 And trees imply on obvious need of roots,
 Besides that all organic growth is slow.
 Both poetry and living illustrate:
 Each season brings its own peculiar fruits,
 A time to act, a time to contemplate.

The image is created; try to change.
 Not to seek release but resolution,
 Not to hanker for a wide, god-like range
 Of thought, nor the matador's dexterity.
 I do not want the *yogi's* concentration,
 I do not want the perfect charity,
 Of saints nor the tyrants endless power.
 I want a human balance humanly
 Acquired, fruitful in the common hour,
 This Elizabeth is my creation,
 Stated in the terms of poetry
 I offer it to you in dedication.

Glossary

- Mediterranean** : short for the Mediterranean Sea.
- Demonic** : suggests inner possession or inspiration: the demonic fire of genius .
- Matador** : the principal bullfighter appointed to kill the bull.
- Elizabeth** : suggests the achievements or empire of Elizabeth I (1553 to 1603 A.D), the queen of England. Her reign was notable for commercial growth, maritime expansion and the flourishing of literature, music and architecture.
- Yogi** : a person who practises yoga, a process of an individual to unify itself with the ultimate.

37.4.3 Analysis

A poem of dedication has many layers of meaning. At one level it is an account of the poet's personal experience, sort of a self-introspection while he stayed in a basement house in Landon. Thus, it is the poet's account of his self-exploration and self-formation.

On another level, the poem may be seen as the poet's quest for the state of harmony between his inner and outer landscapes to arrive at equanimous adjustment between life and art. The poem is a revelation of the fact that life operates on two levels. Below the surface reality of monotonous routine life lies the deep ocean of broad reality hidden in the unconscious domain of the human mind. Even a brief spell into this inner realms brings to us a soothing calm and empowers our eyes with better sight. The poet realizes that we can not afford to ignore the mundane reality. Therefore, through this poem he strives to attain a human balance between the poised duality of life.

When you look at the very first line of the poem 'the view from basement rooms is rather small', you will be amazed to know that this seemingly general remark is pregnant with meanings. It may refer to narrow and flawed kind of living; confined and artificial kind of living besides many other things. The basement rooms may also refer to modern time life styles which create so many walls and confinements for the human beings. The five lines that follow the opening line is written in dramatic mode and create vivid image one can have from basement rooms. The phrase 'children heard but never seen' instantly creates a visual image before the reader's eyes. This also speaks of the problems of modern artificial life. The poet's static living in apartment room attains a sudden dynamism: "But suddenly the mind is loosed of chains, and purifies itself..."

The sudden escape of mind purifies itself because it dives deep into oceanic mind. Moreover, the peace and purification our mind attains is not like a 'mimic calm' caused by the Mediterranean rains which brings to human limbs or soul' just a little relief. Above all, this escape of mind empowers the human beings 'with better sight'. This better sight makes our ability to see realities with broader perspectives.

Let us observe the second stanza:

"There is a landscape certainly, the sea
Among its broad realities, attracts
Because it is a symbol of the free
Demonic life within,
Hardly suggested by surface facts,
And rivers what a man can hope to win
By simple flowing, learning how to flow....."

Here the image of the sea is contrasted with that of the river. The sea represents the broad realities of life and symbolizes the deep demonic power within while the river represents the surface facts of routine daily life. In the latter realm of living, there is nothing substantive to be gained. In such a kind of living, "what a man can hope to win". After deliberating upon both the dimensions of life, the poet strikes a balance:

"Each season brings its own peculiar fruits,
A time to act, a time to contemplate".

In the third stanza the poem turns didactic in tone. The narrator explains that the impressions of life the human beings gather are their own construct. Therefore they should try to change them. The narrator suggests people “Not to seek release but resolution”. He instructs this because he has seen that since centuries Indian religions have taught people to seek release – freedom from the cycle of birth and death and therefore from the sufferings that the very life brings. The narrator also forbids people from taking improbable tasks and suffering on account of the same. He, therefore, wants the people to take strong resolution for: “Not to hanker for a wide, god-like range/ Of thoughts, nor the matador’s dexterity”. With triple negative lines the poet, who also seems to be the narrator, makes his message more forceful:

“I do not want yogi’s concentration,
I do not want perfect charity
Of saints nor the tyrants endless power”.

Similarly, by repeating again and again what the narrator does not want, the poet makes what he wants emphatic:

“I want a human balance humanly
Acquired, fruitful in the common hour”.

The poet here in the guise of narrator wants to suggest that life lies in balance. But even this balance should also be acquired humanly i.e. with love, peace and understanding. Such a human balance will be a common property for the mutual benefits of the societies, the nations and the world. Thus the use of the phrase “common hour” is notable for its meaning. In the concluding lines the poet feels proud to dedicate this philosophy of life in terms of poetry to the readers for their benefit.

Now you may note the rhyming scheme. The poem has three stanzas of twelve lines each. The first line rhymes with the third, the second with the fifth and the fourth with the sixth and this pattern is repeated throughout the poem. The dictions chosen are simple but their usage makes them profound. The adjectives which follow the nouns make their meaning very effective. For example, when the poet talks of windows, its usual meaning should be an outlet to our eyes. But when this word is qualified by an adjective phrase “With high curtains to block the eyes,” its meaning becomes very powerful. Particularly the selection of the word ‘block’ is very effective. The ‘curtain’ too is used metaphorically as a global symbol of artificial separation. When our outward view is ‘blocked’, turning inward becomes its a natural outcome.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Explain how the poet illustrates ‘the view from basement rooms’.

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- 2) Show how the meaning of the second stanza hinges on two images ‘the sea’ and ‘river’.

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- 3) What do the phrase ‘human balance’ mean?

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- 4) Explain the phrases “humanly acquired” and “the common hour”.

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37.5 KAMALA DAS (MARCH 31, 1934 – MAY 30, 2009)

Kamala Das (Madhavikuti) was born in Malabar in 1934. She was educated privately at home and at schools in Bengal and Kerala and belonged to a writers family. Her mother *Padma bhushan* Nalapat Balamani Amma was an outstanding Malayalam poet and winner of the *Sahitya Akademi Award* and the *Saraswati Samman* and her father the editor and Managing Director of **Mathrabhumi**, a leading Malayalam language newspaper. She was only fifteen when she was married to K. Madhava Das, who rose to become an R.B.I. Officer.

Kamala Das began writing poetry at the age of six. She was only fourteen when P.E.N. India, edited by Sophia Wadia, published her first poem. But her poetry got recognition when she was awarded the Asian Poetry Prize instituted by P.E.N. Phillipines in 1963. From 1971 to 72 and again from 1978 to 79, she was the poetry editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Her poems were published in *Opinion, New Writing in India* (penguin Books, 1974), and *Young Commonwealth Poets* (Heinemann, 1965).

Kamala Das was a writer of versatile genius. She handled essays, fictions, short stories, criticism and journalistic features very successfully in both the languages, Malayalam and English. Her writings in English is as varied as in Malayalam. She published seven volumes of poetry, two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *The*

Alphabet of Lust (1976), a collection of short fictions (A Doll for the Child Prostitute) and an autobiography called *My Story*. Her well-known books included *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) and *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Stories* (1973). When the first volume of her *Collected Poems* was published in 1984, it won her *Sahitya Akademi Award* for 1985. Her other collection *The Soul Knows How to Sing: Selections From Kamala Das* was published in 1997.

She made a new experiment in Indian English poetry. She succeeded in exploring those labyrinths which inhibit many a brave poets even today. In her poetry she points to certain biological matters so bluntly and openly that readers frequently feel scandalized and shocked. It appears Kamala Das allowed the poetic impulse to flow into poetry before the social conventions came to arrest the flow. Rajeev S. Patke remarks:

“It would be mistake to suppose that Das is obsessed with sex and marriage and social roles. What she is intent on is honesty of impulse and a sense of direction to the flow of her wants and feelings”.

Talking about her contribution C.D. Narasimhaiah once remarked: “Kamala Das is perhaps the only Indian poet who owes little to Yeats or Eliot and trusted her own resources and culture”. She not only believed in her own personal experience in Kerala and her personality as fit resource for her poetry, what is creditworthy she very successfully transformed those personal experiences into poetic art. Often she depicts about women’s plight in a society dominated by men. Her poetry like most confessional poetry, written by Nissim Ezekiel, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath has therapeutic and cathartic effect on the poet as well as on the readers.

The poet is noted also for her direct public commitments. She involved herself in a number of public responsibilities. She was not only a great votary of vegetarianism but she also initiated the *Bodhiyatra Movement* for environmental protection. She played active roles as a Chairman in the Forestry Board of Kerala and as the President in the Film Society of Kerala besides entering into politics in order to help the poor and teaching deaf and dumb in a school. Suffering from pneumonia on 30th May, 2009 she breathed her last at Jahangir Hospital, Pune.

Now find out yourself how well you have read the biographical note on Kamala Das above with the help of some exercises. In case you fail to locate the answers in the text, read the whole text carefully again.

Self-check Exercise IV

1) Who were Kamala Das’s parents? What did they do?

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2) How did Kamala Das's poetic career begin?

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3) Mention some of the important books Kamala Das wrote?

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4) On what grounds her poetry is compared with those of other poets. Also mention the names of the poets.

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5) Mention some of the public responsibilities Kamala Das assumed in her life.

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37.6 AN INTRODUCTION (1965)

37.6.1 Introduction

An Introduction is obviously an autobiographical poem written by Kamala Das which first appeared in her *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). The poem is a brilliant example of her confessionalism wherein she unfolds her entire self with extreme frankness and candour. In this poem the poet expresses her experiences which were strictly private and personal. The poem is a revolt against conventionalism and restraints put against Indian women. In this poem the question whether or not Indians should write in English is put to rest. The poem is also remarkable for its daring innovativeness.

The poem you are going to read is written in free verse in a colloquial style which appropriately allows the free flow of writer's thoughts and feelings. The poem is highly revealing of the poet, of her political knowledge, of her linguistic acquirements, of her physical growth, of the sad experience of her marriage and of her quest for fulfilling love. What M.K. Naik says of her poetry in general also applies for this poem: "Kamala Das's persona is no nymphomaniac; she is simply every woman who seeks love and she is the beloved and betrayed; expressing her female hunger".

39.6.2 The Text

I don't know politics but I know the names
 Of those in power, and can repeat them like
 Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
 Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
 Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
 Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
 English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
 Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
 Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
 Any language I like? The language I speak
 Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
 All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
 Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
 It is as human as I am human, don't
 You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
 Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
 Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
 Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
 Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
 Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
 Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
 Incoherent muttering of the blazing
 Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
 Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
 Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
 I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
 For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
 Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
 But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
 The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank
 Pitifully. Then ... I wore a shirt and my
 Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
 My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
 Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
 Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
 Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
 On wall or peep in through our lace-draped windows,
 Be Amy, or be Kamla, or better
 Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
 Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
 Don't play at schizpprenia or be a
 Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
 Jilted in love... I met a man, loved him. Call

Him not by any name, he is every man,
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him...the hungry taste
Of river in me... the oceans' tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is; it is I. Anywhere and
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
If in this world, he is tightly-packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of stranger towns,
It is I who laugh; it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

Glossary

- Know the three languages** : Malayalam, Kannad and English.
- Write in two** : Malayalam and English.
- Dream in one** : Malayalam. It is the mother-tongue in which one usually dreams.
- Why not leave me alone** : a glimpse of the poet's spirit instinctively rebelling against all forms of restraints.
- It is as human as I am human** : just as human is liable to make mistakes, so Kamala's language is not without errors.
- The speech of the mind** : language through which feelings such as Joys, desires, aspirations etc. of man's mind is expressed.
- Here and not there** : to the point and not irrelevant.
- Incoherent Mutterings** : speech in a low voice not meant to be heard by others.
- Blazing** : burning strongly.
- Asked for love** : expresses the biwiderment of the innocent young girl who sought love but experienced raw lust which left her feeling assaulted and defiled.
- A quarreler with servants** : People advised Kamala to be a quarreler with servants as otherwise the latter will get the upper hand.
- Belong** : to feel comfortable and happy with the situation one is placed in.
- Categorisers** : the people with traditional thinking who consider men and women as a distinct category having specific dress and roles.
- Schizophrenia** : a mental illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought, emotion and behaviour leading to withdrawal from reality and relationship.

- Nympho** : a woman who has sex and wants to have sex very often.
- Jilted in Love** : abandoned by a lover.
- The hungry haste of rivers** : an image through which lover's strong sexual passion is reflected. As river rushes towards oceans for union with the latter, so the lover moves towards the beloved for the fulfillment of his sexual desires.
- The Ocean's tireless waiting** : an image through which the beloved's infinite patience for a proper sexual union with her lover is expressed. Ocean here is an objective correlative for beloved's psychic state.
- I am sinner.... I too ...** : the poet sums up her introduction by identifying herself with countless others around, all of whom represent a bundle of contrary features.

37.6.3 Analysis

An Introduction is a self-portrait and the anatomy of kamala Das's mind. The poem recounts the major incidents of her life which have affected her experience. The poem is remarkable for its structure even though it encompasses a diversity of facts and circumstances. The rules of punctuation have been fully observed. The lines are almost of the same length. The words used and the use of phraseology show Das's talent of choosing right words and putting them in the most effective order. The poem contains many felicities of word and phrase. Written in free verse the poem has neither any rhyming scheme nor any metrical arrangement. The natural speech rhythm, pauses and punctuation make the poem conversational in style.

When you read the poem the first thing that may strike your mind is the title *An Introduction*. Whose introduction does it talk about? A little thought reveals the poem is an introduction of the poet herself. But a deeper thought reveals that it is an introduction of 'every woman' The opening line of the poem 'I don't know politics but I know the names of those in power beginning with Nehru' makes it obvious that she does not want to assume any political identity. She rather prefers a national identity. Mark the following line: "I am Indian, very brown in colour, born in Malabar, here the poet uses the words which are identity markers – 'Indian', 'brown in colour' and 'born in Malabar'. The narrator boasts of her linguistic proficiency "I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one", to prove that she is a capable writer and fully aware of her role and responsibilities as a writer. Her Indian identity and linguistic ability is emphasized to reinforce her claim of writing in English. The following illustrations advance her claim further:

"The language I speak

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness, All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half, Indian. funny perhaps, but it is honest, It is as human as I am human, don't
you see?"

The narrator asserts that the language with all its distortions of grammar, structure or pronunciation belongs to the users, no matter what nationality they may

belong to. The narrator explains that the language is 'as human (liable to error) as the narrator is human. She makes her case to use English very strong by claiming that 'it is useful to her as cawing/Is to crows or roaring to the lions'. English comes so naturally to her that in it she can voice her 'joys', her longings' and her 'Hopes'.

The narrator is so much vexed with the suggestions that she further illustrates her point with a series of images to clarify what the writing English is not like. She says that English "is not deaf, blind speech"/ "Of trees in storms or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the/ Incoherent mutterings of the blazing funeral pyre". The last line here may refer to the decadent legacy of the British Culture.

The poem shifts to another story which talks of the narrator's early marriage and her consequent psychological hurt:

"He drew a youth of sixteen into the/ Bedroom and closed the door.
He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten./The
weight of my breast and womb crushed me/ I shank pitifully".

The above lines are remarkable for showing the poet's talent in choosing and putting the best words in the most effective combinations. The whole picture of the misuse of sex becomes vivid. The last two lines create true picture of its consequence. As a mark of protest the poet takes resort to western dress:

Then... I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness".

This open revolt created strong resentment amongst her relatives and well-wishers. Their sharpness of reactions is reflected very effectively by the poet through the appropriate selection and arrangement of words and the speaker's tone:

"Fit in, oh
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit/On walls or peep
through our lace-draped window.
Be Amy or Kamla, or better
Still be Madhavikutti. It is time to
Choose a name, a role".

Can you see that the phrase 'Fit in' and the word 'belong' are simple words but their arrangement in the poetic scheme makes their meanings very expressive, deep and varied. Similarly the words like 'cry' and 'categorisers' too are equally simple but very suggestive in meanings. For example, word 'cry' carries with it a sense of anxiety and force and categorizer refers to people with traditional thinking who understand things in terms of category and class only. The later suggestion that the narrator must never pretend to be a split-personality suffering from psychological disorder or tend to act as a nympho shows further griping clout on her. This was not all; the narrator is further instructed:

"Don't cry embarrassingly loud when/jilted in love".

The poem now moves to another story in which Kamala Das's ideal of Man-woman relationship is indicated:

"....He is everyman/'Who wants a woman, Just

as I am every/ Woman who seeks love. In/ him... the hungry haste/Of rivers in me...the ocean's tireless/waiting". Here the words 'want' and 'seek' is notable. 'Want' refers here to every man who needs woman for his service as a subordinate. 'Seek' means every woman who badly miss love, so they keep on looking for what they want their whole life. The last two lines through the use of beautiful images which serve as objective correlative very successfully explain the sexual behaviours of men and women. 'The hungry haste /of rivers and the ocean's tireless/waiting' represent the psychological states of men and women respectively. You may note here that the word 'I' is repeated at a number of times to emphasize the women's quest of identity. Explaining the nature and position of women the narrator says 'I am sinner, /I am saint. I am the beloved and the Betrayed'. The point she is trying to make is that be it man or woman, none is wholly a sinner or wholly a saint. We all are a balance of both. In that case there is no point in viewing the women as the other. Finally, Kamala Das's idea of fulfilled love is neatly presented in "I have no joys which are not yours, no aches which are not yours".

Self-check Exercise V

1) What could be implied meaning of the opening lines of the poem: "I don't know politics but I know the names of those in power, ...beginning with Nehru."

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2) Talking about English language the narrator says, "It is as useful to me as cawing is to crows or roaring to the lions..." What is the literary device used in this line?

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3) What do the images of 'rivers' and 'oceans' imply?

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- 4) “In Kamala Das the poet is the poetry”. Comment maximum in 50 words.

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- 5) “I have no joys which are not yours, no Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I”. In this statement who represents ‘I’? What is so special about the statement “I too call myself I”?

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37.7 THE DANCE OF THE EUNUCHS (1965)

37.7.1 Introduction

The Dance of the Eunuchs is considered one of the finest poems of Kamala Das. Like the earlier one this poem too appeared in summer in Calcutta. This is the first poem of the volume and sets the tone and temper for all the poems. The poem is very powerful and very effectively expresses Kamala Das’s state of mind in well-chosen words. The repetition of words in some of the lines reinforces the intended meaning. There is abundance of imagery in the poem. The whole poem is enveloped in gloom and despondency.

The poem is a linguistic manifestation of poet’s experience. In the poem the poet sympathizes with eunuchs. The costumes, the makeup, the passion with which the eunuchs dance suggest the female delicacies. Their outward appearance is contrasted with their inner sadness which finds outlet in their ‘harsh’ songs about ‘dying lovers’ and ‘children left unborn’. There is no joy in their hearts. With their fractured personality, the eunuchs can not even dream of happiness. The background of thundering clouds, flashes of lightning and meager rainfall suggest their outward sparkle and inner vacuity. The dance of the eunuchs is an objective correlative for Kamala Das’s unfulfilled love.

37.7.2 The Text

It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came/
To dance, wide skirts going round
and round, cymbals/ Richly clashing and anklets Jingling, Jingling Jingling....
Beneath the fiery gulmohar, with Long breads flying, dark eyes flashing, they
danced and/ They danced, oh, they danced till they bled... There were green/
Tatoos on their checks, Jasmine in their hair some /Were dark and some were
fair. Their voices

Were harsh, their songs melancholy; they sang of
 Lovers dying and of children left unborn...
 Some beat their drums; other beat their sorry breasts
 And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They
 Were thin in limbs and dry, like half-burnt logs
 From funeral pyres a drought and rottenness
 Were in each of them. Even the crows were so
 Silent on trees, and the children, wide eyed still;
 All were watching these poor creature's convulsions
 The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lightning
 And rain, a meagre rain that smelt of dust in
 Attics and the urines of lizards and mice...

Glossary

Eunuchs	:	a section of people who belong to neither of the sexes.
Cymbals	:	a musical instrument in the shape of a round metal plate.
Anklets	:	a piece of Jewellers around the ankle usually made of silver.
Fiery	:	looking like fire, showing strong emotions.
Gulmuhar	:	a tree with orange colour bunches of flowers.
Tatoos	:	a picture, a design that is marked permanently on a person's skin by making small holes in the skin and filling them with coloured ink.
Wailed	:	wept loudly.
Writhed	:	twisted their bodies due to unbearable pain.
Vacant ecstasy	:	the exciting movements in dance are mere steps or convulsions which express the joyless state of their hearts.
Convulsions	:	sudden uncontrollable shaking movements of a body.
Crackled	:	made short sharp sounds.

37.7.3 Analysis

In *The Dance of the Eunuchs* meaning operates at two levels. At surface level the poet appears to be sympathizing with eunuchs who are forced to dance in the scorching sun. They danced till they bled... reflects their compulsion. That their voices were 'harsh' and songs 'melancholy' becomes obvious when we know the themes of the eunuchs's song: they sang of 'lovers dying' and 'of children left unborn'. By comparing eunuch's 'thin and dry body' with half-burnt log from funeral pyres, the poet arouses in the readers a sense of shock and pathos. The poet, with a series of sound and sight images, creates a dramatic scene full of convulsions but devoid of inner vitality.

On another level, written in confessional style the poem symbolically portrays the poet's melancholy in her life. The eunuchs are symbols of unproductiveness and metaphor of barrenness. The poem becomes for Kamala Das an objective correlative to represent her inner suffering within. The dance of the eunuchs with their skirts going round and round, cymbals/Richly clashing and anklets jingling, Jingling and Jingling... is contrasted with their 'vacant ecstasy', suggesting a gulf between externally stimulated passion and their sexual drought and

rotteness within. The contrast is sustained throughout the poem. The dance of the eunuchs is the dance of the sterile and therefore is compared with the unfulfilled love of the women in the poet.

The poem shows an admirable sense of proportion in the use of image and symbols. You may note how the poet creates the image of the summer season by using the word 'hot'. Addition of the prefix 'so' before the word hot heightens the sense of weather. The use of the word 'fiery' before gulmohar suggests the unbearable summer. The use of colour-green, jasmine, dark and fair very effectively present colour image reflective of the external beauty of the eunuchs. This beauty is contrasted with the internal vacuity reflected by the use of images like 'vacant ecstasy', 'thin and dry like half-burnt funeral pyres' and 'drought and rotteness'. The phrase "writhed in vacant ecstasy" is very significant as a devastating image of the barrenness of Kamala Das's life.

The words 'crackled', 'thunder', 'lightning' and 'rain' create the atmosphere of the rainy season which is the natural corollary of the hot summer season. Besides, these words also create sound image of the rainy season which represent sudden convulsion but trivial finish.

You may note that the meaning of the title of the poem is not so simple as it appears to be. The dance which is so naturally associated with the eunuchs is not a dance inspired by their internal pleasure but a source of livelihood and therefore a compulsion which is devoid of inner joy. Thus the dance becomes an antithesis because instead of happiness it reflects the dancer's unhappiness.

Written in third person narrative through the description of eunuchs' dress and behaviour the poet creates in the poem the atmosphere of dance. Dance is the dominant rhythm of the poem which goes on increasing as the poem progresses. "...with long breads flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced". They danced, or they danced till they bled..." adds momentum to the dance and the following lines further intensifies it:

"Some beat their drums, others beat their sorry 'breasts'".

But the climax is reached in the following lines:

"The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lightning and rain". Here the word 'then' is so used to add momentum even to the sentence in which it is used.

After the climax there is a sudden fall in the rhythm as is reflected in the last two lines:

"And rain, meagre rain that smelt of dust in /Attics and the urins of lizards and mice". This fall in rhythm is suggestive of the depressed and dejected mental state of the poet because these lines convey the poet's sense of futility of her sexual experience.

Self-check Exercise VI

1) Does the title truly represent the poem? Give reasons.

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2) Pick out the words and syntaxes which create sight images.

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3) What is the dominant rhythm of the poem? Does it increase as the poem progresses?

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4) What does 'Vacant ecstasy' used in the poem imply?

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5) What words used in the poem symbolize convulsion in nature?

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37.8 A HOT NOON IN MALABAR

37.8.1 Introduction

In this poem the poet reminiscences about the landscape, the climate and the vendors of Malabar in the summer season. In this intensely personal and emotional poem Kamala Das traces her sweet childhood memories which still remains so deeply etched in her heart. The poet chooses words carefully to create and pour out the same feelings which had made her those days memorable. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* celebrates and longs for the hot noon in Malabar because the poet associates it with wild men, 'wild thoughts and wild love'. The theme of this poem is different from those of the other two poems you have read. Unlike them

the themes of this poem is the sweet memory of childhood and adolescence which refreshes all human beings especially in moments of crisis. Autobiographical in tone the poem is full of realistic imagery and marked by verbal felicities. Written in condensed and compact style, the poem shows Kamala Das's talent in writing rhythmic lines though she does not use any rhyme.

Now go through the poem.

37.8.2 The Text

This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune-cards,
All stained with time, for *kurava* girls
With old eyes, who read palm in light singsong
Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles, all covered with dust of roads,
For all of them, whose feet devouring rough,
Miles, grow cracks on the heels, so that when they
Clambered up our porch, the noise was grating,
Strange. This is noon for strangers who part
The window-drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
Shadowy rooms and turn away and look
So yearningly at the brick-ledged well. This
Is a noon for strangers with mistrust in
Their eyes, dark, silent ones who rarely speak
At all, so that when they speak, their voices
Run wild, like jungle voices. Yes, this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
Stirring up the dust; this hot noon, at my
Home in Malabar, and I so far away...

Glossary

Whining	:	complaining, grumbling and long drawn-out.
Stained with time	:	turned yellow with dust and frequent use.
Kuruba	:	a tribe of bird-catchers, basket-makers and fortune tellers.
Singsong	:	rising and falling, monotonous.
Clambered	:	climbed with difficulty .
Grating	:	harsh, jarring.
The Window-drapers	:	the window curtains.
Peer	:	peep
Brimming with the sun:		filled with the sunlight
Yearningly	:	with great desire, longing.

37.8.3 Critical Appreciation

'*A Hot Noon in Malabar*' is an autobiographical poem in which Kamala Das recalls some of her experiences in her home in Malabar. This is a nostalgic poem. Kamala Das seems to be fascinated by time 'at noon' with which the poem shows her obsession. The sun and its heat represent the glow and burning of passion for the poet and thus the external nature is brought in close association with her inner nature marked by a consuming carnal desire.

The title is not about what happens to the people, animals, plants and things inanimate during a hot summer noon in Malabar. Its meaning becomes clear only when we understand it in terms of the background of the poet's past memories.

You make note that the word 'noon' is repeated six times in the poem to create the atmosphere of noon. We can also say that noon is the dominant rhythm of the poem. The memory tags associated with noon are noon for the beggars, 'a noon for men carrying parrots in cage and fortune-cards', 'a noon for strangers who part the window-drapes and peer in', 'a noon for strangers who speak in', wild jungle-voice and above all, it was 'a noon for wild men, wild thought and wild love'. "The last use of noon is prefixed with hot and the poet regrets for its loss: "this hot noon, at my home in Malabar and I so far away...". You may note here the phrase "Jungle-voices" which adequately conveys the poet's emotion, enacts a real drama and imparts to the poem its peculiar tone. Every epithet used in the poem is effective and grows with emotion. There is a perfect fusion of sound and sense. We can further illustrate this point when we observe in the poem the speech habits of characters. The use of the words "whining voice, singsong, grating noise and jungle-voices' create beautiful sound imagery".

You may also note that 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' is not about a temporary experience of an hour or a day. It refers to the whole summer season recurring year after year. The scene created of the past is realistic. The mood of the poem is sad and tone somber. The theme of the poem is the loss of the poet's sweet experiences at Malabar home. The dominant rhythm of the poem meanders around noon.

Kamala Das successfully creates the atmosphere of her Malabar home through the imagery depicting the men and women who passed her home in the summer noon. Those men and women included men from hills with parrots in cage and fortune cards, *kuuba* girls who read palm in light singsong, bangle-sellers with red and green and blue bangles and strangers who part the window drapes and peer in for shelter and other things. It is to be noted that because the imagery is realistic, they impart authenticity to the poem. The realism of the imagery is enhanced by such details "as bangle-sellers's feet covered with dust of roads and growth of cracks on the heels and strangers deluded with the sparkle of sun not seeing a thing in shadowy rooms, turn away.

Some of the phrases including a couple of similes show the verbal felicities which Kamala Das is capable of devising in her poetry. The bangle-sellers' feet 'devouring rough miles', the hot eyes of the bangle-sellers 'brimming with the sun' and the strangers who rarely spoke so that when they did speak, their voice ran 'wild like jungle-voices' are among the verbal felicities. You may note the phrase devouring rough miles. The word devour has been used metaphorically to convey the idea of the travellers covering miles and miles of dusty road. 'Brimming with the sun' is another expressive phrase. It means filled with sun light. In the hot sun the eyes of the travellers seem to have been filled to the brim

with the heat of the sun. Similarly the poet was the most appropriate simile like jungle-voices which means like the sounds which are heard in jungle.

Through these imagery poet creates quite a realistic scene and contrasts it with her personal experience of loneliness which give rise to wild men, wild thoughts and wild love experienced at the summer season in Malabar. The feeling of home-sickness has effectively been expressed in the words; “to be here, far away, is torture”. The effect is further enhanced by the lines which follow:

“...Wild feet
Stirring up the dust this hot noon, at my
Home in Malabar, and I so far away...”

Although this poem does not use any rhyming scheme, the poet used at places some rhythmic lines. For example, beggars with ‘whining voices’, ‘stained with time’ and ‘home in Malabar, and I so far away...’ reflect some internal rhythms. Kamala Das’s poetry does not have much music or any melodic quality. This poem resembles prose more than it resembles poetry. Unlike other poems, this poem, through proper use of comma and semi-colon, adds the quality of clarity and lucidity. The language used in the poem is condensed. The poem is also marked for its maximum possible economy in the use of words.

Self-check Exercise VII

1) Why the poet repeats the word ‘noon’ as many as six times in the poem?

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2) Name the words or phrases used in the poem which create the scene of a hot summer.

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3) Give examples of verbal felicities in the poem.

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4) Does the poet use any rhythmic lines in the poem? Give example.

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37.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about two poets Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das. First you read about their life and works and then their poems in detail.

You will note that unlike the poets you read in earlier units, these poets are modernist in approach and their modern kind of poems formed part of the trend Indian English poetry began to experiment after 1960. In them the difference between the poetry and poem collapsed.

Nissim Ezekiel’s *Ganga* is an account of the perpetual suffering of maidservant in every Indian household. His *A Poem of Dedication* is the an account of the poet’s growth of mind; his own philosophy of life. The difference in theme and technique illustrates the variety of his poems.

In this unit you read about Kamala Das’s three poems. *An Introduction* is sort of her self-portrait, *The Dance of the Eunuchs*, an objective correlative for her state of mind and the *Hot Noon in Malabar*, her childhood reminiscence. All the three poems have been dealt differently but all are intensely personal and autobiographical.

We hope after reading these poems you will be able to analyse other poems by these poets.

37.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Nissim Ezekiel was born in Bombay in 1924 of Jewish (Bene-Israël) parents. Because he was born Jew and was raised as a rationalist he remained an outsider to the dominant Hindu-Muslim culture which made him a representative voice of the urbanised western educated India.
- 2) Answer is obvious.
- 3) His outsidersness and marginality kept him alienated from the dominant India Hindu-Muslim Culture. Since this is the case of a typical urbanised western educated Indians, the poet became their representative voice.
- 4) Answer is obvious.
- 5) He was not only a poet but also a playwright, an art critic and a brilliant teacher.
- 6) Answer is obvious.
- 7) Though no one can explain the actual cause of birth and death of a person, surely the apparent cause of death in case of Ezekiel was Alzheimer.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) See the opening para of the analysis (37.3.3.).
- 2) This is an ironic statement. See the last para of 37.3.3.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) From within basement rooms only partial view is possible. For example, the poet sees just a patch or two of green, a bit of sky, an old wall, two trees, a washing line between windows, children heard but never seen and windows with high curtains to block the outer eyes. Symbolically the statement means that the modern kind of artificial living has narrowed our overall vision.
- 2) See third para of 37.4.3.
- 3) The phrase 'human balance' means that the human beings should not aim for the extremes. For example he should not aspire for good-like range of thoughts, the Yogi's concentration, perfect sacrifice of saints or the tyrant's endless power. He should aim at things which can make the human being fulfilled.
- 4) The human balance or the moderate view or approach to life should be acquired 'humanly'. Here humanly may refer to an approach with love, understanding and compassion. 'The common hour' may refer to time when the human beings might be in crisis. In such a moment our values of love, compassion and understanding help stay together and overcome the crisis.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) Answer is obvious.
- 2) See para 2 of 37.5.
- 3) See para 2 of 37.5.
- 4) See para 2 of 37.5.
- 5) See the concluding para of 37.5.

Self-check Exercise V

- 1) See para 2 of 37.6.3.
- 20 The literary device used in this line is simile.
- 3) These two images act as objective correlatives for the psychological states of men and women respectively. In sexual desires men are in haste like rivers while women are patient like ocean.
- 40 Most of Kamala Das's poems are autobiographical in tone. Since she shares much of her private experiences with readers by way of her poetry, she is also called a confessional poet. She drew the subjects of her poetry mostly from her our life, it is justified to say that in Kamala Das, the poet is the poetry.

Self-check Exercise VI

- 1) Yes, the title represents the poems. But it should be clear that the title itself is ironical in tone. The dance of the eunuchs is not born out of happiness but out of compulsion. Dancing is their source of livelihood. The external beauty or their convulsions are shown to contrast their inner vacuity.

Indian English Poets

- 2) Skirts going round and round, with long breads flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced till they bled..., tattoos on their cheeks, Jasmine in their hair, some were dark and some fair, some beat their drums, others beat their breasts are some of the examples which create sight images.
- 3) See last para of 37.7.3.
- 4) See the concluding lines of the para three of 37.7.3.
- 5) The crackling of the sky, the coming of thunder, lightning and rain are symbols of convulsions in nature.

Self-check Exercise VII

- 1) The poet repeats the word 'noon' in the poem to create the atmosphere of the summer noon in Malabar.
- 2) The words or phrases used to create the scene of hot summer are 'hot', 'so hot', 'fiery gulmohar', and 'strangers' hot eyes brimming with the sun'.
- 3) See para 4 of 37.8.3.
- 4) Whining voices, stained with time, old eyes, and my home in Malabar and I so far away...create some of internal rhymes in the poem.

UNIT 38 A.K. RAMANUJAN AND JAYANT MAHAPATRA

Structure

- 38.0 Objectives
- 38.1 Introduction
- 38.2 A.K. Ramanujan (March 16, 1929 – July 13, 1993)
- 38.3 Self-Portrait
 - 38.3.1 Introduction
 - 38.3.2 The Text
 - 38.3.3 Critical Appreciation
- 38.4 Chicago Zen
 - 38.4.1 Introduction
 - 38.4.2 The Text
 - 38.4.3 Analysis
- 38.5 On the Death of a Poem
 - 38.5.1 Introduction
 - 38.5.2 The Text
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- 38.6 Jayant Mahapatra (Oct. 22, 1928...)
- 38.7 Hunger
 - 38.7.1 Introduction
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 - 38.8.1 Introduction
 - 38.8.2 The Text
 - 38.8.3 Analysis
- 38.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 38.10 Answers to Self-check Exercises

38.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- talk about life and works of A.K. Ramanujan and Jayant Mahapatra;
- analyse critically three poems of A.K. Ramanujan – Self-Portrait, Chicago Zen and On the Death of a Poem;
- examine two poems of Jayant Mahapatra – Hunger and A Rain of Rites.

38.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you are going to read three poems of A.K. Ramanujan and two poems of Jayant Mahapatra.

Ezekiel and Parthasarthy praised A.K. Ramanujan as the best of Indian poets. Ramanujan's poetry reflects form without having any formal structure and a

range of technique beyond those of any Indian English poets. His poetry blends Indian as well as European models into new form. Through his poetry he has shown that Indian poets can work within their own literary tradition and yet can be modern. His poetry very successfully exploited south Indian Brahmin roots and contrasted it with his modern life in America.

In the first poem of this unit entitled *Self-Portrait*, Ramanujan probes into the human identity. In the second poem, *Chicago Zen*, the persona in the poet suggests the intuitive knowledge of Zen Buddhism as the solution to the problems generated by a modern kind of life represented by American city, Chicago. In *On the Death of a Poem*, his third poem, Ramanujan seems to regret the loss of meaning which all poems must suffer from due to linguistic limitation in which they are compulsorily born.

Jayant Mahapatra quite like a teacher of physics did a thorough analysis as to what constituted a modern poem. Sound, image and theme, thus discovered, were the elements on which he organized his poetry. Unlike other modern poets who often used topics from urban life, Mahapatra made use of the rural landscape and local tradition. His Christian birth and the Hindu cultural background account for many of his poems expressing a sense of alienation.

In this unit Jayant Mahapatra's poem *Hunger* expresses the moral paradox of the human beings whose hunger of belly overweighs the hunger of sex. Mahapatra's another poem *A Rain of Rites* which you are going to read is a lyric of troubled soul and undefined unhappiness. The poet does not get the answers of many of the questions of his life like one in this poem "What holds my rain so it's hard to overcome?" Yet the poem is an attempt to balance inner world with that of the outer.

38.2 A.K. RAMANUJAN (MARCH 16, 1929-JULY 13, 1993)

An Indian poet, writer, translator, philologist and playwright Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan was born in Mysore in 1929 into a Tamil Brahmin family. His father was a professor of Mathematics and mother a housewife. He was born in a multicultural background where Tamil, Kannada and English were spoken.

He was educated at Marimallapa High school and Maharaja College, Mysore. He did his masters in English from the University of Mysore and taught in various colleges in south India mostly in Belgaum. He obtained diploma in Theoretical Linguistics from Deccan College Pune in 1958. Next year he went to Indiana University on a Fulbright fellowship to do his Ph.D. in Linguistics.

In 1962 he was appointed to the University of Chicago where he remained till he died during a minor surgery in 1993. Gradually he got identified with the university's department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations where his works as a translator and interpreter of Indian epics, oral narratives and devotional poetry won him MacArthur Prize fellowship or genius award in 1983. For his contributions to Literature, the Govt. of India awarded him *Padmashri* in 1976.

There were long intervals between his publications. Of his poetical works the most notable are *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971), *Selected Poems* (1976)

and *Second Sight* (1986). His collected poems came out in 1995 which included *The Black Hen* as its fourth and last section. But it was his artfully made five volumes of Translations from Tamil, Kannada and Telugu that made him internationally known.

These are *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Siva* (1993), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), *Poems of Love and War* (1985) and *When God is a Customer* (1995).

Towards his latter phase of life, he turned his attention to another rich area of Indian life, culture and folklore. Together with his essays on literature and culture these have been published in *Collected Essays* (1999). *Folktales from India* (1994), a selection of oral narratives from twenty-two Indian languages, is one of his last publications. His writings in Kannada which included three collections of verse and a novella along with his translation of U.R. Ananthmurthi's novel *Sanskara* (1976) were some of his other contributions to literature.

Ramanujan's poetry is largely autobiographical and reminiscences his family and Hindu heritage. Indian myth, history, culture, heritage and above all, its topography and environment form the myriad threads of his poetic fabric. His poetry often deals with a contrast between the East and the West, the anxiety of an exile and constant search for native roots.

Regarding his poetic ingredients, Ramanujan himself admitted that Linguistics, English, and Anthropology provided the outer forms of his poetry such as *meter*, logic and other ways of shaping experience. Similarly his long stay in India as a student and teacher, his frequent visits, field trips, personal and professional pre-occupation with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore gave him substance as well as the inner forms like images and symbols for his poetry.

Ramanujan's poetry is image-oriented. His imagery is particular, precise, concrete, vivid and realistic and hence different from those of others. His poetry is marked for its psychological realism and masterly craftsmanship. The terseness of his diction, his consummate skillfulness in using rhymes and assonance, his sharp etching of crystalized images and his masterly control in handling English language make Ramanujan one of the most significant poets in India.

Self-check Exercise I

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

- 1) In what sense was A.K. Ramanujan an Indian English poet?

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2) Throw light on Rumanian’s educational career.
3) Mention some of the important books Ramanujan wrote.
4) What were the usual themes of his poetry?

38.3 SELF – PORTRAIT

38.3.1 Introduction

The poem *Self-Portrait* you are going to read is a highly philosophical poem. It is one of Ramanujan’s most obscure poems. Here Ramanujan himself may be the speaker who says that he resembles everyone but himself. Perhaps he means to say that though he is a man having numerous identities, none of them can be regarded as his true identity. The speaker is not able to portray himself in definite terms. The law of optics says that we see only visible reality: but the speaker observes that even so-called visible reality is so invisible. His self bears just a little stamp of his father or ancestors but the self is still a mystery.

Though written just in nine lines and one sentence the poem opens a vast speculative world. The lack of any rhyme and rhythm in the poem is quite in keeping with the indeterminate nature of the self-portrait the poet would like to paint. He dramatizes the self whose essential passivity allows it to resemble others over an indeterminate stretch of time.

38.3.2 The Text

I resemble everyone
but myself, and sometimes see
in shop – windows
despite the well-known laws
of optics
the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

Note:

I resemble everyone/but myself : The statement seems extremely paradoxical. Here the poet perhaps means to say that a man has numerous identities none of which can be regarded his true identity.

The well-known laws/of optics : This means we see only what is visible to us; if we have normal vision, we would see things as they really are.

38.3.3 Critical Appreciation

The poem “Self-Portrait” by A.K. Ramanujan is an introspective poem. By looking at window- shop, the poet looks at himself and feels the loss of identity as to who he is. It is significant to note that what this poem from *the Striders* (1966) conveys is the usual theme of modernist poetry in general.

The poem is not as simple and direct as its title suggests. When you read the poem the first question that will arise in your mind is as to whose self-portrait does the poem refers to. The question complicates further when we learn that the portrait is of unknown date having only its creator’s sign below in the corner. This may refer to the fact that ancestral root or biological factors are merely partial source of human identity. Similarly the self-portrait’s unknown date may refer to inexplicable nature of the human existence.

“I resemble everyone/but myself” is the thesis statement of the poem which though seems contradictory in itself is a fact of life. Before we analyse this statement, you may be curious to know as to who the speaker of the poem is.

A look into the poet’s biographical detail may give us some clue. In this context it is important to note that the poet had been living in the USA for more than five years when he wrote this poem in 1966. Since he was becoming Americanized, he perhaps felt he was no longer an Indian except his ancestral roots in India. Here taking reference from his personal experience, the poet seems to have universalized the concept of ‘Self-Portrait’. This self-portrait refers to every sensitive individual who often suffer from lack of tune within himself. Coming back to the thesis statement, you may note that it refers to universal oneness of the human beings. This means externally the human beings are one and the same; their thought-pattern, hopes, fear and anxiety shows universal oneness. But the problem is individual’s own inner contradictions. An individual is not a true reflection of his own self.

The poem, therefore, talks of personal reconciliation in this world of contradictions. The poet believes poetry has transformational power and can

change people’s day-to-day philosophy of life. If an individual would become his true-self, he would be able to live his life with better insight and fulfillment.

As discussed above, the title refers to the self-portrait of the poet and through him those of every individual. The poem is written in the first person narrative and the emphasis on the personal pronoun “I” and “my father” very appropriately refers to the speaker’s quest for identity.

The poet draws concrete image of a stranger seen in shop-windows which he wants the readers to see. This vision of a stranger cast a multiplicity of images seen in passing shop-windows. The sight-image of a dateless self-portrait signed in a corner by its creator becomes an objective correlative of the true self-portrait of the poet and through him that of all human beings.

The poem does not mention specific name of any character. It focuses on reality rather than fantasy. Like many other confessional poems, it too is written in monologue. The mood of the poem is reflective and tone serious. The poem is written in open form, with no definite line-length, rhyme and meter. This kind of form is quite in keeping with the theme of the poem which is the quest for true identity of an individual. This poem of Ramanujan like the confessional poems of Nissim Ezekiel serves for him as therapeutic balm.

Self-check Exercise II

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

1) What does the line “I resemble everyone/but myself” imply?

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2) Who do you think is the speaker of the poem?

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3) What does the ‘Self-Portrait’ with “date unknown” and “often signed in the corner by my father” imply?

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38.4.1 Introduction

Chicago Zen like Ramanujan's self-portrait is a complex poem. *Chicago Zen* is an incoherent poem rich in suggestion and wider in implication. This poem like self-portrait you just read is seemingly meaningless and therefore complex. The speaker of the poem passes on the listeners certain suggestions. They are asked to keep their houses neat and clean and all their children named. He also requests them to be careful while crossing the pavements lest they should stumble down. He also tells his listeners that countries can neither be reached by jet nor by boat but only by answering the questions 'walls and small children ask' and finally by answering 'all calls of nature'. He also suggests them to keep a watch on their steps especially while climbing up or down on floor from a staircase. All these suggestions seem too common even trivial. You should go through the poem again and again to understand what might be the wider implications of the suggestions. You will know some of these while reading the critical appreciation of the poem.

38.4.2 The Text

The poem appears to be a monologue. The speaker may be the persona in the poet looking for his own philosophy of life while he encounters the modern ways of life in Chicago. Zen Buddhism which focuses on meditation and intuitive knowledge seems to offer him some of the solutions to his problems. The poem is written in free verse and dramatic style. With the help of images, in an ironical mode of treatment, the poet very effectively presents the dilemma of modern life and a solution thereof.

Glossary

Zen	:	A Buddhist sect which believes in meditation and intuitive knowledge. Indian word <i>Dhyana</i> (meditation) became <i>Cha'n</i> in China and Zen in Japan.
Tidy	:	arranged neatly and with everything in order.
Frothing	:	Full of a mass of small bubbles especially on the surface of a liquid; Foam.
Thumbnail	:	the nail on the thumb.
Lobster	:	a sea creature with a hard shell, a long body divided into eight sections, eight legs and two large claws.
Louse	:	a small insect that lives on the bodies of humans and animals: head louse.
Antipodes	:	a way of referring to Australia and Newziland, often used in a harmonious way.
Hashish	:	a drug made from resin of the hemp plant which gives a feeling of being relaxed when it is smoked or chewed.
Parasols	:	a type of umbrella that is used for example on beaches or outside restaurants to protect people from hot sun.
Threshold	:	the floor or ground at the bottom of a doorway, considered as the entrance to a building room.

38.4.3 Analysis

The poem *Chicago Zen* is written by A.K. Ramanujan while he lived in Chicago, one of the largest cities of America. The poem is an account of the poet's conflict between his Indian soul and the modern American culture he encountered in Chicago and its resolution. Like Nissim Ezekiel's *A Poem of Dedication* which you have just read, A.K. Ramanujan's poem too narrates the progress of poet's mind, how he comes to terms with life. Taking clue from the Zen Buddhism the poet turns to meditative and intuitive knowledge. He becomes more careful towards sanitation and caring towards "all his children", watchful on "traffic lights" while taking steps especially "at first high threshold" and "on sudden low" and especially when he wishes to reach his country.

If you observe the poem closely you may come to the finding that the title of the poem *Chicago Zen* does not refer to a simple and direct meaning. Here Chicago may symbolically represent the modern culture of America and Zen Buddhism with its intuitive knowledge and meditation as its solution, to come to terms with life in the face of modernity.

In the poem the words 'you' and 'your' recur several times to emphasise what the speaker suggests is very important and not easy to grasp. Here the speaker or the poet knows it because he himself sat for meditation. The poem is a monologue where the speaker is persona in the poet talking to himself. You may note that the closing lines of the poem '...and watch/for the last/ step that's never there' is very impactful in the sense it keeps the readers guessing its meaning. The poem's written in the second person narrative. The mood of the poem is brooding and tone ironic. The theme of the poem is to give readers a lesson that they should be watchful, caring and reflective in approach when faced with the humdrums of modern life. The rhythm of the poem is conversational like scenes from a drama. Since the poet examines the poet's personal experience, the poem is confessional and a kind of monologue. The poet very beautifully creates concrete images and successfully blends their different types:

"The traffic light turns orange
on 57th and Dorchester, and you stumble,
you fall into a vision of forest fires,
enter a frothing Himalayan river,
rapid, silent." Through the play of light in the city the poet waves
another beautiful image:
"on the 14th floor,
Lake Michigan crawls and crawls
in the window".

The poem is divided into four stanzas. Through the two instructions that the poet passes in the first stanza on "tidy your house especially living room" and "do not forget to name all your children" perhaps he means to say that in this busy life our house including all our family members should be a very important concern for us all.

The speaker continues his piece of advice even in the second stanza. The speaker wants his listeners to remain watchful of their steps because "sight may strike you blind in unexpected place". In the second stanza itself we see another scene: "your thumbnail/cracks a lobster louse on the windowpane/ from your daughter's hair/and you drown, eyes open/towards the Indies, the antipodes". The cracking of lice from daughter's hair reminds the poet of the eastern countries perhaps of India where life is so leisurely and full of concern and care.

In the third stanza the speaker explains how “country can not be reached by jet” “nor by boat on jungle river”. Neither can it be reached by “consuming hashish behind the Monkey-temple” “nor by any /other means of transport”. The series of negatives accelerate the impact of what could be the viable means of transport. The speaker emphasizes, country, (the soul of it) can be reached:

“but only be answering ordinary/black telephones, questions/
walls and small children ask, /and answering all calls of nature”

The poem is ironical in tone. The most striking example of irony in the poem is that it is not possible for a human being to reach country (to reach its soul) by jet or boat. It is possible to do so only by answering black telephone calls and answering all calls of nature. Here irony arises by play upon words “answering telephone calls and by “answering all calls of nature”.

Here black telephone perhaps refers to baseline telephones. We talk over it only when free from our work, we are comfortable at home. What do we answer to walls and children? Perhaps the questions of walls are the questions we ask ourselves usually when alone and those of the children are innocent questions like who they are, why someone is the other and why the countries are not one and the same etc.

The concluding stanza emphasizes the word ‘watch’ because what Nissim Ezekiel in his *A Poem of Dedication* says, it empowers us with better sight. The poet makes his reader alert about their steps:

“Watch it, I say, / especially at the first high/ threshold.” The second point is at “the sudden low/one near the end of the flight / of stairs”. The third point the poet wants people to be careful at is: “for the last/Step that’s never there”. All these steps may refer to our routine ups and downs in our life. Figuratively it may also refer to our spiritual progress in life.

Self-check Exercise III

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

1) What does the title Chicago Zen refers to?

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2) Give examples of images the poet creates?

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3) Mention the use of irony in the poem.

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38.5 ON THE DEATH OF A POEM

38.5.1 Introduction

The poem *On the Death of a Poem* you are going to read is different from A.K. Ramanujan’s other poems in theme. Here the poet examines the cognitive process of mind through which a poet conceptualizes and expresses a poem in linguistic terms. The poet realizes that much of the truth that a poet experiences personally is lost in the process of its linguistic representation. This experience is not unlikely for the poet who was also a professor of Linguistics in which the limitation of language in capturing and presenting reality becomes a professional concern.

The process of conceptualizing a poem passes through three phases. Firstly, the images consult one another. These images like conscience-stricken jury, having allowed deliberation of multiple contending views, passes on value-judgment. The third phase comes when the images are expressed in linguistic terms “in a sentence”.

Now Go Through The Poem.

38.5.2 The Text

On the Death of a Poem
 Images consult
 one
 another,
 a conscience
 stricken
 Jury,
 and come
 slowly
 to a sentence.

Glossary

- Image** : a mental picture that you have of what sb/sth is like or looks like.
- Conscience-Stricken** : feeling guilty about something you have done or failed to do.
- Jury** : a group of members of the public who listen to the facts of a case in a court and divide whether or not somebody is guilty of a crime.

38.5.3 Critical Appreciation

A.K. Ramanujan and
Jayant Mahapatra

This short poem of A.K. Ramanujan talks of the process of conceptualization and formulation of a poem. This process begins in the mind of the poet when “images consult/one/another”. This core personal experience of the poet now moves to a stage of “a conscience-stricken jury” where they have to arrive at a value-judgment. A poet’s creative mind acts as a jury where it undergoes a lot of aesthetic and moral conflicts. As the images arrive at value judgment and linguistic consensus, they go on narrowing down their choices. This final process results into linguistic verdict “and come/slowly to a sentence”.

The “images consult/one/another” refers to the fact that within poet’s mind various possibilities are internalized. Similarly “a conscience-stricken/Jury” refers to the poetic process in the mind of the poet in which there is give and take of views among themselves. After enough discussion and debate the “poetic jury” passes on a final judgment which in written forms appear as poems. Thus, the poet turns multiple perspectives on the birth and status of a poem. The magnitude of truth that the poet experiences before suffers acutely when reduced to sentences or a poem. This is what the poet refers to by title *On the Death of a Poem*.

Perhaps the poet is in search of a more judicious, secular and subtle kind of theory and practice of poetry. By referring to word “jury” the poet refers to a sense of value-judgment and also that judicial verdict has a linguistic limitation. But while decoding meaning of a poem its interpretation goes much beyond linguistic signs.

The jury may know certain facts and may have wider connotation of a case but for the practical reasons, they deliver judgments based on limited and certain verified facts. Here the poet jury too suffers the same dilemma.

The speaker in the poem is a persona in the poet. The poem is written in the third person narrative. It is written in one sentence spread over three stanzas of three lines. The gaps between the stanzas indicate the gap in processing the meaning of a poem itself. The mood of the poem is reflective and tone serious. The poem personifies the stanza one and two till the final poem is delivered. It is as if Ramanujan wants to hold and propose the view that “the poem is a process of images operating upon one another before being given a fixed order”.

Self-check Exercise IV

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

- 1) Do you agree with the title of the poem as ‘On the Death of a Poem’? Give reasons.

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2) Give examples of use of personification in the poem.

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38.6 JAYANT MAHAPATRA (OCT. 22, 1928...)

One of the best-known Indian English poets Jayant Mahapatra was born in 1928 in Cuttack in the state of Orissa. He was born in a lower middle class Christian family. His father Lemuel was an inspector of Primary schools and mother a housewife who always had disagreement with the views and beliefs of her son. Though born and brought up in Christian tradition, he dealt all his life with dominant Hindu amphitheatre outside.

He had his early education at Steward European School Cuttack, honours in Physics from Ravenshaw College and first class master’s degree in Physics from Science College, Patna. At the young age of twenty one years he became a lecturer of physics. From his school days he grew as a lover of books. He began to learn English from his school days where he had opportunity to be taught by British, Australian teachers and a few Anglo-Indian poets. But he learnt English by reading Walter Scott, Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Rider Hoggard, Faulkner and Hemmingway.

As a poet Jayant Mahapatra as has made his indelible mark on the Indian English poetry. Although his poetic career began late around 1938, he wrote profusely which more than compensated the loss on this account. His first book of poetry *Close The Sky, Ten by Ten* appeared in 1971 and was followed by *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The false Start* (1980), *Life Signs* (1983), *Dispossessed Nests* (1986), *The Poems Selected* (1987), *Burden of Waves and fruit* (1988), *The Temple* (1989), *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992), *The Best of Jayant Mahapatra* (1995), *Shadow Space* (1997), *Bare Face* (2000) and *Random Desert. Relationship* (1980) a long poem in twelve sections, was selected for **Sahitya Akademi Award** of 1981. This was the first honour of its kind given to a volume of Indian English poetry. Jayant Mahapatra has also written short stories and essays and his three volumes of translations from the Oriya. In 1979 he edited *Chandrabhaga*, a literary bi-annual for fourteen years.

The finest multicultural poet writing in India, Jayant Mahapatra lived all his life in Orissa. No wonder, therefore, that Oriya landscape especially Puri and Konark has a strong presence in his poetry. But it is not these places but the mental, moral and spiritual life depicted in them that stamps his poetry as Indian. Except English language everything in his poetry is Indian. Mahapatra insisted that he should be considered as an Oriya poet who writes in English. Once he wrote, “Orissa is my land, my roots are there and my people. But my training was in English”. His perceptions of self and the outside world is the broad theme of his poetry. His poetry also reflects the poet’s efforts to correlate his inner as well as the outer self.

We observe so many influences on his life. He said, “You can’t separate yourself from history or myth”. Division of Orissa particularly multiple distribution of its parts among other states, the second world war, and his alienation from the dominant Hindu world had deeply influenced his poetry. As a poet Jayant Mahapatra was influenced by Robert Bly and American poets of 1960s and 1970s in using the landscape as a means of expressing his subjective feelings. Like romantic poets he employed nature or external objects as a stimulus to the deep ruminations of the self echoing deeply traditions of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. Similarly his acquaintance with the works of William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972) helped him to build up a belief that the logic of poem was ultimately in his inner relations rather than in its being narrative or argumentative. Jayant Mahapatra also read his favourite poets Pablo Neruda, North Eastern poets like Anjum Hassan, Robin Ngangom and Desmond. He was also influenced by the field poetry of William Carlos Williams, James Wright and the surrealists.

Jayant Mahapatra’s poetry is modernist both in the sense of theme and in the use of imagery. His images are conventional and often thought-provoking. Like his other contemporary Indian English poets, he too writes in free verse, having irregular stanza and without rhyming scheme. The tone of his poetry is almost colloquial and conversational. But the dictions he uses are often difficult. Despite everything, his poetry is different from the main-stream Indian verse”.

Self-check Exercise V

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

1) Who was Jayant Mahapatra’s father and what did he do?

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2) What was Jayant Mahapatra’s educational background?

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3) Mention some of his important works.

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4) What were the major influences over his career as a poet?

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38.7 HUNGER

38.7.1 Introduction

Hunger, the poem you are going to read depicts a pathetic scene in which you observe how hunger of belly forces a fisherman to offer his daughter for sex. The poem very powerfully presents the dialectics of the hunger for food and the hunger for sex. According to Mahapatra, “the poem is based on a true incident; it could easily have happened to me on the poverty-ridden sands of Gopalpur-on-sea. Often have I imagined myself walking those sands, my solitude and my inherent sexuality working on me, to face the girl inside the dimly lit palm frond shack”.

The poem unfolds in four dramatic scenes and has even a snatch of conversation. The gravity of the *Hunger* and the simplicity of treatment has made it one of the remarkable poems of Indian poetry in English. The poem is also marked for its profoundly human document of the experience established by the words and their arrangement.

Now go through the text.

38.7.2 The Text

It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back,
The fisherman said: will you have her, carelessly,
trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words
sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.

I followed him across the sprawling sands,
my mind thumping in the flesh’s sling.
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in.
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed
at the froth his old nets had dragged up from the seas.

In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound.
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls.
Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.

I heard him say: my daughter, she's just turned fifteen...
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wile.
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

Glossary:

- trailing his nets** : dragging his nets behind him as he walked homewards.
- and his nerves** : he also seemed to drag his nerves; he tries to keep his nerves or mind under control as he controlled his nets.
- sanctified** : consecrate; give the appearance of being right or good.
- I saw his white bone thrash his eyes** : his white bone (teeth) thrashed (punished) his eyes; one part of the body rebuking another part of it.
- Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in** : the speaker's sense of guilt was so intense that he thought the only way to regain his peace of mind would be to burn his house in remorse.
- Silence gripped my sleeves** : the speaker found himself speechless.
- Froth foam Palm frond** : the leaf of a palm.
- shack** : a humble cottage; a roughly built cabin.
- wile** : trick
- slithering** : slipping; creeping.
- sling** : a device by which a man whose hand or forearm has been injured can support the arm so that it does not have to hang.

38.7.3 Critical Appreciation

The poem you are going to read is a narrative poem containing outlines of a full-length story. In this poem the poet talks about two basic human urges – the hunger of the belly and the hunger of the sex. Packed in compact structure the poem shows the paradoxical situations in which the human beings are trapped. The poem also shows how poverty forces the fisherman's daughter to prostitution.

The opening line of the poem "It is hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back", is a topical sentence and the whole poem is its illustration. The speaker for the first time experience the overpowering urge of sex; that was why it was hard for him to believe the power of sex. The speaker finds himself before a poor fisherman who is willing to 'compromise' on his daughter. The fisherman offers his daughter in a very casual manner, "will you have her". He said so while "trailing his nets and nerves" as though his words 'sanctified' the purpose with which he faced himself. However, the fact that he tries to control his nerves or mind speaks of his inner conflict. This is also clear from the speaker's observation of the fisherman: "I saw his white bones thrash his eyes." Here the word "thrash" is used metaphorically and the word 'sanctified' is ironically because the helplessness of the situation in which the fisherman and his daughter is placed makes this word meaningless.

In the second stanza the protagonist followed the fisherman “across sprawling sands”. This indicates that the protagonist had already some information of the flesh-trade there. But his movement was not very comfortable. His “mind thumping in the flesh’s sling” shows his mental agitation. He continues to think that the only hope for regaining his mental peace after his act of sexual conduct would be through “burning the house he lived in”. Here “the house” may refer to the mental state he lived in. As he proceeds towards his goal he felt as if “silence gripped my sleeves”.

The rhythm of the poem speeds up as the story moves to its climax. Already gripped with a sense of guilt, the speaker suffers with a sense of pathos when he sees “In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound”. “Wind was I” and “Palm fronds scratched my skin” shown how the speaker’s sex- sick movement had turned him quicker. The concluding line of the second stanza “Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind” turns the speaker’s inner state of mind into concrete visual picture.

The fisherman’s deliberate mentioning of his daughter’s age that “she is just turned fifteen” in the opening line of the last stanza suggests that perhaps he had turned professional. The second line of the stanza is very expressive. ‘Feel her’ is too obvious a suggestion for sex. When he says he will be back soon, he means to say he is going away. This is further clarified when he informs the speaker “your bus leaves at nine”. At that moment the speaker felt as if “the sky fell on me”. This shows that the speaker was not a professional kind and therefore it was a shocking experience for him. The way the girl opened her “wormy legs wide” convinced the speaker that the girl was indulged in prostitution out of compulsion.

The poem is written in the first person narrative. The speaker is a male persona and talks directly to the fisherman, the second person. The phrases “In the flickering dark”, “an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls” and “your bus leaves at nine” suggests that it was an evening time. “The trailing of the nets”, “across the sprawling sands” and “the froth his old nets had dragged up from the sea” create an image of fishing on a shore.

The mood of the poem is brooding and tone somber. The title Hunger has been used ironically. The poet shows his remarkable capacity to condense his material in a very short space. The poem is remarkable not only for the compactness of its structure but also for the choice of befitting words and their most effective arrangements.

Self-check Exercise VI

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

- 1) What does the last sentence of the first stanza “I saw his white bone thrash his eyes” imply?

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- 2) What does the speaker in the poem mean when he said, “Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in”.

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- 3) What was the speaker’s mental state whiling going to the shack?

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38.8 A RAIN OF RITES

38.8.1 Introduction

A Rain of Rites is the title poem of Jayant Mahapatra’s collection of poems published in 1976. What the poet says about much of his poems holds true for this poem also: “Today’s poem utilizes a number of images and symbols to form a whole, leaving the reader to extricate himself with the valid meaning or argument from them.” He adds, “a seemingly obscure poem does in its content, contain the hidden voice for its ultimate understanding.” The persona in the poet regrets that his past experiences holds him back shattering all his good impulses that arise in his mind before they rain or rejuvenate.

Written in fourteen lines the poem is divided into four stanzas, first three of four lines each and the last one of two lines only. Since the poem is written in free verse it does not reflect any rhyming scheme or metrical arrangement. This pattern of poem befits the theme of the poem which ends on a note of interrogation.

38.8.2 The Text

Sometimes a rain comes
slowly across the sky, that turns
upon its grey cloud, breaking away into light
before it reaches its objective.

The rain I have known and traded all this life
is thrown like kelp on the beach.
Like some shape of conscience I can not look at,
A malignant purpose in nun’s eye.

Who was the last man on earth.
to whom the cold cloud brought the blood to his face?

Numbly I climb to the mountain – tops of ours
Where my own soul quivers on the edge of answers.
Which still, stale air sits on an angel's wings?
What holds my rain so it's hard to overcome?

Glossary:

- kelp** : a large brown seaweed.
conscience : feeling of feeling of guilt or anxiety.
Numbly : deprived of feeling through cold or shock etc.

38.8.3 Analysis

A Rain of Rites is a poem written by Jayant Mahapatra who lived himself a life of alienation. The title of the poem is symbolic in meaning. In the poet's scheme of sin and expiation, A Rain of Rites may refer to hoped-for expiation. It may also refer to a process of purification.

In this poem Mahapatra uses symbols from his environment to articulate an inner space of feelings. For example his symbols of 'rain', 'sky', and 'cloud' very articulately express the poet's inner feelings which arise during solitude and silence. This poem suggests more than is said as it reveals areas of the mind unstructured by rational concepts and logic.

The poem reflects the poet's question which ends in uncertainty and defeat. The poem is lyric of a troubled soul ; of a weary and undefined unhappiness. Bruce king remarks. "The monsoon season, which provides symbols for A Rain of Rites is both a time of grey skies, disasters and depressions and also a period of renewal, birth, regeneration, after the dry, stifling Indian summer. But the rains brings no renewal to the poet. In the poem a contrast is made between the surprising moments when the sun shines through the clouds of the grey rain and the poet's lack of illumination and renewal:

"Sometime a rain comes,
Slowly across the sky, that turns upon its grey cloud, breaking
away into light
Before it reaches its objective".

You may note that when the opening stanza talks symbolically of 'rain'. the poet uses the word in two different senses: one in the sense of past experience and the other in the sense of purifying agent.

In the second stanza the speaker regrets "The Rain I have known and traded all this life/ is thrown like a kelp on the beach." He perhaps means to say that the experiences of the past he has known proved useless 'like a kelp on the beach.' He adds another simile to illustrate the same subtle point. He says that since he is some shape of conscience, therefore, has a sense of right and wrong; he is not supposed to misunderstand the truth and look for right in a wrong place like looking for "a malignant purpose in a nun's eyes".

The stanza three asks a question as to who the last man was "to whom the cold cloud brought the blood to his face". The poet perhaps refers to the person having right impulse whose thoughts were refined and the loss of it had saddened the man. The speaker wishes to say that it was long-long ago that loss of such human values outraged the human being. The poet examines his own inner feelings to

denote the time over which the human beings lost their innocence and were overtaken by experience. The poet devoid of any feeling approaches this question with shock:

“Numbly I climb to the mountain- tops of ours
Where my own soul quivers on the edge of answers”.

The speaker fails to get the exact answer. Therefore, the last stanza ends on a note of interrogation. The speaker finally wants to know as to why the stale air or old memories “sits on angel’s wings” and they move with the fastest speed. He would also like to know as to what is that holds our rain or past impressions so that “it’s hard to overcome”.

The poem uses the images of ‘rain’, ‘sky’, ‘clouds’ and ‘kelp on the sea’. They are related to the rainy season which symbolizes both devastation as well as regeneration. Although the dictions chosen by the poet is simple but their arrangement into phrases, clauses and sentences makes the overall meaning of the poem complex as are the speaker’s inner feeling. The images are created with the use of similes. For example, the poet compares the uselessness of the past memories with seaweed on the beach. Similarly he compares himself with some shape of conscience. In the title ‘A Rain of Rites’ we marks some internal rhyme as we mark it in the second line of stanza three where the poet uses ‘cold cloud’. The theme of the poem is the loss of human innocence or rejuvenating force within because of the worldly experience we gain which keeps us going in life. This raises the same question which Nissim Ezekiel raises in ‘A Poem of Dedication’ wherein the speaker says:

“And rivers what a man can hope to win by simple flowing, learning how to flow”.

The poem may also be studied in terms of the poet’s own personal life. The listening, waiting, questioning solitude is a reflection of Mahapatra’s being unable to be part of the traditional Hindu Culture around him. A Rain of Rites balances his inner with outer world. The poem appears to be a reflection on relation with and alienation of the self from external realities in a world without apparent purpose. This is existentialist dilemma of most modern literature. The poem is written in the first person narrative. There is enough gap between the lines of the poem because it expresses the narrator’s inner landscape. Because the poem reflects upon intuitive knowledge, much remains unsaid which the readers are supposed to reveal. The overall mood of the poem is regretful and tone somber.

Self-check Exercise VII

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Read the answers (38.9.2) after doing the exercise.

- 1) What does the title *A Rain of Rites* refers to?
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2) Why the speaker cannot look at a malignant purpose in a nun's eye?
3) Why does the poet leave the poem on a note of interrogation?

38.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life and five poems of A.K. Ramanujan and Jayant Mahapatra. You will also have a glimpse of the kind of poetry they have written. Above all, you will be in a position to analyze the poets' other poems.

38.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) A.K. Ramanujan was born and educated in India. At the age of thirty he left for the USA where he studied and worked all his life as a faculty in the University of Chicago. He not only spent formative part of his life in India, he continued to visit his mother land all his life besides representing it in literature. In his writings we mark a comparison of Indian life and culture with those of America.
- 2) See para 2 and 3 of 38.2.
- 3) See para 4 of 38.2.
- 4) See para 5 of 38.2.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) This line means that the human beings, their hopes, fears and anxiety are universally the same. The human being's own self is contradictory and is not in harmony with itself.
- 2) Here the poet himself seems to be the speaker. When he universalizes this question, it becomes a question of identity of every individual.
- 3) The above lines suggest that the time since the human being exist is unknown. The ancestral identity of a man is merely a superficial kind of knowledge of human identity.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) See para 2 of 38.4.3.
- 2) The poem creates the images of 'forest fires' and 'the frothing Himalayan river, rapid and silent'.
- 3) The poem is ironical in treatment. The most striking example of irony in the poem is "country cannot be reached by jet or boat". It is possible to reach a country (its soul) "only by answering black telephone calls" and "answering all call of nature". We mark here the play upon words.

Self-check Exercise V

- 2) See para 5.

Self-check Exercise VI

- 1) This sentence shows although the fisherman spoke it in a spur of moment as it he was a professional but reality comes out when we observe that his white teeth did not agree with the other part of his body.
- 2) The speaker felt that the act he was involved in was morally degrading. He suffered from a severe sense of guilt and thought that he can purify himself only by killing himself. This may also refer to a state of mind having burning desires.
- 3) See para 3 of 38.7.3.

Self-check Exercise VII

- 1) See para 1 of 38.8.3.
- 2) Because it would mean looking for answer in an unexpected place or looking for right answer in a wrong place.
- 3) The poet leaves the poem on a note of interrogation because his quest as to why the past always prevails over our impulses of the present remains unresolved.

UNIT 39 ARUN KOLATKAR AND AGHA SHAHID ALI

Structure

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- 39.2 Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004)
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39.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- write about Arun Kolatkar and Agha Shahid Ali and their poetry;
- discuss the content of the poems prescribed for you;
- be able to comment on the form and style of the poems discussed in this unit.

39.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall take up three poems by Arun Kolatkar and one by Agha Shahid Ali. First of all, we shall briefly introduce you to these Indian poets in English who, though almost contemporaries, came from different backgrounds and have written different kinds of poetry. Kolatkar was a bilingual poet writing both in Marathi and English while Agha Shahid Ali, a Kashmiri, was a professor

of English and creative writing in the U.S.A. After that we shall take up the discussion of the prescribed poems.

All the three prescribed poems of Kolatkar require some background knowledge. We shall therefore try to understand the mythological and historical background to these poems.

Many poems can be interpreted in more than one way. We shall try to find out whether the poems prescribed for us can have more than one meaning.

You know that the study of language used in a text is extremely important but when we are reading a poem it is essential that we are sensitive to the pictorial quality as well as to the music of the poem. In this unit we shall also take a look at the language used in the prescribed poems.

39.2 ARUN KOLATKAR (1932-2004)

Arun Balkrishna Kolatkar was born in Kolhapur in Maharashtra. He was trained as an artist at the J. J. School of Art, Mumbai. He took his diploma in painting in 1957 and began to work as an advertiser in Mumbai. He lived in that city all his life.

When you know more about Arun Kolatkar you will find that he is different from most other Indian poets in English. He is different because he was a bilingual poet who could write poetry in English as well as in his mother tongue Marathi.

Kolatkar's early poems, both English and Marathi, were published in various magazines. Dilip Chitre, whose poem you will read in Unit 42, included Kolatkar's Marathi poetry translated into English in his *Anthology of Marathi Poetry 1945-1965* published in 1967. 1976 was an important year for Kolatkar because that year two collections of his poems, one in English and another in Marathi, were published. The book of English poems was called *Jejuri* and his Marathi poems were published under the title of *Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita* ('Arun Kolatkar's Poetry'). The very next year he won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for his *Jejuri*. Poets and critics, including Nissim Ezekiel and Salman Rushdie, have praised *Jejuri* highly and in 1977 when Prithvi Nandy published *Strangertime*, a major anthology of Indian poems in English, he included Kolatkar's poetry in it.

In 2004, the year Kolatkar died, two collections of his poems, *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpasatra* appeared. Kolatkar also translated the poems of Marathi saint-poet Tukaram into English. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his Marathi poems entitled *Bhijki Vahi* ('A Soaked Notebook')

Kolatkar's *Jejuri* is named after a place in Maharashtra. Jejuri is a temple town near Pune in Western Maharashtra where devotees go on a pilgrimage to worship the deity Khandoba, an incarnation of Shiva. In 1963, Kolatkar visited Jejuri with his brother and a friend. He composed a few poems about the place immediately after he returned from there. Before he actually saw the place he had read about it in a book on temples and legends of Maharashtra. Kolatkar says in an interview that he became interested in Jejuri because 'It seemed an interesting place'.

Although Kolatkar draws many of his images from the temple town of Jejuri, we cannot say that these poems are religious or devotional. He himself said in an interview that he was not sure whether he believed in God. He said, 'I leave the

question alone. I don't think I have to take a position about God one way or the other.' Many of the poems in *Jejuri* are about non-religious subjects. Some of them express the poet's understanding of the problems of living. Many others are about contradictions in contemporary life in India.

Kolatkar's poems are often oblique and sometimes difficult to understand. This is because his poetry is radically experimental and is influenced by the European and American modernist poets like Eliot, Auden, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and many others like them. These qualities of obliqueness and obscurity are seen in both his English and Marathi poems. He often uses myth to comment on the contemporary reality in India. You will find that 'Ajamil and the Tigers', a poem you are going to read, does exactly that. There is also a touch of humour and satire in his poetry.

39.3 SUICIDE OF RAMA

39.3.1 Introduction

This poem is about Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu and the hero of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Valmiki's epic describes how Rama of Ayodhya defeated Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, and rescued his wife Sita who had been abducted by Ravana. After that Rama returned to Ayodhya and ruled as a model king for many years. Rama is said to have died by drowning himself in the river Saryu which flows past Ayodhya.

Now read the poem.

39.3.2 The Text

Suicide of Rama

winding verses stir him up
the turreted epic shrugs him off
the river resumes him
from legend's ledge the hero falls

the crescent cuts a rope of fables
we cloud the skeleton with folklore
from valmiki's roof top rama jumps
disturbing a tile or two

his flesh of myth saponified
his arse turned up toward the moon
rama drifts like a gourd
far from sap or shore

man leaves his legend standing
one wave bears the other out
the river refers his bones
to the salt judgement of the sea

Glossary:

winding : having a curved and twisted shape.

turreted : having small towers atop a wall or building, especially a castle.

- ledge** : a narrow flat shelf fixed to a wall, especially one below a window.
- crescent** : a curved shape.
- saponified** : turned into soap when oil or fat reacts with alkali.
- gourd** : a type of large vegetable with a hard skin and soft flesh.

39.3.3 Interpretation

Arun Kolatkar, as you know, wrote poems both in English and Marathi. Sometimes he wrote a poem in Marathi and then translated it into English himself. ‘Suicide of Rama’ was first written in Marathi and then translated into English by the poet himself. It is about the death of Rama.

The opening lines refer to the ‘winding verses’ of Valmiki’s *Ramayana*. The verses are compared to an ascending flight of stairs that created the hero named Rama. Then Rama commits suicide and falls from his heroic height that Valmiki gave him. It is like the epic shrugging him off. Valmiki’s epic has been called ‘turreted’ which suggests the metaphor of the epic as a grand palace. It also tells you that Rama lived in a palace and he jumped into the river from one of its windows. By juxtaposing the epic and Rama’s palace the poet suggests that it is not only the epic *Ramayana* that is grand like a palace but also that the epic has created the grand image of Rama the hero. But when Rama commits suicide he becomes a common mortal. The word ‘ledge’ in the fourth line continues the metaphor of the palace. It is the ledge, literally that of a window from which Rama jumped into the Saryu, and metaphorically that of the legend of Rama from which Rama falls when he commits suicide.

The ‘crescent’ in the next four lines makes you visualize the curved path that Rama’s body took when he jumped into the river. Fables (here meaning legendary tales) about Rama are imagined to be a rope that kept him secure at a high point as a hero. The poet tells us how heroes are created. When we turn a human being into someone divine it is like surrounding an ordinary person of flesh and blood (‘skeleton’) with the aura of a superhuman being (that is, clouding him with folklore). But when Rama committed suicide he fell from the high rooftop of Valmiki’s poetic imagination to the level of an ordinary mortal. To commit suicide is to admit defeat and the poet seems to suggest that a defeated man cannot be an epic hero. The poem presents a striking contrast between the two images of Rama: one of the hero of *Ramayana*, faultless and immortal in popular imagination, and the other of an ordinary man who commits suicide.

Rama’s image of a great hero and king in mythology is seen turning into soap, something that will eventually disappear in the river. The use of the word ‘arse’ suggests that now the great hero has been reduced to a corpse that is drifting in the river like ‘a gourd’. Thus, in death the hero is far removed from that living creeper of legend (‘sap’) that once bore him high.

The final lines express a general truth. The man leaves only his legend behind. He will die but his great deeds will be remembered even after he is gone. It is like one wave proving that there was another before it. This is the cycle of nature; death always follows life. The river symbolizing change carries his corpse to the salty sea. This is the final judgement of time (objectified here as the sea) that every life, however illustrious, has to come to an end.

The artistic tension in the poem has been built on the contrast between the two images of Rama: the one of an epic hero who is a timeless part of popular imagination and the other of a mortal who dies when he jumps into the river. His leaping into the river and getting drowned symbolizes his transformation from a legend into a mortal being. After death he becomes a part of this phenomenal world of the elements. The river represents that physical world that is bound by the laws of nature which say that anything born has to die. In another words, Rama's suicide suggests his leaving the world of cultural imagination and passing into that of ordinary existence.

This poem will remind you of another poem in Hindi written on the same subject. That poem is 'Ram Ki Jal Samadhi' by Bharat Bhushan but there is fundamental difference between the two. In the Hindi poem, death does not diminish Rama's greatness. The images that Bharat Bhushan employs in the poem relate to Rama's great deeds which he remembers at the time of his death such as his breaking the bow of Shiva. Unlike the Hindi poem, Kolatkar's poem has an unmistakable note of irony.

39.3.4 A Note on the Form

When you read the poem you will find something unusual about it. You will notice that there are no capital letters or punctuation marks in the poem. If you read the poems of the American poet E.E. Cummings (1894-1962) you will notice that he too does not use capital letters or punctuation marks. But can we offer another explanation for it? We all know that proper nouns are written with a capital letter therefore 'valmiki' and 'rama' should have been spelt with capital letters. Can we say that Kolatkar does not write these names with capital letters because he wants to suggest that death makes everyone equal and takes away a person's individuality? Note that in the third stanza, Kolatkar compares Rama's body to a gourd drifting in the river suggesting that after death there is no difference between the body of Rama and that of a nameless gourd. Similarly, we can say that the absence of punctuation marks tries to recapture in verse the unrestricted flow of the river Saryu in which Rama was drowned.

You will also notice that in this poem the river is the central metaphor. It stands for the principle of change. This image of the river is contrasted with that of the solidly standing royal palace that represents the legend of Rama fixed immutably in our imagination.

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) Select words in the first four lines that suggest the image of a palace.

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2) What does the river symbolize?

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3) Explain in your own words the line 'we cloud the skeleton with folklore'.

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39.4 CHAITANYA

39.4.1 The Text

Chaitanya

come off it
said chaitanya to a stone
in stone language

wipe the red paint off your face
i don't think the colour suits you
i mean what's wrong
with being just a plain stone
i'll still bring you flowers
you like the flowers of **zendu**
don't you
i like them too

Glossary:

Zendu : a kind of flower

39.4.2 Background to the Poem

Let us know something about Chaitanya. Chaitanya, or Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534), as he is often called, was born in Bengal. He believed that we should ignore religious rituals and worship the Supreme Being in the form of Lord Krishna. He also believed that a devotee should lose his individual self into Lord Krishna and experience the presence of God in his life. One of the ways of destroying the ego is to recite the name of the lord in great ecstasy and to feel boundless compassion and love for God's entire creation.

39.4.3 Interpretation

Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri*, as you know, is a collection of poems dealing ostensibly with the poet's experience of visiting that place but actually it has poems on many important questions related to living. The poem you have just read has been taken from *Jejuri* and is one of the three 'Chaitanya' sections in the book. How is Chaitanya related to Jejuri? It is said that in 1510-11 he visited Jejuri where he tried to reform the people.

The opening lines of the poem tell you that the speaker is Chaitanya. He seems to be talking to a stone that is painted red. The first line ('come off it') tells you that the speaker's tone is informal as if he is talking to an equal and not to a deity. He speaks in 'stone language'. Can you say what 'stone language' means? First, it can mean language that the deity did not understand. It can also mean that people did not understand what Chaitanya was trying to tell them about devotion. When you read the rest of the poem, you will realize that 'stone language' suggests that the people of Jejuri did not agree to what Chaitanya was asking them to do. Therefore we can say that Chaitanya's language was ineffective; it was 'stone language'.

Let us return to the poem now. The speaker asks the stone to wipe the red paint off its face. If the stone mentioned in the poem is worshipped as a deity, we can safely say that the 'red paint' mentioned in the poem is obviously vermilion that devotees put on the stone images they worship. When we explore the image as a symbol, we understand that the 'red paint' stands for all kinds of rituals that are merely actions without any real feelings of devotion.

The last four lines mention 'flowers' that the speaker will offer to the deity. This word may be contrasted with the 'red paint' mentioned earlier. If 'red paint' stands for empty rituals, flowers represent real and natural feeling of devotion. The last two lines of the poem tell us that the speaker does not see himself and God to be separate. This is indicated by his saying that both he and God like the zendu flowers.

It appears from the poem that Chaitanya wanted to teach true devotion to the people of Jejuri but they preferred to continue using their old religious rituals. This you will realize when you read another Chaitanya section in *Jejuri* which says that the hills (meaning the people living there) remained unmoved.

the hills remained still
when Chaitanya
was passing by
a cowbell tinkled
when he disappeared from view
and the herd of legends
returned to its grazing.

Can we call this a religious poem? In a *Youth Times* interview Arun Kolatkar was asked if he was a religious poet. He replied, 'A religious poet? No. Or may be religious in the sense that any experience can be religious if experienced deeply enough...' This poem is religious in the sense that it expresses the poet's idea of true religious feeling.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Why does Chaitanya ask the stone to wipe the red paint off its face?

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2) Comment on 'red paint' and 'flowers' as symbols.

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39.5 AJAMIL AND THE TIGERS

39.5.1 Introduction

In this poem Arun Kolatkar uses the mythical tale of Ajamil in a new context. According to the legend, Ajamil was an evil man who was a drunkard and neglected his family. He also gambled and sold off his wife's ornaments. He became a thief and looted wayfarers. As a result of his evil ways his wife suffered and found it very difficult to look after her children. The story tells us that he was saved from the messenger of death by God. After that he became a different man. He left his sinful ways. He decided to spend the rest of his life helping others.

39.5.2 The Text

Ajamil and the Tigers

The tiger people went to their king
and said, 'We're starving.
We've had nothing to eat,
not a bite,
for 15 days and 16 nights.
Ajamil has got
a new sheep dog.
He **cramps our style**
and won't let us get within a mile
of meat.'

'That's shocking,'
said the tiger king.
'Why don't you come to see me before?
Make preparations for a banquet.
I'm gonna teach that sheep dog a lesson he'll never forget.'

'Hear, hear', said the tigers.
'Careful,' said the queen.
But he was already gone.
Alone
Into the darkness before the dawn.

In an hour he was back,
the good king.
A **black patch** on his eye.
His tail in a sling.
And said, 'I've got it all planned
now that I know the lie of the land.
All of us will have to try.
We'll outnumber the son of a bitch.
And this time there will be no **hitch**.
Because this time I shall be leading the attack.'

Quick as lightning
the sheep dog was.
He took them all in as prisoners of war,
the 50 tigers and the tiger king,
before they could get their paws
on a single sheep.
They never had a chance.
The dog was in 51 places all at once.
He strung them all out in a **daisy chain**
and flung them in front of his boss in one big leap.

'Nice dog you got there, Ajamil,'
said the tiger king.
Looking a little ill
and spitting out a tooth.
'But there's been a bit of a misunderstanding.
We could've wiped out your herd in one clean sweep.
But we were not trying to creep up on your sheep.
We feel that means are more important than ends.
We were coming to see you as friends.
And that's the truth.'

The sheep dog was the type
who had never told a lie in his life.
He was built along simpler lines
and he was simply disgusted.
He kept on making frantic signs.
But Ajamil, the good shepherd
refused to meet their eyes
and pretended to believe every single word
of what the tiger king said.
And seemed to be taken in by all the lies.

Ajamil cut them loose
and asked them all to stay for dinner.
It was an offer the tigers couldn't refuse.
And after the lamb chops and the **roast**,

when Ajamil proposed
they sign a long term friendship treaty,
all the tigers roared,
'We couldn't agree with you more.'
And swore they would be good friends all their lives
as they put down the forks and the knives.

Ajamil signed a pact
with the tiger people and sent them back.
Laden with gifts of sheep, leather jackets and balls of wool.
Ajamil wasn't a fool.
Like all good shepherds he knew
that even tigers have got to eat some time.
A good shepherd sees to it they do.
He is free to play a flute all day
as well fed tigers and fat sheep drink from the same pond
with a full stomach for a common bond.

Glossary:

- cramps our style** : does not allow us to hunt sheep.
black patch : wearing a patch of black cloth on his eye as it is injured.
hitch : problem.
daisy : a kind of flower.
roast : roast meat.

39.5.3 Interpretation

The poem, as you must have noticed, tells a story in which animals too are characters. It is therefore a fable. A fable is a fictional story in which there are animals as well as mythical characters. The animals are given human qualities such as verbal communication. The story ends with a moral lesson. You must know that a fable is different from a parable in the sense that in the latter there are no animal characters or inanimate things presented as characters.

'Ajamil and the Tigers' is a story about how a compromise was reached between Ajamil and the king of tigers. Here in this story Ajamil is presented as a shepherd whose sheep are protected by a brave and honest sheep dog. The tigers cannot hunt sheep and are therefore hungry. They go to their king and complain that the 'new sheep dog' has does not let them hunt sheep. The king of tigers goes to fight the sheep dog but is defeated. Then once again he attacks the sheep dog taking every tiger with him but is again defeated. Then the king of tigers uses diplomacy and falsehood and tells the simple Ajamil that there has been some misunderstanding. He claims that the tigers could have killed all the sheep in 'one clean sweep' but he feels that 'means are more important than ends'. So he has come to him as a friend.

The sheep dog tries to tell Ajamil by making 'frantic signs' that the tiger king is not telling the truth but Ajamil pretends not to understand the sheep dog. Ajamil invites the king and his tigers to a grand banquet. After that a pact is signed between Ajamil and the tiger king according to which Ajamil offers the tigers some sheep in return for peace. Now there is no fight between the sheep dog and the tigers and both the sheep and the tigers are happy and drink from the same pond. Ajamil is free from worry and can 'play a flute all day.'

You must have noted that the story has been narrated in the idiom of a Hollywood movie about gangsters. Notice the Americanism in the line 'I'm gonna teach that sheep dog a lesson he'll never forget.' Then you realize that the sheep may represent the common people who are at the mercy of mafia dons. The only way they can save themselves is by offering the criminals some protection money so that they may live in peace. You thus see that the story becomes a cynical comment on the present day situation in which a compromise has to be reached with criminals because the leaders (represented by Ajamil in the poem) do not have the will to punish them. This poem has been interpreted in many ways. M.K. Naik, for instance, says that the story highlights the need for harmony in a life full of conflict. But you could also say that the poem has a philosophical dimension and illustrates with the help of a fable how evil can corrupt the good. Again, you can also interpret the poem as a political satire on the contemporary situation in India in which criminal gangs are able to form a nexus with corrupt political leaders. The sheep dog may represent good and honest people in the system but they are overruled by those in power who have compromised their principles for the sake of convenience. As the protector of his sheep, Ajamil should have listened to what the sheep dog was trying to tell him.

Like a story the poem has dialogue and narration. You will notice how characters in the poem have been developed. The tigers are shown as full of confidence while Ajamil comes across as a weak individual. You also see that the central conflict in the poem is between good and evil in which, unlike in a fable, the good reaches a compromise with evil.

39.5.4 Form and Style

In form 'Ajamil and the Tigers' is a satire. In her *The Anatomy of Poetry* Marjorie Boulton says that a satire is 'intended to arouse laughter by its witty and severe criticism of abuses.' Can you identify elements in the poem that arouse laughter? You can, if you look carefully. For instance, when the poet describes the tiger king returning from the battle with a black patch over his eye and his 'tail in a sling' we find it funny. We do not expect the majestic tiger looking like a patient in the orthopaedic ward of a hospital. This unexpected turn in description creates humour.

We can also say that the poem fits into the form of a fable. You see that specific numbers have been used in the poem. For instance, the tigers have been hungry for '15 days and 16 nights' or the dog was in '51 places all at once'. In fables and fairy tales you often find specific numbers used. For instance, in a fable you will find expressions such as 'the prince rode through the forest for seven days and seven nights', 'the ascetic meditated for twelve years', and so on.

This poem has dialogue but it is spoken only by the tigers. Most of the dialogue in the poem is what the tiger king says. What Ajamil says is given in the reported speech. Why is it like this? One of the reasons may be that the poet wants to focus only on the tigers and so reports directly what they say. Another reason that goes deeper than this can be that in the kind of world the poet has described symbolically, only the evil has a voice and therefore, it is only the tigers who speak.

The style of the poem is almost bare with hardly any figures of speech used. You will find a simile in 'Quick as lightning' and a metaphor in 'a daisy chain' but most of the time the poet uses concrete, pictorial words in their literal sense.

Self-check Exercise III

1) What according to you is the moral of 'Ajamil and the Tigers'?

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2) Pick out expressions in the poem that suggest that the tiger king has been described as a mafia don.

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3) Why does Ajamil refuse to meet the eyes of the sheep dog who is trying to say with 'frantic signs' that the tiger king is not telling the truth?

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39.6 AGHA SHAHID ALI (1949-2001)

Agha Shahid Ali belonged to Kashmir and was educated in Kashmir, New Delhi and the U.S.A. earning a Ph.D. from the Pennsylvania State University in 1984. Next year, he also did a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Arizona. He taught English literature and creative writing in colleges and universities in India and the U.S.A. On December 8, 2001 he died of brain cancer at the young age of fifty-two.

In 1972, when Agha Shahid Ali was twenty-three he published his first collection of poems called *Bone Sculpture*. This was followed in 1979 by *In Memory of Begum Akhtar*. But some of his finest poems are to be found in his *The Half-Inch Himalayas* published in 1987.

Ali's poetry is markedly different from Arun Kolatkar's. In his best poetry there is much tenderness and longing for his homeland. You will also find a prominent romantic streak in his poetry. Memory and nostalgia are important elements in his work. He even called one of his collections *A Nostalgist's Map of America* which he published in 1991. Although there are major differences between the two, Ali's poetry will remind you more of the poems of Jayanta Mahapatra than

those of Kolatkar or Nissim Ezekiel. Ali's last book was *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* which he described as a collection of English *ghazals*. The *ghazal*, as you know, is an important genre in Urdu poetry.

Ali not only wrote poetry but was also an accomplished translator. He translated into English the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the famous Urdu poet. His translation of Faiz's poetry is titled *A Rebel's Silouhette*.

39.7 POSTCARD FROM KASHMIR

39.7.1 Introduction

'Postcard from Kashmir' is the prologue poem in Agha Shahid Ali's collection of poems called *The Half-Inch Himalayas* published in 1987. It shows how he was moved when he received a picture postcard from Kashmir in America. The poem shows the poet's deep love for his homeland and nostalgia for it and sets the theme of the volume. The poems in this volume are about the longing for his homeland, memories of it and also about being in exile.

39.7.2 The Text

Kashmir **shrinks** into my mailbox
my home a neat four by six inches.

I always loved neatness. Now I hold
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.

This is home. And this the closest
I'll ever be to home. When I return,
the colours won't be so brilliant,
the Jhelum waters so clean,
so **ultramarine**. My love
so overexposed.

And my memory will be a little
out of focus, in it
a giant **negative**, black
and white, still undeveloped.

(for Pavan Sahgal)

Glossary:

- shrinks** : is reduced to the size of a postcard.
ultramarine : bright blue.
negative : the negative of a photograph.

39.7.3 Interpretation

'Postcard from Kashmir' brings to us the poet's feelings about his homeland Kashmir. It juxtaposes the memory of the poet's home with the picture of some scenery in Kashmir. When he receives the postcard he is reminded of his home in India. Obviously, he is away from home in some foreign land.

Did you find the first two lines of the poem difficult to understand? How can Kashmir be contained in a mailbox? But when you realize that 'Kashmir' here

does not mean the place but a picture postcard showing a view in Kashmir you understand that the word has been used in a different sense. In the second line we are told that the postcard is four inches by six. Why does he use the adjective 'neat' in the second line? It is probably to suggest that though the scene from Kashmir is printed on a well-defined, rectangular piece of paper, the poet's memory of that place is not so clearly outlined. It is hazy and overlapping and is mixed with ambivalent emotions.

In the next two lines the poet tells us something about himself. He likes things that are neat and well-ordered. But we also hear a note of wry regret in his voice. You will see that the lines have irony. They mean the opposite of what they say. The poet appears to be saying that he who prided himself on being clear-headed about things is now confused about what his home means to him. Now he is looking at the picture of the Himalayas on a half-inch stamp affixed to the postcard but he cannot express clearly what the mountains mean to him now, or what memories that picture brings to him.

When you read further you realize that what the poet experiences is complex. For example, we can interpret 'home' in more than one sense. Does 'home' mean Kashmir or does it mean the place in America where he is living now? If the place where he is living now is home, why does he feel homesick for Kashmir where he was born and spent his early years? Continuing the inherent ambivalence and dichotomy of the poem, the poet says that when he actually visits Kashmir, the place will not have such bright colours that the picture postcard has. Similarly, the water of Jhelum will not be so brightly blue. The postcard then becomes a metaphor for his memories of his homeland. He has a romanticised picture of his homeland in his mind. It is said that distance makes things look more beautiful than they actually are. The Kashmir of his memories has brighter colours than the real Kashmir.

Why does the speaker say that his love will not be so 'overexposed' in Kashmir? Here 'overexposed' has been used in the sense the word is used in photography. A negative is said to have been overexposed when more light is allowed to fall on it than what is needed. When it happens, the positive that is printed from the negative plate becomes hazy. Here in America his love for his motherland is overexposed because there is too much longing and nostalgia mixed with it making it difficult to understand.

The concluding lines of the poem continue the metaphor of a photograph. When he visits Kashmir his memory will be a little out of 'focus' suggesting that the reality of the place will not match the memory of it. His memory will be a large negative photographic plate which is still undeveloped. You will readily see that the poet is talking about how imagination works. It transforms everything. He is suggesting here that there are two kinds of reality: one that is out there, and the other the memory of it.

39.7.4 Style

The poem is spoken in a tone that suggests that the poet is talking to himself. You will notice that the poet builds up on the images of light and dark. The 'ultramarine' in line 9 is contrasted with the 'black/and white' in lines 13 and 14. We can therefore say that the poet expresses his longing for his homeland with the help of visual imagery. You will also notice that when the poet describes the actual place he uses expressions such as 'four by six inches', 'half-inch Himalayas', 'Jhelum', 'waters' all of which have a definite meaning and can be

clearly visualised. But when he talks about his feelings he uses words like ‘home’ and ‘love’, words that cannot be visualized so easily. He achieves this contrasting effect in the poem by balancing concrete words against those that are abstract.

Self-check Exercise IV

1) Pick out two words in the poem which you think have been used ironically.

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2) What is the central metaphor in the poem?

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3) Point out two things in the poem that have been contrasted.

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39.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read three poems by Arun Kolatkar and one by Agha Shahid Ali. The text of the poems was explained and their implied meaning was also discussed. You also learnt how to point out stylistic devices used in these poems.

39.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) ‘winding’, ‘turreted’, ‘ledge’.
- 2) The river may stand for the flux of time that makes everything eventually transient.
- 3) The words suggest how legends are made. We invent stories about a man which are passed on from generation to generation turning that man into a hero.

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) Chaitanya asks the stone to wipe the red paint off its face because he does not want rituals to be a part of devotion to God.
- 2) Symbolically, red paint represents empty rituals and flowers stand for the real and natural feeling of devotion.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) If a leader makes a compromise with evil, his followers have to pay the price for it.
- 2) 'I'm gonna teach that sheep dog a lesson he'll never forget.' 'We'll outnumber the son of a bitch'.
- 3) It shows that Ajamil knows he is making a mistake and so is feeling guilty.

Self-check Exercise IV

- 1) 'Neat', 'home'.
- 2) A photograph.
- 3) The actual Kashmir and the poet's memory of it.

39.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, ed., *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*. Kolkata: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bruce King. 'Agha Shahid Ali's Tricultural Nostalgia'. *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 29.2 (1994): 1.20.

K.R.S. Iyengar: *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1985.

R.S. Kimbahune. 'From *Jejuri* to Arun Kolatkar'. *New Quest* (Pune), No. 19, January-February 1980.

UNIT 40 DILIP CHITRE AND KEKI N. DARUWALLA

Structure

- 40.0 Objectives
- 40.1 Introduction
- 40.2 Dilip Chitre (1938-2009)
- 40.3 The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep
 - 40.3.1 The Text
 - 40.3.2 Interpretation
 - 40.3.3 Images
- 40.4 Keki N. Daruwalla
- 40.5 Hawk
 - 40.5.1 The Text
 - 40.5.2 Interpretation
 - 40.5.3 Form and Imagery
- 40.6 Chinar
 - 40.6.1 Introduction
 - 40.6.2 The Text
 - 40.6.3 Interpretation
 - 40.6.4 Style
- 40.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 40.8 Answers to Self-check Exercises
- 40.9 Suggested Readings

40.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- discuss the poetry of Dilip Chitre and Keki N. Daruwalla;
- understand and talk about Chitre's 'The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep' and Daruwalla's 'Hawk' and 'Chinar';
- know how to discuss the style of a poem.

40.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall introduce you to Dilip Chitre and Keki N. Daruwalla and their poetry. You will read one poem by Chitre and two by Daruwalla. We shall read Chitre's 'The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep' and try to understand what the poet wants to say with the help of images.

While reading Daruwalla's 'Hawk' we shall also try to understand the dramatic form of that poem. We shall also try to understand the poem in a wider context and try to understand the symbolism in it.

Daruwalla's poem 'Chinar' relates to Kashmir where this tree grows. We will first make ourselves familiar with the kind of tree chinar is and then read the

poem trying to appreciate the manner in which the poet has celebrated the coming of autumn in Kashmir valley. Besides the visual element a poem often has music in it. We shall try to understand how the poet of 'Chinar' has made the poem sound so sweet.

40.2 DILIP CHITRE (1938-2009)

Born in Vadodara in 1938, Dilip Purushottam Chitre, though known primarily as a poet in Marathi and English, was a translator, editor, columnist, painter and filmmaker. In 1951 his family moved to Mumbai where he studied taking his B.A. (Hons.) degree in English from Bombay University. After that he spent three years in Ethiopia teaching in schools.

The first collection of Dilip Chitre's poems entitled *Kavita* came out in 1960. It was collection of his Marathi poems. Twelve years later, his English poems appeared in a collection called *Ambulance Ride*. In 1980, he published *Travelling in a Cage* which also includes his long poem 'Ambulance Ride'. He has to his credit a number of anthologies of his Marathi and English poems. *As Is, Where Is: Selected Poems*, his last collection of English poems, came out in 2008.

Chitre translated the Marathi poetry of the saint-poet Tukaram and in 1991 Penguin published his translation entitled *Says Tuka: Translation of Tukaram*.

Dilip Chitre made an important contribution to the 'little magazine movement' in Marathi. In 1954 with Arun Kolatkar and Ramesh Smarth he launched a literary magazine called *Shabda*. The magazine continued for six years but even in this short span of time it was able to give a new stimulus and a direction to post-independence Marathi poetry. From 1978 to 1980 Chitre worked as an Honorary Editor of *Quest* (later called *New Quest*) published from Mumbai. He resumed that editorship in 2001.

Widely travelled in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia, Chitre lectured at various overseas universities and was a Fellow and Writer-in-residence under the German Academic Exchange Programme at the universities of Heidelberg and Bamberg in Germany.

Chitre's poetry dilates upon time and reality. If you read more poems by him you will notice a dynamic and mutual relationship between what he is saying and how he is saying it. You will also encounter in his poetry his inner world that is often the space in which he moves as a poet. However, when he chooses to write about things and happening around him, he does it in a controlled, tough and unsentimental style.

Now read the following poem.

40.3 THE LIGHT OF BIRDS BREAKS THE LUNATIC'S SLEEP

40.3.1 The Text

The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep

The **light** of birds breaks the lunatic's sleep
He wakes up moving out of a million dreams

His **burning electric wires** begin to **glow**
The lunatic's fingers extend like wires

Stretched out in the silence:
The lunatic's veins widen: he feels
Darkness **roaring** in place of blood
That darkness is half a sleep: a wide

Awareness of a kind: even total sleep
Is a blaze in his brain: a flaming awareness
The lunatic watches a sound in the Sun:
And his eyes **paraphrase** the Sun:

Numberless sleeps and lightings awaken
A vast **lullaby** in his flesh and blood
The lunatic sees a bird...flying...and his
eyelids flutter
And his eyes, drowning, begin to chirp.

Glossary:

- light** : (here) sound.
- burning electric wires** : (here) his mind.
- glow** : (here) slow down.
- paraphrase** : (literary) to express in one's own words what somebody has said. (Here) his eyes remind you of the sun.
- roaring** : (here) flowing fast.
- lullaby** : a soft gentle song sung to make a child go to sleep.

40.3.2 Interpretation

In 'The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep' the poet imagines what happens inside an insane person's brain. The poem opens with the waking up of the lunatic at dawn. You will see that in the title the poet has used the expression 'the light of birds' instead of 'the sound of birds' to describe dawn. Thus he has merged one sensation into another and is able to suggest the sense of sight and hearing with the help of the same phrase. When dawn breaks, we see the growing light in the sky and at the same time hear the birds singing. He suggests the half-light of dawn and bird-song in 'the light of birds'.

When he wakes up the lunatic's dreams come to an end. The poet uses the metaphor of the filament of an electric bulb to describe the brain of the lunatic. When the bulb burns brightly, the filament is white but as the electric current is switched off it begins to lose its brightness and becomes a dull red ('electric wires begin to glow'). Can we say that with the help of this metaphor the poet suggests that in the lunatic's mind his 'million dreams' are brighter than the reality of this world? The poet continues the imagery of electricity when he says that the lunatic's fingers 'extend like wires' stretching out 'in the silence'. Obviously, the image is that of a person yawning and stretching his arms when he wakes up. What does 'silence' mean here? We can say that the most literal interpretation of silence can be that the place where the lunatic wakes up is

silent. But we can also understand 'silence' in a metaphorical sense. The world in which the lunatic wakes up is silent because it does not speak to him in a language that he can understand. We can also say that the poet wants us to understand that the dream world of the lunatic is more real for him than the 'real' world of the sane people into which he wakes up.

As the lunatic wakes up his veins widen and darkness begins to flow in them. Then the poet adds another metaphor to the idea of darkness: he describes that darkness as 'half a sleep'. You will immediately notice that this statement has to be understood in a metaphorical sense. When we describe something in terms of something else we are using a metaphor. So what can darkness mean here? We know that darkness indicates an absence of light. But in this expression it must be the absence of something for which we can use 'light' as metaphor. Can we say that here darkness represents the absence of understanding or knowledge because we often use 'light' as a metaphor for knowledge? Then we may say that the darkness flowing in the lunatic's veins suggests the absence of knowledge and understanding in the sense 'normal' people, that is, those who have not been branded 'lunatic', have them. The lunatic does not see things, or understands them, in the manner other people do. Again, we may also say that the darkness flowing in the lunatic's veins represents a lack of self-awareness in him.

The next lines build on the word 'darkness'. The 'darkness' in the lunatic is actually another kind of awareness. Using the images of light and darkness the poet suggests that the lunatic does not lose awareness even in his sleep. Even in his dreams there is this 'flaming awareness'. The poet seems to be saying that the lunatic feels things very intensely though we cannot understand how his mind works and how he relates his ideas. We do not understand the logical structure of his ideas. The word 'flaming' in the poem recalls another related word 'sun'. But instead of seeing the sun the lunatic watches a sound in it. Can we say that by deliberately mixing up the senses of sight and hearing the poet implies that there is another order of perception in the lunatic's mind? Then we read that the lunatic's eyes 'paraphrase the sun'. It can suggest that they look as bright as the sun. But if we take the sun to stand for normal reality, the line can also mean that the lunatic perceives reality in his own terms and in that sense he 'paraphrases' it. Paraphrasing, as you know, means expressing in different words what somebody has said or written. Thus, the poet is suggesting here that the lunatic has his own language in which he talks about experience. What he says is a paraphrase of what others say in the sense that the lunatic says it using his own vocabulary.

In the concluding lines of the poem, you will come across many expressions that seem to be paradoxical. For instance, lullabies are sung to make someone, especially a child, go to sleep. But the poem tells you that a vast lullaby awakens in his body. You remember that the poem began with the image of a bird. It also ends with the same image. The image of the fluttering of a bird's wings merges with that of the fluttering of the lunatic's eyelids. His eyes become a bird and begin to chirp. We can understand such statements if we remember that each word here stands for something other than its dictionary meaning. By using 'bird', 'eyes' and 'chirp' in the same breath the poet seems to be saying that on waking up when the lunatic sees a bird flying and chirping, his eyes too begin to look happy and full of life.

Do you think that the poem is just a record of how a lunatic's brain works? It definitely is that, but if you replace the word 'lunatic' with 'poet' or 'revolutionary' you can interpret the poem in an altogether different sense. Then

you can say that the poem is telling us that there exists a vast difference in perception between how a poet sees the world around him and how other people do it. Normal people use the logic of cause and effect as the basic format in which to talk about happenings. The poet or the revolutionary may see the same things in an entirely different manner. The poem then seems to imply that other modes of perceiving reality may also be valid.

40.3.3 Images

You can study the way images have been used in this poem. An image, as you know, is an expression calculated to re-create in the mind of the reader a sense of sight, or sound, or smell or touch, or taste. The primary purpose of an image is not to make the reader understand something but to imagine, feel and experience it. Therefore, if we wanted to describe everything that an image does to a reader, we will end up writing a very long description of the image.

You will notice that in this poem a contrast has been achieved by placing words suggesting light with those indicating darkness. You can point out many expressions in the poem that suggest light: 'light', 'burning', 'glow', 'blaze', 'flaming', 'the Sun', 'lightnings' and 'sees'. On the other hand, you can locate words that suggest darkness: 'darkness', 'half a sleep', 'lullaby' and 'drowning'. These images in the poem give you the feeling that here things are either very bright or very dark. There are no half-lights here. This is the kind of world that the lunatic sees; it is a world in which everything is clearly outlined.

Self-check Exercise I

1) What do 'million dreams' stand for?

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2) What does paraphrasing the sun mean?

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3) Pick out two expressions that suggest a mixing up of senses.

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40.4 KEKIN. DARUWALLA

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla was born in Lahore in 1937. After obtaining his M.A. in English from Punjab University, Chandigarh he joined the Indian Police Service in 1958.

In 1970, Daruwalla published his first collection of poems called *Under Orion*. The next year he published his second book of poems called *Apparition in April*. He received the Uttar Pradesh State Award for this book in 1972. Four years later in 1975 his *Crossing of Rivers* came out. The book has some of the finest river poems written in Indian poetry in English. *Winter Poems* (1980) was his next book of poems which was followed by *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982) for which he won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984. After that came *Landscapes* (1987), *A Summer of Tigers* (1995) and *Night River* (2000). Although Daruwalla is known primarily as a poet, he has also written short stories, some of which are collected in his book called *Sword and Abyss* published in 1979.

Daruwalla's poetry has certain unique features that set them apart from the work of other Indian poets in English. He takes poetry one step further from the inward-looking poetry of Sri Aurobindo and Tagore with which Indian poetry in English really began. It was Nissim Ezekiel who decided to write a new kind of poetry that spoke of many other things besides the inner landscape and spiritual issues, which are the favourite subjects of early serious writers of Indian poetry in English. Although the poetry of Ezekiel and others of his generation is chiefly modernist, it is not a slavish imitation of European modernist poets. Daruwalla's poetry is different from that of other Indian poets because no one has recorded the landscape of northern India with such understanding and honesty. This single fact sets him apart from others because most Indian poetry in English has been essentially urban voicing the problems and issues of the Indian middle class. If at all some poetry on the life in villages has been written, it presents a tourist's view of rural India. Daruwalla himself says, 'I am not an urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscape.' This is refreshingly different in the sense that the modernist poetry that came from Europe (especially England and America) was written by townspeople and was about their problems in a fast disintegrating society. Many Indian poets simply slipped into the European mode of writing as they had somewhat similar problems. Daruwalla, on the other hand, sets out to introduce the Indian landscape to the reader. He does it in a kind of tough, unsentimental language and is seldom tempted to ascend into Wordsworthian epiphanies.

The two poems you are going to read now will tell you more about Daruwalla's poetry.

40.5 HAWK

40.5.1 The Text

1

I saw the wild hawk-king this morning
riding an ascending wind
as he drilled the sky.
The land beneath him was **filmed** with salt:
Grass-seed, insect, bird—
nothing could thrive here. But he was lost

in the momentum of his own gyre,
a frustrated **parricide** on the kill.
The fuse of his hate was burning still.

But in the evening he hovered above
the groves, a speck of **barbed** passion.
Crow, mynah and pigeon roosted here
while parakeets flew raucously by.
And then he ran amok,
a rapist in the harem of the sky.
As he went up with a pigeon
Skewered to his heel-talon
he scanned the other birds, marking out their fate,
the ones he would scoop up next,
those black **dregs** in the cup of his hate!

2

The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.
When snared in the woods
his eyelids are sewn with silk
as he is **broken** to the hood.
He is momentarily blinded, starved.
Then the scar over his vision is perforated.
Morsels of vision are fed to his eyes
as he is **unblended** stitch by relenting stitch.
Slowly the world re-forms:
mud walls, trees burgeon.
His eye travels like the eye of the storm.

Discovering his eye
and the earth and sky
with it, he leaps from earth to ether.
Now the sky is his **eyrie**.
He ferocious floats on splayed wings;
then plummets like a flare,
smoking, and then a gust of feathers
proclaims that has struck.
The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.
Hawking is turned to a ritual, the predator's
passion **honed** to an art;
as they feed the hawk by carving the breast
of the **quarry** bird and gouging out his heart.

3

They have flushed him out of the tall grasses,
the hare, hunted now
in pairs by mother hawk and son.
They can't kill him in one fell swoop.
But each time the talons cart away
a patch of ripped fur.
He diminishes, one talon-morsel at a time.
He is stunned by the **squall** of wings above.
His heart is a burning stable

packed with whinnying horses.
His blood writes stories on the scuffed grass!
His movements are a scribble on the page of death.

4

I wouldn't know when I was stolen from the eyrie
I can't remember when I was ensnared.
I only know the **leather disc**
which blots out the world
and the eyelids which burn with thwarted vision.

Then the perforations, and yet
the blue iris of heaven does not come through.
I can think of a patch of blue sky
when shown a blue slide.
But I am learning how to spot the ones
crying for the right to dream, the right to flesh,
the right to sleep with their own wives—
I have placed them. I am sniffing
The air currents, deciding when to pounce.

I will hover like a **black** prophecy
weaving its moth-soft cocoon of death.
I shall drive down
with the compulsive thrust of gravity,
trained for havoc,
my eyes focused on them
like the sights of a gun.

During the big drought that is surely going to come
the doves will look up for clouds, and it will rain hawks.

Glossary:

- filmed** : covered with a very thin layer of something transparent.
- parricide** : the crime of killing one's father, mother or a close relative.
- barbed** : a barb is a point of arrow or hook that is curved backwards to make it difficult to pull out.
- skewered** : a skewer or some thin, pointed object pushed through something.
- dregs** : the last drops of a liquid, mixed with little pieces of solid material that are left at the bottom of a container.
- broken** : trained to hunt.
- unblended** : allowed to see.
- eyrie** : a nest that is built high up among the rocks by a bird of prey such as a hawk.
- honed** : developed to perfection.
- quarry** : quarry means a bird or an animal that is being hunted or followed.
- squall** : a sudden, strong gust of wind.
- leather disc** : hood that is placed on the eye of a hawk.
- black** : evil.

40.5.2 Interpretation

'Hawk' has been taken from *The Keeper of the Dead* published in 1982. You will see that it is about how a hawk is trained as a hunting bird but you can also read it as describing human behaviour. You will notice that throughout the poem the poet has used 'he' for the hawk giving it a kind of human identity. This bird of prey projects an image of violence that is a common pattern of behaviour in human society. You can take the hawk as a symbol of the destructive instinct in man. But you may also feel that the bird objectifies the spirit of rebellion against the established order.

The poem, as you must have noticed, is divided into four sections. The opening section catches the hawk at an intense moment of killing. The wild hawk, a powerful bird of prey, is seen hunting other birds in the morning. It has speed. When it flies up in the sky it seems to drill a hole into it. Then we are made to see the world as appears to the hawk from the height. To him the land seems covered with a thin film of salt. You know that if there is too much salt in the soil, no vegetation will grow there. Similarly, when the hawk is prowling about in the sky, no 'grass-seed, insect, bird' can thrive. We are told that this hawk is driven by hatred which is like the burning fuse of a bomb ready to go off.

In the evening too, the hawk hovers above 'the groves' looking for prey. From the ground he looks like a speck but he is a speck of 'barbed passion', always ready to kill. Birds like crows, mynahs or pigeons are roosting below. When a parakeet becomes aware of the hawk's presence it flies away 'raucously'. You will notice that by hinting at the silence of the roosting birds and describing the noise made by a flying parakeet, the poet creates a sense of lurking danger in the form of the hawk. We feel that at any moment, the hawk may swoop down on the birds. He has been compared to a rapist in the harem of the sky. He picks up birds at will. As he holds a pigeon in his talons, he scans the other birds and tries to decide which bird he will pick up next. The wild, predatory hawk is burning with hatred which is like a cup in which the smaller birds are the 'dregs' that he scoops up.

The second section describes how a hawk is tamed. Such a hawk is much more destructive because he has been 'touched by the hand of man'. What does the expression mean? Does it mean that because man has trained the hawk to kill, it has become more lethal than the one in nature? Or, could it mean that anything that man touches grows worse than what it was? You will see that both these interpretations are plausible. These two interpretations will take your argument in two different directions. The first interpretation will make you believe that training leads to greater effectiveness; the other will suggest that the poet has a rather unflattering view of the moral qualities of the modern man.

The poem then describes how a hawk is trained to hunt. The training is a painful and frustrating experience for the hawk. His eyes are covered: 'his eyelids are sewn with silk'. The word 'sewn' suggests the pain that the young hawk has to go through. You must have come across the expression 'eagle-eyed'. The hawk's most precious possession is his remarkable eyesight but that is taken away from him temporarily so that he can be trained. The next few lines describe how the hawk is given back his sense of sight bit by bit. The poet uses the metaphor of food when he says that 'morsels of vision are fed to his eyes'. When the hawk can see again, he is fully trained to kill at the command of his master. The hawk's destructiveness is suggested when his eye is described as 'the eye of the storm'.

The hawk then begins to hunt. He is described as leaping up into the sky, hovering on 'splayed wings' and then suddenly plummeting 'like a flair' and striking the quarry in a 'gust of feathers'. Notice how the poet has suggested a sense of sudden, violent movement. You will also notice that the word 'storm' with which the previous movement ended appears to anticipate 'gust' in this movement. Man has made hawking a fine art and a ritual. The section ends with the image of a hawk being fed morsels of meat from the body of the bird he has killed.

The third section describes how a pair of trained hawks, 'the mother hawk and son', hunts a hare. They attack it repeatedly, and its death is slow. This section also suggests how the hunted hare feels. Its heart is pounding with fear; it is like a stable full of whinnying horses. The last two lines describe pictorially how the hare's blood can be seen scattered on the grass where it was killed.

You will see that in the final section the hawk himself is telling his story. He begins by saying that he has no memory of the time when he was 'stolen from the eyrie'. The only thing he remembers is the leather disc that was put on his eyes. He mentions the painful stitching of his eyelids.

But now the hawk is trained. He is learning how to spot the birds he has to kill. Like the young hawk when he was captured, these birds too have a right to live and to procreate. But the hawk has been trained to take that right away. In the closing lines of the poem, the hawk tells us how he feels when he hunts other birds. His presence in the sky means certain death of a bird. There are a number of expressions here that suggest it. You immediately think of 'black prophecy', 'moth-soft cocoon of death' and eyes focussed like 'the sights of a gun.'

In the concluding two lines the point of view changes from that of a hawk to a dove's. There will be a drought and instead of rain the doves will find hawks raining down on them.

You will remember that we often use the word 'hawk' for a person with an aggressive and violent approach to problems and a 'dove' for one who wants peace at all costs. Do you think that the last two lines suggest that in times to come, violent people will become dominant in society and the peace-loving 'doves' will be at their mercy? You will realize thus that this poem can be understood in a wider context too.

40.5.3 Form and Imagery

Now that you have read the poem, how would you like to describe it? Most poems have a single voice but 'Hawk' has two voices: one of the narrator and the other of the hawk; therefore you can call it a dramatic poem.

You will see that in the poem there are many images that suggest something that is pointed and has a tendency to hurt. The hawk 'drill(s)' the sky, he is seen as a speck of 'barbed passion', the pigeon in his talons is 'skewered', his eyelids are 'sewn with silk' suggesting the use of a needle, his vision is 'perforated' and he is fed with morsels of meat that are carved from the breast of the quarry whose heart is gouged out, suggesting the use of a knife. All these images suggest the violent nature of the hawk.

Another set of images are related to wind suggesting the swiftness with which the hawk attacks. He is seen 'riding an ascending wind', his eye travels like 'the eye

of the storm' and he 'floats' on splayed wings. When the hawk attacks there is 'a gust of feathers'. The hunted hare is stunned by 'the squall of wings above'.

To suggest the violence of the hawk, images like the burning 'fuse' of a bomb and his eyes focused on the quarry 'like the sights of a gun' have been used. There are also images that suggest fire. The 'burning' fuse of his hatred, the hare's heart like a 'burning stable' and the hawk's eyelids that 'burn with thwarted vision' are such images.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Describe how the hawk is trained to kill.

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2) Do you think the hawk represents the violence in man?

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3) Point out images of violence in the poem.

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40.6 CHINAR

40.6.1 Introduction

Chinar (*Platanus Orientalis*) is an exotic tree that is said to have been brought to Kashmir from Persia. It is said to have originated in Greece. Kashmiris call it 'Boune'. Its present popular name Chinar is a Persian word. It is said that when the Mughal emperor Jahangir first set foot in Kashmir on an autumn day he saw from a distance a number of chinar trees covered with crimson leaves and in sheer joy he cried out 'chi naar', which in Persian means 'What a blaze!'

Legend has it that the chinar tree was first brought into India at the time of Ashoka the Great. It is a very majestic tree growing to the height of 30 meters or

more. The tree has fan-shaped leaves that are green in spring, become yellow in summer and then turn crimson in autumn. The fall of chinar leaves in autumn spreads a crisp, crimson carpet around its base. It is a very long living tree and a chinar tree may be many centuries old.

40.6.2 The Text

The chinar **confronts** the sunset
with its own dusk.
You can hear the drip of crinkled leaf.
Isn't this what they call dry rain,
this slow, twisting **dead-moth descent**
from the sapless branch?

In the eye of the lake
and the running eye of Jhelum
it holds you, this **bonfire** death
that slowly drips fire,
these smouldering **rusts**
without the **clank** of metal.
A wind alights on the tree
and the eye cannot follow
each bronze-scale severed
from the **mail** of the dying giant,
each clenched child-fist of a leaf,
the **largesse** of it
the aching drift of it
the flame and the fall of it.

Glossary:

- confronts** : matches.
- dead-moth descent** : coming down like a dead moth.
- bonfire** : a large outdoor fire.
- rust** : the reddish brown substance that is formed on iron by the action of water and air.
- clank** : the sound made by metal striking metal.
- mail** : a chain mail. A protective coat of iron that warriors in the past wore during battles.
- largesse** : the act or quality of being generous with something.

40.6.3 Interpretation

The poem describes a chinar tree in autumn. It celebrates the onset of autumn in Kashmir. The poem opens with the image of sunset. As the sun sets, the sky takes on shades of crimson and orange. The chinar leaves too are of the same colour and match the sunset in majesty and beauty.

The poem then focuses on the falling leaves. The soft sound of the falling crinkled leaves can be heard. You find that this falling of the leaves has been compared to the falling rain but this is 'dry rain' as there is no water. The tree sheds its leaves as its branches lose their sap. The falling leaves look like dead moths descending slowly to the ground.

The poet's glance then travels away from the chinar. He can see the lake and the running Jhelum. In the clear water of the lake and the river the trees are reflected. You are transfixed by its breathtaking beauty. The use of phrases like 'the eye of the lake' and 'the running eye of Jhelum' personifies the lake and river. It seems as if these water bodies had eyes in which the russet colour of the chinar leaves is reflected. Why do you think the poet has used the adjective 'running' here? Obviously it suggests the flowing water of the Jhelum. But one also feels that the running water represent the flowing tears of joy that the river experiences when it sees such a beautiful sight.

The poem reminds you of the colour of flames. The trees are full of crimson leaves and look as if they were on fire. You are also reminded of the death of the leaves when you come across the phrase 'this bonfire death.' Then there is another comparison. The poet feels that these red leaves are like the brown red rust falling off from the chain mail of a warrior. This can happen when in a battle someone strikes the mail with a sword. But here there is no such sound and that is why the poet says that here it happens 'without the clank of metal.'

The image of a warrior wearing a mail continues. The wind makes the leaves fall and it is happening so fast that the eye cannot follow each leaf as it falls to the ground. The tree then becomes 'dying giant'. Each scale of his mail seems to be cut off from his armour as it is drops to the ground. The small leaf looks like the clenched fist of a child. The word 'clenched' also suggests that the fists of the dying giant are clenched in pain.

You will notice that the last three lines of the poem suggest a different mood. The viewer is grateful to the tree for having given him such a glorious sight with so much generosity. The leaves that drift to the ground look so beautiful that one feels an ache of joy in one's heart. When you reach the final line you find that the two dominant images have been blended together: the colour of flames ('the flame') and the downward movement of the leaves ('the fall'). This single line makes you visualize the crimson leaves floating lazily down to the ground. The last three lines are not complete sentences; they are phrases only. They suggest the breathless ecstasy of the viewer when he sees the chinar full of red leaves.

40.6.4 Style

After having read the poem when you think of the poem you will remember many words suggesting red or brown colour. You can think of words like 'sunset', 'bonfire', 'fire', 'smouldering', 'rusts', 'bronze-scale' and 'flame'. All these words bring to you the colour of the chinar in autumn. Many of these words also indicate the presence of fire. Fire dries up moisture. Therefore, the dryness of the leaves has been indicated by the word 'crinkled'. However, along with the presence of dry leaves, there is also a hint of the presence of water. You come across such phrases as 'dry rain', 'the eye of the lake' and 'the running eye of Jhelum'. These expressions bring to you the image of the tree standing near water bodies. Taken together these images suggest the colour of autumn in Kashmir which also has lakes and rivers.

The red colour also reminds you of blood. But we do not see blood unless it is shed. This happens on the battlefield. The image of a dying giant warrior wearing a bronze chain mail indicates flowing blood. You will also notice that the idea of death runs through the poem. This has been expressed by phrases like 'dead-moth' and 'dying giant'. This idea of death is in keeping with the fact that the falling leaves are dead, that is, they have lost their sap.

When you read the poem aloud you will notice that there is a musical quality in it. This music has been created by the use of liquid consonants like /l/, /m/ and /n/ that are the most pronounced in the poem. You can think of phrases like ‘the running eye of Jhelum’, ‘smouldering rusts’, ‘clank of metal’, ‘a wind alights’, and the final line: ‘the flame and fall of it’. The title of the poem, ‘Chinar’, itself has a powerfully stressed /n/ sound in it. Again, you will also notice many prominent sibilant sounds (/s/) in the poem. You can locate many words like ‘slow’, ‘sapless’, ‘smouldering’ ‘severed’ and so on that recreate the soft sough of the wind. These sounds have been balanced by heavy consonants such as /d/ /h/ and /b/. Look at the first movement of the poem carefully. In the second half of each of lines 2, 3,4, and 5 you come across words such as ‘dusk’, ‘drip’, ‘dry’ and ‘dead-moth’. You will realize that this is a very sensuous poem that makes you see the beautiful sight of the chinar tree and also enables you to hear the soft sounds that are there.

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) Pick out three phrases in the poem that suggest fire.

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- 2) Point out the words that have been used to describe the shape and colour of the chinar leaf.

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- 3) Comment on the music of the poem.

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40.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read one poem by Dilip Chitre and two poems by Keki N. Daruwalla. You also learnt how to interpret these poems and how to comment on the imagery and music of the poems.

40.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

- 1) 'Million dreams' imply that there is constant activity going on in the lunatic's mind, even when he is asleep.
- 2) The lunatic understands and talks about things in words that other people cannot make sense of.
- 3) The two expressions are: 'The lunatic watches a sound in the sun' and 'his eyes, drowning, begin to chirp.'

Self-check Exercise II

- 1) See the interpretation of the poem (40.4.2.).
- 2) See the interpretation of the poem (40.4.2.).
- 3) See Form and Imagery (40.4.3.).

Self-check Exercise III

- 1) 'bonfire death', 'slowly drips fire' and 'smouldering rusts'.
- 2) 'crinkled leaf', 'twisting dead-moth', 'bronze-scale' and 'clenched child-fist'.
- 3) See 'Style' (40.5.4.)

40.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Chirantan Kulshrestha, ed. *Contemporary Indian English Verse: An Evaluation*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1980.

Keki N. Daruwalla, ed. *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980.

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UNIT 1 DRAMA AND THEATRE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Origins of Drama/Theatre
- 1.3 Growth of Drama
- 1.4 Types of Stage
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Exercise
- 1.7 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarize the readers with the origin of drama, and to highlight the role and significance of theatre as a distinct practice. Drama has its roots in the oral literature of Greek theatre and religio-social life of the Athenian people. As time passed this initial beginning of performative behaviour gave way to dance drama which in turn paved way for formal written and performed plays. This unit intends to focus on the origin and growth of drama and, later emphasizes the different kinds of use of stage that evolved in the last few centuries. The soul of drama is its spectators. Thus the audience plays a vital and pivotal role for the aim and purpose of drama/theatre is performance.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Drama is a literary composition involving conflict, action, crisis and atmosphere meant to be acted by players on a stage before an audience. This definition may be applied to motion picture drama as well as to the traditional stage. In Abram's words drama is, "the form of composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action and utter the written dialogue." Thus the essential ingredients of a drama are actors, dialogue, setting, plot and action. It is primarily meant for enactment on the stage. Thus the stage and the spectators are equally important. Marjorie Boulton says that "A true play is three dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes." A drama operates within the limits and framework of space and time. It is distinguished from other literary forms by its special, complex relationship to the reality we call time. As a narrative art, it addresses to the telling of events which take place in the past, present or future. But as a performing art, along with music and dance it has its existence in time. Thus it is a temporal act. Drama can never be a subject of purely literary study. It has to be known in relation to the stage, to the theatre. Tom F. Driver writes:

The act of performing the play in the theatre becomes a miniature reflection of historical action taking place within the limit imposed by the conventions of the theatre. This will be particularly true in those dramatic periods, such as the Greek and the Elizabethan, where the theatre was frankly accepted as the locus of the action and where there was not, an attempt to black out both audience and theatre... The theatre tends to reflect the assumptions of its age regarding time and history because it is on the one hand a narrative of temporal events, and on the other hand an enactment taking place within a

moment of time. The mimetic instinct is confined to no single nation; it is universal in its appeal and reveals itself as one of the most primitive of human emotions. It is the earliest of imitative arts.

Drama may be defined as a well-told cohesive story presented in action. Compton-Rickett writes:

It must be articulate – that is, spoken; for a pantomime is a story in action, and the orator who declares may give us an articulate story, though not necessarily in action ... for effective drama conflict of some kind is essential ... If the conflict be a trivial one, we get a farce. If a serious one, ending happily for hero and heroine, we have a comedy. If a serious one with an unhappy ending, we term it a tragedy.

1.2 ORIGINS OF DRAMA/THEATRE

Twenty-five hundred years ago, Western theatre was born in Athens, Greece. Between 600 and 200 B.C. the ancient Athenians created a theatre culture whose form, technique and terminology have lasted two millennia, and they created plays that are still considered among the greatest works of world drama. Their achievement is truly remarkable when one considers that there have been only two other periods in the history of theatre that could be said to approach the greatness of ancient Athens – Elizabethan England and the Twentieth century.

The theatre of Ancient Greece evolved from religious rites which date back to at least 1200 BC. At that time Greece was peopled by tribes that we in our arrogance might label 'primitive'. In northern Greece, in an area called Thrace, a cult arose that worshipped Dionysus, the god of fertility and procreation. The Cult of Dionysus practiced ritual celebration. The cult's most controversial practice involved, it is believed, uninhibited dancing and emotional displays that created an altered mental state. This altered state was known as 'ecstasies'. Ecstasy was an important religious concept to the Greeks, who would come to see theatre as a way of releasing powerful emotions. Though it met with resistance, the cult spread through the tribes of Greece. (Dionysiac, hysteria and 'catharsis' also derive from Greek words for emotional release or purification). During this time, the rites of Dionysus became mainstream and more formalised and symbolic. An essential part of the rites of Dionysus was the dithyramb. The word means 'choric hymn'. This chant or hymn was probably introduced into Greece early accompanied by mimic gestures, and probably music. It began as a part of a religious ceremony, like a hymn, describing the adventures of Dionysus. It was performed by a chorus of men, group of dancers, and band of revellers. In this way, over a period of time dithyramb evolved into stories in play form now known as drama.

Greek Theatre: By 600 BC in Greece the most prominent city state was Athens. It was here that the Rites of Dionysus evolved into theatre. In about 600 BC, Arion of Mehtymna (Corinth) wrote down formal lyrics for the dithyramb. Later **Thespis** of Attica (Athens) added an actor who interacted with the chorus. This actor was called the *protagonist* meaning the main character of a drama. When Thespis, the director of choruses, his face smeared with white lead perhaps in simulation of the dead god, stood on a table and addressed the leader of the chorus, dialogue was born in Greece. With his inspired step Thespis also created the classic actor as distinct from the dancer. His table (which probably served as an altar for animal sacrifice) was the first inkling of a stage as distinguished from the primitive dancing circle. In time, a second speaker was introduced and one moved from one art to another, from choric chant to theatre. Gradually the leaders of the dithyramb could include other related details taken from the many tales of ancestral and local heroes which were being recited by poets. The words associated with dithyrambic dances became elaborate and dramatic plot was introduced. In 534 BC, Pisistratus the ruler

of Athens, instituted drama competitions. These competitions became popular annual events. A government authority called the *archon* chose the competitors and the *choregos*, wealthy patrons financed the productions. The 'theatre' was constructed. The Theatre of Delphi, the Attic Theatre and the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. In fact, the word 'theatre' derives from the Greek word 'theatron' which referred to the wooden spectator stands erected on the hill sides, and the word 'orchestra' is derived from the Greek word for a platform between the raised stage and the audience on which the chorus was situated. Thespis who acquired a theatre building where his plays (he was the first prize winning playwright in 535 BC) were performed in a permanent circular dancing ground of stone with a stone temple in the background. Plays in those days were performed in the daytime. Actors wore little or no make up. There was no scenery. Actors wore masks and buskins (leather boots laced upto the knees). Until 484 BC the Athenian drama competitions consisted of a trilogy of dithyrambs and a satyr play. Their style of presentation was choral rather than dramatic. Around 484 BC there appeared on the Athenian theatre scene a playwright named **Aeschylus**. He introduced props and scenery and reduced the chorus from 50 to 12. *Aeschylus' Persians*, written in 472 BC, is the earliest play in existence. His crowning work was *The Orestia*, which tells the legend of Agamemnon, the Greek war hero who was murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and the pursuit of justice by his children, Orestes and Electra. Thematically, it is about the tragedy of excessive human pride, arrogance or hubris. Aeschylus is also known as the Father of Tragedy. Of the ninety-two plays of Aeschylus only seven have come down to us. Hundreds of scattered fragments and comments provide an inkling of some of the subjects he treated. He is a master of the picturesque. His characters are colourful creatures, many of them supernatural, barbaric and his speech is metaphorical. *Prometheus Bound* is an unforgettable work as its theme was God himself. He turned from the drama of God to the drama of man in his last two tragedies of which one is *Agamemnon*. In 468 BC Aeschylus was defeated in the tragedy competition by Sophocles.

Sophocles, contribution to drama was the addition of actors, and an emphasis on drama between humans rather than between humans and Gods. He was a fine craftsman. He won 20 competitions. He experimented, tried different styles and struggled painstakingly for perfection. He used only one play for each plot and was consequently constrained to pack all his actions into it. In all respects the shorter form offered the greater dramatic possibilities. His works bear a strong resemblance to the architecture and sculpture of his time which favoured small temples and statues of gods who are not much larger than well-built human beings. Sophocles is precise rather than rhapsodic. It is noteworthy that Sophocles is the first writer known to have used some comic details in his tragedies, a procedure that could only be motivated by a desire for contrast and variety. He is a master of the device of tragic suspense and tragic irony of which *Oedipus the King* is a supreme example. *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone* and *Philoctetes* are the other well known works.

Another contemporary Greek playwright was **Euripides**. His plays were about real people. He placed peasants alongside princes and gave their feelings equal weight. He showed the reality of war, criticized religion, and portrayed the forgotten of society – women, slaves and old people. Euripides is credited with adding to the dramatic form the *Prologue* which set the stage at the beginning of the play. He managed to create the most forceful realism and social criticism of the classic stage. *The Trojan Women*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Cyclops* and *Alcestis* are the well known plays of Euripides.

Tragedy was not the only product of Athenian theatre but comedy also thrived at the time. Greek comedy had two periods: **Old Comedy** represented by **Cratinus** and **Aristophanes**; and **New Comedy**, whose main exponent was **Menander**. Aristophanes, theatrical works were presented at the Athenian festivals. He used three actors, a chorus that sang, danced and sometimes participated in the dialogue.

His first two comedies *The Banqueters* and *The Babylonians* were lost but it is known that they were a satire on new education and a political satire respectively. *The Acharnians* is the world's first anti-war comedy. His other comedies include *The Wasps* on deterioration of Athens, *Peace* an anti-imperialistic comedy, *The Frogs* and *Plutus*.

The use of overt satire, topicality and the pointed lampooning of celebrated characters to be found in Aristophanes' style were replaced by mistaken identities, ironic situations, ordinary characters and wit. Menander is the more significant name in the New Comedy. His main contribution was to create a comedy model that greatly influenced later comedy. His characters were not celebrities but ordinary people. The chorus resembled modern chorus singers and dancers who provided fillers between acts. They were also portrayed as drunken audience members. His characters were classic comedy archetypes. Emphasis on mistaken identity, romance and situational humour became the model for subsequent comedy, from the Romans to Shakespeare to Broadway. His talent is witnessed in his comedy of errors - *The Girl From Samos*, *The Shearing of Glycera* and *The Arbitration*. The work of Menander was reincarnated in the Latin comedies of Plautus and Terrence.

1.3 GROWTH OF DRAMA

Gassner writes:

...there is not a single human impulse, moral or otherwise, that cannot be associated with the growth of the stage; the masters of the drama are the children of life The first playwright began indeed as a player and a magic maker. But he gradually took the whole world of experience and thought for his field. ...in copying movements or gestures, repeating sounds, and employing human, animal and even vegetable disguises, primitive man was instinctively bringing himself in touch with his environment. And in playing he was not only discharging excess energy but preparing himself for purposeful action. ...Man danced out his desires until the pantomimic dance became the most finished early form of drama. ...The playwright leads the pantomime since the form and execution of the performances requires a guiding intellect ... he is also a social philosopher, for it is he who organizes the performance as a commercial activity and extends the psychological reality of commune.

From Greece, the stage was passed on to Rome. With the fall of Rome in the fourth century, the theatre virtually vanished. Drama in England does not begin until the tenth century. The **medieval theatre** also developed out of the religious services. It was the creation of the Church. Thus it is true to say that the "cradle of the drama rested on the altar." The clergy were obliged to find some method of teaching and explaining to the ignorant masses the doctrinal truths of religion. The Gospel stories were illustrated by a series of living pictures in which the performers acted the story in dumb show. In the next stage the actors spoke as well as acted their parts. These early plays were known as **Mysteries and Miracles**. The former were stories taken from the Scripture narrative while the latter are plays dealing with incidents in the lives of Saints and Martyrs. Drama is inherent in the very ritual of the Church, and the Mass itself was a factor in the dramatic development.

Miracle plays grew out of the liturgy itself, with its solemn rites and the chants alternating between priest and congregation. They began as short dialogues. Recited at first inside the church these dialogues developed into title plays acted in the church porch. One of the most important was the play of Adam written in the 12th C by a Norman. It is in three parts, showing the fall of Adam and Eve, the death of Abel and the line of prophets announcing the advent of the Saviour. This

play was written in French. Another important play was *Noah*, about Noah finishing the Ark, informing his wife and begging her to enter the ark. Thus the plays unfolded scenes from the Scriptures, depicted scenes from the Life of Christ, and celebrated Holy days like Christmas, Easter or Corpus Christi.

Certain towns, either by reason of the importance of their fairs, or through the more powerful organization of their trade guilds became noted for the presentation of their miracle plays. These cycle plays were known by the names of the places where they were shown – Chester, York, Coventry, Norwich, Newcastle and Wakefield. The guilds played an important part in the powerful organization. One of the most touching plays is that of *Abraham and Issac*.

Mystery and miracle plays gave way to **Moralities and Interludes**. In the Mystery and Miracle plays, serious and comic elements were interwoven. Now they part: the Morality presenting the serious and the Interlude the lighter side of things. The characters typified certain qualities - Sin, Grace, Repentance. Moralities emanate from allegory. Bible characters are replaced by abstract virtues and vices personified. Their aim was primarily the teaching of the Christian faith. If in the miracle plays the scenes had a movable pageant, the moralities required a fixed stage. The moralities were concerned with wider issues and showed human life wavering between good and evil, between God and the Devil. Well known plays were *Castell of Perseverance*, *Everyman* and *Mankind*. The protagonist was mankind at large. If on one side were grouped the person of evil angel and his minions the Seven Deadly Sins, then on the other side were the good angel and the Divine Graces. Thus the debate was between Sin, Jealousy, Malice, Gluttony etc. and Mercy, Justice, Peace, Truth, etc. The persons of the mystery plays were nearly all given individual names and the drama was rooted in reality. The performances consisted of a group of local amateurs who formed an association for the specific purpose of acting – in other words, a fifteenth century amateur dramatic society. The three plays mentioned above were pointers to the varied courses that drama looked to. The miracle plays ceased to be acted about 1600, but by that time the regular drama was established.

No masterpiece was produced during the years 1520 – 1578AD.

Interludes were comic dialogues and Heywood's Interludes were popular as his originality consists in the fact that he avoids moralizing and aims at amusement. The best known is *The Four P's* – Palmer, Pardoner, Potheary and Pedlar. Heywood's *The Mery Play Between the Pardoner and the Frere* was also very popular. Such interludes indicate that an effort was made to combine good healthy instruction with much comic business.

The first English drama was *Gorboduc* written by Sackville and Norton and played before Elizabeth at Whitehall in 1562. When published it was called *Ferrex and Porrex*. The tragic story is divided into five acts. Norton wrote the fourth and fifth. The action takes place behind the scenes, and each act ends with a chorus, in imitation of the tragedies of Seneca. It is written in blank verse and treats of an episode in national history.

The first regular English comedy was produced in 1553 by Nicholas Udall and was titled *Ralph Roister Doister*. Udall is justly entitled as the "Father of English Comedy." The play is neither farce nor debate but is a comedy full of incident and intrigue, well ordered and well planned. *Gammer Gurton's Needle* is the second English comedy written by Mr. S.

The foundation of a truly national theatre was helped by the formation of companies of professional players. In 1576, the first theatre was built in Shoreditch. Gradually the Rose, the Swan, the Globe and the Fortune were built.

1.4 TYPES OF STAGE

Drama has undergone significant changes with passage of time. Stage types also changed and have thus required different forms of acting.

Drama, period-wise can be classified into broad categories as follows:

1. Classical Theatre (Greek and Roman)
2. Native Drama (1066-1500)
3. Renaissance Drama (1500-1660)
 - a) Elizabethan Drama: Shakespeare and Contemporaries.
 - b) Jacobean and Caroline
4. The Neoclassical Period or Restoration Drama (1660-1700)
5. Drama in 18th, 19th and 20th Century.

Greek Theatre

Plays in ancient Greece were staged in amphitheatres, which were marked by a round stage about three quarters surrounded by the audience. Since amphitheatres were very large and could hold great masses of people (upto 25,000), the actors could hardly be seen from far back, and for this reason, acting included speaking in a loud, declamatory voice, wearing masks and symbolical costumes and acting with large gestures. The chorus was a vital part of ancient drama. It had the function of commenting on the play as well as giving warning and advice to characters. The stage scenery was neutral and was accompanied by the real landscape surrounding the amphitheatre. Play were performed in day light.

Ancient Greek drama was performed on special occasions like religious ceremonies, and it thus had a more ritual, symbolic and also didactic purpose. The audience consisted only of free men; slaves and women were excluded.

The Theatre in Epidaurus (Theatre in Stone): The theatre at Epidaurus shows an open-air Greek theatre, with seats for the audience hewn out on the slope of a hill. The most prominent feature of the theatre is the large dancing circle, or orchestra, for the chorus. At the side to the right is one of the passageways or *paradoi*, affording entrance and exit for the chorus and processions. At the back, are the ruins of the stone scene building, the *skene*, which could represent a temple or a palace, and served as a permanent scenic background for the stage productions. During 5th century BC, the *skene* became a two -storey stone building where the upper storey or *episkenion* was used for the stage machinery, by means of which the gods were lowered to the stage level. The front of the lower story had a colonnade or *proskenion*. Most of the acting transpired on a low platform in front of this structure, which had three doors and was flanked by projecting wings as *paraskenia*. The theatre at Epidauros belongs to the Hellenistic period (4th century BC), but the above- mentioned architectural features were also present in the theatre of Dionysus. Gradually the stage production became elaborate. The *Skene* was usually rectangular and divided into rooms. The front wall of the ground story had a series of pillars between which were set painted wooden panels or *pinakes*. The actors usually performed on the second story level, so that the stage was about a foot high and from 8 to 10 feet deep running the entire length of the building. At the back of this stage stood the colonnaded front wall of the second story, pierced by three doors, and served as the background. Between the columns of this upper colonnade, too, *pinakes* might be placed. There was less inter-mingling between the actors and the chorus.

Later under Roman influence, the Greek theatre underwent other modifications, the stage or acting-area was lower by a few feet but deeper, the frontage of the stage

lost its colonnade but became a highly decorated scenic façade, and the orchestra was no longer a complete circle.

Later, tragedy was stately and comedy was extravagant. The actors were trained in speech, dance and pantomime.

Native Drama

Medieval plays (Mysteries and Moralities) were performed during religious festivities. They were staged on wagons (pageants), which stopped somewhere in the market place and were entirely surrounded by the audience. The close vicinity between actors and audience had to account for a way of acting. Actors took into account the everyday experiences. Rarely were the mystery plays exhibited anywhere except out of doors and no attempt was made to construct for them any theatre. Within the church stations or locations (*sedes/ seats; loci/places; domus/houses*) were in view of the method of stage representation called 'simultaneous setting' or 'multiple setting'. When the liturgical plays ceded their position to the mystery cycles, the seats or small platforms elaborated into mansions – sometimes made into little rooms by provision of curtains at the sides and back, sometimes decorated with carved or painted scenery and the *platea* served its original function. The stationary set presented the mansions in a curving row facing the audience. The second involved the placing of the mansions on wheels, so that they became pageants, which could be drawn from spot to spot. The actors were amateur – members of various guilds or companies who for a time put aside their labour to perform. They were generally paid for their services. Heaven and Hell were represented either on left and right sides respectively or top and bottom. Costuming was not only gorgeous but imaginative. On a multiple stage live animals such as rabbits and lambs were employed. Placards were used. The attention of the audience was concentrated on gestures, delivery of numerous monologues and the many tirades for effect. There were no actresses, boys took the parts of women. The heterogeneous audience from the groundlings to courtiers were simple folk willing to be taught and edified. They appreciated the essentials of drama: life, pathos and humour.

Apron Stage

The Elizabethan stage was typically found in public theatres, i.e. plays were no longer performed outside. However it was still open air theatre. From 1580 to 1642 London theatres presented almost everyday a number of plays both old and new, each one a medley of styles. Theatres were simple in structure, mostly circular in form; within was a courtyard open to the sky, surrounded by two or three tiers of covered galleries. At one side of the courtyard projected a platform which formed the stage. In the centre, on either side of the platform, two pillars supported the ceiling; at the back, between two doors which served for the entrance and exit of the actors, was another stage overlooked by a gallery with balcony and windows; in front of this rear – stage was a movable curtain. There were no wings, only elementary accessories. The front stage served most purposes. On the bare stage the actors, performance was all important. The most common stage form in Renaissance England was the open stage which was surrounded by the audience on three sides and there was still close vicinity between audience and actors. The vestigial platform was known as the apron and it stood in front of the proscenium arch and accommodated most of the acting. Playwrights wrote long speeches regularly into their plays, employed the embellishments of rhetoric, and made free use of asides and soliloquies. The Elizabethan theatre could hold upto 2,000 people and the audience was heterogeneous. Plays of the period typically combine various subject matters and modes because they attempted to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. The apron was cut down and was finally discarded entirely after the middle of the 19th century. Once the actor played close to the scenery within the

setting, as became customary, he was disproportionately tall and the painted scenery looked false. Stage illusion deteriorated.

Restoration Stage

Theatres of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were considerably smaller than the Elizabethan theatre (held about 500 people) and performances took place in closed rooms with artificial lighting. Audience was seated in a fully illuminated room. The stage was closed in by a decorative frame and the distance between audience and actors was thus enlarged. There was no curtain and changes of scene had to take place on stage in front of the audience. The plays presented an idealized, highly stylized image of scenery, characters, language and subject of matter. Emergence of 'Patent' theatres and minor playhouses is a significant move of the drama in the 17th and 18th century. As the old tightly - knit aristocratic society began to disintegrate and the middle classes started to enter the playhouses, the playhouse established its own tradition, which were passed on to the nineteenth century and even to the present day. Nicoll writes: "Four popular species of entertainment must be noted – the operatic, the spectacular, the terpsichorean and the mimic." The men and women liked show; music appealed to them and dances were appreciated. The ballad-opera invented by John Gay exhibited that the tastes lay within the field of extravagant and satirical.

Proscenium Stage

The stage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is called proscenium or picture frame stage because it is shaped in such a way that the audience watches the play as it would regard a picture: The ramp clearly separates actors and audience, and the curtain underlines this division. While the stage is illuminated during the performance, the auditorium remains dark, which also turns the audience into an anonymous mass. Since the audience is not disturbed and can fully concentrate; it became easier to create an illusion of real life in plays. Scenery is elaborate, and true – to – life. More detailed stage props, lighting and sound system are possible due to new technologies. Multiple stages are operative simultaneously. The play is not just a drama but moves like a film as it creates the illusion of a story world 'as it could be in real life.' There is a wide range of different types of stage in the present era, alongside the conventional proscenium stage or the modern street theatre. With passing time, dramatic power has heightened, artistry refined and situations secularized and universalized.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

At the end of this unit, we are familiar with

- the role of theatre
- the significance of theatre.

1.6 EXERCISE

1. Elaborate Boulton's statement; "A true play is three dimensional."
2. Elucidate the fact that the 'cradle of the drama rested on the altar'.
3. Write notes on:
 - a) Greek theatre
 - b) Growth of British drama
 - c) Origin of tragedy and comedy

4. Development of stage is proportional to the growth of drama. How?
5. Define the terms:
 - a) Mystery plays
 - b) Morality plays
 - c) Chorus
 - d) Dithyramb
 - e) Theatre
 - f) Interludes
 - g) Apron stage

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 ONE ACT PLAYS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Structural Pattern
- 2.3 Select One Act Plays
 - 2.3.1 *The Proposal*
 - 2.3.2 *Riders to the Sea*
 - 2.3.3 *Lithuania*
 - 2.3.4 *The New Hangman*
 - 2.3.5 *The Two Executioners*
 - 2.3.6 *The Zoo Story*
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Exercise
- 2.6 Suggested Readings
- 2.7 Glossary

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit emphasizes One Act Plays and the objective of the unit is not to be informative only but also to discuss a variety of one-act plays. The intention behind discussing a tragedy, a comedy, a problem play, a social play and a play from the drama of the absurd, is to widen the horizons of readers and open for their benefit new vistas for study. The unit clearly demarcates the distinction between a full-length play and a one-act play and the importance of the latter in the earlier and present times. The title itself is suggestive of its nature.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the history of the drama, there have been many short, unified dramatic works which may properly be called one-act plays, but the term is usually reserved for those written since the late nineteenth century. Interest in the genre grew as part of the development of the modern, experimental theatre. A drama consisting of one act is the dramatic equivalent of the short story. Before 1890, one act plays were used chiefly in vaudeville programmes or as curtain raisers for the important play of the evening. The Little Theatre Movement gave a boost to the one act plays. Important dramatists who have written one act plays are Beckett, O' Neill, Chekhov, Synge, Shaw, Ibsen and Anouilh.

This kind of drama comprises a single act and normally lasts 20-30 minutes. It is characterized by precision, brevity, swiftness and limited characters. It is not an abridged version of a full length play, but is an independent literary form.

2.2 STRUCTURAL PATTERN

Any one act play is a complete play, meaning thereby that it has a beginning, a middle and an end. It has a formal exposition, complication, climax and denouement. The playwright does not have enough time and space to delineate his character as

he has a limited canvas. He has to restrict himself to a single theme, lesser characters and not too elaborate and superfluous stage settings. He has to exercise strict economy of words and maintain brevity in expression. The structure is well knit and the exposition introduces the characters and theme of the play and sets the pace of the play. Conflict helps to move towards the crisis or turning point and finally the denouement which leads to the end of the play. The plot which is a sequence of incidents and events is usually not loose and has got to be logical and convincing. Any one act play can be a tragedy, comedy, history play, problem play, social drama, or absurd theatre. Elizabethan drama was a 'five-act' play structure, followed by a 'four act' structure and in the present age the dramatists use a 'three-act' structure. Each act has scenes. In modern plays the playwrights have structured their play into multiple scenes and not acts. The one-act play has a structure which is cohesive, to be presented in a limited time span and therefore unity of action is a must and there is no scope for change of place. The interplay of man and his environment remains important.

2.3 SELECT ONE ACT PLAYS

2.3.1 *The Proposal* by Anton Chekhov

The Proposal is a farce, a comic form of drama based on exaggerated and improbable episodes. This play dramatizes the events of an unmade proposal about the marriage that is to take place between Lomov and Natalia. Arguments, quarrels and misunderstandings evoke laughter. Tschubukov, a landowner, is surprised to see Lomov, a young and neighbouring landowner at his place who is hesitant to state the purpose of his visit. Tschub thinks that he has come to borrow money and decides not to lend him any. Lomov makes a proposal of marriage to Natalia about which Tschub is delighted as he's the father. The complication begins when Natalia appears and there is a heated argument about meadows, and then about the dogs. The situation becomes hilarious as Lomov sinks into the chair because of breathlessness and Natalia becomes hysterical as she comes to know about Lomov's purpose to visit them in his 'evening clothes. Tschub forces them into marriage, they kiss and a hint is given about "domestic joys". The formal proposal is never made. The play ends with the marriage without a priest, Church or ritual and the celebration with champagne.

Thus the follies and foibles of human nature are highlighted. The humour in the play derives from the inability to understand the proposal. The thrust of the play is Lomov and Natalia's marriage but the digressions incorporated are deliberate as they are the chief source of laughter. The play does not pay attention to characterization and the only aim of the actors is to amuse and entertain the audience.

The play specifies the time period i.e. the end of the nineteenth century. There are only three characters and the place of action is Tschub's home. If Tschub is childish; Lomov is irrational, foolish, easily excitable and excessively comical; and Natalia is quarrelsome, stubborn and hysteric. All three want the same thing. Natalia is love sick for Lomov; Lomov has come for the proposal and Tschub indirectly is very happy about the affair and this is what evokes laughter.

2.3.2 *Riders to the Sea* by J M Synge

The play is based on the real incident of a man who was drowned in the sea in Donegal. It is a tragedy that focuses on the theme of death. The shadow of death looms large. The central character of the play Maurya has been a witness to six deaths in the family. The action takes place in the cottage kitchen of Maurya. There are only four main characters — Maurya the old woman, Bartley her son, Cathleen

her daughter and Nora, her younger daughter. In the exposition all the characters are introduced and the central subject as well. Maurya is disturbed because her only surviving son Bartley is determined to go to the Galway fair. The theme of death and the devastating power of the sea are also made evident. As the action progresses, Maurya laments at length about the deaths of all her family members. Her fifth son was missing and it is from the identification of his clothes that it is declared that he too drowned in the sea. The final catastrophe is when Bartley's body is brought in and laid on the plank. She is suddenly transformed, and exhibits self-restraint and composure. She has the capacity to accept reality. Bartley's death imparts a completion to Maurya's cycle of sufferings.

The structure is not at all loose. The motif of the power of the sea is effectively handled. Death lies at the core of the life of Aran Islanders and this has been well taken up by Synge in this one act play. The conflict between man and sea, the irony of fate or cosmic irony is well presented. Maurya and the sea are juxtaposed to suggest that life and death are the two sides of the same coin. Life is tragic and final reality is death. This is the reason as to why Maurya's attitude is changed at the end.

The play lives richly and dramatically. Not only is the interest sustained by the magic of the mood, not only is the spirit moved by the stark pathos of Maurya, but also imagination is stirred by the unseen sea and by the intensely depicted story of people struggling with an implacable natural force. Its depth lies in its language and the rhythm inherent in the limited action and passive experience. It is a tragic chorus which draws its strength from the quality of acceptance.

2.3.3 *Lithuania* by Rupert Brooke

It is a tragedy with four main characters and three peripheral characters. The writer presents the evil effects of poverty, which compels man to commit any crime. It denounces any notion of morality in the presence of hunger and poverty. Crime, sin, morality are meaningless notions when human beings are denied the very basis of survival. It is a realistic play which brings forth the inevitable outcomes of poverty. The reality is more nightmarish than a nightmare. Poverty makes a man inhuman, cruel and soulless. Thus it is a social play that focuses on the ill effects of poverty on human psyche.

The setting is a double-storied hut in a small village in Lithuania (near Eastern Coast of Baltic Sea). It is a common man's house. It is early night in autumn. There is a grim atmosphere of desolation. The main characters are the Stranger, Mother, Father (Ivan) and Daughter (Anna). The stranger is Ivan Junior, a young middle-aged man, medium height, weak built, flashily dressed, black hair and a beard. He ran off from the house when he was thirteen and returned as a wealthy man. His plan is to surprise the family and relieve them of their pitiful plight. Unfortunately he dies before unveiling the secret. He is in fact murdered by his own sister Anna who is unaware of the facts. She wants to rob him of his riches. Anna is past her youth, not very tall, squared faced and not talkative. Poverty has made her emotionless, fearless, greedy and an evil-minded person. For the sake of wealth she is ready to murder a stranger. It's she who devises and executes the plan. She axes the man and repeatedly hits him. Even after the revelation she is not repentant, only petrified that she'll be imprisoned. The father and mother are kind-hearted people. It's the Mother who agrees to shelter a stranger for some compensation. She is forcefully involved in the murder but wants to delay the killing. She is shocked when she realizes that the stranger was her long lost son. The father is human to the core of his heart and suffers the most. His conscience does not allow him to kill a man.

It is a tightly well-knit play. The circumstances, in other words, the social order is responsible for the actions.

2.3.4 *The New Hangman* by Laurence Housman

The New Hangman is a problem play which raises a voice of protest against capital punishment. It is a kind of drama that deals with a specific contemporary problem. The play dramatizes a difficult situation arising out of the blatant refusal of the hangman to perform his job of executing a convict, because his conscience is burdened with the guilt of murdering (lawfully), when he participated as an assistant in twelve executions. Different characters are given an opportunity to hang the convict. The Chaplain rejects, the 2nd and 3rd Warden refuse; the Governor shirks. Thus it is evident that no one wants to do the dirty job; no one wants to be a party to the act of execution; no one wants their hands with blood on them. The hangman succeeds in easing his conscience when he makes a public confession that he had been a murderer for money.

The playwright highlights that a problem like capital punishment is anti-humanity because in the process another human is made a scape goat. He also suggests that executing criminals cannot obliterate crime. Execution is against the very spirit of mankind and the hangman calls the act inhuman and 'murder in cold blood'. The play debates on the issue – is man a slave of the system?

2.3.5 *The Two Executioners* by Fernando Arrabal

The play is a melodrama in one act. Arrabal a Spaniard lived in France since 1954. His contribution to the absurdist spectrums is a highly original one as his main preoccupation is with the absurdity of ethical and moral values. He looks at the world with the incomprehension of a child. In this play the rebel son objects to the tortures that his mother inflicts on his father. He is faced with the dilemma of contradictory moral laws: obedience to father and need to obey one's mother. These moral laws are in conflict with the human goodness that prompts one to save the suffering victim. This exposes the absurdity of the system of values that accommodate them.

There are two executioners whose names are not known; the mother Françoise, the two sons - Benoit and Maurice and the Husband Jean is the cast of the play. The action takes place in a very dark room. Jean dies towards the end of the play. The Mother and the Father both have their view point about life and on the upbringing of children. Françoise says: "It's about my husband. The being in whom I placed all my hopes, the man to whom I gave the best years of my life and whom I loved as I would never have thought I could love ... Yes, he is quitty". She tells the son Benoit: "Nothing but suffering. I've always been their slave ... I preferred to sacrifice myself for my husband and for you ... All my life I've been a martyr" She tells her husband: "You're guilty and it's your duty to accept your punishment with patience". Maurice is depressed at the death of his father. He accuses the mother who in turn feels that her husband had comprised his children's future by his failings. Discussing the theme of the absurd in life. Esslin writes: "... the playwrights are concerned with expressing a sense of wonder, of incomprehension, and at times of despair, at the lack of cohesion and meaning that they find in the world."

2.3.6 *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee

Albee, the American exponent of Theatre of the Absurd shares the sense of loneliness in an alien world with other Absurd theatre playwrights.

The Zoo Story, is one of Albee's earliest dramatic ventures, has a complicity; it is a clinically accurate study of schizophrenia; an image of man's loneliness and inability to make contact and also on the ritual and symbolic level, an act of ritual self-immolation that has curious parallels with Christ's atonement. The two characters are Peter and Jerry and the setting is a Sunday afternoon in summer at Central

Park. Peter is a man in early forties, neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely; Jerry is a man in his late thirties, carelessly dressed, going fat and is no longer handsome. The names are a parallel to Jesus/Jerry and Peter/Peter. The plot is anchored in reality. The poetic image conveys the central idea, atmosphere and mode of being.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

The independent literary form which emerged from theatre and regular drama is well appreciated in the present day times when most of the people want things to happen quickly as they are short of time. The spectators demand entertainment, satisfaction, a platform for raising their voice against social evils, a catharsis of their own day-to-day routine problems and complexities of life, in the performances. Offshoot of one act plays have been radio plays or street plays. Television serials or even films do not fall into this category.

2.5 EXERCISE

1. Compare and contrast a one act play with a full length play. Support your answer with illustrations.
2. Discuss a tragedy and a comedy as representations of real life in a capsule form on the stage.
3. 'Brevity' is the word that explains a one act play. Elucidate.
4. What are the offshoots of a one-act play? Elaborate.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Absurd Drama. Introduction Martin Esstin. 1965; rpt Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.

Under the Spotlight. Ed. Roshan Sharma and Ajay Khurana. Delhi: Worldview, 2002.

2.7 GLOSSARY

Little Theatre Movement: Little theatres have been important to the evolution of drama. It is a term applied to a series of efforts in North America, the British Isles and Europe to encourage the writing and production of significant plays as opposed to more highly commercialized productions. The movement originated in Paris in 1887.

Propaganda play: It argues for a particular idea or ideology. The issues involved are more topical and the solution closely related to the ideology. This developed into street theatre. In street plays no props, no stage, no elaborate costumes or sound effect are used. The characters/actors are the life of the performance; as they sing to attract spectators, they use gestures for props, they have to speak loudly to be audible to the audience and should be able to highlight the problem (woman's rights, alcoholism, drug abuse, etc.)

Tableau: A stationary, silent grouping of performers in a theatrical production for a special effect. It is a living still picture presented on stage.

UNIT 3 ASPECTS OF DRAMA

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
 - 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Dramatic Structure
 - 3.3 Dramatic Texture
 - 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
 - 3.5 Exercise
 - 3.6 Suggested Readings
 - 3.7 Glossary of Literary Terms
-

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The focus of this unit is on dramatic structure which includes plot, character and unities, and the dramatic texture that has a wide range from imagery and symbolism to setting and props, from dialogue and action to acts and scenes, from atmosphere and setting to the tone of the play. The unit hopes to update the readers with dramatic terminology and the aspects of drama which constitute a play in general. The various ingredients of drama were rightly used to make the play a success or a failure. These ingredients also categorize the kind of drama which we will read in the next unit. Therefore, before reading various kinds of drama it is important to focus on the essentials that go into the making of a play.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Drama is the most 'dependent' of art forms — director, actor, dialogues, story, actor, dialogues, story, action setting, props, costumes, stage and spectators, all are required to make it happen as a 'play'. Also consider that the play involves conflict, action, crisis and atmosphere. The same is true of films, too. New entrants in this area are T.V. serials. All these are entertaining to watch. Plays enjoyable to read as text also where words alone are the medium. If we are to do justice to plays it does seem essential to take into account their unique nature as a sequence of situations that underlie 'action'. Plays are acted on a public stage and focus on prouder social issues. Spectators go to the theatre as members of the public and in some way associate with questions raised in the play which is about the order man has created in society, and conversely the threat to the established social order. Thus, drama is the most peculiar, elusive and enthralling of all forms of literature. It has a universe appeal and "lies near to the deeper consciousness of the nation in which it takes its rise" (Nicoll). It is capable of addressing widely and diversely to people of different epochs and cultures.

Before we move to the terms related to structure let us be clear as to what structure is and what texture is: This we shall take up here. A literary text reminds us of a building. The foundation, pillars, beams, walls, roof, etc. are the structure of a building but the finish with paints, colour-combination, accessories, wood – work, flooring, etc. is the texture of the building. In any literary work the structure comprises the story, the characters, action and the dialogues whereas the texture is highlighted through images, symbols, metaphors, settings, audio-visual aids, etc.

Thus the dramatist presents life on the stage. S/he deals with a much larger question of human experience and concern. One must grasp this wider meaning of the play. This is implicit in the action and characterization, the dramatic theme and the dialogues which reveal the soul of the play.

3.2 DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Plot

If we tell a story through a play we are constructing a simple account of what happens. Plot is a more inclusive term: it is a fully developed version of the story. It takes account of the nature of the characters, the way in which events are related to each other and their dramatic effect. Plot talks about the overall significance of the play.

The plot (Aristotle termed it *mythos*) in a dramatic or narrative work is constituted by a number of events as these are presented in an order so that specific artistic effects are created. Plot and characters are interdependent. To put it into Henry James words, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" The dramatist is given the task of providing the actors with such dialogues as will enable them adequately to interpret their parts and at the same time are in complete harmony. Nicoll writes : "[when] Any dramatist sets to work he will have, at the outset, three things to determine – the theme which is to be dealt with, the characters by means of which that theme is to be displayed, and the médium (the actual dialogue) through which both are to be given expression." Thus the plot is the main entity that controls the intricate machinery of the play. The order of a unified plot is a continuous sequence of beginning, middle and end. The beginning initiates the main action and is also known as the exposition; the middle presumes what has gone before and requires something to follow and the rising action reaches its climax. Crisis comes later through a reversal of happenings following which denouement and the final resolution takes us to the end of the play. German critic Gustavo Freytag introduced the analysis of plot as Freytag's Pyramid. He described the typical plot of a five-act play as a pyramidal shape.

In many plots the denouement involves a reversal, in the protagonist's fortunes, whether to protagonist's failure as in tragedy or success as in comic plots. 'Recognition' also happens at this moment. This is the recognition by the protagonist of something essential and important. As a plot evolves, it arouses expectation as well as surprise. The interplay of suspense and surprise is plot.

So far as conflict in drama is concerned one can say that it may arise between characters and ideas or between characters and events, or between characters, situations and the larger forces of existence. Still, each development must follow logically from a preceding development and every situation that arises in the course of the play has to be logical and convincing.

A plot may have a sub-plot i.e. a second story that is complete and runs parallel to the main plot. The subplot seems to broaden our perspective on the main plot. For example, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Lear's story and Gloucester's story run parallel.

Character

The people involved in the action of a play are referred to as characters. We assess them on the basis of what they say and do. A character is an individual or a type representing distinct traits through speech (dialogue) and deeds (actions). According to Aristotle 'Ethos' i.e. the moral element, and 'Dionia' i.e. the intellectual element are the two basic elements that constitute a character. The main character is called the hero or protagonist; the opponent is the antagonist or villain. A character may remain stable or may undergo a radical change but he should be consistent from beginning to end. E.M. Forster in *Aspects of Novel* distinguished between a 'flat' or 'type' character built around a single idea or quality and a 'round' or 'complex' character who is primarily an individual in his/her own right and has many intricacies as well as depth and intensity in temperament. If a flat character is two-dimensional

then a round character is three dimensional. Apart from simple and complex characters there are 'stock' and 'shadowy' characters that are new functionaries and assist in the development of the plot. Introduction of the characters in the growth of drama has been discussed in the earlier units.

Some of the plays titled on the name of the characters are *Romeo and Juliet*, (the major tragedies of Shakespeare) — *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Prince of Denmark*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, Brecht's *Mother Courage*. The player/actor should have technical equipment in voice, facial expression, bodily praise, gesture and must understand the essence of his character. He should respect his parts, as well as fellow players and the audience. It is he who reveals the feelings, emotions, intentions and conflicts inherent in the dialogues meant for the play and these have to be made lucid and interesting.

Three Unities

The three unities are the unity of action, place and time. In simplest terms, the unity of action means that the action represented by a play should approximate the actual conditions of the staging of the play; the unity of place is that the action represented be limited to a single location and unity of time means that the time be limited to two or three hours to enact the play. Because the unity of place and time were often flouted, they became optional. Aristotle emphasized the desirability of preserving some kind of unity in action, pointing out that this unity must be organic and could not be seconded by the mechanical device of making one man the centre and cause of the plot. It presupposes that no subplot of importance be made to appear in any serious play and no admixture of tragedy and comedy is permissible. But these two assumptions raised controversy and with the passage of time, the comic and tragic fused harmoniously with each other; tears and laughter were in close proximity as comedy and tragedy were not dissimilar, nor were they fundamentally opposed to each other as to be treated in isolation.

Unity of place and time restrict the length of time and the place of dramatic action to one locality while performing the play on the stage. It is true that for certain plays the unities can never be applied but just as drama itself presents a kind of concentration of life, a certain amount of restriction helps the dramatist considerably in his task. The whole thing may be summed up by saying that in drama the one essential unity is the unity of impression. Alardyce Nicoll in *The Theory of Drama* writes: "This unity of impression is closely linked to the ancient unity of action, but places essentially stress not on the creative process involved in the construction of the play, but on the effect which the whole drama will have on an average audience. ...Drama as we have seen, must be excessively concentrated and this very concentration demands the securing of a unity of impression. On the other hand, by unity of impression is not necessarily implied mere monotony and sameness of emotions, for the unified impression as such may be gained by means of the utilization of a variety of emotions." Thus drama shows a subordination of some particular elements of which it is composed. In every great drama there is an idea and through the unity of action and significance of characters, the whole structure of drama is produced.

3.3 DRAMATIC TEXTURE

Act and Scene: An act is a major division in the action of a play. In British drama this division was introduced by Elizabethan dramatists and there were five acts. In the nineteenth century there were four acts and in the twentieth century non-musical dramas constitute only three acts. Acts are subdivided into scenes. In recent times, plays are a sequence of scenes and there are no major acts. If

Shakespeare's plays were divided into five acts and each act contained scenes, then Brecht's plays are divided into scenes and no acts (*e.g. Mother Courage and Her Children* is a play staged in twelve scenes); and Kalidasa's plays are divided into Acts only. An act and a scene can be differentiated easily by the two following dramatic presentations:

- i) The curtain falls only after the act ends and the scene can change just by dimming of light. Intermission is usually between acts.
- ii) A scene is an independent unit marked by the continuity of action without any change of place or a break in time.

One of the most productive ways of discussing a play is to focus on individual scenes, for any scene will tell us a lot about the play as whole. Our focus in looking at a scene is, thus, twofold: we are getting hold of the play as a whole, identifying the thematic issues; and we look at the complex texture of the scene i.e. the use of imagery, similes, metaphors, poetry etc.

We have already read One Act Plays.

Atmosphere: It is the tone pervading a section or whole of the drama. The atmosphere can be happy, sad, suspenseful, fearful, religious, etc. E.g. in *Hamlet* at the initial stages of the drama the ghost makes the whole atmosphere tense and fearful.

Aside: These are lines whispered to the audience or to another character on stage (not meant to be heard by all the characters on stage). Sometimes the purpose is to inform the audience.

Comic relief: It is a bit of humour injected into a serious play to relieve the heavy tension of tragic events. The introduction of comic characters, speeches or scenes in a serious work of art to alleviate tension and add variety. Comic relief characters amuse the audience. This theatrical device was frequently used in Elizabethan tragedy e.g. the horse courser scene in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* or the grave diggers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Deus ex Machina: It is Latin for "a god from a machine." It describes the practice of some Greek playwrights (especially Euripides) to end a drama with a god, lowered to the stage by a mechanical apparatus, who by his judgement and commands resolved the dilemmas of the human characters. The phrase is now used for any improbable device by which the plot is resolved.

Foreshadow: This indicates lines that give a hint or clue to future events.

Flashback: It is used by the playwright to narrate an incident from the past and this either interrupts the main story line of the play or is used by the chorus at the beginning of the Act or scene.

Irony: Dramatic irony is a method of expression in which the ordinary meaning of the word is opposite to the thought in the speaker's mind and the events are contrary to what would be naturally expected. The audience or reader shares with the author the knowledge of present or future circumstances of which the character is ignorant. Sophocles' *Oedipus* is an example of tragic irony and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is an example of irony in comedy. In the former, Oedipus engages in a hunt for the incestuous father-murderer and the object of the hunt turns out to be the hunter himself, for he is responsible for the incest and the plague. In the latter play, a comedy, Malvolio is ignorant of the prank being played on him by the sub-plot characters and his speech heightens the dramatic effect.

Masque: (Mask) was introduced in Renaissance Italy and flourished in England. It was an elaborate form of court entertainment that combined poetic drama, music, song, dance, costume and stage spectacle. The characters wore masks and at the end doffed their masks.

Motif: It is a conspicuous element, such as a type of incident, dance, reference or formula which occurs frequently.

Pantomime: also known as “Dumb-show”. It is to enact on the stage without speech, using only posture, gestures, bodily movement and exaggerated facial expressions. At times music was introduced. Charlie Chaplin movies are a fine example of pantomime shows.

Poetic Justice: The term was coined by Thomas Rymer. It signifies the distribution of rewards and punishment in proportion to virtue or vice, at the end of the literary work, which must be governed by ideal principles of decorum and morality.

Setting: It is the general locale, historical time and social circumstances in which the action occurs. Setting is synonymous with décor which denotes scenery and the properties used on the stage.

Soliloquy: It is the act of talking to oneself, usually aloud and alone on the stage. This is a dramatic presentation of the character’s inner thoughts and this theatrical device is used for the purpose of exposition and to guide the judgements and responses of the audience. The best known are Hamlet’s soliloquies in Shakespeare’s play of the same name. The purpose of such speeches is to reflect on the wider significance of the action. Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* opens with a long expository soliloquy and concludes with another which expresses Faustus’ mental and emotional condition.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

All ages have tried to find the secret of the art that embraces the tragic and the comic, magnificent heights of poetic dramatization and forceful dialogue delivery, extravagant settings to bare stage, serious and joyful, crisis and resolution.

3.5 EXERCISE

1. Differentiate between structure and texture of play.
2. Distinguish between a drama, novel and motion pictures.
3. Write notes on:
 - a) Plot
 - b) Character
 - c) Three Unities
 - d) Atmosphere, Setting and Tone
4. “Drama is a dependent art form”. How?

3.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Nicol, Allardyce. *The Theory of Drama* Indian rpt. Delhi: Doaba House, 1969

Peck, John and Martin Coyle. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1984.

The Oxford Companion to English Literature. Ed. Margaret Drabble. 1932; rpt. Oxford Univ. Press, 2000.

3.7 GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

Boulevard drama: Originally the body of plays produced in the late nineteenth century. The term is applied to comedies of some sophistication, designed primarily as commercial products.

Bourgeois drama: The modern realistic drama dealing with the problems of middle-class characters.

Closet drama: A play written to be read rather than performed. Also plays intended to be performed but survived as literature rather than theatre.

Passion play: A passion play is the acting out of the passion, or suffering and death of Jesus as told in New Testament. It was put up by many groups of actors and in many cities and towns. Today the most famous performance of the passion play takes place once every ten years.

School Plays: Plays influenced by Roman comedy, performed in schools and colleges during the early Sixteenth century in England.

Stichomythia: Dialogue consisting of single line spoken alternately by two characters. Usually a verbal duel. It is characterized by repetitive patterns. This was used in classical drama and by the Elizabethans.

UNIT 4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF DRAMA

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Tragedy
- 4.3 Comedy
- 4.4 Tragi-Comedy
- 4.5 History Plays
- 4.6 Problem Play
- 4.7 Realistic Drama
- 4.8 Poetic Drama
- 4.9 Epic Theatre
- 4.10 Theatre of the Absurd
- 4.11 Classical Sanskrit Theatre
- 4.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.13 Exercises
- 4.14 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit is to discuss in detail the kinds of drama that we see being performed or read. Plays are categorised and labelled as tragedy, comedy, history, problem plays, poetic drama, epic drama, the theatre of the absurd, etc. The present unit explains as to how these distinctions are made; what reasons behind the specific labels are; and what time period (socially and politically) has been responsible for their growth. The unit has a sub-division on Indian Classical Sanskrit Theatre which discusses the Indian aesthetic theory. One would do well not to ignore Sanskrit drama as it has been a landmark development in the growth of theatre at the world level. This also initiates the growth of drama as part of new literatures which is inclusive of Spanish, German, French, Indian dramatic writing, etc.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Different types of Drama have existed down the ages from Greek classical theatre to the present times. We have already read about the origin and growth of drama in our first unit. Let us answer a few questions about drama which helps us understand the different kinds of drama entertaining, realistic, romantic, relations-based, theme-oriented, etc.

4.2 TRAGEDY

Aristotle first defined tragedy in his *Poetic's* around 330 BC. He defined tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself," in the medium of poetic language and in the manner of dramatic rather than of narrative presentation, involving "incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotion."

Aristotle says that the **tragic hero** will evoke pity and fear if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both but is certainly “better than we are in the sense that he is of higher than ordinary moral worth. Such a man is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of his mistaken choice of an action, to which he is led by his **hamartia**, the tragic flaw or the error of judgment or a moral weakness in character. The plot evokes tragic pity and fear. In this way tragedy relieves the spectators of harmful emotion. The dramatist depicts incidents which arouse pity and fear for the protagonist, bringing the plot to a logical and foreseeable conclusion. This explains how an audience experiences satisfaction even from an unhappy ending. In Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Lear’s madness and his death arouses pity and fear in the audience, thus catharsis in spectators gives a satisfaction despite it being a tragic play. “In his tragedies Shakespeare is indeed grappling with the whole world on a scale approximated only by the profound tragedians of Greece. Tragedy in his work goes beyond individual failure, Nations crumble, and ambition, lust and ingratitude sear the earth. Sensitive souls shudder. They question the chimeras of man and fate, receiving dusty answers. Love for them turns to mockery, common decency become a jest, they see blood flowing like a torrent; conscience gnaws at the marrow of their being; self disgust and a general disgust with mankind ravage many of them” (Gassner:234). Thus Hamlet and Lear are partially authors of their own suffering because of their conduct. Hamlet’s sharp questioning of man and society emanates from the dramatic shock of discovering the murder of his father and his mother’s infidelity; but later his procrastination are aberrations from sound policy. Man struggles against man. Thus it is drama of individual will. Aristotle’s definition excludes many plays which are commonly thought of as tragedies. Not all tragic heroes suffer because of a tragic error.

Contemporary critics suggest a cluster of overlapping perspectives which collectively describe the tragic vision.

First, tragedy begins by asking the ultimate questions: why are we here? Does life have meaning or purpose? Can life have meaning in the face of so much suffering and evil in the world? Does death negate the significance of the protagonist’s life and the goals he/she was seeking? Tragedy offers no singular solution: people suffer because of their own actions. At times the tragic hero appears to suffer simply because he/she lives in a cruel and unjust universe. Though the causes of suffering are diverse, yet the purpose of suffering appears almost universally acknowledged: only through suffering does a person attain wisdom. According to Francis Fergusson, the plays follow a tragic pattern of purpose, passion and perception.

Second, tragedy pushes the individual to the outer limits of existence where one must live or die by one’s convictions. Facing the end of life, a person quickly recognizes life’s ultimate values. Tragedy depicts men and women who dissatisfied with the hand destiny has dealt with them, challenge the rules of the game. Tragedy does not depict man as a helpless puppet dancing to the strings of destiny. The tragic vision does not assure man’s ultimate downfall. Instead, it explores ways in which free will exerts itself in the world. The determination to act rather than submit often leads to disastrous results but at the same time it tests the basic substance of humanity. This tremendous strength of will to scale the heights and accomplish the impossible sets the hero apart from the ordinary humanity but inspires us with a vision of human potential. Thus tragedy far from being a pessimistic view of life, is ultimately optimistic about the value of human achievement and the unconquerable strength of human spirit. To put into Eric Bentley’s words. “Tragedy cannot entail extreme pessimism, for that would be to lose faith in Man.” The tragic vision encompasses the paradox of human freedom, admitting the possibility of great goodness and great evil.

Some of the kinds of tragedy are:

- i) **Revenge tragedy** or the tragedy of blood which derives from Seneca its materials of murder, revenge, ghosts, mutilation and carnage. It was a dramatic genre that flourished in the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period. Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1586) established this popular form, later to be followed by Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1592), Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1602).
- ii) **Domestic tragedy** was written in prose and presented a protagonist from the middle or lower social ranks who suffer a commonplace or domestic disaster. This was popularized by eighteenth century writers. For example, George Lillo's *The London Merchant*.
- iii) **Social tragedy** revolved around an issue of general social or political significance. These represent middle class or working class heroes and heroines. Notable tragedies of nineteenth and twentieth centuries are Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and, *Ghosts*, and Arthur Millers *Death of a Salesmen* (1949).
- iv) **Melodrama**: originally applied to musical plays including opera. The protagonists are flat types. Here drama relies on implausible events and sensational action. Continuous action drives the plot through a series of adventures. It thrives on thrills, excitement, suspense and rescues. The conflict is external and everything is delineated as black or white. Melodrama appears to deal with serious subjects, but its seriousness is only pretence. Most of the serious dramas never reach the heights of tragedy and thus become melodramas. Adventure films are examples of this.
- v) **Romantic tragedy**: Romances which end unhappily or with the death of the hero and heroine are categorised as romantic tragedies e.g. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.
- vi) **Heroic drama**: Heroic dramas may not look deeply into the philosophical questions of good, evil, man's relation to supernatural, etc. but they abide by the rule of poetic justice and portray swash-bucking adventures. e.g. *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

4.3 COMEDY

At the most fundamental level, comedy focuses on pleasure and amusement. The spectators are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur and usually the action turns out to be happy for all.

Allardyce Nicoll describes three techniques of comedy which create a comic detachment (i.e. we laugh at the hardships of comic characters because the author sets them at a psychological distance): derision, incongruity and automatism.

Derision takes aim at human frailties such as stupidity, hypocrisy and arrogance, knocking the victim off his self-built pedestal. The character too pretends more, thus setting himself up for the fall. With insults and sarcasm, comedy's sharp wit seeks to pierce the over-inflated egos of pompous politicians, bragging generals and haughty aristocrats. Derision creates distance by placing its subjects beneath us as contemptible and foolish. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a classic example of this.

Incongruity provokes laughter by means of ridiculous contrast in situation, character or dialogue. The unexpected element takes us by surprise. Misplaced words or statements are also a source of laughter. For instance, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Gogol's *The Inspector General*.

Automatism occurs when people are depicted as acting without thinking. Comic characters often have annoying habits or mannerisms. They lose the ability to interact naturally. For example, Chekhov's *The Marriage Proposal*.

Comedies make use of several of the traditional roles. They tend to portray characters as recognizable stereotypes. Comic characters remain on the other side of line separating fiction from reality. This aesthetic distance allows us to laugh at their troubles without feeling pity and fear of tragedy. The world of comedy is characterized by absence of real pain. For all its criticism of human limitations, hypocrisy and foolishness, comedy views human beings as survivors. In comedy we laugh at our shortcomings and learn from our failures.

In his work on ethics, Aristotle describes two types of contrasting characters. The braggart (*alazon*) pretends to be more than he is, while the ironist (*eirone*) seems to be less than he is. Aristotle defined comedy as written about persons of minor importance whom their faults rendered ridiculous. The pair of crafty schemer and the parasite was one of the most popular plots. This can be witnessed in Jonson's *Volpone* (1606) where Volpone and Mosca trick others out of money and wives both. Similarly Horner in *The Country Wife* (1675).

Within the broad spectrum of comedy the following types are often distinguished:

- i) **Farce:** It is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to hearty laughter – ‘belly laugh.’ This employs highly exaggerated or caricatured type of characters, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and makes free use of sexual mix-ups, broad verbal humour, and physical bustle and horseplay. At times the sustained brilliance and wit of dialogue helps to achieve the comic effect in a better way. Human beings are presented as helpless victims of their bodily urges, hungry for food, drink and sex. Characters in farce are usually single minded, seeking to satisfy their cravings with reckless desperation. Little emphasis is on depth of characters. Thus comedy which focuses on physical humour or “slapstick” is called farce. Plot complications, mistaken identities and miscommunication make it effective. Facial expressions and body gestures bring farce to life. Farce is effective in performance than as literature. Comedians like Charlie Chaplin and Keaton became masters of farce.

Commedia dell Arte was a form of comic drama developed around mid-sixteenth century by guilds of professional Italian actors. Playing stock characters, the actors largely improvised the dialogue around a given scenario. Commedia performers relied on stereotypes and familiar situations to invent dialogue and action. The plot is enlivened by the buffoonery of ‘Punch’ and other clowns. Wandering Italian troupes played in all the large cities of Renaissance Europe and influenced various writers of comedies.

- ii) **Comedy of Manners** is the most prominent form of high comedy as it holds the customs of aristocratic society up to ridicule. It uses verbal wit and sarcasm to depict the charm and reveal the pretensions of its characters. It exhibits two contrasting impulses: to celebrate and to criticize. The comic vision professes both hope and discouragement about the human condition, looking for the best but expecting the worst. It originated in the *New Comedy* of the Greek Menander as distinguished from the Old Comedy of Aristophanes. Shakespeare's *Loves Labour Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are examples of comedy of manners. The comedy of manners, as its name implies, concentrates upon the depiction of men and women living in a social world ruled by convention. Its manners are not simply the behaviour of humanity in general but the affectations and cultured veneer of a highly developed and self-conscious group. Intellectual refinement, epigrammatic wit and easy dalliance had been made the prime qualities sought after by the gallants and their mistresses. At the same time, it tends to tone down and to intellectualize ordinary emotions.

This form of comedy was given a high polish in Restoration Comedy (1660-1700), and is much indebted to French writer Moliere (1622-73). It deals with

the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper class society and relies for comic effect on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue often in the form of repartees. Each person tries to cap the remark of the other, or to turn it to his or her own advantage. William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) are classic examples of mastery of wit.

- iii) **Sentimental comedy** grew out of this comedy of manners. It represented the 18th century middle class life and its reaction against what had come to be considered the immorality of a situation and indecency of dialogue. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, Sheridan's *The Rivals* and *A School for Scandal* and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* deleted the indecency, revived the wit and gaiety of Restoration comedy.
- iv) **Comedy of Humour** was a type of comedy developed by Ben Jonson based on the ancient physiological theory of the 'four humours' the primary fluids i.e. blood, phlegm, cholera (yellow bile) and melancholy (black bile) whose mixture was held to determine both a person's physical condition and character type. Thomas Shadwell had a flair and skill in depicting humorous types. This is also called the 'satiric comedy' or the 'corrective comedy'. It tends to see the dark side of humanity and uses laughter as a satiric weapon. Jonson's *Volpone* is an example of this comedy which exposes the false premises on which people stand.
- v) **Tendency comedy** is another mode of the comic in which one is made to laugh at a person not merely because he is ridiculous but because he is being ridiculed; the laughter is derisive with contempt and malice.
- vi) **Festive comedies:** They emphasized celebration; the victory symbolized the process of renewal and regeneration which allows life to continue. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a perfect example of love found, lost and regained and the traditional wedding at the end of comedy represents the continuance of life itself. This was also categorized as the Romantic comedy. *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare are examples of romantic comedy as they represent a love affair which goes topsy-turvy due to problems or disguises but ends in a happy union.

4.4 TRAGI-COMEDY

According to Horace Walpole, "Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel". Not all plays fit into a single category; in fact most plays consist of elements from two or more genres. It was a type of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama which intermingled both the standard characters and subject matter and the standard plots of tragedy and comedy. People were of high degree and low degree and the plot was serious criticism with lowbrow farce and slapstick humour. Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1610), Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *The Winter's Tale* are popular tragicomic romances. It is thus defined as an interpretation of emotional reaction where tragedy and comedy are both present yet one does not merely follow upon the other but arises from it.

One of the first dramatists to explain tragicomedy as a uniquely modern world view, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921-1990) felt that the 20th century was an era lying in the shadow of two wars, and the Holocaust, and could no longer support the spirit of exaltation and therefore the true reflection of modern humanity is a paradox in which the tragic is depicted as comic; thus man is like a circus clown with a sad face, whose actions appear comical but the implication of ultimate meaninglessness behind those actions came closer to tragic despair.

4.5 HISTORY PLAYS

Chronicle plays were dramatic works based on the historical materials in the English Chronicles by Raphael Holinshed and others. Chronicles were written accounts in prose or verse, of national or worldwide events. These works achieved high popularity in the sixteenth century. The early chronicle plays were a loosely-knit series of historical events and depended for effect on stage battles. Public was fascinated by these historical dramas. The dramatic presentation of historical events such as *Julius Caesar*, *Richard II*, *Edward I*, *Henry V* are popular Elizabethan historical plays and recent examples are Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1962). The concern with history committed the playwright to deal with all sorts of situations, ambiguities and apparent irrelevancies. The fusion of the outer (events) and inner (character) i.e. the close interdependence of action and character brings the dramatic effect.

4.6 PROBLEM PLAY

Problem plays pertain to drama with a specific contemporary problem by making the protagonist face it. It was a type of drama popularized by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. The dramatist manages to propose a solution to the problem which is at odds with the prevailing opinion. From Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* are examples of problem plays as they explore problems like morality of behaviour, capital punishment, dignity of women, capitalist society, racial and ethnic issues, etc. Social issues are either incorporated into the plot or are debated amongst characters, but may not necessarily search a solution and thus the problem may remain unresolved. Such plays create awareness on social issues and force the spectators to think.

4.7 REALISTIC DRAMA

Realistic and Naturalistic drama of 20th century has been discussed at length in the last unit.

4.8 POETIC DRAMA

In poetic drama the dialogue is written in verse, which in English is usually the blank verse. This was chiefly associated with the work of TS Eliot and Christopher Fry. *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, are popular plays of Eliot. He emphasized vigorous and bold use of all devices proper to the form of verse drama, emphatic melody, alliterative values, arresting imagery. The dialogue is so shaped that the audiences are not made conscious of the fact that they are listening to verse at all. The drama floats on moving words and musical melodies. The choruses were formal and fluid. Spanish writer Lorca made effective use of poetic overtones. In his play *The House of Bernard Alba* (1936), Lorca created a nationalistic prose-poetry, combining realistic exposition with theatre of local colours. Lyrics and ballads were dramatized in a unique and stylized way. Dialogues became formal poetry. *Blood Wedding* (1933) and *Yerma* (1934) are rare dramatic presentations of this kind.

4.9 EPIC THEATRE

The term epic theatre was first used in Germany in 1920s and became associated with the name of Bertolt Brecht. It cuts across the traditional divisions. Epic story telling is objective. The beginnings of epic theatre coincide with German experiments in the use of the theatre as an instrument of political instruction. Brecht rejected the

conventional theatre for he said that it delighted the senses without impinging on the mind. In his essay *On Experimental Theatre* (1939) Brecht asked: "How can the theatres be entertaining and at the same time instructive?" He was looking for a theatre that would help to change the world.

He set out the contrasts between dramatic theatre and epic theatre as follows:

dramatic	epic
plot enactment	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture
spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feeling preserved	brought to the point of recognition
spectator is in the thick of it	spectator stands outside (observer)
the human being is taken for granted	human being is the object of inquiry
he is unalterable	able to alter
eyes on finish	eyes on course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

Dramatic theatre enacted plots, involved the audience and stimulated their emotions. Epic theatre tells a story in a way that invited the audience to consider the events involved and to make their assessment of them. Adjustments had to be made in the form of the play. If the dramatic play was a closed system of underdevelopment scenes, but with a plot so structured that the audience was in suspense till the end ; then the epic play was a montage of independent incidents which showed a process and it moved from scene to scene by curves and jumps which kept the audience alert to judge what was right. Brecht sometimes compared his plays to scientific experiments and change for the better lay at the centre of thinking. Brecht rejected the notion that human nature was fixed and that man's own thinking governed his being. In epic theatre man's thinking is conditioned by his social situation and will change if that changes. He is the agent of social change. *Mother Courage and her Children* (1941) is a good example of an epic play. By employing a detached narrator and other devices to achieve **alienation effects**, Brecht aimed to subvert the sympathy of the audience and the identification of the actor with his role. He hoped to encourage his audience to criticize and oppose the social conditions. The theatre of illusion had always carefully concealed machinery behind the curtain. Brecht had a bare grey stage and had minimal scenery and properties. Bright white light was used for every scene. The songs invite the actors to step out of their roles and address themselves to the audience. Brecht always insisted on the texture of reality.

Brecht's theory which rejected Aristotelian principles, regarded a play as a series of loosely connected scenes, dispensed with dramatic climaxes and used songs to comment on the action.

4.10 THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

It is a term applied to drama that reflects the attitudes that the universe is without purpose and that human life is futile and meaningless. Under such circumstances, man's existence becomes absurd. In both form and content, it portrays human beings as isolated from others. There is no conventional plot, dialogue or character motivation. This formlessness and apparent irrationality are an expression of the absurd predicament of man, whose existence has no reason. Important playwrights are Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Albee and Adamov. Martin Esslin writes: "A term like Theatre of the Absurd must be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method and convention of shared philosophical and artistic premises whether conscious or subconscious, and of inferences from a common store of transition." Sense of loss of meaning (due to political and social upheavals in the first half century) must inevitably lead to a questioning of the recognized instrument for communication of meaning – Language. Conversation is absurd and nonsensical as the language reflects the preoccupation of contemporary philosophy with the discovery of reality and it emphasizes the basic absurdity of human condition. Thus it has much in common with the existential philosophy of Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. The theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. "It does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation" says Martin Esslin.

4.11 CLASSICAL SANSKRIT THEATRE

Kalidasa belongs to Sanskrit Classical Theatre. The sources of classical Indian drama probably antedate the Gupta period in which most literary compositions are complex, multi-layered works that display and play with conflicting philosophies of life and art. The earliest extant works are fragments of plays of Buddhist poet Asvaghosa. It was during the Gupta period that drama emerged as a sophisticated form of public literature. Sudraka's satiric romance *Mrcchakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart*), Visakhadatta's political drama *Mudraraksas* (*The Minister's Signet Ring*) and Kalidasa's dramatic romances were performed. The *Natyasastra* was probably compiled during the Gupta period.

"Bharata's dramatic theory recognizes the emotional and ethical instruction afforded by the spectacle of theatre. Like Aristotle, Bharata stresses the emotional satisfaction that spectators may enjoy through the action of drama. Although their modes of ordinary experience are significantly different, Greek tragedy and Indian heroic romance (*nataka*) were conceived and performed as sources of pleasure and insight for the audience. Indian heroic romances represent human emotions in a theatrical universe of symbolically charged characters and events in order to lead the audience into a state of extraordinary pleasure and insight. The goal of a Sanskrit drama is to re-establish emotional harmony in the microcosm of the audience by exploring the deeper relations that bind apparent conflicts of existence. The manifestation of these relations produces the intense aesthetic experience called *rasa*. (Miller: 13 - 14).

Rasa is essentially the flavour that the poet / dramatist distils from a given emotional situation for aesthetic appreciation. There are eight *rasas* : the erotic, the heroic, the comic, the marvellous, the horrible, the furious, the pathetic and the disgusting. Every drama has a dominant *rasa*. For Indian aesthetics human emotions (*bhava*) also exist. There are eight (*bhava*) also known as *sthayi bhava* (permanent emotions) – *rati/shringar* (romance); *haas* (comic); *shok* (melancholy); *krodh* (angry); *uhsaah* (zeal); *bhay* (fear); *jigyasa* (anxiety); and *vismay* (surprise). The ninth sentiment is *shaant* (tranquillity). *Anubhava* is the outward manifestation of the internal feelings through the eyes, face, gestures, etc.

Drama is a representation of the emotional states of the threefold universe and therefore includes concerns of duty (*dharmā*); play (*kridā*); desire (*kamā*), material gain (*artha*); peace (*sama*), mirth (*hasya*), war (*yuddh*) and death (*nadha*). Drama is a holy presentation that the gods originated to offer ethical instruction through diversion. Drama was patronized by royalty and permanent troupes of actors were associated with major courts. Royal palaces contained a theatre with a backstage greenroom. The world is created by enactment, gestures and verbal delivery, costume, make up and emoting *bhava* and *rasa*.

As Miller writes:

Bharata analyses acting into four components:

1. Acting through the body (*angika*), relating to gestures and movements.
2. Acting through speech (*vacika*), relating to voice intonation, recitation and singing.
3. Acting through accessories (*aharya*), such as makeup, costume, jewellery, props.
4. Acting through signs of emotion (*sattvika*), relating to the physical manifestation of emotional states such as tears,,,,,(Miller: 18).

Gestures function to make vivid pictures, to communicate motions and emotions and therefore must not be mechanical but graceful and spontaneous. "In the Indian theatre acting is considered a discipline (*yoga*) where the actor and acted became one. Arduous training is essential to the perfect acting (*abhinaya*) that can produce aesthetic experience (*rasa*)". (Miller: 19).

Nature functions as a setting as well as a representative of creation and destruction of life. The eight essential principles of empirical existence – air, water, earth, fire, ether, the sun, the moon and the ritual sacrifice express Siva (*ardhanarisvara*) – the male and the female; the *purusa* and *prakriti*; Siva and Parvati. These concepts are the basic tenets of Kalidasa's drama. The Indian drama begins with an invocation and a prologue (*prastavana*). The invocation of the recital of *Nandi* suggests the gist of the plot. The Prelude may begin with a brief allusion to the poets' literary attainment, his genealogy etc; the *Sutradhara* (Chorus) suggests the subject, names the character about to enter and pleases the audience with sweet songs descriptive of some season. The prelude marks a transition to the action of drama itself. The swift rhythms give way to dialogue, poetry and action. This also sets the zones on the stage that represent different realms of the dramatic universe. The whole matter is well- determined and divided into Acts and Scenes. An act must not be too long and should be full of *rasa*. The play should end with a Benediction or prayer (*Bharatvakya*). The language used by the hero and the higher character is Classical Sanskrit, while female and other minor characters speak in the different Prakrit dialects. The plot should be drawn from real life; the Hero must be of ministerial rank or a Brahman; the Heroine may be a maiden of a noble family or a courtesan, and the character to be represented should be celestial as well as human. It is observed that the characteristic peculiarities of the Indian drama are mainly three - 1) its peculiar structure, 2) the absence of the distinction between comedy and tragedy and 3) the diversity of language spoken by the characters. The Sanskrit verses are rich in imagery and metaphor and follow the aesthetic norms whereas the Prakrit verses are lyrical, expressive and imaginative.

The hero in each play is a king and it is through the king that the natural, social and divine worlds unite. The King's spiritual powers can be equated with his martial strength and moral superiority. He is the royal sage. His responsibility is to guide and protect those beneath him. The heroine of drama is the vehicle for transforming erotic passion into aesthetic experience.

Kalidasa's literary reputation is based on his six surviving works : *Malavikagnimitra* (*Malavika and Agnimitra*); *Vikramorvasiya* (*Urvashi won by valour*); *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (*Sakuntala and the Ring of Recollection*); *Meghduta* (*The Cloud messenger*); *Raghuvamisa* (*The Lineage of Raghu*) and *Kumara Sambhava* (*The Birth of Siva's Son*). Coherent language, poetic technique; style and sentiment makes Kalidasa the acknowledged master poet of Sanskrit. The heroines are endowed with physical forms, language, dance movement and magical relations to nature. The heroes are also connoisseurs of natural beauty and art. The audience tends to forget the everyday world and enters the fantastic realm of imagination. His plays are also known as the "Theatre of Memory" for memory is crucial to the production of romantic sentiment throughout Sanskrit literature. Miller writes : "... memory has the power to break through the logic of everyday experience – it makes visible what is invisible, obliterates distances, reverses chronologies, and fuses what is ordinarily separate" (Miller : 39 - 40).

David Gitomer describes the playhouse as follows:

...most attention is given to the medium rectangular variety ...Ninety-six feet in length, forty-eight in width, but divided so that equal halves were given over to audience and performers, these halls could have accommodated no more than 200 spectators sitting on a mat-covered floor with benches for the distinguished and elderly on the sides. Wooden pillars supported the roof, which was thatched. At least few of these pillars stood away from the walls within the audience area. Each was associated with one of the four classes (*varnas*) . . .

The part of the house which was the domain of the performer was again subdivided.... there was a wall between the backstage area and the stage, with two doorways cut near the centre for entrances and exits....there were sliding curtains over these doorsbetween the doors were two large drums; clustered around them were the other musicians of the ensemble, which seems to have provided an almost continuous accompaniment to any dance-dramathe actual playing area may have been as small as twelve feet square; another scheme works out to a rectangular 24' x 12'....

Every aspect of the construction of the playhouses, from the laying of the string to measure the foundation to the drawing of a mandala for the installation and worship of gods in the building, was part of a great ritual, undertaken at the proper astrological moment, which drew on traditional modes of vedic sacrifice . . . (Miller : 63 - 65).

The stage becomes a fluid space in which divisions are established by dialogue and movement, highlighted by lights and costumes and the audience transported through earthly and cosmic spaces.

From the time of Kalidasa to the present times poetic drama or verse play is popular on the Indian stage. Verse plays like Batalvi's *Luna* or love legends of *Laila-Majnu*, *Sassi-Panu* and *Heer-Ranjha* belong to a single cultural tradition and seek to teach didactic and moral lessons. The epical modes of Eastern epic have remained dependent on established and elitist notions. With the passage of time imaginative construction gave way to a new direction in literary creation which amounts to flouting of the tradition and searching for new meanings and interpretations.

4.12 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit we get to know that there are different kinds of plays such as Tragedy, Comedy, Tragi Comedy, History plays, Problem plays, Realistic plays,

Poetic drama, Epic theatre and Absurd Theatre. This unit also makes us familiar with Classical Sanskrit theatre.

4.13 EXERCISES

1. Enlist the different types of drama and point out two distinctive features of each.
2. Differentiate between high comedy and low comedy.
3. Trace the growth of tragedy and comedy in English Literature.
5. How does comedy offer a balance to the perspective of tragedy?
6. Compare and contrast Greek theatre with Sanskrit drama.

4.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 5 DEVELOPMENTS IN 20th CENTURY DRAMA

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be introduced to drama written in the 20th century and its growth and development. The characteristic features of 20th century Drama and the important dramatists of this period are also discussed in this unit.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The drama written and performed in the 20th century is by any standards a major achievement. There has been much innovation and experiment and this has been related to the growth and crisis of civilization. The new movements in 20th century were influenced by liberty, equality and fraternity and the challenging attitude in Art and Life. There was an array of complex and confusing trends. This century witnessed the final culmination of the stage's commercialism and this was evident in the rise of the repertory playhouses and the associated movements (some of which we have already studied in *Kinds of Drama*). A new style of acting emerged: "less polished, less virtuoso, but stronger, more direct and individualistic, more related to behaviour outside the theatre" (Russell Brown: 1).

The characteristic features of drama in 20th century are:

1. New acting schools and theatres: Royal Academy of Dramatic Art of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art; Abbey Theatre in Dublin (1903); Gaiety Theatre in Manchester (1907); People's Theatre at New Castle (1911); British Drama League founded by Geoffrey Whitworth (1919) and the establishment of Scottish Community Drama Association, to list a few.
2. Emergence of silent cinema which rapidly destroyed the tradition of theatre. In thirties came the sound films and then television.
3. Translations of foreign works proliferated and were at equal footing with English drama, in fact influenced it more.
4. The stage of this period was influenced and altered by historical, social, political, economic and scientific trends. The two wars, the economic depression, the technological advancements - from washing machines to nuclear bombs, from emergence of fractions of religious cults to man's conquest of space, all have led to diverse and manifold growth of human mind.
5. Emergence of new plays and new young dramatists with newer creative ideas and more imaginative presentations. Kitchen sink drama, neo-realist drama, drama of non-communication, absurd drama, comedy of menace, dark comedy, drama of cruelty, etc. evolved from the long tradition of stage and drama writing. To understand the new movement we must look beyond individual plays. The common ground was experimentation and innovation. The motives for writing plays and choice of subjects were different from the previous Elizabethan or Restoration drama. Conventional drama had accepted standards, formal rules and technical means in an acted performance. Development in conventions always exists as the audience is open-minded and therefore the dramatist may use any change in the performance of the play as there is a "latent willingness to accept them" (Williams. Raymond: 8).

The newer dramatist liked to be sensational, to surprise and shock; to be fantastic, and outrageous. Homosexuality, nymphomania, prostitution, abortion, violence, deaths, disfigurement and callow humour are all part of new drama. The writers choose popular, up-to-date, topical, obvious subjects. They use song, dance, soap-box oratory, pantomime and commercial techniques in their play adaptations.

Brown writes:

Although the new British dramatists do not want to make statements or define their aims, they are creatively involved with society and seek a full revelation in their plays of what they find in the world around them and within them. They write for the theatre because this is the art form which allows them to show the complexity of those worlds: the permanent and frightening forces that lie behind each explosive crisis and each boring, dehumanizing routine; the limitations, dangers, and excitements of a personal, subjective view; the impossibility of judging any man except in relation to others; the strength of truth and permanence of idealism. They write youthful, topical, sensational, theatrical plays because the theatre can be a realistic, exploratory, complicated and, hence, responsible medium. They are promising and important dramatists (Russel Brown: 14).

A comparison with the Elizabethan theatre can help us understand the new drama better.

1. Marlowe, Jonson, Greene, Decker, Heywood, Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher all started writing for the theatre in their twenties. All of Jonson's best works were written by his mid thirties; Shakespeare started writing plays when he was twenty six and great tragedies like Hamlet were written by mid-thirties.
2. Elizabethans were sensational. Some of the title pages of printed editions proclaim "extreme cruelty", "lamentable tragedy", "odious death". "pitiful murder", "filthy best", etc. Plays dealt not only with violence, murder, grotesque deaths but also rape, sodomy, blasphemy, necrophilia sex.
3. The Elizabethans too were 'pop'.
4. The Elizabethans too worked in closest contact with theatre companies.

Modern theatre is a richly varied enterprise of realism on the one hand, and of numerous departures from it, on the other. Practical matters and commonplace interests stirred the creativity of the new dramatists. They not only accept their environment as a subject for study and improvement but derive from it a new, comparatively literal style and approach. Each dramatist brought a new and individual touch to the growth of theatre from the transitional age of twentieth century to the present times. There is a change in dramatic method. Each movement offered completion of the creative effort.

Drama in the world is no longer coexistent with theatre alone as the largest audience for drama is in cinema and on television. The liberating media and advanced technological inputs have released the drama from a closed form to a more open and wide frame work.

The twentieth century drama is "a record of difficulty and struggle ... from Ibsen to Brecht, [it is] one of the great periods of dramatic history, a major creative achievement of our own civilization which gives us a continuing understanding, imagination and courage" (Williams Raymond: 401).

5.2 MODERN DRAMA

Modern Drama has partially been read in the Kinds of Drama unit as epic theatre, theatre of the absurd, poetic drama, etc. In this unit we need to read the important dramatists at some length. This will give you a view of specific creativities.

5.2.1 Ibsen (1828-1906)

Henrik Ibsen was born on 20th March 1828 in Skein (Norway) to middle class parents. He was unable to communicate his mental gropings with the few people he knew initially. Later he prepared for matriculation and it was at this time that he composed his first tragedy *Catiline*. When it appeared in 1850, it was the first Norwegian play to be published in seven years. This was followed by the one act play – *The Warriors Barrow*. Towards the end of 1851 he was made the official playwright of the theatre. Then came the comedy *St. John's Night* (1852), historical drama *Lady Inger of Ostrat*, *The Feast at Solhaug*, *The Vikings of Helgeland* and poetic-satiric *Love's Comedy*. The period of apprenticeship ended with *The Pretenders*. Then came the major non-theatrical plays *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *Emperor and Galilean*. The prose plays are also known as the domestic plays and thus Ibsenism established in *The League of Youth*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*. The fourth major period was that of visionary plays -- *The Masterbuilder* and *When We Dead Awaken*. In the early years i.e. between 1851 to 1864 he worked as a dramatist, producer and stage manager. The most heroic and affirmative of his plays was *Brand*. The play is arranged not to study a character but to state a theme.

In *Peer Gynt* Ibsen created a character that was the incarnation of everything that is vacillating and unstable in man. It is said that Peer Gynt was the most daring extravaganza of the modern theatre, as it was a “realistic critique couched in terms of mock-heroic fantasy” (Gassner: 366).

Ibsen is known for *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*. In *A Doll's House* he addressed to woman's place in the home and her limitations. Nora the heroine is never allowed to develop and grow as a woman either by her father or by her husband. The woman in the doll's house was not intrinsically a doll; she only pretended to be one, because this was expected of her when she was locked in a dolls house where she was expected to be pretty and playful, submissive and mindless.

The intensification of Ibsen's grappling with realities was witnessed in *Ghosts*. Ibsen created a taut human drama as it combined realism with protest against everything that shackles the individual in his pursuit of happiness and integrity. *Hedda Gabler* is a powerful play too, as it is a psychological study of a child.

Ibsen did envision a new social order and created the consciousness of modern European drama. He created new attitudes of drama, and is credited with being the first major dramatist to write tragedy about ordinary people in prose.

5.2.2 August Strindberg (1849-1912)

Strindberg was a Swedish playwright born in Stockholm to a steamship agent. His first important play was *Master Olof*, a history play; followed by fairy play *Luckey Peters' Travel*; *The Father*, *Miss Julie* and *Creditors* which combine a highly aggressive and original version of **naturalism** with a sense of the extreme and pathological. The later works are tense, symbolic, psychic dramas, marked by a sense of suffering and a longing for salvation and absolution. These are *To Damascus*, *The Dance of Death*, *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata*. Strindberg's genius as a dramatist was that his influence has been immense, both from the conflict plays and from the experiments in dramatic sequence and imagery in the later work. He is supposed to be the most restless and experimental playwright as he was “perpetually dissatisfied, perpetually reaching after shifting truths seeking the miracle of transmutation in the crucible of his tormented intellect”. (Brustein in *Modern Drama*: 313).

Strindberg initiated an alternative anti-realistic theatre in opposition to Ibsen's realism. He has been regarded as Ibsen's antimasque. He was a master of both naturalism and symbolism, and a forerunner of the expressionism of the post war theatre. His weakness was his deficiency in balance and consistent rationality. His rebellious discontent expressed through drama highlighted his dissatisfaction with the essence of life. He wrote in his last play *The Great Highway*:

Bless me, whose deepest suffering, deepest of human suffering was this - I could not be the one I longed to be.

5.2.3 Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

One name among the post-Ibsen dramatists is of Anton Chekhov, the Russian dramatist and short story writer. He was born in a family of serfs (peasants) in 1860 in the Crimea region of Southern Russia. Chekhov's father ran grocery shop, he had four brothers and one sister and the family lived in utter penury. Later, his father fled and Chekhov was left to fend for his family. He wrote to support himself. Chekhov's professional training was in medicine. In a life spanning 44 years, he wrote nearly 800 short stories and 17 plays. He was an “even-tempered soul”; his sense of humour never failed him and he retained a lovable simplicity and sweetness. He never lost his optimism and his faith in man. His major works are:

Short stories: *The Duel and Other Stories*, *Lady with Lapdog*, and other stories, *A Dreary Story*,

Ward No. Six, *My Life*, *The Man in a Case* and *The Horse Thieves*;

One Act Plays: *Swan Song*, *The Bear*, *The Proposal*, *The Wedding* and *The Anniversary*;

Full length plays: *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters*.

His plays were staged by the Moscow Art Theatre.

Chekhov's plays are thought to be complex, soulful (as also since) vague they reflect the mood of dejection which permeates the anxieties of 20th century. For Chekhov, "life was an insoluble problem" and he wrote in *The Seagull*: "Tell me, what can I do?". This sentence, and feeling runs like a leit motive through his works. The central theme of all his plays is estrangement. He was aware of the fact that the very conditions of life doom man to failure. Despite this realization, he finds projects meaningful relationships and meaningful action in his writing. In *Sea Gull* nobody succeeds in finding love; in *Uncle Vanya*, no one achieves the goal; in *Three Sisters*, the sisters do not go to Moscow and in *Cherry Orchard* the cherry orchard is not saved. His characters dream and rebel and try to reach out for what they want. Thus, defeat is transferred into spiritual triumph. His plays offer an alternate shade of despair and hope, tears and laughter.

In *The Three Sisters*, the three sisters and a brother are stranded in a provincial town after the death of their father and their only hope of escape from the tedium of exile is the brother Andrei who has prospects of professorship in the capital. However he marries a shallow woman who betrays him. Olga remains wedded to her school-teaching job; Masha is united to a fatuous pedagogue (a friend of her father); and Irina takes a job in telegraph office and later becomes a teacher. To the end, the sisters retain their vitality and vigour.

In *Cherry Orchard* the chief character Madame Ranevsky who represents the upper classes. She brings on her calamities by leading a spendthrift life abroad and converts her estate into a summer colony. Her adopted daughter Varya manages the household and finds the economy insufficient to save the situations. Madame Ranevsky is accustomed to a life of pleasure and liberty and possesses no pragmatic understanding of the world. The cherry orchard is a luxury that cannot be afforded and thus is auctioned off. The play is an attempt to come to terms with the past, to live without owning the orchard and its servants.

Chekhov wanted his plays to express the paradox and the contradictions of experience. Thus a Chekhovian play shows the inner lives of his characters.

5.2.4 J.M. Synge (1871-1909)

Irish playwright, Synge was born near Dublin. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. Later he went to Paris where he met W.B. Yeats who suggested that he go to Aran Islands to write of Irish peasant life. He wrote *The Aran Islands* that documents his life among these rural people. His first play was *In the Shadow of the Glen* followed by famous elegiac one-act tragedy *Riders to the Sea* and his best known controversial play *The Playboy of the Western World*. His plays were produced by the Irish National Theatre Society and were presented by the Abbey players. His later works include *The Tinkers Wedding* and an unfinished tragedy *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. He uses rhythmic, lyrical prose to achieve effects of great power and resonance. He instilled poetry into the modern drama and romanticism was invigorated with reality. Synge was changed with satirizing Ireland and thus the Irish populace misunderstood him. He was an Irish nationalist and hoped that Ireland would get freedom through peaceful negotiations rather than armed rebellion.

His most popular play is *The Playboy of the Western World*. In this play, Synge weaves a web of ironies through romantic illusion and reality. It's a perfect blend of a comedy and seriousness. His characters enjoy a sense of individuality Christy is a bragging tale-teller, Pegeen is a curious figure as she is mix of sharp tongue and romantic illusions, the Widow Quin is looking for a second husband and Old Mohan possesses incredible strength. In the Preface to this play, Synge writes:

On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be fully flavoured...

5.2.5 George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

Shaw was born in Dublin but moved to London. He was a supporter of women's rights and an advocate of equality of income, abolition of private property and a radical change in the voting system. He campaigned for a **theatre of ideas**. Shaw wrote over 50 plays including *Man and Superman*, *Major Barbara*, *Pygmalion*, *Saint Joan*, *Back to Methuselah*, *The Apple Cart* and *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*. These plays were published in collections *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* and *Three Plays for Puritans*. The plays had lengthy prefaces in which Shaw clearly expresses his views as a non-romantic and a champion of the thinking man. The dramatic conflict in his plays is the conflict of thought and belief. Discussion is the basis of the plays. He believed that war, disease and the present brevity of lifespan frustrate the **Life Force** and that "functional adaptation, a current of creative evolution activated by the power of human will, was essential to any real progress, and indeed to the survival of the species (Drabble:924). His *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* reveals his debt to Ibsen as a playwright. He died at the age of 94.

Man and Superman: A Comedy and a Philosophy is a paradoxical version of the Don Juan Story. The hero is John Tanner who is pursued by Ann Whitefield, who is interested in him as a potential husband than in his political theories. The most important Act is Act III which consists of a dream sequence set in hell in which Tanner captured by Brigand Mendoza becomes his ancestor Don Juan; and Ann becomes Ana. The play ends with the announcement of Ann and Tanner's marriage and Tanner's submission to the life force.

Arms and the Man is play that resorted to humour in stripping war of its glamour. The play critiques the 'romance of arms' and the 'romance of love'. The play ridicules pretentious rationalisms.

Major Barbara portrays the conflict between spiritual and worldly power embodied in Barbara, a major in the Salvation Army and her villainous father Andrew Undershaft, a millionaire armament manufacturer. Barbara suffers a crisis of faith as she glimpses the possibility that all salvation and philanthropy are tainted at the source. By the end she recovers her spirits and embraces the possibility of hope for future.

Pygmalion was made into a film titled *My Fair Lady* in 1957. The flower seller Eliza Doolittle gets transformed into a duchess by the phonetician professor Henry Higgins who undertakes this task in order to win a bet and to prove his own point about English speech and the class system. He teaches her to speak standard English and introduces her to social life, thus winning the bet. The play ends with a truce between them. Shaw was not a man but a phenomenon. If some of his plays communicate personal feeling of great intensity, others embody powerful feelings which are not emotional; the parody is not confined to conventional form.

5.2.6 W.B. Yeats (1865-1939)

Yeats was born in Dublin, studied at the school of Art in Dublin and at 21 abandoned art as a profession in favour of literature. He helped in the founding of an Irish Literary Society in London as well as Dublin. Better known as a poet Yeats applied himself to the creation of an Irish National Theatre. He died in France. His well known plays are *The Countess Cathleen*, fairy drama *The Land of Heart's Desire*, *The Shadowing Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *The Death of Cuchulain*.

5.2.7 Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936)

Pirandello the Italian dramatist, short story writer and novelist challenged the conventions of naturalism. Best known of his published plays are *Naked Masks*, *Right You Are, If You Think You Are* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. His major contribution is to re-evaluation of the nature of man and his reassessment of conceptions of reality. According to the well-known critic Raymond Williams:

“The worlds of naturalism and expressionism cross and engender what is really a new form: one which has continued to be influential. Delusion, loss of identity, the reduction of personality to a role and of society to a collective impersonation: these are the elements of a new kind of theatre: a use of the theatre to expose itself, and then in the double exposure to question any discoverable reality. What began as a twist of romantic drama become a decisive twist of a whole dramatic tradition” (Williams Raymond: 184).

5.2.8 Garcia Lorca (1898-1936)

Lorca Spanish poet and dramatist was killed in the early days of Spanish civil war. He had been experimenting in drama since his earliest years. He drew on the life of Spanish country people, on the national literature and on the gipsy songs and dance. His popular plays are *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*. *Blood Wedding* is about jealousy and revenge in which the unique notes are the creation of a dramatic poetry of intense desire. Lorca moves from realistic conversation through speeches which are lyrics, elegies, songs or chorus. The play begins with the mother talking to her only son about work and marriage. It ends with the lament of the mother and the bride at the death of the son the bridegroom, and the other man with whom the bride went away. Interestingly the characters are called, The Bride, Bridegroom, Mother, Wife, Father and Leonardo, for it is him who breaks the pattern. It's a poetics drama in which the imagery and action are fused. In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, the house of Bernarda Alba is occupied only by women, all unmarried and the mother who works against their marriage. The father has died, the largest portion of money has come to the eldest girl. The bitter jealousy breaks the whole situation open. Adela takes her life.

5.3 MID CENTURY THEATRE

5.3.1 Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)

Brecht, German dramatist and poet, settled in East Berlin in 1949. Brecht's early plays *Baal*, *Drums in the Night* and *Man is Man* anticipate later development of his 'alienation effect'. *The Three Penny Opera*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Mother Courage* and *He Who Said Yes/He Who Said No* made him an outstanding dramatist in modern Europe.

What Brecht created was a dramatic form in which men were shown in the process of producing themselves and their situation. This is a dialectical form drawing directly on Marxist theory. His methods of writing, producing and acting embodied a critical detachment. He used boards across the stage to indicate the time and place of the actor and situation. He presented characters that were

alienated from themselves and from one another. His figures often moved in vacuum where the most unexpected must be expected. Brecht's epic theatre is a legitimate offspring of the expressionist revolution of the twenties and of European theatrical history. Politzer writes: "His aesthetic theory is a mechanism, both of offence and defence, it may well be recognized for what it is: the intellectual mimicry behind which a creative mind hid from outward persecution and inward doubts."

In *The Caucasian Chalk* the prologue is set in Soviet Russia. Russian peasants who return to a village destroyed by the Germans are engaged in a discussion bordering on a quarrel: one group claims the valley as a homestead, the other plans to irrigate it and to use it for vineyards and orchards. The latter group wins. To celebrate the reconciliation, the play of 'Chalk Circle' is performed. The play describes Grusha's rescue of the governor's deserted child, her flight before the revolution, her marriage to a peasant who is supposedly dying and finally the return of the Governor's wife and her claim for the child. Azdak tries the case of the child and awards the child to Grusha the foster mother who had saved him by sacrificing her personal happiness. Her sacrifice is recognized as superior.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Mother Courage is a canteen woman serving with the Swedish Army during the Thirty years War (1618-48). Despite an early warning that war can never be all take and no give, she intends to make a living off the war while keeping her children out of it. Her brave son Eilif is tempted into the infantry, kills a peasant and is executed. Her honest son Swiss Cheese defends the regimental cashbox. He is captured and executed by the enemy. Warm hearted daughter Katrin dies warning the sleeping town of Halle that the enemy is at the gates. Mother Courage's business prospers and then declines. Bowed and alone, she drags her battered wagon. Speaking on the performance of the play Brecht said that the show primarily highlighted that. "War is a continuation of business by other means, and makes human virtues fatal. No sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war."

5.3.2 Samuel Beckett (1906-89)

Beckett who became known as a playwright of **Theatre of the Absurd**, was born in Dublin. He became popular with plays like *Finnegans Wake*, *Malone Dies*, *Waiting for Godot*, *End Game*, *Happy Days* and *Come and Go*. He used stage and dramatic narrative to revolutionize drama.

Waiting for Godot is essentially about uncertain waiting. Pozzo and Lucky are in a formal world and in an unorthodox social relationship: dominating and being dominated. They are tied to each other. Vladimir and Estragon have a different relationship: informal and outside society; at once loving, doubtful and resentful; wanting to break away and yet anxiously returning to each other. There is a major contrast in tone as well. Each pair is on the road. It is Vladimir who is waiting for Godot; Estragon is waiting for death. Beckett controls with extraordinary skill, his actions, speech, imagery uncertainty and revelation.

5.4 AMERICAN DRAMATISTS

5.4.1 Eugene O' Neill (1888-1953)

O' Neill was the son of a well-known romantic actor in America and had a varied career as a seaman, gold prospector, journalist and actor before associating himself with the experimental theatre group. His first big success was the full length naturalistic drama *Beyond the Horizon* followed by expressionistic tragedy *The Emperor Jones*. His other important plays were *The Hairy Ape*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *Ah! Wilderness*, *Days Without End*, *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Days Journey into Night*. The plays give a powerful presentation of the struggle between self destruction, self deception and redemption.

O' Neill caught the reality of common people living on sea or land. His *Desire Under the Elms* is about the timelessness of the inner struggle between a son and a father. Eben and old Ephraim. Ephraim was a hard husband to his gentle first wife whom he worked to death and whose child Eben he hated for resembling her. *The Hairy Ape* tells the story of the super stoker Yank who discovers his shortcomings from a chance meeting with one of the passengers, cultured and wealthy Mildred. It is a symbolic play about a man who has lost his old harmony with nature and has not acquired a new spiritual way. *The Iceman Cometh* is a lengthy naturalistic tragedy set in Harry Hope's Bowery saloon, where a collection of down- and -out alcoholics nourish their 'pipe-dreams' with the aid of an extrovert, cheerful salesman Hickey.

Long Days Journey Into Night has been praised as his finest play. The play is the cultural expression of American - Irish-Catholicism.

5.4.2 Tennessee Williams (1911-83)

Tennessee Williams was born in Mississippi and brought up in St. Louis. His important plays are *American Blues*, *Battle of Angels*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The semi-autobiographical play *The Glass Menagerie* is a poignant and painful family drama set in St. Louis, in which a frigid and frustrated mother dreams of her glamorous past. The conflict is with the grimness of her reduced circumstances as she persuades her rebellious son Tom to provide a gentleman caller for her crippled daughter Saura. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a study of sexual frustration, violence and aberration, set in New Orleans, in which Blanche Dubois's fantasies of refinement and grandeur are brutally destroyed by her brother-in-law Stanley whose animal nature fascinates and repels her.

5.4.3 Arthur Miller (1915-2005)

Arthur Miller became famous with the play *All My Sons*, an Ibsenesque drama about a manufacturer of defective aeroplane parts, and established himself as a leading dramatist with *Death of a Salesman* in which a travelling salesman, Willy Loman is brought to disaster by accepting the false values of contemporary society. This was followed by *The Crucible* in which the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 are used as a parable for McCarthyism in America in the 1950s. *A View from the Bridge* is a tragedy of family honour and revenge; *The Misfits* is a screenplay for his wife Marilyn Monroe; *After the Fall* presents the semi-autobiographical figure of Quentin and *The Price* contrasts the lives and opinions of two estranged brothers. Miller himself wrote:

It is the everlastingly sought balance between order and the need of our soul for freedom; the relatedness between our vaguest longings our inner questions, and private lives and the life of the generality of men which is our Society and our world.

Miller's plays deal with questions of social status, honour and freedom from constraints.

5.5 RECENT DRAMA

The recent European drama is unusually serious, vital and responsive. The emergence of working class drama presented disorganized life. This movement with common aims and methods created the new drama. The prominent new dramatists are Arden, Wesker, Pinter, Osborne Edward Bond and Caryl Churchill.

5.5.1 John Arden (1930 -)

Arden was educated at Cambridge and Edinburgh university where he studied architecture. His popular plays are *The Waters of Babylon*, a grotesque satirical,

sprawling play about a corrupt municipal lottery organized by a slum landlord, *Live Like Pigs* dealing with social conflict and violence, *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* and *The Happy Haven*. In *The Waters of Babylon* the central character is a Polish émigré who leads a double life, working in an architect's office by day, while out of office he runs a lodging house. The characters are likeable, amiable and good-natured. His plays are fragments selected, isolated and shaped into a whole.

It was with *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* that Arden made a break with realism. It is a complex play with confusing characters who appear as concepts. About this play, Gilman said, "it is not a political play except in the sense that Arden writes to test certain modes of political action ... it is not real, it is an artefact of the dramatic imagination, and it leaves the problem of violence to those agencies, outside art, whose province it is" (Gilman in *Modern Drama*, 114).

Arden is unclassifiable and cannot be put into a category. His drama is between didacticism and impressionism. Arden is one of the few complete originals.

5.5.2 Arnold Wesker (1932-)

Wesker was educated in Hackney. He worked at various jobs before making a name as a playwright. He is known for his **kitchen sink drama** and his popular plays are *The Kitchen*, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Chips with Everything*, *The Four Seasons*, *Their Very Own* and *Golden City*. Wesker was recognized as a social dramatist whose plays need a large cast. In *Chips With Everything*, Wesker studies a class of attitudes in the RAF during National service on the parade ground. Audiences are gripped by the savage precision of military training and the rebellious dancing and singing at a canteen party. The play is an attack on the British ruling class. The individual and group reaction both are portrayed.

The Four Seasons has only two characters and tells the story of a love affair that was private, intimate and finally in-conclusive.

Wesker uses theatre to explore and demonstrate significant themes in more comprehensive and subtle ways. His most notable qualities are emotional maturity and his command of action in depth.

5.5.3 Harold Pinter (1930 - 2008)

Pinter is the most consistent of new British dramatists as his settings remain simple. They come from the world he lives in and the plot progresses by a revelation of inner tensions. His interests belong to the everyday ritual, from a birthday party to a homecoming from taking possession to taking care of a room, from breakfast or lunch to fulfilling routines are subjects of dramatic focus. Pinter was born in East London to a tailor Jewish and educated at Hackney. His first play *The Room* was followed by *The Birthday Party* and then came *The Homecoming*, *No Man's Land*, *Betrayal*, *Party Time* and *Ashes to Ashes* to list a few. Drabble writes. "Pinter's gift for portraying, by means of dialogue which realistically produces the nuances of colloquial speech, the difficulties of communication and the many layers of meaning in language, pause and silence, have created a style labelled by the popular imagination as 'Pinteresque' and his themes — nameless menace, erotic fantasy, obsession and jealousy, family hatreds and mental disturbance — are equally recognizable" (Drabble: 793). He is the inventor of **comedy of menace**. Pinter wrote for radio and television also.

The Room and *The Birthday Party* present seven or eight people, each carefully introduced. *The Room* dramatises the fact that every room has a door and the very existence of a door suggests the unknown. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley the hero has found a cosy home in a seaside boarding house. The heralds of the outside world appear to drive Stanley from the warmth of his security for reasons not explained. The play merely conveys the image nameless menace.

Pinter's plays do away with lengthy exposition. Further, they leave the action unexplained and the characters unmotivated. Further, they reach no solution and force the audience to find their own interpretations. The plays provide observations of ordinary human behaviour.

5.5.4 John Osborne (1929-1994)

Osborne was born in London to a commercial artist. He made his name with *Look Back in Anger*, and for his outbursts of rage against contemporary society and this anger made him known as the Angry Young Man. His other known plays are *Epitaph for George Dillon*, *Luther*, *Inadmissible Evidence* and *a Patriot for Me*. His first plays were structurally conventional, but mirrored Osborne's world and its idealistic pretensions.

In *Luther*, the hero driven by his moral, sexual and physical tensions brings terror and pain to himself and others. The play proves the ability of Osborne to grasp dramatic ideas and the language to convey them on a poetical level.

Inadmissible Evidence is about the frankly apologetic presentation of Maitland who is struggling with the same adversary all the time Osborne is no longer angry and defiant and asks for compassions and understanding.

5.5.5 Edward Bond (1934-)

Bond was born in North London to an East Anglian Labourer. His popular plays are *The Pope's Wedding*, *Saved*, *Early Morning*, *The Sea*, *The Fool Summer* and *The War Plays*. "Bond's theatre is an out-spoken indictment of capitalist society; his belief that violence occurs in 'situations of injustice' and that it therefore flourishes as 'a cheap consumer commodity' under capitalism, continues to arouse extreme responses from critics and audiences" (Drabble 118).

5.5.6 Caryl Churchill (1938-)

Churchill was educated at Montreal and Oxford. Most of her plays are radical and feminist in tone. Her well known plays are: *Owners* is a satire on property and capitalism; *Cloud Nine* explores contemporary sexual identity; *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* exhibits sexual repression in Victorian Africa.

5.6 SOME OTHER DRAMATISTS

Other dramatists who are equally important and made landmark presentations and wrote plays in the contemporary period of turmoil, experiment, innovation and adjustment need to be studied at a glance, if not in detail. These are the French and German dramatists.

5.6.1 Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80)

Sartre, the French philosopher, novelist, playwright, literary critic and political activist was the principal exponent of existentialism in France and exercised a considerable influence on French intellectual life. His dramas *The Flies*, *In Camera*, *No Exit*, *Dirty Hands* and *Loser Wins* are well known. Sartre's plays are marked by clarity of attitude. He tried to mediate between man's despairing sense of a void in the world and his need to recover some justification for remaining alive and respecting himself. He offered a new idea of courage and integrity.

5.6.2 Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944)

Giraudoux became popular because of his plays *Amphitryon 38*; *Judith*; *Tiger at the Gates* and *Duel of Angels*. His gifts of irony and paradox and modernized

versions of biblical or classical legend made him stand apart from the rest. He used simple individual conflicts as metaphors, simplified the terms of conflict and then played freely with the element of surprise in unexpected reversals. Almost all works of this French dramatist are organized around analogous debates: war and peace; love of a young man and the love of an old man, etc. His is the 'theatre of language' as the magic of words and power of combination of words was fundamental to his universe.

5.6.3 Jean Anouilh (1910-87)

Anouilh was the most popular French dramatist with nearly 50 dramatic works. The most popular of these are *Thieves Carnival*, *Ring Round*, *Que Moon*, *The Lark* and *The Waltz of The Toreadors*. Anouilh's works do not reflect reality as everyday experience. They do not attempt an explanation of the human individual in terms of psychological realism. Thus his drama was essentially a-social. He implies no faith and little interest in social relations as such. His bitter satirical portraits of aristocracy are moral rather than social.

5.6.4 Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946)

The first German naturalistic play to be produced was *Before Sunrise* by Hauptmann in 1889. His other important plays were *The Weavers*, *Signalman* *Thief* and *Shrovetide*. He combined naturalist observations with social democratic sympathies and this made *The Weavers* epoch-making. He cemented a new bond between realistic theatre and the masses. Joyce called *The Weavers* a "masterpiece; a little immortal thing". For him a pessimistic conclusion was peculiarly relevant. He created timeless works.

5.6.5 Freidrich Duerrenmatt (1921-90)

Swiss dramatist Durrenmatt was a writer of grotesque black comedy and he thought that after the Second World War tragedy was a form no longer applicable to our modern upside-down world.' His best plays are *The Visit* and *The Physicists*. Both deal with power and responsibility, the first with reference to money, the second on the theme of criminality of atomic physics. Certain tendencies typical to his drama are the grotesque setting with emphasis on bizarre and macabre.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

The twentieth century drama was a naturalistic, realistic, existential, epic, absurd and impressionistic drama. It was experimental and each dramatist made a mark with his kind of observations, amendments and innovations. It varied far and wide between countries and techniques. It was no more a bastion of the aristocrats or specialists; amateurs and middle class, or even low class drama emerged in this century. We are indebted to the 20th century for the growth and development of drama.

5.8 EXERCISE

1. Write a critical note on Epic Theatre.
2. Ibsen influenced the modern drama. How?
3. Recent drama is the drama of 'angry young man' or 'kitchen-sink' or in other words of the middle class .Elucidate the statement.
4. Summarise the different movements that emerged in the development of drama in 20th century.
5. Contemporary drama is a mix of tragedy, comedy, music, philosophy, etc. Where the effect is heightened by technological devices. Explain.

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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5.10 GLOSSARY

Angry Young Men: Since 1950 a host of playwrights came upon the English literary scene protesting violently, sometimes even very noisily against a society. They criticized the traditions, standard and manners of the Establishment. They aimed at exposing the oppressiveness, hypocrisy and stultifying values in the social, commercial or industrial world. Their protest was mainly directed against a world for which they did not feel responsible and which seemed to them almost intolerable on account of its stupidity and cruelty. These writers were labelled as “angry young men” and the eminent playwright was Osborne.

Didacticism: is the quality of writing that manifest’s the author’s desire to instruct and improve the reader.

Epic Theatre: Erwin Piscator is regarded as the founder of this movement but Brecht gave it a new shape and meaning. Epic theatre does not restrict itself to the unity of time and uses a number of episodes in a simple and direct way. This theatre is known for its use of chorus, a narrator, slide projection, film, placards and music.

Existentialism : was a philosophy that began as the attempt of French writers as Sartre and comes to face reality of World War II, argues that the universe is meaningless, and that consequently all choice is without reason yet paradoxically that the individual is the product of the choices he makes. The existential drama attempts to depict the universal meaninglessness.

Expressionism: is a revolt against realism. Its an artistic movement that originated in Germany during the first three decades of the 20th century. Its exponent was the Swedish playwright Strindberg. It emphasized the primacy or symbolic or stylistic expression of the artists inner experience and as such realism was of subsidiary importance. The writer tends not to represent the world as it is from an objective point of view but describes it as it appears to him from the point of view of his inner experience. It used stylized dialogue, masked characters and distorted stage setting. Eugene O’Neil and Miller were expressionists.

Impressionism: A highly personal manner of writing in which characters and scenes are portrayed as they appear to the writer rather than as they actually are. The term is borrowed from art.

Kitchen – sink drama: The very title of the drama suggests that the action of these plays is centred mainly on the kitchen sink. The term was used derogatorily. This kind of drama was in vogue in 1950s and it was highly realistic as it portrayed the life of the working class. Plays of Osborne, Wesker and Owen are examples.

Meta-theatre: The term was used first by Lionel Abel in 1963 to describe serious plays which do not have the qualities as found in tragedies. Such plays as Miller’s

Death of a Salesman; William's *A Street Car Named Desire* and Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* are meta theatre.

Musical Comedy: It refers to a form of theatrical entertainment developed in the United States during the 19th century but was implemented in 20th Century also. It makes use of a light thread of plot, jokes, comic situations, songs, music and spoken dialogue. The comic play *My Fair Lady* which is an adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion* is a fine illustration of this.

Theatre of the Absurd: This term refers to the works of such dramatists of the 1950s as Adamov, Beckett, Genet, Ionesco and Pinter. Their plays did not use formal logic and conventional structure. Both form and content support the absurd predicament. In such plays, human beings are represented as individuals struggling hard with the irrationality of experience in a state described as meta physical anguish. Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* are the finest examples.

Theatre of the Cruelty: This term is derived from the theories of the French dramatist Antonin Artraud. In 1938, he expressed clearly that the theatre is intended to disturb the spectators and aims at changing their minds greatly. This theatre attached greater importance to mime, gesture and scenery than to words; and much depends on spectacle and lighting. *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat* is a splendid example.

UNIT 6 DRAMA AROUND SHAKESPEARE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Origins of English Drama
- 6.3 Major Dramatists and Their Works
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Exercise
- 6.6 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit intends to introduce you to:

- origins of English Drama;
- the Miracle plays, Mystery plays and Interludes; and
- the major dramatists influencing the growth and development of English Drama around Shakespeare.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The English Drama which at present has become a highly developed form of entertainment had its origin in the Church. The drama of Greece and Rome had considerable influence on the English stage. In the earlier medieval centuries in England, people could not go to anything like a modern theatre - the theatre came to them in the shape of the minstrel or the gleeman who went from one home to another of whom we hear in early song and story. The minstrels gave entertainments that are termed as recitals, and into their work got frequently introduced the idea of impersonation. Towards the end of the ninth century the Church which earlier had sternly repressed drama all along the Dark Ages (the 6th to the 10th century), gradually began to use dramatic action to enrich its liturgy and to enforce its teachings. There were tropes or additional texts to ecclesiastical music. Sometimes these tropes were written in dialogue form. Later they were separated from regular services and presented on Easter and Christmas. Gradually they took the form of liturgical plays and became more complex. The major events of Christ's life were enacted by priests in the church. These plays enjoyed great popularity.

6.2 ORIGINS OF ENGLISH DRAMA

The origins of English Drama date from the eleventh century and it had its roots in the religious instincts of humankind. In the beginning, in the Dark Ages the Church was hostile to drama. It was later that the Church brought drama into utilization to preach and teach the truth of religion to the illiterate masses. Services were held in Latin which few could understand. Hence in early times the gospel stories were performed by the actors only with action without speaking.

Later special plays were written by clerics in which the actors spoke and acted. Drama was in complete control of the church with the performances held in the church with clerics as actors. The stories of the Mystery plays were taken from scripture narrative while Miracles consisted of stories dealing with incidents in the lives of martyrs and saints. These plays known as Mysteries or Miracles were earlier written in Latin.

As the Mystery and Miracle plays grew in popularity, more audiences came to watch them. There was not enough room for the crowds to fit in the church. The stage was shifted to the porch. With the increase in the crowd the stage was again shifted to the churchyard and finally to the marketplace. Soon the laity also started performing in the play with the priests later to be overtaken completely by the laity. With the change in locale and performers, the strictly religious plays underwent change and became more secular.

In the thirteenth century with the professional troupes taking over the responsibility of performance, there was remarkable improvement in their art of performance and stage techniques. Latin was later replaced by vernacular French.

In the Mystery plays the seasons of the year, Christmas, Easter, stories from the Bible depicted the subject matter of the play while the stories from the lives of saints were subject of the Miracle plays.

In the fourteenth century the guilds were entrusted to perform the plays in the market place. They carried on their work seriously. Any incompetence or unpunctuality would require them to pay heavy fines. It was customary for each craft to represent a play according to the trade.

The Miracle and Mystery plays developed immensely in the fourteenth century. The Miracle plays were divided into four cycles. Each cycle included the major events of the biblical history from the Fall of Satan to the Day of Judgment.

The next stage in the history of English drama is the Morality plays. The Morality play developed out of Miracle and Mystery plays. These plays were different from the Miracle and Mystery plays. Their subject matter was not stories from the Bible or from the lives of saints but were personified abstractions. The personifications of various abstract qualities like Perseverance, Gluttony, Sloth, Despair, Free Will, the Seven Deadly Sins, Good and Bad Angels were common.

The Morality plays presented the serious side of things. They depicted the strife between good and evil, the continual strife of life. These plays showed that the human being has choice, and the consequences of choosing wrong moral lessons could be more easily understood than they could in normal sermons. Morality plays put special emphasis on plot. The writers of morality plays had more freedom than those of the Miracle and Mystery plays, as the latter were required to follow a particular sequence of events in the bible or popular legend. In some Miracle plays the personified abstractions already existed with the characters of the bible. These abstractions were detached from the religious setting and presented separately in the morality plays. The most amusing characters of the morality plays were Vice and Devil. Vice was depicted donning a grotesque costume and armed with a dagger while Devil was presented with horns, long beard and hairy vest. Vice was mainly employed to thrash Devil.

The well-known Morality plays are *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Everyman*. The Morality plays still flourished till the end of the sixteenth century and continued to be popular in the heyday of Shakespeare's fame.

The 'Interlude' appeared towards the end of the fifteenth century and presented the lighter side of things. It could not displace the morality plays whose popularity

continued till the end of the sixteenth century. In the interludes there was a shift from symbolism to realism. It dispensed with the allegorical figures of the Morality plays and did away with the religious drama. It is purely secular and quite realistic. The most noted creator of interludes John Heywood (1497-1580) was also a court musician and entertainer to Henry VIII. His four P's are the Pardoner, a Palmer, a Pothycary and a Pedlar who have a lying competition in which the biggest is awarded the palm. The Palmer wins the palm by saying that out of half a million women he has met no one seemed to be out of patience.

The 'Interludes' were often acted by household servants. Most of Heywood's Interludes are farcical skits full of wit and humor and a realistic portrayal of men and manners.

6.3 MAJOR DRAMATISTS AND THEIR WORKS

Between 1530 and 1580 drama in England saw a sharp transition. With the dawn of the Renaissance the English dramatists began to get influenced by the Greek and Roman dramatists. They were influenced more by the work of Roman dramatists than by the Greeks. The tragedies of Seneca and the comedies of Plautus and Terence attracted the English dramatists. These tragedies are characterized by excessive bloodshed, long rhetorical speeches and inclusion of the ghost. *Gorboduc*, is the first English drama written by Thomas Sackville (1536-1608) and Thomas Norton (1532-84). Played before Elizabeth at Whitehall in 1562 the play is on the model of Senecan tragedies. It has all the characteristics of Seneca's tragedies. There is excessive bloodshed, long rhetorical speeches, revenge as the leitmotif and the chorus between the acts. *Gorboduc* is the first English play to use blank verse. Following the Roman model, the play is divided into five acts which later became a universal feature for a tragedy.

Another important development of this period is the growth of the comedy. English Comedy was chiefly influenced by Plautus and Terence. The first English comedy was *Ralph Roster Doister* written by Nicolas Udall followed by *Grammer Gurton's Needle* written in 1553 by John Still. Both the plays are rich in humour. *Ralph Roister Doister* is divided into five acts in the Latin style and is written in rhyming couplets. The plot is laid in London and the characters and humorous dialogues represent the manners and ideas of the contemporary middle classes.

Grammer Gurton's Needle is inferior to *Ralph Roster Doister*. It has a loose plot which is based on a single incident. The play is crude, presenting the low country life.

Drama thus grew and developed from liturgical plays to comedy portraying the realities of life. The quarter century after the production of the play *Gorboduc* was a period of experimentation in English drama. This was a conflict between those who insisted on the classical tradition and those who wanted the strong national taste of the English public. In the end the conflict ended with more people opting for the national taste. The credit for the establishment of this romantic drama goes to John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nash writing in the closing years of the sixteenth century. The plays written by them mark a pronounced stage of development in the existing drama. Their works paved the way for Shakespeare who is indebted to them for bringing in and evolving Romantic drama. This group of scholars were commonly known as the 'University Wits' because they were all educated at either Oxford or Cambridge Universities. They were also members of learned societies and had liberal views about God and morality. Of these John Lyly and Christopher Marlowe directly influenced Shakespeare.

John Lyly (1554-1606) wrote plays which were very popular with the Queen and the court. His plays were not written according to the taste of the masses. John Lyly wrote eight comedies of which *Endymion* is the best. In his plays he puts more emphasis on language, wit, ingenuity and the grace of the dialogue. Plot and characterization do not hold much interest. Lyly gave a sense of sophistication and intellectual touch to comedy. His skill in puns, conceits and language was used by Shakespeare in his early comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. John Lyly amalgamates humour and romantic imagination in his plays which was followed by Shakespeare in many of his comedies.

Christopher Marlowe's (1564-93) contribution to English tragedy is vital and manifold. His plays *Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II* became models of tragedy and chronicle play for his immediate successors. Marlowe's plays were different from the conventional plays. His tragedy was different from Senecan tragedy which had revenge as the motive. Marlowe's tragedies had ambition as the theme. For example in *Tamburlaine* the theme is ambition for power. In his play *Dr. Faustus*, he brings in ambition for infinite knowledge as the theme. In *The Jew of Malta* ambition for gold is taken as the central issue. His concept of tragedy varied from the medieval concept of tragedy. In the medieval plays tragedy was depicted as the fall of a great man, while Marlowe revived the Aristotelian concept of the tragic hero. He portrayed flaws in the character of the tragic hero who is a superman and is over-ambitious. The heroes want to reach their ambitious destinations but perish because of the dramatic conflict between their ambition and the antagonistic forces of life. We find greater unity in his plays with greater technical and constructive skill as he matured. His use of blank verse in these plays is a great achievement.

Marlowe's use of blank verse was effective and a great dramatic medium essential in all tragedies that were put into use by his successors including Shakespeare for serious drama. His blank verse brought life and throbbing energy into the plays that were otherwise mechanical and lifeless. Shakespeare's narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* is inspired to some extent by Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. Marlowe's *Edward II* set an example for Shakespeare's plays *Richard III* and *Richard II*. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* is also inspired by Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

It was during the reign of Elizabeth I in the late 16th and early 17th century that Shakespeare wrote plays, acted and was involved in running of the theatre company that performed his plays. Other important playwrights of the period were Ben Jonson and John Webster.

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) was a dramatist, poet and actor. All his writings were deeply moralistic and yet remarkably innovative. He is best known for his plays *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. Produced in 1606 *Volpone* is a dark comedy a sub-genre of comedy and satire where serious topics and events like death, mass murder, sickness, madness, terror etc. are treated in a humorous or satirical manner. A merciless satire of greed and lust, *Volpone* is among the finest Jacobean comedies.

The Alchemist is a comedy first performed in 1610 by the King's men (William Shakespeare's playing company, led by Richard Burbage). The locale of the play is Ben Jonson's contemporary London. The play *The Alchemist* is a powerful play and has a comical satire on greed and works through the exposure of that gullibility that is engendered by greed. The story of the play *The Alchemist* is built around the nefarious activities of three swindlers, Subtle, Face and the courtesan Dol Common.

The three types of plays that are studied today are histories, comedies and tragedies. Most playwrights specialized in one of these. Shakespeare was remarkable in that he excelled in all of these three types of plays. He had written tragedies such as *Hamlet* (1603), *Othello* (1604) and *King Lear* (1605); his comedies include *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* (1594-96) and *Twelfth Night* (1602) whereas history plays are *Henry IV* (Part I and II), *Henry VI*, *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*.

During the years 1649 to 1660, the period of interregnum, English theaters were closed by the Puritans for religious and ideological reasons. With the Restoration of Monarchy in 1660, they flourished under the support of Charles II. The introduction of the first professional actresses and topical writing in this period attracted a large audience from among the rich and the poor. The new genres of the Restoration include heroic drama, pathos-oriented drama and Restoration Comedy. Some well known tragedies of pathos of this period were John Dryden's *All for Love* (1677) and *Aurengzeb* (1675) and Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682).

John Dryden (1631-1700) was a well-acclaimed English poet, literary critic, translator and playwright. He dominated the literary life of Restoration England to such an extent that the period was also known as the Age of Dryden.

Dryden's play *All for love*, a heroic drama, was written in 1673. It is a tragedy written in blank verse which is an imitation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and focuses on the last hours of the hero and the heroine. Thomas Otway (1652-1685) was an English dramatist of the Restoration period. Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved*, an English Restoration play is the most significant tragedy of the English stage of 1680s.

Among the Restoration plays there are some comedies that are popular even today such as George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1676) John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). Aphra Behn, the first woman playwright belonging to the period, wrote a number of comedies including *The Rover* (1677).

Sir George Etherege (1635-1692) was an English dramatist and his play *The Man of Mode* was considered the best comedy of manners written in England before the days of Congreve and published in 1676. William Wycherley (1640-1716) an English dramatist of the Restoration period, wrote *The Country Wife*, a Restoration Comedy. Printed in 1676, it reflects an aristocratic and anti-Puritan ideology and was controversial for its sexual explicitness.

Sir John Vanbrugh, another English dramatist, wrote *The Relapse*, an argumentative and outspoken comedy. William Congreve (1670-1729) wrote some of the most popular English plays of the Restoration period. *The Way of the World* (1700) is his best known work.

In the 18th century the Restoration Comedy lost its popularity, to be taken over by sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy (such as George Lillo's *The London Merchant*, 1731) and also an interest in Italian opera. Towards the end of the 18th century drama went through a period of decline and in the early 19th century, drama was no longer represented by stage play but by closet drama, a play written to be privately read in a 'closet'.

The Restoration period was followed by the writing of successful plays by Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*) and Sheridan who wrote *School for Scandal* and *The Rivals*.

6.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the growth and development of English Drama during the time of Shakespeare. This unit has also discussed the major dramatists of this period who influenced the growth and development of English Drama. The work of some later dramatists has also been given a quick glance.

6.5 EXERCISE

1. Discuss Mystery and Miracle plays.
2. Explain Morality plays.
3. Write a note on Christopher Marlowe's contribution to English drama.

6.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Beadle, Richard. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Cambridge University Press, U.K. 1994.
2. Arthur, Crompton, and Rickett. *A History of the English Literature*. UBS. Publishers Distribution Ltd. New Delhi. 1998.

UNIT 7 SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE AND WORKS

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Shakespeare's Life and Works
- 7.3 Shakespeare The Playwright
- 7.4 Shakespeare's Major Plays
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Exercise
- 7.7 Suggested Readings

7.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will give you an account of Shakespeare's life and works. It introduces you to Shakespeare's achievement as a writer and gives you a glimpse of his major plays.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will briefly introduce you to William Shakespeare as a man and a playwright. Regarded as one of the greatest dramatists of the world, none of his contemporaries could equal him in the universality of his appeal. *Julius Caesar* is one of his major plays, a political tragedy. It depicts the conflict between monarchists and Republicans. The play *Julius Caesar* is among the greatest in English language and in Western Literature. His plays are divided into three genres of tragedy, history and comedy. Among his most famous and critically acclaimed plays are *King Lear*, *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV (Part I)*, *Henry IV (Part II)*, *Richard III* and *Macbeth*.

7.2 SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE AND WORKS

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was also known as the 'Bard of Avon'. He wrote the famous 154 sonnets and numerous highly successful dramatic works. Shakespeare earned praise in the areas of literature, art and theatre. Over the centuries there has been much speculation about the various aspects of Shakespeare's life, authorship and the chronology of his plays and sonnets.

26th April 1564 is claimed to be the date of birth of Shakespeare as births and deaths were not properly recorded in Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare was born in Stratford -On -Avon and baptized in his parish church Holy Trinity. He was the first of the four sons of John Shakespeare (1530-1601) and Mary Arden (1540-1608) who also had four daughters. John Shakespeare was a businessman at Stratford and was also involved in municipal affairs until late 1570s when there was decline in his fortune and he fell into debt. His mother was the daughter of a prosperous farmer. Both his parents were illiterate.

There are no records of Shakespeare's education. He probably began his education at the age of six at the Stratford Grammar school where he learnt what Ben Jonson calls, "Small Latin and Less Greek." Scholars believe that Shakespeare was

removed from school around the age of thirteen because of his father's financial and social difficulties and continued his studies in spite of his removal from Stratford Grammar school.

Shakespeare perhaps worked as an apprentice with his father, but there is speculation also of his being a school teacher or lawyer. This period between 1577 and 1585 known as the lost years also gives us vital information about his marriage. In 1582 at the age of eighteen he married Anne Hathaway (1556-1623) the daughter of a peasant family in the village of Temple Grafton. Anne was eight years older than Shakespeare. In 1583 their first daughter Susanna was born who later married noted physician John Hall.

It is probable that sometime between 1585 and 1592 Shakespeare could have been recruited by Leicester or Queen's men. He became an established actor in London by the end of 1592. He wrote poems and plays and was involved with theatre troupes and acting. Records say that several of his plays were popular by this time including *Henry VI*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Titus Andronicus*. The popular company Pembroke's Men that performed regularly at the court of Queen Elizabeth staged most of his early plays, sponsored by the Earl of Pembroke, Henry Herbert. Before 1592 Shakespeare spent his time both as a writer and actor for Pembroke's Men.

In 1593 'the Plague' broke out in London and forced people to flee the city. Shakespeare probably spent these days travelling between London, Stratford and the provinces, which gave him time to write many more plays and sonnets. By the end of 1593 Shakespeare's hard work got noticed by the Earl of Southampton. Southampton became Shakespeare's patron and his Ovidian narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* was published in April 18, 1593. Among the first of his known published works was the Ovidian narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. This was followed by the *Rape of Lucrece* also dedicated to Southampton in 1594, *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599 and *The Phoenix and the Turtle* in 1601.

At the time when he became a prolific writer he also began his association with the Lord Chamberlain's men. These men became the king's men with the accession of James I who bought and performed most of Shakespeare's plays. His friend and actor was also in the troupe. They performed frequently at court and in the theatres that were co-owned by Shakespeare including Blackfriars, The Theatre and The Globe in London till it burnt down during a performance of King Henry VIII.

Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic career developed with the growth and experience of his life and mind. Shakespeare's early plays appeared around 1590-1594 while he was still learning his craft.

The plays from this period are:

Titus Andronicus

Henry VI (three parts)

Love's Labour's Lost

Comedy of Errors

Two Gentlemen of Verona

Richard III

Richard II

Romeo and Juliet

Other works belonging to this period are

Venus and Adonis

The Rape of Lucrece.

In the next five years from 1595-1601 his plays show a rapid growth of his poetic genius. There is a change in style with further increase in maturity.

The works of this period include

King John

The Merchant of Venice

Henry IV (Part I and Part II)

Henry V

The Taming of the Shrew

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Much Ado About Nothing

As you Like It

Twelfth Night

Shakespeare's great tragedies appeared from 1600 to 1608. These plays portray the darker side of human life and experience with a tone of evil and the themes are based on the sins and weaknesses of human beings. The plays had over-whelming passion and great maturity. These works include:

Julius Caesar

Hamlet

All's Well that Ends Well

Measure for Measure

Troilus and Cressida

Othello

King Lear

Macbeth

Antony and Cleopatra

Coriolanus

Timon of Athens

The plays in the last period from 1608 to 1616 are known as 'Last plays' or 'Dramatic Romances'. They are completely different from his earlier plays and reflect a peaceful mind.

The plays of this period include:

Percles

Cymbeline

Winter's Tale

The Tempest

7.3 SHAKESPEARE THE PLAYWRIGHT

Shakespeare's plays are distinguished by immense variety and he is counted among the very few dramatists to have excelled in both tragedy and comedy. He uses different patterns in his tragedies *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* with each having a unique dramatic movement.

Shakespeare's earlier plays had characters that were natural and spontaneous and were effortlessly formed. His later plays had characters that were bold and complex. His characters Rosalind, Portia, Juliet, Cleopatra, Caesar, Brutus, Orlando, Shylock, Falstaff, Touchstone, etc. are strikingly realistic and have unfailing humanity.

Shakespeare was a genius in the use of words and powers of expression. The aptness of words and phrases, the striking similes and metaphors, richness of verse brought astonishing difference to the beauty of his plays. The easy flow of words and the variety of images is visible in his plays. Another achievement of Shakespeare was successful blending of words, metaphors and lyrical passion in his blank verse.

7.4 SHAKESPEARE'S MAJOR PLAYS

Let us look at some of Shakespeare's major plays in detail:

Henry IV (Part I) features Sir John Falstaff, an opportunist. The play is a continuation of the story of Bolingbrook family and Plentagenet monarchy that begins with Henry IV seizing power in the play Richard II. The plot shifts back and forth between the chaotic and disturbed Kingdom of Henry IV and the tavern where Sir John Falstaff is joined by Prince Henry or Hal who is as much fun-loving as himself. Falstaff is also accompanied by his group of rascals. The plot includes rebellion and struggle for power. Prince Hal and Falstaff fight against the rebel Hotspur where Hotspur is killed. The play ends with King Henry and Hal departing for Wales to fight the rebels while Prince John of Lancaster, Hal's younger brother leaves for York to fight with the rebel led by the Earl of Northumberland, Hotspur's father.

Henry IV (Part II) picks up where the earlier play Henry IV ends. The fighting gets over with a lot of confusion but the rebels are defeated and peace is restored. Hal becomes King Henry V. Hal realizes that he must change his boisterous behaviour and become a sober person. Falstaff is banished from Hal's court and lectured to change his rough nature.

Richard II is another history play of Shakespeare in which Richard II is an intelligent but weak king. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster is the King's uncle and father of the king's rival, Henry Bolingbroke. The king takes away the property of John of Gaunt who dies rich. Bolingbroke with the other nobles rebel against the king and force Richard to give up his throne. Henry Bolingbroke crowns himself as Henry IV. A plot is hatched against Bolingbroke by the Duke of Aumerle, the Bishop of Carlisle and the Abbot of Westminster but fails again. The task for the king now is to tackle his enemies and finally consolidate his authority, the country being in a State of disarray.

From history plays we move on to comedies. An important comic play by Shakespeare is *Twelfth Night*. It was first performed on February 2nd 1602.

In this play, Shakespeare skillfully uses the theme of mistaken identity. The play is set in a place called Illyria where Viola arrives after surviving a shipwreck. She loses contact with her twin brother Sebastian who thinks that his sister is no more alive. Dressed as a man Viola under the name of Cesario enters the service of the Duke of Orsino.

Orsino longs for the love of the bereaved Lady Olivia who is in mourning for her brother's death and uses Viola as the intermediary. Olivia is infatuated by Cesario, while Viola falls in love with the Duke Orsino. Meanwhile Sebastian too survives the shipwreck and comes to Illyria. Olivia asks him to marry her. They are then secretly married by a priest. It is only when the twins Sebastian and Viola appear before Olivia and Orsino do they reveal that they are twins and Viola is a lady. Sir Toby Belch is Olivia's uncle staying with her and is a merry character. The play ends with the declaration of marriage between Duke and Viola and Olivia and Sebastian. Such a pattern of events is repeated in other comedies also.

Shakespeare is particularly famous for tragic plays such as *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Let us first consider *King Lear*, a tragedy of great magnitude.

King Lear, an aging monarch takes the decision to abdicate the throne and divide the kingdom amongst his three daughters: Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Goneril and Regan are married and they pretend to love him but are essentially self-seeking. On the other hand, Cordelia loves King Lear unselfishly and is loyal to him. King Lear banishes Cordelia but soon realizes his mistake when he observes that Goneril and Regan betrayed him.

The sub-plot of this play includes the Earl of Gloucester whose two sons Edgar and Edmund are at Loggerheads. Edgar is loyal to him and is his heir while Edmund is Gloucester's evil bastard son. Edmund forces his half-brother into exile by concocting false stories against him leading to his lunacy. Gloucester is blinded.

Edgar disguised as Tom O' Bedlam helps Gloucester out of the storm. Lear appears in Dover talking wildly to mice. Gloucester attempts to throw him from the cliff to be saved by Edgar. Edgar reveals his true identity to his father but Gloucester dies. Later, Cordelia dies and Lear who is a broken man also dies falling upon Cordelia.

Throughout the play we find betrayal, lust for power greed and cruelty. The play ends with death everywhere.

Macbeth is considered one of Shakespeare's most powerful tragedies. The play opens in the middle of a thunderstorm where three witches conclude a meeting deciding to confront the great Scottish General Macbeth on his victorious return from a war between Scotland and Norway.

In the next scene the soldier reports to King Duncan of Scotland that his generals Macbeth and Banquo have defeated the army led by the rebel Macdonwald. The three witches greet Macbeth and Banquo with prophecies as they wander on to the heath. Witches predict that Macbeth will become king one day while Banquo will beget a line of kings. Macbeth begins to harbour ambitions of becoming King and decides to murder Duncan. His wife Lady Macbeth agrees to his plan and hatches a conspiracy to murder him. Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle with his entourage and decides to stay at Macbeth's castle. Macbeth murders Duncan while his wife assists him to smear the blood of Duncan on the daggers of the sleeping guards.

Macbeth remembers the prophecy made by the witches about Banquo. He hires two men to murder Banquo, his sons Donalbain and Fleance. Fleance is the only one who escapes. At the banquet, the ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth making him act and speak strangely. The guests are sent away by his wife.

Disturbed, Macbeth visits the witches again and they tell him to 'beware Macduff' and 'none of woman born shall harm Macbeth' and he will 'never vanquish'd be until great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.'

Macbeth murders everyone in Macduff's castle including Macduff's wife and children while Macduff is in exile. Lady Macbeth is guilty of the crime committed by her husband and herself and imagines her hands to be covered with blood. She commits suicide.

A battle ensues with Macduff, Malcolm and the Englishman Siward invading Dunsinane Castle. While camping in Birnam forest the soldiers cut down three branches to hide their numbers. Macduff kills Macbeth, proving that witches had made a correct prediction. In the end of the play Malcolm takes over as the rightful king of Scotland restoring peace to the kingdom.

Hamlet is arguably the best known tragedy written by Shakespeare.

The play deals with the revenge of Hamlet whose father the King of Denmark suddenly dies while Hamlet is away from Home at Wittenberg University. Before the play opens the King's brother Claudius has been made king. Soon after King's

death, Claudius married Hamlet's mother Gertrude so that his claim to the throne does not fall into controversy.

The play opens on the battlements of Elsinore castle, seat of Danish monarchy. The soldiers camping here are visited by the ghost of King Hamlet. Hamlet's friend Horatio also sees the ghost with them.

Hamlet is present with Horatio on the battlement in the night when the ghost appears again. The ghost of his father reveals to him that he was murdered by poisoning through the ear by Claudius. The ghost asks Hamlet to avenge his death. Hamlet makes Horatio and the soldiers swear an oath not to reveal about the night's event to anyone.

Hamlet is unsure that the ghost is really his father. He therefore wants to test Claudius's conscience by pretending to be insane. Polonius, the king's councilor is convinced of Hamlet's madness and believes it to be the result of the unrequited love for his daughter Ophelia. He suggests arranging a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia while he and Claudius would spy on them. Fearing Hamlet's deceitful ways Claudius also asks Hamlet's school mates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be present. Hamlet suspects his school mate's sudden visit and becomes cautious. Hamlet arranges for a play *The Murder of Gonzago* to be staged by traveling performers. The play is modified by him to re-enact the circumstances of his father's murder. Claudius becomes uneasy when the play begins and rises calling for lights. Horatio notices his strange behaviour while Hamlet is also convinced of his guilt. Claudius hatches a plan to kill Hamlet and deports him to the Danish territories of England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where he would be killed on his arrival

Hamlet discloses to his mother about her husband's murder. Meanwhile Polonius hides behind the tapestry listening to their conversation. Hamlet stabs him as soon as he sees him eavesdropping. Claudius sends Hamlet to England with his school mates ordering Hamlet's death. On the way Hamlet's ship is attacked by pirates who take him as prisoner but return him to Denmark. During Hamlet's absence Ophelia becomes insane disturbed by Hamlet's rejection and her father's death. Meanwhile Laertes hears of her sister's lunacy and his father's death and determines to take revenge.

Claudius fixes a fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet where Laertes will be using a poisoned foil and Hamlet will also be served poisoned wine as toast. The contest begins and Hamlet wins the first two rounds. Gertrude drinks some wine to toast unaware that it is poisoned. In the third round Hamlet is hit with the sword and fatally poisoned. While the fight continues Hamlet swaps blades with Laertes and hits him with the poisoned sword. Gertrude dies after drinking the poisoned wine. Before dying she warns Hamlet that the wine is poisoned. While Laertes is dying he confesses the whole plot to Hamlet. Enraged Hamlet kills Claudius with the poisoned sword and also forces him to drink the poisoned wine. Horatio seizes the poisoned wine to drink it to join his friend in death but Hamlet snatches the cup from him. He orders Horatio to tell his story to the world in order to restore his good name. Hamlet recommends to Norwegian prince Fortinbras to be the successor to the Danish throne.

We see that Shakespeare wrote these plays to share with the audience the deep sense of crisis he witnesses in post-Elizabethan an England. Uncertainty and moral laxity being the order of the day, it was only appropriate that the bard of Stratford-Upon Avon would construct tales of death and destruction.

7.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at Shakespeare's life, career and discussed his major works paying special attention to his outstanding comedies, tragedies and history-plays.

7.6 EXERCISE

1. Name the tragedies of Shakespeare.
2. Name the comedies of Shakespeare.
3. Where was Shakespeare born?

7.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. MacCallum, Mungo William Sir, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Background*. Russell and Russell, New York. 1967.
2. Charlton, H.B. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge University Press, England. 1949.

UNIT 8 STRUCTURE AND STYLE OF THE PLAY *JULIUS CAESAR*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Structure of *Julius Caesar*
 - 8.2.1 Conspiracy against Caesar
 - 8.2.2 Shaping of Conspiracy and its Effect
 - 8.2.3 Caesar's Murder
 - 8.2.4 Defeat of the Conspirators
- 8.3 Style
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Further Reading
- 8.6 Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit an attempt will be made to give you an idea of the structure of the play. After studying the unit with attention you should be able to:

- assess the importance of the structure of the play;
- outline the different stages of the play;
- identify the important events in the play; and
- understand the style used in the play.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The story of the play *Julius Caesar* is derived from Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, published in Sir Thomas North's Translation in 1579. According to Janette Dillon in her article 'Julius Caesar' in her book *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies* 'Plutarch, a great writer of the first century A. D., was sympathetic to republicanism, a political position inherently challenging the absolute monarchy of the Elizabethan state'. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was first published in the First Folio of 1623. It was probably first staged a quarter of a century earlier in 1599. It was in this year that Thomas Plate, a Swiss visitor to London, saw the play in The Swan Theatre.

8.2 STRUCTURE OF *JULIUS CAESAR*

Julius Caesar has characteristics of both a history play and a tragedy. It follows the pattern that exists in Shakespearean History plays where social order in a society collapses giving rise to chaos. In history plays things begin to go wrong because people are either weak, ambitious, fallible or dislike authority. *Julius Caesar* is a historical play too as it deals with certain events which took place in ancient Rome in the years 45 B.C to 42 B.C. Most of the characters in the play are also historical. In this play Shakespeare has used his imagination and modified some historical events to meet his own dramatic purposes.

As a tragic play *Julius Caesar* follows the concept of tragedy that is largely Aristotelian. The play has feelings of pity and fear which according to Aristotle is one of the dominant features of a tragedy. *Julius Caesar* also arouses in the spectator feelings like hope, admiration, awe and wonder.

The plot of *Julius Caesar* begins with conspiracy against Caesar, followed by development of conspiracy. These are followed by Caesar's murder and the defeat of the conspirators. It informs us of the popular enthusiasm for Caesar as well as the hostile elements against him.

The play begins with Caesar returning to Rome where some of the people are jealous of his achievements because of which they turn against him. This ends in Caesar's murder, for which Brutus too, is responsible. Mark Antony, swears to revenge Caesar's death. He astutely guides the course of events and is later successful in his mission.

8.2.1 Conspiracy against Caesar

The plot of *Julius Caesar* begins with Caesar's triumphant entry into the city after defeating Pompey's sons. The common people of Rome celebrate Caesar's return to Rome. The two tribunes Flavius and Marullus who are people's representative in the senate, rebuke the citizens for their celebration of Caesar's recent victory. They criticize them, urging them to return to their work. They reproach the people for forgetting so soon their love for Pompey. At one time Pompey was regarded as a great statesman and a warrior in Rome but he had been defeated in a battle by Julius Caesar. The two tribunes send the humble artisans home whose only offence is that they have taken a holiday from their work so that they could witness Caesar's triumphant entry into the city of Rome. These tribunes are supposed to be protectors of the rights of the common people but actually prevent the populace from welcoming their popular hero. In the minds of the two tribunes, there is a strong feeling against Julius Caesar even though the common people are his great supporters.

The two tribunes are sympathetic towards the republicans who are criticizing Caesar and are also plotting his murder. The first seed of the subsequent tension has already been sown. They angrily ask the crowd:

*O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney tops,
You infants in your arms, and there have sat
The livelong day, with patient expectation,
To greet Pompey pass the streets of Rome;*

(Act I sc i. 36-42)

They rebuke the citizens for being ungrateful and fickle - minded. In the past they had idolized Pompey and now they are acclaiming Julius Caesar's triumph and have declared the day to be a holiday. They further ask the mob:

*And do you now put on your best attire?
And do you now call it a holiday?
And do you now strew flowers in his way
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?*

(Act I sc i. 47-51)

The final speech of Flavius in this scene indicates the widespread feeling that the people have forgotten about Julius Caesar's growing ambitions and that his wings need to be clipped:

*These growing feathers pluck'd from Caesar's wing,
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
Who else would soar above the view of men
And keep us all in servile fearfulness.*

(Act I sc ii 72-75)

We can see in this Act that there is a conflict between the Tribunes, the supporters of Pompey and the artisans who have taken Caesar's victory against Pompey's sons as an excuse for a holiday. There is dualism in the first scene where we see that on the one hand Caesar is a popular man among the common people while on the other hand he has also roused jealousy among the tribunes. In the opening scene we see that the various people in Rome are beginning to turn against Caesar and conspire against him which develops further as the play moves on. This conspiracy leads to the subsequent war of Philippi between Caesar's enemies and his supporters.

The opening scene is significant in many ways. In this scene we come across certain people in Rome who are hostile to Caesar. We also note that Caesar is a popular man so far as the common people are concerned. In addition, this scene reveals the fickle-mindedness of the populace. First, they display a lot of enthusiasm over Caesar's victory and his triumphant return to Rome and then, after being rebuked by the tribunes, they disperse and quietly go home.

This scene suggests that the hostility represented by the two tribunes will soon develop into a strong antagonism against Caesar, with Casius as the chief instigator against him. The result of this can be a civil war between Caesar's enemies and his supporters. The opening scene of the play is dramatically very important in acquainting us with the circumstances relating to the political situation in Rome.

Although Caesar does not make a personal appearance in this scene, yet his greatness as a ruler and conqueror is clearly indicated. The scene is also important in revealing to us the character of the populace who cannot think for themselves and have no judgment of their own. Critic Dieter Mehl in his book *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction* says:

The first scene, contrasting the relaxed holiday mood of the opportunist plebeians with republican zeal and indignation of the Tribunes of the people, presents the demonstrative personality cult of Caesar side by side with the political fears and apprehensions it arouses, thus introducing the crucial phenomenon that Caesar's impact, throughout the play, is more powerful indeed more real, than his physical presence.

Caesar, his wife Calpurnia and Mark Antony make their first appearance in Act I sc ii.

The second scene of the first act indicates the opening of the movement of the action of the play where the sooth-sayer gives his prophecy. The festival of Lupercalia is held in honour of the legendary she-wolf who suckled Rome's founders when they were children. Two noblemen run a race through the city during the feast and they touch the woman they come across with a thong. It is believed that those barren women who are touched by the thong become fertile.

As the procession passes a soothsayer calls to Caesar to beware the Ides of March (15th March) He warns Caesar to take necessary measures for his life's safety on the 15th of March because there is danger to his life on that day. Caesar ignores him calling him a dreamer.

The procession passes on, but Brutus and Cassius step aside and admit to each other that they are not willing to be present if a crown is offered to Caesar. Cassius is jealous of Caesar and also worried about the power Caesar is assuming for himself. He attempts to persuade Brutus to join him in the conspiracy against him. He invents many stories to prove Caesar's shortcomings. After learning about Brutus's attitude towards Caesar, Cassius reveals to him his own resentment at Caesar's growing appeal. He tactfully poisons the mind of the noble Brutus about the importance Caesar is assuming for himself. He compares Caesar with himself and Brutus and states that Caesar is no more extraordinary than themselves. Before Brutus leaves Cassius persuades him to join in the killing of Caesar. Brutus does not directly agree to participate in Cassius's plans but says that he would think over and give the matter a serious consideration.

When the festival of Lupercalia is over and the procession returns they detain Casca who reports to them that Antony had offered the crown to Caesar thrice and how Caesar had refused it. Later he forges letters and orders Cinna to throw them into the house of Brutus urging him to free Rome from Caesar's tyranny. At the end of the scene Cassius expresses in a soliloquy his satisfaction at the result achieved:

I will do so: till then, think of the world.
Well Brutus thou art noble; yet I see
Thy honourable mettle may wrought
From that it is dispos'd: therefore 'tis meet
That noble minds keep even with their likes;
for who so firm that cannot be seduc'd?
Caesar doth bear me hard; but he loves Brutus.
If I were Brutus now, and he were Cassius,
He should not humour me.

(Act I sc. iii, 304-312)

This is the first soliloquy of the play. The soliloquy was one of the dramatic devices of the Elizabethan theatre, in which the actor speaks his thoughts aloud, directly to the audience, alone on the stage, which the other characters are supposed to hear. A soliloquy would convey information about a character's motives and state of mind or provide a general comment on the progress of the action of the play. Cassius's soliloquy reveals him as a schemer and also initiates a dramatic movement in the play.

This section introduces us to most of the characters of the play. It reveals the characters of Caesar, Brutus, Antony, Cassius, Calpurnia, Portia, Cicero and Casca.

Particularly, Casca gives an account of the dreadful sights he has seen on the stormy night. This scene continues with great dramatic skill and portrays both the conspirators and the victim skilfully. The manner in which Cassius manipulates Brutus into a conspiracy shows Cassius' skill as schemer. Here, we also come across a supernatural incident as the soothsayer warns Caesar to beware of the Ides of March. It arouses our curiosity and makes us wonder about the warning.

8.2.2 Shaping of the Conspiracy and its Effect

I talked about a conspiracy in the preceding discussion. It takes place between Act I scene iii and the end of the Act II. The scene opens with the raging of a fearful storm. Casca the terror-struck senator meets Cicero and acquaints him of the supernatural phenomena that has occurred. The earth seemed to shake with fear as if it had become unfirm. It seemed as if there were 'civil strife in heaven' and

fire seemed to drop from the skies, as if gods were expressing their anger by causing death and destruction all around:

A common slave, you know him well by sight,
Like twenty torches join'd, and yet his hand,
Not sensible of fire remain'd unscorch'd
Besides (I ha' not since put up a sword)
Against the capitol. I met a lion
Who glar'd upon me, and went surely by.
Without annoying me and there were drawn
Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women,
Transformed with their fear who swore they saw
Men, all in fire, walk up and down the streets.

(Act I sc iii 15-25)

The supernatural occurrences witnessed by Casca also produce an atmosphere of horror in the play. In Shakespeare's plays storms have far reaching symbolic significance. These storms are brought into closest relation with character and action. The term used is pathetic fallacy which means the poetic belief that nature shows sympathy with humans by reflecting human passions. The use of pathetic fallacy tends to produce in us a sense of the supernatural. We are made to feel that there is some kind of force outside human affairs which anticipates and acts as a warning to the great disturbances in the lives of humans.

The Elizabethans thought of individual man, his society or 'the state' and of the natural world as intimately and indivisibly connected. It was also believed that disorder and violence in the world of nature predicts disorder in the society and individual. For the Elizabethans the king symbolized the state and therefore when the king was murdered the social order was violently disrupted. In Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* we have a similar storm. In this scene the conspiracy against Caesar makes further progress and the unnatural events in nature are a premonition of the unnatural events about to take place.

In the first act of the play, Casca meets Cassius who convinces him that the supernatural events are an indication of some great catastrophe which is about to overtake the people of Rome. Cassius calls the storm an expression of God's wrath over the state of affairs in Rome brought by the tyranny of Caesar. Cassius thus succeeds to enlist Casca into his conspiracy. Another conspirator Cinna, is sent by him to distribute forged letters in Brutus' house so that Brutus would think that the people of Rome want him to take action. Cassius knows that the best way to manipulate Brutus is to make him believe that he is acting in the interest of Rome. Cassius feels that including Brutus in their conspiracy would make it appear much more patriotic and noble. Cassius' act shows his ruthlessness; he is willing to deceive his close friend for his self-interest. Cassius is able to draw a few other members of the Senate —Metellus Cimber, Decius Brutus and Trebonius into the conspiracy.

In Act II Scene i we see the mental conflict in Brutus. Brutus is walking in the garden disturbed, reviewing his reasons for joining this conspiracy to murder Caesar. Brutus' secret thoughts are revealed in his soliloquy. According to Dieter Mehl in his book *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction*, 'The first part of the impressive scene (Act II scene i) can be seen as one long soliloquy, interrupted three times by Lucius' brief appearances. It is through this monologue that Brutus' central position as the real, tragic protagonist of the play is established.' In his soliloquy he says that he has no personal enmity against Caesar; instead, Caesar loves him and has great confidence in him. But the interest of the common people demands that

he should prevent Caesar from becoming all-powerful. He comes to the decision that Caesar should be assassinated so that the country is saved from tyranny. Commenting on the soliloquy Diuter Mehl has remarked that the soliloquy here is not used 'as a kind of solo performance of aria, a recital of emotions or an unfolding of intentions for the benefit of the audience, but tries to render a continuous process of reflection, uncontrolled associations and worrying uncertainty.'

As Brutus is visited by Cassius and his conspirators and together they come to a resolution to murder Caesar, Cassius' proposal of killing Antony along with Caesar is turned down by him (Brutus). This decision of Brutus will have far-reaching consequences afterwards. Not being sure if Caesar will come to the capitol where he is to be murdered, Cassius decides that they will all meet at Caesar's place. The scene enlightens us about the natures of Brutus and Cassius. Brutus is portrayed as a noble man and idealist, unfit for practical politics and intrigues, whereas Cassius is a shrewd and practical man of the world.

The domestic scene between Portia and Brutus shows their deep attachment to each other. Portia is worried at his recent behaviour. She makes a gash on her thigh to prove that she can bear the pain of knowing his secret and the cause of his worry. Brutus is deeply touched and promises to reveal all his secrets to her. Portia here reminds us that her troubled husband has been happy and contented until recently. This gives added pathos to the destructive course he seems to be taking. When the death of Portia takes place later in the play we realize the gravity of the destruction he is heading for. Portia proves to be Cato's daughter - Cato the elder had always been a symbol of Roman strength and courage.

In Act II scene ii we come across another domestic scene between Caesar and his wife Calpurnia.

Calpurnia prevents him from moving out of doors because of some dreadful sights of evil witnessed in a dream.

A lioness hath whelped in the streets,
and groves have yawn'd and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds
In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
Which drizzled blood upon the capitol;
The noise of battle hurtled in the air,
Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.
O Caesar, these things are beyond all use,
And I do fear them.

(Act II sc. ii. 17-26)

These signs of ill omen again add to the horror in the play. The symbolic association of the storm with violence in the world of men is again presented here. The storm in Act I Scene iii and the storm which Calpurnia described in Act II scene ii are linked with each other. The storm scene deals with the supernatural. Both have a deep dramatic significance. Both are a prelude to the murder of Caesar and reflects some evil omen for Caesar and the people of Rome. It also signifies political unrest in Rome.

The storm in Act I scene iii highlights the psychological unrest in the hearts of the conspirators while the storm in act II scene ii depicts the death of Caesar and the resultant upheaval in Rome. In both the scenes Shakespeare makes strong and mysterious events happen keeping in mind the taste of the Elizabethan audience.

In her dream the senators stabbed Caesar three times and his statue was pouring out blood in which Romans bathed their hands. The priests also declare that the omens are unfavorable for Caesar. Caesar dismisses the omens but has to yield to his wife's request and sends word to the senate that he will not be present that day. Caesar is then artfully flattered by Decius who interprets Calpurnia's dream as a good sign for Caesar and not as a warning of calamity. He gives the news that the senate will confer on him the crown of Rome that day. Brutus and the other conspirators also come to escort him to the capitol and Caesar agrees to attend the meeting of the Senate.

This scene shows Caesar as an inconsistent and fickle -minded person. He is superstitious, ambitious, loves being flattered and is befooled easily. These negative qualities in him cost him his life. The last two scenes of act II form a kind of bridge between Caesar leaving his house and his arrival at the capitol. The characters that appear in these scenes - Artemidorus, Portia and soothsayer - are suspicious of the approaching crisis. Artemidorus, a teacher of the rhetoric is aware of the conspiracy against Caesar. He writes a note to warn Caesar that his life is in danger and intends to hand it over to Caesar. Artemidorus has a special function as spokesman of Caesar's supporters and their point of view. This scene creates a feeling of suspense and arouses our curiosity.

In the last scene of Act II Portia is depicted in an ironic contrast to her proven ability in act II scene i. She fails to show strength and courage any more as she has done when she had seen Brutus in distress in act II scene i. In act II scene iv she is agitated and full of anxiety on account of her husband. Thus, despite being Cato's daughter, a symbol of dignity and courage, she becomes frail and weak.

8.2.3 Caesar's Murder

The third part of the action brings us to the climax of the play in Act III scene ii. This is an important scene in the play as Caesar's murder is shown here. While Caesar proceeds to the capitol with his followers he notices the soothsayer and remembers his warning. As soon as the procession enters the capitol building, the conspirators start acting according to the plan. Caesar is asked to withdraw the order of banishment against Publius Cimber. Caesar tells Metellus Cimber that the banishment of Publius cannot be repealed. Brutus comes forward and requests Caesar to free Publius from the punishment but Caesar again rejects his request. Caesar compares himself to the pole-star which remains fixed at one place and does not change positions like the other stars.

Caesar is haughty in his reply to the conspirators and speaks in an insulting manner. Casca then stabs Caesar followed by the other conspirators. The dying Caesar sees Brutus attack him and is overwhelmed with grief and disappointment saying: 'Et tu Brute? Then fall Caesar!' With the assassination of Caesar the soothsayer's prophecy proves to be true.

Chaos follows Caesar's assassination with people running in panic. Screams and noise fills the air. Brutus tries to calm down the crowd, comforting the elderly and the frightened senators. Antony reacts to the murder of Caesar in the following manner:

O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?
Are all the conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.
I know not, gentlemen, what you intend
I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,
Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,

Fulfil your pleasure. Live a thousand years,
I shall not find myself so apt to die;
No place will please me so, no mean of death.
As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,
The choice and master spirits of this age.

(Act III sc i. 147-163)

Antony's request of being allowed to speak at Caesar's funeral is also granted provided he tells the people that he speaks with the permission of the conspirators and that he would not say anything against them. Antony also agrees to allow Brutus to address the crowd before he does.

At the funeral of Caesar, Brutus makes a speech which mainly justifies the murder of Caesar. He explains to them that his love for Caesar was not less than any of the other friends of Caesar. But his love for Rome is greater than his love for Caesar.

Brutus's speech to the crowd is logical, calm and factual, but the crowd is not intelligent enough to understand his argument. The crowd cheers and supports him and the other conspirators not because they have understood what he has said but because Brutus for them is an honourable man

The crowd was making a loud noise and praising Brutus as he was leaving the platform for Antony to give his speech. The people of Rome appeal to each other to be silent and listen to Antony who says the following:

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious.
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest,
(For Brutus is an honourable man,
So are they all, all honourable men)
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
But Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept;
Ambition should be made to sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.
Your all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And sure he is an honourable man.
I speak not to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause;
What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?
O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me.
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

(Act III sc. ii. 75-109)

Antony does not make an argumentative speech; his is an appeal to the mob's emotions. He is aware that the Roman crowd is illiterate and has no thinking of its own; they cannot be moved by reason but by reference to emotions and passions. First he praises his conspirators calling them 'honorable men' repeatedly to create dramatic irony. He disproves the charge that Caesar was ambitious and that he refused the crown thrice at the festival of Lupercalia. He gains the sympathy of the crowd by showing the wounded body of Caesar and connecting the wounds with each conspirator. Antony's speech makes use of rhetorical and poetic devices. He speaks in verse and makes use of irony, flattery, sarcasm and pathos in his speech. His clear understanding of human-nature makes him successful in instigating the Roman crowd against the conspirators. It is actually Caesar's spirit asserting itself through Antony's speech that worked wonders. The action captured in this scene marks the beginning of the sliding down in the play. The critic David Daiches comments in his essay "Guilt and Innocence in Julius Caesar" on Antony's speech in *Shakespeare's Tragedies An Anthology of modern Criticism* edited by Laurence Lerner (see Further Reading)

Wherein lies Antony's success? Is it not in his ability to manipulate people, to act the puppeteer and utilize the worthy emotions of innocent people for his own purposes? Cassius does this in a very mild way with Brutus, but Antony is the great puppeteer of the play, and his famous ovation is the work of a supreme puppet master. He manipulates other people's innocence.

Granville Barker comments on Antony's funeral speech in *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (1947)(see Further Reading):

One may so analyze the speech throughout and find it a triumph of effective cleverness. The cheapening of the truth, the appeals to passion, the perfect carillon of flattery, cajolery, mockery, and pathos, swinging to a magnificent tune, all serve to make it a model of what popular oratory should be.

The success of Antony's speech arouses the crowd's passion and they go about the city burning and destroying whatever they can lay their hand upon. The mob is infuriated and show irrational behaviour. They kill Cinna the poet spite of his explanation that he is not Cinna the conspirator. The crowd is in such a state of anger that it loses all sense of distinguishing between right and wrong. Commenting on the scene Critic Deiter Mehl says:

The scene where the utterly harmless and innocent poet Cinna is butchered in the street by excited and totally irrational plebeians only because he happens to have the same name as one of the conspirators. Nothing illustrates better the threat of political chaos than his desperate and unsuccessful attempt to save his skin by explaining the mistake.

This scene provides shock as well as brings comic relief to the tragic incident.

8.2.4 Defeat of the Conspirators

Act IV scene i throws light on Antony's shrewdness who decides with other members of the triumvirate consisting of Octavius and Lepidus, to execute along with a large number of citizens, Lepidus' own brother and Antony's own nephew. In Antony's opinion Lepidus is a worthless fellow even as he carried out certain tasks for them. This reveals Antony to be an unprincipled person. In *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction*, Dieter Mehl comments on this scene saying 'On the enemy's side, the bartering about human lives and the open contempt of the triumvir Lepidus shown by his partners are a demonstration of a cynical attitude towards humane values that greatly diminishes our sympathy for the avengers.'

Act IV scene iii takes place during the civil war being fought between anti-Caesar and pro-Caesar forces. Antony, Octavius and Lepidus are the leaders of the imperialist cause while Brutus and Cassius represent the republican cause. Brutus and Cassius are commanders of the army of two different regions. A misunderstanding arises between Brutus and Cassius leading to a rift between the two. Brutus complains to Lucilius of the changed attitude of Cassius towards him saying:

Thou hast describ'd
A hot friend cooling. Ever note, Lucilius,
When love begins to sicken and decay
It useth an enforced ceremony.
There are no tricks in plain and simple faith;
But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle;
But when they should endure the bloody spur,
They fall their crests, and like deceitful jades
Sink in the trial.

(Act IV sc. iii 18-27)

The quarrel continues, with Cassius threatening Brutus and Brutus ridiculing Cassius. Unable to bear the insult, Cassius offers his dagger to Brutus to kill him saying he loves Brutus very much and cannot be insulted by Brutus any further. But they soon reconcile and shake hands while Cassius admits that grief and ill temper had upset him when Brutus spoke rudely to him. Brutus is touched and confesses that he too was in a bad mood.

The quarrel scene also has dramatic significance. It brings out the contrast between Brutus and Cassius. Brutus is portrayed as an idealist and a man of principles whereas Cassius is a realist and a man of practical sense. This scene helps in the development of the character of Cassius.

Hazlitt comments in the book *Julius Caesar* edited by E.C. Houghton illustrates this:

'The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius is managed in a masterly way. The dramatic fluctuation of passion, the calmness of Brutus, the heat of Cassius, are admirably described; and the exclamation of Cassius on hearing of the death of Portia, which he does not learn till after their reconciliation. How scaped I killing when I crost you so?' gives double force to all that has gone before.'

Another important incident in this scene is the appearance of Caesar's ghost to Brutus. Whether the ghost of Caesar really appeared to Brutus or whether it was simply the creation of Brutus's exhausted mind is unclear. In either case it contributes to the atmosphere of horror in the play and gives us a sense of impending disaster.

The ghost of Caesar has a deep dramatic significance. It symbolizes the power of dead Caesar. His return to Brutus is ironic. Brutus with the other conspirators assumed that after the death of Caesar they would be able to seize power easily but Caesar proves to be more powerful dead than alive.

In this section Brutus and Cassius arrive with their armies at Philippi where they exchange sarcastic and insulting remarks with their opponents Octavius and Antony. Cassius in anticipation of the defeat asks Brutus what he would do if defeated by the opponents. Brutus says he will not allow his enemies to take him as prisoner and was also against committing suicide. They bid farewell to each other knowing that their defeat is imminent.

The battle begins but Brutus shows no signs of eagerness to fight the opponents. Pindarus brings a wrong report that the enemies had taken Titinius as prisoner whereas he was surrounded by his own army in order to rejoice the victory over Octavius. Thinking that Titinius is dead, Cassius feels deeply disappointed and tells Pindarus:

Come now keep thine oath.
Now be a freeman; and with this good sword,
That ran through Caesar's bowels, search this bosom.
Stand not to answer. Here take thou the hilt,
And when my face is cover'd as 'tis now,
Guide them the sword, (Pindarus stabs him)
Caesar, thou art revenged,
Even with the sword that kill'd thee.

(Act V. sc iii. 40-46)

On seeing the dead body of Cassius, Titinius is greatly grieved and kills himself. On seeing Cassius and Titinius dead, Brutus pays tribute to both saying:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails

(Act V. sc. iii. 94-96)

He further says:

Are yet two Romans living such as these?
It is impossible that ever Rome
Should breed thy fellow.

(Act V sc iii 99-101)

Brutus is deeply grieved by Cassius' death. With the death of Cassius and Titinius comes the downfall of the Republicans.

David Daiches in his essay 'Guilt and Innocence' in *Julius Caesar* included in Lawrence Lerner's *Shakespeare's Tragedie: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* says:

Nowhere is the Epicurean Cassius more like the Stoic Brutus than when he commits suicide because he is ashamed of having lived 'so long, to see my best friend Ta'en before my face.' And that suicide, rather than military defeat, seals the doom of the republican cause.

In the next scene in the battle led by Brutus and Cato, the latter is killed. Lucilius is taken prisoner after being defeated. He pretends to be Brutus but Antony recognizes him. He is treated with great respect by Antony and his men.

In the last scene the defeat of Brutus becomes certain. After he sees the ghost of Caesar the second time, he is sure of his approaching death. He persuades his friends Clitus, Volumnius, Dardanius and Strato to run him through with the sword. None of them agree to kill him. There is an alarm and all his friends flee to safer places except Strato. After Strato is persuaded by Brutus to kill him, he reluctantly runs the sword through him. Brutus dies while saying:

Farewell, good Strato —Caesar, now be still;
I kill'd not thee with half so good a will.

(Act V. sc. v 49-50)

Octavius and Antony enter Brutus' tent to find his body. Antony pays a moving tribute to Brutus saying:

This was the noblest Roman of them all.
All the conspirators save only he
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only, in general honest thought
And common good to all, made one of them.

(Act V. sc. v 68-72)

The power of the dead Caesar is felt throughout the second half of the play. It asserts itself through the army led by Antony and Octavius. It is visible in the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius where it is present in the thoughts of these conspirators. The spirit of Caesar again dominates the minds of Cassius and Brutus when they decide to end their lives.

Cunningness and flattery in Antony come forth in the second half of the play. Brutus takes him at his face value. He realizes very late what he had meant while speaking to the mob. Antony's speech has dramatic irony.

Thus, we note that *Julius Caesar* on the whole has a straightforward and well-developed plot. The play has a compact structure with no digressions. The plot moves smoothly keeping the readers in suspense throughout the play. The exciting events and incidents hold the attention of the reader. The play includes a number of supernatural incidents creating horror in the play that adds interest to the play. The abundance of dramatic scenes greatly enhances the appeal of the play.

About the structure of *Julius Caesar*, Granville Barker further comments in the *Prefaces to Shakespeare*(1947): "The larger rhythm of *Julius Caesar* can be variously interpreted. The action moves by one impetus, in a barely checked crescendo, to the end of Act III. Caesar's murder is the theme; the mob provides a recurrent chorus of confusion, and ends as it has begun, this part of the story."

8.3 STYLE

Style refers to the way the writer uses his language in his work of literature. The choice of words also is an important component of style. We find a continuous process of change in style in Shakespeare's early, middle and later plays.

About the style of the play *Julius Caesar*, Bradley has commented in his book *Shakespearean Tragedy* as follows:

In *Julius Caesar* neither thought on the one side, nor expression on the other, seems to have any tendency to outrun or contend with its fellow. We receive an impression of easy mastery and complete harmony, but not so strong an impression of inner power bursting into outer life.

Shakespeare's use of diction

Shakespeare uses rhetorical devices frequently in his play *Julius Caesar*. One of the figures of speech is onomatopoeia involving the use of words whose sound seems to resemble closely thus conveying the sense of the author. One such example is in Act I Sc.i:

'you blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!'

Here the repeated use of 's' emphasizes the harshness with which the tribune Marullus scolds the crowd.

Alliteration is another rhetorical device put into use by Shakespeare. Alliteration is the selection of words in which we come across repetition of initial consonants or same sound. A suitable example of alliteration is in Act II Scene ii in Calpurnia's speech:

And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead.

The repetition of 'y' sound adds to the eeriness of the disturbed nature

The same is true of the lines:

Fierce Fiery warriors fought upon the clouds

In ranks and squadrons and right form of war.

The repetition of 'f' in the first line and 'r' in the second line reinforces the warlike situation in this scene.

Shakespeare's use of puns add humour to his play. Pun is a play on words having identical meanings or having similar sounds but a vast difference in meaning. This figure of speech is employed for humour.

Let's take the example of pun in Act I scene i where the second citizen answers Marullus' question:

A trade, Sir, that I hope I may use with a safe conscience;

Which is, indeed, sir, a mender of bad soles.

Here 'mender of soles' is meant by Marullus as 'mender of souls'. This makes him ask the second citizen his occupation once again. Here the confusion is brought out to create humour for the readers.

Shakespeare's use of Language

While composing verses, Shakespeare does not follow the rules of grammar or syntax. To convey the exact thought was most important for him and he did not care much about rules of language. Flavius' says in Act I scene ii lines 63-64.

Go you down that way towards the Capitol

This way will I

In one of his other speeches in Act I scene ii line 70-71, we see:

I'll about and drive away the vulgar from the streets; so do you too, where you perceive them thick.

Here the phrases 'go you down' and 'so do you too' used by Shakespeare are not in time with standard usage.

Shakespeare uses words for expressions that he wants to convey to his audience. He uses words which best suit the action in the play. For example in Act IV scene iii Brutus says:

Remember March, the ides of March remember.
Did not great Julius bleed for Justice' sake
What villain touch'd his body that did stab,
And not for justice? What, shall one of us,
That struck the foremost man of all this world
But for supporting robbers, shall we now
Contaminate our fingers with base bribes,
And sell the mighty space of our large honours
For so much trash as may be grasped thus?
I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon;
Than such a Roman.

(Act iv sc iii. 18-28)

Shakespeare's use of metaphors is also remarkable.

Brutus's soliloquy in the orchard in Act II scene i brings out the best example of metaphor:

But 'tis a common proof,
That loneliness is young ambition's ladder,
Where to the climber-upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend.

(Act II sc i. 21-26)

Or in the sentences,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,
Which, hatch'd, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.

(Act II sc. i. 3-34)

8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you were introduced to the structure and style of the play *Julius Caesar*. Here, these have been analyzed in detail to enable you to understand the play as a whole and to place it in a proper perspective.

8.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

Granville -- Barker, Harley. *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947, II.

Lerner, Laurence. *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*. England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971.

8.6 EXERCISE

1. Who are Tribunes? What advice do the tribunes give to the craftsmen of Rome.
2. What were the unnatural events seen by Casca during the stormy night?
3. Critically comment on the speech made by Antony after the murder of Caesar.
4. Recapitulate the events that take place on the occasion of Caesar's Murder in *Julius Caesar*.

UNIT 9 THEME AND CHARACTERIZATION

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
 - 9.1 Theme of *Julius Caesar*
 - 9.2. Characterization
 - 9.2.1 Major Characters
 - 9.2.2 Minor Characters
 - 9.3 Let us Sum Up
 - 9.4 Exercise
 - 9.5 Suggested Readings
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9.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to comment on the theme of *Julius Caesar* and to understand the role and nature of different characters in the play.

By the end of this unit you should be able to have a clear view of these two aspects of *Julius Caesar*; namely theme and characterisation.

9.1 THEME OF JULIUS CAESAR

At the beginning of the play we find a sharp division between the Monarchists and the Republicans. Monarchists were the supporters of Caesar while the Republicans were those senators who opposed the monarchic principle. The reasons behind the conduct of Monarchists and Republicans centered around freedom, liberty as well as selfish motives.

The play *Julius Caesar* opens with the crowd of commoners celebrating in the streets of Rome the triumph of Caesar over Pompey's sons. We also witness the bitterness of the two Tribunes, the representatives of the people of the Senate. They are jealous of the popularity of Caesar and rebuke the crowd for supporting him.

The opening scene gives us some suggestion of the development of the main theme of the play which is the conflict between Caesarism and Republicanism. Romans had a tradition of a Republican government or a government by the people rather than monarchy. It is this tradition of Republicanism that the tribunes try to uphold against the ambitions of Caesar. We get a hint of the atmosphere of strife and disunity in Rome preparing us for the crisis later in the play. The hostile elements against Caesar presented in the first scene contain germs of the conspiracy against Caesar.

The theme of Caesarism versus Republicanism is seen in the Cassius- Brutus conspiracy. Cassius makes an attempt to bring Brutus, a trusted friend of Caesar, into the conspiracy to murder Caesar. Cassius himself has some traits of Republicanism and love of freedom in himself but it is more out of jealousy of the growing powers and popularity of Caesar that he hatches a plan to kill Caesar.

On learning Brutus's love of freedom, liberty, and Republicanism and his disapproval of Caesar's assumption of royal power, Cassius reveals to Brutus his own jealousy of Caesar and his contempt for Caesar's physical weaknesses. Cassius is able to win Brutus to his side wholly by reminding him of his ancestor's love of Republicanism.

The conflict between his republicanism and loyalty to Caesar puts Brutus in a dilemma who essentially values freedom and republicanism. In his soliloquies he betrays the suspicion that Caesar is becoming more powerful each day.

The severe storm, thunder and lightning with unnatural happenings taking place in Act I sc iii is interpreted by Casca and by Cassius as an expression of the wrath of gods against the tyranny of Caesar. This sign of ill - omen further strengthens the approval of Republicanism against Caesarism.

Before his assassination Caesar is handed over a letter by Artemidorus warning him against the conspirators, which he ignores saying haughtily 'what touches us ourselves shall be last served.'

This pride and arrogance of Caesar reaffirm his monarchic quality a symbol of Caesarism. With the victory of Republicanism, chaos and commotion follows in the form of noise and movement all over the stage. In other words the victory of Republicanism has brought chaos and war. It is only with the triumph of the monarchical principle that peace is established later. In his soliloquy after Caesar's death and the fall of Caesarism, Antony predicts the violence and strife that will destroy Rome.

In his funeral speech Brutus again reiterates his love for liberty, freedom and republicanism to justify why he murdered Caesar. He says that he murdered him not because his love for Caesar was less but because his love for the people of Rome was greater. In his view, Caesar was ambitious and tyrannized the common people.

In his speech Brutus defends republicanism while Antony attacks republicanism and shows his preference for a monarchical rule. Antony then regrets the fall of Caesarism with Caesar's death and the rise of republicanism in these lines:

Even at the base of Pompey's statue
(which all the while ran blood) great Caesar fell.
O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
Whilst bloody treason flourish's over us.

(Act III sc. ii, 191-195)

The appearance of the ghost in the last part of the play works against the assumption of the conspirators that the death of Caesar would produce a free Rome. Ironically, Caesar proved to be more powerful after death. All see that Caesarism which the conspirators wanted to destroy is not destroyed but is still alive with Caesar's spirit and is all powerful. It is the spirit of Caesar or the power of Caesarism which dominates the minds of Cassius and Brutus towards the end of the play. Brutus is too hasty in Caesar's spirit again directed the belief of Cassius that his army had lost the battle, an error instigating him to end his life followed by Brutus. Republicanism dies with the death of the conspirators one by one. Both Cassius and Brutus die with Caesar's name on their lips. Brutus says finally:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad and thus over swords
In our proper entrails.

9.2 CHARACTERIZATION

Shakespeare's characters have complexity as well as fullness. He makes use of his great artistic skills while creating his characters. His characters have variety and are strongly conceptualized.

Julius Caesar has numerous characters. Julius Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, Mark Antony and Octavius Cimber are the major characters. The minor characters include Portia, Calpurnia, Casca, Cicero, Decius Brutus, Lepidus, Lucilius, Messala, Titinius, Pindarus, Lucius, Ligarius, Cinna the Conspirator, Strato, Volumnius, Young Cato and Popilius Lena.

9.2.1 Major Characters

Julius Caesar

In the very opening scene Caesar is introduced to us as a great warrior who has just returned to Rome after defeating Pompey's sons. Caesar does not appear in the opening scene of the play but the manner in which the tribunes Marullus and Flavius discuss him reveals that he has great power in Rome. Brutus is all praise for him and refers to Caesar as 'the foremost man of all this world'. His deafness and affliction with epilepsy do not effect his glorious conduct. According to Dieter Mehl in his book *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction*

As the play proceeds Caesar still remains a figure seen from the distance rather than in close – up and we learn more about his impact on others than about the actual individual. Whenever he appears in person he seems more anxious to create an impression of superhuman stature and commanding presence than to allow us any revealing insight into his real thoughts and emotions.

On the few occasions that he appears on stage he is delineated as having other individual traits. Caesar makes only three brief appearances before he is murdered. Again Critic Dieter Mehl in his book *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction* says:

His (Caesar) real personality comes out much more impressively through Cassius' attempt to influence Brutus and Brutus' tragic dilemma, as well as Casca's satirical account of what happened off stage. The fact that he is deaf in one ear- a handicap added by Shakespeare- and troubled with the 'falling sickness' does not mean that the dramatist deliberately reduced his heroic structure , but rather underlines the extraordinary force of his presence which is not even impaired by these physical defects.

Kenneth Muir in *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence* comments that for Caesar public interests came before his own interests. 'He reforms the crown offered to him by Antony so as to demonstrate that he did not wish to be a king; he postpones the reading of Artemidorus's warning because his personal interests are of less importance than those of the state; and as Brutus admits , he has never let passion usurp the place of reason.'

Caesar is superstitious. He asks Calpurnia to stand on the way so that when Antony is running his race he can touch her because the old people believed that if barren women are touched by a runner of the holy race, they can be set free of their barrenness. At other times he disregards superstition. He calls the soothsayer a dreamer.

Caesar's fearlessness comes to the fore when Calpurnia insists that she would not allow him to leave the house because of the dreadful dream she saw and the watchman too had seen some frightening sights. Talking of Caesar and Calpurnia, Mehl has remarked: 'Caesar's tone towards her is hardly different from his usual public manner, showing little personal concern or genuine affection' (*Shakespeare's Tragedies : An Introduction*) His relationship with his wife is presented without such personal ties that Brutus shares with his wife Portia of love, concern and intimacy. He shows heroic bravery towards danger but this impression about him does not last long.

Caesar is a good observer and has remarkable psychological insights. He asks Antony to keep a distance from Cassius. He says that Cassius is dangerous and is capable of bringing harm to the people. His judgment of Cassius comes out to be true.

Caesar's arrogance is revealed when he meets the soothsayer on his way to the Capitol. Caesar points out to him that it is the Ides of March and no harm has been done to him yet. Again when Artemidorus asks him to read his petition, Caesar haughtily replies that whatever affects him personally will receive his attention last.

Another incident of Caesar's boastfulness and his haughty behaviour is seen at the Capitol at the meeting of the senate. As planned by the conspirators Metellus Cimber goes to Caesar to appeal to him to withdraw the banishment against his brother Publius Cimber. Caesar refuses his request. To Cinna he says that he is like Mount Olympus which cannot be lifted by anybody.

Caesar's generosity impresses the readers as revealed by Antony in his funeral speech. According to Antony, Caesar had made a will. In it he had left all his walls and his gardens for the common people. He had also left seventy five silver coins for each Roman citizen.

Caesar liked being flattered and pleased with Decius' interpretation of Calpurnia's dream as a sign of good omen. Decius says that the dream signifies that the Romans will draw vitality and strength from Caesar and that Caesar would be regarded as one of the most powerful personalities.

What is largely revealed of Caesar's qualities emerges from the opinions formed mostly by other characters in the play. He is killed by the conspirators in the middle of the play but the spirit of Caesar or Caesarism survives till the end of the play. Caesar's character is such that it arouses admiration for him.

Brutus

When we are first introduced to Brutus in the play we come to know that he is not interested in witnessing the holy race, a part of celebrations of Lupercalia.

Brutus is a man of principles. That is the reason why Caesar fails to understand how this right-minded man can commit his conscience to murder.

Brutus is appointed the leader of the conspirators because in Cassius's opinion he is the most respectable and honourable man in Rome. Brutus is very clear that he would not approve of Caesar being crowned as the king of Rome.

He tells Cassius that he would not like that Caesar should be made king. And yet he loves Caesar.

Brutus's love of freedom and republicanism gets further expressed in his soliloquy where he is again in conflict regarding his affection for Caesar and his love for liberty.

Brutus lives in the world of ideals. The forged letters thrown into his house make him believe that the common people genuinely need his help. He is unable to understand the realities of life and ugly facts of human behaviour. The suffering of the people is reason enough to compel them to commit the murder. Brutus does not agree to the suggestion made by Cassius that they kill Mark Antony. He says that they are sacrificers but not butchers. Contrary to Cassius's suggestions he allows Antony to address the crowd. The only precaution he takes is to address the mob before Antony after which he leaves without foreseeing the harm that Antony could bring to the conspirators. Brutus shows himself to be an idealist once again in the quarrel scene with Antony. Cassius is one who does not allow the rift to widen by expressing his regret to Brutus.

Brutus's love for his wife Portia is well presented in the domestic scene. Dieter Mehl comments in addition that his dialogue with Portia on the departure of the conspirators suggests very strongly that Brutus himself is not really convinced of the worthiness and integrity of his purpose. His dilemma comes to the fore again when his servant Lucius' innocent sleep appears to him as the image of a mind untroubled by any conflict or worrying reflections.

Later Portia's death overwhelms him with grief. He seems to be stoic and remains calm when Portia dies. To his servant Lucius, he shows fatherly care. He grieves for Cassius when the latter dies and sheds tears for him and says he owes him more tears than those he was shedding now.

The conflict in his mind between love for Caesar and love for freedom makes Cassius take advantage of his wavering mind. Cassius flatters Brutus saying that many Romans of the noblest reputations discuss his personality. Brutus' weakness for flattery and his love of freedom and republicanism bring him to join the enterprise Cassius was planning.

Brutus was not an able politician. His funeral speech after Caesar's death was dry, appealing to reason but not to the emotion. His speech was more of a philosopher that was 'too reflective and bookish for the harsh world of political realities...' (Dieter Mehl, *Shakespeare's Tragedies An Introduction*) that could not be understood by the masses. '..... people have not understood his true political motives behind the assassination and are hardly able to follow a rational argument, but he is obviously unable to recognize the thoroughly unreliable nature of public opinion, and the play leaves us in no doubt that he commits a fatal error when he leaves Antony alone with his audience. The fact that Antony turns out to be a much more effective virtuoso in manipulating the masses - does show his (Brutus') limited political foresight.' (Dieter Mehl, *Shakespeare's Tragedies; An Introduction*).

Brutus follows a wrong strategy as the leader of the army. He does not follow Cassius's suggestion of waiting for the enemy to attack them at Sardis. Instead he commands his army to march to Philippi and attack the enemy first. This was a blunder in the military strategy in the final stages of the battle. He orders an attack upon the enemy earlier than needed, bringing confusion in Cassius' camp leading to Cassius committing suicide. Towards the end of the play Brutus contradicts his own statement given to Cassius. He had told Cassius that he would not commit suicide if defeated by the enemy but he does commit suicide in the end.

At Brutus's death Antony refers to Brutus as the noblest Roman of them all. He also mentions that Brutus was the only conspirator murdering Ceasar for a noble cause prompted by his love for the common people.

Brutus was truly a noble and honourable man. But at the same time we cannot get over the fact that he betrayed his best friend Caesar by joining in the conspiracy of murdering him.

Cassius

Cassius is a contrast to Brutus, in being motivated by self-interest and jealousy in plotting Caesar's murder. While Brutus is philosophical, idealistic, and impractical, Cassius is shrewd, opportunistic and practical. Cassius maneuvers the noble Brutus into joining the conspiracy against Caesar by working on his patriotism and republicanism. He is very keen to involve Brutus in the enterprise to give it a certain respectability.

It is Cassius who hatches a conspiracy against Caesar but his reasons are less patriotic and more personal. He is envious of the growing powers and popularity of Caesar. He is least bothered about the tyranny which can befall the people; but

to hide his true motive behind the conspiracy he lets Brutus know how much he worries for the future of the common people and Rome. Cassius tries to arouse Brutus's jealousy by saying that Brutus is in no way inferior to Caesar and that he has the right to be as ambitious as Caesar.

In Caesar's opinion Cassius is a dangerous and unpredictable man, a quality often seen in lean and hungry-looking men, he thinks and reads too much, is a great observer and looks through the deeds of men. He believes that such qualities make a man self-centered. Caesar rightly reads Cassius's character.

Cassius is successful in enlisting Casca into his conspiracy as well. He finds Casca terrified after all the fearful events he has witnessed which he believes as ill omens. Cassius links the storm with the anger of the gods over the disturbance and chaos in Rome.

Cassius is shrewd and practical while making decisions. He makes practical suggestions while planning the assassination of Caesar to which Brutus disagrees. Cassius makes a point that they should take an oath to murder Caesar. He wants Cicero to be approached to join the conspiracy and Antony to be murdered along with Caesar. His suggestions are logical and far-sighted. Had his suggestions been accepted there would not have been civil war in Rome. The conspirators would have easily taken over as the rulers of Rome.

Cassius presents himself as a better strategist and able military officer by suggesting to Brutus that they should stay at Sardis and wait for the enemy to attack them before they retaliate.

Cassius is extremely cunning and unscrupulous. He has very few commendable traits in his character. The demerits in his character over-rule the merits in him.

Mark Antony

The most striking quality of Mark Antony is his firm loyalty towards Caesar. We are introduced to Antony at the celebration of the Lupercalia where he participates in the race. He is asked by Caesar to touch the barren Calpurnia so that she would be free from the curse of barrenness. His respect and humility is depicted once again when he offers Caesar the crown three times. His loyalty towards Caesar is reflected in his funeral speech to the mob. Antony begins his speech with humility and reasonableness. He describes the conspirators as noble and honourable men repeatedly until its ironic use is understood by the crowd. The main objective of his speech is to make the crowd emotional and rouse their passion. Their comments during his pauses assure him that they are with him. In his speech Antony points out that Caesar was not at all ambitious and Brutus had wrong reasons for murdering Caesar. He shows them the blood-soaked cloak and points to the holes made by the daggers of the conspirators. Antony's use of irony, passion, flattery and craftiness in his speech incite the crowd to rebel against the conspirators.

In Brutus's opinion, Antony is a harmless man. He has liking for sports, theatre and music. Caesar's murder brings great shock to Antony and he flees his home. He is determined to avenge the murder of Caesar with craftiness. Antony comes to meet the conspirators and reveals his wish to establish friendly relations with all the conspirators. He shakes hands with them and at the same time apologizes to the dead Caesar for establishing amicable relations with his murderers. His shrewdness and vengeful intentions are not suspected by any of the conspirators.

As a member of the triumvirate, Antony is unscrupulous. The open contempt shown by Mark Antony for Lepidus, diminishes our sympathy for him and also demonstrates his 'cynical attitude towards humane values' (Dieter Mehl, *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction*). Antony pays a generous tribute to Brutus at his death saying "This was the noblest Roman of them all."

Octavius Caesar is Julius Caesar's nephew and inheritor of his property and power. He comes to Rome after Caesar's murder in response to the letters that Julius Caesar writes to him. On hearing about Octavius's presence in Rome, Antony feels it to be the right time for Octavius's arrival.

Octavius is made one of the members of the triumvirate to help the pro-Caesar elements. He allows Antony to take major decisions, interfering only when he thinks is necessary. Over Antony's decision of getting rid of Lepidus, Octavius gives him the freedom to deal with him the way he wants.

Octavius takes right decisions at war as a military officer. He has a good understanding of human nature. Octavius asserts himself showing a position of authority on certain situations. He orders Antony to lead the army from the left side while he would lead from the right side of the field. Octavius is a true soldier having a 'do or die' attitude. He does not believe in wasting time on trivial matters.

Octavius is sympathetic towards the people of Brutus's camp after his death. He decides to employ them in his service. He decides to give due respect to the body of Brutus and to perform the ceremonious burial with respect and honour. He gives the same kind of honour and respect to the body of Brutus that a soldier should get.

9.2.2 Minor Characters

Portia

In *Julius Caesar*, there are only two women characters Portia and Calpurnia. Portia appears in only two scenes in the play. We are introduced to a worried Portia concerned about her husband's strange and unnatural behaviour. She pleads with him to reveal the cause of his sadness. Reminding him of the marriage vows which united them and made her a part of him, she emphatically says that she is his wife having all the rights to share the joys and sorrows and not a hired mistress. Reminding Brutus of the wound he had once inflicted on her thigh to prove her powers of endurance, she said she could even keep her husband's secret. Later in the play Portia contradicts her own statement of her bravery by saying that she has an ordinary woman's strength. She worries about Brutus's well-being and sends Lucius to the capitol to observe the happenings in the Capitol.

The plan of the conspiracy revealed to Portia becomes the cause of her restlessness and weakens her mentally. Later we learn from Brutus's talk with Cassius that Portia swallowed burnt coals and committed suicide. Her worry about Brutus, his absence from Rome for a long duration and her fear of his defeat in the hands of the enemies leads her to take such a drastic step. She struggles with her strength and endurance but in the end fails. She is presented as a noble woman who loves her husband and is always worried about his safety.

Calpurnia

Calpurnia, the wife of Caesar, is first seen at the festival of Lupercalia with Caesar and his friends. She is an obedient wife who follows the instructions given by Caesar to stand in the path of Antony, one of the participants in the holy race, so that she gets rid of her barrenness.

Calpurnia is superstitious and nervous, she gets very disturbed by the unnatural events at night. She requests Caesar not to move out of the house. Calpurnia appeals to him asking him to tell the people that it was her fears that kept him inside the house and not his.

Deiter Mehl comments on Calpurnia by saying 'Calpurnia's apprehensions are more general and far less personal than Portia's, caused by external forebodings and

warnings rather than by own observation of her husband...’ Calpurnia shares a very formal kind of relation with her husband and their relationship lacks the love and affection that is visible in Brutus-Portia relationship .

Cicero

Cicero is one of the senators and a friend of Ceasar who enters the play in Act I sc. ii but does not have any major role to play. Cicero speaks in Act I sc. ii after Caesar is offered the crown thrice which he refuses. The crowd shouted and cheered. Disgusted at the crowd and irritated by Caesar’s behaviour Cicero said something in Greek which Casca failed to understand. Cicero very well understood Rome’s plight under Caesar’s ambition and dictatorship and must have said something cynical at the expense of Caesar.

Cicero is the first senator to whom Casca discloses the horrifying sights during the storm and the other strange and unnatural events that he saw in the evening. Cicero is respected by most people. Most of the conspirators want him to be included in the conspiracy but Brutus says that he is too independent-minded and would never follow the course of action initiated by others. We last hear about Cicero when he is killed by the orders of the triumvirate.

Casca

Casca is first introduced to us at the festival of Lupercalia when the race is about to begin. Casca seems to be one of the loyal servants of Caesar who orders the crowd to calm down so that the race began peacefully.

The overall impprèssion one gets of Casca is his scornful and cynical nature. Casca does not fail to mention Caesar’s weaknesses. Casca dislikes Caesar’s pomposity, he mentions how the women were praising Caesar but is quick to remark that even if Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would still praise him.

There is a contrast between his sarcastic account of the events of Lupercalia and his nervousness and superstitious temperament on seeing the horrors of the raging storm. Brutus calls him a dull-witted fellow. Casca’s nervousness and his superstitious temperament come to the fore when he sees the raging storm. The dreadful signs horrify him and he interprets the happenings as warnings from God to the people of Rome. Cassius manipulates Casca into the conspiracy by accusing Caesar of being a dictator and a tyrant who would treat the people as slaves. Cassius also speaks of his love of freedom and his hatred of slavery which arouses Casca’s patriotism for Rome.

Casca shows inconsistent behaviour. He agrees with Cassius when he wants to include Cicero in the conspiracy but a moment later he speaks against him saying that he is not the right kind of person to be taken into the conspiracy.

Decius Brutus

Decius Brutus makes his entry in the play Julius Caesar in Act II sc i. He is introduced by Cassius to Brutus as one of the conspirators. He pretends to be one of Caesar’s friends and a well-wisher while Caesar loves him. He is in the play for a very short while but his role in the play of manipulating Caesar to the senate is significant. He has pertinent questions to ask from Cassius such as: Who else would be killed apart from Caesar?

Decius Brutus is a great flatterer. He offers to bring Ceasar to the Senate house in case he decides not to come. He is very clever and knows Caesar’s weakness. He interprets Calpurnia’s dream so that it becomes favourable for the conspirator’s evil designs. He says that the dream does not prophesy ill- omen to Rome and to Caesar but Caesar’s good fortune and luck. He is cynical and reassures Caesar

into false confidence saying that if the latter did not go to the senate the crowd would disperse.

Decius is tactful in distracting Caesar from Artemidorus and drawing Caesar's attention to Trebonius's petition first even as Artemidorus pleads Caesar to read his note.

Decius is one of the conspirators who comes to plead to Caesar to cancel the banishment of Metellus Cimber's brother. He keeps instructing the conspirators about their turns to go to the public platform so that they can surround him to stab him. He is a dangerous conspirator and skilled at flattery.

Flavius and Marullus

Flavius and Marullus are the first two characters we are introduced in the play. They are sending jubilant craftsmen home who have taken a holiday and gathered in the streets of Rome to celebrate the victory of Caesar over Pompey's son. Flavius and Marullus rebuke the people for being ungrateful to Pompey who was acclaimed by them some time back. The tribunes remind the people of the love and respect they once had for Pompey.

The two tribunes are dramatically significant in the play because they introduce us to the political atmosphere existing in Rome.

Flavius and Marullus are the two tribunes who have been given legal powers to protect the rights of the common people. They are believers of republicanism. They have their sympathies with Pompey's sons. They envy Caesar's growing popularity among the people of Rome and are hostile to Caesar.

Lucilius

Lucilius is a loyal officer in the army of Brutus and Cassius. He is loyal to such an extent that he pretends to be Brutus in order to protect him from the danger of being killed.

Lucilius is ready to die for Brutus and offers the soldier some money to kill him. Antony discovers his trick of trying to put on a false identity of Brutus. He is so touched by his heroism that he decides to take Lucilius in his service.

Brutus considers Lucilius a trustworthy friend and confides in him about the behaviour of Cassius. Lucilius has the same kind of opinion of Cassius as Brutus had of him. Lucilius says that he had become indifferent lately and did not have the same warmth that he had earlier.

Titinius

Titinius is a friend of Brutus and Cassius. He is an officer under Cassius during the civil war mainly to give commands to his subordinate officers. Titinius is bold to point out that Brutus has committed a blunder by giving order to attack early. Titinius is obedient to the commands given by Cassius and rushes to see whether the soldiers present there were theirs or the enemies. Pindarus conveys to Cassius that Titinius has been surrounded by the enemy and taken prisoner. Cassius cannot bear the fact that his best friend Titinius is taken as prisoner while he is helpless. He orders Pindarus to kill him. Titinius regrets Cassius's death and describes it as the setting of the sun in Rome forever. He fears that danger would soon overtake their lives.

Pindarus

Pindarus is taken prisoner by Cassius in Parthia. Cassius had spared his life on the condition that Pindarus would obey any kind of order given by him. Brutus wants to demand an explanation from Pindarus once he comes face to face. Defending

Cassius, Pindarus says that Cassius is an honourable man with warm feelings for Brutus.

Pindarus misinterprets Titinius being taken prisoner by the enemy's troops when asked by Cassius to observe him from the top of the hill. Cassius is ashamed of himself and feels extremely guilty of being a coward and letting his best friend Titinius to be arrested while he is still alive.

Lucius

Lucius is an innocent, trustworthy and obedient servant of Brutus who plays and sings for Brutus. Brutus is also very affectionate towards him. Lucius is first introduced into the play when he is fast asleep in the garden. Lucius represents the peace of mind and tranquility that Brutus has lost. Lucius is the first one to see papers thrown at Brutus's house by Cinna urging him to join the plot to kill Caesar.

Brutus is dependent on Lucius for trivial things like lighting the candle, looking at the calendar or attending to the visitors at the gate. While dealing with Lucius, Brutus treats him gently and with humanity and says that he will not give him work beyond his capacity.

Portia also finds Lucius very trustworthy to run errands. She sends him to the senate-house to bring information about Brutus' well being and to observe Caesar's action.

The name Lucius is derived from the Latin word 'Lucere' meaning light. Lucius in the play represents light that Brutus needs, to understand the true motive of the conspirators.

Ligarius

Ligarius is a sick man having great regard and respect for Brutus. He is pleased about the enterprise in which Brutus is involved.

Ligarius is aware that flattery is the weakness of Brutus. He calls him a magician who has made a dead man alive. He has immense faith in Brutus. For him it is enough to know that Brutus is involved in a particular venture and Ligarius will follow him without any incentive.

Publius

Publius is a senator hardly visible in the play. We see him only twice in the play. The first time when he comes with Ligarius, Messala, Casca, Tribonius and Cinna to take Caesar to the Senate house. The next time we see him driving away Artemidorus from Caesar. After Caesar's murder he is in a state of shock.

The Roman Crowd

The Roman crowd has a significant role in the play. Romans are fickle-minded, inconsistent and irrational. In the opening scene of the play, the crowd is shown celebrating the victorious return of Caesar after defeating Pompey's sons. The two tribunes Flavius and Marullus have to remind them that they loved Pompey when he was alive. The crowd meekly obeys them and returns to their work with guilt.

The crowd is irrational and cannot think independently. During the funeral speech given by Brutus, which they cannot understand in the least, the mob still applauds for Brutus saying 'Let him be Caesar'. The funeral speech of Antony moves the mob exciting them against the injustice done to Caesar and they run for the blood of the conspirators calling them traitors and villains.

Being filled with fury the mob later tears Cinna the poet into pieces only because he had the same name as Cinna the conspirator. The cruelty and irrationality of the mob is brought out here.

We come to know something more from Casca about the Roman mob. The Roman mob was dirty and foul smelling and wet with perspiration. Casca was cautious not to open his mouth to laugh at the whole spectacle fearing the foul smell would enter his mouth. In Casca's opinion, Roman women in the crowd had no independent thinking and would have forgiven Caesar even if Caesar had stabbed their mothers. The Roman crowd is foolish and ignorant with no judgment of their own. They worship Caesar as a demi-God.

Cinna the Conspirator

Cinna is one of the main conspirators appearing in Act I Scene 3. Cassius considers him faithful and loyal. He recognizes him from far by the manner of his walking. He is among the first ones to be appraised about the enterprise of Cassius that was in his mind. Cinna is anxious about the strange sights seen at night by some conspirators. He is considered responsible by Cassius and is assigned important tasks. He is also asked to throw some paper at his window and another paper to be stuck to the statue of Brutus's ancestor with wax.

He is one of the conspirators to strike at Caesar and once Caesar falls to his death, he is the first one to shout excitedly 'Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!' He is a strong Republican and his motive to join the conspiracy is to fight against tyranny. The mob hate Cinna for his anti-Caesar feelings and tear Cinna the poet into pieces despite his explanations that he only shared the name with Cinna the conspirator.

Strato

Strato is brought into the play only in Act V sc. iii. He is the loyal servant of Brutus whom Brutus trusts. Brutus calls him a man of good reputation with a touch of honour in what he says. Strato obeys his wishes to hold the sword while Brutus falls on it to die. Strato tells Messala that his master is free from captivity. He praises the brave Brutus and says that Brutus was never defeated by anybody except by himself. He is modest enough not to claim to have done the honour of killing Brutus. Messala is glad that Strato did the last service to his Lord Brutus and recommends Strato to be employed with Octavius.

Volumnius

Volumnius is one of the loyal officers of Brutus appearing in the play in Act v Sc. iii. Brutus shares information with Volimnius about the appearance of Caesar's ghosts on two occasions once at Sardis and the other in the plains of Philippi. He tells him that the time of his death has come and it would be a more dignified death to jump into his grave than to be pushed into it by his enemies. Volumnius is taken by Octavius into his service after Brutus' death in return for his loyalty to Brutus.

Young Cato

Young Cato appears in Act V sc. iv. He is the son of the brave Cato and brother of Portia. He fights valiantly against Caesar holding his head high. Lucilius later finds him in the battle-field dead. Lucilius expresses grief over his death.

Popilius Lena

Popilius Lena is a senator appearing in the play in Act III sc i just before Caesar's murder is going to take place. He creates more tension to the already nervous Cassius by wishing him success in their enterprise. Cassius fears that Popilius Lena had come to know about their plan. Popilius Lena's advancement towards Caesar further scares Brutus. Fearing that they would be stopped, Cassius wants to hurry things before they could be stopped. Cassius threatens to kill himself if their conspiracy was not successful. Brutus gives a sigh of relief when he notices Caesar without any change of expression in his face after Popilius Lena had spoken to him.

9.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed:

- The theme of the play *Julius Caesar*
- The major characters namely Julius Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar
- Minor characters such as Portia, Calpurnia, Casca, Cicero, Decius Brutus, Lepidius, Lucilius, Messala, Titinius, Pindarus, Lucius, Ligarius, Cinna The Conspirator, Strato, Volumnius, Young Cato and Poplius Lena.

9.4 EXERCISE

1. Comment on the theme of *Julius Ceasar*?
2. Who are the major characters in *Julius Ceaser*? Comment briefly on each of them.
3. Comment on the function of minor characters like Casca, Portia and Calpurnia in *Julius Ceasar*?

9.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Houghton E.C. Ralph. *Julius Caesar*. Oxford University Press. London. 1967.
2. Muir, Kenneth. *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence*. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool. 1979.
3. Barker. Graucille, Harley. Prefaces to Shakespeare.
4. Daiches, David, *Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*.

UNIT 10 AMERICAN DRAMA AROUND ARTHUR MILLER

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
 - 10.1 Introduction
 - 10.2 American Drama Around Arthur Miller
 - 10.3 Arthur Miller: Life and Works
 - 10.4 Miller's Major Plays
 - 10.5 Let Us Sum Up
 - 10.6 Exercise
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10.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will examine the growth of American Drama from its beginning in the 17th Century till the 1940's, the era when the modern American drama emerged. American Drama achieved recognition with the realism of plays by Eugene O' Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

American Drama began in the American colonies in the 17th Century and has continued developing to the present. The American Drama of the 18th and 19th centuries mostly had British influence on it. In fact until 1910 the New York city theatre season presented more British plays than American plays. The common language and the ready availability of British plays and British actors was the reason for their domination. American Drama began to diverge from British Drama around the 1830's. Despite this growing divergence most American plays continue to copy British model till the early 20th century. For this reason critics claim that American Drama was born only at the end of the World War I with Eugene O' Neill in the 1920's. By the end of 19th century American Drama had moved towards realism. Realism dominated both comedies and tragedies even in the 20th century and as the century advanced, American Drama took up broader issues of race, gender, sexuality and death.

10.2 AMERICAN DRAMA AROUND ARTHUR MILLER

Beginnings of American Drama: 1600s and 1700s

Little theatrical activity took place before the mid-18th century because the early settlers of American colonies faced harsh living conditions after migrating to this alien land. Their belief in hard work, frugality and piety also disallowed them from indulging in theatrical activity so much so, that the play *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb* produced in 1665 and probably the first theatrical performance in America led to the trial of actors. In the 18th century many colonies in America enacted laws forbidding the performance of plays, because of the puritan belief that the seventh of the ten commandments in the bible did not allow dancing and enacting plays. However, opposition to theatre did not last long. Aware of the new cultural beginnings, the colonies wanted to brush up their intellectual and oratorical skills by theatrical activities. The 17th century colleges in several colonies allowed theatrical activity after much hesitation which they thought could benefit students to utilize their

speech skills in their careers such as business and law. To meet this requirement, the first play *Androboros* (1774) written by Robert Hunter, an English Governor, came as an attack on his political enemies, despite New York's Antitheatre Law. This play established the tradition of political satire charting out the course that American Drama was to follow for the next two centuries. Several popular plays of this period were *The Paxton Boys* (1732), *The Trial of Atticus* (1771) whose authorship is not known and Robert Munford's *The Candidates of the Humours of a Virginia Election* (1770).

Before more plays appeared, a group of British professional actors formed a touring circuit in the 1750s and this group in the early 1760s was known as The American Company. In 1767 they staged a play *The Prince of Parthia*, a tragedy by Thomas Godfrey, the first professional production of a play written in America. During the American Revolution, many professional actors moved to Jamaica. During the period of American Revolution (1775-1783) satirical plays were written either supporting British control of the colonies or attacking it. *The Battle of Brooklyn* which was pro-British and written anonymously, satirized leaders like George Washington. Mercy Otis Warren, the strongest American dramatic voice of the revolution presented the revolutionary cause in her plays *The Adulateur* (1772) *The Defeat* (1773), *The Group* (1776) and *The Blackheads* (1776). A play by Robert Munford *The Patriots* (1779) attained true dramatic character by taking a neutral stance and attacking both sides for their intolerance.

The professional actors who had moved to Jamaica during the American Revolution were touring America again in mid 1780s. America became a nation in 1783 through a victory against the British colonial power. Robert Taylor was the first playwright of the nation to write the finest American play of the 18th Century, *The Contrast* (1787). This five-act comedy that satirises the customs of the upper classes is written in the format of British Comedy owing much to Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777).

American Drama: 1800s

William Dunlop introduced melodrama in his plays, the most prevalent dramatic form in the 19th century. The credit for giving drama its most important characteristic, dramatic conflict also goes to him. Most of his plays were adaptations or translations from the French and German. The Protagonist Major John Andre in Dunlop's play *Andre* (1798) shows admirable qualities by saving a young American Captain despite George Washington's unqualified antagonism towards him for conspiring to destroy an American garrison.

Majority of the plays written in America in the 19th century were largely produced for commercial purposes to benefit the heterogeneous public residing all over America whose primary interest was seeing the shows and their favourite actors performing in these plays. Most of the plays were not published but were meant only to be seen and not to be read; as a result they are now irrevocably lost.

One of Dunlop's contemporaries James Nelson Barker produced some of the best-known works *Marmion* (1812) and *Superstition* (1824). The latter a romantic tragedy based on specific American situations, was set in New England and explored the themes of isolationism, bigotry and intolerance. *The Indian Princess* (1808) written by him was the first play to explore native American themes and characters. It told the story of Pocahontas, a native American woman who married in English man. The most well-known of such drama was *Metamora* (1828) by John Augustus Stone. The popularity of the Indian plays that began in 1820's continued through the 1840s.

In the early 19th century in American Drama, there is a shift in focus from a nationalistic cause to the aesthetic values of romanticism. Edwin Forrest, an

immensely popular actor encouraged the writing of American romantic plays. The best American play of the time was *Francesca da Rimini* (1855), a romantic verse tragedy by George Henry Boker. *Brutus: The Fall of Tarquin* (1819) by John Howard Payne and *The Gladiator* (1831) by Robert Montgomery Bird were other American Romantic tragedies that merely promoted the aesthetic values of romanticism without furthering the cause of the American Drama.

In 1828 Edwin Forrest began to offer annual awards for new plays with American themes, the first to receive the award was *Metamora*. No one kind of drama appealed the play-going masses of America; play-goers were ready to welcome any new type of play that the actors could perform well. The lampooning of the Indian plays signalled their waning interests and by mid-century they started fading. Racial, social and economic tensions in America that brought about the civil war are well represented in Harriet Beecher Stone's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The adaptation of the novel for the stage by G. L. Aiken was a great success that was staged all over America and survived well into the twentieth century.

American Drama in the Nineteenth Century

In the 19th century the most pervasive dramatic genre was Melodrama. Similar to what we see in Hindi cinema where a heartless villain troubles the heroine who is finally rescued by a strong hero in the nick of time after fighting insurmountable odds. Melodrama addresses to issues of family, social position and wealth, a preoccupation of every individual. 'Its appeal to the general public lay in its stereotyped, easily identifiable character types and in simple, formulaic plots that could be easily adapted to any setting, character or event desired.' (*American Popular Culture Through History: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, Browne and Kreiser)

The great flexibility of these plays made them easily adaptable to any type of audience, allowing actors to use their talents freely, taking advantage to present a wide range of materials. The popular plays in this genre are Boucicault's *The Poor of the New York* (1857), Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1857), and Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West* and *The Heart of Maryland* (1857). The popularity of melodramatic form that had begun in the 18th Century continued through the 19th Century.

Realism in American Drama

Drama after the Civil war was marked by a steady shift towards realism illuminating the scene of humble life, criticizing social conditions and creating believable characters. Concerned with a faithful representation of life the playwright concentrated on middle-class life and preoccupations, avoiding larger and more dramatic issues. The scenes had three dimensional settings and the actors spoke authentic sounding dialogue. While the melodramatic plots prevailed, the playwrights gradually moved towards psychological realism, influenced by Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright.

The late 19th Century works, Bronson Howard's *Shenandoah* (1874), Steele Mackaye's *Hazel Kirke* (1880) and William Dean Howell's *Mouse Trap* (1889) are notable realistic plays. Bronson Howard was more concerned with morals than morality. Realism reached new levels in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, concerned with the social issues of the time. Benson Howard's *A Texas Steer* (1896), *The Banker's Daughter* (1873) and *Henrietta* (1887), *A Trip to China Town* (1891) Edward Harrigan's *Dan's Tribulations* (1884) and Benman Thomson's *The Old Homestead* (1886), A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890), *Shore Acres* (1892) and *Griffith Davenport* (1899). A. Herne known for powerful acting and excellent stage management wrote *Margaret Fleming* (1890) his greatest achievement. 'He created an Ibsenesque heroine who was not merely capable by challenging convention but who deftly asserted her

autonomy with marriage'. (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* C. W. E. Bigsby) His plays had clarity and simplicity.

Among the late nineteenth-century dramatists David Belasco, Steele Mackaye and William Gillette were closely associated with the theatre business, Belasco one of the most well known producer also directed his own play. His play *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905) deals with rural California in the mid-19th century Gold Rush Days. Mackaye mostly wrote romantic melodramas, among them the most powerful was *Hazel Kirke* (1880), a melodrama without heroes or villains. The play's theme was familial misunderstanding. The play was also notable for its more natural dialogue. Realistic portrayals of sensational subjects were commonly used in the plays of this period.

Clyde Fitch in the early 1900's wrote *The City* (1909), an entertaining satire using natural dialogues that delved into the evils of shady business and drug addiction. Fitch was also the first American playwright to write a subtle kind of satire. Social tensions in America began to be explored by playwrights leading up to the First World War (1914-1918). William Vaughn Moody's *The Great Divide* (1906), Rachel Crothers' *A Man's World* (1909) and Langdon Mitchell's *The New York Idea* (1906) addressed social issues meaningfully while managing to entertain the audience. The American family, its development and disintegration that dominated the plays of this period also became a recurring theme of playwrights of the 20th Century.

In the early part of the 20th Century there was a new artistic awakening with a host of American playwrights forming an amateur group, the 'Province Town Players', for promoting American Drama and producing new plays exclusively by American playwrights. The efforts of this amateur group set a new course for American theatre in the modern period, while also launching careers of Eugene O' Neill and Susan Glaspell. Based on a journalistic investigation, Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* (1916) was among its first productions. The play's uniqueness comes out with the main character, the wife who is never present on stage. Eugene O' Neill's play *The Hairy Ape* (1922) was the first to introduce expressionism in American Drama. Developed in Germany in the early 20th Century, expressionism was a movement in the visual, literary and performing arts that expressed subjective feelings and emotions rather than depicting reality objectively. In expressionism the artist is not concerned with reality as it appears but presents the inner nature with the emotions aroused by the subject. Concerned with the nature of man and the forces that move him, Eugene O' Neill's plays involved characters on the fringes of society while including speeches in American vernacular for the first time. The other prominent playwrights were John Reed, Louise Bryant, Max Eastman and Ida Ruah, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

In the 1920's the most important plays were professionally produced in New York City stage. The plays of the 1920s and early 1930s were incisive and exciting such as Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson's *What Price Glory* (1924). Some remarkably fine plays were produced such as Eugene O' Neill *Strange Interlude* (1928), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), lightly satirical play in such as Philip Barry's *Holiday* (1928) and S. N. Behrman's *End of Summer* (1936) were produced. Paul Green's *Abraham's Bosom* included African American Characters in his plays. Lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II and composer Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* (1927), a musical production was adapted from a novel of the same name by author Edna Ferber, the first American musical to fully integrate music with meaningful and consistent dialogue.

The economic collapse of the great Depression of the 1930's led to the permanent closure of many theatres in America. The new sound technology in America gave voice to the motion pictures. As a result, the number of theatergoers declined severely in the 1930s. A new wave was seen in the drama of the 1930s that tackled

economic suffering, left wing political ideologies and fears of another world war. Clifford Odet's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) debated the pros and cons of capitalism while *Awake and Sing!* (1935) dealt with the 1930s anxieties. Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* (1934) displayed social conscience.

In the mid-40s the most striking new writings for theatre emerged in the works of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. The latter contributed many psychological plays of disillusion such as *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). Arthur Miller's modern tragedies *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) combined realistic characters and social issues. During the 1950's Miller's chief contributions were *The Crucible* (1953) and *A View from the Bridge* (1955), while Tennessee Williams play *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) received the Pulitzer Prize posthumously. Most famous among new playwrights, William Inge wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950), a realistic play. Late 1950's also saw new African American playwriting with Lorraine Hansberry's well-acclaimed play *Raisin in the Sun* (1959). A major dramatist of the 1960's Edward Albee wrote absurdist plays such as *Zoo Story* (1959) and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) that examined unsympathetically the modern conditions influenced by European playwrights Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco.

The 1990s saw the exciting return of two notable playwrights who, thought critics, had finished their careers. Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* (1994) and Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* (1994) received widespread acclaim with Albee's work winning the Pulitzer Prize while Miller's last play *Finishing the Picture* was produced in 2004. Albee continues to give biting satirical commentaries on modern society in new works such as *The Goat or Who is Sylvia* (2002).

Realism continued to be the primary form of dramatic expression in the 20th century and as the century progressed many talented new dramatists came to the fore with broad issues such as civil rights and the devastation wrought by the AID's epidemic. In the mid-1990s and beginning of 21st Century, block buster musicals eliminated new commercial theatre in the Unites States targetting the younger audience who were attracted more by films, television and computer entertainment. Economic difficulties resulted in plays with single setting and lesser characters that would make them less expressive but also less ambitious. Many playwrights started writing plays with film and television adaptation in mind to reach geographically diverse audience, making the American theatre specialized in its alternative productions.

10.3 ARTHUR MILLER: LIFE AND WORKS

In 1920 when the World War I had come to an end, it was time in America of the great depression that had deeply wounded the American economy and also its psyche. The U.S. prosperity in the 1920s had faced a steep though short decline. Throughout the decade around 600 banks failed along with 20,000 business concerns. Mining, farming and textile industry were on the decline. As a result there was unemployment. It was during this interesting period of history of America that Arthur Miller was born.

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) an American playwright, essayist and author was born of moderately affluent Jewish American parents Isadore and Augusta Miller on October 17, 1915 in Manhattan in New York City. His father was an illiterate immigrant from Poland but came to own a coat manufacturing business employing a thousand workers, which was ruined with the 1929 Wall Street Crash. Thereafter, the family moved to a smaller house in Brooklyn. The sudden change in fortune had a strong impact on Miller. Miller was fortunate enough to withdraw his entire savings of twelve dollars a day to buy himself a bicycle before the United States Bank closed

down. Miller, though, was not very lucky as his bicycle was stolen the same week and he realized that no one was immune from the disaster of Depression.

Because of the effects of Depression, Miller's condition was financially unsound and he could not attend the university in 1932 after graduating from high school. After taking admission at the University of Michigan in 1934 Miller took up a succession of small jobs such as delivery boy, dishwasher, waiter, warehouse clerk, singer in a local radio station, mice attendant in a laboratory, truck driver, tanker, seaman, factory labour, and shop fitter's helper to pay for his tuition.

Miller studied journalism from the University of Michigan where he ran a student newspaper with a group of others and became its reporter as well as night editor of the Michigan Daily that helped him earn money. Arthur Miller was greatly influenced by his critic and teacher Kenneth E. Rowe, of the University of Michigan Drama Department and after reading his book *Write That Play!* there was no looking back for Miller. He wrote one play after another and for two years he succeeded in winning the Avery Hopwood Award given yearly at Michigan for the best original play.

During one of the vacations he went to Chicago and saw the performance of Clifford Odet's play *Awake and Sing*. The play's message 'Life should have some dignity' had a deep and lasting impact on him. Miller wrote his first work *No Villain* for which he won the Avery Hopwood Award. This play is about a small garment manufacturer and his University educated son, Arnold Simon, based on young Arthur. In 1937 Miller wrote another play *Honours at Dawn* which also won the Avery Hopwood Award. This play is about the Depression era, dealing with the hopes and heartbreaks of the Zabriski family. He won several other awards for play writing and with his record of prizes, he had little trouble joining Federal Theater Project, a nation-wide organization established to provide jobs in the theatre to unemployed writers, actors, directors and designers for a salary of \$ 22.77 a week. He had to report at the Federal Theater Project Office everyday and at night he continued writing plays on his own. He completed his play called *Montezuma* that concerned the conquest of Mexico. However the project had to close in 1940 as the congress worried about possible communist infiltration. Miller started working in Brooklyn Navy Yard. He also continued writing radio plays some of which were broadcast on CBS (Columbia Workshop).

On August 5, 1940 Miller married his college friend Mary Slattery, the daughter of an insurance salesman. The couple had two children Jane and Robert. Robert later became director, writer and producer of the 1996 movie version of *The Crucible*. Miller's injury in the left kneecap while playing football in high school exempted him from military service during World War II.

In 1944, Miller wrote *The Man Who had All the Luck*, that was produced in New York. It won the Theater guild's National Award. Despite it being awarded, the play closed after only six performances. The next few years were a difficult time for Miller. He published his first novel *Focus* but the novel was little known. George Abbott's and John C. Holm's *Three Men on a Horse* was adapted by him for radio.

During wartime Miller wrote a play *All my Sons* that was produced at the Coronet Theater in 1947. It was an immediate success and ran for three hundred and twenty-eight performances. Despite receiving criticism for being unpatriotic, *All My Sons* won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and two Tony Awards in the year 1947. This play is about a factory owner who sells faulty aircraft parts during World War II.

In 1948 Miller built a small shed in Roxbury, Connecticut, in which he wrote *Death of a Salesman* within six weeks. The play was premiered on Broadway on

February 10, 1949, at the Morocco Theatre New York City. *The Death of a Salesman* became his best known work winning Tony Award for best play, New York Drama Critics Award and Pulitzer Prize. *Death of a Salesman* ran for seven hundred and forty-two performances.

Miller responded to the growing anti-communist hysteria of the early fifties by writing an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and *The Crucible*, set during 1692 Salem witch trials. In the play Miller likened the situation with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), (a committee of the House of Representatives which set itself to identify present and former communists and so-called fellow travelers in all branches of American life) to the witch hunt in Salem. Though *The Crucible* was unsuccessful at the time of its initial release, running for mere one hundred and ninety seven performances, today it is one of Miller's most frequently produced plays.

In the early fifties Miller joined a group of writers, publishers and journalists whose objective was to write articles attacking the Senator Joseph MacCarthy. No newspaper was willing to publish their articles. The FBI infiltrated their group as a result of which the group broke up. Miller was called before the HUAC in 1956 to identify those who attended the meetings which he refused and as a punishment he was fined and sentenced to prison for contempt of Congress and denied passport to attend the Belgium opening of *The Crucible* in 1954. In 1958 the court of appeal overturned his conviction, ruling that the chairman of HUAC had misled about Miller.

His last play of the 1950s *A View from the Bridge* opened in Broadway in 1955 in a joint bill with one of his lesser known plays, *A Memory of Two Mondays*. The following year Miller revised this one act version play and changed it into a two-act version which Peter Brock produced in London.

In June 1956 Miller divorced his wife Mary Slattery and later that month, married Marilyn Monroe. Miller had met Monroe for the first time in 1951 after which they had a brief affair and kept in touch with each other since then. After his conviction was overturned, Miller started work with his film *Misfits* in which his wife Monroe acted. He wrote this film as a gift for Marilyn Monroe who lost a child in pregnancy. Shortly before the film's premiere the two had already divorced. A year later Marilyn Monroe died of overdose of drugs and on February 1962, Miller married for the third time, Austrian photographer Inge Morath. Their first child Rebecca was born in September the same year followed by their second child Daniel in November, 1966.

In 1964 Miller's next play *After the Fall* was released several years later after his last work. A strongly autobiographical work, it was based on his personal views of his own experiences during his marriage to Monroe. *After the Fall* was premiered at the Anta Theatre in Washington Square Park amidst outrage at putting a Monroe character, called Maggie, on stage. In the same year Miller produced another play *Incident at Vichy* which ran for ninety-nine performances. Miller was politically active throughout his life. In 1965, he was elected International Pen's president, an international writers' organization that spoke in defense of imprisoned writers.

The Price was his most successful play that appeared in 1968 since *Death of a Salesman*. This play was published in a year that was characterized by trauma in Vietnam and assassinations at home. *The Price* is based on two brothers who meet one another after years of hostility and separation.

In 1980 Miller returned to his past by writing a play *The American Clock* that is set during the depression years. In the 1990s Miller wrote plays such as *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* that was produced in 1993 and *The Last Yankee* produced in 1993.

In 1994 he wrote another play *Broken Glass* set in 1938 set in the times of Nazi persecution of the Jews, but relates to a moral and political paralysis recreated in contemporary Europe.

In 2002 Miller was the first U.S. recipient to be honoured with Spain's prestigious Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature. Miller's last play, *Finishing the Picture* was produced in 2004 and depicted the making of *Misfits*.

After Inge Morath's death in 2002 the eighty-nine year old Miller was in love with Agnes Barley, a thirty-four year old artist and intended to marry her after living with her at his Connecticut farm for two years.

Miller died of heart failure at his home in Roxbury, Connecticut, on February 10, 2005 at the age of 89. At the time of his death Arthur Miller was considered one of the greatest American playwrights. Throughout his life Miller remained socially active and wrote with conscience, clarity and compassion. His work is infused with his sense of responsibility to humanity and to his audience.

10.4 MILLER'S MAJOR PLAYS

Death of a Salesman was published in 1949 and is considered a classic of American theatre. This play was a caustic attack on the American Dream of achieving wealth and success without regard for principle. Enthusiastic reviews were written on this play. *Death of a Salesman* was the first play to win three major awards. It received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1949, Tony Award for best play as well as the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play. *Death of a Salesman* helped Miller to become an internationally known playwright.

Death of a Salesman finds the main character Willy Loman in his sixties struggling to come to grips with the fact that his American Dream is unattainable. Willy places great importance on supposed native charm, ability to make friends, stating that once he was known throughout New England, driving long hours but making unparalleled sales, his sons Biff and Happy were the pride and joy of the neighborhood, and his wife Linda was smiling throughout the day. Willy Loman might have been a superb craftsman, but he is forced by the demands of a mechanized world to run in search of financial wealth.

Willy is a traveling salesman for Wagner Company for thirty four years. But as time passes, life for him seems to be slipping out of his control. He has worked hard his entire life and likes to think that he is indispensable to the company in the New England territory. He closes deals with contractors on the phone — since increasing episodes of anxiety and depression are impairing his ability to drive. Soon all of his aspirations fail and he is thrown out of his job as the owner of the firm that did not pay enough for his survival and told him that he could no longer represent the firm in New England because he was doing harm to the company. Loman's fortunes change drastically, he has to depend on loans from his friend Charley to make ends meet. His thirty-four year old son Biff is unable to settle down. The younger son is also on the look out for some job in order to settle in life. Charley on the other hand becomes a successful businessman. Bernard becomes an excellent lawyer.

Witnessing his failure, Willy clings to his sons hoping that they might succeed. Loman cannot accept that his life has been a failure and that Biff is not interested in big business. He decides to commit suicide in the hope that at least the insurance business will help Biff become successful. The play ends with his family and only friend Charley grieving by his grave side.

The play resembles a stream of consciousness account and Miller uses this device to contrast Willy's dreams and the reality of his life. It also helps to contrast the

characters in sympathetic as well as villainous light while it unfolds the story. Miller does not allow the audience to be the permanent judge. Their opinions keep shifting about each of the characters.

The Crucible written in 1952 was first performed on Broadway on January 1953. The play is set during the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials of Salem, Massachusetts. Reverend Paris, a despised local preacher discovers that some young girls were performing a sinful dance with the slave Tituba in the woods. One of the girls was Paris's daughter, Betty who becomes unconscious on being discovered by her father.

The villagers are in panic when they come to know that witchcraft is being practised. Reverend John Hale, an authority on witchcraft is sent for investigation. Abigail Williams the unofficial leader of the group of girls is questioned regarding the incident that took place in the forest. Abigail denies that there was any kind of witchcraft involved, and says that she and the girls were only performing dance. The girls actually lied following Abigail's instructions. Abigail and John Proctor were former lovers while she was working in his house and still she was obsessed with him.

The witch trial begins and Abigail and other girls lie and accuse others of witchcraft. Many villagers are found guilty of denial of witchcraft and are executed. Many women are brought to trial as well including John Proctor's wife. Judge John Proctor has to confess his adulterous relationship in order to save his wife from being hanged based upon the accusations brought by his own former lover. The Proctor's wife lies about the adultery in order to save her husband's name and the Judges believe her. Proctor is given chance to save his life on condition that he names people who practice witchcraft. Proctor chooses to die than to betray his friends and neighbours. The play ends with Proctor being led for execution.

A View from the Bridge is a play written by Arthur Miller in 1955 and was produced as a one act verse drama on Broadway in 1955. In this play Miller takes the subject of illegal immigrants smuggled into the Brooklyn water front from Sicily by the Mafia through friends and relatives familiarly called 'Submarines' The protagonist of the play is Eddie Carbone who, in a passion of jealousy informs on his wife's relatives. He is an Italian American longshoreman who lives with his wife Beatrice and orphaned niece Catherine but as the play moves ahead his feelings for Catherine develops into an unwitting sexual attraction. Beatrice's two cousins Marco and Rodolfo enter America illegally from Italy in the hope for a better life here away from hunger and unemployment. For Eddie 'It's an honour' to give the man refuge, after which Catherine instantly falls for the young and charming Rodolfo.

Eddie Carbone gets jealous and takes out faults with Rodolfo, accusing him of not being right (homosexual). He backs up his argument by using Rodolfo's effeminate qualities such as dress-making, cooking and singing.

When Catherine wants to marry Rodolfo, Eddie in his desperation to split them reveals to the Immigration Bureau that he is giving refuge to two illegal immigrants. Eddie is no longer respected by his friends and family for betraying the men. The elder brother vows revenge on Eddie once he is out on bail. Out on bail, Marco comes to Eddie who draws a knife in order to avenge him.

The play comes to a climax with the fight between Eddie and Marco. Eddie attacks Marco with a knife but stronger Marco turns the blade into Eddie killing him and Eddie dies in Beatrice's arms at the end of the play.

All My Sons opened on Broadway at the Coronet Theatre on January 29, 1947 and ran for 328 performances. The theme of the play is that of moral responsibility in the family, linked to the inner struggle of men in authority during the war. The play begins with a relaxed atmosphere in an American household of Joe Keller's backyard

where neighbours gather on a summer's evening. Ann Deever is supposed to come from New York to visit Chris, Joe Keller's thirty-two years old son. She was previously engaged to Larry, brother of Chris and a pilot by profession. He lost his life in an air crash in the Second World War. Kate Keller his mother refuses to accept that he is no more. Moreover, Ann is Joe Keller's business partner Steve Deever's daughter whose father is jailed for supplying damaged engines to P-40 fighter planes, killing twenty-one pilots. Keller was the one to have instructed Steve Deever to provide damaged engines after repair to the Air Force. On discovering the truth, George her brother comes to take away Ann from the Kellers. Despite knowing the truth Ann still wants to marry Chris. She has a letter that she shows to Kate Keller and Chris that reveals that Larry's death was a suicide. Ashamed of his father's criminal acts, Larry deliberately air crashed his plane and died. Chris had a vague idea about his father's crime in the beginning but once it is confirmed, it horrifies him and he wants to send his father to prison so that he realizes that he is responsible not only to his family but to the society at large. Realising his guilt Joe Keller shoots himself. In this play Miller deals with the consequences of man's dereliction.

10.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to sum up American Drama from the time immigrant settlers occupied American colonies from the 17th century to the 1940s around the period when renowned dramatists, Eugene O'Niell, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller reached profound levels of psychological realism.

10.6 EXERCISE

1. Name the major plays of Arthur Miller.
2. Name the first theatrical performance of America that led to the trial of actors.
3. Examine the growth of American drama during the seventeen, eighteen and nineteenth centuries.
4. How did Henrik Ibsen contribute to the growth of modern American drama?

UNIT 11 *ALL MY SONS*: A DETAILED STUDY

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Structure and Plot of *All My Sons*
- 11.3 Arthur Miller on Drama as Tragedy
- 11.4 *All My Sons*: A Tragedy
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Exercise

11.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit explains:

- the structure and plot of the play *All My Sons*;
- Miller's perspective about tragedy; and
- the play *All My Sons* as a tragedy.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

All My Sons opened at Coronet Theater in January, 1947 and ran for 328 performances. Four years earlier Arthur Miller had read the account of the Truman Committee investigation into allegedly faulty airplane parts manufactured in Ohio. The actual idea of the play came to his mind when he got to know about a family where a daughter had taken her father to the authorities for selling faulty machinery to the army. Miller decided to write the play 'so that even the actual criminal, on reading it, would have to say that it was true and sensible and as real as his life,' (Arthur Miller). *Collected Plays*, Vol-I New York: Viking, 1957) *All My Sons* was extremely popular among the audiences. The success of the play earned great reputation for the author and secured his financial position.

11.2 STRUCTURE AND PLOT OF *ALL MY SONS*

All My Sons is a well constructed and realistic play. It is conventional realism, Ibsenite only in that Miller - as Ibsen so often does - starts in the middle of things and spends most of the play uncovering the facts of the past so that the audience can see the last act consequences in the present.' (Daniel Hoffman *Harvard Guide to American Drama* Gerald Weales 1979. (OUP). The work of Ibsen influenced *All My Sons* structurally as well, for Ibsen had liberally applied the principle of Greek Theatre that stresses the influence of the past on the present. The play is carefully constructed and well knit. It follows the pattern in which there is an appropriate link between previous actions and present consequences. Miller skillfully observes all the three dramatic unities of time, place and action mentioned by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The unity of time limits the action to take place in roughly a single day; unity of place limits it to one general location and the unity of action limits it to a single set of incidents which are related as cause and effect, having a beginning, middle and an end. The play does not cross the time limit of twenty-four hours; thus the unity of time is observed by Miller. The play maintains the unity of place with the entire action taking place in the Keller home in the American town of Detroit. The unity of place and action is also observed in the

play. The action happens in the backyard of the Keller household. This unity owes a great deal to the conduct of a single character, Joe Keller.

The setting of *All My Sons* is designed to suit Keller's 'myopic world view' of not thinking beyond his family interests. ('All My Sons' Steven R. Centola in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby.) The backyard of the Keller home in the outskirts of an American town..... The stage is hedged on right and left by tall, closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere..... At the right, beside the house, the entrance of the driveway can be seen, but the poplars cut off view of its continuation downstage. (pg-1 *All My Sons*) The scenic image successfully hides Keller's secrets, but gradually discloses them as the play proceeds.

The play *All My Sons* is divided into three acts that roughly cover eighteen hours from Sunday morning to the early hours of Monday. The entire action takes place in the backyard of the house of Joe Keller, a rich industrialist. The Keller home includes his wife Kate in her early fifties and their thirty two year old son Chris. Their neighbours who are also their family friends comprise forty year-old Dr. Jim Bayliss, his wife Sue around forty, their eight year-old son Bert, thirty two year old Frank Lubey and his twenty seven year-old wife Lydia.

Miller has skillfully worked on the exposition of the plot that gradually increases dramatic tension as we move ahead in the play. In the first act, Miller gives background information revealing certain facts about the past taking his own time, as the playwright Ibsen did. In act I the play opens with Joe Keller reading the Sunday newspaper, while involved in trivial talks with his neighbour Dr. Jim Bayliss, later joined by another neighbour Frank Lubey. The fallen apple-tree snapped under the wind's fury catches their attention. This scene is significant as it acquaints us with the background of the play, giving a flashback about Larry. The apple-tree was planted to keep Joe Keller's son Larry's memory alive who had been reported missing during the war while flying a mission off the coast of China and had been presumed to be dead. Larry's mother does not believe that Larry is dead and is hopeful that one day he would come back safe. This belief of hers plays a major role in the development of the plot.

A young woman Ann has come to visit the Kellers on Chris' invitation. Ann and Chris are in love and after writing letters to each other for two years, Chris has now invited her in order to propose to her. Chris discloses to his father about his intention of marrying Ann. Keller discourages him to marry Ann, because in the opinion of Chris' mother Kate, Ann is Larry's fiancée. Kate believes that Larry is alive and would turn up any day.

Ann is the daughter of Steve Deever, business partner of Joe Keller who owns a factory manufacturing cylinder heads. An urgent contract comes from the army to supply cylinder heads for aircrafts to be used in war. But it so happens that the whole batch of cylinder heads, produced by the manufacturing firm has developed cracks. Keller calls up Steve Deever asking him to weld the cracks on the cylinder heads and ship them off to the army. The damaged cylinder heads were passed by the factory and shipped out to the army resulting in the death of twenty one pilots. There was a court case against both Joe Keller and Steve Deever. However, during the trial Joe Keller denied his responsibility for the damaged cylinder heads. The court acquitted him while Steve Deever was sent to jail where he is at the time the play opens.

Frank Lubey, one of Keller's neighbours wants to know about Ann's father and enquires about his release on parole. Ann wants to avoid such a question, since she is critical of her father after he was found guilty of fraud. Ann recalls that the neighbourhood had described her father and her family members as murderers after her father was found guilty of causing death of several aircraft pilots in the war on account of defective cylinder heads supplied by him to the army. Even though

Keller was acquitted by a higher court, the people of his locality still believed that Keller had got himself acquitted through underhand means.

Keller is of the opinion that Ann should write to her father explaining to him that during the war the conditions were difficult and no one knew what was actually happening. Ann and her brother George are no longer in touch with their father Steve Deever out of disgust and shame that he was involved in such a dreadful crime.

Ann is surprised at the concern Joe Keller still has for her father and her family. She was under the impression that Keller would have a feeling of revenge and hatred towards her father. Her father had charged Keller of being involved in the supply of the defective cylinder heads. Keller says that he had forgiven her father and had no grievances against him.

Ann is of the opinion that Larry died as a consequence of her father supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. Joe Keller disagrees with her and says that Deever was not responsible for Larry's death. The aeroplane that Larry was flying had not used those cylinder heads, such cylinder heads were used exclusively for P-40 aeroplanes. Giving an account of how the defective parts were supplied, Keller explains that urgent orders had come for supplying cylinder heads to the army. The trucks were already rushing to army depots with cylinders but more orders were pouring in. Steve Deever came across a batch of cylinders that had tiny cracks. Without thinking of the damage these cylinders could cause, he covered the cracks with his tools so that they would be accepted for use. Defending himself, Keller says that though Deever was his partner in the firm, he was not told about the cracks in the cylinder heads or else he could have saved such a disaster from happening by advising Deever to withdraw that batch of cylinders. He defends Steve saying that he cannot be held guilty of murder because he had no intention of murdering anyone.

Joe Keller informs Ann that her brother George had called up from Columbus and wished to speak to her. George's trip to Columbus surprises Ann as he had never gone there all these years to meet his father. Keller is suspicious of George's visit to his father Steve, and Ann's visit to their home. He tells Chris that Ann's father had been blaming him for the supply of defective cylinder heads to the army during the war and then George suddenly went to Columbus to visit his father in jail. Keller is of the opinion that George must be wanting to reopen the whole case about the supply of defective cylinder heads so as to harm the Kellers. Both Joe Keller and Kate get worried and nervous about George's visit to the Keller household in order to meet Ann. Kate reminds Keller that George had become a lawyer and must have gone to meet his father in connection with the defective cylinder heads case. She warns him of George's visit and asks him to be alert and get ready for the worst situation he might have to face. This scene arouses suspicion in our minds that Keller has manipulated certain facts. Act I ends with the audience anticipating that some hidden secrets would be revealed with the arrival of George in Act II.

In Act II the truth about Keller's role in the crime is finally revealed increasing dramatic tension. Act-II begins in the evening of the same day with Chris seeing the broken off apple tree and the family getting ready to go out for dinner. Kate fears that Steve Deever who had alleged in the court till the last day of the trial that Keller had forced him to despatch the defective cylinder heads to the army might get the case reopened with George's help, thus putting them into trouble. Kate then urges Chris that he should help them if any difficulty arose.

Sue enters the scene asking Ann the reason why George was coming to the Keller household. She guesses that his visit was to get Ann married off with Chris. Ann herself has no idea why her brother was coming. Accusing Keller of being guilty

like his partner Deever, Sue says that Keller being smart got himself exonerated in the case by some trick. Ann objects to what Sue says because she believes that her father alone is guilty in the defective arms case. To this Sue replies that Keller is smart enough to make the people of the neighbourhood believe that he is innocent. Ann asks Chris whether his father Joe Keller is guilty to which Chris replies that his father is completely innocent and has been falsely accused in the case.

The arrival of Ann's brother George helps in the further development of the plot and causes conflict between Joe Keller and his son Chris. George reveals the truth about Joe Keller, accusing him of befooling and exploiting his father. Steve Deever was languishing in jail because of Joe Keller. According to George, Steve Deever was informed by the foreman in his factory that the cylinder heads produced had some manufacturing defect. Steve Deever called up Keller to come to the factory immediately. Meanwhile a large number of orders were coming from army authorities on an urgent basis. Instead of coming to the factory Joe Keller asked him to weld the cylinder heads and ship them to the army. Keller said he had flu and was unable to come to the factory but would take full responsibility for the supply of airplane parts. However, during the trial Joe Keller denied his responsibility for the damaged cylinder heads. The court knew that Joe Keller was telling a lie but in the appeal they believed Keller's story, acquitting him while sending Steve Deever to jail.

George then accuses the Kellers to have taken away everything belonging to the Deevers. He says that he will not allow Chris to marry Ann and asks Ann to leave the place with him. After listening to George, Chris confronts his father to know whether he is the culprit. To justify his actions, Keller says that there were a hundred and twenty defective cylinder heads in the factory which he could not discard or he would have got bankrupt. He did not disclose to the army officials that he had in the store damaged cylinder heads. This would make him lose the contract and his business that had taken forty years to build. To avoid such a situation he supplied the defective cylinder heads to the army, confident that the army officials would check the engines before installing them to the aircraft. Keller further says that he was sure that the army authorities would send him a report after checking the engines. By the time he decided to inform them about the cracks in the cylinder heads the damage had already been done. The newspaper headlines read that twenty-one aeroplanes had crashed and the pilots had been killed. The military officers came to his factory to arrest him and he denied the charges keeping in mind his son Chris' future. Keller says if he had let his business to collapse, he would not have been in a position to set up another business at the age of sixty one.

Chris gets furious at this. He accuses Keller of killing his own country men. He was worse than an animal, 'no animal kills his own' (pg-76 *All My Sons*). Chris says that he does not know how to punish Joe. He cries out 'What must I do, Jesus God, What must I do?' (pg-76 *All My Sons*) and Keller says, 'Chris.... My Chris.....' Both of them seem to be helpless and feel miserable.

The play reaches its climax in Act III with dramatic tension building up again. Act III opens with Kate rocking impatiently in her chair waiting for Chris to return home after he disappeared from the house. Kate wants Keller to apprise Chris of the whole situation admitting his mistake once he came back. Kate suggests to him to tell Chris that he is ready to go to prison so that Chris felt happy that his father was willing to repent. According to Kate, Chris would not let Joe go to prison but would rather forgive him. Keller does not agree with her as he feels he had done everything for his family's sake. Kate says that for Chris there is something bigger than one's family and that Keller had broken Chris' heart.

Kate wants Ann to leave the very next morning without Chris and is firm on her belief that her son Larry is still alive. Ann tries hard to make Kate believe that Larry was dead and speaks about Larry's aeroplane crash on the coast of China on

the 25th of November. Ann points out that his plane had not crashed due to engine failure. Kate refuses to believe her. Their future union in marriage is threatened by Kate and in order to save their marriage Ann takes out a letter from her pocket which she had brought as proof of Larry's death and shows it to Kate. After reading the letter that explains the motive of Larry's suicide Kate is not shocked for 'she has always known, while constantly denying, that Larry had died in the war.' (P.56 Steve R. Centola's, 'All My Sons' in C. Bigsby's *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*). Unable to accept the death of her son she has lived in self deception that he was still alive and would come back home some day. Chris who had gone out, comes back after driving around. Chris informs his mother that he is leaving home alone for good and that he is going to Cleveland where he hopes to get a job in a private firm.

Ann wants to leave with Chris but he refuses to take her along. Meanwhile Keller appears on the scene to talk to Chris. Now it has become clear to him that both his wife and his son want him to go to jail. Keller asks Chris if he wanted him to be jailed. He further says that during war time everybody sold their manufactured goods to the government against money. Defending himself he says that everyone tries to make money by all possible methods. Chris says that he had idolised his father but the latter proved himself to be unworthy.

In order to show the letter to Chris, Ann snatches the letter from Kate, giving it to Chris to read. Chris reads the contents of the letter and tells his father that Larry had deliberately killed himself in a crash. He further says that Larry was very upset about his father's involvement in the death of his fellow pilots. Larry intentionally crashed his aeroplane when it became unbearable for him to live with this shame. He had further written that if he had been there at the time of his father's conviction in court, he would have killed him.

After reading the letter Chris tells his father that he should know what is to be done. Keller asks Chris to get the car ready and drive him to the police where he will surrender himself. Kate prevents him from surrendering to the police saying that Larry would not have wanted him to surrender. Keller says that in Larry's opinion the other pilots were also like his sons and so he has to pay the penalty. Kate pleads with Chris not to take his father to jail as she fears that he will die in prison. She reminds Chris that the war is over and the letter has no meaning anymore. Chris disagrees with her.

Keller goes inside the house and a shot is heard from inside the house. Chris enters the house and has no idea that his father has shot himself. Chris comes out inconsolable after seeing his father dead. Kate knows very well that her husband had committed suicide to pay the penalty for his crime. She tells Chris not to feel guilty for his father's suicide but to forget the past and live a new life. The play ends with a tragic scene, Ann running to look for Dr. Bayliss and Chris and Kate are left alone grieving for Joe Keller.

'The play ends with Chris facing with horror his own complicity in his father's self-destruction, and with Keller's death the play forcefully repudiates anti-social behaviour that derives from the myth of privatism in American Society'. Steven R. Centola's ('All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion To Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby).

The minor characters in the play such as Dr. Jim Bayliss, his wife Sue, Bert, Frank Lubey and Lydia contribute to the unity of the plot with their dialogues enhancing the play's realism. Their dialogues contribute to the routine activities of daily life such as the damage caused to the trees that were snapped by the fierce wind, the weather forecast in the newspaper, the poor remuneration which the doctor gets as compared to a film star, a toaster that is out of order, and has to be repaired. The banalities of conversation bring interest to the plot giving it a realistic effect without disturbing the progress of the main plot.

11.3 ARTHUR MILLER ON DRAMA AS TRAGEDY

In his essay, 'Tragedy and Common Man' Miller says that there were very few modern tragedies written because people thought that they were 'fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly' ('Tragedy and the Common Man' in Arthur Miller's *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin The Viking Press 1978 New York) as Aristotle believed. For Aristotle, in a tragic play the protagonist should be a king or someone of high class so that his change in fortune from good to bad can be presented on a big scale. Arthur Miller challenged the belief previously accepted about tragic plays, saying that tragic consciousness existed even in the ordinary people. For him 'the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing, his sense of personal dignity' ('Tragedy and the Common Man' in Arthur Miller's *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin the Viking Press 1978 New York). Arthur Miller believed 'that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were' (Tragedy and the Common Man' in Arthur Miller's *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin The Viking Press 1978 New York). Miller emphasised that main characters in a tragedy should be ordinary people in domestic surroundings to whom the audience will readily relate. The audience's understanding of a tragic play becomes easy with ordinary people playing the main role. A play having a great person as protagonist would involve elevated language, understood only by the upper-class people while the common man would be unable to comprehend the meaning of the play. According to Miller, 'Tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly. The 'tragic flaw' is not exclusively in grand or elevated characters,' it is also present in ordinary people. 'The flaw or crack in the character is 'his unwillingness to remain passive of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status.' ('Tragedy and the Common Man' in Arthur Miller's *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin The Viking Press 1978 New York)

Arthur Miller wrote tragic plays such as *The Crucible*, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. In fact *All My Sons* was Miller's first attempt to write such a tragedy of the common man. His tragedies were associated with the American's belief of a certain form of idealism, that man is the captain of his fate. One such tragedy was 'All My Sons' which was about the high significance of Joe Keller and the resulting actions and consequences. His actions lead to his downfall, making him a tragic character and the play a modern tragedy.

11.4 ALL MY SONS: A TRAGEDY

The play 'All My Sons' deals with the fate of Joe Keller. Though uneducated and a self-made man Keller has committed an atrocious act during World War II. Joe Keller and Steve Deever are partners of a factory that manufactures cylinder heads for aircrafts. During the war they get a contract from the army for supplying to them cylinder heads on an urgent basis. Steve Deever is informed by the foreman in his factory that the cylinder heads that were produced had hairline cracks in them. Steve Deever calls up Keller to come to the factory immediately. Keller says that he would be unable to go to the factory as he was down with flu. Asking him to weld the cylinder heads, he assures Deever that he would take full responsibility for the damaged cylinder heads. These damaged cylinder heads cause twenty-one planes to crash, killing their pilots. Both Deever and Keller are arrested and convicted but at the trial Joe Keller denies responsibility and is exonerated as the blame shifts to Steve Deever who is imprisoned. The main action in the play revolves around this tragic incident.

The ostensible harmony of the house is disturbed three years later with Ann's arrival to the Keller household in order to marry Chris Keller. Situation in the Keller home worsens with the arrival of George, Steve Deever's son and Ann's brother who comes to prevent Ann's marriage with Chris. Kate believes Larry to be still alive though he had gone missing in action during the war. It is this belief of hers that enables her for three years to support her husband Joe Keller and be partner in his crime by concealing her knowledge of the case. George reveals the truth that Keller was the main culprit, responsible for the death of twenty-one pilots and because of him his father is in jail. When confronted by Chris to know whether his father was guilty, Keller justifies his action saying that he took the decision to ship faulty cylinder heads to the army to preserve his business and for the welfare of his family. Joe Keller pursues the American Dream of owning materialistic wealth — a nice home, good job, financial security, car — all are done for the sake for the family. Keller says,

'Chris.... Chris, I did it for you, it was chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance, do ya? (*All My Sons* P.75)

Kate Keller supports her husband's guilt by concealing her knowledge of the terrible crime he had committed fearing that it might break the family unit. It is also ironic that Keller's decision to act for his son and his family is the cause of estrangement between him and Chris. Keller's myopic world - view disallows him to see beyond his family. His claim that there is nothing bigger than his family cuts him off from any kind of relationship with society which is wrong.

The views on morality of both Chris and Larry Keller are a contrast to those of his parents. Chris is disgusted when his father tries to justify his act, saying:

'For me! I was dying everyday and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the god dam business? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you?...' (P.75,76 *All My Sons*)

Larry's letter to Ann reveals that shamed by his father's involvement in fraud and profiteering Larry is compelled to destroy himself deliberately. It is a devastating irony that Joe's attempt to work for the interests of the family results in fraud and the deaths of twenty one pilots. The clash between the ideals of father and his sons finally results in the suicide of Joe Keller.

Denial on the part of most of the characters of the play also contributes towards making the play a tragedy. Joe Keller the chief character himself lied to everybody including his family that he was not involved in supplying defective cylinder heads. His denial in the court despite the assurance given by him to his partner Steve Deever at the time of the shipment landed Deever in jail. To save her husband from going to jail Kate herself lives in denial and self deception. She firmly believes that Larry is alive despite the knowledge of his death because she knows that Larry's suicide is the result of her husband's crime of killing the pilots. Her belief that Larry is alive is beneficial for the peace and harmony in the family. Chris has a vague idea of his father's crime but is unable to accept him as a criminal as he had always looked up to his father and idolised him.

Ann herself chose to deny the truth for three years only to save her relationship with Chris. The facts of the case that Keller had manipulated to prove himself clean was also known to the neighbours but they pretended that he was honest 'and they accepted him back into their social life'. (P.167 'Arthur Miller' *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* C.W. E Bigsby)

In spite of being uneducated, Joe Keller is a hardworking person and a successful business man. An honest worker and a friendly and polite person he likes to socialise with everyone. But he has a flaw or weakness. This in turn causes him to act wrongly. His tragic decision to ship defective cylinder heads that killed twenty-one pilots changes him into a despised character. His love for his family and his unwillingness to become bankrupt forces him to ship the faulty cylinder heads to the army. His wrong decision was due to a 'tragic flaw' in his character that led Larry to commit suicide which in turn caused him to commit suicide. Realising his guilt that the pilots were all his sons, Keller shoots himself towards the end of the play, creating for him sympathy in the audience.

Keller's act of suicide at the end of the play is tragic in a number of senses: he is unable to cope with the estrangement between him and his son; at the same time his death is designed to spare Chris any further embarrassment at what his father has done, etc. The conflict between morality, denial of the characters, the guilt of killing pilots who were all his sons and finally Joe Keller's realisation that there can be no real forgiveness for his actions point towards the state of affairs in the modern world.

All My Sons is considered a modern tragedy because of the creation of the chief character as tragic and how his actions lead to several tragic consequences.

11.5 LET US SUM UP

In the first section of this unit we have discussed the structure and plot of *All My Sons* while in the second section we get to know Miller's views on tragedy and why the play *All My Sons* is primarily called a tragedy.

11.6 EXERCISE

1. How does George's arrival to the Keller household help in the development of the plot in Act II?
2. How is Larry's letter instrumental in forcing Keller to realise his guilt?
3. Does Kate know about Keller's guilt? If yes, why does she conceal the facts from others?
4. What is Miller's view on tragedy?
5. Why is *All My Sons* considered a tragedy?

UNIT 12 THEMATIC CONCERNS IN *ALL MY SONS*

Structure

12.0 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

- 12.1.1 Theme of Social Responsibility
- 12.1.2 Problem of Chris's Marriage as Theme
- 12.1.3 Idealism as Theme
- 12.1.4 Father-Son Relationship as Theme
- 12.1.5 Actions and its Consequences as Theme
- 12.1.6 Mother-Son Relationship as Theme

12.2 Let Us Sum Up

12.3 Exercise

12.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses in detail various themes in the play *All My Sons* such as social responsibility, marriage, idealism, father-son relationship, actions and their consequences and mother-son relationship.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In *All My Sons* we come across several themes, the theme of social responsibility is the single major theme while there are several other themes juxtaposed with the major one. The relatively minor themes are interwoven in such a way with the major theme that they have become an integral part of the play.

12.1.1 Theme of Social Responsibility

The play *All My Sons* has a single major theme — the theme of social responsibility. It emphasizes the importance of a man's duty towards society and his country before his duty to his family. The play brings out the tragic consequences of a man's mistake of becoming rich and providing comfortable and luxurious life to his family at the cost of society. Joe Keller wants to fulfill the American Dream that goes back to the early puritan settlers in America who came with the aim to establish New Jerusalem, that practically meant establishing an economic civilization in the wilderness of American continent. In due course of time however the achievement of success was through manipulation and disregard for moral values. Keller merely believes in the economic interpretation of the American Dream where values and morality take the back seat. Joe Keller's dream is confined to his family; his ultimate goal being to look after the comforts of his family. This obsession makes him dupe his own friend and partner Steve Deever. He is inspired by the myopic vision of the 'American Dream' This meant to become successful by manipulation and duplicity. He believes that to survive in this world of competition one has to be successful alone. The fear of failure leads him to betray not only his friend but also his own country.

Joe Keller, a manufacturer of aircraft engines had received an urgent contract from the army to supply cylinder heads for aircrafts to be used in war. But it so happened

that the whole batch of cylinder heads produced by the manufacturing unit had developed cracks. On the day the urgent order came Joe Keller was at home, while his business partner Steve Deever was in the manufacturing unit. Steve Deever called up Joe Keller to inform him about the hairline cracks in the cylinder heads discovered by him in the factory. Joe Keller could have asked Steve Deever to withhold the supply of these defective cylinder heads, but he felt that putting a halt to the supply of the damaged cylinder heads would lead to a huge financial loss. A hundred and twenty defective cylinder heads that the factory had manufactured were damaged and discarding them and making new ones would lead to a lot of delay as also to the termination of their contract. Moreover they would not be able to meet the demands of the army who needed the cylinder heads immediately for the ongoing war.

Owing to the financial pressure and the obsession of becoming rich, Keller risked shipping the faulty parts of the cylinder heads. Keller could not bear to see his business collapse that had taken forty years of struggle to build it. Keeping his personal and family interests in mind he called up Steve Deever asking him to weld the cracks on the cylinders and ship it out to the army. Keller told him that he was down with flu and would not be coming to the factory, but would take full responsibility for supplying the damaged cylinders. Later defending his action, Keller tells his son that he thought that the authorities would send him a report of the damaged cylinder heads after they themselves had tested them. Twenty one pilots were dead in consequence as their aircrafts crashed. Both Steve Deever and Joe Keller knew that the defective cylinder heads would put the lives of the pilots in danger but they wanted to make profit without bothering about the consequences. Keller disregards his social responsibilities and seeks his own material interests at the cost of other people's lives. For Joe Keller the duty towards his family is his priority; he makes a wrong choice and the result is disastrous. Keller insists that his own values are those of the American capitalist society that emphasises achieving success by economic gain in this land of opportunity. As he asks, 'Who worked for nothing in that war? When they work for nothing, I'll work for nothing. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clear? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clear? Half the goddamn country is gotta go if I go.' (*All My Sons*, p- 87) Joe Keller places his commitment to his immediate family above his wider responsibility to the society at large.

12.1.2 Problem of Chris's Marriage as Theme

One of the minor themes of the play is the problem of Chris's marriage. Kate Keller is of the view that her son Larry would return some day from the war that had ended three years ago. Larry went to the war as a fighter pilot and had been reported missing. For all practical purposes he was presumed to be dead. Steve Deever's daughter Ann had been in love with Larry and was engaged to him before he went to fight in the war. But after the news of Larry going missing, Ann had accepted the fact that he was no more. Larry's brother Chris is in love with Ann. After his brother was reported to be killed in the war, Chris desires to marry Ann. He keeps in touch with her through letters and later invites her to his house in order to propose to her. Ann comes to the Keller household in response to Chris's invitation and agrees to marry him. Their idyllic set up gets disturbed with Chris' invitation to Ann to visit the Keller household. The arrival of Ann to the Keller household opens up several questions that had been left unanswered for three years, leading to the downfall of Keller and the collapse of the Keller family. Her arrival after a long interval connects the present with the past and actions with consequences.

While everyone in the Keller household believes that Larry is dead, Kate persists in believing that Larry is alive and would come home one day. Joe Keller knows

Chris's intention of inviting Ann home but he tells Chris that his mother would not agree to this marriage because she believes that her son Larry is still alive and Ann is Larry's fiancée. Kate is already suspicious of Ann's arrival to her house and when she learns that Chris wants to marry Ann she does not approve of it, as for her to agree for their marriage would mean the confirmation of Larry's death which in turn would prove her husband's complicity in the crime of killing twenty-one pilots. However, Ann is willing to marry Chris as she is convinced that Larry is dead. The Apple tree that had fallen down by the fierce wind on the day of Ann's arrival reinforces her belief that the coincidence has some hidden meaning. Kate refuses to agree with both Chris and Ann's firm view that Larry is dead.

The arrival of George in the Keller household further complicates the situation. George had come to the Keller household to prevent his sister's marriage to Chris after he learnt about certain facts about the case in which his father had been convicted and Keller had been exonerated after meeting his father in prison in Columbus. On arrival at the Keller household, George takes up the matter in order to expose Keller's complicity in the case. He tells his sister Ann that he would not allow her to marry Chris, the son of a man who ruined their father's life.

Kate wants Ann to leave with George because she still believes that Larry is alive and Ann should wait for Larry's return. Chris makes it clear that Ann would not leave the house and that he would marry Ann because Larry is dead. Kate says that Larry is alive and if everyone believes he is dead then he has been killed by his father. She says that a father never kills his son, so Larry must be alive. In spite of knowing that Larry is dead, Kate lives in self-deception that Larry will return. "To justify her conviction, she adopts a blind faith in religion and obstinately argues that 'God does not let a son be killed by his father'" (*Collected Plays* P-114). In order to justify that he has not killed Larry, Keller says that Larry could not have been killed by engine failure because he was not flying P-40 but some other airplane. Chris is suspicious about his father's role in the supply of damaged cylinder heads and asks him whether he was responsible for the death of the other pilots. Keller tries to hide the fact from his son Chris but reveals the truth when Chris threatens to tear him to pieces.

Keller admits his guilt saying that if the cylinder heads had not been shipped out to the army he would have become bankrupt. To save his factory from ruin he had no choice but to supply the defective cylinder heads to the army. He says that he had visualized the repercussions but he thought that the army would check before bringing them into use and report to him about their malfunctions if any. Shocked with his father's arguments to defend himself, Chris shouts at him for having endangered the lives of twenty-one pilots. Chris feels miserable and helpless at the crime his father has committed.

Chris wants to move out to earn his own living away from his parents. He refuses to be a part of the fraud by living on the profits of his father's business made by wrong means. Ann offers to accompany Chris, but he refuses to take her along because Kate has made Chris feel guilty of marrying Ann. Kate objects to Ann's marriage with Chris saying that he will have to wait for Larry to return and if Chris married Ann he would always be unhappy because he would be feeling guilty all the time that he had married a girl belonging to Larry.

Ann emphatically says that Larry died after his aeroplane crashed off the coast of China on the 25th of November which was not due to engine failure. Refusing to believe her, Kate accuses Ann of lying. In order to save her relationship with Chris, Ann shows Kate the letter from Larry, a proof of his death that he had written to her on the last day of his life. Kate was not shocked by the letter for she already knew the truth. Chris also had a vague idea about his father's crime. Kate on one hand could not accept the death of her son Larry, as this would lead her husband's

guilt to be proved. Chris on the other hand did not want to accept his father's crime as he had idolized and respected him. In the letter Larry had written to Ann that he had come to know through the newspaper of his father being convicted for supplying defective cylinder heads that had killed a large number of pilots. Ashamed of his father's crime, he was ending his life by letting his aircraft to crash. Ann Deever also had been living in denial after she received Larry's letter. She knew about Keller's guilt but does not reveal to anyone until she is compelled to do so to save her relationship with Chris.

12.1.3 Idealism as Theme

Another minor theme juxtaposed with the main theme in the play *All My Sons* is the theme of idealism. Chris has an idealistic bent of mind. He feels guilty in even wanting to marry Ann and settling down to lead a blissful and comfortable life while all the men under his command have been killed in the course of the war. These soldiers had repeatedly proved by their actions that they were real human beings. Chris feels guilty of having survived the war while the other soldiers died. He tries to console himself by thinking that the soldiers under his command were sacrificing their lives for a noble cause. In his opinion, by giving up their lives these soldiers were helping in changing the world into a better place. But when the war ended and he came back home he saw to his shock that nothing had changed in the world around him. He found the same kind of selfishness, competition to make money and the desire to fulfil the 'American Dream' as he had observed before the war. The existing situation makes Chris feel guilty for the people who had given their lives in vain as nothing had changed in the world. Chris felt ashamed of everything around him. He was ashamed of looking at his cheque-book, or driving his new car or looking at the new fridge that was bought for the house. He feels awkward to use these comforts and is also hesitant to marry Ann. In the war he had seen men having a bonding among themselves while here people were driven by their selfish motives.

Chris's idealistic personality influences Jim Bayliss to such an extent that he wants to give up his medical practice for medical research. The idea of medical research upsets his wife Sue who accuses Chris of misleading her husband and filling his mind with wrong notions. Medical research had given immense satisfaction to Jim making that particular period of his life much happier. But he had to discontinue with his research to please his wife Sue for whom materialistic comforts mattered more.

Chris says, 'The business! The business doesn't inspire me'. (*All My Sons* Pg-15) It is against his ideology to enter his father's business that had been built by fraudulent means. He fears that he might also follow the success-code of society. Chris's idealistic qualities even compel his father to realize the enormity of his crime of killing twenty-one pilots. Joe Keller is forced by Chris's idealism to realize his social responsibilities. In result he kills himself as a punishment for his crime of being involved with killing twenty one pilots.

12.1.4 Father-Son Relationship as Theme

Another minor theme interwoven with the main theme in the play *All My Sons* is father-son relationship. Keller says, 'there's nothing he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he's my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son.....Nothing bigger than that..... I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!' (*All My Sons* P-81).

Chris has a high opinion of his father Joe Keller. He considers him as an infallible father figure. He is very close to him and has complete trust in him. Keller is the first person in whom Chris confides his marriage plans with Ann. Chris convinces his father to support him in the fight that involves Kate who still thinks of Ann as

Larry's fiancée. Joe Keller does not want to interfere in the complex matter: he thinks that Chris' marriage is his own affair and he is also worried that his wife Kate would not like the idea of Chris marrying Larry's fiancée. Keller is a friend more than a father to Chris. Giving him friendly advice Keller says that Chris should first take Ann's opinion in planning his marriage. Confiding with him Chris says that from the letters he had been receiving from Ann he is of the opinion that she has forgotten Larry completely. Chris expects him to take his side if his mother refuses to allow the marriage threatening to leave the house and live somewhere else if he is not given consent to marry her. Keller is shocked to hear his decision to quit home. He is worried about their family business that he had built for Chris. Chris blackmails his father saying that he would stay back to take charge of the family business only if he is allowed to marry Ann.

Chris refuses to believe that his father is guilty when Ann tells Chris that she heard from Sue that the neighbours think that Joe Keller has manipulated in the case of supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. Defending his father he says he would never have forgiven his father if his father had been found guilty of fraud. Chris trusts his father and tells Ann that he is innocent in the case but has been falsely accused.

The arrival of Ann's brother George gives rise to conflict between Chris and Keller. Revealing the truth George says that Keller is the main culprit in the damaged cylinder head case and had deceived Steve Deever. Chris objects strongly to George's accusations of his father having duped his partner Steve Deever. George says that the court had passed the judgment without knowing the cunningness of Joe Keller but Chris defends him saying he knows his father very well and that Joe Keller was not guilty of supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. Chris again blatantly denies George's accusations of his father being responsible for supplying defective cylinder heads. When George asks for Chris' permission to talk to Keller, Chris asserts that his father has done nothing wrong, and he knows what reply his father would give to his questions. Coming under pressure from George, Chris breaks the semblance for family harmony maintained all this while, questioning his father Keller about his role in the sordid business transaction. Justifying himself Keller says that financial pressure and his duty towards his family compelled him to supply the damaged cylinder parts.

The relation between father and son collapses with the clash of their principles. Joe Keller believes that nothing is bigger in the world than one's family and nothing is more important than a son's relationship with the father. Justifying his actions Keller tries to convince Chris saying, 'Chris....Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance do you?' (*All My Sons* P-75) Chris has a different set of ideals. In his view there is a larger world outside his family and one has a certain responsibility beyond one's family. In Chris' opinion all the pilots killed in the war were also his sons. Defending himself of his actions Keller says that he has supplied the defective cylinder heads to the army to save himself from bankruptcy. He did not want to be out of his business which had taken him forty years to build; he was already sixty-one and was in no position to build up another business if he allowed his business to collapse. He says he did all this for Chris' sake, to protect his future interests and to ensure his family's survival. Further defending his actions Joe Keller says that there was no harm in making money and that everyone else earned money by all possible methods during the war. Chris' character is contrary to his father's character. The conflict between Chris and Joe Keller arises from Chris' consciousness towards social responsibility while Keller is insensibly following the American Dream. Chris is ashamed to know of his father's principles and says that he had always put his father on a high pedestal but now he had fallen in his estimation.

Chris says that he had judged Keller not as a man but as his father. Chris is furious to hear from his father that he had put the pilots' life at stake for his family's sake. Chris had been risking his life daily while fighting in the war and had seen soldiers under his command at the war perishing daily while Keller had ignored the interests of the country and worked for his selfish motives. He lashes at him furiously,

.... 'What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you?'..... (*All My Sons* p.76)

Chris does not know how to punish Joe. He feels helpless and miserable.

Larry's letter finally makes Keller realize that there is something bigger than the family. The letter reads that Larry could not live with the shame of his father being involved in the death of the pilots. Keller says, 'sure, he was my son but I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were... (*All My Sons* p-89)'. Keller punishes himself by shooting himself on realizing that he was wrong in seeing only his family while both his sons Chris and Larry are right in seeing the larger family. Chris holds himself responsible for his father's self-destruction.

Keller wants to rename the business for Chris from 'J.O. Keller incorporated' to 'J.O. Keller and Son', but Chris is uneasy with the proposition. Keller suspects that Chris is ashamed of their money and he tries to convince him that he has earned them morally.

Unlike Chris-Keller relationship, George's relation with his father improves from callousness to that of a dutiful son as the play proceeds. George disowns his father Steve Deever thinking him to be the main culprit in the defective cylinder case. He snaps his relationship with his father as he himself is an idealist like Chris who cannot tolerate his father's involvement in the crime of killing twenty- one pilots while working on his personal profit and looking after the welfare of his family. George comes to know about the truth after his meeting with his father in the prison when he went to inform him of Chris' marriage with Ann. Convinced by his father's version of the case he visits the Keller household to expose Keller's crime and prevent Ann's marriage with Chris. George's accusations against Keller are rejected by the Keller family and also by Ann. Though George does not succeed in convincing them, the sincere efforts of a dutiful son do bring disturbance to the peaceful existence of the Keller family.

12.1.5 Actions and their Consequences as Theme

Another theme that is integrated with the main theme is actions and their consequences. Joe Keller, manufacturer of aircraft cylinder heads had been charged with the supplying of defective equipments that led to the death of twenty-one pilots. It was his decision to ship the faulty cylinder heads to the army, yet he denies his responsibility for his actions at the trial and the blame shifts to Steve Deever his partner. While his partner is convicted, he is exonerated, thus re-establishing his business successfully and winning back the respect of his neighbours. Despite suspicions that he is guilty, they apparently accept him back in their social life. But relief at his acquittal lasts only for three years. At the time the play begins, Ann, the daughter of Steve Deever arrives at the Keller household to get married to Chris Keller. Kate refuses to allow the marriage between Chris and Ann as agreeing to their marriage would mean that she has accepted the death of her son Larry with whom Ann was engaged. Acceptance of her son's death would also mean linking Larry's death with her husband's guilt. Keller is nervous and frightened once he gets to know that George who is a lawyer was on his way to the Keller household after visiting his father Steve Deever in Jail. George's arrival to the Kellers further complicates matters as he comes to the Kellers to know the truth of the defective

cylinder case from Joe Keller. After visiting his father in jail, George now believes that Joe Keller is equally responsible for the death of the pilots. He wants Ann to break off the engagement with Chris and return with him to New York. Though he fails to get the facts out of Keller, Kate Keller accidentally lets out the secret by the slip of her tongue that Joe 'hasn't been laid up in fifteen years'. In order to protect her husband from being proved guilty she reiterates her faith in the theory of Larry being alive because if he's dead Joe Keller has killed him and God does not let a son to be killed by his father. Chris angrily confronts his father, who tries hard to defend his actions as 'business'. Justifying his acts Keller explains that one works for forty years and in one moment with one failed shipment, the contracts get cancelled and one loses everything. He had thought that the army would check the engine heads before bringing them into use, and he would send him their reports. He would then warn them. But it was too late and the disaster had already taken place. Chris is flabbergasted that his father knowingly put the lives of pilots at stake. But his father says that he had done for Chris, for his family and his business. Keller had acted within the profit orientation of capitalism. Wartime profiteering and the pursuit of business profit beyond humanity was part of the American capitalist system. And Keller was one of thousands of men caught up in the existing situation making a choice according his own values. Keller works for the interests of the family, otherwise he would have lost his business and his family would have landed in poverty. Chris is disgusted and ashamed of his father's choice, ignoring the larger social and cultural values. Larry's letter that is revealed by Ann after she fears that her relation with Chris is threatened brings out Larry's intention of committing suicide because of her father's actions. Stunned by the consequences of his actions that have led his son Larry to commit suicide and the guilt of killing the pilots and finally understanding that in the eyes of Larry and in a symbolic moral sense all the dead pilots were 'all his sons', he shoots himself to pay the penalty for his actions. Keller's decision to commit suicide at the end of the play comes as a direct response to his realization that the pilots who died as a consequence of his actions were 'all his sons'

12.1.6 Mother-Son Relationship as Theme

One of the minor themes again juxtaposed with the main theme is the mother-son relationship. Kate is a dominant figure in the Kate-Chris relationship. Chris's closeness to his dad is more evident in the play *All My Sons* than with his mother Kate though he cares for his mother and she is a loving mother to him. Ann's visit to the Keller household makes Kate suspicious that she might have come to marry Chris. Kate believes that Larry is alive and will return someday and marry Ann. Both Ann and Chris try to explain to Kate that it is ridiculous to wait for a man who had been missing for three years. Kate had known that her husband was guilty of shipping the defective cylinder heads but had kept the secret to herself. She lives in an illusion that Larry is alive and will return someday. Her son Larry being very close to her heart, she cannot come to terms with his loss. Her irrational belief is beneficial for the family unit and her false hope of his return strengthens her. Kate disagrees for the marriage of Chris and Ann because giving her consent to their marriage would mean that she would have to accept Larry's death which in turn would lead to the revelation of her husband's crime of killing twenty-one pilots so she still waits for Larry's return. Chris finds it ridiculous to wait for someone who has been missing in action for three years. Chris is of the opinion that his mother is simply harboring a wrong notion. In his opinion she is the only woman in America who is still waiting for her son to return.

Being aware of her husband's guilt in the case of supplying defective cylinder heads, a worried Kate asks Chris to protect both her husband and herself. She fears that Steve and George might re-open the case because on the last days of the trial, Steve Deever persisted in alleging in the court that Keller had forced him to dispatch the defective cylinder heads to the army.

Both Chris and Kate are living in a state of denial of Keller's guilt; as a result their viewpoints are different on many issues. Chris disagrees with Kate's view of Ann being inwardly hostile to the Keller family because of her father. While Kate insists that Ann is still waiting for Larry's return, Chris disagrees with her as he knows very well that Ann is in love with him. Kate does not like the idea of Ann staying with them while her brother George leaves. She wants that both George and Ann should leave together. Chris makes it clear to Kate that Ann was not going anywhere. Chris calls Frank insane for believing in astrology and being certain that Larry was alive while Kate trusts Frank and disagrees with Chris.

Both Chris and Kate knew about the defective cylinder case but kept it to themselves trying to hide the fact from each other so that the family could function in harmony. Chris is suspicious of his mother's knowledge about the truth of the defective cylinder heads case when George accuses Kate of telling lies that her husband Keller had not suffered from illness in the last fifteen years and later his father modifies her statement saying that he had suffered from flu. Kate says that it had slipped her mind.

Chris is furious to hear from his mother that she has packed Ann's bag so that she leaves with her brother George. Chris makes it clear to his mother that Ann would not be leaving and that if Ann did not have any place in this house, he would go away from his house as well. Chris emphatically says that Larry is dead so he would marry Ann. Chris wants to go ahead with his marriage plans in spite of his mother telling him that she would not allow the marriage to take place and that everybody in the house must wait for Larry's return. Hinting that Keller is responsible for Larry's death, she says that Larry is alive and that if Larry is dead, then Larry has been killed by Joe Keller. And a father never kills his son, therefore, Larry must be alive. Taking cue from her statement Chris asks his father about the case and Keller is forced to come out with the truth of the case.

Kate's concern for her son is obvious in her restlessness following Chris' disappearance after Keller's acceptance of his guilt in the case. Advising her husband Joe, she asks him to tell Chris that he is ready to go to prison in order to pay for his guilt in the case. She is sure that it would satisfy Chris and he would forgive his father. Here Kate judges him wrongly.

Kate acts as a mediator between Keller and her son after Chris refuses to talk to his father once he comes to know about Keller's fraud. Joe asks Kate to convey to Chris that he had spoiled Chris and that he should have let him earn his own livelihood from the time he was ten years old, to make him realise that it was not easy to make money in this world. He further says that he would not ask Chris' forgiveness because he had committed the crime for the interests of his family. Talking about Chris' ideals, Kate says that for Chris the interests of the nation were bigger than the family.

Kate makes Chris feel guilty of his decision to marry Ann by reiterating that Larry was alive and that Chris would never have a happy marital life if he married Larry's fiancée Ann. Kate's disapproval for their marriage compels Ann to show Larry's letter written to her on the last day of his life. The contents of the letter do not shock Kate as she has been aware of her husband's complicity in the damaged cylinder heads case. Ann has to snatch the letter from her in order to show it to Chris as Kate tries to prevent Chris from reading the letter. Chris reads Larry's letter that is the proof of the circumstances in which Larry had killed himself. Joe Keller asks Chris to drive him to the authorities so that he can surrender himself. Pleading with Chris not to hand him to the authorities, she says that if Chris would take Keller to jail, he would be killing Joe. Trying to save her husband from going to jail, she conveniently tells Chris that Larry's letter had no meaning as the war was over. Chris then asks his mother if Larry was not important to her any more. He

makes both Joe and Kate realize that it is not enough to feel sorry, they should have a certain responsibility towards society and the nation. Kate had all this while kept repeating that Larry is alive in order to conceal her husband's guilt. And once Larry's letter comes out with the truth, she begins pleading with Chris not to take her husband away because he would not live long.

After her husband shoots himself inside the house, Kate consoles Chris like a loving mother telling him not to take the blame on himself. She asks him to be strong, to forget the past and to look forward to the future.

12.2 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the themes in *All My Sons* in detail. After reading this unit we are clear about the main issues that Arthur Miller conveys to us through this play.

12.3 EXERCISE

1. What is the major theme of the play *All My Sons*?
2. Write a short note on the theme of actions and their consequences.
3. How is the character of Chris contrary to that of his father?
4. Briefly discuss the various themes of the play *All My Sons*?

UNIT 13 CHARACTERISATION IN *ALL MY SONS*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Major Characters
 - 13.1.1 Joe Keller
 - 13.1.2 Chris Keller
 - 13.1.3 Kate Keller
 - 13.1.4 Ann Deever
 - 13.1.5 George Deever
- 13.2 Minor Characters
 - 13.2.1 Jim Bayliss
 - 13.2.2 Sue Bayliss
 - 13.2.3 Frank Lubey
 - 13.2.4 Lydia Lubey
 - 13.2.5 Bert
- 13.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.4 Exercise
- 13.5 Suggested Readings

13.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will be discussing:

- the development and significance of all the major characters; and
- the development and significance of the minor characters.

13.1 MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Play *All My Sons* has major characters such as Joe Keller, Chris Keller, Kate Keller, Ann Deever and George Deever being central to the action of the play.

13.1.1 Joe Keller

Critic Paul Blumberg in his article 'Work as Alienation in the Plays of Arthur Miller' in *Arthur Miller: New Perspectives* edited by Robert A. Martin says 'Joe Keller, manufacturer, and central figure in *All My Sons*, has a moral perspective no larger than the fence that surrounds his factory or the grass growing evenly around his own house. Joe Keller is not a selfish, disagreeable or greedy industrialist; he is, really, an ignorant, good-natured and kindly fool, whose love for his wife and family is genuine and unselfish'.

Joe Keller the chief character of the play in his sixties is an amicable, warm person who loves social life. A self-made man with no education to fall back upon, he still manages to set up a successful business after forty years of hard work. He had struggled to earn his livelihood from the age of ten and as a result knows the value of money. A man with little intellect, he lacks common sense. Every simple thing makes him wonder. He has values that are old-fashioned and judgments based on his experiences. A loving father to his sons, Keller feels honoured to have sons, but having lost one of them in the war, he wishes he had no sons so that he would

not have to send them to fight in the war. War has changed his opinion and ideas. Keller is fun-loving, jovial and becomes a child while interacting with children. He makes friends with eight year-old Bert, the son of Frank and Lydia who equally like him.

A family man, Keller has great concern and affection for his wife. It disturbs him whenever Kate is upset. Keller is solicitous for his wife having to work in the kitchen whenever the maid servant is absent. He is anxious about his wife's belief that Larry is alive and would be back one day. Keller does not want to interfere much in Chris' choice of his bride for he believes that marriage is entirely one's own affair; however he is concerned that Kate would not like the idea of Chris marrying Larry's fiancée who still believes that Larry would return someday. Concerned about his wife's sentiments, Keller does not want his son to get married to Ann as Kate would not approve of it. After knowing Chris' decision to quit home if Kate disapproves his marriage with Ann, Keller is worried about the future of his business that had taken him his whole life to establish.

In spite of the geniality and warmth, the tragic flaw in Keller's character allows him to betray his partner Steve Deever. His neighbours know about his manipulation of his acquittal but have apparently included him in their social circle. Keller is proud of the fact that his self-confidence, guts and the proof document of his innocence have gradually allowed them to forgive him. His son Chris is proud of his father who has faced the difficult times with courage so much so that Chris wants his name to be changed as Joe McGuts, for he is a tough man who has shown guts. Keller is glad that he had won confidence of the local people, Chris, Kate and Ann and does not let anyone have an inkling that he was involved in the supply of defective cylinder heads as much as Steve Deever.

After having wronged Steve Deever, Keller still shows his concern for him, asking George about his father's health and whether he still has the old-heart trouble. Keller sympathizes with Steve saying 'A little man makes a mistake and they hang him by the thumbs; the big one become ambassadors'. (*All My Sons* p.-67) To Ann's question whether he has any grievance against her father for dragging him in the defective cylinder heads case, Keller replies that he believes in the policy of forgiving and forgetting and had no grievances against him. In order to reduce his guilt, Keller wants to help Deever re-establish himself once he is out of jail.

Confronted by Chris, Keller is compelled to reveal the truth of the case. Keller gives account of the entire incident of the supply of defective cylinder heads to the army, implicating Steve Deever as the main accused. To justify his acts, Joe says that he had supplied the defective cylinders to save himself and the family from those of bankruptcy; otherwise, he would have to discard the defective cylinder heads and as a result his business that took him forty years to build would collapse in seconds. Being ignorant, he had never thought that the engine heads would be fixed in the aircrafts without being checked and before a report sent to him about the status of the engines. Keller is no 'cynical profiteer, deliberately reducing the margin of safety in order to increase the margin of profit. Miller sees him as the simple man who has got on by energy and will power but who is hardly clever enough to know how he has done it.' (P.-26 'Three Yearly Plays' in *Miller: A study of his Plays* Dennis Welland, Eyre Methuen London.1979) 'As with most of Miller's characters, there is no vice in him, only littleness and his form of myopia. He is genuinely unable to visualise the public consequences of what was for him a private act.' (Pg-26 'Three Yearly Plays' in Dennis Welland, Eyre Methuen's *Miller: A Study of his Plays*. London 1979.) Trying to fulfill the roles of a father and husband, Joe Keller sees an obligation towards his family and a father's duty towards his son to work for their future interests. Keller believes that there is nothing bigger than one's family and for him father-son relationship is above all relationships. Like all men, he too has his own material interests and strives to work

for the monetary gains of his family. Like other people he is not bothered about the damage to society that he brings while ensuring economic stability to his family. Keller's values are no different from those of any ordinary man living in the American capitalist society where there was a maddening competition in business. Being a practical man, Keller is unable to live up to the expectations of his son Chris, an idealist.

The letter written by Larry reveals that he committed suicide by allowing his plane to crash, shamed by his father's involvement in fraud and profiteering. Keller finally understands the disastrous implications of his actions. He realises in the end the responsibility he had to all twenty-one pilots who lost their lives and that there is no real forgiveness for his act. For him his suicide is the only way he can repay for his crime and escape from guilt. It would also save his son Chris from further humiliation. Joe Keller has a tragic end after he makes a wrong choice between the interests of the family and those of the nation. He is a flawed character who cannot be considered a ruthless and harsh character but someone with whom the audience can empathize and whom they can forgive.

13.1.2 Chris Keller

Chris Keller, the son of Joe Keller is a thirty-two year old well-built man who loves to keep himself informed of the latest publications of books and never misses to read the book section of the newspaper though he never buys those books. In the battlefield, Chris was called Mother McKeller in his battalion because he cared for everyone and was kind and sympathetic towards all of them. Returning from the war as a hero, Chris works for his father.

Chris is not fond of the company of women and does not mix with them except Ann, his only woman friend who had lived as a neighbour during childhood. After receiving several letters from Ann, he is convinced that she desires to marry him and has forgotten Larry completely. He still wants to clear his doubts by discussing with Ann and thereafter wants to convey his plans to his mother. A straightforward guy, Chris decides to quit his house and family if he is not given consent by his mother to marry Ann. He is willing to stay with his parents and take charge of the business, if only his father supports him to marry Ann.

Chris knows to deal with his mother with patience in order to please her to agree for his marriage with Ann. Kate does not give up her hope of Larry's return which is the biggest obstacle for Chris marriage. Chris has a selfish motive in pursuing his mother to accept Larry's death. '.....he does so for his own selfish reasons and not because he thinks it is in her best interest to be able to face reality. (*All My Sons*' Steven R. Centola in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby). Chris' sincere love for Ann makes him protective towards her forcing him to argue with his mother several times whenever Kate tries to discourage their marriage.

An idealist Chris feels guilty of surviving the war when many of his friends died sacrificing their lives in the war for some noble cause. On his return home after the war, he saw that nothing had changed. Chris is amazed to see the way people carry on with the banalities of life. He feels ashamed seeing selfish people struggling for monetary gains. For Chris, the soldier's lives were laid down in vain because it did not change the world. He was hesitant to use the amenities and comforts that he had and was guilty even to marry Ann.

Chris' influence on her husband Jim Bayliss upsets Sue because he tries to encourage Jim Bayliss to give up medical practice in order to pursue a higher calling in medical research. Accusing Chris of being a hypocrite Sue is of the opinion that Chris wants people to sacrifice their comforts for the sake of principles while Chris himself takes money from his father's business that is established by dishonest means.

Out of love for his parents he assures them of his protection if a difficult situation came up on George's arrival to the Keller household. The immense faith Chris had on his father does not allow him to accept his father's guilt despite having a vague idea about the fraud committed by him. Chris believes that his father is innocent and that he is being falsely accused by the neighbours. Believing that Steve Deever had wrongly implicated his father, he does not want Keller to show so much concern for him, afraid that people of the locality might misunderstand him if he accommodate him in his factory. Chris is sure that a timid man like Steve Deever would not only supply defective cylinder heads but also put the blame on somebody else. In Chris' opinion, Steve conveniently puts the blame for his misdeeds on Keller but his plans failed. He says that only George who is a fool believes his story. Chris does not believe in astrology. He refuses to agree with Kate and questions her view on how stars determine human destiny.

Chris who loves his parents, trusts his father and is shattered when his father acknowledges his guilt. Chris considers him as an infallible father figure and is ashamed by the arguments given by his father in order to justify his actions. 'Chris is his father's perfect opposite. While Joe cannot see beyond his family's dining room table, Chris feels a sense of unity with the world.' (Paul Blumberg in his article 'Work as Alienation' in *The Plays of Arthur Miller: New Perspectives* Edited by Robert A. Martin). Chris is profoundly hurt that Keller has deceived his partner Steve Deever and his own country. Chris sees a wider responsibility beyond that of a family; a human commitment. He is ashamed of his father being involved in such a criminal act while he was fighting in the war and risking his life daily and the men under his command were dying daily in the war. He says that the selflessness of his fellow soldiers has counted for nothing. He accuses his father of making money out of a business, which does not value the man on whose labour it relies. Joe is also accused of ignoring the interests of his country and deliberately endangering the lives of the countrymen.

After his father's guilt is revealed, Chris sees no other option but to put his father in jail. Keller on the other hand tries to escape from his guilt and to save his son from further humiliation, he shoots himself. Chris blames himself for his father's self-destruction.

13.1.3 Kate Keller

Joe Keller's wife Kate Keller is kind, affectionate and motherly. Like her husband Keller, Kate is jovial, warm and a friendly neighbour welcoming everyone home. She is a woman of enormous maternal love extending her affection beyond her two children to George and Ann. She has firm belief that Larry who was reported missing in World War II has survived the war and would eventually return home. Kate does not approve the marriage of Chris with Ann as this would mean that she has accepted Larry's death; this in turn would prove her husband's guilt. Her love for Larry does not allow her to accept the fact that he has died and she is hopeful for his return, living in 'denial' and resorting to 'lies and self-deception as a means of contending with her sorrow and anguish'. (Steven R. Centola's 'All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* by Christopher Bigsby) Her belief in astrology keeps her hopes of Larry's survival alive with Frank's insistence that Larry's horoscope indicated: the day Larry had died was his favourable day.

By her resort to superstition, Kate wants to persuade others to agree with her, in her belief that Larry was alive. Kate links Ann's arrival to the Keller home with the storm that had snapped the apple tree planted in Larry's memory thinking it was a sign of something significant. She connects both these incidents with Larry's gloves that she had unexpectedly seen for the first time after Larry had left. The day Larry was leaving for the battle she got up early even though she did not know that Larry had to leave for the war. An instinct within her indicated that something

dreadful was going to happen. Later, she got the news that Larry was missing in action. Now she believes that Larry is still alive which she feels is a right notion.

Kate is impressed by Ann's devotion to Larry's memory. She is of the opinion that Ann was different from other fickle-minded girls who would have changed loyalties after their lover's death. Kate thinks that had she forgotten Larry or thought he was dead, she would have somebody else in New York and would have got married already.

Kate has several arguments with Ann and Chris trying to persuade them to believe that Larry would return someday. Her son Chris is of the opinion that she is the only woman in America to be still waiting for her son to come back after three years. Kate thinks that deep down in her heart Ann must be still waiting for Larry. Ann denies it as she already knows that Larry has committed suicide deeply shamed and embarrassed by his father's conviction. Unaware about Larry's suicide Chris supports Ann adding that she knows her mind well and is not waiting for Larry to return.

When asked by Ann what makes her believe that Larry was still alive, Kate says that certain things have to be, while certain things can never be. The sun has to rise; this is something, which has to be. That is the reason why we believe in the existence of God. If there was no God, anything could happen. But God exists hence certain things can never happen. Kate says that her heart tells her what can happen and what can never happen.

Kate was not enthusiastic about Ann's visit to their house, the reason being the hostility of the neighbours towards Ann's father Steve Deever who was found guilty. Kate stops Chris from criticizing Ann's father while asking Ann not to blame her father. On Ann's questioning her why she said so, Kate says that her father's misdeeds had nothing to do with Larry.

Being aware of her husband's crime Kate asks Chris to protect both Keller and herself from any untoward incident that could arise on George's arrival to their house. She wants George and his sister Ann to leave the Keller household in order to prevent them from bringing damage to the Kellers because in her opinion both of them could destroy them out of hatred. According to her, Steve Deever had persisted in alleging in the court till the last day of the trial that it was Keller who had asked him to dispatch the damaged cylinder heads. In the midst of the speculations about George's visit, Kate's fondness for George persists and she does not forget to prepare his favourite grape-juice. Kate assures George that their family still loves him with the same warmth as they had done earlier. Showing her concern for him, she advises him to get married assuring George that Joe would help him with his career and she would find him a girl.

Amidst their conversation Kate comes out with the truth of Keller not falling ill during the war. Realising the revelation she has made, she corrects herself calling it a slip of the tongue pretending that she had forgotten that Keller had fallen ill. Instead of encouraging Keller to face his responsibilities honestly Kate supports him in the complicity of covering-up her husband's crime.

When Chris threatens to leave home with Ann, seeing that their marriage is imminent 'Chris' mother plays her final card in order to prevent the marriage which will signal the end of her hope.' (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century Drama* C.W.E. Bigsby, Cambridge University Press 1984) She reveals her husband's guilt to her son saying that if Larry is dead, he has been killed by his father Joe, 'God does not let a son be killed by his father' (*All My Sons* p. 73). Kate's indirect accusations at Joe forces Chris to confront him, compelling him to come out with the truth.

Out of love and concern for Chris, Kate is restless after Chris disappears from the house after his argument with Joe. Kate feels helpless once she comes to know

that Jim Bayliss knows the secret of Keller. Worried that Keller could not be saved anymore, she feels that there is no strength in her.

Kate wants Joe to confess his mistake and tell Chris that he is ready to pay the penalty for his crime which she thinks would satisfy her son and he would forgive him. Kate assures Joe that his mere willingness to go to prison would make Chris forgive him. Replying to Keller's justification of his act Kate says that she wanted him to make money but not by wrong means and there is no excuse for him to say that he made money by fraud for the sake of his family. Kate's refusal to Chris and Ann's marriage even after several requests made by both of them compels Ann to show her trump card in the form Larry's letter to save her future union with Chris. Kate is not at all disturbed by the contents of the letter for she had known all this while that her husband was responsible for killing Larry. The letter forces Kate to accept Larry's death and her husband's crime of killing twenty one pilots. Kate wants to save her husband from languishing in jail pleading with Chris not to take him to the police saying that the war is over and that the contents of the letter no more have any meaning as Larry is dead.

After the shot is heard from inside the house, Kate understands that Joe had killed himself as a punishment for his crime of killing twenty-one pilots. Despite her own grief of losing her husband, she lovingly consoles Chris telling him not to hold himself responsible for his father's death but to forget the past and live a new life.

13.1.4 Ann Deever

Ann Deever the daughter of Steve Deever, business partner of Joe, surfaces in the play in act I and is described by Jim, Frank and Keller as a beautiful and intelligent girl. Ann Deever is twenty-one years old with gentle looks and firm belief. She is admired for her beauty by Kate, Joe and Chris. Seeing her previous house, Ann feels nostalgic and is reminded of her childhood days that were filled with happiness when she had stayed with her family in the neighbourhood.

She comes to the Keller household in order to marry Chris. 'She comes with a purpose of rescuing Chris from the demoralized family, haunted by Larry's ghost.' (A. Karunakar's 'Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*': *The End of An American Dream in Perspective on Post-War American Drama* Edited by D. Venkateswarlu, Y. Satyanarayana, A. Karunakar). For Joe Keller she is the ghost of the past, a threat to him, who would reveal the truth of the defective cylinder case. Ann is not waiting for Larry to return from the war, as it has been a long time after he went missing and she presumes that he is dead. After exchange of several letters Ann and Chris are in love and Ann comes to the Keller household on Chris' invitation to propose marriage to her. Ann is firm in her belief that Larry will not come back and does not agree with Kate's view that Larry is still alive. After coming to the Keller home Ann is disappointed and wants to leave because Kate does not want her to stay here any longer and Chris is uneasy with Ann's presence in the house. Ann feels assured after he expresses his love and proposes her to marry him. Hearing Chris explanation that he was ashamed to love her because of the tragedy he had seen around. Chris is hesitant to use the comforts and amenities he had and even thought that he did not deserve her. Ann makes him understand that he should not develop a feeling of guilt as he had the right to make use of everything including the money that his father had saved for him.

Ann shares Chris' idealism and righteousness and has shunned her father Steve Deever after he was found guilty in supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. She disowns him refusing to visit him in jail. Having no concern for her father Ann avoids answering questions related to her father and when asked about him she is ill at ease and says 'I really don't know'. She says that she had wept on hearing about his imprisonment after he was found guilty by the court, but when she came to

know about Larry being killed by the defective cylinders, she realized the seriousness of his crime.

Ann talks very harshly about her father saying 'Father or no father there was only one way of looking at him' (*All My Sons* p. 31). Keller told Ann how her father had cried half the night on hearing about Larry's death. But Ann is too harsh and says that her father should have cried the whole night. Ann thinks that Chris is lucky that he can love his parents.

When George tells the facts about the case accusing Keller, Ann intervenes saying that the court had exonerated Keller after finding him innocent. She accuses her father of telling lies. Ann supports the Kellers, vehemently disagreeing with George when he says that whatever Keller family owns is by dishonest means. She is perhaps blinded by her love for Chris whom she wants to marry. Despite knowing the real culprit in the defective cylinder case, she conceals the facts known to her in order to avoid any kind of obstacle coming in the way of her marriage with Chris.

Ann is quite surprised by the concern Keller shows for her father; he is ready to help George settle in the neighbourhood with his family. Keller says that after he completes his term in prison he would help Steve begin a new life.

Chris' honesty and his idealistic qualities impress Ann. In Ann's view Chris is doing nothing wrong if he creates in Jim a desire to get better. According to Ann if Chris spends his father's money, he is also helping his father with his work.

Ann is embarrassed to meet Kellers' neighbours as she remembers the neighbours calling her father and her family 'murderers' and does not want to face humiliation again. Ann trusts Keller and is not prepared to believe Sue's words that Keller was guilty in the defective cylinder case. She learns that everyone in the locality believes that Keller is involved in the fraud. Ann knows that Chris would not have forgiven his father had he been involved in the case. Ann trusts Chris as much as Chris trusts his father.

Ann patiently tries to convince Kate to allow her to marry Chris and not to make him feel guilty of his intentions to marry her merely because she believes that Larry is alive. Ann requests Kate to accept the death of Larry. She tells Kate that she wanted to show Larry's letter to her not to hurt Kate's feeling but only to prove that Larry was dead. Ann had known in advance from the letter that Joe Keller was as much guilty as her father, but was living in denial despite knowing the fact that her former lover Larry had committed suicide shamed by his father's involvement in killing his fellow pilots. Her desperation to get married to Chris did not allow her to reveal the truth about Keller's crime. She does not want to become a villain for the Keller family by getting Keller arrested. '....she refrains from impeaching Keller until she feels compelled to do so in order to save her relationship with Chris. Her motives are selfish, governed primarily by a fundamental drive for self preservation.' (Steven R. Centola's 'All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by C. Bigsby). Being insecure she wants love and shelter in the Keller household. She shares with Chris that she has nowhere to go and would accompany him wherever he wishes to go. Ann is successful in clearing the way for their marriage without the feeling of guilt. Assuring Chris that she would not ask him to go against his father by handing him to the concerned authorities.

13.1.5 George Deever

Steve Deever's son George is a lawyer by profession and a veteran of World War II. He comes to the Keller's home after visiting his father serving imprisonment in Columbus. Being idealistic, George disowns his father, feeling disgusted with his father's shameful offence. However, George gets to know about the truth of the

defective cylinder case and the cunningness of Keller. He regrets the fact that he had lost touch with his father and had not seen him even after coming back from the war. He arrives at the Keller's house to prevent Ann's marriage with Chris and bring her back to New York.

The news of George's meeting with his father Steve Deever brings apprehensions to Joe Keller and his wife Kate. Joe Keller fears that George Deever might reopen the case which would put him in prison. Accused by Steve Deever several times during the trial of supplying defective cylinder heads to the army and now George's visit to his father in prison makes Joe Keller speculate about their intentions. George is a threat to Keller, his role is that of catalyst for the truth to emerge. Kate has her own apprehensions about George's visit to her house making her wonder why he went all the way from New York to Columbia to meet his father and now was coming to visit them. It surprises her that a person who had never written to his father for the last three years suddenly goes to visit him after he becomes a lawyer.

George wants to know from Ann if she would still marry Chris after hearing about the truth of Joe Keller's slyness. George finds Keller very clever to have told Deever on the phone that he would take full responsibility for supplying the damaged cylinder heads and then denying during the trial knowing very well that whatever he had said on the phone could not be proved. George alleges Chris of pretending to be ignorant despite knowing about the fraud that his father had committed. He accuses Kate of hiding the facts that she knew about her husband. Accusing her father of lying at the spur of the moment Ann is not satisfied with George's argument against Keller of committing fraud. Ann refuses to accompany George to New York unless Chris would ask her to leave because she had come to his house on Chris's invitation. Arguing about the truth of the case with Chris, George leaves no stone unturned to prove Keller's involvement in the case but fails to convince Chris.

George is tactful in dealing with Keller. Instead of showing his fury towards him he talks to him calmly enquiring about his business. Only when Keller shows his sympathy towards his former partner Steve Deever, George gets furious and says that his father hates Keller's guts. Yet George is easily disarmed by Keller's good humour and Kate's kindness shown to him. He recalls how happy he was growing up in a homely atmosphere. He recollects the good times and the closeness the Deevers and the Kellers had shared. A pacified George even seems ready to accept Keller's version of the defective cylinder case but Kate's inadvertently lets out the secret, saying that 'Joe hasn't been laid up in fifteen years' (*All My Sons*, p.69). Thereby confirming the facts told to him by his father. Though George is unable to get the truth out from Keller, he does build tension in the minds of Kate, Joe, Chris and Ann.

Sue finds George blunt when she refuses to see his old home bought by them. He bluntly comments:

George (removing his hat): You're the people who bought our house, aren't you?

Sue: That's right. Come and see what we did with it before you leave.

George (walks down and away from her): I liked it the way it was. (*All My Sons*, p.54)

George again replies bluntly on noticing the stump of the apple-tree.

George:The tree got thick, didn't they? (Points to stump) What's that?

Chris: Blew down last night. We had it there for Larry. You know.

George: Why, afraid you'll forget him? (*All My Sons*, p.55)

13.2 MINOR CHARACTERS

The minor characters such as Dr. Jim Bayliss, Sue Bayliss, Frank Lubey, Lydia Lubey and Bert serve to further the action of the play, comment on the main characters, add depth to the main issues and also bring humour to the otherwise sombre play *'All My Sons'*.

13.2.1 Dr. Jim Bayliss

Dr. Jim is Sue's husband and a close friend and neighbour of Joe Keller. He does not want his son to become a doctor like himself because he believes that doctors do not have a high income like film actors.

His conversation with Frank makes it clear to us about what he thinks of his profession:

Frank: That boy's going to be a real doctor; he is smart.

Jim: Over my dead body he'll be a doctor. A good beginning, too.

Frank: Why, it's an honourable profession.....you could help humanity,.....

Jim: I would love to help humanity on a Warner Brothers salary. (*All My Sons* p.5)

Having no belief in astrology, Jim criticises Frank saying that Frank is completely out of his mind to believe that by reading Larry's horoscope he could find out if Larry was alive. According to Frank, Jim is a person who does not believe in anything.

Being aware of his money-minded wife, Jim jokingly gives a piece of advice to Ann saying that after she gets married she should never count her husband's earnings. Chris is fond of Jim and mentions about him to Ann in his letters he wrote to her. Jim is equally fond of Chris. Jim tells Ann that Chris was nicknamed Mother McKeller by the soldiers who found him kind and affectionate.

Although Jim suspects that Joe is as guilty as Deever, he likes the Kellers. He even tries to protect the Kellers 'from George Deever's hostile accusation and the family's ultimate confrontation over the truth'.....Jim tries to shield the family, particularly Chris, from the truth not only because he longs to protect them, but also because he needs to sustain the illusion of their perfection..... Having already watched "The star of (his) honesty.... go out." Jim knows he is lost "in the usual darkness"(p.118). If he no longer has the illusory image of Chris's perfection to drive and inspire him, he will find it impossible "to remember the kind of man he wanted to be" (pg-118). Therefore, he lives in denial like the other characters in the play.(Steven R. Centola's 'All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby, p.58)

Seeing George in a nasty mood, a sensible Jim asks George to be seated in the car that he deliberately parks at a distance from the house. Later he goes to inform Chris that George is furious and would burst into rage any time. Jim does not want George to explode in front of Kate who is unwell. Knowing his state of mind Jim is scared of some violent happening to take place. He tells Chris that he can see blood in George's eyes therefore it would not be right to bring him home.

Jim shows his concern for Kate after a disturbed Chris leaves the house assuring her that he would come back. Jim knows Chris well. In his opinion Chris is not the kind of person who could accept the facts about his father's crime at once. It will take him some time to swallow the bitter pill. He says that Chris will reconcile to the situation slowly. Jim Bayliss has idealistic notions that is awakened by Chris.

Inspired by him he once left his wife to do medical research but eventually had to go back home as his wife wanted him to earn money in order to live a lavish life.

13.2.2 Sue Bayliss

Jim's wife Sue Bayliss, a practical and jovial woman is about forty years old. She never lets her husband go out of her sight for longer than she can help. She had supported her husband financially while he was an intern and now she expects more than gratitude in return. Sue knows the truth about Joe Keller and also reveals the neighbourhood's awareness about Keller having manipulated the court's acquittal, yet she along with her husband continue to share the relation of close friends with the Kellers. 'Sue Bayliss even expresses admiration for Keller for pulling a fast one to get out of jail.' (Arthur Miller, *All My Sons* in *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, p.94)

A straight forward woman, Sue complains to Ann that her husband had refused to take her to the beach saying that it was very hot. She tells her that this did not deter him from going to the airport to pick up George. She further says that men did anything for their neighbours but not for their wives. Inquisitive in nature, Sue is quite eager to know whether Ann's brother George was coming to give away Ann in marriage. Sue thinks that Ann has chosen Chris as her husband because he is monetarily sound. For Sue, money makes all the difference in life. She deeply resents Chris' friendship with her husband, a successful doctor accusing Chris of misleading Jim by suggesting to him to do medical research. According to Sue it is an impractical choice as it would bring a meagre income. She is afraid that if Jim devotes time in medical research they would be denied all the comforts of life. She says every time Jim has a session with Chris he feels as if he is compromising by not giving up medical practice for medical research. In Sue's opinion everyone in the world does something wrong. Sue shares the same belief with Keller— that of family responsibility. In her opinion Chris wants to make people better than it is possible for them to be.

Sue thinks that Chris is a hypocrite enjoying all the comforts of life, taking money from his father's business regularly, despite knowing that his father had earned it dishonestly. Sue says she does not have anything personal against Keller but if Chris wants people to be ideal by sacrificing their comforts, he should first give up his comforts. Sue dislikes Chris and his father's inflated sense of self importance.

13.2.3 Frank Lubey

Frank Lubey is Lydia's husband and a friend and neighbour of Joe Keller. He is thirty-two years of age but already getting bald. A practical man like Keller, Frank had earned a good deal of money by property transactions. Frank does not read the newspaper because he believes that there is always bad news in the newspaper. He believes in astrology and by insisting that Larry's horoscope could reveal the truth, he keeps Kate's hopes of Larry's survival alive. A superstitious Frank sees certain significance in the fallen apple tree that had been snapped by the wind in the same month in which Larry was born. Frank's wife Lydia finds him very useful in fixing faulty toasters and other gadgets while Sue calls him 'Thomas Edison'.

Frank believes that a doctor's profession is honourable as doctors can serve humanity by researching in medicine. In Frank's opinion, for an intelligent man like Ann's father in prison, there should be a law that either you execute him or release him with minor penalty. While George Chris and Larry were fighting in the war, he courted Lydia and produced three children. Frank missed joining the war because when the army had kept the maximum age limit as twenty seven, Frank was twenty eight and when the army raised the age limit to twenty eight, Frank had already become twenty-nine. Thereafter, he took up astrology.

13.2.4 Lydia Lubey

Lydia Lubey is a 'robust laughing girl', she is admired for her good looks and is also praised for her creativity and talents. Lydia is charming, affectionate and has great warmth. She is addressed fondly by George as 'Laughy'. The former girlfriend of George, Lydia married Frank when George went off to the war and did not return home after his father's imprisonment. When George comes to confront the Kellers and prevents Ann's marriage with Chris, he realises that he had lost everything including Lydia.

13.2.5 Bert

Eight year old Bert is the son of Frank and Lydia and is quite friendly with Keller. Keller tells him that there is a jail in the basement of his house. This annoys Kate. They play games in which Keller pretends to be a police officer while Bert acts as a policeman keeping watch on the objectionable elements in their neighbourhood.

13.3 LET US SUM UP

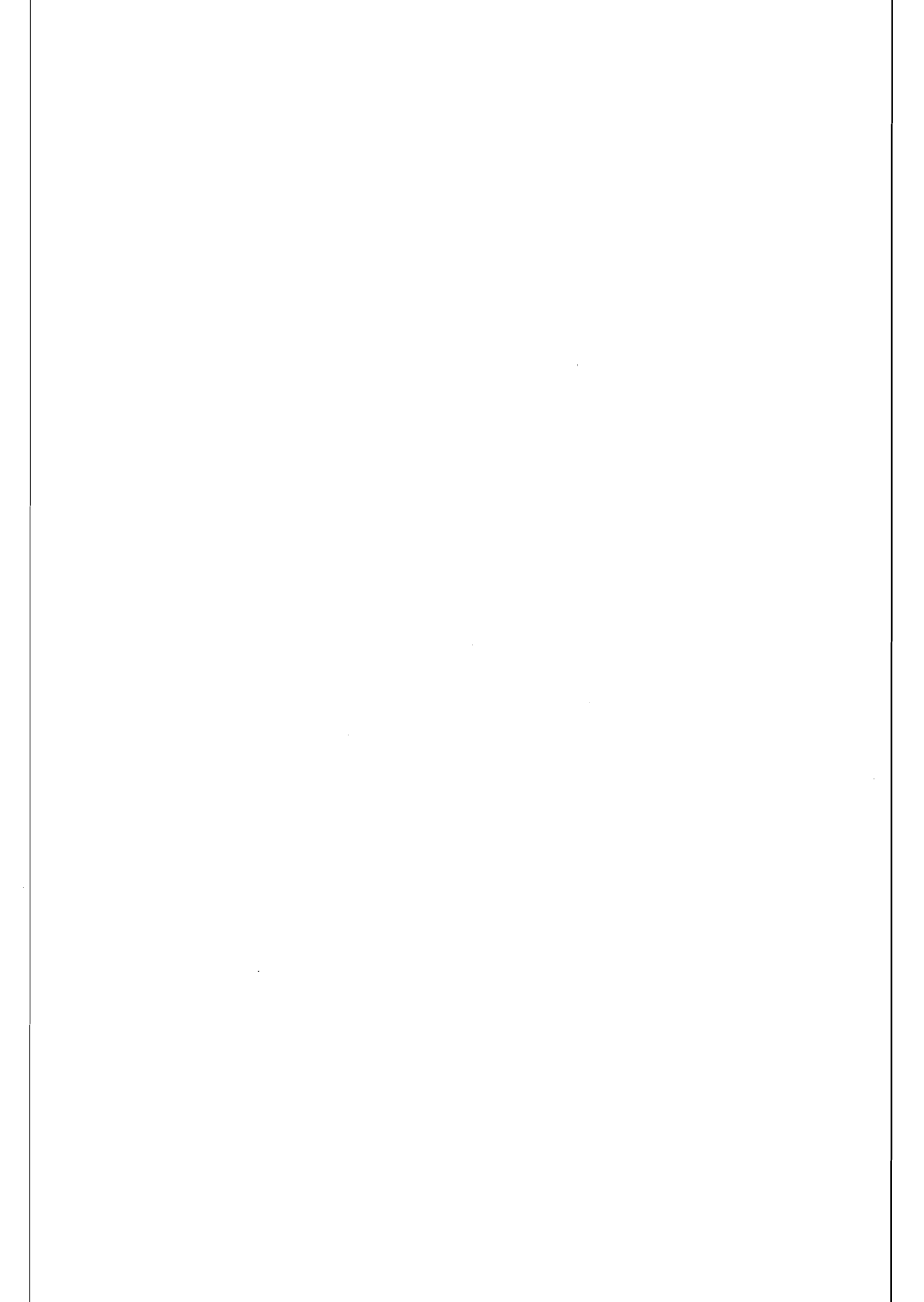
In this unit we have discussed the major and minor characters of the play *All My Sons* in detail.

13.4 EXERCISE

1. Discuss the character of Joe Keller.
2. Evaluate the character of Chris Keller.
3. Write short notes on the minor characters in the play *All My Sons*.

13.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Bigsby, Christopher, *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom. 1997.
2. Martin, Robert, A. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. The Viking Press, New York. 1978.
3. Welland, Dennis. *Arthur Miller*, Oliver and Boyel, London. 1961.
4. Gould, Jean, *Modern American Playwrights*. Popular Books, Bombay. 1969.
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8. Bloom, Clive. *American Drama*. Macmillan Press Limited, London. 1995.
9. Bigsby C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1984.
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UNIT 14 MOHAN RAKESH: LIFE, TIMES, WORKS

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Early Life
- 14.3 The Importance of Arya Samaj in Early Twentieth Century
- 14.4 Emergence of New Issues in Independent India
- 14.5 Literary Writing in the Nineteen Fifties
- 14.6 Rise of the Middle Class
- 14.7 Evolution of Mohan Rakesh as a Major Literary Voice
 - 14.7.1 Literature in the Middle of New Socio-Cultural Developments
 - 14.7.2 Mohan Rakesh's Important Plays
 - 14.7.3 A Short Account of Rakesh's Fiction
- 14.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.9 Exercise

14.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will read about the Hindi playwright Mohan Rakesh's biographical details with particular reference to his education and writing career. Equally importantly, you will also have a view of the times in which Mohan Rakesh lived and wrote. All these, in fact, are inseparably linked.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

We should keep in mind that the surroundings of a writer play an important role in his/ her growth and development. It is from these that a writer draws his/ her inspiration to be active in the world s/he is born in. It applies in ample measure to Mohan Rakesh, a well-known Hindi writer of our times. Initially, he lived in colonial India and was witness to the policies of British administration that rarely, if at all, saw our country's issues with sympathy, its sole purpose being to control and utilize our resources for furtherance of England's interests. Rakesh also watched with alert attention the growth and evolution of India's National Movement under the inspiring leadership of Gandhi. Rakesh's own understanding of the contemporary period is reflected in his early short stories where he presents characters and happenings with great sensitivity. His later stories, novels and plays continue this creative involvement with gusto. His writing was marked by a rare integrity and courage on the strength of which he won appreciation and wide acclaim.

14.2 EARLY LIFE

Mohan Rakesh was born in an educated middle class family in Jalandhar, Punjab in 1925. He got his early schooling in the atmosphere of the famous Arya Samaj ethos. He learnt Hindi and Sanskrit simultaneously and became proficient in both languages. This brought him in touch with contemporary literature as well as classical

Sanskrit texts that sharpened his intellect. His love for languages that would stand him in good stead later in life began with this early schooling. Equally significantly, the Arya Samaj movement gave him the required passion to pursue knowledge and look at things in rational terms. This also kept him free from that sentimentality which worked as a wall between social happenings and an individual's discerning eye. The peculiar sense of identity that Rakesh came to be known for in due course was forged in the nineteen twenties and thirties. He was also benefited by Jalandhar's closeness to Lahore, the educational and cultural centre of north India.

14.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF ARYA SAMAJ IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Arya Samaj swore by social reform and aimed to bring about a radical change in the outlook of the people. It was a major ideological presence in the Punjab of the day and ran schools and colleges in many towns of the province, notable among them being Lahore, Amritsar and Jalandhar. Education was an important means through which the mental horizon of the common masses could be widened and they were drawn into the process of understanding and changing their surroundings.

This reform movement encouraged discussion among educated sections about religious and social issues and a large number of Arya Samaj activists went about preaching the ideals and principles of Swami Dayanad Saraswati, its founder. Tirelessly, the preachers went from towns to villages and addressed gatherings. The main target of these preachers was the ritualistic orthodox Hindu Sanatan Dharma that promoted idol worship and observance of rules laid down by Brahman priests in the temples. Activities of the Arya Samaj were taken as an affront by the followers of the orthodox Hindu religion and exchanges between the two resulted in violent clashes in many a case; the attack on rituals and idol worship had the potential to grow as a threat to the age-old 'wisdom' of the powerful group of Brahmins. Arya Samaj, on the other hand took its inspiration from the original teachings in the Vedas that according to the adherents of this movement stood for truth and knowledge that any individual, man or woman could grasp.

The seminal book of Arya Samaj was 'Satyarth Prakash' ('The Light of Truth and Meaning') written by Swami Dayanand. Obviously, Mohan Rakesh would absorb the intellectual values of such a social movement and look at his world critically. This critical outlook became an essential ingredient of Rakesh's mental make-up. It has been said, however, that Arya Samaj was not the same in the nineteen thirties, the time of Rakesh's adolescence and mental growth, what it had been initially – in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In fact, the formative years of Mohan Rakesh, the nineteen thirties bore influences of a totally different kind – this new era was marked by nationalist politics and socialist ideals. In the realm of ideology, too, a strong sense of materialism and atheism had set in. On reading Mohan Rakesh's major writings, we realize that the writer's focus is clearly on what he perceives around himself, the seemingly innocuous and ordinary developments in society. Still, these developments turn into his writings quite engaging and serious details that disturb and shock the reader. Thus, we are struck by sudden emergence of a phenomenon in the text that takes us deeply into the socio-economic scene of the times.

14.4 EMERGENCE OF NEW ISSUES IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

As a writer, Mohan Rakesh belongs to the post-Independence period when the country had entered a phase of what is known as nation- building after the era of subjugation to British colonial rule had ended. During the nineteen fifties, India was

witness to adoption and implementation of progressive economic policies of constructing a strong industrial base; this went hand in hand with a constitutional system of governance based on free and fair elections. Till the nineteen forties, Indian people had been familiar only with instructions and orders from 'above', a euphemism for the privileged few who controlled India's socio-political life. Largely, these constituted the landed gentry and small-time rajahs who had enjoyed protection and patronage of the British till 1947.

Independence came to India's millions in the name of equality between man and woman who would be a significant part of social collectivity. Big plans were drawn up to open schools and colleges where education would be provided to the men and women of the country to integrate them into the social system as responsible citizens. Understandably, a great deal of fervour and excitement was generated in the new situation across the length and breadth of the country that had long lived by settled values and an entrenched code of behaviour. This was meaningfully combined with the idea of freedom: freedom to say what one wanted to say, join the stream of education one wished to join, move around confidently, set up a shop if job was not that one liked to do and adopt modern ways. The last one, 'modern ways' was a window that presented immense possibilities. All this looks rather ordinary today, but in the fifties such a phenomenon was considered unthinkable by many.

Wasn't freedom of this kind somewhat abstract – unreal and lacking substance? It was difficult to challenge orthodoxy, moral beliefs and religious views. These things had shackled Indians for centuries and their grip over the masses was strong. In spite of the spread of education in the post-Independence era, the custom of purdah remained in towns and villages. In cities, too, most households stuck to keeping girls at home and training them to become efficient house-wives when marriage happened. Clash was bound to happen between the new ideas and old ways of life. Literature could not remain untouched by such issues that seemed to affect the day-to-day perceptions of people. In result, new stories, plot lines, plays and essays were written to take stock of the changing scene.

Another important question related to equality among classes, sections and regions as well as cities and villages. The question of gender equality also loomed large. These issues were raised by the Nationalist leaders in the first half of the twentieth century also, but in the changed scenario their meaning had changed. With no common enemy in sight to fight such as British imperialism, men and women in India were compelled to look inwards and transform themselves as equals in every way. Whereas the fight between high and low, rich and poor, men and women was of a political nature earlier, in the fifties it had turned socio-cultural.

14.5 LITERARY WRITING IN THE NINETEEN FIFTIES

The nineteen fifties had their peculiar impact on literature also. It was now supposed to shed its activist trait and become reflective. More and more writers came to believe that ideas were the domain of social sciences, not literature and that writers had to stop 'preaching' the right and desirable things. Writers of the old school were asked to rethink their earlier stand and accept the new reality. The word 'new' became a slogan, a guiding principle and a motto. There is no wonder that in the manner of New Criticism in western Europe and America, Indian literature too began using such terms as New Writing, New Poetry, New Short Story, New Novel, etc. With the passage of time, antagonism between the new and the old became so pronounced that the contending sides refused to discuss cultural-literary matters patiently and democratically.

In the backdrop of these debates and differences stood the silent upheaval that affected the foundations of existence in India. Policies of progress and development

that the Indian government adopted and implemented in the nineteen fifties touched villages and small towns as never before. Jobs in the cities attracted people from far and wide who would now live in different surroundings and cope with unfamiliar pressures. Most men came alone from their places to take jobs as their wives and children remained behind. They also had to compromise on the caste-related rituals and travel in buses and trains with unknown people. How could one be sure that the person sitting next to him was of a lower or upper caste? Women, too, had to partially shed purdah so that they could move around with ease. Stray cases of women joining office or school jobs brought them on a par with male clerks and teachers and created independent space of interaction. Still further, the employed woman became a threat not just to her mother-in-law at home but also to her husband – the employed woman was no longer the dependent of the male or males. It was a mixed blessing – the woman with regular earning boosted the economic status of the family and yet her ability to be on her own changed the power equation in the family and neighbourhood.

14.6 RISE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

The silent upheaval in the wake of rise of the middle class pressed ever so persistently against deep social prejudices, with bitterness being the result in the general environment. Of this, Pratibha Agrawal said this: “The new writing that emerged after Independence – of which Rakesh himself was an important part – primarily, of city-based, city-oriented, middle class writers. What one finds, therefore, in the writings of the last 35-40 years, in novels and stories, poems and plays are this middle-class environ and the city-circumscribed problems of this class. Today’s modern, middle-class man is wrapped up entirely in his own private problems. Personal happiness and sorrow, the forging of one’s identity as well as a personality, the establishment of new values, the new parameters of the man-woman relationship, the desire for personal freedom which, when too powerful, takes the shape of license, the apprehension of loneliness – the many question that modern man has to constantly face have also been the predominant concern of Hindi literature of the last forty years.” (‘Mohan Rakesh’, Mohan Rakesh, *Halfway House*, tr. Bindu Batra, Delhi: Worldview) This can work as an appropriate summing up of the point made above. Also mark the issues such as “middle-class environ”, “personal happiness”, “man-woman relationship”, “identity”, “loneliness”, etc. in this quotation. These indeed haunted the writers of the nineteen fifties and later.

G. P. Deshpande takes this issue to a theoretical level and says that “By the time independence came to India in 1947, modern drama as we knew then was deeply aware of the west and also of modernity. Inasmuch as it was a response to colonialism and imperialism, it was also a response to modernity, for colonialism and imperialism were ‘modern’ phenomena. With the arrival of political independence, we do not quite have post-colonial theatre. In fact the phenomenon of the ‘post-colonial’ made a lot of sense at least superficially. At another level it helped the thinking processes which wanted to announce the end of imperialism. The term ‘post-colonial’ is one of the many ‘post’ phrases which came into vogue following the failed student-uprising of 1968 (in France). From ‘Post-modernism’ to ‘Post-colonial’ seemed to suggest that the colonial was over and gone. ‘Post-colonial’ was and is a post-colonial category.” What Deshpande suggests here is that struggle in Indian life and ethos had shifted after Independence to an ideological plane and different global interests clashed with one another to sidestep the basic question of redefining India’s needs and requirements in an objective manner. Colonial phase had come to an end in the political sense but there was much that needed to be sorted out. Indian literature had to address questions that came with socioeconomic policies adopted by the new regime under a democratic constitutional framework. Rather than borrowing terms from cultural centres of the west, Indian drama in,

particular, "seemed to celebrate," says Deshpande, "the 'Indian' more than any other form of writing in India." (Intro., *Modern Indian Drama*, New Delhi: Sahitya, 2000)

Take the phenomenon of the early years of post-Independence era as coinciding with the literary writer, an individual who lived at many levels: a householder, person with a job in the city, a sensitive observer of trends and an articulator of concrete responses; each position made him feel and think differently and the overall process left him confused, if not altogether disoriented and broken. Thus came up the need to redefine one's role as a writer in the given situation. It goes to Mohan Rakesh's credit that he remained ever eager to learn and evolve, seldom sticking to things that he may have held dear. The urge to experiment and tread new ground was innate to him who questioned what he saw and disagreed with the existing social norms. At the same time, the central figure in his writing was invariably a young man or woman who saw dreams and measured his circumstances against his long-cherished vision. This in course of time enabled him to reach a unified vision. We shall know about this vision in a separate unit of this block later.

14.7 EVOLUTION OF MOHAN RAKESH AS A MAJOR LITERARY VOICE

As an educated middle class individual, Mohan Rakesh went through different phases of evolution as a writer – observing happenings that would obstruct his plans, provide him options of success, compel him to leave his home town and live away from the near and dear ones. One such thing entailed teaching, first in a school in Shimla and later in the Hindi Department in Delhi University. The writer Rakesh came to be familiar at these places with the way literary texts were explained and interpreted for the benefit of students. The occasion also helped him look at the working of educational administration, rivalries among teachers as also ideas and paradigms that shaped sensibilities of middle class men and women. These found expression in Rakesh's fiction and plays. Particularly notable in this regards was his novel *Andhere Band Kamre* ('Dark, Closed Rooms') that had at its centre the growing sensibility of a sensitive individual in urban India. Since Rakesh was active simultaneously in the world of writing, he was able to watch the way writers and artists related to the environs of publication, distribution and appreciation of literary works.

Rakesh's specific participation in the world of letters began in the early nineteen sixties when he joined the famous monthly magazine, 'Sarika' as its editor. His dynamism was reflected not just in the selection of short stories for the magazine but also the regular columns that he introduced in it. One such column was 'Aaine Ke Samne' ('In Front of the Mirror') in which eminent writers of the day were approached to share with the reader their inner thoughts, predilections as well as literary strategies – how they wrote, what their aim was, which were the shaping influences in their lives, etc. Suddenly, the Hindi scene was transformed by this column that drew great attention of the reading public. Rakesh did not confine this column to the Hindi writers alone; he included famous writers from Urdu, too. In fact, the first writer to present his views and perception was none other than Rajinder Singh Bedi, a foremost Urdu writer of the day. Rakesh also took care to encourage young writers and treated with respect. This was the period when the issue of writer's identity and role in society emerged in a big way in the Hindi literary scene.

The magazine 'Sarika' was a sister publication of the Hindi weekly 'Dharmayug'. Both were published from Bombay under the banner of Bennett and Coleman Company that also owned such important national dailies as 'The Times of India' and 'Navbharat Times'. The fifties and sixties were the decades when literature

was prominently highlighted in the print media. In fact, magazines and dailies published from big business houses such as the Bennett and Coleman Company faced a tough competition from a number of other Hindi magazines that came from other towns or cities such as Allahabad, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Delhi and Varanasi. All this is to suggest that the Hindi literary scene of the fifties and sixties in India was extremely vibrant and Rakesh got an opportunity to provide a character to the writing of the period through discussions and debates that he initiated in 'Sarika'. Writers of different age-groups and persuasions were given an opportunity to freely air their views and differ with one another. This was indeed in continuations with the tradition of analyses of literary-cultural trends that had begun in the days of Indian National Movement in the nineteen twenties when Premchand wrote and also edited magazines. Also come to mind in this context such eminent editors as Bhairav Prasad Gupt who energized the creative-artistic atmosphere in the nineteen fifties through magazines like 'Kahani' and 'Nai Kahaniyan'. Rakesh took things still further in the sixties. In the process, he emerged as a great experimenter and visionary.

Along with being a teacher in educational institutions and an editor of the short story magazine 'Sarika', Rakesh kept effectively intervening in the literary world with his short stories, novels, plays, translations of some Sanskrit classics into Hindi, each work, long or short, earning for him wide appreciation. A bit later in life, his travel account that was serialized under the title 'Akhiri Chattan Tak' ('Up to the Last Rock') became a constant reference in discussions for its stark prose, journey details, comments about his contemporaries as also descriptions of the many individual experiences he went through. People linked the many episodes in his works to his personal life. Rakesh's name was mentioned in many a relationship with women and there were times when interested commentators drew parallels between particular characters in his short stories, novels and plays and the individual women or men he had come in contact with. Rakesh also wrote pen-portraits of his writer-friends and on the other side, friends, too, unveiled many 'secrets' of his life. This happened in the nineteen sixties when the middle class of the Hindi region had effectively asserted itself in the world of writing. Rakesh and many writers of his time became carriers, so to say, of the self-centered, narrow and individualistic tendencies of North India's petty bourgeoisie. The tendencies in question took away literary writing from bigger social issues of the time – poverty, widening gap of inequality, exploitative acts of the rich and privileged, illiteracy, etc. Instead, a large chunk of Hindi writing of the period devoted itself to aspects such as individual disillusionment, self-alienation, the disintegrating family structure, identity, etc. Mohan Rakesh was in the middle of all this.

14.7.1 Literature in the Middle of New Socio-cultural Developments

I have not yet talked of the role of the emerging state vis-à-vis the writer. In the nineteen fifties, writing had become a relatively profitable proposition. One could publish, broadcast or present one's literary piece and get money as remuneration from the magazine, newspaper, radio or the programme organizer. If the fame of the writer increased, he or she could win an award from a government or semi-government agency. There was now also a safe concept of writing for mass appeal that did not entail taking a firm stand against the powers that be, as was the case in the pre-Independence era. At the same time, the writer was worried about losing literary worth and power in his/her writing through compromising on the standpoint, a risk that all writers face – their role in the objective sense being to reflect their times as faithfully as possible. Obviously, writing is not an ordinary activity providing to the writer a steady income. That successful writers make good money and also earn fame as well as status, they do so generally by paying the cost in terms of compromising on principles. Is writing a handmaid of the power structures or a

voice that shook the reader out of complacency and helped him stand erect with pride? This question haunts a writer all the time and makes his venture a difficult one to pursue. Still, a middle class writer with a sense of playing safe and at the same time bringing important subjects in his writing indirectly can be a portrayer of the existing reality to some extent. What should also not be overlooked is that s/he can come out in an entirely new style in the course of composing a text. There always remains a gap between what one intends and what finally gets expressed. These different layers of literary representation come to surface when a reader confronts a work or a text. A complex phenomenon, literature is supposed to be handled with care and appropriate sympathy. The years after Independence raised these issues and many more in the literary-social sphere, with writers addressing them in their own specific ways.

14.7.2 Mohan Rakesh's Important Plays

Rakesh's First Important Play, 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din'

At this stage, it would be useful to know how Mohan Rakesh negotiated his literary path and endeavour, particularly in his plays. We note, for instance, that Rakesh's first play 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din' ('A Day in the Month of Ashadh') proved to be a landmark in Hindi drama precisely because it placed at its core a budding writer who would later become the famous Sanskrit poet Kalidas. The play went back to India's ancient history for providing background to Kalidas's writing career. That the play referred clearly to Kalidas was indicated by the title itself, 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din' being an important phrase used by Kalidas in the beginning of his long poem 'Meghdoot'. The theme of the play revolved around relations between Kalidas and his childhood friend and beloved Mallika. The latter had seen sparks of genius in young Kalidas and wished him to become a poet. This went against her individual interests since to achieve success, Kalidas would have to go to the city where the patrons of art live. Thus, a choice was to be made both by Kalidas and Mallika. At this stage, neither of the two realizes that change of place and circumstances can bring about transformation in the poet's character – the atmosphere of the city can turn an idealist poet into a compromising individualist. This is precisely what happens to Kalidas. He loses interest in his bond with Mallika and gets seriously into the business of establishing himself as a writer in the city of Ujjain. Later, as Kalidas earns fame, he is rewarded with more favours by the king of Ujjain who sends him to Kashmir and to take charge of the rule there. Meanwhile, his beloved keeps waiting for him in vain. However, Kalidas had to pay for the success he met with in Ujjain and Kashmir. The price he paid was in the form of losing the original poetic inspiration. The new Kalidas composed stylized epics and plays but could not retain the flow and vigour of his early writing.

Was 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din' a metaphor for the cultural scene that unfolded in post-Independence India? Did Rakesh intend to comment on the way in which Indian writers began expending their creative energies to seek petty rewards and success? What about the apparently insignificant world of home and the village which they left in order to search for jobs in the cities? Those who did so put their near and dear ones at home were at a disadvantage. The way of life that the younger males adopted for achieving success took its toll and turned the idealistic youth into hard-boiled pragmatists. This eventually gave rise to cynicism that kept spreading as time passed. Thus, Mohan Rakesh was able to capture an important social aspect of his time. This also opened a window upon the ordinary people left behind at home by the young men of the day. Mallika and her mother represent these ordinary people. We are struck by Mallika's grit and unwavering devotion to Kalidas. At the end of the play, Mallika is seen fending for herself as a victim of men's lust. But this has not deterred her from thinking of Kalidas. In her mind, Kalidas is associated with strong attachment and love. If we compare Mallika with Kalidas, we would find that the former is made of sterner stuff. In this play, the character of Vilom poses

difficulties of accepting life as it comes. Vilom is a cynic; for him the behaviour of Kalidas is suspect since he is given to empty idealism. Vilom, on the other hand, has a keen eye for that which is present and easily available.

‘Lehron Ke Rajhans’

The second play that closely followed ‘Ashadh Ka Ek Din’ was ‘Lehron Ke Rajhans’. This play, too, used a historical episode to reflect upon the issue of relevance and appeal in life. The protagonist of ‘Rajhans’ is Nand, the younger brother of Gautam Buddha. Nand is not able to decide whether to follow the path of renunciation or remain at home to be with his wife and enjoy domestic bliss. He is essentially a person given to pleasures of the body. His sensuous nature keeps him attached to his wife. At the same time, however, the ideal of higher life where spirit is considered superior to worldly matters beckons him. Gautam Buddha with his message of search for resolution of life’s problems is felt to be highly appealing and remains a constant reference point. Mohan Rakesh puts to use the symbol of the waves that always move; they are not stable even for a moment. Even as Nand leaves his life to follow Buddha, he returns home to the puzzlement and shock of his wife. She wished to get him back entirely – of one mind and resolute. Would he ever decide what he has to do or where he would eventually settle down? The swans visualized on the uncertain waves truly symbolize the mental state of Nand. Here also, we note Nand’s wife to be a strong person. She tests her husband’s commitment to home or conversely the path of renunciation. On her side, she clearly adheres to the life of material interests and intends to keep Nand by her side. Being a prototype of the Indian woman rooted to the family, she considers questions of human conduct and aim far beyond the reach of human imagination. She believes in those real and concrete aspects that characterize day-to-day dealings in society.

His last play, *Adhe Adhure (Halfway House)* made a departure from the use of myth and history bringing under focus the life in urban India. We shall take up this play in detail in the next units where various aspects of this important text would be studied. Suffice to say here that ‘Halfway House’ truly became landmark in Hindi drama and is arguably the most significant text dealing with urban India in the post-Independence era.

14.7.3 A Short Account of Rakesh’s Fiction

Mohan Rakesh continued writing short fiction and plays more or less simultaneously. In fiction, he was associated with the Nai Kahani movement that showed a clear preference for depicting middle class situations. In this depiction, however, the surrounding society was kept out and the main focus remained on individual characters. His early short stories such as ‘Miss Pal’, ‘Malbe Ka Maalik’ and ‘Uski Roti’ drew critical attention for their selection of issues that brought out the dilemmas faced by sensitive individuals. This created a bit of difficulty for the writer who would circle around the cityscape, so to say, for dealing with his characters – issues of the large mass of peasantry and the general poor remained outside his creative ambit. Very soon, for this reason perhaps, his writing would be considered narrow in scope and of limited significance. Wasn’t this the reason that his own interest shifted around the mid-sixties towards drama? The form of drama offered to him an opportunity, through the image and ‘scene’ on the stage, to delve deeper into the psyche of the characters he had chosen to represent. We have earlier in this unit how Rakesh made use of powerful symbols in his two plays – ‘Ashadh Ka Ek Din’ and ‘Lehron Ke Rajhans’. This was not possible in fiction, short or long, since it put restrictions associated with life-like depiction. On the other hand, his strong involvement in drama towards the end of his career left him with a dramatist’s identity. Few consider him today as a writer of fiction.

14.8 LET US SUM UP

It is important to familiarize ourselves with a few significant details of Mohan Rakesh's life; these give us insights into his creative self as well as the concerns that he addressed in his writing. The same can be said of the times in which he lived. The socio-ideological scene in early twentieth century India left a lasting impact on Rakesh's mind and made him respond to the challenges with intense engagement. Consideration of questions arising from the broader relations in society greatly helps in understanding a writer. In the case of Mohan Rakesh, such a consideration is extremely valuable.

14.9 EXERCISE

1. To what extent did the Arya Samaj movement contribute to the evolution of rationalist discourse in early twentieth century writing?
2. Comment on the new literary trends in post-independence Hindi drama and fiction.
3. How did the rise of the middle class influence literary writing in the nineteen fifties? Explain.

UNIT 15 *HALFWAY HOUSE: A READING*

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Prologue
- 15.3 Act One
- 15.4 Act Two
- 15.5 Perspective and Approach
- 15.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.7 Exercise

15.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit offers a working summary of Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* and aims to introduce you to certain nuances of the text. The focus of this unit will be on:

- comprehending the relationship between actors and characters;
- analyzing situations and characters specifically;
- gaining awareness of the nature of social institutions;
- looking closely at the way the plot evolves; and
- locating the playwright's view on events and characters in the text.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Halfway House follows a peculiar pattern. The audience gains entry into the play through a character called The Man. A little later, The Man becomes Savitri's husband and watches the goings on in the family helplessly. We shall understand the significance of this man's movements, responses and interventions in this unit.

15.2 PROLOGUE

The play *Halfway House* is divided into three parts: 1) Prologue; 2) Act I; and 3) Act II. The Prologue is an important part of the play which begins with it and also receives a specific direction from it. Let us see the role it plays in the structuring of *Halfway House*. We note that Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* is a play about a family going through difficult times and raises a number of issues relevant to the socio-cultural ethos of the time. The Prologue introduces the subject of the play: "a particular family and its particular circumstances". In the Prologue we meet "the man in a black suit" talking directly to the reader/spectator in the first person and making general observations on life. At this point, the man wearing a black suit is both an actor and a character who talks about the various roles he is going to play in the unfolding drama. In fact, he comes across first as an actor and then as a character of the play. He creates a link between the performers, the performance and the audience and for this reason is a figure similar to that of a sutradhar, the introducer of a play in traditional Indian drama. Apart from this role that this actor assumes in the prologue, he also enacts the characters of Mahendranath, Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja in the text. Indeed it is an innovative method in drama where

one man plays four different roles; nevertheless it is not a mere technical point. In fact, Rakesh seems to make a comment here on human nature in that all men essentially are the same behind the different masks they wear.

The man in a black suit informs the reader/spectator that he does not have a well-defined role in this play. According to him the same is the case with other characters in the play. Clearly, he makes a statement here shunning the expectations of the audience who would hope to see a play that is well-formed with a predetermined structure. The man further suggests that the play itself is "undefined". He goes on to ask the existential question: "who am I?" To this, his answer is: "I am the man you bump into by chance in the street." Commenting on the nature of the play he clearly tells us that "it is because of me that it (the play) does or does not evolve" and that he is responsible for all the happenings in the play. He explores alternative situations where the woman in the play could have had a different set of values, but later concludes that in any case the play would have remained as "undefined" than as it exists in the present state. Finally, he encourages the reader/spectator to give her/his suggestions on the problems raised in the play. Don't you think that had the playwright offered a solution to the problems projected in the play, the plot and characters would have been appropriately defined? In answer, one may say that Rakesh consciously leaves characters, complex situations and issues midway / 'halfway' as it were, without probing them further. This offers us some clue about the title of the play—*Halfway House*. This aspect is going to haunt us throughout this unit. Let us see how we confront it in the following discussion. First, we take up 'Act One' of the play and comprehend it from the point of view of marriage, family etc.

15.3 ACT ONE

Marriage in the Post-Independence Context

The act opens with Savitri entering the living room, the place where the entire action takes place. The first impression one forms of her character is that she has a sense of self-assurance who knows her position in the house. In comparison, her husband is a beleaguered man. The moment Savitri enters the house, she either orders her husband around or complains of the reckless attitude of the household towards her. The setting of the room and the objects lying around tell us something about the characters who belong to the family. The pyjamas of "Bara Sahib" Mahendranath, Ashok's magazine-clippings, and the torn books of Kinni give us a clear view of these characters. Angry with all of them, Savitri begins clearing the mess the members of the family made for she has invited her boss Singhanian over for tea to fix a job for her son Ashok. You should think why she has felt compelled to plan this visit of the boss. Her Husband, Mahendranath decides to leave the house on knowing about the invitation. We are told at this point that Mahendranath in the past borrowed money from his friend Juneja and that this money has to be paid now. Can Mahendranath pay the money to Juneja and be on equal terms with him? On his side, Mahendranath hopes that some help can come by associating with Juneja. Savitri, however, does not find Juneja trustworthy nor does she think he would ever be genuinely friendly towards her husband. One can see a clear lack of trust between the husband and wife. One can truly call it a kind of disconnect between Savitri and Mahendranath. In one of their many quarrels Mahendranath puts across a relevant question to Savitri: "Have you ever considered why I stay away?". The question remains unanswered as the reader/spectator struggles to find the answer with the hints available in the text.

Meanwhile, we are introduced to Binni the older girl in the family who eloped with and married Manoj. Binni regularly visits her parent's home in a state of tension and unease. Unhappy in marriage, Binni helplessly tells her mother that "before I got

married I thought I knew Manoj very well. But now..." she feels that "the longer two people live together, breathe the same air,...the...the more estranged they become from one another" (16-17). Isn't this because of the state of stagnation in the family?

We have two concrete instances of marriage—one that of Mahendranath and Savitri, and the other of Binni and Manoj—both of which point towards the failure of the institution itself, in which individuals find themselves becoming more and more alienated from their spouse but find it difficult to move out of the arrangement. It is for the reason that marriage comes along with a whole baggage of customs and laws ordained by society.

The Dimension of Family within Marriage

At the same time, there is a kind of mystery created around the house in which these characters live. Binni tells her parents that her husband feels uneasy in her parent's home and that the "air" in the house has made them abnormal people. Binni can perhaps play a role in this situation: "I can find out only from within myself or from this house" the solution to the problem. That is why Binni keeps coming back to the house to find out the problem. Note that Manoj gets a mention in this conversation but never once appears in person. Here, Mohan Rakesh presents a perspective on the family of Mahendranath through an outsider, Manoj, but the playwright has carefully sifted the unimportant from the important in that he keeps the man offstage but presents his view of the family. This has made the situation complex.

We are next introduced to the younger girl in the family Kinni who after having returned from the school and finding no one in the house runs out in the street. Later, she finds that all the members in the family including her married sister Binni have come back. Where did they go and why didn't they wait for her? She complains of having eaten nothing in school for want of money. Kinni's state in the house is that of a neglected adolescent who craves for care and affection but gets none from the family. She turns into a rebellious girl with none in the family to confide in. She is bullied by her brother Ashok, too. It is a reflection on the home Kinni belongs to. One sympathizes with her in the play for more often than not she becomes a victim of other people's bad temper. Kinni told her mother that she "feels so ashamed wearing torn socks to school" but Savitri evaded the problem. She keeps recounting the ways in which she's humiliated in class by the teacher for not having brought the skeins of thread to school. In response, she gets scolding and threats. Indeed, Savitri is acutely aware of the problem but lacks sufficient means to meet the needs of the young girl. Savitri feels helpless and once says to her elder daughter: "I can't manage any longer, Binni. I just can't ..." (21-23). The audiences are left to wonder whether Savitri's family is an isolated case or represents broader social trends in post-Independence India.

However, Ashok, the eldest among the three children of Mahendranath and Savitri, has no desire to take up a job particularly through help from social contacts of his mother. We are told that Ashok hasn't shaved for days, is wearing old trousers, a worn-out but flashy shirt and that he has been sleeping in the house all day long. The image provided to us of Ashok here is that of an idler who scarcely feels responsible about matters relating the family. It is also given that Ashok had quit his college halfway and left in six weeks the job his mother arranged for him. He is disrespectful to his parents, particularly his father in this scene which irks him no end. Consequently, Mahendranath has a bout of self-pity as he comments: "For how many years have I been bearing the burden of life? And for how many years have I been looking after this family? And despite that, what have I come to...that everyone answers me back, is rude, disrespectful, impertinent...I'm responsible for ruining my life, your (Savitri's) life, all your lives! And I still stick to this house, because I'm a parasite, because I like living off my wife" (26-27). The issue he has

raised in this speech can scarcely be ignored. Irritated, he leaves the house at this moment deciding never to come back. Initially, he goes to his friend Juneja's place but returns home the next day.

Such interactions in the course of the play create tensions and build an unhealthy atmosphere; already the notion of family with principles that govern it has received a big jolt. It is not the ideal family that stands united in times of crisis nor are its members sympathetic towards one another. The image of a self-sacrificing mother is constantly denied to Savitri even when she iterates her claim to it. The values of love, compassion and respect that form the basis of the familial world are constantly done away with in the text from one situation to another. Does it suggest that family as an institution in the modern times is no more a secured zone that sustains the individual? Also, does the playwright focus upon a particular section of society, the upper-middle class where notions of family and fellow-feeling are increasingly receding to the background? Let us remind ourselves that Mahendranath's family is by no stretch of imagination an upper-middle class one; still it runs on the aspirations of economic success and the life of plenty. Indeed, it seems Mohan Rakesh has in mind the upper echelons of society when he projects the disintegration of a 'home' in *Halfway House*.

Next comes the announcement from Savitri that her boss Singhanian is about to reach their place. To this, Ashok reacts in the following manner: "If he hadn't been your boss, I would have booted him out that day. Lolling on the sofa and scratching himself in the groin. His thoughts stray in one direction, his eyes in another, and I'm supposed to guess that he's addressing me" (28-29). Ashok's description is indeed graphic; we actually witness Singhanian with his boastful look and pompous style. This bears reference to his comment: "What a wonderful publication... the Reader's Digest! In our country there's just trash; one never sees a good magazine. An American came here recently" (31). Singhanian's elitist pro-American approach has its basis in the class he belongs to. When Savitri entreats Singhanian to have tea, he responds thus: "No, not at all. The company has an international clientele, people from all countries visit our office. Recently, a Japanese delegation... whatever you may say, Japan is really keeping them all on their toes. Just the other day I glanced through the industrial statistics..." (31-32). Singhanian in the play is evidently upset about the way "labour unrest (is) sweeping through the country today" and more particularly the labour problem in his own firm. Although Singhanian appears only once in the play, the impact that his personality leaves on the reader/spectator is offensive. Mohan Rakesh makes a scathing attack on this particular section of Singhanians, suggesting that it is almost impossible to sympathise with such a lot. The audience is left to identify with Ashok's disgust of the man and the turmoil caused by his presence in the house. The act of squashing the insect played out by Ashok is in some sense a reference to what he'd like to do with Singhanian who is viewed by Ashok as an insect and a monster alternatively. We have also noted a sexual innuendo in Singhanian's comment for Savitri: "Come to the house some day. You haven't been over for a long time" (35). It is evident that Singhanian would not help Savitri without extracting a price from her. As Singhanian leaves the house, Savitri chides Ashok for sketching a portrait of Singhanian as a monster:

THE WOMAN : Don't, if you can't but I won't stand for it. When I go out of my way to invite people, then you make fun of them. Did you hear? I'll never, never stand for it.

THE BOY : If you can't stand for it, why do you have to invite people who make...

THE WOMAN : Go on, tell me!

THE BOY : Let's change the subject. This is why I wanted to leave at the start.

THE WOMAN : Complete your sentence.

THE BOY : ...who make us feel even smaller than we actually are (40).

The argument ends with Savitri's decision that "from now on I'll only bother about myself...I have done my utmost. It's the end now as far as I'm concerned...it really is the end" (43). However, as things turn out to be later in the second act, there seems to be no end to quarrels and fault-finding among the family members, with Mahendranath and Savitri disagreeing on almost every point that is raised.

15.4 ACT TWO

Wishes and Expectations of the Middle-classes

The second act begins with clear indication of Savitri losing interest in the running of the house; she has not tidied the room on the following day. One expects significant changes to take place in this act with the feeling that things would finally move in a particular direction—perhaps the family would break gradually as each individual leaves the place and opts to live life on one's own terms. Binni's comment is significant: "She (Savitri) was so withdrawn last night...and this morning...I've never seen her like this before" the situation sets the mood of expectation that Savitri would change considerably and so would the circumstances.

Savitri's defiant appearance is a prelude to Mahendranath's decision of not coming back home and Juneja's plan to meet Savitri. It is evident that Mahendranath has been staying with Juneja all this while and the latter's visit to their house is in connection with the state of affairs that exist between Savitri and Mahendranath. At the same time, the focus shifts for a while on Binni. The following conversation between Ashok and Binni makes them both conscious of their lives in relation to the surroundings:

- THE OLDER GIRL : How should I know? I feel like a stranger in this house now...
- THE BOY : Didn't you ever feel like that before...?
- THE OLDER GIRL : Before? Before, it was...
- THE BOY : You didn't even know that you felt it. And when you became conscious of it you cleared out!
- THE OLDER GIRL : Don't say that!
- THE BOY : Why get upset? I feel the same...started feeling it from the day You left...
- THE OLDER GIRL : What do you mean?
- THE BOY : Perhaps I felt it before too...but I started thinking about it only when you'd gone.
- THE OLDER GIRL : I ...don't understand...
- THE BOY : There is something in this house that...
- THE OLDER GIRL : (shattered) You think so too...? (46)

The sense of mystery created earlier in Act I with Binni telling Savitri that Manoj thinks she is not 'natural' gets re-established in this part of the play with Ashok's similar observations. What constitutes the unnatural element vis-à-vis the house remains a mystery till the very end. Nonetheless, such pointers spur the reader/spectator on to trace the clues in the text to what the issue is. The playwright makes use of the air of the house as a metaphor for the incomprehensible force governing the lives of the people in the house. Such instances add to the dramatic quality of the play. The device enables the playwright to express his concern for the incomprehensible layers of reality that are 'felt' but not 'seen'.

The focus in this part of the play further shifts away from Binni and Ashok towards Kinni who is dragged in from the street by Ashok and beaten up for talking with her friend Surekha about matters of sex, as this curiosity does not go well with her older brother, Ashok. Kinni on her side does not own up that she is in the wrong and this leads to another conflict in the house further on.

Meanwhile Savitri has decided to go out for tea with her long-standing friend Jagmohan with whom she has "something important to discuss". She says to Binni: "When you come next time I may not be here" (52). It seems that Savitri has finally resolved to move out of the house and give up her role of a wife and mother. The breaking of her necklace at this very moment symbolises the breaking of the family-ties she has held until now. The broken necklace leaves her upset but she goes to the cupboard to wear another one—which in turn suggests that Savitri has chosen another life for herself. Is this symbolism integral to the playwright's plan? As Savitri looks in the mirror she finds her hair growing grey, her eyes becoming more shadowy and suddenly finds Jagmohan behind looking silently at her from the door. He addresses Savitri—"Hello, Cuckoo"—from which we get an impression that Jagmohan has been an intimate friend of Savitri (here she calls him "Jog") and that the two have in fact been one-time lovers. This further gets substantiated with Savitri's commanding tone while speaking to him: "But I told you to come straight here, without wasting a moment" (54). The two share a kind of compatibility one expects Mahendranath and Savitri to share in matrimony. Her comment to Jagmohan "I know. I never misunderstand what you say" (55) is the case in point. This act in particular is significant in that each of Savitri's gestures and actions tell of a larger concern. Her feeling of losing something important before going out with Jagmohan and her constant hesitation at finally leaving the house create this specific version of events.

Broader Aspects of Familial and Social Life

Interspersed with the main narrative we have the narratives of the three children of the house among whom Kinni's problems draw the attention of the reader. Here, the play opens up in a general way. The problems likewise that Binni and Ashok face are partly the result of their own doing. Binni could have avoided marrying Manoj and taken up a job instead, and Ashok too had the choice to earn his livelihood independently. But he would not take up a job that will ruin his self and he must save his individual being from being tainted by the corrupt social influences. Consider whether this could actually be the case or I am stretching the point. Kinni on the other hand seems more of a victim of choices taken by her elders. Put together, these individual acts reflect the general ethos of disintegration that causes angst: a sense of helplessness pressing upon one's psyche. As soon as Savitri leaves with Jagmohan, Kinni enters the house crying and on looking "around at the emptiness of the room" runs out. She has been chided by Surekha's mother who as Kinni tells Binni "says I'm ruining her daughter and other...horrid things about us..." (60). We realize that the concept of helpful, sympathetic neighbours gets inverted in the text and for some reason we are made to feel that the cause of it lies in the house run and controlled by Savitri and Mahendranath. Do you notice a sort of matriarchal structure entering the family as an economically independent woman has become a bread-winner in the family? This inversion of the patriarchal order inside the house as against the smooth working of it outside has created the rift between the family and the neighbours and it is for this reason that Surekha's mother thought that Kinni's entire family lacked moral values. Note that 'morality' as well as the accepted value system is produced by society in order to keep the individual within the bounds of general norms. Once a person flouts these norms, s/he is considered both immoral and threatening. Does it mean that the playwright Mohan Rakesh has taken a radical stand in presenting to us the framework of a matriarchal structure as an alternative to the existing one? The answer may be

difficult to reach but we certainly are left to wonder. In consequence, our attention as readers and viewers shifts to the world outside the text.

The question of domestic violence is another important aspect of India's social life. There is a sharp reminder in the text of brutal wife-beating by Mahendranath. This is prior to the loss he incurred in his work and Savitri took upon her the responsibility of running the household. Binni in her conversation with Juneja tells him of this: "It's not a matter to be dismissed that lightly, Uncle! When I lived here it was like being...you can't even imagine what it was like...Daddy's rages when he tore Mama's clothes to shreds...when he gagged her and beat her up behind closed doors...dragging her by the hair to the WC...(shudders) I can't even recount the fearful scenes I've witnessed in this house!"(64). Our perception of Mahendranath also undergoes a change as the figure of a meek husband transforms into a ferocious animal. The conflict assumes new proportions as Savitri and Mahendranath are being analysed in their absence by the two close observers—Binni and Juneja. While Binni more or less defends her mother, Juneja is on the side of his friend Mahendranath.

Why does Juneja think it right for Mahendranath to leave Savitri? Why is Mahendranath bent on coming to the same house where he was humiliated and considered a non-entity? On this, Juneja is of the opinion that "Perhaps something can be done for a day. Or even for a week. But for ever? Nothing!" (65). In the case of Mahendranath, the house provides a sense of meaning to his existence which is why he has a strong urge to come back to it.

Soon we have Savitri back in the house facing Kinni who insists that Savitri meet Surekha's mother. Savitri pays no heed to her and indeed hits her later for calling Binni a "lump of clay". Is parental violence the answer to children's queries and questionings in the house? Or is it that situations unfolding in the house point towards things happening elsewhere, in that environment of ruthlessness commerce and trade that seeks to swallow harmonious interaction between members in a family? Go over it and analyse matters further.

Feminist Questions and Concerns in *Halfway House*

The encounter between Savitri and Juneja turns out to be a bitter one in the text. Suspicions get established and secrets revealed as each blames the other for the wrongs done to the family; Juneja accuses Savitri for having Mahendranath "in a trap" so that "he has become incapable of doing anything for himself" (67) and Savitri tells him that Mahendranath has not proved to be a 'man'. Should Savitri be blamed for her husband's incapability? Mahendranath is the same man who subjected Savitri to violence, as if to take out on her his hidden frustrations. We are forced to ask from ourselves: how could the victim of violence put him in a trap? If Juneja's view seems blinkered to us at this moment, we have to consider whether the playwright has too, a share in it.

Let us also take up the issue that Savitri has raised about Mahendranath: "Ever since I've known him, I've always found him leaning on someone or other. Particularly on you (Juneja). He's never been able to do anything without asking you. If we want to buy something, he must ask you. If we want to go somewhere, he must ask you. When he wanted to marry me, he had to ask you. He can't even breathe without asking you!" (68). According to Savitri, "the object of his existence is...as if...he were there only to fill in the gaps in the lives of others...whatever other people expect of him...or in whichever way they think they can use him" (69). Savitri has always been suspicious of Juneja for using Mahendranath and befooling him with regard to the money he owned and invested. She voices her opinion at this point to which Juneja's reply is "Mahendranath was always a bit hasty" (69). Mark Juneja's condescending tone in this remark. Savitri recounts her experiences in

marriage when Mahendranath bullied his children and beat her up, how he wanted to “change the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I ...that same Mahendra who smiles meekly among his friends becomes a fiend when he comes home” (70). We witness here the kind of violence embedded in the very structure of marriage where the woman is at the receiving end; even when the man appears “meek” to the outside world, within the four walls of his house he becomes the oppressor. We admit that Rakesh gives ample space to the character of Savitri in the course of the text generally and particularly in this section, still he fails to do justice to her character by making her desire “a man” and not Mahendranath who is a weakling. Is it possible that Savitri apprehends the subordinate position of a woman in marriage and still believes that her life would have been any different had she married a *man*? By insisting on having a ‘man’ in her life, a bold and self-assured husband, Savitri seems to have a superficial understanding of things around her, the moments of depth in her observations notwithstanding. For instance, would it not be appropriate if she wished for a life with a person who was her equal appreciated her for what she was?

In the lengthy dialogues and constant accusations between Savitri and Juneja, Binni is the silent observer; she stands in the same relationship to the other two characters as does the reader/spectator to all the characters. Initially, Savitri wishes Binni to listen to the entire conversation but later she asks Binni to leave and Juneja insists that she listen to the other side of the story. In Juneja’s words:

But every other year you’ve tried to free yourself by looking around for another man! In the beginning I was one of these men. You say you respected me then. But what you think of me now...you have also just said. After me, you were enamoured of Shivjeet...his university degree, his trips abroad, or whatever. In reality he interested you only because...he was not Mahendra. But you were also quick to point out his faults. Why wasn’t he frank? Why so much double-talk? Then you met Jagmohan. You admired him for his excellent contacts, his smart way of life, his generosity. But the real reason was the same; no matter what he was, he was Jagmohan...not Mahendra. Yet you began to find fault with him too...why he accepted even the harshest of words with a silent smile! It was a good thing he got transferred or...(73).

There are several questions that come to the fore at this point in the text. How does Juneja know so much about Savitri? He is Mahendranath’s, not Savitri’s friend. It is obvious that Mahendranath has shared these details with Juneja. Also, Mahendranath’s views of Savitri and her associates have influenced Juneja’s assessment of the same. In this sense, the above-quoted lines suggest the bias of a husband and his male friend. For them, interacting with other men in itself constitutes Savitri’s crime. It is overlooked that like any individual, Savitri is bound to meet new people, make new friends and comment on people’s behaviour. She is aware of her unsuccessful marriage and it is only natural that she would imagine a happy life with another man. Why is it expected that Savitri must find happiness with her husband? Let us recognise that both Mahendranath and Savitri are caught in the values of the upper-middle class given to self-seeking and individual progress. Juneja’s harangue on her unaccepted behaviour is actually a sermon on how women should not forget their inferior and fragile position in the marital contract. Note this for instance “Because the meaning of life to you is how many different things you can have and enjoy at the same time. One man alone could never have given them to you, so no matter whom you married, you would always have felt as empty and as restless as you do today...” (74). Juneja meant it to be ironical but see how the remark reflects back on the class in society he belongs.

Juneja is aware of the events that have taken place in Savitri’s life, and sure that Savitri tried to attract Manoj. The latter however, chose the daughter. Binni expresses her state of shock at this revelation, the first impact of which is one of disgust for

Savitri. Instead, if we look into the matter closely we find that there is no response from Savitri on the matter which is why Juneja's argument gains credence. Why is Savitri provided with no justification for this? Further, Juneja claims that after "Binni went away with Manoj you were in a frenzy. At times you nagged Mahendra, at others you lashed out at Ashok. And when you lost patience you made hysterical attempts to find a way to get out. Just then you heard that Jagmohan was back. Seeing all doors closed before you, you tried to step into the past" (75).

Juneja sums up her entire life in his comment with an air of authority. He is presumptuous to the extent that he claims to know what happened between Savitri and Jagmohan when they were out for tea. To quote:

You needn't tell me. I can tell you what happened. You said you were very unhappy. He said he sympathized. You said you wanted to leave this house. He said how fortunate it would have been if you'd come to this conclusion some years ago. You said what didn't take place then could take place now. He said he'd like it to, but there were too many obstacles...his position, your children, this and that. And then he wasn't happy in his job, he didn't know when he might quit, so he couldn't take such a step at this time. You listened in silence and kept wiping your tears. Eventually, he said you were getting late, he would take you home. You stood up quietly and got into the car. On the way, he perhaps mentioned that if you needed money he would... (76).

Note that it is only in the last line that Juneja adds a "perhaps" to his imaginative narrative, otherwise throughout his tale he is sure of what happened between Savitri and Jagmohan. In such circumstances is it justified on the part of the reader to believe Juneja word for word when we know that while Savitri was out for tea he was sitting in the house chatting with Binni? How is it then that we feel inclined to take Juneja's assumptions to be true? This is because, the playwright refuses to make his character of Savitri talk or give any kind of justification. One explanation for her silence could be that she feels put off by Juneja's allegations and therefore finds it useless to justifiably explain her conduct. Nonetheless, it finally appears that Savitri does not speak out of her guilt and there is little ambiguity regarding the matter for Rakesh seems to have projected in Juneja the voice of a sane man, going out of his way to help his friend while the real 'devil' is the woman. Juneja's assertion that Mahendranath is "attached to you (Savitri)" and helpless, makes one pity the man once again, thereby believing that the relentless Savitri has no attachment with her husband.

The play ends with Mahendranath's return to the house and it becomes clear that nothing is going to change in the life of any of the characters. This is in a way the anti-climax of the play for at the end of Act I and the beginning of Act II we were under the impression that things would change and move in a new direction, taking us perhaps to a new set of problematic. This, however, does not happen. Why? The playwright gave the background of the unchanging nature of circumstance in the Preface where an all-controlling figure of a single man plays many roles.

15.5 PERSPECTIVE AND APPROACH

Certainly, Mohan Rakesh focuses upon the problems faced by the family but is unable to indicate for the benefit of the reader a direction in which answers could be found. The play seems static and the problems insurmountable. This version and representation of life remains predominant till the very end of the play.

The direction in which characters move or develop is determined by the writer's or text's perspective. The way characters unfold in the course of the play and project a specific trait that defines them in relation to other characters marks their development. Perspective draws together the different parts of a representation in

such a way that the important and the superficial are clearly identified and separated. They are organized into a pattern so that together the contending viewpoints take us towards a meaningful resolution of issues. Mohan Rakesh's view of his times finds expression in *Halfway House* in that the family presented in the play is an ordinary family whose problems are those that the India of the time is faced with—the widening gap between the rich and the poor; the role of the middle class in such a scenario; the predicament of such a class along with the challenges it has to face; and the complex mechanism of the social system of the time. Individuals are changed by the forces in their environment and they too contribute to the change in their social surroundings.

15.6 LET US SUM UP

One can see a step-by-step growth of 'action' in *Halfway House* with special reference to the relationship between Mahendranath and Savitri under the structure of marriage and family. The text helps us understand the many layers of reality accompanying the middle-class life and concerns in post-Independence India.

15.7 EXERCISE

1. What is the playwright's intention in making one actor play the characters of Mahendranath, Singhania, Jagmohan and Juneja?
2. Critically analyse the character portrayal of Savitri in the play?
3. What is Mohan Rakesh's position on family, marriage and society in *Halfway House*?
4. Comment on the ending of *Halfway House*?

UNIT 16 MIDDLE CLASS CONCERNS IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Educated Middle Class and the Family
- 16.3 The Title *Halfway House*
- 16.4 The Crisis in the Play
- 16.5 The Characters in *Halfway House*
- 16.6 Culture and Society in *Halfway House*
 - 16.6.1 The Scope of Individual Freedom in *Halfway House*
 - 16.6.2 Male Dominance in *Halfway House*
 - 16.6.3 The Historical Context
 - 16.6.4 Conflicting Perspectives in *Halfway House*
- 16.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.8 Exercise

16.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objective in this unit is to 1) familiarize you with a few important areas of Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* and 2) convey to you the central theme of the play.

In this unit, we shall discuss

- the economic problem the family in *Halfway House* faces;
- the crisis visible in the play;
- the impact of the economic crisis on the lives of Mahendranath, Savitri etc.;
- the socio-cultural context of the family in question; and
- the perspective that emerges in the play.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

I begin this discussion on Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* with a clear reference to its main character Mahendranath and his family. Here, the main point to be taken up is the deteriorating economic condition of the family in question. To share with you my responses to the play, I shall focus upon the specific moment of transition from a middle-class to a lower-middle-class set up in the body of the text. The next thing that follows is the problems that come along with such a condition in the lives of the characters. Along side I shall bring to your notice the important attributes of the middle-class in relation to the social system as a whole.

16.2 EDUCATED MIDDLE CLASS AND THE FAMILY

Halfway House has at its centre middle-class concerns which are marked by different kinds of constraints; the central among them being, as said above, financial pressure. Apparently, the play provides us with details of characters and their attitude towards life. We are witness to strained relationships as each character living in the house struggles to break free from familial ties. Nonetheless, they are all bound to the same house and keep returning to it. What is the compulsion that brings the characters together each time they are on the verge of leaving the family? More importantly, what has caused the disintegration of the family? Taking hints from the “broken furniture” and “limited space” in the play, we observe that we are dealing with a middle-class family pushed downwards, as it were, in the social hierarchy by certain hidden forces. At the same time, these hidden forces are active in creating conditions that work to the detriment of the middle-class. This results in a shift from the middle-class to lower middle-class lifestyle which creates problems for the members of the household, Mahendranath, Savitri, Binni, Ashok, and Kinni as they have to cope with the oppressive social organization.

Mohan Rakesh captures a phenomenon in which there is little scope for the small capitalist venture to make profit or for that matter thrive in competitive times. The family of Mahendranath is at the receiving end of this phenomenon.

As the middle-class family presented in the play comes to hard times, it is accompanied by turmoil in the lives of those who suffer the blow. An essential trait of the middle-class, too, comes to the fore, that of being cut off from the lower strata of society. It is also peculiar of the middle-class to look up to the upper-middle class to find favour there in the fond hope of becoming rich themselves. The inability to attain better standards of living or even maintaining one’s existing social position leaves the middle-class individual desperate to hold on to one’s fixed notions and ideas. This is because the dominant forces in society work upon the individual allowing little space to him/her in determining one’s own life.

16.3 THE TITLE *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Let’s see what the title of the play means to us. In the scenario mentioned above neither can the middle class individual gain admittance in the upper class nor can the person maintain one’s existing social position. Once social conditions are determined by historical necessities, we cannot move out of our social environment. In Mohan Rakesh’s scheme of things, there is little that an individual can do in such circumstances and there is also no possible way out. Hence, *Halfway House*. In fact, in the play, we have a house that is ‘halfway’ to its economic decline. The first line of the prologue substantiates the point—“A disorderly living room in what was once a fairly well-to-do middle-class home” (4). The transition from a well-to-do status to a “disorderly” one lies at the bottom of the crisis the entire family of Mahendranath is engulfed in. There is a stark difference between what the case was in the past and what it *is* in the present; this difference constantly pointed out in the play etches further the present state of affairs in the family. Certain minor instances in the text tell us about the economic downturn of the family. At the very outset of the play, Savitri complains “A whole pot of tea for just one person” (8) and later “We wouldn’t even get the scraps we manage to eat on my salary” (14). The harsh reality finds expression in the younger girl, Kinni’s comment “If I’m hungry in school, I’ve no money to buy anything. And at home it takes hours to heat the milk” and “You (Savitri) said my hair-clips and socks would be here within a week—have you got them? I feel so ashamed wearing torn socks to school” (20-21). All the characters feel oppressed by the circumstances and feel helpless about the way

things are for they are unable to move out of the constraints of social life. Also, their interaction with others makes the awareness of the financial pressure more acute.

16.4 THE CRISIS IN THE PLAY

In this section, I plan to particularly look into the causes and effects of the economic crisis faced by the family of Mahendranath. These are vitally linked to the kind of relationship the members of the family have and thus I would also analyze this very relationship vis-à-vis the text. Also, I would emphasize the responses and attitudes of characters towards the socio-economic condition they confront. These responses are to a large extent a product of the humiliation the family has to suffer in the midst of insecurities.

Everything in the text points to the economic crisis of the family and we face the question: What does the economic shift entail for Mahendranath's family and what would happen if the characters lost their social standing? These questions haunt the characters living in the house and create a sense of fear in them leading them to desperate attempts to restore the little they can. When faced with difficult circumstances, the family begins to disintegrate as each of its members is caught in the web of compulsions and restraints emanating from society. Consider the way in which they interact with one another—Mahendranath complains, "everyone answers me back, is rude, disrespectful, impertinent" (26), Savitri questions, "If no one else is bothered, why should I alone go on?" (41), and Kinni, the younger girl almost becomes a hysterical case being stubborn, calling her older sister "a lump of clay" (65). Their behaviour lacks spontaneity and ease. Material lapse on the part of Mahendranath gives rise to emotional insecurities as each individual finds that she/he is alone, struggling in vain to fight against odds. Let me remind you here that the lapse I talk about is attributed in the play to Mahendranath by Savitri while the latter holds Savitri responsible for spending all the money. This leads to bickering. It is significant that none of the family members in the play has hopes of becoming comfortable economically. What do you think could be the reason? Suppose I said that the system under which they work is beyond their control, would you agree?

The material condition of the family forces the characters to act in particular ways; these clash mutually and stalemate is the result. Their responses are in some ways a rebellion against the norms that bind them. Take for instance, Ashok's cutting pictures from magazines and tearing them all apart in frustration later. All characters in fact react very strongly to the situation they are caught up in, the first instance of which is to be found in the prologue. When the man in a black suit "stands up, as if to meet a challenge"; he fails to leave an impression on the audience. Nonetheless, he raises the real issue vis-à-vis the play "Who or what has the determining role... I, the woman, the circumstances that surround us or the questions that arise out of our interaction with each other" (5-6). This question remains pertinent till the very end of the play as clashing perspectives of characters stand justified from their particular angles. This makes one wonder if these characters are really at fault. The other view could be that the social set-up of which they are a part is the real reason for their peculiar conditions.

Financial limitations lead to humiliation as each one in the family suffers the ghettoisation created by social hierarchy. What ghettoisation means here is that the family in question has been isolated from the larger community it once belonged to. People belonging to this class begin to consider Mahendranath and his family their inferior and let them understand that they no more hold rights and privileges they earlier had. Mahendranath, Savitri, Binni, Ashok, and Kinni have to accept this segregated mode of living.

16.5 THE CHARACTERS IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Let us take Mahendranath, Savitri and others as figures to be interpreted in the context in which they are placed. We notice **Mahendranath** becoming increasingly inconsequential in the house; he has lost respect with the loss of his fortune—"what is my status in this house? Silent acceptance, perpetual snubs, constant insults" (26). Economic dependence weakens his self-esteem as others in the house too view him as a burden. This is accompanied by a fear in him of being alone if and when his wife would leave him for being "dry rot in this house, eating away at its very foundations" (27). There is also some kind of emotional insecurity found in Mahendranath as he finds his wife giving importance to men having influence in society.

The economy of the house is inextricably linked with the world of trade and market in the society outside. This is to be particularly noted and understood. We are informed that Mahendranath had taken and spent his share of the money from the factory owned jointly by him and Juneja. While the latter is able to secure a comfortable position and lifestyle, Mahendranath remains without a job. We are also told later that Mahendranath is in debt and owes money to Juneja. Obviously, there is a suggestion that Juneja has deceived Mahendranath and misappropriated funds. It is significant how the market with its crass form of commercialism alters the personal relations of individuals. In the context of the play we witness the basic human values attached with friendship going down the drain. The role of the market in ruining personal relations needs to be stressed here. Ironically, Mahendranath finds Juneja his only companion. For this reason, Juneja assumes the role of a decision-maker in another man's house. Mahendranath remains a meek petitioner as money borrowed from Juneja makes him completely submissive to the latter. This also enables Juneja to establish his superiority to Mahendranath. We have to grasp how the market has entered the domestic world and impinged on the daily lives of individuals.

However, **Savitri** does not view Juneja as a sympathizer of the family; she feels that he is the perpetrator of their troubles. What is your view? Don't you think she understands the situation much better than her husband? She wants Mahendranath to understand it as well but in vain, as she comments in the text:

THE WOMAN : That's right! Keep hoping! He's just dying to help you! (starts dusting the furniture) There's always so much dust. Where does it come from?

THE FIRST MAN : You have no right to keep abusing him. He has always helped me.

THE WOMAN : We would have been better off, if he hadn't.

THE FIRST MAN : (sits down) Alright, I won't go! I don't go there to have a good time! If fate has been against me up to now...

THE WOMAN : Get up. Let me dust the sofa. (He stands up.) Sit down on that chair. (He sits down sulkily.) One can excuse what happened the first time. But what about the second time? Both Juneja and you invested equal amounts of money. There was one factory. The profit and loss occurred in the same factory. Yet, fate favoured him and not you?

THE FIRST MAN : (swallowing his anger with difficulty) If you had been a partner in the factory you'd have realized—

THE WOMAN : that I've already realised! Haven't I? (10)

Being the sole breadwinner of the house, Savitri has a rightful claim to the decision-making in the family. This becomes clear when we notice that she does not get the kind of importance she expects at home or actually gets at her workplace. One, she is cautious to maintain her profile at her workplace and two, she is eager to secure a job for her son even when the chances of his getting it are bleak. Her vain attempts exasperate her; she feels humiliated as neither do the businessmen she interacts with seem in earnest to help her nor do her family members—especially her husband and son—contribute to the family's well-being in any way. The behavior of her son Ashok before the guests she invites home distresses her. She is unhappy about the fact that Ashok has not accepted her idea of success and economic stability.

The anxiety that **Ashok** experiences on such occasions, is brought out in the text with full force. He suffers on account of having to bear with an unmannerly boss. Ashok finds he is incapable of doing a job that is not after his heart and despises the occasion when his mother invites 'influential' people at their house "who make us feel even smaller than we actually are" (40). He has a soft corner for his father—he tells Binni "Don't you pity him (Mahendranath) when you see what he's been reduced to?"—while his attitude towards his mother is somewhat ambiguous. This means that he dislikes Savitri's efforts of introducing him to people with considerable social standing and wishes her to do nothing about the state of the family—he retorts "If she can't manage, why does she continue to try?". Is he possessive about his mother and thinks that her meeting the visitor will reflect badly on the 'honour' of the household? Does he feel threatened that his mother is a working woman?

Binni on the other hand is unhappy in marriage and the source of her unhappiness is the broken house of her parents. Consequently, she keeps returning to the house to find out the problem that has led to a state of uneasiness in her after her own marriage. She feels the ignominy of being a part of the family only when her husband debases her by claiming that "It's from this house I have taken something with me which prevents me from being natural" (18). It remains a kind of mystery till the very end of the play as to what is it about the house that makes these characters 'unnatural'. Obviously, it works as a metaphor to be deciphered by the reader/ spectator as the play unfolds. In the course of the text Binni "starts despising myself. I feel like...like smashing everything around me. Like defying him in a way that would...enrage him" (19). This assertion not only projects Binni's humiliation but also her helplessness vis-à-vis the way things exist. When back in her parent's house she tries hard to resolve the situation but she gets more and more entangled in it. Is it a fate-like pressure that she bears? Also, is there some link she has with the act of marriage?

Kinni the youngest in the family has her own set of troubles—she is an adolescent who requires care and affection from her in family in her formative years, the lack of which has an adverse impact on her mind. Kinni's sorrows get intensified with the behavior of elders towards her and her problems. She has to bear the embarrassment of wearing torn socks to school and at home she remains unattended to, as the elders seem engrossed in their own worries. The level of normalcy is low to an extent in the family that there is sheer lack of tenderness and love among them. Instead things are violently thrown helter-skelter in the living room of the house. Note that Kinni in fact has to bear the aggression of others in the family as Ashok beats her up and Savitri slaps her and locks her up in the room. These incidents render her hysterical on many an occasion.

16.6 CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Having understood the precise nature of conditions of a family hard pressed for resources, I would analyze now a few of central issues in the context of the discussion of *Halfway House*. One, the relationship between the individual and society provides important clues vis-à-vis the text; two, the inter-relationship between the different classes present in society gives us an opportunity to understand comprehensively the nature and attitude of characters in the play; and three, the relationship among individuals who are a part of a given social structure and whose lives are determined by a shared tradition and culture helps us attain specific insights into the causes and effects of material changes in society. Looked at in this way, the entire phenomenon presented in the play becomes a subject of analysis. Let's evolve a view on this in the following section.

16.6.1 The Scope of Individual Freedom in *Halfway House*

What kind of relationship exists between the individual and the society one inhabits? The individual is more or less dependent on society for his/her existence and development. However, the moment one becomes aware of this reality, even if partially, one begins to resist this dependence by deriving strength and solace from within one's self. Of course, I am not saying that the individual is self-contained. The mind of the individual is full of social content and it is therefore almost impossible to dissociate one's self from society and for this reason it becomes imperative for the individual to become involved in social affairs. Is it possible for the individual to move out of the given social formation? This is obviously not the case. At the same time, institutions and organizations built by society over a period of time impact the sensibility of the individual thereby molding/altering one's mind. Indeed, institutions of education, family and religion, for example, play a decisive role in the development of the individual psyche. While these form the background of a literary work, the focal point in the text remains the individual as also his/her interaction with the environment.

In *Halfway House*, these concerns find concrete shape as the play foregrounds the struggle of characters from their specific positions. The characters in the play realize to some extent that their human significance and specific individuality cannot be seen in isolation. These cannot be separated from the context in which they were created. It is felt that their life is governed not by their personal will but by some external force which is abstract, yet it crushes their self-esteem, as it were. Hence, their recourse to one or another kind of escapism. For instance, Mahendranath avoids confronting the truth that he is an unsuccessful man who cannot sustain his family. This is why every time Savitri invites well-to-do male guests to the house Mahendranath finds some way to leave the place. He cannot entertain a guest who would make him conscious of his own ineptitude—the harsh reality of Mahendranath's life becomes starker when compared with another man's achievements. Ashok too manages to elude the circumstances by directing his thought towards idle work such as cutting pictures from magazines or drawing caricatures of people. The more he becomes aware of the limitations the more he feels oppressed by them and strives to divert his mind away from such thoughts. With this kind of realization he becomes guarded, defending himself against society as also against other members of the family. A sense of loneliness takes over his being making him drift away from social activities and social relations. Binni, too, evades the situation, whether knowingly or unknowingly, by running away from the house and marrying Manoj. Ashok claims "you didn't even know that you felt" like a stranger in the house "and when you became conscious of it you cleared out" is the case in point. That both Ashok and Binni feel like strangers in their own house corroborates the fact that the family has ceased to provide sustenance to the family members.

16.6.2 Male Dominance in *Halfway House*

We witness a host of characters, not a part of the family in *Halfway House*. These characters operate from their respective class within the social structure. Here it needs to be pointed out that Juneja, Singhanian and Jagmohan belong to the upper strata of society and their relation with the members of Mahendranath's family is one that exists between the privileged and the underprivileged. Note that Mahendranath and Savitri in their relationship with Juneja and Singhanian act as supplicants in need of some help. Even Jagmohan's attitude towards Savitri is somewhat sympathetic. In all these relations, the position of Mahendranath and Savitri is marked by helplessness. Juneja particularly plays a decisive role in the fate of the family as he takes upon himself the responsibility of setting things right between Mahendranath and Savitri. He has an authoritative presence in the house owing to his economic stature which gives him the right to speak about the internal affairs of the family. Singhanian, on his visits to the house, sits and lolls on the sofa as if the house were under his personal control. This gives him the right to lecture to Ashok on political rights and labor issues. He assumes a commanding tone in passing his judgment on Ashok "shiv shiv shiv! This violent attitude" and wears a conceited look recounting tales of his own success and social prestige. Further, the following dialogue from the play explains to a large extent the relationship between Singhanian and Savitri:

- THE WOMAN : I wonder if you've had the time to think about...?
- THE SECOND MAN : (munching noisily) What?
- THE WOMAN : That if ...that if you have a good job in view...
- THE SECOND MAN : It's delicious!
- THE WOMAN : You were kind enough to...
- THE SECOND MAN : Yes, yes...you did mention something. For a cousin of yours...no, that was Mrs. Malhotra. Who was it you mentioned? (33)

The half broken sentences of Savitri point towards her hesitation to ask the favour but she has no choice. Singhanian on his side is least interested in the matter—his answer to Savitri's question about the job for Ashok is, "it's delicious". He constantly changes the topic and talks about his own achievements. Also, note that Savitri is perhaps not the only one bound by circumstances; there are others like her who seek favours from Singhanian such as Mrs. Malhotra mentioned in the conversation above as she too has been asking him to help her kinsmen. This gives credence to the argument that the family presented in the play is both peculiar and a type that represents a particular part of society at the time.

Nonetheless, there is an underlying tone of superiority in all the three men interacting with Mahendranath's family. It is significant that all members of the family face humiliation from the 'outsiders' who impress upon them the decline in their status. Whether it is Juneja, Singhanian, Jagmohan, Binni's husband Manoj, Kinni's school teacher or her friend Surekha's mother, all of them add to the agony of the family by making them not only conscious of their weak position but also miserable about their present state.

16.6.3 The Historical Context

Let us comprehend these instances in terms of the larger scenario of the time. What has caused this gap between Mahendranath's family and the outsiders who have moved up the social ladder? We have known by now that the economic shift of the family from middle to lower middle class status has led to this crisis. However, the historical context that gave rise to such a crisis in the Indian society of the

1960s is to be borne in mind. With the Indo-China war in 1962 and the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, a phase of 'disillusionment' had set in in the minds of the people at the time. We also find that India around this time was increasingly turning into a market-oriented society as Nehruvian socialism receded to the background. Private capital tended to become concentrated in the hands of a few as competition grew among entrepreneurs and industrialists, as technological development encouraged the formation of large units of production at the expense of the smaller ones. Mohan Rakesh seems to have broadly observed this particular phenomenon in *Halfway House*. This led to a crippling of certain segments to society. Mahendranath, Savitri and Binni seem to be overwhelmed by this logic of materialistic expansion—Ashok would try to make a place for himself among the rich. On her side, Savitri is bent on making social contacts with people who have a strong influence in society. This mindset of hers gets passed on to those around her especially her children. Ashok is perhaps an exception in this case for he occasionally questions her way of thinking: "A man with a salary of five thousand. A chief commissioner. Whenever you've invited anyone, it hasn't been for the person himself but...because of his name, his salary, his position" (40). Ashok's outburst follows the episode of Singhanian's visit to their house and the consequent conflict between Savitri and Ashok on the latter's approach to the whole affair. Ashok mimics his mother's boss and draws a monstrous picture of him which peeves Savitri no end. Savitri wishes him to take the matter seriously and respect the man for his position. The opportunistic approach reflected through the characters of Mahendranath and Savitri in particular point towards the predominance of profit-oriented values and the suppression of human-centered ones in the contemporary Indian milieu.

16.6.4 Conflicting Perspectives in *Halfway House*

We witness that schisms in the family finally gain centre-stage and it appears that the characters in the play are solitary beings who fail to connect with one another. Nonetheless, two things need mention here—the individual who finds himself in a state of isolation does so owing to certain concrete situations, and that individual solitariness is but a phase, one leading to a climax, and is in no way a universal human predicament. The tensed human relations presented in *Halfway House* are in this sense a product of specific changes occurring in the economic and social life of the family. There is a sense of an impending tragedy about to absorb the entire family as it were. This is why the attitudes of characters in the play at one level seem highly individualistic. However the attitude and behavioural pattern of characters must be seen as a response to the particular happening of the period.

At the same time, it is important to question—does the playwright idealize the isolation of the modern man or views it as a kind of deviation from normalcy? Mohan Rakesh views this isolation as a product of the social context and does not look up to such a condition as an ideal state of existence for human beings. It is evident in the text that while Savitri remains at her wit's end to procure the lost social and economic stability for the family, Ashok seems determined to let things take their course and the house fall apart. For Ashok, the complicated transitory state of existence has a far more oppressive feel to it than the actual condition would be once the family disintegrates. For this reason he claims "High time the situation changed!" and "I want the whole business to be decided one way or the other" (45-46). Alternatively, Savitri keeps hoping that "somehow, something might come of it. If I try and keep up contacts with certain people, it's not for my sake but for all of you! The burden of this house is so great that I need someone to share it with me. I can't manage it alone!" (41). The contrasting attitudes of Savitri and Ashok towards the situation they are confronted with, cause a further flux in relations as both fail to see eye to eye with one another on issues that relate the family. For this reason, Ashok finds the word "home" inappropriate to describe their house. Insofar as Mahendranath is concerned, he too hopes to start a new business

with Juneja thinking that his friend might help him in the long run but above all he is governed by the logic of fate working against him which is why he finally leaves everything on destiny and passively waits for the outcome. In spite of all the insults heaped at him Mahendranath finds he is incapable of severing ties with his family and remains anxious about the lives of those around him. We are confronted with another question here—are these characters confined within the limits of their own experience which is why they fail to see the sufferings of others who are caught in the same situational web? In the text, it does not seem like Savitri understands Mahendranath or vice versa, yet they have stayed together for good twenty two years. As individuals they fail to enter a successful relationship. Perhaps, marriage and family act as binding forces that finally bring them together. If they could act according to their personal will they would have separated long ago but social institutions of marriage and family constrain individual freedom and impose its own laws on them. While these institutions restrain the individual by curbing his/her freedom, they simultaneously enable one to participate in the socio-cultural forces that govern the individual. This is why it is imperative that we view the relationship between individual and society dialectically in that the characters are not confined to their personal space but act as agents capable of making/altering the state of things in society. We find that in *Halfway House* the characters' put up a fight against the dominant forces in society but whether they become active agents participating in and thereby changing the social order is an area open for discussion.

16.7 LET US SUM UP

The role of the middle-class in the changing social systems is important in the play. Also, the reactions and responses of the inhabitants of the house projected in the play should be viewed as product of the socio-historical predicament the characters are faced with. For Mohan Rakesh, the oppressive nature of social forces is felt even in the domestic world and that it contributes to the destruction of the familial space. Individuals become the meeting point of these forces active in society and their inability to work in tandem with the social norms gives rise to decentred sensibilities. The play in this sense does not evolve into a climax, the whole action in fact constitutes the climactic moment when the above mentioned forces impinge on individual lives. In *Halfway House* we also witness the enormity of circumstances but not the agency of the collective human force that fights against it. Finally, the family of Mahendranath has been placed in this nexus to understand the ways in which the play offers a critique of the social life of the 60s and 70s.

16.8 EXERCISE

- 1) In what way is the play *Halfway House* a comment on the present times of the 1960s?
- 2) What are the central issues projected by Mohan Rakesh in the play?
- 3) How does the middle-class family presented in *Halfway House* cope with the socio-economic problems it faces?
- 4) Comment on the clash of different perspectives in *Halfway House*?

UNIT 17 WOMEN AND SOCIETY IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Issue of Domestic Harmony in Mohan Rakesh's Writing
- 17.3 Disintegrating Family as a Major Theme in Post-Independence Writing
- 17.4 How is the Man-Woman Question Presented in *Halfway House*?
- 17.5 Social Dimension of Conflicting Values and Principles
- 17.6 The Woman's Perspective in *Halfway House*
- 17.7 The Male as a Victim of Society of his Time
- 17.8 Viewing Possibilities of an Alternative Paradigm
- 17.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.10 Exercise

17.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall consider at length the issue of women's representation in Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* with particular reference to family, neighbourhood and the broader market-oriented world where women bear the burden of oppression at physical and mental levels.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

We have read in the earlier units that *Halfway House* is a play that deals with the clash between a man as the master of the household and his wife who is the sole breadwinner in the family. Their respective positions in such a context generate peculiar pressures: Husband Mahendranath feels helpless since he cannot confidently communicate with wife Savitri, and conversely, the wife fails to understand why Mahendranath is so weak from inside that he has to lean again and again on his friend Juneja. The reasons for their peculiar behaviour go far in the direction of the society that assigned gender roles to them – to the man as the strong guiding partner in marriage and to the woman as the weak life-companion expected to confine herself to the home. The ensuing complexity of their relationship is at the heart of this play as we shall see in the following discussion. At first, we take the principle of domestic harmony that each woman in an Indian household is supposed to strive for. This will also give us an occasion to see whether this aspect was in focus in drama alone or it traversed other literary genres, too.

17.2 ISSUE OF DOMESTIC HARMONY IN MOHAN RAKESH'S WRITING

Even though Mohan Rakesh had started writing plays quite early in life (his first play 'Ashadh Ka Ek Din' was conceived and partially composed in the nineteen fifties), he got recognition as a dramatist only in the late nineteen sixties when popularity came his way through the staging of his third play *Adhe Adhure* translated

in English as *Halfway House*. Immediately after the production of this play in 1969, Rakesh became a phenomenon to reckon with in Hindi and a familiar name in the Indian theatre in general. The play was hailed as a masterpiece that indeed brought to centre-stage the issue of middle class existence in post-Independence India. Not exactly forward-looking or 'progressive' in its treatment of the marriage and the home, the play drew notice for its peculiar 'realism' that made the audience sit up and rethink their attitude to relationships within the four walls of the household. In the situation, the boundary of the household seemed not to protect the occupants from the social gaze but became an oppressive agency that worked to the detriment of the weak under its discipline. The people within the household felt anguished but lacked the means to effectively voice their grievance. They assigned no significance to their lot in the overall context of larger social happenings, for reasons that we shall take up in the following discussion. The same aspect of life (linked with the urban middle class) was represented with a keen sense of realism and urgency in Hindi short fiction. We have to keep in mind that Mohan Rakesh had been recognized till the nineteen fifties mainly as a writer of short stories.

17.2 DISINTEGRATING FAMILY AS A MAJOR THEME IN POST-INDEPENDENCE WRITING

The question of strains and difficulties in the family was nothing new to the Hindi short fiction of the nineteen fifties. Short stories dealt with such problems quite seriously and engaged with the increasing disillusionment in life with sensitivity. It had dawned on the writers of the period that the feeling of unease and disquiet in the nineteen fifties had resulted from the inept handling of economic policies and dilutions that India's privileged sections had made of moral and ethical principles with a view to furthering their narrow interests. The weakened idealism of post-Independence India caused a sense of uncertainty and unease in the writers of the day who still looked for inspiration towards the glorious fight the country had given to British imperialism. New developments marked by tough competition and individual progress, however, dampened the spirit of self-sacrifice and collective functioning and made ordinary people wonder whether all was right with the world, so to say. Impact of the said disillusionment could be seen on the life in a joint family that scarcely met the demands of the upwardly mobile middle class.

What struck the depiction of the same theme in theatre was the dramatic presentation of 'ordinary' aspects of life – the drudgery of the home with its day-to-day miseries. It appeared as if the dramatist had held a mirror up to the Indian middle class, literally – the 'ordinary' in life shocked when seen actually happening on the stage that in turn distanced and 'objectified' the mundane. In *Halfway House*, the middle class in India suddenly became an important site upon which larger battles of ideology and socio-economic living were fought. Here, we encounter, for instance, the man-woman clash not merely at the level of ego or temperament but as crucial changes in equation between individuals; the equation in question had a great deal to do with paradigms that unfolded in the post-imperialist phase of Indian society. This last question would be taken up at length in Unit 5 of this block.

17.4 HOW IS THE MAN-WOMAN QUESTION PRESENTED IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*?

Let us go a bit deeper into the text of *Halfway House*. In this play, Mohan Rakesh has given a good deal of space to the central woman character Savitri. The space has enabled her to articulate her dilemma whether to run her 'house' in its present form or altogether leave it to move from there to an alternative 'home.' Wouldn't the latter decision mean that she is abdicating responsibility towards her husband and the two young children who share this house with her, whereas the third got

married but eventually came back to stay with her parents? More importantly, is Savitri in a position to settle down elsewhere with another man? Her bearing the burden of responsibility has two aspects to it: one, being the bread-winner, she feeds people in the household; two, she is a woman because of which fact she has the additional role of keeping things together in the house she inhabits.

It would be in order to have a close look at the way the *Adhe Adhure* was interpreted in the initial stages of its production. The Hindi title was translated as *Halfway House* in English by Bindu Batra who was not only Mohan Rakesh's contemporary but his close associate (1). She was in constant touch with Rakesh in the course of translating the play. This suggests that Rakesh accepted the English title and 'saw' the point made by the translator through the interpretive word *Halfway House*. That is the way the play appeals to almost every reader who appreciates it as an account of the disintegration of the institution of the family in post-Independence India – the play is about the family of Mahendranath and wife Savitri. Whatever Rakesh meant by *Adhe Adhure* in Hindi, he made peace with the idea that the play was substantially about a couple who were not able to live together with comfort under one roof.

The play represents the reality of life in India in the nineteen fifties and reflects the changed social circumstance at the time. Significantly, the traditional mode of the husband active in the outside world and the wife performing the dull mechanical job of running the house is partly reversed in *Adhe Adhure*. More specifically, the two are exposed to the outside pressures of the day in an equal measure. In fact, the seemingly easy arrangement of dividing the human labour into the 'outside' and 'inside' activity had for centuries subjected the female population to passive servility in the four walls of home. The jolt received by the society of post-Independence India with women enjoying parity with men on the strength of education and job that made them an equal participant in social life was indeed severe. Men of that generation felt torn between the principle of equality in life on the one hand and social orthodoxy that subtly worked on the minds of people through the existing patriarchal system on the other – disintegration of the family had a lot to do with this development.

17.5 SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CONFLICTING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Let us take up the critical comment made by eminent theatre person and scholar Sanjay Kumar in the context of the perspective that Rakesh gets to project in the course of the play. To quote: "In its analysis of contemporary society, the play shows a worrying lack of dynamism. Showing a circularity in its ideational movement – a halfway house and its unfinished, incomplete inhabitants, the play rules out the possibility of any kind of collective approach to move out of the mire. Even at the personal, existential level, its characters are in a cul-de-sac and the final message of the play can be one of replicating neo-modernist endorsement of existent structures" (H.H., ed., D. Basu, 134). The comment provides us an entry point to the text that ostensibly seeks to do justice to the situation in which the female protagonist Savitri is placed. We note the institution of the family, for instance, entering a phase of crisis in post-Independence India also got strongly linked up with the emerging system of economic growth and expansion. For an observer of society such as Rakesh, this may have meant rise of individuals on the economic scale merely – a simplistic conclusion but nonetheless 'real'. If patriarchy pulled men towards rejection of the new ethos and self-assertion as the way to counter women, the tempting ideal of affluence and good living made individual males send their women to schools, government offices, hospitals, etc. as salary-earning staff. The income accruing to the family from women doing jobs made a substantial difference to what was considered the standard of living of the family. This process had been

captured to a certain extent in Hindi fiction, but it still remained to be forcefully represented on the stage through drama. Mohan Rakesh seriously engaged with this phenomenon in *Halfway House* where the husband Mahendranath realistically typifies such a male – he doesn't mind the money but rues that the wife has to go to the office to earn it. Modernity and patriarchy run counter to each other and place the male in a state of dilemma.

There is a peculiar socio-moral dimension to this phenomenon as Mahendranath sees it: he is haunted by the gnawing thought that he is prostituting his wife for gaining a foothold in the respectable world. Here, the typical male psyche is at work which is visited by the ethical unease that the woman provides economic upliftment to the family – the obvious end result of this would be a sense of insecurity in the male. More than middle class, this idea is ingrained in the ethos of capitalism where the appearance of success is more important than success itself. Thus, quality and status in the upper circle assume attractive proportions of wealth that would in the long run multiply itself and become still more valuable – a cycle that would take individual players in its grip and drive them by its own dynamic.

However, Mahendranath does not know the way in which the dilemma of climbing up in social hierarchy and at the same time protecting one's sense of 'dignity' can be resolved. It is not a capitalist family per se (business partnership, negotiations, cold discussions on who gains and who loses, etc.), even as the male protagonist has many a time thought of investing in a business venture. We have on the one side the ambitious male unable to succeed in a business venture and on the other a self-respecting husband drawn backwards to stress the humanist principle of selfhood and dignity. The irony, however, is that the other members of the family, the son and two daughters, do not link their parents with attributes of identity and self-respect; instead they behave as critical bystanders when things hot up in the household. They have the grievance that protection, harmony and peace have always remained away from the environs of the household. Add to this the fact that they have their own small matters to think of where the parents have little role to play, the Mahendranath-Savitri duo stuck through bickering with each other and having no time for the kids. In this sense, the play is indeed about existential efforts of a male to achieve comfort and importance in life and rise in self-esteem. He would brood, look helplessly around since there is no alternative in sight and feel important as a victim. At the same time, however, he lacks the 'manly' capacity to successfully negotiate the world that is wedded to climbing high irrespective of the cost involved in doing so. Clearly, the whole perspective is male-centered. Thus, Savitri's attitude to the existing pressures would have to be defined from a different angle.

17.6 THE WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Halfway House could be seen as an endeavour to examine and critique, albeit narrowly, a woman's struggle to assert in face of circumstances that males alone drive and control. It can be said that the paradox surrounding the male is inextricably tied up in *Halfway House* with the potential effort by a woman to express her mind in the situation of a family. In fact, the key word of the dramatic representation in the play is 'situation' that does its disciplining act at the expense of Savitri. Examples of this being a situation are many: the husband in the family wished to make money through a business venture and failed in the plan; the male ego of the husband was damaged in the long process of the failure; the superficially liberal atmosphere of the household led the children to take to anarchic behaviour; the woman in the house, being educated and qualified to work in an office to earn money, flouted the existing norm of remaining stuck to home; the woman protagonist came in contact with men in the outside world and became an object of exploitation at their hands, as she also dreamed of breaking free from the shackles of the family to live

independently, etc. All these constitute what have called 'situation' that is given, unmoving and oppressive in the body of the play. Please remember that the male protagonist is confused, sad and answerless in the beginning of the play, the same way he is seen entering the house at the end of the play. In this closed world, Savitri is allowed to quietly dream, feel irritated, become concerned about the future of kids, as also be of help to her husband caught in the dilemma of what can be charitably called modern living. The brunt of the situation is borne obviously by the female protagonist.

Let us consider the married woman's interpretation of the aforementioned situation from a slightly different angle. The wife Savitri married Mahendranath as much for liking him from a distance (this is what courtship before marriage meant in India in the nineteen fifties) as for seeing him in terms of an equal partner in life. Under the binding values of patriarchy, this included the perennial worry of a woman that her husband may not belong to her in the sense in which she belonged to him, entirely and exclusively. Whereas the female leaves her home and hearth as well as all those who 'related' to her really closely, the male owns and controls that territory to which the woman goes and which she occupies as a subordinate. This would sound quite simple at present but at the time Mohan Rakesh wrote the play, the situation would leave an upwardly mobile woman deeply anguished. She felt truly threatened that the husband quite acceptably moved around in male company where he observed gentle and cultured ways since the circle consisted of equals but turned different vis-à-vis the wife at home. Was he at fault for doing so? The educated woman of the nineteen fifties would think this to be the case. On being called Mahendranath's wife by her husband's friend, this is how Savitri articulates her serious grievance to him. I quote the speech in more or less its entirety:

Don't call me that [a wife] – Mahendra is also a man, with a family ... a fact that those who were close to him never liked from the start. By getting married he almost seemed to have snatched something away from you, 'Mahendra no longer laughs as he used to' ... 'He's no longer the Mahendra he used to be!' ... And Mahendra's life-struggle has been to somehow remain what he used to be. So that no one would be able to say that he has changed. That is why he's so frustrated – bangs his head against the wall – bullies the children – beats up his wife ...! His friends need him to pass their leisure hours. No party is right without Mahendra. No picnic is fun without Mahendra. His main job is to keep his friends happy. And not only is it *his* main job, but I should also be the only concern of his family. 'How can you refuse to go there?' ... 'You think you're an educated woman' ... 'You don't even know how to behave!' He wants to change the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I ... That same Mahendra who smiles meekly among his friends when he comes home. One never knows when he may scratch one's eyes out or drink one's life-blood! One day he makes a bonfire of his clothes in anger. Another day he sits on my chest and bangs my head against the floor. 'Tell me whether you'll come with me or not? Whether you'll do all I say or not?' But I still don't do what he wants. I still don't conform. I hate all this – I hate it. I want ... a man, not just a miserable ... hanger-on! Sometimes I try to wrench my tortured being away from him. There was even a time when I tried to turn to him into a man. But if my efforts ever began to bear fruit, his friends started pitying him. 'Savitri is leading Mahendra by the nose!' 'Savitri has broken him ... he is no longer a man.' Just a puppet ... Poor Mahendra! (The emphasis and the gaps are in the original). (2)

This speech is important on two counts – one, it is apparently made by the female protagonist and thus presents her point-of-view; two, conversely, it betrays the male construction through the mimicry that is inherent in the representation. In fact, the two are so well-joined in its final form that the speech becomes a multi-layered account of the situation we intend to analyze.

In this quotation, why does Savitri initially resist being called the 'wife'? Is it that she dreamt of a special home from where she would actively engage with the world she is born in and where she would have a place of her own? If we take that to be the truth, Savitri accepts the fact of patriarchy and considers the institution to be friendly to her interests as a woman. Being a wife in this sense is not as significant as being a part of the social establishment consisting of husband, children and neighbours with whom she would have fulfilling relations. Her being possessive about Mahendranath also reveals this aspect of her understanding of the world. She seems to be competing with her husband's friends for gaining control over him – how she wishes he would remain away from the friends and be in his company 'smiling' as 'meekly' as he does with others! To a great extent, Savitri is out and out a patriarchal soul, accepting the given arrangement and pursuing her path of gaining control over the household including the husband. That is why she is bitter with Mahendranath's friends, they come in the way of her effort to capture the house to run it after her heart. This perspective, ironically, works to the detriment of Savitri's own interests as a person and citizen. The ethic of the home to which she subscribes more or less entirely would enslave her being and impose on her the role of wife, or the woman of the house. She would not have realized this issue but for the fact that she works for a living in the office – representing the outside world that bears the stamp of equality among co-workers. Relative independence at the place of work is enjoyable and appealing; it gives Savitri a different sense of fulfillment, modern as well as creatively satisfying. The distinctive feature of this fulfillment is individual gain. Savitri herself creates points of opportunity to meet colleagues and see them for what they are. Her alliance with Jagmohan being of a piece with it, she fantasizes to move to his place and walk free from the family she left behind in the morning. Is it objectionable? Patriarchal gaze would certainly find it unacceptable and bring in questions of loyalty, commitment, duty, etc. These, as is known, drive the family institution and expect the woman to adhere to them. If we look closely at the speech quoted above, we would see clear hints of this complex working of patriarchy in the background of Savitri's utterances. Thus, patriarchy puts Savitri in the dock in spite of the fact that she herself articulates her grievance to Mahendranath in this speech.

One could also note a streak in Mahendranath to make his wife conform to what he considers the right kind of behaviour. Savitri quotes her husband saying, "You think you are an educated woman? ... you don't know how to behave ..." This way, the situation compels him to become a carrier of the views and preferences of his male friends. The woman in Savitri cannot easily take this since she asserts the right to be what she is. Her resistance to Mahendranath's effort at making her behave in true manner of an educated woman fails since she chooses to reject a conformist code. This turns the husband violent. Isn't such violence indicative of a hidden male agenda under which the woman is denied the right to run her life inside the family the way she wants? It would come particularly heavily on a woman who works outside the home.

But how could she imagine matrimony to be the agency that would be partial to her and open out to her individual fancies? This question is relevant keeping in view the above discussion about the occasions that her job creates for her individual freedom. As suggested, Savitri has failed to grasp the essence of matrimony as a full-scale package, a contract in which not just the male (husband) is to call the shots but the whole lot of males supporting the primary male (husband again) are to actively assert themselves as the patriarchal authority ("By getting married he almost seemed to have snatched something away from you", says Savitri). Thus, getting married for Savitri is to associate herself with the husband and his friends from the subordinate position of an outsider who appeared on the scene on terms set by the already established structure of the family. Isn't she a 'refugee' in Mahendranath's home? This is one side of Savitri's problem. Another is that her

husband, her partner in marriage is also subject to the rules governing the larger world. Is there a point where the husband-wife duo could meet and see prospects of a joint struggle against a common enemy? We shall see this aspect in the next part of the analysis.

17.7 THE MALE AS A VICTIM OF SOCIETY OF HIS TIME

It is difficult to also overlook the fact that Mahendranath is frustrated not as much in marriage as in the competitive ethos that prevails outside the home. How would Savitri cope with this aspect of the society of which she is an important (productive) member? She has a stake in the running of her world as an employee. In this sense, that world of which Mahendranath feels to be the victim has entered the portals of this house through his own wife Savitri. He has to bear the brunt of competition from his own wife. She is sanctified by a renewed patriarchy unless the present social systems fought it consciously. Even as she is a subordinate partner in the matrimonial arrangement, Mahendranath cannot subdue her in his own home. With no settled job or a regular source of income, he is bound to play second fiddle to her. The irony is compounded this time by Savitri who now wishes that Mahendranath make a grade in the world and let her have all those comforts enjoyed by successful people. Her grouse with this husband is that he is not a man but a hanger-on ("I want ... I want a man, not just a miserable ... hanger-on!"). She also has this feeling of her own failure in the case because of which she says self-pityingly that "There was even a time when I tried to turn him into a man." The speech in its totality presents the family as a hostile formation of which Savitri is a helpless victim in spite of her best efforts to turn it into an instrument used by her to promote her narrow interests. The irony persists that the speech that began with "Don't call me that [a wife]" ends with "Just a puppet ... poor Mahendra!" The two could perhaps sympathize with each other and together look critically at their surroundings. There would be a chance here to bridge the male-female divide and place the husband and wife together against bigger forces at work outside the home. Let us not forget that Mahendranath has lost in the bigger battle away from home: his friends Juneja and Jagmohan succeeded where he failed. Curiously, Rakesh presents in *Halfway House* the male-male bonding and shuns intricacies of social dynamics in which many fail and some succeed. Also, those who succeed in the emerging world cling to their male friends in the name of solidarity (with men) under patriarchy but seldom care to protect the nuclear family they are supposed to run with commitment. Most of the difficulties visiting the *Halfway House* emanate from this careless handling by the male, who might as well have stuck as a middle class householder to the children and wife and gave them supportive company.

17.8 VIEWING POSSIBILITIES OF AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM

There is a third aspect to Savitri's speech also that takes it outside the purview of her individual suffering. Savitri's apparently personal statement against her husband has a broader sociological bearing – it reads more like an articulation of a complex response to a social issue with separate points explored and analyzed. In this sense, Savitri is not an individual but a person who typifies the social trend of asking too much from an institution than one gave it – a kind of unfair demand made on a social collective. In the same manner, Mahendranath becomes a symptom of a general social malady caused by the internal logic of interests that govern larger life. Can individuals, howsoever talented, dynamic and motivated, do anything truly effective against such odds and hit upon an alternative paradigm? More, is the writer really interested in exploring or evolving such a paradigm? As a young man,

Rakesh had been witness to an important phase of the National Movement and could, therefore, be expected to search for answers that were at least compatible with the values of that movement. Instead of extending the values in question, he chose to adopt the individualist competitive logic of capitalism in free India. Sidestepping history as a guide to intervention in a different phase, Rakesh elected to adopt the present-centered sociological paradigm, under which things were to be merely interpreted for the benefit of the audience. Sharing with readers/ audiences the pains and sufferings of the day was found sufficient enough through the medium of literature. Sociological logic does not leave scope for an enterprise committed to general good, since at the root of individual motivation in such cases lies the determining reality of a given world. Helplessness being the end result of such a fight between individuals on one side and the governing logic of an existing society on the other, we finally accept conclusions such as “Just a puppet ... poor Mahendra!”

All the three aspects of the speech by Savitri discussed above lead us to the conclusion that Savitri in fact does not have a say in the matter – the task assigned to her by the writer is to merely externalize her inner confusion and anguish in face of an insurmountable problem. Should we not expect the playwright to have related Savitri with broader social trends where she could engage herself a bit positively and find a way to assert herself as a working person? Her helplessness seems depressing, uncharacteristic of an intelligent woman capable to see through strategies that males generally adopt to control them. In this, the play as theatre also brings forth quite clearly the high-strung nature of Savitri’s utterances in the speech quoted above – she pauses meaningfully, fumbles to find words appropriate to her feelings and goes silent every now and then to recover breath. Obviously, she hasn’t thought over the issues that her interlocutor, The Fourth Man, has brought forth to draw her into the conversation and force her to say what he could later manipulate to his advantage. As theatre, *Adhe Adhure* merges entirely with the dramatic intention of the author out to give five men and a single woman chance to sort things out vis-à-vis each other. Mark the fact that the fight is of five against one and thus the result is a foregone conclusion. The speech provides an argument to Savitri’s opponents to stay merrily in their well-protected positions of social power and familial dominance.

17.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have considered gender subjugation through an analysis of Savitri’s predicament in *Halfway House*. This gave us an opportunity to examine some broader aspects of the emerging social scene in post-Independence India. Patriarchy and family were the other areas that came under discussion from the point of view of women who bore pressures from these institutions even as they revealed their own concrete responses to them.

17.10 EXERCISE

- 1) Write a critical note on the way Savitri confronts her husband Mahendranath in *Halfway House*.
- 2) How is patriarchy reflected in Mohan Rakesh’s *Halfway House*? Explain.
- 3) What is role of family in the life of a middle class woman in our times? Discuss with particular reference to Mohan Rakesh’s *Halfway House*.

UNIT 18 DRAMATIC FORM IN MOHAN RAKESH'S *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 A View of Mohan Rakesh's Short Fiction and the Issue of Marriage
- 18.3 Representation of Reality in Short and Long Fiction as Distinct from that in Drama
- 18.4 Drama and the Socio- Cultural Environment
- 18.5 *Halfway House* as Drama of Family in Middle Class Surroundings
- 18.6 Concreteness of *Halfway House* as Theatre
- 18.7 One Actor as Playing Five Roles in *Halfway House*
- 18.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.9 Exercise
- 18.10 Suggested Readings

18.0 OBJECTIVES

You will read in this unit an argument about the importance and role of drama as a literary form. The discussion will focus upon the direct contact drama has with living people in surroundings that are a combination of market, neighbourhood and the closed hall or a room. Thus, words or text are not of seminal significance in drama, since drama is not be merely read but seen and watched. More, the words, dialogues and gestures used in drama are independent of the author in a sense they are not in the case of novel or poem, for instance.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

We plan to interpret here Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* as a dramatic representation of life in India in the post-Independence period. For us, drama in the context would cover aspects of enactment, characterization, visualization of that which is fore-grounded and that other part which (since hidden somewhere in the background) is suggested through pauses, absences, etc. At the same time, we shall also view the broader picture of representations through other forms such as fiction. This attempt is to let the student and young scholar know that Mohan Rakesh used the fictional mode in his writing quite extensively and there was indeed a significant interaction between his novel *Andhere Band Kamre*, a number of short stories and other prose accounts that contained important biographical details on the one hand and the plays he wrote on the other. All this of course happened against a backdrop that constituted cultural and ideological life-segment of great magnitude. The present unit will provide a comprehensive view of these literary-social aspects in their combination and integrity, rooted in the belief that ideas and experiences as well as specific human responses always remain intertwined.

18.2 A VIEW OF MOHAN RAKESH'S SHORT FICTION AND THE ISSUE OF MARRIAGE

The short fiction in Hindi explored diverse processes that had emerged in urban India around the time Mohan Rakesh took to writing. In the period following Independence, industrialization became a priority project in the country with most resources spared for the productive economic sector. Thus, the direction of development in free India had become clear as rural India looked towards the city for progress and growth. Necessitating shift in population from the village to the city shook the very foundations of rural India where people had lived since times immemorial along an established life-pattern. Not only were relations within in the family redefined generally, but actual bonds between men and women as husband and wife or parent and child underwent radical change. Man and woman remained no longer interdependent in the old way, as the one active in the outside world and the other managing the household exclusively – this, as we know, being the custom in the orthodox household. A new sense of equality, togetherness and companionship became the call of the times. Was it not a welcome development? Ordinarily, it would seem so. However, in the times we are talking about, this was merely a vision, a projected idea of the emerging India that offered a new life-paradigm to men and women of the nineteen fifties. That there would be complexities, stalemates and crises was only expected since the existing scenario was too vague and amorphous to make possible and sustain visions of egalitarian living. Rakesh grappled with this issue as time passed and struggled to articulate his response to the difficulties this reality posed to him. For his achieving his objective, he would experiment with a number of prose forms in literature, fiction and drama being the dominant ones among them.

Let us take up this issue at the level of form in life. There is, for instance, a form in the household according to which segregation between males and females appears not just natural but also a feasible and useful thing. With males organizing production outside the family and women taking care of rearing children and carrying out domestic chores works out quite efficiently as the two groups seldom meet and discuss things of common interest. Boundaries remain clearly demarcated and neither party expects much from the other. Consider this form of social existence in the region of drama and you would realize that a curtain is necessary on the stage to keep the area sharply divided and 'un-intruded upon'. This form stood questioned in the nineteen fifties since a sizeable part of the female population was exposed to a changed set of priorities. In the family, an area called the living room enable men and women of the household to sit together and welcome guests that also included women. Visualize this in the context of Mohan Rakesh's short stories and his play *Halfway House* and see whether this disturbs the old arrangement and creates tensions among members of the family as well as the group of family friends. Mohan Rakesh struggled to understand and capture this new form in his fictional works and plays. Let us first see this happenings in one of his well-known short stories.

This point in the specific context of Mohan Rakesh takes us to his short story 'Ek Aur Zindagi' ('One More Life') in which the stasis as a consequence of the said change in the urban middle class existence was depicted with compelling effect. Similar to *Adhe Adhure*, 'Ek Aur Zindagi' devoted itself to the emergence of a new form of relationships within the institution of marriage in the nineteen fifties. The reigning emotion of this story being inertia and the ensuing frustration, Rakesh's name was at the time more or less synonymous with that aspect of the 'Nai Kahani' (New Short Story) trend in Hindi that stressed in negative terms the mechanical and repetitive ways of living in big cities. Under this trend, sensitive individuals got married with stars in their eyes, so to say, since they thought that

marriage in their case would become a basis of raising norms of a higher value than the one prevalent at the time. The activism that such individuals envisaged through marriage would not straightforwardly critique their environment ('parivesh') in theoretical or ideological terms but have a bearing on the conditions around them and reflect critically on the attitudes of those others who passively moved with the times. The passion of these 'sensitive individuals' out to realize themselves through a different kind of marriage was such that they remained skeptical about every detail of man-woman relationship under traditional principles of matrimony.

Would such a marriage meet their imagined goals of happiness and fulfillment was the question that lurked somewhere at the back of their minds. The form we are discussing here manifested quite differently in short fiction and drama writing. Let us try to understand the specific nature of each.

18.3 REPRESENTATION OF REALITY IN SHORT AND LONG FICTION AS DISTINCT FROM THAT IN DRAMA

The critical distance from, if not antagonism to the environment I mention in the case of educated middle class individuals was bereft of the Romantic notion of rejecting the real world for an imaginary one; it took the alternative paradigm of individual-based matrimony literally. What is meant is that the individuals concerned shunned critiquing their world; instead they sought to live with things as they existed. In the event of failure coming their way, these individuals would be filled with bitterness, blaming the times in which they were born and indulging in self-pity. Mohan Rakesh particularly took up the case of fulfillment in marriage in new surroundings and combined the relationship with love, mutuality, honest dealing and self-assertion, only to realize in the process of living that another set of circumstances with different priorities in sight would solve the problem. In 'Ek Aur Zindagi', he dealt with these issues step by step and came to the conclusion, worked out through lived experience in the environs of art, that things in this enclosed circle remained static. But what was this 'lived experience'? The title of the short story in question pointed towards the principle of social typicality – such a marriage in Rakesh's opinion was the sole reality of the educated middle class in urban India. No wonder that the assumed heroism of the individual sacrificing oneself on the altar of self-created 'idealism' immediately appealed to many of those who felt devoid of worth in their day-to-day life. In 'Ek Aur Zindagi', this heroism belonged to the male protagonist. What about 'Adhe Adhure'? Under criticism from fellow writers and theatre persons that 'Adhe Adhure' let the male bias control the proceedings in the play, as the director Rajinder Nath has written, Mohan Rakesh consciously planned to do justice to the female Savitri in the play and gave her the long speech that we read in the later revised draft that constituted the final text of the play.

Around the same time as 'Adhe Adhure' formed itself in the mind of the author, the novel 'Andhere Bandh Kamre' ('The Dark Closed Rooms') had also been published. Mohan Rakesh gave in this novel the kind of picture of the household one saw in 'Adhe Adhure' and 'Ek Aur Zindagi' – young men and women with plans, such as educating children and helping them settle in jobs, to execute and the belief that they could indeed realize their long-held ambitions sooner or later. A temperament relying on hard work and commitment was common to these sensibilities that were scattered over the length and breadth of what was called 'New Fiction' – 'New Hindi Short Story' and the 'New Hindi Novel'. Rakesh seems to have been particularly obsessed with such characters in his own writing that were so typically present in these fictional trends of the time. Like 'Ek Aur Zindagi', for instance, 'Andhere Bandh Kamre' clearly hinted at a world that enclosed individual men and women within its rigid boundaries and prevented them from realizing their potential in life. Also, the

novel went into the minute details of particular efforts and tactics that young aspiring individuals normally employ to reach their goals, only to see eventually that failure was inevitably in store for them. Was it not because the men and women involved in such struggles failed to see beyond their narrow world of home or house? It would have been a different case if the wider world outside home became socially equipped to handle issues of progress and development. This would entail socio-economic development in the vast rural space. This was not happening and the urban middle class could only focus upon their individual lives and conditions.

18.4 DRAMA AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Looked at from the socio-ideological angle of the ethos prevalent at the time, these three works of Mohan Rakesh comprised an integrated artistic unit that projected, with an incredible authenticity, the picture of the life of the middle class in Northern urban India. I stress this to tell that 'Adhe Adhure' can be properly understood only when we recognize the author's serious engagement with a social trend that was new, attractive and challenging, howsoever present-centered or regressive it may have been. Rakesh seems to have given so much imaginative thought to this aspect of contemporary social life that through the motions of the different characters in 'Adhe Adhure', he provides vital clues to the unfolding 'meaning' (the words 'arth', 'arthavatta', 'sarthakta', etc. formed an important part of the critical vocabulary of the period) of life in the new circumstance. In this respect, Mahendranath and Savitri seem constantly to refer (for the reader) to the three children – The Boy, The Older Girl and The Younger Girl – as their natural extensions, as persons that later in life would face the same predicament that the parents do now. Why? My answer is that the author meant to create through them an imaginary presence of a stifling structure, the one that he had faced at the level of imaginative re-creation in the other two works mentioned above.

Mohan Rakesh shared with his contemporaries the way society was to be looked at, examined and interpreted. This is to suggest that the post-Independence generation in India had no view of history and that the Indian National Movement of the previous decades meant little to them. The young scarcely saw any appeal in the idealism pursued by their elders whose inspiring examples were such national figures as Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and Bhagat Singh. The Hindi writing of the fifties on the other hand resisted idealism as an abstract principle that people talked of but seldom practiced. Was there any reason why such a standpoint had emerged in the nineteen fifties? The question takes us back to the Partition in 1947 and communal riots that told a different and highly depressing story of the nationalist struggle. Communal riots of the Partition days distorted the vision of the Indian middle classes who saw in the new phenomenon of the nineteen fifties a perspective of individual fulfillment. A young man in the nineteen fifties, Rakesh contended with this development with a mixed feeling of happy expectation that Independence had produced and pain (he does not seem to have gone into the reasons of the phenomenon) that the society stood divided along religious-communal lines.

18.5 HALFWAY HOUSE AS DRAMA OF FAMILY IN MIDDLE CLASS SURROUNDINGS

Isn't the family an important area of life where personal, social and political facets of reality interact with each other? In the light of this question, we can further take up the points dealt with in the discussion above. What did the said antagonism between the notion of a united nationhood and the politics of religious intolerance signify? In answer, we could say that the basic motivation informing human behaviour in such a case was indeed animalistic since human beings were essentially driven

by instinctive urges in those circumstances. The implicit clash is felt in *Adhe Adhure* in the depiction of not just Mahendranath and Savitri but their son and the two daughters. In fact, this is the dimension that is more or less entirely missed in the appreciation of the play – the dimension in question is supposed to merely bring out the ego-centric or somewhat larger ideological differences within matrimony. What for example is the issue faced by the Older Girl in her marriage? We have a vague idea of this in the following exchange between the daughter (the Older Girl) and the mother (The Woman Savitri). To quote:

The Woman: Sit down. Tell me the truth. Is there anything ... ?

The Older Girl: No. Nothing and yet ... everything!

The Woman: For instance?

The Older Girl: For instance ... everything!

The Woman: So you mean?

The Older Girl: I mean ... that ... before I got married I thought I knew Manoj very well. But now ...

The Woman: Hmm. Is he unfaithful?

The Older Girl: No.

The Woman: Bad-tempered?

The Older Girl: No.

The Woman: Then what is it?

The Older Girl: That's just what I can't understand. I don't know what is wrong and why.

The Woman: Is he short of money?

The Older Girl: No.

...

...

The Older Girl: It's ... it's just the air we breathe ...

...

...

The Woman: Well?

The Older Girl: That the longer two people live together, breathe the same air, ... the more estranged they become from one another.

...

...

The Woman: Then there must be a reason ...

The Older Girl: What reason? A cup of tea spilt from his hand or a short delay when he returns from work? These little things are not really reasons; they become reasons. A strange sort of feeling mounts up within me and speaks like poison through my whole being. Everything I touch or see or hear becomes distorted and I stand helpless and fearful under the spell of a destructive fate. But mama, I don't know why ... I just can't see why! It happens unasked, unforeseen. It ... it ... tortures me till I think I am going mad. And in the end? In the end, he too turns against me and says ...

The Woman: What does he say?

The Older Girl: That ... it's from this house I have taken something with me which prevents me from being natural. (4)

The problem discussed here by the mother and daughter is linked up with the essential nature of marriage, the way marriage turns into its opposite because of

something that the two partners in it are unable to understand. In this dialogue, The Woman, being 'woman', knows more about the phenomenon but at the given moment she uses the rational discourse of economic difficulties, equality, compatibility and mutual understanding – this is what is reflected in the questions she has posed to the 'girl', a novice in the business. Also, the positioning of the Woman in this situation is that of a well-meaning questioner who has taken upon herself to resolve the contentious issue of 'making' or 'preserving' the 'home' of her daughter. On the stage, this issue is visualized as two happenings that go parallel to each other and render the significance of each other null and void.

18.6 CONCRETENESS OF *HALFWAY HOUSE* AS THEATRE

It is a theatrical scene in the true sense of the word – there is an interlocutor and judge in the form of the mother, the 'party' with a grievance in the form of the daughter and an audience on stage in the person of The First Man, who in fact is literally forced by the 'judge' to keep shut during the interrogation. Good theatre this since the bigger audience in the hall watch the 'action' of characters caught in the situation as well as another audience in its peculiar role of trying to intervene in the matter every now and then but not allowed to do so. Wouldn't the 'real' audience, too, feel the need to participate in the 'discussion' happening on the stage? Yet, they, too, are to merely watch the proceedings. The theatrical 'doubling' of the audience first and then of 'actors' in the scene (as The Woman and The Older Girl are married and discussing marriage, so would the audience wish to take an active part in the 'session') is so well conceived and executed that for once we entirely accept The Older Girl's version of marriage – "I stand helpless and fearful under the spell of a destructive fate". Interestingly, *Halfway House* has deployed the technique of democratic exchange between two or more parties but actually put one in the seat of authority and the other in that of helpless listeners or speakers who are not supposed to be taken seriously.

What one finds hard to accept in this scene is the steamrolling of the active consciousness of the characters involved. Being drama and theatre, *Adhe Adhure* is supposed to produce a clash of interests as well as exchange of views that take the characters and the audience into the wider world of marriages, divorces, relationships, struggles involved in being single in a vast patriarchal set up, etc. Something is being done at the expense of the dramatic form – a riddle is presented not through dialogue but through a series of stoppages, silences, stammerings – all merely struggles of an individual who has seen and known it all. We also note that use of the 'poetic' and the 'philosophical' – the way it has been made to serve the purpose of eliminating the 'dialogue' – may be appropriate for representation in other literary forms, but not in drama that is supposed to recognize and stress dichotomies, antagonisms and conflicts in actual life. If that does not happen, the world away from the theatre would lose out on its democratic ways of difference-oriented pluralism; the actual world (in which characters represented by actors and the audience live) would either stand negated or reduced to 'inaction' through authoritarian/ fascist handlings of uncomfortable developments. When the Older Girl says: "What reason? A cup of tea spilt from his hand or a short delay when he returns from work? These little things are not really reasons; they become reasons. A strange sort of feeling mounts up within me and spreads like poison through my whole being", she becomes an excuse in the hands of the writer to launch an attack on 'reason' ("reason", "not really reasons", "become reasons" – the changing meaning of the word through punning reinforces the point I make) and also state that the example supporting the Older Girl's thesis of "A strange feeling" spreading "like poison through my whole being" leaves us with no possibility to refute, or even

differ with the view being presented on the stage. The use of 'theatre', life-like fumbblings, the build-up through stoppages and interruptions work here under the logic of rhetoric that can be largely seen as 'anti-drama'. There is rhetoric in almost every other situation in the play because of which the effect of this scene and the play as a whole is nothing but overwhelming, indeed 'stunning' (6).

Is the rhetoric we notice in the situations of the play integral to the text, the captured totality of the phenomenon? To answer this question, the earlier reference to the fictional works of Mohan Rakesh might help. Again, this is a question of form. The aesthetic of the short story or novel has a continuity that is equivalent to a flow, an ongoing movement from one end of the text to the other. There are, of course, instances where the direction of the fictional work with respect to its movement is deliberately changed and its principle of 'ongoing' process violated. But such violations are done to problematize the literary effort and reveal the unpredictability of the 'action' sought to be represented in the text. The form of fiction, its twentieth century/ modernist manifestation, however, imposes a discipline on the writer to 'depict', tell or 'narrate' (these are Georg Lukacs's words) so that a sort of lyricism, highly subjective and forceful, asserts itself in the literary work. (7) This was particularly noticed in the short and long fiction of Mohan Rakesh where he insistently brought out that part of the modern-day living which had reached a dead end – a point in history that refused to look ahead (or back) and move. Marriages, individual friendships, living alone by artists to lead bohemian lives, etc. became significant points of reference in the new situation. All fiction of Mohan Rakesh bears testimony to the precise working out of this aesthetic principle in social existence. However, when the said aesthetic (of the 'dead end' situation) was used for dramatic representation in *Adhe Adhure*, it left little scope for testing, questioning/ self-questioning or placing the imagined situations in their relation with the ones actually present in the society of the time.

The descriptive aesthetic of modern/ modernist fiction disallowed any 'dialogic' or dramatic projection of the chosen situations. E. Alkazi has drawn attention to this aesthetic (appreciatively though) while commenting on the stage-effect in *Adhe Adhure* of a certain scene where we are faced with, as he says, "a heap of broken furniture, moth-eaten files, pieces of wood and iron, torn magazines and stinking cups and saucers." For Alkazi, these details "intensify the atmosphere of suffocation and loneliness and become symbols of disintegrated life"(8). This in my opinion is a part of the rhetoric that drowns the submerged attitudes and counter-voices as well as differences, since the "suffocation" is built up in the scene so assertively. Another way to deal with the issue may have been to let the clashing perspectives come out in the open and use their own dramatic/ theatrical space to address the audience. In such a situation, twistings of form and excessive use of silences could be usefully done away with for capturing tones and colours of actual life evolving in the specific conditions of the nineteen fifties.

18.7 ONE ACTOR AS PLAYING FIVE ROLES IN *HALFWAY HOUSE*

Is the employment of the technique of one actor playing all the five male roles not symptomatic of *Adhe Adhure* presenting a larger-than-necessary generalization of the marriage situation and what has been called 'House' in the English title *Halfway House*? Om Shivpuri, who enacted the multiple roles in *Adhe Adhures* first production in 1969 had this to say on the issue: "At one level, this play is a manifestation of similarity of the human experience in spite of the many individual shades found in it. To this end, the dramatist has relied upon the interesting experiment of making one single actor essay five different roles. If Mahendranath is replaced by Jagmohan or Jagmohan by Juneja, no radical difference would occur, for the reason that the

mould of specific situation compels the individual to follow the same path as any other person would. To emphasize this, a few stage-productions began with a spotlight that was focused on a mask” (9) Coming as it does from a renowned actor and director of plays, it gives the interpretation that many in the world of Hindi theatre accept and some have contested – quite sharply. Nemichandra Jain thought, for instance, that a narrow segment of experience was blown out of proportion to erroneously make the play’s theme representative of the entire humanity. He dwelt on the point further by saying that “barring perhaps Mahendranath,” no character in the play has raised the question “Who am I” in the world that s/he inhabits. This, says Jain, is in spite of the fact that the play raises the issue of identity in a big way and aims to apply universally to all men in all times(10). A bit severe, the comment does take the reader to the important question of outlook on social/ human life. Jain has also made the pertinent point that the theory or ideology of sameness in different situations may be sociologically interesting, but it does not go far in making the viewer conscious about the nature of relationships that one actually confronts in life. (All page numbers in the above discussion refer to Jain, Nemichandra, ed. Sampurna Natak).

The difficulty, however, lies in considering the ‘five-roles-one-actor’ idea in the play to be a matter of technique alone. More than technique, this idea provides to the play a peculiar structure that controls all happenings and changes as well as differences marking the play. It strengthens the basic argument of this paper that the aesthetic of the rhetoric of modernist fiction stands as a wall between the understandability of human/ social life in its process of change and the stalemate that human existence is supposed to have reached in the contemporary world. Given such an aesthetic, the ‘powerful’ speech of Savitri stands easily countered by her final admission later in the play that she cannot exist without Mahendranath. In any case, it does not seem to matter whether she is married to Mahendranath or makes a working liaison with another of the five males in the play. Worth noting in this context is the following comment by Dilip Basu:

I think the play *Adhe-Adhure* hesitates, structurally, between the naturalistic and the absurdist.

When the same actor is seen performing in four different roles, there is in the auditorium a sense of watching a delightful game, and a positive expectation that the actor will be good enough to portray the difference in these four persons. The delight in the game subdues to a degree the claustrophobic feeling of watching a set of people within the four walls of a home where happiness, mutual relations and communication have rotted almost beyond recovery. Looking for the difference in the presentation of the four persons by one actor works in direct contradiction to a search for the essential likeness of the four men encouraged at the outset by The Man in A Black Suit. This ‘likeness’ is ‘recognized’ through our seeing the same actor continuing to perform; the recognition does not register from any similitude amongst the four men dramatically emerging from the script with any clarity. The four variations of ‘Man’ presented in the play do not combine to give a powerful impression of ‘Everyman’ systematically revealed, though The Prologue together with the naming of the characters as The First Man, The Second Man, etc. – all to be played by the same actor – do encourage such a search (The implied understanding of ‘Man’ in Rakesh’s play, of course, is one belonging to Indian middle-class; there is some hesitation – to which we shall very soon have to respond – as to whether it is a male human being or any human being belonging to this group). (126-7).

Here, Basu has talked of ‘four’ (or five) roles that the actor is supposed to play and termed the different roles in *Halfway House* as “variations” of ‘Man’. Basu has rightly raised the issue of male and female in the context of Indian middle class and

suggested that females do not belong to the category of middle class with adequate authority: there being "hesitation" on the writer's part about an integral link (even within the educated middle class) between the sexes. Thus the gendered constructs remain fixed and separate in the play and only a secondary place is assigned to the female protagonist. At the level of form, too, whereas the male has a number of "variations", the female is confined to the category of a single individual prone to making one misjudgment after another. Basu is justified in assessing the limited worth of Savitri under the pattern that *Halfway House* has captured and projected.

18.8 LET US SUM UP

Mohan Rakesh has used the drama form in *Halfway House* quite earnestly. Foremost among the techniques used by the writer is the assigning of five male roles to one actor. Then, even as all other characters have individual names in the body of the text (the names of characters get mentioned in the middle of the dialogues), they are referred to as man, boy, older girl, younger girl, etc. consistently. Dialogues, too, have a naturalistic air about them – close to what we come across in short or long fiction. When we keep these things in mind, an entirely different version of the depicted incidents and situations comes forth through drama perceived as theatre. Also as a result of this, the play gains in resonance and widening of appeal.

18.9 EXERCISE

1. Explain the difference between Drama and theatre keeping in mind Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House*.
2. What is the significance of an actor playing five roles in *Halfway House*?
3. *Halfway House* ends at the same point where it began. Comment

18.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 19 AFRICAN AND KENYAN HISTORY AND DRAMA IN KENYA

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Africa – the Dark Continent
- 19.2 Pre-historic Kenya – Location, Antiquity
- 19.3 The British
- 19.4 The Settlers – the Land Grab
- 19.5 First Protests – K.A., K.C.A., Y.K.A., Harry Thuku
- 19.6 The Emergence of Jomo Kenyatta
- 19.7 Banning of Mau Mau – The Emergency
- 19.8 Drama in Kenya – The Beginnings
- 19.9 Drama under Colonialism
- 19.10 Drama after Independence
- 19.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.12 Exercise

19.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are manifold. The first is to trace briefly the history of the African continent since the pre-historic times, and also to discuss the various meanings implied in the epithet 'the dark continent' as applied to Africa by the European colonial powers

A brief account of the colonization of the continent from the time of the arrival of the first Europeans – the Portuguese – is also given. This has been done with the aim, primarily, of providing the political-cultural background to our study of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In the second part of the Unit you will be given a detailed history of Kenya since the pre-historic times to the situation at the point of its Uhuru in December 1963. In between are the details of its first colonization by the Arabs and the Portuguese. The model of colonization followed by the British is described next. Some of you may be reading African literature for the first time. It is for this reason that a detailed background history is necessary. The struggles waged by the Africans – including the Mau Mau struggle – are also discussed in the Unit. All these have a significant bearing on our understanding of the text – *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* – which is based on the theme of the freedom struggle of Kenya.

19.1 AFRICA – THE DARK CONTINENT

In most books of history written by Europeans, the continent of Africa is referred to as 'the dark continent'. This expression – the dark continent – was most probably first used by travelers and missionaries who happened to visit the African continent much before political claims on its territory were made and it was colonized by various European powers. The term 'dark' has been used for describing the continent

of Africa because, firstly, the early travelers as well as missionaries considered as 'dark' anything that they did not understand much about. Secondly, and more importantly, these first visitors considered Africa to be inhabited by people who were primitive and uncivilized. The colour of ignorance, as we know, is black. According to these early missionaries, the Africans believed in magic and other so-called irrational rituals and customs. Once again, magic is associated with black colour as the term 'black magic' implies. Finally, there was the most obvious reason for calling Africa the dark continent: its inhabitants had very dark skins. These opinions, particularly about the Africans being primitive and uncivilized were accepted blindly by most Europeans who entered the continent either for trade or for colonization. In fact, the colonial administrations built upon this myth of primitiveness of the Africans by stating that Africa had no history, no culture, no past.

Africa – the Myth of Primitivism and Political Reasons Thereof

From the European point of view, there was a sound reason behind accepting such an image of the Africans. The European powers used the excuse of 'civilizing' these savages for entering Africa and staying on for the economic and political exploitation of its people. Thus was created the myth of the white man's burden which expression meant – on the face of it – that the white man had taken upon himself the onerous task – the burden – of 'civilizing' the savage African.

However, as later researches into the history, politics, social organization and cultural achievements of the continent have shown, Africa was neither primitive nor uncivilized before the Europeans occupied it. Civilization, as we know, is much more than technological progress and cannot be equated with the possession of fly-by-wire aircrafts, flat screen television sets, personal computers, cell phones, microwave ovens and even under the-skin planted chips. If this were so, people belonging to the most ancient civilizations like the Indian, the Chinese, the Egyptian and the South American would all be primitive and savage. Like these, ancient Africa also boasted of various centers of civilization and culture with well-organized social and political systems and significant achievements in their respective fields of fine arts like music and dance.

Africa and the Evolution of Man

By now enough archeological and anthropological evidence is available to show that during the evolutionary process our ancestors – Australopithecus African or man-ape, as he was called – first emerged on the African continent. Rift valley region in East Africa was the most probable place where it happened. Excavations at the Olduvai Gorge in what is now called Tanzania have produced ample evidence of it being one of the oldest sites of world cultures. Discovery of primitive tools for hunting like the hand axe in not only east Africa but also in the Congo Basin and Zimbabwe shows a parallel development of this culture. This also compares well with the developments in other similar centers in India, China and parts of Europe.

Africa and the Ancient Egyptian Civilization

However, the most fascinating evidence about the culture developments in Africa has been provided by a Senegalese school – Cheikh Anti Diop – who claims that the ancient Egyptian civilization was set up and nurtured by black Africans more than ten thousand years ago. Relying upon evidence from various sources including historical accounts, Cheikh Anti Drop convince us that when the great Sahara started drying up about 7000 B.C., before which it was a huge lake, a section of Africans began to trek along the routes of the river Nile. They finally settled in the valley at the mouth of the Nile delta where the river emptied into the Mediterranean. Here they set up the great ancient Egyptian civilization with unprecedented progress in speculative scientific research. This cycle of the civilizational progress lasted many thousands of years during the course of which these black Africans colonized neighbouring territories inhabited by whites. The Semitic world of today perhaps a result of a free cross breeding between the two races.

However, like many other ancient civilizations, this civilization set by black Africans in the valley of the Nile also ran out of steam. In the course of time it was overruled by the Persians. Then came the Macedonians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks in that order. More recently, the French and the British occupied the territory. This prolonged colonization resulted in the snapping of the links between the delta and the original centers of the civilization back in Africa. These centers lost touch with not only the Egyptian art but with one another as well, surviving for some time as isolated pockets during which period they concentrated more on the social, political and moral organization of their societies rather than on material development. In the mean time, Europe benefited from the ancient Egyptian civilization via the Greeks and the Romans. Thus, while Africa lagged behind in technological progress, Europe marched ahead full steam. The great empires of Ghana, Mali, and life in West Africa, Ethiopia in the East, Zimbabwe in the South and Congo in South West are a testimony to the great civilization that the Africans built thousands of years ago.

Whether the hypothesis of Cheikh Anta Diop is wholly or partially true is really not so important for us for the time being. What matters is the fact that it establishes beyond any doubt that ancient Africa at that time was as much primitive or developed, as much barbaric or civilized as any other part of the world, including Europe. It, therefore, proves as false the opinion of the European powers that when they arrived in Africa they found its people to be primitive.

Africa under Europe

Africa's recent contact with Europe took place at the end of the fifteenth century when the Portuguese set up some rest and recuperation stations as also military garrisons on both the west coast of Atlantic and the east coast of the Indian ocean route to the East where they were headed, led by the legendry Vasco da Gama, for exploring the fabled riches of the Orient. Later, as the naval supremacy of France and Great Britain increased after the defeat of the Spanish Armada at the end of the sixteenth century, they, too, entered Africa to explore its interior for economic exploitation. By the end of the nineteenth century many more European powers had entered Africa. In fact, there were military clashes among them for proclaiming supremacy over various parts of Africa. It is this that led to the holding of an European conference in Berlin in 1885 to portion out Africa among them. With this, the process of colonization of Africa was initiated with common European consent and was soon completed.

19.2 PRE-HISTORIC KENYA – LOCATION, ANTIQUITY

The Republic of Kenya – abode of legendry Gikuyu and Mumbi – is an ancient land, lying on the east-central coast of Africa, across the Equator and encompassing some of the most arid as well as most fertile parts of Africa within its geographical bounds of 5,82,644 square kilometers. Bordered in the north by Sudan and Ethiopia in the east by Somalia and the Indian Ocean, in the south by Tanzania and in the west by Uganda, Kenya is a former British colony which at one time was known as East Africa Protectorate.

Anthropologists would have us believe that man first appeared on the earth in these parts of Africa, as also in many other parts of the continent, about a million years ago. Once again, like in other parts of the world, the people in this region too passed through various stages of development.

The inhabitants of Kenya seems to have come in contact with traders from some of the civilized countries of that time, such as Egypt, Greece, Persia and India. In all probability, it is these traders who first introduced agriculture and domestication of animals to the people of this period.

Social and Political Structure in Pre-historic Kenya

There were no classes in most Kenyan societies at that time. There were only different ethnic groups with varied styles of political and economic organizations. Because of a lack of means of communication, they lived in isolation from each other. The mode of production was subsistence-oriented and was based on a communal system of labour utilization which was either voluntary or obligatory or both. Each tribe was a distinctive unit, generally managed by the tribe-elders, as was the case with the Gikuyu, for instance. Land tenure was a complex affair. While land was not saleable, each adult had rights to its use that was controlled by the tribal authority. A member had temporary use on a piece of land, which ceased when he moved to another assigned area under the shifting cultivation system.

Modern Kenya – the First Colonization by Arabs and First Contacts with Europe – the Portuguese

The first colonization of these people and of the coastal region began with the arrival of Arab Muslims in the eighth century, who came to propagate Islam but stayed on to trade in ivory, gold, timber, iron and black slaves.

In course of time, a number of independent city states – mostly ruled by Arabs came up all along the coast from Mogadishu to Kilwa. Most of the Arab influence was, however, confined to the coastal areas only and there is no evidence of a similar contact with the natives of the interior.

By the middle of the 15th century, the Portuguese who had by then become a major colonial power and who were looking for controlling the sources of ‘exotic’ products of the Orient for trade purposes, made their first penetration of the coast, in their search for gold and spices and began to expand their slave trade. In doing so, they drove the Arab rulers from the coastal areas of Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, which they continued to occupy and exploit for the next 200 years.

19.3 THE BRITISH

The beginning of the 19th century, however, saw more European powers, particularly the British, the Germans and the French becoming more interested in Africa in general and the East Coast in particular. A number of explorers and missionaries traveled into the interior and made contacts with the Africans.

Towards the end of the 19th century, European interests in the continent had reached competitive proportions. In a conference held in Berlin in 1884-85, in which Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc. participated, it was decided to ‘partition’ Africa. Germany and Britain, however, continued to clash over supremacy in East Africa. Eventually, it was agreed that Lake Victoria would form the boundary between their respective areas of influence. The territories lying north of the lake – Kenya and Uganda – came under the British control, while the territories lying south of the lake – Tanganyika – became the German domain. The British government, however, chose not to administer these areas directly.

East Africa Trading Company

A trading company – The Imperial British East Africa Company – was founded in 1888 through the granting of a Royal Charter to Sir William Mackinnon, a shipping magnate. Besides, Kenya and Uganda, a ten-mile strip of the East Coast was obtained from the Sultan of Zanzibar on lease. The Company, it was claimed, had been ‘formed for the purposes of pushing forward the civilization of Africa’. The *modus operandi* of this colonization in the name of civilization was once again the same as in Asia: eventual political control in the guise of trade.

However, the Company soon found out that the trade, particularly in ivory, cost enormously on account of transportation. It was then decided to construct a railway right from Mombassa up to Lake Victoria. During the construction, which was being done with the help of labour force brought from India, the Company had to bear huge financial burdens. The Company was wound up. Its Charter was annulled in 1895.

East Africa Protectorate

The East Africa Protectorate was proclaimed in 1895, with Lord Harding as its first Commissioner. By 1896, the British control over the area had stabilized, and the work on the railway was progressing smoothly.

Big game hunters and explorers passing through the region had been struck particularly by vast tracts of fertile land in the Rift Valley region. Among such travelers was one Captain Lugard who dreamt of large-scale agricultural farming and stock-raising.

The principal inhabitants of the region, which later came to be known as 'white highlands' were the Gikuyu who were primarily agriculturists.

19.4 THE SETTLERS – THE LAND GRAB

With the completion of the railway in 1901, the idea of European settlement in the area was taken up in earnest so that the traffic derived from settlement would make the railway a profitable undertaking. This together with the transfer of the Eastern Province of Uganda where most of the highlands were situated, to the East Africa Protectorate in 1902, further strengthened the possibility of non-African settlement. Harry or Johnston, who was then the Special Commissioner for Uganda, proposed initially to develop the area 'as a white man's country'.

Reports of the fertility of the land sent out of the administration to South Africa attracted a number of Europeans and as per the available records, the first batch of settlers mainly from Great Britain and South Africa arrived in 1902. These settlers occupied large chunks of fertile land for both farming and trading. Through a number of ordinances, the government reserved the highlands exclusively for the white Europeans, excluding the native Africans and Indians. The principal sufferers were of course the Gikuyu, since it was they who primarily inhabited the area and who were dislocated more than once after their land had been 'alienated' and given away to the European settlers – for a song. As the land lust of the settlers increased, other tribes were deprived of their land as well. The Masai, the Nandis and the Kissis too suffered through removal to far-flung areas labeled as 'native reserves'. A series of land legislations – Land Regulations of the East Africa (1897), Indian Land Acquisition Act (1902) – provided the government with control of all land in Kenya and parts of Uganda for selling, granting lease or otherwise disposing of.

Forced labour

Land grab was not the only problem brought about by the colonial policy of European settlement. The settlers wanted a constant supply of cheap or free labour to work on these farms and with the African reluctance to work for outsiders i.e. European farmers, they found it increasingly difficult to obtain cheap labour. The Africans' reluctance was due to the fact that their basic needs were provided by the subsistence economy and moreover, they did not want to work for the colonialists. In those cases where African settlements were part of European acquired lands, the Africans were declared squatters with permission to cultivate a small plot of land on the farm premises and to keep the members of their families as well as a few cattle.

Appalling working conditions and severe restrictions on both the physical movements of the squatters and also on the number of cattle they could keep and the kind of crops they could cultivate were definitely oppressive. Moreover, the wages were abysmally low. They were subjected to most cruel punishments on the flimsiest of excuses. In fact, their plight in many ways was worse than that of their brethren who had been sold as slaves in the Americas by the Arabs and the Europeans. The result was that as in other countries of Tropical Africa, labour force in Kenya was created by the 'method of extra economic coercion'.

In fact, the settlers, with the help of successive government legislations, seized more than 7.6 million acres of most fertile land. Yet, even close to the end of colonial period, only 18% of this land was cultivated while millions of Africans strived to eke out a living on highly congested reserves.

Native Reserves

These steps together with prohibitive rates of poll and hut taxes led to massive migration of peasants in search of living. This led to further problems in the native reserves, from which most able-bodied males were absent. Earning money as wage labourers for paying personal taxes (it caused physical hardships to peasants who walked large distances, sometimes hundreds of miles for many weeks and sometimes months to gain employment) also stripped the African villages of its most efficient labour force, leaving behind mainly old men, women and children.

19.5 FIRST PROTESTS – K.A., Y.K.A., K.C.A., HARRY THUKU

By now, the Africans were sufficiently alarmed about the settlers' conspiracy to annex their land permanently and they formed two Associations to defend their interests. The Kikuyu Association (K.A.) was formed in 1920 with the primary aim of defending Gikuyu land. It comprised mainly Gikuyu chiefs and headmen. A year later, more broad-based and more militant association – the Young Kikuyu Association (Y.K.A.) – was formed with Harry Thuku as its secretary. Thuku, a government telephone operator, launched his agitation against not only the policies of annexing Gikuyu land, the 'Northey circulars' on forced labour, but also against the policy of carrying of Kipande – a card bearing the finger-prints of the bearer – by all African male adults and the doubling of the hut and poll taxes from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10. Thuku received generous help from M.A. Desai, an Indian leader and journalist, in running his association. Although he started by enrolling only the Gikuyu, he soon extended its membership to other tribes as well. His arrest and subsequent deportation by the government led to a large demonstration in Nairobi in which over 20 Africans were killed by police firing. This act of the government triggered off the militant struggle by the Africans which led to the full scale national liberation movement and eventual independence of Kenya in 1963.

Thuku's Y.K.A. which had been banned after his arrest and subsequent deportation, reappeared in 1925 under the new name Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A.). Its appearance had coincided with the transfer of authority among the Gikuyu from one age-group to another – an event which occurred once in about twenty years. The K.C.A. immediately demanded, among others, the Africans right to grow coffee, the appointment of a Gikuyu Paramount Chief, the publication of laws in Gikuyu language and the release of Harry Thuku. It also demanded direct representation by twelve Africans on the legislative council since the Europeans had neither true sympathy nor thorough contact with the people. They also expressed their fears about the security of title of their land after the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915.

Female Circumcision

In the meantime, yet another confrontation broke out, this time between the missionaries and the Africans. In 1929, The Church of Scotland condemned the tribal practice of female circumcision – a form of clitoridectomy – as ‘savage’ and barbarous. Female circumcision was a custom that was regarded by the Gikuyu as also many other tribes, as an essential element of their social structure. The issue was immediately taken up by K.C.A. and it held large meetings in the Gikuyu reserves, highlighting the condemnation as yet another attack on their way of life by the Europeans, since the missionaries threatened to debar from church those persons practicing female circumcision and polygamy and also those disallowing the children of such parents from obtaining education in missionary schools. Most schools, as we know, were at that time run by Christian missions. It, therefore, called the bluff of the missionaries of doing the wonderful job at least in educating the Africans. The Africans went to the extent of setting up their own African Church and Independence African Schools, both of which institutions were to play a crucial role in the Kenyan struggle for national independence. The controversy also provided an excellent opportunity to Jomo Kenyatta, the general secretary of the K.C.A. to increase the sphere of the influence of this organization as well as to project himself as a leader. He addressed big political meetings that helped the organization in enrolling new members and collecting money for the struggle.

Joint Struggles by Africans and Indians

The joint fight by the Indians and Africans was brought about through contacts among the trade union leaders. The government tended to overlook the strength of the African Associations. The government decision in 1938 to destroy thousands of cattle heads belonging to the Wakamba provoked a mass protest by them and brought them in touch with the Gikuyu.

At the same time, the simmering discontent over appalling working conditions among the labour broke into a full scale strike. Makhan Singh, an Indian printing press worker, who had organized the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, and the K.C.A. played a stellar role in organizing this strike that led to the appointment of a Commission to enquire into the working conditions of the labour force in Kenya. The report revealed government neglect and a scandalous state of affairs. With the outbreak of the war, K.C.A. and other such organizations of the Kamba and Teita tribes were banned and their leaders arrested. The Indians and Europeans too suspended their political activities.

19.6 THE EMERGENCE OF JOMO KENYATTA

The Kikuyu African Union (K.A.U.), feeling frustrated, began to talk of a revolutionary struggle to free themselves from the colonial yoke. It was at this stage that Kenyatta returned to Kenya after his long stay in England and other countries of Europe and was accorded a hero's welcome.

Kenyatta found that the country was a fertile field for political activities because of the post-war discontent. The war-returnees had become aware of national liberation movements in Asia. As unemployment grew both in the cities and in the countryside, the cry of ‘Africa for Africans’ grew stronger. Overcrowding in the reserves and extensive soil erosion had made the Africans talk of getting back their ‘stolen lands’ from the Europeans. Kenyatta began to travel around the country and addressed large meetings. In June 1947, he was elected the President of the Kikuyu African Union (K.A.U.) and began to attack the government policies.

African Trade Union Congress – the First Demand for Total Independence

African Trade Union Congress under the leadership of Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh also supported the struggle launched by Kenyatta in a big way. In fact, it was the ATUC, on May 1, 1950, that demanded for the first time in Kenya, total independence. Both Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were arrested for being office bearers of an 'illegal' labour organization. Although the ensuing strike failed finally, it further strengthened the increasing cooperation between the Africans and the Asians in Kenya. As frustration increased and as Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were deported, the custom of oathing began in a big way across the whole country and a militant movement – Mau Mau – began to take shape which believed in inflicting damage on government machinery, among others, through violent means.

19.7 BANNING OF MAU MAU – THE EMERGENCY

In 1950, the government banned the so-called Mau Mau movement. Although Kenyatta and other so-called moderates denounced the movement, it continued to gain strength through the active cooperation of the people at large. As subsequent events were to prove, proscribing it proved to be counterproductive for the British government that got bogged down by it more and more with each passing day. The Europeans started putting pressure on the government to arrest the Gikuyu leaders and declare a state of Emergency in order to check what they called the 'Mau Mau' activities and which according to them were both anti-Christian and anti-European. On October 20, 1952, the Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring declared a state of Emergency. Not only Jomo Kenyatta and eleven other top African leaders were arrested but killing and arrest of ordinary Kenyans began at an unprecedented scale. Over 90,000 Kenyans were detained and over 10,000 killed during the Emergency that lasted five years.

Lifting of the Emergency and the Constitution Conference in London

Finally the Emergency was lifted in 1957 and the process of devolving more powers to the Africans began. A Constitutional Conference was called in London in 1960, wherein it was decided to give the Africans majority seats – 33 out of 65 – in the Legislative Council. The Africans would also have the largest number of ministers, viz. four against three Europeans and an Asian. The plan naturally irked the Europeans who dubbed it as a 'victory of Mau Mau' and attacked the British volte face. The fond hope of an Uhuru in not so distant a future gave a new fillip to the efforts of Africans. A new mass organization – Kenya African Nation Union (K.A.N.U.) was formed incorporating the member of the K.A.U. and Jomo Kenyatta was nominated as the President. Soon, however, there was a split and another party – Kenya African Democratic Union (K.A.D.U.) was formed with the aim of opposing K.A.N.U.

Uhuru – Kenyatta as the First Prime Minister

In 1961, first national elections were held and K.A.N.U. dominated the K.A.D.U. and in June 1963, Kenyatta became the first Prime Minister. Finally, on December 12, 1963, Kenya gained its much awaited Uhuru.

19.8 DRAMA IN KENYA – THE BEGINNINGS

Like in any other society, drama in Kenya too had its origin in man's interaction with nature. Like any other group of people, primitive people in Kenya, too, tried to overpower nature for sustaining themselves. Thus, they cleared jungles, planted and harvested crops, first with their hands and later with the help of some tools. These tools for them were no less than things endowed with magical powers and they expressed their gratefulness to them by worshipping them or performing certain rituals relating to them.

Sustaining life in the face of all kinds of difficulties and calamities was no less than a miracle and hence there were rituals and rites for various mysteries of life, too: birth, circumcision, initiation, marriage, death.

Again, nature was not just benign but cruel, too. There were diseases and epidemics, floods and droughts, devastation and death. So nature and gods needed to be propitiated. More ceremonies, rituals and rites started happening. It was believed that these could help convert a hostile nature to a friendly and kind one.

And then, there were man-made calamities, too. Battles and wars, thefts and robberies, wounding and killing took place. Once again, men turned to rituals and ceremonies to seek nature's assistance in combating the enemies.

Most of the rituals and rites, ceremonies and propitiations involved the community and were carried out in the open and in everyone's presence. A large number of them involved imitating or miming with the help of masks or without, pretending to be this or that. In other words drama was central to all these ceremonies and rituals. It was so with all human societies at that stage of evolution, including in pre-colonial Kenya. Thus drama came to be associated with what Ngugi calls 'the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community'. And it was enacted in 'empty spaces' where everyone could be present and participate, if required. Some of these dramatic activities could last days or weeks or even more. So specific periods of time were chosen so as not to disrupt the daily flow of life and everyday chores. However, some continued over fairly long periods of time. The Ituika ceremony, for instance, was held every twenty five years among the Gikuyu in Kenya. This coincided with the power change from one generation to another and the celebrations involving feasting, singing and dancing over a period of six months. New songs and dance forms as well as dramatic performances were created specifically for such occasions.

Thus we can see that drama in pre-colonial Kenya was not an isolated event. It was, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it, 'an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities.'

19.9 DRAMA UNDER COLONIALISM

This tradition of drama in Kenya as enunciated above was destroyed during the period of colonialism under the British. Missionaries termed some of these rituals, rites and ceremonies as works of the devil and hence many performances were banned. For instance, the Ituika was banned in 1925. For other ceremonies, they made obtaining of a license compulsory. Again, 'empty spaces' were converted into community halls, school halls, and church buildings or even open prisons with barbed wires surrounding them, as was the case during the Emergency after the 'Mau Mau' movement.

The kind of plays that were encouraged to be staged were propagandist in nature, eulogizing the colonial administration. In the name of naivete of the people from the countryside, who could not handle the urban situation and mechanical devices, Kenyan people were presented as fools and their cultural practices ridiculed. Also, plays were produced in English that were based on English literary texts, thereby alienating the masses from dramatic activities. Besides the plays of Shakespeare presented in simplified versions, West End comedies and sugary musicals, as Ngugi calls them, were staged regularly in Kenyan National Theatre, a government establishment. The colonial regime also encouraged radio plays with Africans depicted as clowns.

19.10 DRAMA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The situation did not change much after Kenya gained independence in 1963. Theatre continued to be confined to enclosed spaces like 'halls' and musicals like *Annie Get your Gun* or *Boeing* continued to be popular performances. Expatriate professionals continued to comprise both the production teams and the cast and very few if any Africans were involved in either production or performance of these.

However, a counter movement had started in schools and colleges during the last phase of colonialism where young students wrote scripts in Kswahili. Some of the popular productions included *Nakupenda Lakini* by Henri Kuria, *Maisha ni Nini* by Kimani Nyoike and *Atakiwa na Polisi* by B.M. Kurutu.

Immediately after independence, an alternative tradition, more nationalistic in character, came into existence. This included playwrights like Francis Imbuga, Kenneth Watene and Micere Mugo and directors like Seth Adagala, Tirus Gathwe and David Mulwa. Some of these plays were openly patriotic, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist in their message. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* scripted by Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiong'o is the high point of such a trend, if not the tradition. The seventies also saw a movement to wrest the control of the Kenya National Theatre from the clutches of white expatriates and clamour for African Theatre grew stronger. A debate ensued whether a theatre was only a building or a location or it had something to do with the kind of plays that were staged there. Schools Drama Festival now came to be dominated by Africans and instead of being located at the Kenyan National Theatre in Nairobi, it became a touring festival. Kiswahili replaced English as the language of the plays. Thus the seventies saw Kenyan theatre undergoing major changes with drama trying to break from its colonial confinement.

Kamirithu Community and Educational Cultural Centre

One such attempt was the setting up of the Kamiriithu Community and Education Cultural Centre – a four acre plot with mud-barracked four rooms that were falling apart and the rest only grass. The peasants and workers from the neighbourhood built the stage and a semi-circular bamboo wall behind to separate it from rooms that served both as a store and changing rooms. With no roof over it, it was an open air theatre, much in the tradition of empty spaces that we have spoken about above. Over 10,000 people could be accommodated to watch performances. When Muri and Ngugi wa Thiong'o collaborated to script a play, they decided to do it in Gikuyu rather than in English, a language in which Ngugi wa Thiong'o had done all his earlier writings. The result was a play called *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I will Marry when I want*) that resulted in what Ngugi himself has called an 'epistemological break' with his past, particularly in the area of theatre.

The play depicted the proletarianisation of the peasantry in a neo-colonial society through the family of a poor peasant – Kiguunda – who owns a small piece of land that sustains him and the family but is deprived of the same by a multi-national consortium with the help of comprador landlords and businessmen.

The play was path – breaking in more than one ways. It asked several questions – about national freedom, its objectives, people's perception of post-colonial societies and the role of the leadership in meeting people's aspirations. At the level of language while it was Gikuyu, it had been revised after repeated consultations with people at large through practice performances. Many aspects of the pre-colonial dramatic form were brought into the script – song, dance and mime. But what was most crucial about the play was its depiction of history that had been done, once again, after extensive consultation with the community. And this is what the authorities

found to be most unpalatable and hence the play was banned on November 16, 1977. Ngugi was arrested and spent a most horrible year in jail without any charges. A second attempt in 1982 to stage another play with a similar theme – Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing for me) by Ngugi wa Thiong’o was again outlawed. And this time, the whole building itself was razed to the ground.

As stated above, song, dance and mime were an integral part of the African drama in pre-colonial times and playwrights brought it back as an integral part of theatre after independence for the simple reasons that it continued to be an integral part of their lives – at birth, circumcision, marriage, funerals and many other ceremonies. Thus plays like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda* have a number of songs, dances and mime as part of the structure and movement in the plays. However, what gives the form of these plays tautness and special character is the content, involving man’s interaction with nature through history. But these plays also focus on correcting distortions of history introduced by the colonizing forces. And one of the ways of making such corrections was to introduce African languages rather than English as the medium of expression in plays since it is through language that many such distortions are slipped into the portrayal of history. Thus African drama with its focus on dance, song and mime but above all with its use of African languages has gained some of its pre-colonial significance and glory.

19.11 LET US SUM UP

This unit enables us to trace the history of Africa since the pre-historic times. It gives a detailed history of Kenya since the pre-historic times to the situation at the point of its Uhuru in December 1963. The various struggles waged by the Africans including the Mau Mau Struggle is also discussed briefly. This unit also deals with the tradition of Drama in Kenya.

19.12 EXERCISE

1. Why Africa is called ‘the dark continent’?
2. Write a short note on the importance of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya’s modern history.
3. Write a short note on the dramatic tradition in Kenya.

UNIT 20 NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S LIFE, LITERATURE AND IDEOLOGY

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Birth and Early Education
- 20.2 Higher Education
- 20.3 Teaching Career
- 20.4 Detention and Exile
- 20.5 Ngugi's Ideology and World View
- 20.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.7 Exercise

20.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarize you with the details of Ngugi's life, including his education, teaching and writing career. The unit would also focus on the evolution of Ngugi's world view, especially as it got reflected in his writings at various stages, especially in the writing of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

20.1 BIRTH AND EARLY EDUCATION

Born in 1938, in the family of a landless squatter on the land of a well-to-do farmer in the Kamiithu village in Limuru district of Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went to the mission-run Kamaandura school in Limuru and later to a school of the Independent Schools Movement. Later, he joined the Alliance High School – Kenya's first full-fledged school for Africans – run by an alliance of the Protestant denominations in Kenya. It is here that Ngugi's religious awareness about Christianity – all his writings including *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* have copious references to Christianity – was formed.

Ngugi was fourteen when a state of Emergency was declared in Kenya in 1952, on October 20, 1952, to be precise. His passion for education seems to have weighed heavily with him in his decision to continue with it and as a result, unlike a large number of young persons of his age, he missed out on actual participation in the movement. This fact seems to have given him a kind of guilt complex and is perhaps one of the major reasons for making the freedom struggle, particularly the 'Mau Mau' phase, the theme of most of his books.

20.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

Makarere University College, Uganda

After finishing his school education at Alliance High School, Ngugi joined B.A. (Hons.) in English at the Makarere University College, Kampala, Uganda which was the only university college in the whole of East Africa. It is here that his creative talents developed. Before graduating in 1963, Ngugi had written his first full length play – *The Black Hermit* – which was performed on the occasion of the Independence of Uganda in 1962. He had also written his first two novels – *The River Between and Weep Not, Child*. During this period, he also became the student editor of *Pen Point Africa*, and wrote a number of short stories as well.

During the same period he also contributed a regular column – ‘As I see It’ – to the *Daily Nation*, a prominent newspaper published from Nairobi.

It was a conventional course in English Literature that Ngugi pursued in Makerere, and some critics are of the opinion that the study of D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad exercised an early influence on his writings.

Leeds University, United Kingdom

Leeds was Ngugi's next halt for education. Here he soon became part of Arnold Kettle's group that provided him with a new perspective on various issues – political, social, cultural and academic. In his own words – “Leeds systematized my thinking”. At Leeds, he started working on Caribbean literature for his dissertation for the M.A. degree – a work that he never submitted and that was later to be published as a part of his first book of essays – ‘Homecoming’ – in 1972.

But what is really significant about his staying in Leeds is that it is here that he published his next novel – *A Grain of Wheat* – in 1967 which many critics believe to be his magnum opus.

20.3 TEACHING CAREER

Nairobi University

Returning home the same year, Ngugi became a lecturer at the English department of Nairobi University. Soon, he suggested a number of radical changes in the syllabus, recommending, among others, the incorporation of literatures written in African languages as a part of the Programme of English Studies. These were, however, not accepted. Ngugi resigned from his position in 1969, due to the stiff attitude of the university authorities against students who had been forced to go on a strike for raising various demands. Back to Makerere, where he had accepted a year's fellowship, Ngugi wa Thiong'o helped his new institution reorganize its English department as the African Literature Department with special focus on world literatures rather than on English literature alone. This was very much in keeping with his recommendations at the English department in Nairobi University.

Teaching in the U.S.A. and After

Ngugi went to the U.S.A. for a year to teach African literature at North Western University, Illinois, where he got an opportunity to observe, as he put it in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, “Neo-imperialism at close quarters”. He was back at the English department in Nairobi University in 1971 where he was able to introduce the desired changes and the department was organized as Department of Literature. The period between 1972 and 1977 proved very fruitful in Ngugi's literary career. He published a number of books, beginning with *Homecoming and Other Essays* (1972), *Secret Lives* (1975), a collection of short stories, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), which he wrote together with his colleague Micere Mugo. *Petals of Blood* (1977), his next novel, was also published during this period.

20.4 DETENTION AND EXILE

Ngugi got into trouble with government authorities in Kenya over portions of his *Petals of Blood* in which he dealt with, for the first time in his writings, situations in post-independence Kenya. Also the text of a play – *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will Marry when I want)* about peasants in independent Kenya which he wrote together with Ngugi wa Miiiri in his mother tongue Gikuyu and which was performed at the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, Limuru in 1977. The authorities did not find it to their liking and eventually banned its performance on November 17, 1977. On 31st December, 1977, Ngugi was taken to a police station near his

residence for “routine questioning” but was detained without trial for almost a year – until December 12, 1978. He was released as inexplicably as he had been detained. However, he was not restored to his position as Professor and Head of the Department of Literature, Nairobi University.

During his detention, Ngugi wrote down on pieces of toilet paper – literally – the details of his routine as a detainee as also the strategies through which he was to keep his sanity in the face of humiliations and torture – both physical and mental. The writing was later published as ‘Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary’ in 1981. During this period, he also wrote the manuscript of his next novel – *Cathiani Mutharaba Ini (Devil on the Cross)* – in Gikuyu. Ngugi had made his first attempt at writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu as a conscious decision when he had collaborated with Ngugi wa Miiri in writing a play which was published *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will Marry when I want)* in 1980.

After his request to restore him to his position as Professor in Nairobi University was turned down, Ngugi wa Thiong’o went away to England, settling down as a full time writer. It is from here that a number of his books – *Writers in Politics*, *Barrel of a Pen*, *Decolonizing the Mind*, *Mother Sing to Me*, *Moving the Centre* and his latest novel *Matigari* – were published. He also made common cause with all those who were fighting for the restoration of democracy in Kenya. Ngugi wa Thiong’o has since shifted to the USA where he teaches literature. Ngugi went back to Kenya in 2005 but unfortunately he and his wife were assaulted brutally and his wife was also raped.

20.5 NGUGI’S IDEOLOGY AND WORLD VIEW

Ngugi wa Thiong’o believes that literature and politics are inextricably linked with each other because both are about “living men, actual men and women and children breathing, eating, crying, laughing, creating, dying, flowering men in history of which they are the products and the maker.”

Therefore, he chose as the subject of his writings single events in the history of Kenya that has affected its people the most, namely, Mau Mau. Ngugi believes, together with many other African writers, that the primary aim of literature is not merely to entertain but also to persuade. Ngugi, therefore, does not confine himself to mere chronicling of factual details of historical events, but he also adopts a position on them. In his own words:

What is important... is the attitude and the world view

Embodied in (the Writer’s) work and with which he has persuaded us

To identify vis-à-vis the historical drama his

Community is undergoing.

(*Writers in Politics*, p. 75)

It is because of this historic responsibility of a writer through which Ngugi makes known his own partisanship; while portraying the basic opposition between the forces of imperialism and capitalism on one hand and the forces of national liberation and socialism on the other, between a small class of ‘haves’ backed by transnational monopoly capital and the ‘have nots’ representing the masses of Kenyan people. Ngugi, therefore, has refused to confine his portrayal of the national struggle – as has been the case with many other African writers portraying similar struggles in other respective countries – as a struggle of the black against the white. Once again, unlike his other fellow African counterparts Ngugi is very forthright – particularly in his later novels and plays – in advocating socialism not only as a viable but an extremely desirable political system of governance for solving the problems of newly – liberated African nations reeling under the covert attack of neo-colonialism.

Ngugi is also critical of those writers who seek a solution to all their present, post-colonial ills by suggesting to go back to the past, by making an appeal for adopting the African past completely and uncritically. He suggests – quite candidly – a class approach to those problems and their solutions:

...for as long as there are classes – classes defined by where or how the various people stand in relation to the means of production – a truly human contact in love, joy, laughter, creative fulfillment in labour will never be possible. We can talk meaningfully of class love, class joy, class marriage, class family and class culture.

(*Writers in Politics*, p. 79)

Ngugi is therefore quite wary of those writers who talk of humanism, universalism, justice and peace in abstract terms. In this respect he reserves his worst criticism for a section of the bourgeoisie that may be characterized as comprador bourgeoisie – the class of people that collaborated with the ruling colonial forces during the phase of colonialism, particularly during the crucial phase of the national freedom struggle. According to Ngugi, such a class worked itself into positions of political power during the post-independence phase in order to subserve the interests of neo-colonialism and imperialism via the transnationals. Ngugi has stressed that the colonial administration-appointed home guards and village chiefs were the most prominent representatives of the class of comprador bourgeoisie.

While tracing the origin of the colonial process in capturing the economic resources of Kenya, particularly the illegal misappropriation of its fertile land – white highlands, as these came to be called – Ngugi does not overlook another important fact: 'cultural bomb'. Culture for Ngugi includes the sum total of all the intellectual, moral, ideological forces that give the social relations of production – what we call society – a unique character, a distinctive mark, a certain identity in a particular historical phase. Culture, therefore, includes for Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the education system, the legal system, the religious system, language, literature, forms of dances and songs. Of these the two most significant instruments of cultural imperialism were the church and western system of education, both of which subserved the interests of colonialism. It is because of this that these two underlie the themes of almost all his creative writing including *A Grain of Wheat* wherein he exposed the collaborative role of Christianity most forcefully through the character of Kihika, a revolutionary in the struggle for national freedom.

The other major component of the British colonial cultural bomb in Kenya has been education – the western system of education. Once again, the western system of education which, like Christianity, had been first introduced by the missionaries as a part of the church activities to lure and beguile the gullible, had the same twin objectives of disrupting the traditional way of life in Kenya and to create a class of obedient Kenyans who, mouthing clichés and phrases from English language, expressed their allegiance openly to the power of colonialism. No wonder that this class received a big patronage from the colonial administration through nominations as village chiefs and employment in the home guards system, both of which played the negative rôle of collaborating with saboteurs during the height of Emergency between 1952 and 1957. Karanja in *A Grain of Wheat* is Ngugi's most powerful portrayal of such collaborators.

In fact, this class of comprador bourgeoisie became the subject of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* wherein he has shown this class to be essentially a parasitic class with a wish for permanent identification with the cultures of imperialist bourgeoisie. The members of this parasitic class are the ones

who promote prostitution, alcoholism and gambling by setting up massage parlours, beer-bars and casinos in the name of encouraging tourism and effecting 'development' of Kenya, particularly the rural areas.

Ngugi, however, is not satisfied by mere portrayal of the socio-political situation in Kenya during and after the national struggle for independence. He suggests this in a book titled 'Decolonizing the Mind'. By this he means a kind of 'dialectal negation of the colonial process', dismantling, as it were, the various psychological structures that had been in the minds of men as a result of sustained colonial propaganda, covert as well as overt, during the period of colonization. In his book 'Writers in Politics', he suggests to the writers and intellectuals the task of 'going back to the roots' with the aim of restoring the African personality to its true creative potentials in history, so as to enhance the quality of life. He exhorts teachers and educational institutions to emphasize African languages and literatures while pleading with African writers to write in their own languages rather than in European languages.

Ngugi then goes on to define the function of literature in society:

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is
Given impetus, shape, direction and even area of
Concern by social, political and economic forces in a
society. The relationship between creative literature
and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially
in Africa, where modern literature has grown against
the gory background of European imperialism and its
changing manifestation: slavery, colonialism and neo-
colonialism.

(*Home Coming*, p.xv)

Based on this, Ngugi differentiates the social role of a contemporary artist in Africa from that of one in Europe:

There was never, in any African society, the cult of the artist with its bohemian priests along with the banks of Seine and Thames. Today, the artist in Europe sees himself as an outsider, living in a kind of individual culture and obeying only the laws of his imagination.

(*Home Coming*, p. 6)

It is for similar reasons that Ngugi advocated the use of African languages as the vehicle for the writings by Africans. For many years, he observed, members of the petty bourgeois class comprising students, teachers, journalists and bureaucrats have continued to compose what Ngugi calls 'Afro-European literature' in the languages of Europe, for a readership that also came from the same class. It meant that the moment of truth for Ngugi had arrived. He had to link up his struggle through creative literature with the struggle of the Kenyan masses – now pitted against the comprador bourgeoisie that had usurped power in Kenya and was clinging to it. Thus in a statement prefixed to *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi declared that –

This book, *Decolonizing the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili as the way. (Preface, p. xiv)

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that Ngugi assigned a very radical role to a writer in a society, particularly in a society based on sharp class distinctions:

...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battle field: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics...

(*Writers in Politics*. Preface)

It is on this very powerful note about the ideological obligations of a writer that we would like to end this discussion about Ngugi's world view.

20.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed –

- the details of Ngugi Wa Thiongo'O's life, education and career.
- the evolution of Ngugi's Ideology and world view.

20.7 EXERCISE

1. Give in brief some of the important events in Ngugi's life and career.
2. Comment on Ngugi's ideology and world view with special reference to the relationship between politics and literature.

UNIT 21 *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN*

KIMATHI – CRITICAL SUMMARY

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 ‘The Preface’
- 21.2 The Opening
- 21.3 First Movement
- 21.4 Second Movement
- 21.5 Third Movement
- 21.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.7 Exercise

21.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to provide a detailed summary of the play. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* written by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Micere Githae Mugo. However, it is not a plain summary but is also an elucidation of issues wherever there is a need for contextual elaborations – historical, political and social. Extensive quotations from the text have been reproduced to support the points made during the summarization and also to provide inter-connectivity.

Before we discuss the detailed summary of the play, it would be in order to make the observation that **The Preface, Acknowledgements** and **Preliminary Notes** also carry significant statements by the authors about the play and must be read carefully for the evaluation of the play. Therefore, before summarizing the play proper, we present a critical summary of the Preface.

21.1 ‘THE PREFACE’

The authors state that it was in August 1971 that they first thought of writing this play. The authors also let the readers know that their literary interests and collaboration goes back to their ‘undergraduate days at Makerere of the early 60’s where we used to share many literary interests including editing *Penpoint*, reading and directing plays.’ The immediate provocation for their agreeing to write this play was a joint realization by both of them ‘that Imperialism was the enemy of all working peoples’ – a realization they had reached after both of them had ‘lived in North America and travelled in Western Europe’ and after they had ‘encountered capitalism in its home ground’. Taking the example of the United States of America as an instance of imperialism the authors observe that while America had ‘huge highways, skyscrapers, the world’s most efficient systems of communication, tremendous leaps in science and technology, every kind of material luxury one could think of, there was ‘the appalling poverty of workers especially those in the black and Puerto Rican Ghettos’ and ‘All the advantages of modern science and technology, the wealth produced by the labour power of many people, went to the hands of a few’.

The authors also observe that there existed ‘American Imperialist projects of theft through deception, murder and enslavement of the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America. There was the American direct occupation of Vietnam and South Korea: there was the indirect American control of South Africa and Palestine.’ America’s

immense wealth, the authors observe, 'was gained through the impoverishment and misery of millions!'

A discussion about the war in Vietnam, the authors observe, 'led us back to Mau Mau, the actual subject of our discussion' and they wondered whether the theme of Mau Mau struggles had been exhausted in their literature. Other related questions, for instance, that agitated their thinking were:

"Had this heroic peasant armed struggle against the British Forces of occupation been adequately treated in our literature? Why was Kenyan Literature on the whole so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history? Take the heroes and heroines of our history: Kimathi, Koitalel, Me Kitilili, Mary Nyanjiru, Waiyaki. Why were our imaginative artists not singing songs of praise to these and their epic deeds of resistance? Whose history and whose deeds were the historians and creative writers recording for our children to read?

The play, structured differently from the tradition of plays in Europe, is divided into what the authors call 'Movements' that are preceded by an 'Opening'. Given below is a detailed summary of all the Movements as also the Opening.

21.2 THE OPENING

The stage directions for the Opening tell the readers/viewers that the venue of the action is a courtroom where a white judge is presiding. Seated near him is an African clerk who is described to be 'fat' and 'important-looking' but who is 'fiddling nervously with papers'. The use of the adjective 'nervously' to describe the state of the 'important-looking' clerk is to send a signal to the readers/viewers that something significant – unusual – is about to take place in the courtroom.

Next, the focus of the stage directions shifts to the person in the dock who is described to be in chains. This observation sends a signal to the readers/viewers that the accused is perhaps too dangerous to be allowed to free movement of his body. Simultaneously, it is perhaps also indicative of the gravity of his alleged crime. This latter inference is also borne out by the fact that he is being guarded by a 'European District-cum-police officer' – Waitina – and two African K.A.R. – the full form is Kenya African Rifles – soldiers who are 'heavily armed'. The suspense builds up about the prisoner since despite being chained, he is being guarded by armed soldiers and an officer. Adding to the suspense is the observation by the authors that the courtroom is 'overcrowded'.

The next set of stage directions carry a whole lot of significant socio-cultural and political information: 'Africans squeeze around one side, seated on rough benches' while the 'Whites occupy more comfortable seats on the opposite side'. The segregation is symptomatic of the racial divide in the country which extends even to the courtroom – right in front of the law. And the contrast between 'rough benches' and 'more comfortable seats' symbolizes the difference in economic status of the two – Africans and the White Europeans – right under the nose of the law. In fact, it is the court which has provided for this differentiated treatment between the two segments of the society.

It is important to note here that the directions themselves have been very carefully thought out by the authors and communicate significant information not only about the state of affairs in Kenya but also about the shape of things to come.

After it has been observed as a final part of stage directions that there is 'Dead silence' and the Judge begins to speak.

The Judge addresses the accused in the dock, speaking aloud his name and other related details about his identification: 'Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime

Minister or Field Marshal, of no fixed address...’ One may pause and observe here that the contrast created by the pronouncement by the judge that Dedan Kimathi who has an alias or a Prime Minister or a Field Marshal but does not even have ‘fixed address’ is done with the deliberate intention of making fun of the accused.

The judge then goes on to announce the charge laid against him – Kimathi is ‘found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a licence, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency Regulations constitutes a criminal offence’. He then asks the accused whether he confesses his guilt or not. The stage directions state that Kimathi ‘remains silent, defiant’. The stage directions once again give an indication about the impending confrontation between the judge and the accused, between the white colonial rulers and the black colonized ruled.

The judge, feeling slighted and hence angry on this act of defiance of his authority, threatens the accused that this would tantamount to ‘contempt of court’ and the accused could be punished for this by being ‘sent for a certain term to jail’. Since Dedan Kimathi still remains silent and hence defiant, a murmuring starts among the audience. The judge reads aloud the charge again and asks the accused to state whether he considers himself guilty or not.

The stage directions state that for a few moments there is silence after which the whole stage goes dark suddenly. This ‘sudden darkness’ is symbolic of many things simultaneously. It symbolizes a complete rupture in communication. More significantly, it anticipates the shape of events to come which would lead to the death of Kimathi eventually since darkness symbolizes death. At the same time it also draws the reader/viewer’s attention to the dark – non-transparent – aspect of the farcical trial which is about to follow.

Thus we see that the ‘Opening’ which is a kind of prelude to the actual action of the play is significant in both providing the socio-political background and setting the tone for whatever is to follow.

What are usually described as Acts in western drama are described as Movements in this play. The play has been divided into three Movements which the authors claim should in fact be viewed as a ‘single Movement’.

21.3 FIRST MOVEMENT

The directions before the opening of the action in the First Movement state that ‘Darkness reigns’. There is the sound of ‘Distant drums that grow louder and louder until they culminate in a frantic, frenzied and intense climax, filling the entire stage and auditorium with their rhythm.’ With the coming on of the ‘Twilight’, loud singing by a crowd of peasants is heard. Once again, the authors’ directions are that the voices of the peasants combine ‘aggression with firmness’. The song which is in Swahili, is apparently a song of freedom. Simultaneously, there is the sound of a gunshot. Groans and screams follow after ‘whiplashes are heard falling on human skins’. Sad music now takes over as ‘the Black Man’s History takes place on the stage’. The enactment of the history is in four phases, signifying the milestones in the history of Africa: the first phase shows the hoodwinking of black African chiefs by slave-traders wherein ‘Several strong black men and a few women are given away for a long, posh piece of cloth and a heap of trinkets’; in the second phase, ‘a chain of exhausted slaves, roped onto one another... row a boat across the stage, under heavy whipping’. The third phase shows ‘A labour force of blacks, toiling on plantation under the supervision of a cruel, ruthless fellow black overseer’ and the fourth phase shows ‘An angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans through songs and thunderous shouts’. The song is once again a freedom song showing the determination of the blacks to ‘unchain the people’.

The significance of the directions as well as the enactment of the Black Man's History is to not only provide the audience with the socio-political background of wherever has happened to Africa and Africans during the last few hundred years but also – more significantly – to make them aware that whatever is to follow is a part of the same history and there is a continuum in the struggle of Blacks from Africa to America.

'Now definite dawn breaks over the stage' and the 'action focuses on two retreating Mau Mau guerrillas into the 'bush' with machine guns on the ready'. Off stage sounds of 'rough kicks, slaps and whiplashes' are heard together with voices of protest. Then an African official – Waitina – and a hooded collaborator – Gakunia who also doubles up as Gatotia – are seen to be instructing the African soldiers to present before them 'those Mau Mau villagers two by two' for screening. On a nod from Gakunia, some are detained for further questioning. Among those brought before Waitina is a 'fruitseller – Matunda' who appears to be acting funny and even Waitina is amused by his 'antics'. However, Waitina tells the fruit seller to go "to Manyani to sell your fruits there". The directions given at this point tell the readers that "we should see the man frustrated" (p.8).

The scene now changes. It is proper daylight. A woman is seen walking across the stage. Between 30 and 40, she is mature, slightly built good looking with a youthful face. Though "apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously world-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert.

Fearless determination and a spirit of daring is her character. She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations. A mother, a fighter, all in one." (p.8)

She walks straight into the mouth of a gun wielded by a white man, Johnnie who is a soldier. He asks her for her 'passbook' to which she replies that 'women, they don't carry pass'. He then eyes her seductively and begins to flirt with her:

"Women are their own passbooks, eh? Even to heaven (grinning seductively) Do you live around these parts?" (p.9)

Suddenly he becomes tense on seeing her carry a kondo – a small basket generally carried by women and asks her to 'put it on the ground. Now hands on your head. Move a step back. Two steps. That's good. Don't try any tricks now.' (pp.9-10) This incident is intended to highlight the state of paranoia that prevails among the whites. Picking up the basket, he observes – 'You never know what's hidden in these shenzi things!'

Seeing fruit, he cannot help picking up a banana and eating it. As it turns out, he has had a hard night's work.

"Of course. A white man also gets hungry especially after a whole night without sleep or food. Had to fight off those bloody terrorists until daybreak"

Then Johnnie discovers suddenly that there is a bread wrapped in the parcel that the woman has been carrying:

"Ahh, just bread... Rather heavy bread, I must say. Bush millet, eh? Could have been a grenade. They are quite cunning, you know. Homemade guns. Homemade machine guns. Fanatics! Shall we have a bite?"

He is about to break the bread into two when he is suddenly distracted by the woman 'kneeling on the ground, almost reaching out for his legs' and beseeching him not to break the bread since it was meant for her hungry children. She supplicates to him to let her go.

A sudden noise from somewhere nearby scares him and he runs away in a hurry. The woman too gets away. Two African soldiers appear on the stage. Their conversation updates the readers on the current socio-political situation as also gives them a peep into the past vis-à-vis Kimathi and the 'Mau Mau'.

The first soldier is quite sceptical about the whole exercise of hunting for Mau Mau terrorists:

“Where are the terrorists who are supposed to be all over Nyeri? We’ve been patrolling all night without as much as catching sight of a single one of them . Simply harassing innocent villagers. The way mzungu makes us thirst to kill one another!” (p.12)

The second soldier replies to this by observing that “The bloodyfuckin’ Mau Mau are finished without that bugger Kimathi.” (p.12)

Through their conversation we also come to know that ‘their bloody Kimathi is appearing in court at Nyeri today. This afternoon.’ While one of them hopes that there would be ‘no attempt to rescue him. Something like what happened last night’, the other observes that “...I don’t think they will try again. Mau Mau... They are funkin’ cowards. They won’t come out into the open in daylight and fight it out like men.” (p.13)

As they discuss the details of Kimathi’s character, the audience/readers are presented with two opposite views about Kimathi the individual and his deeds:

“Second Soldier: ...Angry mothers who have lost their husbands and their children might want to tear that beastly Kimathi to pieces!

First Soldier: Wapi? That’s what Bwana Shaw Henderson says. But he doesn’t know the people. Kimathi is a hero to the people. They love him like anything, say what you will.”

...

...

Second soldier: ...But ...let me tell you, after the trial, after Kimathi is hanged, there will be no more fighting. It will be the end of this bloody struggle. Mzungu! Don’t play with him.

First Soldier: Well, time will tell.”

After the soldiers have left, the woman comes out of her hiding, observing to herself about a comment made by one of the soldiers –

“What was one of those soldiers said? “The way the enemy makes us thirsty to kill one another.” How right he was! He must be one of the lost sons of the soil. H’m. Take the case of us peasants, for one. We

are told you are Luo, you are Kalenjin, you are Kamba, you are Maasai, you are Kikuyu. You are a woman, you are a man, you are this, you are that, you are the other. (After some thought): Yes. We are only ants trodden upon by the merciless elephants.” (p.14)

She wraps her bread back, resolves to ‘find the fruit seller quickly’ and is about to start off when a youth enters, chasing a girl. He catches her, holds her down roughly and demands his money. Seeing this, the woman reproaches him for ill-treating a girl:

“Shame on you. A big boy, well, a young man like you! And you want kill your sister! Your own mother’s daughter!”

On his continuing to quarrel with the girl and abusing her for letting the girl escape his clutches, she berates him:

“You are a woman’s son? I have a mind to wring your neck. Running about and fighting like that when screeners and army jeeps are all over Nyeri. Where is your heart? Can’t you see that you are big enough? That you can easily be taken to Manyani? What has she done?” (pp. 15-16)

She then asks him to tell her about himself and the girl. After a brief hesitation during which he examines the woman closely, the boy ‘involuntarily begins to tell his story:

“It was in Nairobi, you see. She and I and other boys and girls used to roam the streets together...

... We scrounged into every dustbin from Kariobangi to Grogan Road. But mostly we’d hang around big hotels: New Stanley, Norfolk, Grosvenor. There were a lot of settlers and tourists and we would carry their bags. Sometimes we would act crippled or blind and deaf. They would give us money – some of them as much as ten shillings! The police would often come chasing us away, but we managed. Somehow.” (p.16)

He then goes on to say how one day she – the girl – had run away without giving him his share of money earned by carrying bags of a fat American. And ‘Today by luck, I saw her’.

Touched by his story, the woman gives the boy twenty shillings to go eat something and bring her back the change. While he is gone, she observes to herself:

“It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nkuru. Kisumu. Eldoret. The same old story. Our people... tearing one another... and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us – in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forests; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi’s teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat. It is for this that the enemy has captured him.” (p.18)

The Boy goes on to narrate his story – how a greedy relation of his father had deprived them of their land in Nyeri, reducing his father and him to workers in Nairobi where his father died of an accident on a machine and he was forced to fight “with dogs and cats in the rubbish bins, for food... and we became men and women before our time.” (p.19)

Narrating her own story in the city where “I was a bad woman”, she tells them that she knew the vicious bind of “Fighting..Drinking...Fighting...Drinking...Kangari, karubu, busaa, chang’aa...Mather Valley...Pumwani...all that and more.” (p.19) She then goes on to tell them how she changed after hearing “The call of the people”. Inviting the Boy to understand the real nature of things, she tells him this:

“The day you understand why your father died: the day you ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you ask yourself: “what can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances?” that day, my son, you’ll become a man. Just now you are a beast and the girl was right to call you a brute.” (p.19)

She lets them know later about Dedan Kimathi who has been captured by the colonial administration and who had been fighting to ensure that “the soil will be restored to the people. Our land shall one day be truly ours”. (p.21)

Finally, she assigns them a task:

“There, outside the prison gates or outside the courtroom, or somewhere between the prison gates and the courtroom, you will find a man selling oranges. He will be wearing a red shirt. He will be singing: “Oranges cheap today! Thandaraita – aaa.” Give him this loaf of bread.” (p.21)

The First Movement ends with the Boy recalling the words of the Woman, “The day you’ll ask yourself... what can I do so that another shall not die under such grisly circumstance... that day you’ll become a man, my son.” (p.22)

21.4 SECOND MOVEMENT

The scene is outside the court where quite a big crowd has gathered around. The Woman disguised as a man in a red shirt, is selling oranges from a basket ‘he’ is carrying.

Inside the court, “Whites enter, women dressed as if for a show, fanning their faces. Men swagger in with pistols belted around their waists. They sit on one side of the court.” (p.23)

The stage instructions state that “As the Africans enter, it should be a study in contrast with their torn clothes and tattered shoes. They are frisked by the African soldiers under Waitina’s orders. Sticks or anything that might suggest a weapon are removed from them. N.B. Throughout the court scenes, Africans are defiant towards the settlers and the colonial authorities while appreciative of Kimathi’s stand... In the court, blacks and whites sit on separate side. It is as if a huge gulf lies between them.” (p.23)

After the entry of Shaw Henderson dressed as a judge, the prisoner – Dedan Kimathi – is “brought in under heavy guard, with chains on his feet and chains on his hands. He is pushed into the witness box by Waitina who is flanked by First and Second soldiers.” (p.24)

The judge then reads out the charges against him:

“Dedan Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, alias Prime Minister, or Field Marshal, of no fixed address, you are charged that on the night of Sunday, October the 21st, 1956, at or near Ihururu in Nyeri District, you were found in possession of a firearm, namely a revolver, without a licence, contrary to section 89 of the penal code, which under Special Emergency regulations constitutes a criminal offence. Guilty or not guilty?” (p.24)

On Kimathi remaining silent, the judge warns him of contempt of court and repeats the entire charge. Kimathi questions his right to try him – “By what right dare you, a colonial judge, sit in judgement over me?” (p.25) The judge reminds him that he is charged with ‘a most serious crime. It carries a death sentence.’ Kimathi now enters into a polemic with the judge questioning the very basis of colonial justice:

“Kimathi: To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by criminal law: the law of oppression. I have no word.

Judge: Law is law. The rule of law is the basis of every civilized community. Justice is justice.

Kimathi: Whose law? Whose justice?

Judge: There is only one law, one justice.

Kimathi: Two laws. Two justices. One law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry, our people” (pp. 25-26)

Kimathi then goes on to list the 'crimes' of colonial administration:

"Protected the oppressor. Licensed the murderers of the people
Our people,
whipped when they did not pick your tea leaves
your coffee beans
Imprisoned when they refused to "ayah"
your babies
and "boy" your houses and gardens
Murdered when they didn't rickshaw
your ladies and your gentlemen."

The polemic ends in the judge adjourning the court until the next day. After the judge had left, a settler rushes at Kimathi, pointing his gun at him, he threatens to kill him:

"Field Marshall/Prime Minister. Fucking black monkey. Listen, you'll die now, wog.
I'll teach you justice...
I had cattle and sheep – by the thousands.
Where are they now?
I had acres of maize and wheat:
Where are they now?
I had a wife and daughter:
Where are they now?
Killed. Burnt. Maimed
by this lunatic and his pack of bandits" (p.28)

The scene briefly shifts to the street where the woman disguised as Fruitseller is seen selling oranges. After she has left, the boy comes looking for the Fruitseller, holding the loaf of bread in his hand, spots the Girl and runs after her demanding his money.

Next, we have the First Trial.

The First Trial

The stage instructions tell us that "All four trials of Dedan Kimathi take place in his cell.

...Kimathi sits in a corner, long chain from his leg dragging behind him." (p.31)

Shaw Henderson enters and identifies himself as 'I am a friend' and tells Kimathi that the people have 'sent me to talk sense into your obstinate head'. He says further that he had come to 'make a deal': "You must plead in court tomorrow. And you must plead guilty?" (p.33) He promises to spare his life, citing the examples of 'China. Gati. Hungu. Gaceru' whose lives they had spared after they became 'our collaborators'. Henderson recalls how as children they – Kimathi and him – used to play together the game of the horse and the rider. Kimathi in turn reminds Henderson that he always wanted Kimathi to play the horse so that he could ride him.

Henderson asks Kimathi to stop the blood-bath, observing that 'your people are the losers, Dedan'. Kimathi's reply is typical of a nationalist freedom fighter:

"With the British, we have been losers all the way – yes – but this is a new era. This is a new war. We have bled for you. We have fought your wars for you,

against the Germans, Japanese, Italians. This time we shall bleed for our soil, for our freedom, until you let go.” (p.34)

On being told by Henderson that he was dreaming again, Kimathi says, ‘Yes. And I shall keep on dreaming till my visions come true and our people are free.’ On Kimathi’s observation that ‘Kimathi will never sell Kenya’, Henderson leaves in a huff, threatening that ‘I’ll get you yet. I swear I’ll get you. I, Shaw Henderson, will break you. I know the native mind. Black man, I’ll have the last laugh.’ (p.36)

The Second Trial

In the second trial, Kimathi recalls his childhood, particularly the influence of his blind grandmother on him:

“I was blessed by a blind grandmother,
A peasant, a toiler.
She imparted her strength, the strength
of our people into me.” (p.36)

He recalls the various dances by different peoples of Kenya before the intervention of colonialism –

“They used to dance these
Before the white colonialist came
In the arena...at initiation...
during funerals...during marriage...
Then the colonialist came
And the people danced
A different dance.” (p.37)

He recalls how he became a leader of the struggle of the people:

“I became an organizer of youth,
We collected from the seven ridges around Karunaini.
Gichamu we called ourselves
And we devised new dances
Talking of the struggle before us
Readying ourselves for the war...

...

We asked ourselves
How long shall we
Gichamu Karunaini youth
of Iregi Generation
Allow our people to continue
Slaves of hunger, disease, sorrow
In our own lands
While foreigners eat
And snore in bed with fullness?” (pp.37-38)

At this point, when he is soliloquizing about ‘hunger, disease, sorrow’, he is visited by a Trade-cum-businessman’s delegation, who observe that ‘this is holding back investment, the flow of money, development’. On Kimathi’s questioning whether money is development, one of them – the banker – cites the example of foreign banks as the makers of modern Kenya:

"Now you'll agree with me that they did transform this land. Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kisumu. Modern cities, Modern Highways." (p.38)

Then the Indian who is a part of the delegation, joins in –

"In India – a, ve got our independent. Freedom. To make money. This here, our true friend. Not racialism. Leaves your customs alone. You can pray Budha, pray Confucius, pray under the trees, pray rocks, wear sari... your culture...songs...dances..ve don't mind...propided...ve make money... friend...friend." (p.39)

When Kimathi reminds the Indian that Kenyans passing through India during the war had seen 'hungry peoples, beggars on pavements... wives selling themselves for a rupee...', the Indian can only mutter – 'Little, Little...'

Soon the delegation is pleading with Kimathi to confess, repent:

"Co-operate – like the surrendered generals. Tell your people to come out of the Forest. We need stability. There never can be progress without stability. Then we can finance big Hotels...International Hotels...seaside resorts...Night Clubs...Casinos...Tarmac roads...oil refineries and pipelines... The tourists from USA, Germany, France, Switzerland, Japan, will flock in. Investment, my friend, development, prosperity, happiness." (p.40)

On being questioned by Kimathi about the fate and role of 'my people... The oppressed of the land...all those whose labour power has transformed this land', the reply of the Banker is typical:

"Toilers there will always be... There are servants and masters... sellers of labour and buyers of labour. Masters and servants." (p.40)

On being called 'Judas' by Kimathi the members of the delegation go out.

The scene now shifts to the street outside. The Girl enters, soliloquizing about her life:

"All my life I have been running. On the run. On the road. Men molesting me. I was once a dutiful daughter. A nice Christian home. It was in the settled area. ...I ran away from school because the headmaster wanted to do wicked things with me. Always: you remain behind. You take the wood to my house. You take this chalk and books to the office. Then he would follow me and all he wanted was to touch my breasts. So I left school. I wanted to stay home and teach myself how to sew or do something with my life. But my father would have nothing of it. He called me an idler and sent me to pick tea leaves for that cruel settler, Mr. Jones. How he used to abuse and punish us! I had to run away from home... In the city it was the boys...I lost my virginity while trying to run away from losing it. How else could I live?" (p.41)

Now the Boy enters the scene and soon enough a quarrel ensues, the girl mistaking the Boy's sincere apology for another trick of his. In the melee, the bread falls down and out comes the gun, on seeing which both are shocked beyond belief. The boy thinks that he has been tricked by the Women to land him into trouble and proposes to report her to the police. Suddenly he hears a voice – the Woman's – telling him:

"The day you'll understand why your father died: the day you'll ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you'll ask yourself – what can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances, that day, my son, you'll become a man." (p.43)

He changes his mind saying, 'But how can I turn/Against her call/And/Live?'

They leave.

Third Trial

This time the delegation visiting Kimathi comprises an African Businessman, dressed like an Englishman, politician and a Priest. Kimathi seems to recognize the Businessman and tells him that he has been 'sitting on hot coals of trials and temptations' and asks him to 'Ease my heart' (p.44). The African Businessman reminds Kimathi that he had stood by him. He had contributed money to the cause and his shop at Masira used to be an 'oathing centre'. He goes on to ask Kimathi – 'Don't you think we have won the war?' In return, Kimathi asks him whether their oppressors had surrendered. The reply by the African Businessman is again typical of collaborators:

"It is not, eeh, exactly like that. But there have been two important announcements. They have said: No more racialism. No more colour bar. In public places. In administration. In business. In the allocation of loans. In the grabbing, well, in the acquisition of land. Partnership in progress, that's the new motto. Is this not what we have been

fighting for? Any black man who now works hard and has capital can make it to the top. We can become local directors of foreign companies. We can now buy land in the White Highlands. What Highlands no more. It's now: willing Seller, willing Buyer." (p.45)

At this point, the politician takes over and tells Kimathi that they had been given the choice to independence 'province by province'. Kimathi rejects his contention as that of 'new drinkers of honey from human skulls' and calls them 'Neo-slaves'. Once they leave, the Priest approaches Kimathi. Like the others, the Priest too urges Kimathi to "Surrender. Call off bloodshed. New Life, New Brotherhood in Christ." (p.50). He informs Kimathi that "We are now Africanizing the Church. We want to see Christ reflected in our culture. Drums in Church. African Bishops. African

Moderators. African cardinals". (p.49) Kimathi, however, refuses to see the kind of light that the Priest is trying to show him. He considers them as collaborators:

"Betrayal. Betrayal. Prophets. Seers. Strange. I have always been suspicious of those who would preach cold peace in the face of violence. Turn the other cheek. Don't struggle against those that clothe themselves as butterflies. Collaborators." (p.49)

Finally, he too is asked to go: 'My trial has begun'. As the Priest leaves, Kimathi soliloquizes:

"Who are friends and who enemies?

Oh, the agony of a lone battle!

But I will fight on to the end

Alone...

Alone, did I say?

No. Cast out these doubts!" (p.51)

The scene changes back to the street where the Boy and Girl are seen talking to the Warder of the jail, asking if he had seen 'a man selling oranges around here'. Stranded with the gun, they leave to devise the strategy of reaching the gun to Kimathi. After they have left, the Woman enters, disguised as Fruitseller only to discover that the Warder she had expected to see is not there. The Warder informs her that the fear of an armed rescue could have led to sudden changes of guards. She goes out.

Fourth Trial

Kimathi is visited in the jail by Shaw Henderson who asks him to ‘Stop dreaming’ and wake up to the reality. Kimathi is furious:

“What more do you want from me?

Sale of our people...land..sale of my soul.

For a badge from King George, or is it the Queen?

...Shaw Henderson! Trader with people’s lives!.

...Yes, self-appointed saviour of our people. Listen and listen well. I will fight to the bitter end. Protect our soil. Protect our people. This is what I, Kimathi wa Wachiuri, swore at initiation.” (p.54)

Listening to all this and more, Henderson reacts wildly, striking Kimathi ‘with hands, legs, gun and swearing as he strikes’. Finally, he orders Waitina to instruct Gatotia to ‘give him intensive treatment’ in the torture chamber.

The stage instructions at this point tell us that as Waitina lifts the whip, ‘lights go off and the audience only hear noise from the torture chamber. Gradually, semi-darkness. In semi-darkness we watch the miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on, against the torturing behind the scene.’ (p.56)

Further stage instructions tell us that :

“Kimathi, blood-stained, shirt torn, emerges from the torture chamber kicked, pushed from behind. He can hardly walk. He falls on his hands and feet. Henderson, Waitina and Gatotia and the two soldiers follow, holding some of the instruments of torture. They stand in a group except the human soldier who stands apart, slightly hiding his face in shame. Kimathi is obviously broken in body. BUT not in spirit.” (p.57)

After Henderson has handed him a piece of paper, ordering him to ‘Sign – surrender’, Kimathi tears it into pieces, ‘throws the pieces in Henderson’s face’ and says:

“Our people will never surrender.”

The Second Movement ends with this.

21.5 THIRD MOVEMENT

In the Third Movement, the scene is early morning, near the gate of the jail house where Dedan Kimathi has been held. Boy and Girl, dressed as Masai, approach the Warder and express a wish to see the prisoner – Kimathi. The Warder is surprised – “Wonders will never cease. Masai? Kimathi? Who are you fooling? Go away!” (p.59)

They tell him that they want to greet him and give him the loaf of bread they are carrying. Observing that he has been starving on his duty, he snatches the bread from them. He is about to break it when suddenly there is a sound of an aeroplane and throwing the bread, he rushes off. The Boy and Girl retrieve the bread and are about to go away when they run into the Woman, still dressed as a fruitseller. She reveals her real identity to them and they are quite surprised.

They move away to confer. “Both Boy and Girl sit at the feet of the woman”, who “now represents all the working mothers talking to their children.” (p.59)

The Boy asks her – “Why did you trick me into carrying a gun?” to which she replies that that was a kind of initiation for him. On her enquiring whether he was afraid, he confesses that he was... “But the Girl here.... She was all strength and daring and no fear.” The woman praises them, observing that –

“Instead of fighting against one another, we who struggle against exploitation and oppression, should give one another strength and faith till victory is ours.” (p.59)

She then informs them that “Yesterday was a day of setbacks. First the screening and the Johnnies! I walked into the mouth of a gun! Then, after we parted, I found out that fruitseller so that you would easily recognize me. The court adjourned sooner than I had thought: I then followed the crowd. I was going to speak to the Warder, another contact. I found that he too had been transferred to another place. So only you remained. I kept on looking for you. Between here and Majengo, there is not a place I have not visited. Great risks: but the task once started must be completed?” (p.60)

She reveals to them the plan to rescue Kimathi and assigns them the crucial task of starting the shooting when Kimathi is taken to court. Suddenly, the Girl, losing interest in the whole thing, asks a basic question – “Who really is Dedan Kimathi?” to which the Woman replies – “Leader of the landless. Leader of them that toil.” (p.61)

The Boy and Girl then narrate some of the stories – these are legends in the making – that they have heard about the miraculous feats of Dedan Kimathi. For instance, they believe he once disguised himself as a European inspector of Police, enjoyed the hospitality of a dinner by the Governor and escaped. Again, they believe that “he could turn himself into an aeroplane” or “walk for a 100 miles on his belly” or “that he could mimic any noise of a bird and none could tell the difference”. (p.61) The Woman replies to these beliefs of the Boy and Girl by observing, sadly and contemplatively:

“It is true children, that Kimathi could do many things. Even today, they sing of the battle of Mathari; the battles he waged in Mount Kenya; the battle of Naivasha. Yes, they sing of the enemy aeroplanes he brought down with only a rifle! He was a wonderful teacher: with a laugh that was truly infectious. He could also act and mimic any character in the world: a story teller too, and many were the nights he would calm his men and make their hearts light and gay with humorous anecdotes. But above all, he loved people, and he loved his country. He so hated the sight of Africans killing one another that he sometimes became a little soft with our enemies. [*softly*] He, Great commander that he was, Great organizer that he was, Great fearless fighter that he was, he was human! [*almost savagely, bitterly*]: Too human at times!”

The scene now shifts to A Guerilla Camp in Nyandarua Forest where in a court-cum-general meeting, a trial of two British soldiers and one African K.A.R. is in progress. Kimathi is seen to be questioning the prisoners about their names, regiments, places of origin back in United Kingdom and the background of their parents. On learning that their parents were poor, Kimathi observes:

“It’s always the same story. Poor men sent to die so that parasites might live in paradise with ill-gotten wealth. Know that we are not fighting against the British people. We are fighting against British colonialism and imperialist robbers of our land, our factories, our wealth. Will you denounce British imperialism?” (pp.64) On their refusal to do so, they are led away to be punished.

Kimathi then turns to the K.A.R. soldier who pleads – “Truly, I’m black. Black like you. Spare me brother.

Kimathi comments:

“And yet you fight against us?”

A true mercenary!
You fought for imperialism in Burma!
You fought for them in Japan!
And now you fight for them
Against your own country?
Against your people's interest! (pp.64-65)

On learning that they are paid only a hundred shillings per month plus posho, he ridicules them –

“I thought they would bribe you with more!
A share in their Export-Import trade,
A share in their tourist hotels,
A share in their wheat fields
A share in their stolen wealth.
Only that? (p.65)

They too are led away to be punished.

Kimathi now turns to the general meeting and addressing them, he observes –

“We now must open new fronts
We have sent envoys to arouse
Warriors from Nyanza,
Giriama people at the Coast
And also young Kalenjin braves
To set a grand alliance of Kenyan People
And chastise the enemy for ever.

...

...

We must know our history
Especially the deeds of those
Who have always resisted
The rape of our beautiful Kenya
Who have always stood firmly
Against oppression and exploitation.
I could sing praise for them all day:
Waiyaki, Me Katilili
Mbatiani, Koitalel.
And vilify collaborators:
Mimias, Wangombe
Karuri, Gakure
Kinyanjui, Luka –
All who sold us to foreigners to aid
their own stomachs and their family store.
We must learn from our past strength
Past weaknesses
From past defeats
And past victories.” (pp.66-68)

Next, another group of offenders are brought in who are guilty of negotiating with the enemy. These include Kimathi's younger brother, Wambararia. Kimathi is shocked:

"My kindred brother –
To negotiate behind my back?" (p.71)

A debate ensues about the kind and quantum of punishment to be meted out to the offenders. At this point, Kimathi points to the Woman and observes:

"Do you see this woman?
How many tasks has she performed
Without complaint
Between here and the villages?
How many people has she
snatched from jails, from colonial
Jaws of death!

...

...

When this struggle is over
We shall erect at all the city corners
Monuments
To our women
Their courage and dedication
To our struggle? (p.72)

While the fate of the offenders is being decided, the news is brought in that they have managed to escape upon which Kimathi orders – "Shoot them on sight".

This was a kind of flash back after which the scene now shifts back to the Courtroom where the trial of Kimathi is to be resumed. While the judge is reading out the charges to Kimathi, the Woman enters the court but is identified by the collaborators and is apprehended, chained and led away. While she is leaving, singing songs of freedom, the Boy and Girl enter and take the place vacated by her on the bench. When the judge asks Kimathi to plead 'Guilty or not guilty?', Kimathi's reply is typical of freedom fighters –

"In the court of Imperialism!
There has never and will never be
Justice for the people
Under imperialism.
Justice is created
through a revolutionary struggle
Against all the forces of imperialism.
Our struggle must therefore continue." (p.82)

Admonishing the collaborators like Hungu Gati, Gatotia for their acts of betrayal and lauding the bravery of the Woman who he had seen being arrested, chained and led away a short while ago, he proclaims –

"But our people will never surrender
Internal and external foes
will be demolished
And Kenya shall be free (p.83)

After the judge pronounces the judgement “Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, you are sentenced to die, by hanging. You will be hanged by the rope until you are dead” and leaves the court, the Boy and Girl stand up suddenly, break the bread, hold the gun and speak together – “Not dead!”

In the ensuing melee, darkness falls for a moment, after which “the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song. All the soldiers are gone, except for the First soldier who shyly joins in the singing from behind.”

The play ends on this note.

21.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed in detail:

- The Preface, Acknowledgements and Preliminary Notes that carry significant statements by the authors about the play.
- The summary of the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* along with the elucidation of the historical, political and social issues.

21.7 EXERCISE

1. Comment on the broad movements in the structure of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
2. What view of the justice system emerges from the exchanges between the judge and Dedan Kimathi.

UNIT 22 *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN* *KIMATHI – AN EVALUATION*

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 The Objective of the Play
- 22.2 Theatrical Techniques and Devices Employed in the Play
- 22.3 'Time' in the Play
- 22.4 Characters in the Play
- 22.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.6 Exercise
- 22.7 Suggested Readings

22.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarize you with major critical evaluations of the Play. For this, various aspects of the play, namely, the Preface, the theatrical devices, characters, etc. have been presented as separate sections. But this is only a strategy for focusing on various aspects and the play must be viewed as a whole.

Given below are critical comments on various aspects of the play. While the comments are based on observations made by various Ngugi scholars, illustrations have been drawn from the text to support the arguments contained therein. More illustrations may, however, be found through an intensive study of the play.

22.1 THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PLAY

Commenting on the objective of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo in writing this play, G.D. Killam (*An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, London: Heinemann, 1980) comments that it is " 'a song of praise' for the feats of leadership and resistance of the most brilliant of the generals of the independence struggle who, along with his brothers-in-arms, Koitalel and Me Kitilili, for example, are neglected, often repudiated heroes, their deeds for the most part not known by the present generation of young Kenyans." (p.86) The play, therefore, according to Killam, is "an attempt to restore the character of Kimathi to his legitimate place in the history of Kenya." (p.86)

Again, according to Killam, "the play establishes the connection with the masses in the present struggle by reasserting Kimathi's values. More than this the play is a self-conscious assertion of the part that literature should play in the revolution." Killam goes to reproduce the following quote from the Preface of the play –

"We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants' and workers' struggle before and after constitutional independence. The play is not a reproduction of the farcical 'trial' at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement." (Italics author's, p.viii)

In fact, Ngugi and Micere Mugo elaborate on the *raison d'être* of their project:

“There was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination, a resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15th and 16th centuries when Kenyans and other East African people first took up arms against European colonial power – the Portuguese forces of conquest, murder and plunder. Our historians, our political scientists, and even some of our literary figures were too busy spewing out, elaborating and trying to document the same colonial myths which had it that Kenyan people traditionally wandered aimlessly from place to place engaging in purposeless warfare; that the people readily accommodated themselves to the British forces of occupation! For whose benefit were these intellectuals writing? Unashamedly, some were outright defenders of Imperialism and lauded the pronouncements of colonist governors, basking in the sunshine of their *pax-Anglo-Africana Commonwealth*.” (Preface)

22.2 THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES EMPLOYED IN THE PLAY

The authors employ a number of techniques and devices which are different from those used in the theatre conventionally. The play is divided into an **Opening**, **Three Movements** and fourteen **scenes** which are different from the usual divisions of plays into Acts and Scenes which are numbered and referred to as Act I Scene 2 etc. G.D. Killam refers to them as ‘characteristics of the non-naturalistic theatre’.

“Note that the peasants singing should also enact the flashback of Black people’s History that follows the song.” (p.4)

Again, in the Second Movement, Court scene, the stage directions state, among others, *“As the Africans enter, it should be a study in contrast with their torn clothes and tattered shoes... In the court, blacks and whites sit on separate sides. It is as if a huge gulf lies between them.”* (p.23)

In the Third Movement, the scene involving the Woman, the Boy and Girl, has the following as stage directions:

“They move a little way off. Both Girl and Boy sit at the feet of the woman. It should be symbolic: the woman now represents all the working mothers talking to their children.” (p.59)

These stage notes show very clearly that the authors want the characters to communicate their ‘message’ most appropriately.

The play also makes use of related audio-visual devices like mime, dancing, drumming, singing, music, sudden blackouts and changes in light effects.

In the First Movement, for instance, while ‘*Loud singing by a crowd of peasants*’ is going on, in the background ‘*the Black people’s History*’ is being enacted on the stage:

“Phase I: An exchange between a rich-looking black chief and a white hungry-looking slave trader. Several strong black men and a few women are given away for a long, posh piece of cloth and a heap of trinkets.

Bereaved relations and children weep, throwing themselves onto the ground, while other raise closed fists in a threatening manner.

Phase II: A chain of exhausted slaves, roped onto one another, drag themselves through the auditorium, carrying heavy burdens, ending up on the stage. They row a boat across the stage, under heavy whipping.

Phase III: A labour force of black, toiling on a plantation under the supervision of a cruel, ruthless fellow black overseer. A white master comes around and inspects the work.

Phase IV: An angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans through songs and thunderous shouts:

LEADER: Away with oppression!

Unchain the people!

CROWD: Away with oppression!

Unchain the people!

...

...

FEW VOICES: Uhuruuuuuuu-uu!" (pp.4-5)

During the Second Trial of Kimathi, When Kimathi recalls the glorious pre-colonial past of various Kenyan ethnic groups, the Mime in the background shows "the Groups of dancers, performing a sequence of dances by different peoples of Kenya take up the arena in turns. Each group dances its part and then walks right across the stage and stands aside." (p.37)

The purpose behind the mime is to show not only a composite cultural identity of Kenyans but, more importantly, co-existence and cultural cooperation among members of various ethnic groups in Kenya.

Again, when during the same trial, the Banker refers to the financing of the building of the railways in Kenya, a Mime shows "*Coolies and Swahilis building the Railway. They are driven away by Nandi warriors led by Koitalel.*" (p.39)

The purpose of showing this Mime is to recall that the resistance to colonial forces is not something new but it goes back to the times when the railways was being built and that the people of Kenya had understood the colonial designs of economic exploitation from the very beginning.

In fact, these devices together with their worldview – expressed through various characters – is what the authors 'believe' 'good theatre' is – "that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation." (Preface)

22.3 'TIME' IN THE PLAY

Ngugi and Mugo have used some of the theatrical devices mentioned above to communicate a continuum in the flow of time – the past and the present merging in order to point to the future. In fact, the authors, keeping in with the objectives they set for themselves – reinterpreting the history of the people's struggle for independence, designated by the colonizers as Mau Mau – have offered a time-sequence of events in such a manner that not only does the present appear to be linked to the past events but also the present throws a new light on the past, offering a fresh interpretation of the past events in the light of present happenings. For instance, in the First Movement, when the 'Loud singing by a crowd of peasants' also shows – simultaneously – the enactment of the history of the Black people in four Phases, the authors' stage directions are –

"The phases recapitulated flow into one another, without break or interruption."
(p.4)

During the Fourth Trial, while “In semi-darkness we watch the miming of black history (earlier enacted) going on, against the torturing behind the scene.” (p.56), the authors’ stage directions are –

“There should be as much harmony as possible between the action on the visible stage and the goings on in the torture chamber.” (p.56)

Finally, an excellent example of this merger of time past and time present occurs in the very last scene of the play when after the judge has pronounced the death sentence on Dedan Kimathi and the Boy and Girl stand up to announce “Not dead!”, the stage directions are –

“...soon, the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song.”

22.4 CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

The characters in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are more of type than those endowed with traits that signify individuality. The **Preliminary Notes** make it very clear:

“There is impersonation, merging of characters and reflection of history emphasizing the complexity, duality and interrelationships of people and events. A character like Shaw Henderson, for instance, can be played as a judge-Prosecutor and member of the Special Branch. He is also the enemy-friend of the Africans.” (p.2)

Note the use of compound word-formations like ‘Judge-Prosecutor’ and “enemy-friend”, highlighting the apparent contradictory duality contained in them which in turn is a significant pointer to the audience/readers to distinguish between the mask and the reality of colonial administration.

In no other characters is the type mode more evident than in those of the Boy, the Girl and the Woman. In fact, all three of them have not been given any names which as we know is the first sociological device to differentiate between individuals. Named simply as ‘Boy’, ‘Girl’ or ‘Woman’, they represent all persons in Kenya belonging to their respective categories. This is neither an oversight nor a coincidence but is quite deliberate. It is quite apparent from some of the stage directions given by the authors to those directing it for performance.

In the beginning of the Third Movement, for instance, when the Boy and Girl and the Women move ‘a little way off’ on the stage to confer, the stage directions are

“Both Girl and Boy sit at the feet of the woman. It should be symbolic: the woman now represents all the working mothers talking to their children.” (p.59)

The authors had all this – the woman representing all the working mothers – worked out from the very conception of the character. It is apparent from the description they bestow upon her when she is first introduced:

“She is between thirty and forty years of age, with a mature but youthful face, strongly built. Goodlooking. She wears a peasant woman’s clothes and is barefoot. Though apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously world-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert.”

Fearless determination and a spirit of daring is her character. She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations. A mother, a fighter, all in one. She wears a kanga cloth wrapped around her upper body – over her simple frock – and has a small kondo, a sisal basket, hanging over her neck and across the shoulder over her shawl on the side nearest the audience. She walks not exactly stealthily, but with great care – as if she treads on treacherous ground.” (p.8)

The characteristics bestowed on her – She is versatile and full of energy in her responses to different roles and situations – are borne out amply when Johnnie, the soldier notices her kondo – the sisal basket – and is about to discover – among others – a parcel wrapped in paper. The stage directions tell us – ‘the woman is talking, cunningly trying to distract Johnnie’.

Again, after Johnnie has discovered the bread wrapped in paper and is about to break it into two – we come to know later that a gun had been hidden in it – the woman changes her stance suddenly, changing it into one of ‘supplication and feminine submissiveness’. The stage directions tell us – ‘*The woman dramatically kneels on the ground, almost reaching out for his legs... She talks all the time.*’:

“WOMAN: [*simultaneously with the above action*]: Don’t eat it. Bwana. Master. Afande a hundred times. It’s all I have to quieten the enemy who is finishing us.

JOHNNIE: Enemy?

WOMAN: Hunger. If you take it, I’ll die. I spent so many hours kneading the heavy millet paste. Look. You have almost finished all my bananas. You deserve to die. Have mercy on a poor woman.

JOHNNIE: [*Obviously relieved and pleased with her supplication and feminine submissiveness. He does not realize that she is over-reacting*]

You don’t look too poor to me. Stand up. All you need is a brush, water, soap, high heels. A modern lady.” (p.11)

When, in the Third Movement, the Girl and Boy catch up with her disguised as fruitseller and the Boy accuses her of tricking him into carrying a gun, she explains –

“In the struggle, you learn to adapt to changed circumstances. Yesterday was a day of setbacks. First the screening and the Johnnies! I walked into the mouth of a gun! Then, after we parted, I found out that the fruitseller was among the ones picked in yesterday’s morning raid. That was a crucial contact gone. This upset all the plans. What was I to do? I dressed as a fruitseller so that you would easily recognize me. The court adjourned sooner than I had thought: I then followed the crowd. I was

going to speak to the Warder, another contact. I found that he too had been transferred to another place. So only you remained. I kept on looking for you. Between here and Majengo, there is not a place I have not visited. Great risk: but the task once started must be completed.” (p.60)

Earlier, on not finding the fruitseller to whom he had been instructed by the Woman to hand over the bread, the Boy – representing the stereotypical thinking about women and their lack of courage – soliloquizes:

“She told me that he would be around here. But I have not seen an orange seller or any fruitseller. What a woman! Why would she not take the bread herself? Afraid. That’s it. Afraid. Why should she expect me to risk my life taking bread, just a loaf of bread to Kimathi? In any case, they say that Kimathi does not eat

bread. And suppose it's not Kimathi, and it is his double, his shadow whom they have arrested? [makes as if to move]: But where shall I find her? Where can I get her? I know. She did not want me to take the loaf to anybody. She wanted to test me. To see if I would eat the bread. [breaks a piece]: But she said she would be watching me all the time." (pp.30-31)

Still earlier, when the boy after telling his life story had observed that he did not understand the reason behind the exploitation of 'millions of labouring men and women of Kenya', the Woman – true to her role as the mother of all children – had explained to him:

"The day you understand why your father died: the day you ask yourself whether it was right for him to die so; the day you ask yourself: "What can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstance?" that day, my son, you'll become a man." (p.19)

It is because of this understanding of and dedication to the cause of the freedom struggle that Kimathi pays a handsome tribute to her:

"Do you see this woman?
How many tasks has she performed
Without complaint
Between here and the villages?
How many people has she
snatched from jails, from colonial
Jaws of death!
How many brave warriors has she
recruited at great risks!
Walking for miles
Hardly getting sleep
for days." (pp.72-73)

In fact, Dedan Kimathi recognizes – through the Woman – the contribution made by women in Kenyan freedom struggle. He goes on to declare –

"When this struggle is over
we shall erect at all the city corners
Monuments
To our women
Their courage and dedication
To our struggle..." (p.73)

Like in the case of the Woman, so in that of the Boy and Girl also, the authors have created characters that would represent the Kenyan youth in general rather than individual persons. Once again, it is for this reason that they too have been identified simply as Boy and Girl rather than with individual names.

When the Woman first finds the Boy chasing the girl, catching her and handling her roughly and shouting to kill her, she berates him for behaving like an animal. The Boy protests and explains his reasons for being harsh with the girl. Then, he goes on to narrate to her how his mother had died during childbirth and his "father was driven away from Mbari land in Nyeri by one of his relatives who worked as a court interpreter. Now that man is a big government chief and a big landowner... The man was clever at court cases and bribed the magistrates." (p.18) The boy then tells her how his father and he went to Nairobi:

“He found a job with a firm of timber merchants. A tiny room: a tiny salary. Then I did not understand and I would steal from him, even the little that he earned for both of us. His ambition was to earn enough to come back to Nyeri and buy a piece of land. But he never made it. The machine cut off his right hand...and... he died of bleeding. No medical care from his employers. I was thrown out of the room he had rented.” (pp.18-19) Since then, he tells her, he and the Girl and other boys have been roaming the streets at Pumwani, Shauri Moyo, Bahati, Makadara:

“we scrounged into every dustbin from Kariobangi to Grogan Road. But mostly we’d hang around big hotels: New Stanley, Norfolk, Grosvenor. There were a lot of settlers and tourists and we would carry their bags. Sometimes we would act crippled or blind and deaf. They would give us money – some of them as much as ten shillings! The police would often come chasing us away, but we managed. Somehow.” (p.16)

The Woman’s reaction only confirms that the Boy represents not only himself but most Kenyan youth:

“It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nakuru. Kisumu. Eldoret. The same old story. Our people...tearing one another...and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us – in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forests; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi’s teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat.” (p.18)

The Boy is confused and does not understand when the Woman tells him that she too used to be like him – ‘Fighting...Drinking...Fighting...Drinking...’ until the day she heard ‘The call of our people. The humiliated, the injured, the insulted, the exploited, the submerged millions of labouring men and women of Kenya.’ The Woman then goes on to educate him:

“...the day you ask yourself: What can I do so that another shall not be made to die under such grisly circumstances? That day, my son, you’ll become a man.”

The Boy still does not understand it all and after the woman has given him money to go eat something since he had been hungry for a full day, he offers to work for her:

“...if I can do something, anything, you know... like cleaning up your house, your compound, weeding your shamba, even washing you clothes..” (p.20) The Woman continues explaining things to him, commenting –

“You want to change masters? A black master for a white master! Have you no other horizon? Except to be a slave! If I didn’t have better things to do, why, I would properly thrash you.” (20)

It is from this point onwards that the transformation of the Boy begins and when the woman assigns to him the task of carrying a loaf of bread to a fruitseller he readily accepts. However, doubts continue to haunt him from time to time – when, for instance, the Boy and Girl discover – accidentally – that the bread had a gun hidden in it and again when they are not able to find the fruitseller. But then each time, the words of the woman – ‘the day you’ll understand... that day, my son, you’ll become a man’ – come back to her in the form of a voice he hears and his resolve returns:

“No, no, not now, Mama.

But how can I turn

Against her call

And

Live?” (p.4)

The culmination in the Boy's evolution is reached when after Dedan Kimathi has been sentenced to death by Judge in the last scene of the play, the Boy and Girl suddenly enter the court, break the bread, pull out the gun and shout in unison – 'Not dead'.

Suddenly it is all dark on the stage during which 'A loud shot is heard' and when the light returns, 'the stage gives way to a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song.' (p.84)

The story of the Girl is never told in such details as that of the Boy but from the way she is found initially to be 'scrounging' dustbins and roaming the hotels and tourist places and from the manner in which the Boy refers to her as 'a thief' and 'a slut' only shows the kind of rough life she too has had in the city. After the Woman has restored peace between them and after she has explained the real reasons behind their life and after she has assigned to them the task of carrying a loaf of bread to a certain fruit seller, the girl shows signs of more maturity and better understanding of things. As stated above, while the Boy has, at times, doubts about the intention of the Woman, the Girl is more rigid in her resolve. It is she who acts as his inspiration in the absence of the Woman. The end of the play shows them together – this time not 'scrounging' the dustbins but acting in unison in a mission to rescue Dedan Kimathi.

Not only the characters of the Woman, the Boy and Girl but also the characters of soldiers, the Priest, the Banker, the Indian and the Politician are all drawn in the type mode, representing their class and the authors make their intentions clear by making them speak on behalf of their community or class. Even Shaw Henderson has been assigned multiple identities to show how, under colonialism, various sections of the colonizing community acted in collusion. Similarly, the character of Dedan Kimathi himself has been drawn more in terms of general characteristics of leaders of freedom fighters rather than specific individuals. This is also evident from the observations that the authors make in the Preface to the play:

We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants' and

workers' struggle before and after constitutional independence. The play is *not* a reproduction of the farcical 'trial' at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement." (Preface)

But having said that, the authors let us know the efforts they put in to discover the 'real' Dedan Kimathi as he existed in the minds and memories of the people among whom he lived and grew up and those with whose help he organized the struggle rather than in the official records, documents and history books written by armchair academics:

"The writing of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* has been both challenging and exciting. It has put us through a lot of education in connection with the continuing struggle against economic and other forms of oppression. We also discovered that Kimathi was still a hero of the Kenyan masses. One day, for instance, we visited Kimathi's birthplace (thanks to Mr. Mundia who organized the trip) with the aim of eliciting a first hand assessment of Kimathi from the people who had known him as a child, a villager and guerrilla hero. It was a Sunday. The drive to Karunaini took us through beautiful valleys, ridges, hills and forests that helped the imagination recapture the countryside where the Mau Mau War was hottest and had often been fought out in pitched battles. Standing powerful and dominant to the north was Kirinyaga,

the mountain at the foot of which the undulating Nyeri plains spread, rising to the Nyandarua mountains. Karunaini was right next to Nyandarua Forest and, standing very near the school where Kimathi once taught, we could see the spot where he was finally shot down. The huge trench that the people were once forced to dig by the British forces so as to cut off the villages from the Forest was still visible.” (Preface)

The authors then go on to share with the readers the responses of some of Kimathi’s contemporaries:

“Among the group that stopped by the roadside to talk to us was a woman who had once been Kimathi’s pupil at Karunaini Independent School, and some four or five older men, who had known Kimathi since childhood. Had we too come all the way to see where Kimathi was born? From them, we learned a few factual stories as well as one or two conflicting legends about this great fighter. For instance, it is generally assumed that Kimathi fought in the Second ‘World’ War and people have tended to assume that that was where he learnt his military skills as well as his skills in making guns. Kimathi *never* fought in that war. He evolved his brilliant guerrilla tactics and his enormous organizing capacity from the needs of the struggle.” (Preface)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo wanted to counter the colonial construction of Dedan Kimathi as a gun-totting terrorist who was always thirsty for the blood of the innocent – be they Africans or Europeans. They recall for us, in the Preface, how people remembered the multifaceted personality of Dedan Kimathi:

“Karunaini people were proud of their son; they talked of him as a dedicated teacher, the committed organizer of a theatre group he named Gichamu, as a man with tremendous sense of humour who could keep a whole house roaring with laughter. They talked of his warm personality and his love of people. He was clearly their beloved son, their respected leader...” (Preface)

The authors also show how Kimathi had become a legend among the people of Kenya:

“...and they talked of him as still being alive. ‘Kimathi will never die’, the woman said. ‘But of course if your people have killed him, go and show us his grave!’ She said this in a strange tone of voice, between defiance and bitterness, and for a moment we all kept quiet.” (Preface)

At this point, it is relevant to recall how the Boy, in the play, recalls Kimathi when the Woman mentions him for the first time –

“Boy: [*becoming really excited*]: They say...they say he used to talk with God.

...

Boy: They say...they say that he could crawl on his belly for ten miles or more...

...

Boy: They say...they say that he could change himself into a bird, an aeroplane, wind, anything?

...

Boy: They say...they say that the tree under which he used to pray fell to the ground?

...

Boy: May be they only captured his shadow, his outer form...don’t you think?...and let his spirit abroad, in arms.” (pp.20-21)

However, the authors are not out to eulogize Kimathi. They do not hesitate to point out his weaknesses, too. For instance, in the Third Movement, the Woman while speaking to the Girl and Boy makes the following remarks about Kimathi:

“...He so hated the sight of Africans killing one another that he sometimes became a little soft with our enemies. [*softly*]: He, Great commander that he was, Great organizer that he was, Great fearless fighter that he was, he was human! [*almost savagely, bitterly*]: Too human at times!” (p.62)

As spokesperson for the worldview of the authors, Dedan Kimathi, while fighting the colonial oppression, has also the choicest invectives for their guile and guise of being friends of Kenyans. When, during the Second Movement, Shaw Henderson visits Kimathi in the prison for the First Trial, he remarks – ‘All your people know me I’m a friend’. (p.32) Kimathi’s response is forthright – ‘Friend and killer of Africans, ugh!’ In fact, when Shaw Henderson asks Kimathi to ‘plead guilty’ in the court the next day, Kimathi mocks him by telling him – ‘I must say you looked rather splendid in your prosecuting judge’s robes. Even handed justice.’ (p.33) When even after all this, Henderson goes on to tempt him with an offer of decorations for him if he confessed and cooperated, Kimathi’s reply is stinging:

“Luring voices of poisonous serpents. Do you take me for a fool?” (p.34)

However, acting as the persona carrying the burden of speaking for the authors, Kimathi comes down most heavily on the class of collaborators – those Kenyans who joined hands with the colonizers in order to hoodwink and put down innocent Kenyans. Thus, his harshest criticism is reserved for Gati, Gatotia, Hungu, Gaceru, Mwendanda and his own brother Wambararia:

“...
To sabotage our cause
It is treason to the people
It is like having homeguards In our midst!
These traitors must die!” (p.71)

Earlier, Kimathi had similarly chastised the Banker and the Indian – comparing them with the betrayer of Jesus Christ – when they visited him in the prison with tempting offers only if cooperated and let peace return to Kenya:

“The religion of enslavement! Like colonialism which makes the colonized sweat and bleed while master comes to harvest.
...
Money...for a sell-out of our people...NEVER.
...
Judas!” (p.40)

Finally, before he is sentenced to death by the judge in the last scene of the play, Kimathi pronounces his own judgement:

“In the court of Imperialism!
There has never and will never be
Justice for the people
Under imperialism
Justice is created
through a revolutionary struggle
Against all the forces of imperialism
Our struggle must therefore continue.” (p.82)

Recalling his struggle, he observes:

“In the forest. I was sometimes plagued
by doubts.

If I died today
Would our people continue
the struggle?

I would look at the braves
killed

I would say:
If I died to-day
Will this blood ever be
betrayed?

That was my Trial.
But now I know that
for every traitor
there are a thousand patriots. (p.82)

His final message to them is –

“So, go!
Organize in your homes
Organize in the mountains
Know that your only
Kindred blood is he
who is in the struggle
Denounce those who weaken
Our struggle
by creating ethnic divisions
Uproot from you those
Who are selling out to imperialism
Kenyan masses shall be free! (pp.83-84)

Thus we know that the main objective of the authors in “not a reproduction of the farcical ‘trial’ at Nyeri. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.” (Preface)

There is, however, a second objective too:

“In this, we believe that Kenyan Literature – indeed all African Literature, and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with the people or aiding imperialism and the class enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation.” (Preface)

Finally, a third and an equally significant objective in writing the play that the authors tell us in the closing words of the Preface is:

“So the challenge was to truly depict the masses (symbolized by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective, heroically and as the true makers of history.”

Thus, to end our evaluation, the play is not only what the authors call, ‘good theatre’ but ‘good history’.

22.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed in detail :

- the objective of the Play.
- Theatrical Techniques and Devices employed in the play by the authors.
- the significance of time in the play.
- the importance of characters in the play.

22.6 EXERCISE

1. Comment on characterization in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
2. How does the Mau Mau struggle (a part of Kenya’s recent history) get reflected in the play?
3. Comment on the concept of time in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.
4. Write a character sketch of Dedan Kimathi.

22.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 23 *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Indian Drama
- 23.3 Marathi Theatre
- 23.4 Modern Indian Theatre
- 23.5 Vijay Tendulkar: Life and Works
- 23.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.7 Suggested Readings
- 23.8 Answers to Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall briefly discuss the growth and development of Indian theatre, especially Marathi theatre so that we can understand *Ghashiram Kotwal* in its proper context. In addition to this, we shall also take up the intellectual, social and political reasons that influenced Indian theatre in the fifties and sixties and gave a certain direction to its subsequent development.

After reading this Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- have a view of the main trends in Indian drama;
- describe the development of Marathi theatre;
- discuss the historical background of the play; and
- outline the life and works of Vijay Tendulkar.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last Block in your course. In all the previous blocks, we have discussed Western drama which comes from a different culture, a different tradition. You have studied one-act plays and you have read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a play in five acts and the three-act plays of Ibsen and Shaw. Here we turn to *Ghashiram Kotwal* which is quite different from all the plays you have read so far. Modern Indian theatre has emerged from a different tradition. It is for this reason that we shall discuss Indian and Marathi theatre to give you the introductory background which you will find useful.

Vijay Tendulkar, the well-known playwright wrote *Ghashiram Kotwal* in Marathi (first published, 1973). It has been translated into different languages – the Hindi translation was done by Vasant Dev (Delhi, 1974). Jayant Karve and an American professor Eleanor Zelliot jointly translated *Ghashiram Kotwal* from the Marathi into English (Calcutta, 1984).

Even though this is a play from our own country, yet we know that India is very large with diverse cultures and languages. It is this diversity that we must keep in mind while approaching the play. Some of us, who belong to different regions, may not be aware of the specific features of Maharashtrian culture. However, we shall

try to highlight these in the course of our discussion over the next few Units. You will find *Ghashiram Kotwal* an interesting play, but before we begin to read it we need to know something about Indian theatre, something about Marathi theatre. We also need to find out who Vijay Tendulkar is and what is the historical background of the period in which the play is set. All these aspects will help us in understanding the play better.

Drama, as we know, is quite different from a novel or a poem. We usually read a novel or a poem when we are alone. But drama is something more than simply words on the page – it is meant to be performed or enacted. The audience is an active participant in the theatrical presentation. So we respond to a play not alone but along with other members of the audience. It is quite another matter that other people will respond in their own specific ways. But then there are some plays which we do not see performed but read them as literature. How will we approach such plays? We must remember that playwrights usually expect their plays to be performed. It is for this reason that they present their themes through dialogue, action, music, song and dance so that the play is visually captivating. When reading a play we have to make full use of our imaginative powers. We must try to see the action and scenes as well as hear the voices of the characters. It is only then that we will be able to experience the play in its multiple dimensions: as ‘literature’ as well as ‘theatre’.

You may face a slight problem trying to relate the English dialogues to traditional Marathi characters of the eighteenth century. As you know, the play was originally written in Marathi and comes to you in translation. We shall discuss this aspect in a later section.

Do go through all the sections and answer the questions given in ‘Check Your Progress’. This will help you to remember what you have read and also give you some practice in expressing yourself in your own words. We do hope you enjoy working through this Unit.

23.2 INDIAN DRAMA

You may have heard that the tradition of Indian drama is very old. It goes back to the Sanskrit drama of ancient India and encompasses contemporary Indian theatre in Hindi, English and the regional languages. Modern Indian drama is influenced not only by classical Sanskrit drama or local folk forms but also by Western theatre, following the establishment of British rule in India.

Sanskrit Drama

Sanskrit drama flourished in ancient India and produced Bharata’s *Natyashastra*, the great treatise on all aspects of drama. Bharata’s book comparable in range and scope to Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle prioritizes tragedy as a higher art form as opposed to comedy. But in classical Sanskrit drama there cannot be a tragic end. This is because of the Hindu worldview which considers the world a ‘maya’ or an ‘illusion’ and death not a final end, but a release of the soul into higher forms of being – an event to be celebrated rather than lamented. So you will find no tragedies in Sanskrit drama.

People in the West first heard of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* (circa 5th century) when Sir William Jones translated it into English in 1789. His excellent translation brought Sanskrit drama to the attention of the Western world. Goethe (1749-1832), the German writer was so impressed that he borrowed the convention of the Prologue from *Shakuntala* and used it in his own play *Faust*. Kalidas, however, was not the only playwright that ancient India produced. In the Hindu period of the first nine centuries, we have three kings Shudraka, Harsha and Visakhadatta who wrote

plays that now form part of our great cultural heritage. Shudraka (circa 4 A.D.) wrote the famous *Mrichkatakam* or *The Little Clay Cart* which features regularly in contemporary drama festivals as *Mitti Ki Gadi*.

The Little Clay Cart is a social play. Vasantsena the beautiful courtesan loves Charudatta a noble Brahmin who is already married. Sansthanaka, the brother-in-law of the king tries to make overtures to the courtesan who repulses him. His wicked schemes to implicate Charudatta in Vasantsena's alleged murder come to nought as Aryaka a shepherd rebel overthrows the king and sets both Charudatta and Vasantsena free to marry and live a happy life.

Visakhadatta wrote the powerful play *Mudraraksasa* (Raksasa captured through the Signet Ring). The play deals with two rival ministers – Chanakya and Raksasa. Chanakya represents intelligence and intrigue whereas Raksasa is a man of noble ideals and integrity. The play gives us an insight into the minds of power-hungry politicians.

Bhasa wrote 134 plays comprising monologues, one-act plays, and six-act dramas. His masterpiece is *Swapana-Vasavadatta* (Vasavadatta Seen in a Dream). The story is about King Udayana who is torn between his love for his wife Vasavadatta and the political necessity of marrying Padmavati, the daughter of a neighbouring king. Harsha's (7th century) best-known play is *Ratnavai*. *Ratnavai* is somewhat similar in plot to *Swapana-Vasavadatta*.

Sanskrit drama was eclipsed with the advent of the Mohammedans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Sanskrit drama, with its ornate language, was addressed to sophisticated courtiers. Moreover, it has many rules and regulations. For instance, according to the conventions adopted by it, there could be no tragic end, no violent or repulsive act that could be depicted on stage, the hero and heroine had both to be charming and noble and that the jester had to be greedy and fat. As opposed to this, folk theatre with its flexible and free form has changed, developed and adjusted itself to the changing social conditions reflecting the lives of the people. But before we examine some of the different types of folk theatre, let us briefly consider some of the basic principles of drama as laid out in the *Natyashastra*.

Natyashastra

In the West, Aristotle's (4th century B.C.) *Poetics* is taken as a basic classic that states the principles of poetry in general, and gives a more detailed account of the epic and tragedy. In India Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* (circa 200 BC to AD 200) is regarded as a comprehensive book that discusses all aspects of dramaturgy. Not only does it touch upon production and direction, but it also deals with make-up, costumes, jewellery, movements of the eyes, neck, as well as body postures.

This exhaustive study is directed at the playwright, director and actor because these three were considered inseparable in drama. Sanskrit plays began with a ritual of music and dance performed on stage. The *Sutradhara* or stage manager dressed in white came in with two assistants and offered homage to the presiding deity at the centre of the stage by scattering flowers and sprinkling water. This was not only an appeal to the deity for the success of the performance but also helped to create an atmosphere of austerity. Then the *Sutradhara* called the leading actress and opened the play with a prologue that announced the time and place of the action. For example, Balwant Gargi in his book *Theatre in India* (1962) tells us how *Shakuntala* begins:

Sutradhara: Our audience is very discriminating, and we are to offer them a new play, called *Shakuntala*, written by the famous Kalidasa. Every member of the cast must be on his mettle.

Actress: Your arrangements are perfect. Nothing will go wrong.

The Sutradhar not only introduced the play but took one of the chief roles as well. In fact, we shall see the Sutradhar assuming different roles in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. The Sutradhar provides a link between the different episodes in the play. Another stock character in Sanskrit drama is the clown or Vidushaka. Both the Sutradhar and the Vidushaka are found in Folk theatre.

Four kinds of representations

In Sanskrit drama, an actor expresses himself through four kinds of abhinaya.

angika: Representation of action physically by moving hands, fingers, lips, neck and feet.

vacika: Expression through speech, song, intonation to evoke various sentiments in the audience.

aharya: Use of specific costumes and make-up.

sattvika: This is the most important of the four representations. The actor must feel the role and the emotion that he is to convey. This emotion is the bhava which has to be expressed to convey the **rasa** (taste or flavour) to the spectator. **Rasa** literally means 'taste' or 'flavour' and is an important concept in Hindu drama.

What are the character types in Hindu drama?

Some characters are sublime like the epic heroes Rama and Krishna. Others are impetuous like demons and fierce characters. Soldiers and kings usually fall under the category of gay and cheerful characters while subdued characters are the ministers and merchants. The Sutradhar not only introduced the play but took one of the chief roles as well. The clown, a stock character, was called the Vidushaka. This comic figure spoke in Prakrit (the local dialect) while the other characters spoke in Sanskrit. Did women act in plays? The Sutradhar's wife, the Nati, helped her husband in looking after the production and also acted. Actresses were not regarded highly in society.

TYPES OF DRAMA

There are 10 types of drama categorized but the two important ones are **nataka** and **prakarana**. The themes of **nataka** or heroic drama are taken from history or mythology and feature gods, kings or heroes. **Prakarana** or social drama deals with the common man. *The Little Clay Cart* that deals with a courtesan and a Brahmin belongs to this category. But whatever the types of play, there are no tragedies in ancient drama. The hero cannot die or be defeated. This is quite different from the Western view where great tragedies were considered a more elevated genre than comedy.

Time of the performance

The time of the performance was determined by the theme of the play. If virtue was the theme, the play was performed in the morning, while a story of strength and energy was usually enacted in the afternoon. Plays of erotic sentiments were performed in the first part of the night whereas one of pathos in the fourth part of the night. Performances usually lasted four or five hours.

Many great dramas have been produced in ancient India covering a wide range of subjects. According to Kalidasa 'Drama provides satisfaction in one place to a group of people whose taste may differ a great deal.'

Folk theatre is usually based on mythological tales – of Rama, Sita, Radha, Krishna and other popular episodes from the great Hindu epics – *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The performances usually take place in the open air and the specific feature of folk drama is improvisation. Improvised stage, improvised dialogues often refer to something of topical interest. There is extensive use of song, dance and music including a great deal of slapstick humour. The emphasis is on audience participation and interaction with the performers and the performance is conducted in an informal manner.

Let us look at some of the popular regional forms of folk theatre.

Nautanki is an operatic drama popular in Rajasthan and even Gujarat and Maharashtra. The hero is usually a character from history, a lover or warrior, and the story is based on old ballads. The language used is the local dialect – music is folk melodies. The stock character is the buffoon and there is usually a stage manager, the **Ranga**. This is a very informal kind of performance and there is a free intermingling of the actors with the audience.

Jatra is peculiar to Bengal and this again is operatic in form. Initially, Jatra dealt with incidents in the life of Krishna but gradually, as improvisations began to take place, it became more secular and offered comment on contemporary life. The action is stylized and vivid and the chorus which is an integral part of it interrupts the action and sings.

Bhavai is popular throughout Gujarat and parts of Western India. It is a series of playlets which deal with medieval tales of chivalry. Bhavai actors must be experts in dance, music and mime. The make-up is exaggerated making use of soot and red and white pigments in oil. Bhavai usually starts late in the evening and lasts all night.

Tamasha is similar to bhavai in many ways. It is popular in Maharashtra and you will see elements of it in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. These plays are based on love stories and tales of chivalry presented through dance and music. These are basically musical plays but prose dialogues are also used to make social and political comment. These are performed by roving troupes – men and women – and the sound of their drum attracts large crowds to the venue of the performance. It is interesting to note that while women do act in a 'tamasha', they are not usually allowed to witness it because of the abusive language that is used freely.

Terukoothu is a street drama popular in Tamil Nadu. Peasants and their women perform it in the fields and village streets after the harvest is over. Usually mythological plays are performed. Song, dance and prose are all mixed together. The costumes are splendid and the make-up is of sandal and rice paste with colours extracted from herbs and leaves.

Yakshagana from Karnataka is also performed in the open air. These performances with songs and prose-dialogues are by men only. The Bhagavathar or the singer introduces the characters as they come dancing on to the stage. These are usually based on mythological tales.

Kuchipudi is a dance drama from Andhra. These dance dramas are usually based on episodes from the life of Krishna. The performances usually take place at night in an open-air stage. Speech, dances, songs, mime and music all form part of this performance.

Ramlila, popular in Uttar Pradesh and all over India, is a pageant play based on the life of Rama, and take 14 days to stage. The songs linking the various events in the plot are rich in narration and description. The actors wear splendid costumes and lavish make-up. The stage is arranged for multiple settings. The Kathakar sings of

coming events helping the movement of the plot and heightening the emotional impact. Masks, effigies and fireworks are often incorporated in the play.

Krishnalila: The stories of Radha and Krishna are popular all over India and performed across the length and breadth of the country, even though the real home of **Krishnalila** is Vrindaban and Mathura in U.P. The role of Krishna is played by a young boy before his voice bleaks. The boy is raised in a religious atmosphere and made to believe that he is Krishna himself. This creates the necessary conditions for the boy to act out his role with sincerity and conviction, moving the audience to tears and ecstasy. The audience begin to chant the hymns with the chorus and this audience participation is a specific feature of these religious dramas.

Folk theatre still has a base in religious mythology but has moved towards a more secular orientation. It represents the cultural life of the community – its songs, dances, beliefs, customs and dresses. The bare stage makes for innovation and improvisation and contributes to the vitality of the form. It also leads to directness of action and therefore a close actor-audience participation.

Let us now look more specifically at Marathi theatre. But before we do that, let us first answer the following questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline the functions of a Sutradhara in a Sanskrit play in your own words. (50-60 words).

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- 2) Name and define the four kinds of *Abhinaya* as described in the *Natyashastra*.

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- 3) What are the popular folk theatres in Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra? Give brief description. (50-60 words each)

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23.3 MARATHI THEATRE

Marathi theatre is now about 150 years old if we take as its starting point Vishnudas Bhave's play *Sitaswayamvar* (1843). He used grotesque masks made from wood and papier mache to make his gods look superhuman. Bhave worked in the theatre for 60 years and when he died in 1901, he left behind 50 plays, among them *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*. In 1885 the Indian National Congress began its struggle for independence. The nationalist sentiment was expressed in plays based on historical and mythological themes. *Keechakavadha* (1906) by Khadilkar is one such play. This incident from *Mahabharata* tells of how Keechaka, the brother-in-law of king Virata, steals into Draupadi's room in the dead of night only to find Bhima, one of the Pandavas waiting for him. Bhima kills Keechaka and when the faces are revealed it is Lokamanya Tilak, the national leader, as Bhima, who kills

Keechaka who is recognizable as Lord Curzon. Another favourite by the same author is *Bhau Bandaki* that describes palace intrigues when Anandibai, very much in the manner of Lady Macbeth, causes the Peshwa to be murdered. Anandibai often features in several folk tales in Maharashtra.

Gadhari's (1885-1919) *Akach Pyala* (Only One Glass) is the best known among his six plays. It is the story of the life of a drunkard and sermonizes on abstinence from wine and women. This play leans heavily on melodrama. Under the influence of Ibsen and Shaw, a touch of realism was added to Marathi theatre with the plays by Mama Varerkar. *Satte Che Gulam* (Slaves of Power) has a political message of social reform and Gandhi's philosophy. In *Sonya Cha Kalas*. (The Pinnacle of Gold) we have the son of a mill-owner taking up the cause of the workers. Warkerkar's *Bhoomi Kanya Sita* (Sita, Daughter of the Earth), highlights the cause of Indian women by projecting Sita's revolt against some of Rama's values – she cannot condone some of his battles or denial of the privileges of reading the Vedas to lower-caste people. Another play with feminist overtones is P.L. Deshpande's 3-Act *Sunder Mee Honar* (I Shall Be The Beautiful) which depicts the struggle of a crippled woman-poet who regains her strength, beauty and love of life.

According to Balwant Gargi, 'It is in the boisterous comedies that the true Marathi acting and theatre are reflected. These comedies, which also deal with social problems, have mass appeal (Theatre in India p. 129). Tendulkar, tends to agree with Gargi that 'Marathi theatre-goers don't have the concept of 'identification'. They don't want to identify with characters in plays, or see a representation of their own lives. They prefer to see a romanticized version of life, to escape into fantasy. They don't see the things they are looking for in my plays.' (Interview with Priya Adarkar, *Enact* 49-50, Jan-Feb 1971).

In the last two decades Marathi playwrights such as Sai Paranjpe, Mahesh Elkunchwar, C.T. Khandekar and Vijay Tendulkar have made significant contributions to the development of Indian theatre by experimenting with new forms. Let us now briefly look at some of the trends in modern Indian theatre.

23.4 MODERN INDIAN THEATRE

The production of Mohan Rakesh's "Aashad ka ek Din" by the Anamika Mandali gave a new direction to Hindi drama. Even though Dharamvir Bharati's "Andha Yug", an important landmark in Hindi theatre, was published in 1955, yet it was produced much later. And the establishment of the National School of Drama in New Delhi gave an added impetus to the development of theatre in India. The Shri Ram Cultural Centre, New Delhi, organizes National Drama Festivals which feature plays in Urdu, Sanskrit, Kannada, Marathi and Bangla. National and state level awards for drama also provide the necessary encouragement and patronage for the art. Rajendra Paul's *Enact* and Nemichandra Jain's *Natrang* are journals that have provided the forum for the most recent and up-to-date information on theatre. *Enact* however, is no longer printed.

Translation of plays from English, German, Sanskrit, French, Russian and regional languages into Hindi have also enriched the field of Indian theatre. The theatre goer can see the plays of Moliere, Brecht, Ibsen, Shakespeare, Kalidasa, to name a few, in the language that they understand. Similarly Indian plays have been translated into various foreign languages. For example Peter Brooks presented the *Mahabharata* in French in the South of France with an international cast. The importance of translation in drama is clear from the fact that you will read *Ghashiram Kotwal* in English. If it was not for the translation, you would have to read it in the original Marathi. How many of us can claim to know the language?

There are various trends in modern Indian theatre. There is the theatre in English which caters to a select audience and produces adaptations of the Western masters Brecht, Becket, Shaw, Ibsen, to name a few. The theatre in English also takes up light comedies or musicals that have been successfully produced in the West. Another trend is to revive classical Sanskrit plays, not as adaptations but by reconstructing medieval stage sets and approximating to the spirit of the original. The use of folk forms for providing a commentary on the current social and political situation is also popular. You will be able to appreciate this when you read *Ghashiram Kotwal* because you will see how Tendulkar has used the 'Tamasha' form to expose the socio-political ills in contemporary society. Yet another trend in modern theatre is the engagement with problems of inequity and the anguish and disillusionment of modern life. Rather than providing escapist fare by projecting a romantic or comic attitude to life, most contemporary playwrights display concern and commitment. This means that they wish to highlight the place of the individual in a society that is becoming increasingly hostile to individual aspirations. The sham and humbug of political institutions is also exposed. Some of these concerns you will find reflected in Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

23.5 VIJAY TENDULKAR: LIFE AND WORKS

Born in Bombay on 7th Jan., 1928, Vijay Tendulkar started as an apprentice in a bookshop, read proofs and managed a printing press and later took up journalism as a profession. He was assistant editor of Marathi dailies such as *Navbharat*, *Maratha* and *Loksatta*. At 11, when Tendulkar was still at school he wrote his first play. As he says in an interview with Priya Adarkar (*Enact* 49, 50, Jan 1971), 'It had a mythological theme, and some of us at school performed it.... My childhood writing was unimportant in itself. But because of it, when I eventually started writing seriously, I wrote with great ease. I had acquired a certain 'colloquial sense.' His first full-length play *Grihastha* only came in 1955. A versatile writer, Tendulkar has written plays, short stories, features, translations of drama and novels as well as television serials in Hindi and screenplays for films in Marathi and Hindi. He has received many awards for his plays. In 1969 he received the Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya Play of the Year Award for *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe!* Which Girish Karnad, another distinguished playwright has described as 'the best play written in the last thousand years'. He was also given the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for playwriting in 1970. He received the Kalidas Samman for 1991 instituted by the Bharat Bhavan Trust, Bhopal. On this occasion he called for cultural freedom saying: 'Culture needs to be nourished by patronage. It must not be overwhelmed or stifled by the state. In case this happens the sole motive of the patronage to culture will be self-defeating and suspect.'

Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe is a satire against male-dominated society in which a woman can neither get a sympathetic response nor win over a man to give legitimacy to her child. Translated into English by Priya Adarkar, this version was first put up by the Muslim Theatre, Madras, in March 1971. The play was also broadcast in English by the BBC.

Sakharam Binder has also been translated into Gujarati, Hindi and English and is one of Tendulkar's popular plays. It is about Sakharam, a womanizer who uses women and then discards them. He drinks heavily, abuses them and inflicts all kinds of violence on them until he meets his match in the bold and rebellious Champa.

His most controversial play is perhaps *Kanyadan*. The daughter of a socialist politician marries a young dalit poet with the approval and encouragement of her father. But what seems a politically sound match turns into a nightmare as the dalit beats his wife mercilessly even when she is pregnant. The play has been seen by many as anti-dalit just as *Ghashiram Kotwal* is considered anti-Brahman. We shall discuss this aspect in later Units.

Tendulkar's plays alongwith Girish Karnad's have changed the face of Indian theatre by demolishing the 3-act play and creating exciting new moulds. For developing this flexible as well as carefully crafted form, he took up folk forms, modes of recitation and story-telling specific to his region. He has managed to bridge the gulf between traditional and modern theatre by creating a vibrant new theatrical form, an example of which is the play in your course *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

Selected Works

DRAMAS

- ASHI PAKHARE YETI. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1970.
 GHASHIRAM KOTWAL. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1973.
 GIDHADE. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1971.
 KAMALA. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1982.
 KANYADAN. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1983.
 SAKHARAM BINDER. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1972.
 SHANTATA! COURT CHALU AHE, Bombay: Mauj Prakashan Griha, 1968.
 SHRIMANT. Bombay: Anand Pai 'Meghaduti', 1955.

ONE-ACT PLAYS

- AJAGAR ANI GANDHARVA. Bombay: Mauj Prakashan Griha, 1966.
 CHITRAGUPTA AHO CHITRAGUPT. Bombay: Ramkrishna Book Depot, 1958.
 THIEF POLICE. Bombay: Ramakrishna Book Depot, 1970.

SHORT STORIES

- DWANDWA. Bombay: B.L. Pathak Prakashan, 1961.
 KACHPATRE. Bombay: Nav-Lekhan, 1958.
 PHULAPAKHARU. Pune: Nav Maharashtra Prakashan, 1970.

SCREENPLAYS/DIALOGUES

MARATHI

- GHASHIRAM KOTWAL (1976); SHANTATA! COURT CHALU AHE (1972);
 UMBARTHA (1981).

TRANSLATIONS (DRAMA)

- ADHE ADHURE. (Translation of Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure*). Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1971.
 TUGHLAK (Translation of Girish Karnad's *Tughlak*), Pune: Nilkantha Prakashan, 1971.
 VASANACHAKRA (Translation of Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*). Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966.

NOVELS

- KATHA EKA VYATHECHI (Translation of Henry James's *Daisy Miller*). Bombay: Nav-Lekhan.
 PREMPATRE (Translation of Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*). Bombay: Nav-Lekhan.

TELEVISION SERIAL

SWAYAM SIDDHA (HINDI), 1987.

Check Your Progress 2

Read the following questions and answer the questions in the space that follows:

- 1) Name five Marathi playwrights mentioning at least one play by each.

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- 2) Has Tendulkar only written plays? If not what other forms of writing is Tendulkar also famous for?

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- 3) Name five plays written by Tendulkar.

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23.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed certain topics that will be helpful in approaching the text of the play. We have given you:

- a brief introduction to Indian theatre which includes both ancient Sanskrit plays as well as folk theatre.
- an idea of the concepts of theatre in Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*, an ancient Sanskrit text that takes into account all aspects of drama from costume to make-up to performance.
- an outline of the developments in Marathi theatre since its inception about 150 years ago.
- an introduction to the life and works of Vijay Tendulkar.

In the next Unit we shall read the text. After we have given you brief guidelines on how to read a play, we shall discuss the text.

23.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to read more about Indian theatre you may consult:

Mulk Raj Anand, *The Indian Theatre* (London: Dennis Dobson)

Balwant Gargi, *Theatre in India* (NY: Theatre Arts Books, 1962)

Prabhakar Machwe, *Four Decades of Indian Literature* (New Delhi, Chetana Publications, 1976)

Ghashiram Kotwal

These are only suggested as additional reading and are in no way compulsory. If you would like to buy your own copy of *Ghashiram Kotwal* and if it is not available in bookshops, you could write to Seagull Books, 36 Circus Avenue, Calcutta-700017.

23.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

For all answers refer to 23.2.

Check Your Progress 2

For your answers refer to 23.3 and 23.4.

UNIT 24 BACKGROUND AND PLOT

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 The Production of the Play
- 24.3 The Historical Background
- 24.4 How to Read the Play
- 24.5 Critical Summary
- 24.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.7 Answers to Exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully, you should be able to:

- discuss the plot of *Ghashiram Kotwal*,
- outline the themes in the play.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second unit of this Block. So far you have read a brief introduction to classical Sanskrit drama, folk theatre and Marathi theatre. You have also read about the life and works of the playwright Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar's plays, as you know, have made a major contribution to the development of contemporary Marathi theatre. *Ghashiram Kotwal* described as 'a major event in the history of modern Indian theatre' (Dnyaneshwar Nandkarni, 'Ghashiram Kotwal' *Enact* 73-74 Jan-Feb 1973) was originally written in Marathi and has been translated into several Indian languages including Hindi. The English translation, which is prescribed for you, is done by Jayant Karve and an American academic Eleanor Zelliot, who also knows Marathi well.

In this Unit, we shall briefly discuss the production of the play and its historical background. Then, we shall give you some guidelines regarding how to read a play. After this we expect you to take up the text of *Ghashiram Kotwal* and read it very carefully, making notes wherever necessary. After you have done that, we shall discuss the play in some detail.

We have given you some exercises so that you can check your progress as you go along as well as reinforce what you have already learnt.

24.2 THE PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY

The play was first performed on 16 December, 1972 at Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune by the Progressive Dramatic Association. But after nineteen successful performances, the play was banned on the grounds that:

- the portrayal of Nana Phadnavis's character was a distortion of historical facts;
- the play was anti-Brahman;
- violent audience reaction was feared.

Balachandra, Kelkar founder president of the PDA, said when banning the play: "The whole drama has been written with an animus for Brahmans, the patriotic Maratha Chancellor Nana Phadnavis has been portrayed as a lecherous character and a golden period of the Peshwa rule has been shown as a period of decadence". (Veena Nobledass *Modern Indian Drama in Translation Hyderabad, 1988, p. 121*).

In reaction to Kelkar's statement, most of the actors who resigned from the Progressive Dramatic Association formed the Theatre Academy and the play was revived on 11th Jan, 1974. It has been performed successfully more than three hundred times not only all over India but in France, Germany, UK, Netherlands and Italy. Dr. Jabbar Patel directed fifty-five actors in this musical play.

The photographs of the play that you find in your units are taken from this production of the play. The Hindi version of *Ghashiram Kotwal* was directed by Rajinder Nath and put up by Abhiyan in New Delhi in October, 1973. The English version of the play was enacted in America. Satish Alekar who helped Dr. Jabbar Patel in directing the play, was invited to direct the English version in New York.

Tendulkar's plays are often controversial – *Kanyadan* raised a great deal of protest in Maharashtra for being anti-dalit as *Ghashiram* did for being anti-Brahman. But as you will discover after reading the play, it is far too complex to be simply dismissed as anti-Brahman or a distortion of history.

Tendulkar often bases his plays on real incidents. For example, *Kanyadan* is supposed to be based on the life of the dalit poet, Namdev Dhasal. *Grashatha*, his first full-length play was based on a friend's experience. Similarly *Shatata Court Chalu Ahe* was modeled on a mock-trial enacted by a group of players close to Tendulkar's house in Bombay. *Kamala* was based on a newspaper report. As you have already seen, Tendulkar is accused of distorting history in his play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Let us first examine the historical background of the play before we are able to conclude whether such a charge is justifiable or not.

24.3 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ghashiram Kotwal is set in eighteenth century Pune at the time of the Peshwa rule. The play features the Peshwa's chancellor Nana Phadnavis and when it was first staged it met a lot of criticism for showing the revered Nana's character in a derogatory light. But according to Tendulkar:

This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere. ('Introduction', *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1984, p.iv).

However, it would be well to look very briefly at the history of the period. If we look at the *New History of the Marathas Vol II Sun Over Marashtra* by G.S. Sardesai, we note that a North Indian Brahmin Ghashiram was appointed the police prefect of Poona on 8 Feb 1777 and continued to hold office till his death which took place on 31st August, 1791. He enjoyed the full confidence of Nana Phadnavis and unleashed a reign of terror in Poona. His downfall came when he ordered the arrest of 35 Brahmans who were locked up in a small cellar. Due to lack of ventilation, 21 died of suffocation. A Marathi chief passing that way discovered the dead and reported the matter to the Peshwa. In the mean time Ghashiram told the Nana that they had died due to opium poisoning. Upon the Peshwa's orders, Nana

ordered an enquiry but the news had already spread and the Brahman community clamoured for the arrest of Ghashiram. Nana did not shield the Kotwal who was handed over to the crowd who stoned him to death on 31st August. (pp. 358-60).

We have a similar incident in the play where history has been transformed into a lively situation full of theatrical potential. How does history rate Nana Phadnavis? In the history books, he is described as 'secretive, exclusive and often vindictive, his exacting and stern methods, his insistence more upon the form than the essence in a thousand and one matters of administration, did in the long run harm to the Maratha State'. (p. 66) Nana, we are told was born on 12th Feb, 1742 and lived to be 58 years 1 month. He married several wives, of whom the names of nine are available. His last wife named Juibai who became a widow by his death, was then nine years of age'. (p. 358)

Just as Shakespeare has made use of history from North's *Plutarch Lives* and transformed historical facts creatively into great drama that has withstood the test of time, so Tendulkar appropriates history to create a powerful play that raises questions of the politics of power that have a great relevance to Indian society today. At first glance it may seem a historical play, a period piece but its success lies in the fact that it challenges contemporary values by exposing them and therefore becomes meaningful to us, who are reading it in the 1990s. This becomes clearer when we read the play more than once. In the writer's note to Vasant Deo's Hindi translation, Tendulkar said:

In my view *Ghashiram Kotwal* indicates a particular social situation which is neither old nor new. It is beyond time and space. Therefore 'Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis are also beyond space and time'. (New Delhi: Radhakrishnan, 1983, p. 8 *My Translation*)

The significance of the play does not lie in its depiction or distortion of historical reality. As such, these questions become irrelevant. Tendulkar has created his own artistic world and it is within this context that we should read the play.

24.4 HOW TO READ THE PLAY

Drama, poetry and the novel are different genres or kinds of literature. Of these, drama can be said to be the most complex and multi-dimensional. Why? Drama is a complex form because it is not simply meant to be read like poetry or a novel but is written for production in the theatre. It is multi-dimensional because it incorporates other literary genres such as poetry and other forms of fine art like music and dance. But when we talk about the inclusion of these forms, we are speaking of drama in its totality from its text to the theatre production.

A story, poem or novel is written for a readership and the poet or novelist is free to give rein to his/her imagination, taking liberties with time and space. But a playwright has to write for an audience which will provide an immediate response. He also has to keep the basic principles of stagecraft in mind – the use of time and space, the use of dialogue, action, tone of voice, facial expression, costumes, setting and so on.

The basic thing that we must remember is that a play is to be read imaginatively so that we are able to picture the whole action in our mind's eye. In short, we must be able to **see** and **hear** the plot unfolding itself in front of our eyes. It is only then that we will be able to appreciate a play in all its dimensions.

What then are the aspects of a play that we are to keep in mind while reading it? We first need to consider the title of the play. What does it signify? Our next question is: What is the play about, that is, what is the theme? In what time is it set? Where is it set? Who are the main characters? In what sequence has the playwright

arranged the events and to what effect? In short what is the plot of the play? What about dialogue? Has the playwright made use of other fine arts like song, music, dance etc.? What use has he made of action costume, setting and spectacle? What kind of play is it – is it a tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy or poetic play? What is the influence of classical or folk theatre on the play? If we keep these questions in mind, we will be able to read the play perceptively. Now let us take up the text of Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*. It is a short play, that does not have any formal divisions into acts or scenes.

It just has 2 parts – part 1 ends at the intermission and after a break, the second part begins. You will find the text in your Study Centre Library – do go through it once, and during your second reading make notes regarding themes, characters and dramatic techniques. You will be reading a Marathi play in English in which the characters are Poona Brahmans living in the eighteenth century and the cultural context is specifically Maharashtrian. How then do the English dialogues sound?

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Do you think *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a historical play? Give reasons to justify your answer.

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24.5 CRITICAL SUMMARY

We assume that you have read the play thoroughly. Let us examine it at some length.

The Title

The title suggests that the play is about a man called Ghashiram who is also a Kotwal. But is he the only important character in the play? You may have felt that Nana Phadnavis is a more important character. The Sutradhar is there from the beginning to the end. Why then is the play called *Ghashiram Kotwal*? The title is similar to another play by Tendulkar called *Sakharam Binder*. The play is not simply about a man called Ghashiram but it is about the way in which power operates to create and destroy people like Ghashiram. The play is not so much about real historical characters like Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis but about the hypocrisy, shame and decadence of those in high places who are willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of power and pelf. It is also about those who use power to grab whatever they wish and destroy those who would oppose them. For those who would play the power-game, people are pawns to be used when the need arises and to be discarded when there is no longer any use for them. How does power operate? Through social institutions like caste and religion. It is for this reason that the play is so relevant to our own social situation today.

The Story

Briefly, the story is about Ghashiram, a Brahman from the North, who comes to eighteenth century Poona. It was at that time that the Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis ruled supreme. Implicated in a false charge of theft, Ghashiram is insulted and humiliated by the Poona Brahmans and he vows to take revenge. His

moment comes when the ageing lecherous Nana takes a fancy to his beautiful young daughter Lalita Gauri. He sacrifices his daughter's virtue to Nana's lust and manages to become the Kotwal of Poona. Now he unleashes a reign of terror on the Brahmans. His cruelty crosses all limits and the death of 22 innocent Brahmans results in his downfall and leads to his ignominious end when he is stoned to death. The Nana who has used Ghashiram's daughter and discarded her when he moves on to fresh pastures goes scot free. After Ghashiram's death he announces public rejoicing for three days.

The play is a satire on a society which shields the powerful and the corrupt and punishes people like Ghashiram. Justice is seen to be done, and the equilibrium of society seems to be restored. But is it really justice? Is justice possible at all in a corrupt social system?

Part 1

The Opening of the Play

The play opens with twelve men standing in a line, singing. At this point Ganapati comes in dancing and is later joined by Saraswati. Prayers are offered to Ganesh or Ganapati at the beginning of any undertaking in order to invoke his blessings for good luck. This is a traditional ritual. Ganapati is an especially popular deity in Maharashtra. Saraswati is the goddess of wisdom and music. Lakshmi the goddess of wealth also comes dancing to the stage and is asked to shower her blessings for the success of the play. This spectacular opening helps to arrest the attention of the audience who will later be called upon to appreciate as well as analyse the events as they occur. Let us further try and understand the significance of this opening.

- 1) The line of 12 singing Brahmans forms a human curtain that will be employed in many ways throughout the play to indicate changes in scene. This play thus does not require a curtain like in a conventional stage. Proscenium theatre requires stage props and a certain degree of formality. In this play, because of the human wall, the play can be staged with equal success and facility on a city stage or a village green.
- 2) The arrival of Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi and the prayers offered to them for the success of the play is similar to the ritual performed on stage before the commencement of a classical Sanskrit play. That ritual was performed by the Sutradhar and some others but in this play there is some adaptation.
- 3) It is only after the three deities go dancing off stage that the Sutradhar enters and stops the singing. A Sutradhar is important in folk theatre and introduces all the characters. In some plays he has a limited role and makes only one or two appearances. But in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the Sutradhar plays several roles:
 - i) he introduces the characters and initiates the action of the play;
 - ii) he comments on the action throughout the play;
 - iii) he is not simply an objective observer but also takes active part in the performance by assuming different roles;
 - iv) acts as a cohesive device stringing together the many and often disparate scenes of the play.

After asking the Brahmans who they are the Sutradhar indulges in a witty dialogue with one of the Brahmans who try to sneak away from the human wall. In a series of crisp and brief questions, the Sutradhar is able to extract the information from him that he is going to Bavannakhani, infamous for its wine, women and songs.

Another Brahman sidles out of the curtain apparently in a hurry to get to Bavannakhani. Meanwhile the holy chant of 'Shri Ganaraya' continues. On the one hand the holy Brahmans, the custodians of social morality and religious ritual sing hymns publicly and on the other they indulge their lust and illicit passions in private. This exchange not only exposes the hypocrisy of the Brahmins, their arrogance and use of abusive language in dealing with the Sutradhar but also comments on the decadence of eighteenth century society in Poona. This scene has another purpose. It has introduced us to the main characters, the societal background and by mentioning Bavannakhani repeatedly, provided a smooth transition to the next scene.

Nana Phadnavis

In Bavannakhani where we see the famous courtesan Gulabi dancing with Ghashiram. At this point our main protagonist Nana Phadnavis comes in joins the dance in the course of which he hurts his foot. It is Ghashiram who, true to his sycophantic character, offers Nana his bent back to place his injured leg. In gratitude Nana gives him a pearl necklace. But when Nana goes away, Gulabi demands that the necklace be given to her. When Ghashiram resists, he is beaten up and sent away. Outside, he is accused of picking a Brahmin's pocket and inspite of an English Sahib's testimony to his innocence, he is beaten up and put in jail. All his protestations regarding his innocence fall on deaf ears following which Ghashiram vows to avenge his humiliation saying "I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs". How do you think he will do this? What was the role of the English Sahib who passes by in a palanquin? Don't you think his presence further exposes the subservience of the Brahmans to the white people and their greed as they try to coax money out of him? The sahib also testifies to Ghashiram's innocence but in spite of that the unfortunate man is beaten up. The corruption of the brutal police is also highlighted here. But in addition to all this, the presence of the English Sahib in the palanquin serves to underline the fact that we are in colonial India.

Ghashiram's opportunity for revenge comes when Nana is captivated by the sight of his beautiful daughter Lalita Gauri. Ghashiram tantalizes him by postponing the gratification of his lust and exultantly claims 'Now he's in my hands...' The innocent Lalita Gauri is bargained away so that her father can become the Kotwal in order to gratify his vengeful desire to "make this Poona a kingdom of pigs". But Ghashiram does not realize that not only has he bartered away his daughter but he has also ransomed his freedom to the wily Nana who means to turn this concession to his advantage as he spells out in a soliloquy – 'what'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do, our Kotwal pays. The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram.' Following Nana's statement, we find Ghashiram dressed ceremoniously as the Kotwal of Poona and the scene draws to a close.

The Soliloquy

Up to this point, we have seen Nana as a hedonist indulging himself in the pleasures of the senses. His penchant for girls young enough to be his daughters is more than clear in his pursuit of Lalita Gauri. In this soliloquy we see another aspect of his character.

A soliloquy as you know, is a speech in which a character shares one's innermost thoughts with the audience. The other characters do not know these and in the action that follows this ignorance results in situations full of dramatic irony.

Ghashiram feels he has won a major concession from Nana. But Nana is a sinister and wily politician. He has given him an inch to take away an ell. By making Ghashiram the Kotwal, he will kill two birds with one stone. He will gratify his desire to possess his beautiful daughter and unleash terror on Poona through his Kotwal. In addition, by making an outsider like Ghashiram the Kotwal, he will be able to check the conspirators. Moreover, Ghashiram cannot join the conspirators

because as an outsider they would not trust him and he would be forced to turn to the Nana for support. Nana, astute politician that he is, can see that Ghashiram will become more arrogant than the 'Chitpavan Brahmins' – a prophecy that is soon fulfilled as we see an arrogant Ghashiram appear on the stage as soon as Nana's monologue is over.

What purpose does this soliloquy serve?

- Another dimension of Nana's character is highlighted
- His evil motives are revealed
- Provides dramatic irony when we see the oblivious Ghashiram strutting in his finery. His arrogance rings hollow to the audience who can see him as a pathetic pawn in Nana's game.

Thus ends the first movement of the play.

- Here we are introduced to the main characters by the Sutradhar who does not simply appear at the beginning of the play but stays throughout, giving the many scenes a certain coherence and continuity.

We have indications that Ghashiram is an opportunistic and sycophantic character. Initially, he is just a newcomer, a Brahman from Kannauj who has come to Poona with his wife and daughter. But due to a false charge of theft, for which he is convicted, he vows to revenge himself upon the Brahmins. This vindictive streak in Ghashiram will ultimately be the cause of his rise, downfall and destruction, as we shall see. Nana Phadnavis is projected as a weak effeminate character whose primary aim seems to be the pursuit of women much younger than himself. Behind his dancing, pleasure-loving exterior is a scheming powermonger who can manipulate circumstances to suit his own selfish ends.

We have also seen that Tendulkar has made creative and multiple use of a line of human beings – (i) they act as a human curtain on stage; (ii) this line also functions as a wall; (iii) they sing as a chorus and (iv) provide interesting and innovative visual effects.

- Tendulkar has also made extensive use of song and dance which seems to bear the influence of the Tamasha form of folk theatre popular in Maharashtra. Abusive language and slapstick humour are all used in the Tamasha form. Lavani, the traditional love song is sung in alternation with religious hymns. This highlights the fact that religion is used as a façade to hide the decadent habits of the Brahmins. Dances add a spectacular touch to the performance, provide dramatic relief after tense situation.

- Nana's final soliloquy exposes his Machiavellian schemes. A soliloquy, as we know, is a monologue in which the character speaks to him/herself. The character's innermost thoughts are revealed to the audience while the rest of the people remain unaware of his thinking.

The context of the play is set by the period costumes and we are taken into eighteenth century Poona during the rule of the Peshwas.

Part 2

Now turn to the second part of the play which moves at a faster pace.

The play re-opens with the twelve people singing the Ganaraya song. The Sutradhar walks in and a chorus of people confirm the fact that Ghashiram is already performing his duties as Kotwal. We are told of how he has 'whipped people', 'arrested people' and how 'Poona loses heart'. Innocent people are punished and forced to

accept crimes not committed by them. They are tortured in jails. For instance, the Sutradhar who now plays the role of a Brahman is caught wandering on the streets at night without a permit. For him it is a crisis situation as he has to fetch a midwife to help in the delivery of his child. His truthful explanation is dismissed as lies by Ghashiram who has him thrown into the prison.

In another instance, hearing some noise from a house, Ghashiram knocks at the door and demands to know what is going on. A bewildered Brahman opens the door to say that nothing was wrong at all. But Ghashiram refuses to believe him and despite evidence proclaims that the woman was not his wife and the innocent couple is arrested. These are only some of the examples of the injustice and terror that are perpetrated by Ghashiram.

Nana, meanwhile is oblivious to all this. He is enjoying himself with Lalita Gauri and his support has driven the Kotwal to ruthless cruelty. A woman cannot cremate her dead father-in-law because her genuine permit has been declared counterfeit by the Kotwal. Her husband and brothers-in-law have been arrested instead. The unattended corpse has been in the cremation grounds and the distraught woman comes to Nana for justice. Instead of a hearing, she is ordered out by Nana who cannot bear to have his song and dance interrupted. This incident not only underscores the cruelty and inhumanity of the Kotwal but also the utter self-indulgence and decadence of Nana.

The woman is dismissed and dramatic relief is provided by a song and dance sequence which also indicates the passage of time as confirmed by the Sutradhar. Ghashiram's cruelties only increase. Innocent Brahmans are tortured, the nails of their hands pulled out and their fingers washed in lemon juice and soap. Hot iron balls are placed on the hands of an innocent Brahman to make him admit of a theft he had not committed. When under pressure he does admit of it, orders are passed for his hands to be cut off. All this violence is depicted on stage through mime. As the tormented man screams, the line of Brahmans begins to sing hymns as if to drown his groans and the scene shifts. This is also symbolic of the way that cruelty and oppression are swept under the carpet of religious rituals.

From accounts of Ghashiram's violent oppression, the focus shifts to the Kotwal's ambitions for his daughter's marriage. Soon after, we see preparations being made for Nana's wedding. Needless to say the bride is a very young girl bought in exchange for 'three hundred gold coins' and 'a great gift of land'. The depiction of the wedding on stage produces a spectacular effect. But in addition it offers a contrast to the suffering of Ghashiram who is panic-stricken for no one had seen his dearest child Gauri for the last ten days. And we see the oppressor becoming the oppressed. When he confronts Nana about where his daughter is, he is told, with some reluctance, that she had gone to Chandra, the midwife. Shocked, Ghashiram hurries in the direction of Kasba Peth only to find that his child had already been buried. Here Tendulkar works by suggestion for even though no details are given, yet the meaning of what could have happened to cause Gauri's death becomes clear. Ghashiram is ready to react murderously but loses his nerve when face to face with Nana who insists that protocol must be maintained. He further insists that Ghashiram should stop grieving for his daughter for 'Death is without meaning... No one belongs to anyone'.

This incident leaves a mark on Ghashiram whose cruelties assume horrendous proportions. The climax comes when a group of Brahmans, newcomers to Poona, are caught stealing fruit from the Kotwal's garden. They are arrested and all herded into a prison cell too small to accommodate them. By daybreak twenty two had died of suffocation and the rest were half dead. This is reported directly to the Peshwa by Sardar Phakade, who happened to be passing by. The Brahmans of Poona are furious and are up in arms against the Kotwal. Thousands of them rush

to the Nana's house. The cowardly Nana is willing to promise them anything. When he finds out that they want the Kotwal's head, he is greatly relieved that it is nothing more important than that. He happily signs the paper for Ghashiram's execution and sends the message to the mob 'to humiliate him' and do all they want.

The angry mob sets out in search of Ghashiram. What follows is a scene full of dramatic irony. Ghashiram does not know of his fate and tries to disperse the crowd but they surround him menacingly. Later, we are told that he was publicly beaten up, his head shaven off and 'sindured' and he was taken around on a camel after which he was tied to the leg of an elephant. The disgraced, disfigured and battered Ghashiram comes on stage. He is stoned by the Brahmans and this action is again depicted by mime. At this moment, just before his death, realization dawns upon him and he admits: 'I should be punished for the death of my daughter'. Sadistically, the crowd pounces upon him and beats him up.

The pleasure in violence is shocking and speaks of the degeneration in the society of the time. Tendulkar has done a project on violence in society and the depiction of violence in all his plays is a comment on the direction which our own society has taken. From the non-violence and pacifism of the days of Gandhi during the struggle against the British, Indian society has veered towards violence which has now come to the surface. The society depicted may be eighteenth century Poona but the phenomenon of violence is real and has relevance here and now. In our daily lives we can see violence everywhere – in films, entertainment, on the street, in the home, at work. Commenting on his liberal use of violence to shock the audience, Tendulkar said:

Violence cannot be a spectacle. If it's recurring factor, it is so because violence is around us, it is within us, our times happened to be violent times. It is bound to reflect in any creative work in some form or other even if it is ugly and unpleasant.

Once Ghashiram is dead, Nana makes an appearance. He condemns Ghashiram and orders that his corpse be left to rot and all his relatives expelled from the city. He then declares three days of festivities to mark the end of the 'demon Ghashya'. The crowd cheers and Nana joins the dancing. The play ends with the song with which it had begun. The wheel has turned full circle.

Ghashiram, the cruel Kotwal is dead. Evil has been punished but does good triumph? What about Nana and the decadent Brahmans with their façade of religiosity? Does the ending leave you feeling uneasy? What is Tendulkar trying to say? Think about these questions and we shall discuss them in the next two Units. Meanwhile, let us complete the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 2

Let us now answer the questions in the space given below. Make sure to write the answers in your own words.

- 1) Define the role of the Sutradhar in the play. (About 200 words).

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- 2) Describe the fate of Ghashiram's daughter and the role Ghashiram plays in her ruin and death.

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- 3) What was Ghashiram's attitude to the Brahmans of Poona? Can we justify his actions?

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- 4) Explain with reference to the context the following lines:

'Use a thorn to take out a thorn. That's great. The disease has been stopped. Anyway, there was no use for him any more'.

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24.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have gone through the play analytically. We have discussed:

- the production of the play;
- the historical background;
- the traditional opening of the play with a song and dance and the Sutradhar who introduces the characters;
- some aspects of Tendulkar's technique with regard to use of song, dance, meme soliloquy and the use of contrast in alternating the violent scenes with those of song and dance.

We shall discuss some of these topics in greater detail in the next two Units.

24.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Refer to Section 24.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The 'Sutradhar' is a familiar figure in ancient Sanskrit plays as well as in folk theatre. His role is generally to perform the opening ritual on stage and to introduce the characters. In some plays the Sutradhar appears on stage in the beginning and then at the very end of the play. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* the role of the Sutradhar is much more extended. Not only does he introduce the characters but he remains throughout the play binding the different scenes together with the necessary commentary.
- 2) Lalita Gauri, Ghashiram's young daughter, is a marginal character in the sense that she has no dialogues to deliver or any direct participation in the action of the play. However, she is important because she is the catalyst who sets the main events in motion. Her extreme youth and budding beauty catches the attention of the lecherous old Nana, who in his passion, is willing to give anything, to get her. And it is this lustful passion that Ghashiram exploits by exchanging his daughter's virtue for the position of Kotwal of Poona city. The innocent girl is used as a pawn in this nefarious deal. It is she who finally

suffers an ignominious death at the midwife's after being discarded by the Nana whose roving eye has alighted on yet another young beauty who is to be used and then cast away like Lalita Gauri. That a father can compromise the honour of his innocent child is inconceivable but the lust for power can make an individual inhuman, as it does in the case of Ghashiram.

- 3) Ghashiram was a newcomer in Poona, a Brahman from Kannauj. He had come in search of a respectable life for himself and his family. However, all he got at the hands of the Poona brahmans is insults and humiliation. The necklace given to him by Nana is forcibly taken away from him. In another incident he is charged with theft and beaten up mercilessly. It is then that he vows to avenge himself upon the Poona brahmans. Once he becomes the Kotwal, he unleashes a reign of terror on the brahmans beating, humiliating and torturing them on the slightest pretext. Even if he had been maltreated by the brahmans initially, his subsequent actions cannot be justified on moral grounds.
- 4) These lines have been taken from the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* by Vijay Tendulkar, the famous Marathi playwright. Written originally in Marathi, this play was translated into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Set in eighteenth century Poona, it deals with the Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis and the Kotwal of Poona Ghashiram. Even though it draws upon history, the play is a fictional dramatization of real-life events. The play deals with the themes of violence in society and of the stranglehold of power that continues unabated. Ghashirams may come and go but the real power rests in people like Nana who despite their decadent, unjust, authoritarian and inhuman behaviour get away with all their sins.

UNIT 25 THEMES AND CHARACTERISATION

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Themes of the Play
- 25.3 Characterisation
 - 25.3.1 Sutradhar
 - 25.3.2 Nana Phadnavis
 - 25.3.3 Ghashiram
 - 25.3.4 The Women in the Play
- 25.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.5 Answers to Exercises

25.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this play you will be able to:

- discuss the themes of *Ghashiram Kotwal*;
- outline the relevance of the characters in the overall scheme of the play.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first two Units of this Block, you have read the general background to the play as well as a fairly detailed summary. In this Unit, let us discuss some of the main themes. We shall also discuss the characters in the play. By now you have read both the complete text of the play and its summary. While reading the text, you must have made some notes regarding themes, characters, style etc. Compare these with our discussion and see how far we agree or disagree.

As we have told you, Ghashiram Kotwal is often referred to as 'total theatre' which indicates that the playwright has used all the techniques of his craft to create a spectacular theatrical experience. All the directions are given in such detail that the play has been envisaged in its totality by Tendulkar.

As you read the play, the story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram unfolds itself. It is an interesting story set in a specific period in history. Even so, it is not a historical play though it is based on specific people in a particular time and place as well as certain incidents in history. It is contemporary in the sense that it makes us reflect on the state of our society by highlighting violence, the intrigues of power, the use of religion for the oppression of women and people of the lower castes. The oppressor survives in spite of his tyranny, decadence and authoritarianism. These are some of the themes that continue to perplex us throughout the play.

25.2 THEMES OF THE PLAY

A theme is the subject of the play – the view and message that the playwright communicates. A play may have more than one theme and it is quite possible to have a main theme and several sub-themes that originate from it.

What then is the main theme in *Ghashiram Kotwal*? The personality clash between the Nana and Ghashiram may appear to be the theme at the surface level but we know that Tendulkar has examined the relationship between religion, caste, sexuality and violence to expose the structures of power that maintain the status quo. As you will have noticed, Tendulkar is concerned about the politics of power and its various implications. According to Saimik Bandhopadhyay, 'In *Ghashiram*, power is defined 'horizontally' in terms of individuals against individuals from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization....' (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1984, p.v.) Do you agree with this? It might seem on one level that an individual is pitted against another. However, at another level it is clear that the forces of state and society remain supreme even after individuals have perished. For example, Ghashiram, an innocent newcomer to Poona is unjustly accused of stealing and is beaten up by the Poona Brahmans. This incident makes Ghashiram vow to revenge himself on them.

It is interesting that Ghashiram, himself a Brahman, has turned against his other brethren. The opportunity for getting even with the Brahmans presents itself when the lecherous Chief Minister of the Peshwa, the ageing Nana Phadnavis desires his beautiful daughter Lalita Gauri. Then begins the game of power in which Gauri is made a pawn and sacrificed to Nana's lust. In return, Ghashiram is made the Kotwal of Poona. This serves two purposes: one, it gives Ghashiram the opportunity to take his revenge and unleash terror on the people of Poona and two, it allows Nana to have his cake and eat it too. He has Gauri on the one hand and on the other his own tyranny is obscured by Ghashiram's cruelty. It is clear even at this stage that the deal is an unfair one as the benefit lies mainly on the side of Nana. And finally, Nana sacrifices Ghashiram to the bloodthirsty crowds without the slightest compunction or regret and at the end of the play we find that he himself continues to thrive.

Who is really powerful; Nana or Ghashiram? We notice that the power is only deputed in Ghashiram who does not realize this and begins to mistake it for real power. When he loses Lalita Gauri and his game is up, he realizes his error and the reality of his position. It is Nana's misdeeds that have been "credited to his account". It seems then that power conceals itself behind its agents and continues to thrive unchallenged. Does the power rest with Nana? It would seem so but even Nana can be summoned at any moment by the Peshwa. The Peshwa himself is a symbol of power within the context of feudal society. Thus the power vested in him is underpinned by the social set-up which functions on the basis of maintaining the status quo. The king or the Peshwa in this case has the power by virtue of the Divine Right. His position is maintained by various state apparatuses like the army, the police, religious and social institution, etc. Here the power is delegated in the Nana who further deposes it to Ghashiram by making him the Kotwal who then operates through a police force. Thus, there is a whole hierarchy of power positions. It seems then that it is an individual against an individual. For example, if a person is beaten up by the police, he can see the evil face of that particular policeman alone. He does not realize that the policeman is backed by the police force which again is maintained by a particular state. The state itself functions according to a certain ideology. A society structured in such a way ensures that power is maintained and supported by such hierarchies. The attention is focused on individuals who are passed off as culprits. But the real culprit, the social set-up continues unchallenged as individual is pitted against individual. And even if Ghashirams are created and destroyed, society remains unchanged. The attention is diverted from the real problem which still remains untouched. And Tendulkar's play very subtly makes us think about and analyse this phenomenon.

We have seen how power operates more overtly through violence and oppression. At a subtle level, it functions through such social attitudes that help in maintaining

hierarchies and hiding the real source of power which is delegated in agents such as Ghashiram who are also victims of that same power. Religion and sexuality are also used as the strategies of power.

Religion

While the army and police are used by the state to maintain control within societies, there are other subtler strategies that are also used. For instance, **religion**. Most religions tell us to turn the other cheek if we are hit. This prevents us from reacting against tyranny and injustice. When we imbibe these values during childhood, first in the family, then in the school and finally in society at large, they become so deeply ingrained in us that they do not allow us to challenge or change our social situation. Such values are imparted to us so subtly that we do not question if they are right or wrong.

Take the case of *Ghashiram Kotwal*. The play begins with a religious hymn and the popular gods dancing on stage. This sets the context against which the drama unfolds itself. The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani to see the dancing girls and say they are going 'to the temple' to give a sermon on 'Vishwamitra and Menaka'. They justify their decadence by comparing Bavannakhani to holy Mathura. The 'abhanga' or devotional song is often sung with the 'lavani' or love song in his play. Scenes of violence and cruelty are alternated with devotional songs. When Nana tries to seduce Gauri in front of the statue of the holy Ganapati, he simply dismisses her fears saying: 'That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side'. Further on in the play, when Gauri is dead and the distraught Ghashiram confronts Nana and accuses him of his daughter's death, the latter reassures him: 'He – the Omnipresent – He makes everything happen..... We are merely instruments'. He then urges him to 'forget what's happened. All merges into the Ganga. Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that' (P 44). 'Don't you think here is a case of the devil citing scriptures to suit his purpose? Religion then becomes a useful alibi in covering people's misdeeds. By invoking religion, all kinds of evils are glossed and even sanctified. Rituals are encouraged to fill the pockets of the greedy Brahmans. Moreover, their position as the 'twiceborn' is reinforced by the prevalence of the caste system.

Caste

Alongwith religion, caste is also a major factor in the play. Is it a comment on the decadence of the Brahmans? When the play was first performed it was banned for being anti-Brahman and for fear of there being a revolt in the audience. Is it really meant to expose Brahmans, their corruption and moral degradation? According to the playwright he was more interested in 'the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams..... The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmans, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental though not accidental. Caste is used as an instrument of power. The Sutradhar reports that according to Ghashiram 'to eat with a lower caste person is a crime' (p. 26). To sleep with a 'Mahar woman' (a lower caste among the untouchables) is also considered a crime. On the other hand, the Brahmans, have no hesitation in chasing and pestering a white Sahib for money. This shows that race and colour constitute a higher position in the social hierarchy. And the white Sahib ranks higher than the privileged Brahman who is feasted and showered with gifts in the Peshwa's Poona.

Tendulkar has depicted the hypocrisy of the Brahmans, their arrogance, authoritarianism and their, debauched and adulterous behaviour. Rather than being identifiable by their good deeds and noble behaviour, the Brahmans are known by their 'shaven head', 'holy thread' and 'pious look'. It is this pious look that

conceals their petty deeds. Nana himself a Brahman is marrying for the seventh time not to mention his lusting after numerous young girls, Lalita Gauri among them. Though full of revenge and hatred for the Brahmans, Ghashiram is himself a Brahman. And his conduct in bartering his daughter's virtue for the dubious distinction of becoming the Kotwal of Poona, can hardly be justified and speaks of his inhuman opportunism as well as total lack of paternal sentiment and sensitivity. The total picture of the Brahmans that emerges from this play is one of hypocrisy, double standards, self-indulgence and moral degradation. It exposes the rottenness of the caste-system that privileges a person on the basis of birth rather than merit and maintains the rigid hierarchy to control and suppress persons.

Sexuality

Women too, as we have seen, have become a pawn in the power game. In fact there is a close nexus between sexuality and power. Consider, for example, Nana's statement with reference to Lalita Gauri: 'Our grandeur's gone if she's not had' (p.20). A man's self-image, identity and machismo is definable only, it seems, in relation to the conquest and oppression of women. There is a close connection between sexuality and religion as *lavanis* (love song) and *abhangas* (devotional song) are sung at the revelries in *Bavannakhani* which is likened to *Mathura* and the erotic dances to *Krishan Lila*. The garb of religion helps to justify and whitewash the debaucheries of the Brahman men. *Gulabi's* tantalising dances, the Nana's lustful pursuit of *Lalita Gauri*, the clandestine meeting of the Brahman wife with a *Maratha* lover, all serve to create an underlying strain of eroticism throughout the play.

Violence

Tendulkar did research on violence in India because of which he has explored its many dimensions. He is not only concerned about the violence of the State against the people but against the violence of people against other people. This is clear in *Ghashiram's* torture of innocent Brahmans and the belligerence of *Gulabi's* men against *Ghashiram* when he is forcibly divested of the necklace that *Nana* had given him. A stark example of this violence is the ordeal-by-fire episode. An innocent Brahman, accused of theft, unsuccessfully tries to convince *Ghashiram* of his innocence. Even though the evidence indicates that the Brahman has been unjustly implicated, *Ghashiram* has an ordeal set up to test his innocence. The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out and his fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap and then hands are sealed in a bag. Seven *Rangolis* are drawn on the floor and an iron ball is heated red hot. The ball is then placed forcibly on the hands of the protesting Brahman. Naturally, his hands burn and the cruel *Ghashiram* triumphantly proclaims that this would not have happened had he told the truth for only liars get burnt. He then urges the agonized man to 'confess' or else the ordeal would be repeated. Left with no choice, he falls into the trap – 'I confess that I stole'. (p.36). Instead of letting him off *Ghashiram* orders the soldiers to 'cut off his hands and drive him out of Poona'. (p.36). Here is an example of the extreme physical and mental violence that can be perpetrated by one human beings on another. How does this square with the so-called religious commitment of the Brahmans? In addition to this is also the more subtle violence that human beings are capable of. This is the violence of mental cruelty-the kinds we witness when *Nana* subdues *Ghashiram's* agony and anger at the death of his daughter by invoking protocol.

But what is *Tendulkar's* aim in portraying this violence? According to *Sudhir Sonalkar* 'It [violence], has to somewhere grasp the tragic human condition, it has to have a poetic dimension to itThe violence of greek tragedy, moves and enriches. *Tendulkar's* violence shocks and even when it disturbs, the ethical question remains both untouched and unanswered'. ('*Vijay Tendulkar and the Metaphor of violence*' *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Nov. 20, 1983, p.21). By leaving the ethical

question open, Tendulkar is perhaps inviting his audience to think about the solutions for themselves.

Is Tendulkar trying to convey a 'message'? As we know the function of art is not to provide answers or solution but to raise questions. If indeed it begins to have 'palpable designs on us' as Keats would say, it becomes mere propaganda. In this play, as we can see, Tendulkar provides us with a blueprint for an unforgettable theatrical experience by satirizing the utter decadence of feudal society. By exposing the foibles and hypocrisies of Brahmans, he forces us to think about the situation of our own society. There are no easy answers. Underlying the entertainment is a thread of seriousness and you may have felt slightly confused after completing the play. The 'end' in fact makes you think – How has Nana got away scot free? How can the celebrating crowd be so oblivious to the fact that the real evil remains? And the fact that such questions come to mind proves the success of Tendulkar's enterprise.

Before we move to the next section, let us do the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 1

Answer the following question in your own word: (About 200 words each)

- 1) Which is the main theme in the play? What does Tendulkar try to depict through the story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram?

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- 2) Describe the role of religion and sexuality in maintaining the structure of power and dominance.

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- 3) Comment on the end of the play. (100 words approx)

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25.3 CHARACTERISATION

After reading the play, you must have formed some impression about the different characters. How do we 'know' a character in a play? The playwright uses several techniques to present a character:

- i) the character appears directly on stage as opposed to a character in a novel or story. In a novel or story the character can be described in detail but in a play this cannot be done;

- ii) other characters talk about him/her;
- iii) the character is shown in dialogue with others;
- iv) the character may soliloquize to speak his/her thoughts out aloud on stage;
- v) the character's actions may reveal his/her traits.

Any playwright has to be very careful with regard to the status, class, age, nature, style of dress, gestures and habits of the character as he will be observed and his voice and speech will be heard with attention.

Thus when we draw a character sketch, we must remember not to simply describe what the character has "done" but to say what he "is". In short, we must pick out the character's traits. For example, if a particular character spends the better part of the day preening in front of a mirror, we can conclude that such a person is 'vain'. This is the trait that is manifested by one's action.

There are many kinds of characters: tragic, comic, or those who have both traits. Earlier the main character in a play was called the 'hero' as characters in Greek tragedy and other plays were persons of high rank and status. They were usually kings, princes or people who controlled the destinies of others. In the twentieth century when the characters became more ordinary and were people from common life, the main characters came to be known as protagonist. Who is the protagonist in *Ghashiram Kotwal*? Think for a moment before you answer this. If we were to ask you the same question regarding *Macbeth*, *the Doll's House* or *Arms and the Man*, you may be able to answer it without any difficulty. But who is the main character in this play? Is it the Sutradhar with whom the play begins and ends? Or Ghashiram himself? It seems that all are equally important and constitute a totality that focuses on the aberrations of society.

In addition we have the women, who are there as catalysts rather than full-fledged characters. According to Tendulkar the aim was not to develop any one character but 'The urgency was of finding a form in which a class or a multitude could become the central character. (The present title came only to suggest the incident and not the character Ghashiram Kotwal'. (p viii)

25.3.1 Sutradhar

As we have already told you in the first Unit of this Block, the Sutradhar is an essential part of Sanskrit drama and can be found in many folk plays such as Tamasha. The traditional role of the Sutradhar is to introduce the characters and initiate the events as well as comment on the action, wherever necessary. Let us now discuss the role of the Sutradhar in *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

As in traditional theatre, the Sutradhar introduces the characters and sets the context for the action. He remains on stage continuously, becoming a different person at different times. In the beginning, he plays the role of interlocuter who shops and questions the Brahmins as they sneak about slyly trying to get to Bacannakhani. As the Brahmins crowd round Bavannakhani, a lonely Brahmin woman is shown embracing her lover and the Sutradhar comments ironically on the scene: 'Here a Brahmin woman in solitary confinement; there the crowds waiting for a glimpse of Gulabi.....' (p.8). This role of Sutradhar as commentator continues throughout the play. When Ghashiram is thrown in jail, the Sutradhar masquerades as a 'fellow prisoner' and after commiserating with his lot, observes wisely:

'This thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves'. (p.16): a wisdom that will strike a sympathetic chord in many in the audience.

At other times he leads the chorus.

Sutradhar: Nine court Nana only thought of Gauri.

All: Thought of nothing else; etc. (p.22).

Then again the Sutradhar becomes a passing Brahman who is caught roaming the roads at night by Ghashiram. When the Kotwal apprehends him he explains 'Sir, I was going to fetch the midwife' (p.28). It is through the Sutradhar's persistent probing that Nana's wedding plans are revealed dramatically. An account of Ghashiram's final humiliation and punishment is provided by the Sutradhar's running commentary. And his final comment is loaded with meaning:

'And in the end came the End'

The Sutradhar thus has a variety of roles. In addition to all these his function is to act as a cohesive device between the different scenes and the different modes such as song, dance and music which contribute to the total effect of the play.

25.3.2 Nana Phadnavis

This character of Nana is based on that of the historical character Balaji Janardhan Bhanu (12 Feb. 1742 – 13 March 1800) who inherited the post of Phadnavis or administrator at the age of fourteen when his father died. Nana was the Peshwa's chief minister until his death on July 11, 1778. How does Tendulkar distance his Nana from the Nana of history? By Making him dance on stage and behave in a ludicrous manner. The Sutradhar introduces Nana's arrival by focusing on his status and wealth –

'Nana of the nine courts, Nana of the wealth and power.....
to Gulabi's place proceeds' (p.8)

We are given no physical description or Nana's Personality except that he has a 'silver handled walking stick' (p.9) and a 'garland of flowers on his wrist'. We can conclude that he is quite a dandy and when he hurts his foot while dancing and makes a fuss, we also know that he is an effeminate character who can also be generous as he is to Ghashiram who offers his back for him to rest his foot on – the reward being his own necklace.

That Nana is old is nowhere stated but is implied through subtle hints. The walking stick, for instance. At the time of his wedding to a 'slender willowy bride. A shy fair lily-white bride' (p.39). We are told that he is still young enough to marry! His moustache's turned gray. But not all his teeth are gone' (p.40).

We can see Nana as a lustful and lecherous old man from his presence at Gulabi's dance in Bavannakhani. He then tries to seduce the young and beautiful daughter of Ghashiram. He is furious when he finds that the 'prey fled' (p.19) and comments "Our grandeur's gone if she's not had". Why does he say that? For him the girl is not an individual but merely a 'prey'. And if he is able to snare it, his self- image as a macho man, a 'Nine Court Nana' will be enhanced. If for some reason, he cannot get her, this Bavannakhani. He then tries to seduce the young and beautiful daughter of Ghashiram. He is furious when he finds that the 'prey fled' (p.19) and comments 'Our grandeur's gone if she's not had'. Why does he say that? For him the girl is not an individual but merely a 'prey'. And if he is able to snare it, his self- image as a macho man, a 'Nine Court Nana' will be enhanced. If for some reason, he cannot get her, identity is called into question. The power that he boasts of is not located in his character but in the people around him by belittling whom he can define himself in positive terms. And when the girl is finally delivered to him, Ghashiram cries out 'Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf!.....That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach..... (p.22).

The Nana in the play dances and sings. While this is in keeping with the rest of the characters in this play it also distances the Nana from the imposing historical character on whom he is based. Thus he is not simply an individual but also a type – a type of the corrupt Brahman community as well as a symbol of those in position of power. It is this power which makes him immune to the laws and requirements of justice.

The Nana has all the cunning and connivance of his tribe. Even when he capitulates to the demands of Ghashiram by making him Kotwal, he still has the upper hand: ‘What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do, our Kotwal pays’. By giving Ghashiram the false illusion of being powerful the Nana continues to use him and discards him when he feels, ‘there was no use for him anymore’. (p.52) When Ghashiram accosts him with his daughter’s disappearance, he very piously states: ‘Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that’ (p.44). The juxtaposition of what is being said with what has already been done, is an effective device in un-masking Nana further.

What is your impression of Nana? Write it down in your own words in the space given below.

25.3.3 Ghashiram

Ghashiram is the historical character of the same name as we have already stated in our second unit. The whole play is a story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram, who from the position of an unknown visitor to Poona rises to become the Kotwal of the city striking terror in the hearts of the Brahmans. It is on account of his indiscriminate cruelty that he is discredited and meets an ignominious end.

When does Ghashiram first appear in the play? We see him in Brahman dress as he offers his back to Nana to rest his injured foot on. His sycophantic nature is already in evidence as he very deferentially holds Nana’s slipped foot and comments ingratiatingly:

‘In my hands has fallen-grace!’

In return for his deference, the Nana gives him a necklace. But because he is a mere foreigner, the necklace is forcibly taken away from him by Gulabi for whom he has been performing all sorts of odd jobs to earn his keep, and he is thrown out.

Ghashiram is next seen looking hungrily at the Brahmans being fed at a .feast. Even here his credentials are questioned and the soldiers arrest him as a thief. Despite his protest, he is thrown into goal and he piteously tells a fellow-prisoner: ‘I’ve been here two weeks. I came here to find my fortune – and lost my reputation’ (p.16). When he is finally released after his humiliation and torment, Ghashiram vows to “make this Poona a kingdom of pigs” (p.17).

Is he able to keep his vow? Yes, as we know the opportunity of becoming powerful presents itself to him when his daughter’s youth and beauty catch the attention of the lecherous but all-powerful Nana. He trades her virtue to become the powerful Kotwal of Poona. But this power that he has achieved at the cost of his daughter is only an illusion. His strings are in the hands of Nana who wishes to kill two birds with one stone: ‘We’ll fell your luscious daughter..... we will make the city of Poona dance’. Not only will Nana be able to satisfy his lust but he will also be able to unleash terror in Poona through the Kotwal who can never really become powerful as he is an outsider. The opportunistic and short-sighted Kotwal cannot see that he and his daughter are being exploited. Not only is the Nana exploiting his daughter but he himself as a parent has bartered her away as an object for his own selfish ends. This is a subtle comment on the status of women in society as it existed then and society as it exists now.

As Kotwal, Ghashiram becomes unbearably arrogant and insufferable. His misplaced sense of morality ("I'll straighten out this adulterous city") makes him absolutely blind to reason and he indicts innocent people on various charges. Even without the least shred of evidence, people are imprisoned and put through the worst kinds of torture such as forcibly putting a red hot iron ball on a brahman's hands to make him 'confess' a wrong he has not committed.

When he hears that his daughter has been sent off to a midwife in Kasba Peth, Ghashiram sheds his deference towards Nana and confronts him aggressively only to be soon placated by Nana who reminds him that 'protocol should not be forgotten' (p.43). Though numb with grief, Ghashiram can no longer accuse Nana for causing the death of his beloved child and finally we see him bowing humbly before the ruffled Nana. Love for his child on the one hand and love for his position on the other find expression in this paradoxical behaviour.

When Ghashiram catches some hungry Brahmans stealing mangoes from his orchard, he has them all locked up in a small cell. Twenty two Brahmans suffocate to death and all hell breaks loose. The incident comes to the notice of the Peshwa and Ghashiram can no longer escape punishment. The Poona Brahmans would be satisfied with nothing less than Ghashiram's head and Nana cheerfully signs the order for his death as there was no use for him any more (p.52). It is here that we find that Ghashiram the cruel administrator of law and order is himself a victim of a system in which people like him are created and destroyed when they outlast their utility. Does the evil lie in the individual or the system?

Ghashiram, as we have seen, is a character who does not win our sympathy. The first impression of subservience is maintained in his relationship with Nana. As a father, he not only fails to protect his daughter but willingly hands her over to Nana, into 'the jaws of that wolf' (p.22). In his role as Kotwal, he oversteps his brief and instead of protecting the people of Poona creates terror and destruction. In short, he fails as a father, a husband, a Kotwal but what's more as a human being, becoming a pawn of the system that creates and destroys him. Ghashiram develops from a harmless newcomer into a ruthless and sadistic Kotwal and it is only when he repents of his deeds before his violent death that he earns our sympathy. His moment of revelation comes when he says, 'I should be punished for the death of my daughter' (p.54) But you will notice that this sympathy is not for Ghashiram the individual but for people like him who become victims of circumstances.

25.3.4 The Women in the Play

You will have noticed that even though women are mentioned, they hardly exist in the play. The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani to the house of Gulabi the courtesan. Gulabi is seen dancing with Ghashiram and providing entertainment both to the characters and the audience. She tantalizingly keeps the men who want to touch her at bay. In addition to this seductive image, Gulabi is also a determined woman who forcibly takes the necklace given to Ghashiram by Nana.

While the Poona Brahmans are lusting after Gulabi, their wives remain at home. But are they alone? The Sutradhar informs us that they 'are sentenced to solitary confinement' (p.8) but this turns out to be an ironical comment in the light of the fact that a Brahman woman waits with a saucy air for her lover, a Maratha landowner. Would this imply that Brahman women had the freedom to take lovers in feudal Poona? Certainly not. What is depicted is a transgression and within the play serves to expose the contradictions that exist between the public and the private.

We see women from time to time on stage but merely as mute characters, Lalitha Gauri, Gulabi and Chandra the midwife have a few insignificant dialogues in the

play. What does this imply? Does the fact that women are totally marginalized in the play in some way reflect social attitudes towards women? Even though women are ‘hardly there’, the violence and oppression against them is clear throughout. That they are treated as objects is also evident in the Nana’s various relationships with different women – Gulabi, Lalita Gauri and the young bride that he marries. He does not see them as individuals but as playthings to be trifled with and then discarded.

In plays like *Kamala*, *Kanyadaan*, and *Silence the Court is in Session*, women play a central role. But because Tendulkar seemingly shows them as losers and always exploited and used, some critics have called him anti-women. But Tendulkar presents his own point of view:

‘When I show the struggle of a woman, it is not one woman’s fight. The individual must have name and identity and caste and background to be credible, but she is not just a woman on stage, in a particular play. I am, in writing of her situation, showing that the possibility of a struggle against it exists.... By not giving a solution, I leave possibilities open, for whatever course the change may take. When the members of my audience go home and chew on the situation, they might be able to see their daughter or sister in the woman’s position and come up with a way of changing the situation to her advantage’. (*Femina*: Interview with Satya Saran and Vimla Patil – June 8-22, 1984, p.37).

Do you think the women in *Ghashiram Kotwal* are important? Or are they important only in so far as they are able to offset the characters of Nana and Ghashiram? Or are they a useful structural device in exposing the hypocrisies of society? How does Tendulkar make us think about their plight –by empathy or identification with them or by alienation or distancing us from their situation? These are some of the questions for us to think about and discuss in the next unit. Meanwhile, let us complete the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the character of Ghashiram and comment on the title of the play.

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25.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed how:

- power operates through both overt and covert means;
- religion, caste and sexuality interlock to maintain the status quo;
- the characters, though based on real historical persons do not develop or come to life as they do in *Macbeth* or *The Doll’s House* but remain unidimensional. Tendulkar’s aim seems to be not to provide us insight into individuals but into social processes and as such the development of character is not his main concern.

25.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Refer to Section 25.2
- ii) Refer to Section 25.2
- iii) Read the ending of the play once more before you write your comment.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Look at Section 25.3.3 and Section 25.6 in the previous Unit before you write your answer.

UNIT 26 DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Language and Style
- 26.3 Dramatic Techniques
 - 26.3.1 Music and Dance
 - 26.3.2 The Human Wall
 - 26.3.3 The Use of Folk Forms
- 26.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.5 Suggested Readings
- 26.6 Answers to Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- outline Tendulkar's use of language and style;
- discuss the different dramatic techniques used by Tendulkar;
- outline the special theatrical effects projected by the human wall;
- explain how song and dance taken from Indian folk forms create a special blend of the old and new in this play.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last Unit in your Block and it also happens to be the last one of the course. You have read one-act plays, three-act plays as well as longer plays like Shakespeare's 5-act *Julius Caesar*. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is not divided into the conventional demarcations of act and scene. Nor is it as long as *Julius Caesar*. But it has two parts separated by an interval. The scenes change smoothly, orchestrated and directed by the subtle commentary of the Sutradhar and the configuration of the human wall that arranges and re-arranges itself on stage. As such there is no need for a curtain that is usually required in a conventional performance. While reading the play, you must have noticed the innovative techniques used by Tendulkar. It would seem that the director's task is easy for the variations and dramatic effects seem to be inbuilt.

So far, we have given you a brief introduction to Indian theatre in general and Marathi theatre in particular in the first unit. We also read about the life and works of Tendulkar. Then we discussed the background of the play, i.e. the historical situation and the people on whom it is based as well as the central theme of power and how it is constructed in a society interested in maintaining the status quo. By this we mean the hierarchies of class, caste and gender by which some dominate and oppress others. In this Unit, we shall take up questions relating to form – i.e. techniques by which the playwright effectively communicates his vision. In short, *how* and *by* which methods the theme is expressed.

First we shall discuss the use of language and style, and the other dramatic techniques by which Tendulkar achieves his ends.

Please complete the exercises we have prepared for you. Remember that in literature there can be more than one interpretation. As such you may come up with a fresh response to the play which may be different from ours. Please read the play as well the discussion **carefully** and **critically** so that you are able to decide for yourself whether you agree/disagree with the points being made and whether you have alternative readings to propose.

26.2 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

We are often told: 'Style is the man himself'. And every literary piece carries the particular stamp of the specific idiom of the writer. For example, we can say that the style of one playwright is different from the style of another. For example, the style of Shakespeare is different from that of Shaw. But in a play the writer is speaking through the person of the different characters. And so the style has to vary according to the personality of the character. In fact an educated person speaks differently from an uneducated one. In short, each person has his/her/own style of speaking. And the success of a playwright lies in the extent to which he/she can script the dialogues to suit the personality of the character.

In *Ghashiram Kotwal* we have a range of characters from the powerful Nana to a member of the chorus. How far has Tendulkar succeeded in giving us a variety of dialogues to suit his characters? But before we do that, let us consider the fact that what we have before us is a play in translation.

The Play in Translation

Translation does not simply mean rewriting the Marathi text into English. It also means translating the cultural context of eighteenth century Poona into an English version. There is no doubt that Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot have succeeded in rendering the translation as faithful to the spirit of the original as possible. While translating drama, the translator often adapts the play according to the demands and expectations of the audience in the target language. It is not possible to translate literally and some degree of adaptation is required in literary texts. As Eleanor Zelliot, the translator has said that Tendulkar's play demands and inspires a great deal of creativity, gives the example of a Marathi abuse which translates literally as 'O you worthless one'. As this sounded somewhat weak, the translators felt that an original substitute with the necessary punch would be 'you shape piece of shit!'.

Most serious theatre is enacted in Hindi itself and in Delhi, theatre groups usually perform the works of world famous dramatists like Brecht and Beckett in Hindi translation. English theatre usually confines itself to Western plays written in English or in translation. However, urban theatre groups are increasingly taking up the production of English translations of various plays written in Hindi or the regional languages. For example, the theatre groups of Bombay took up the production of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*. English translations ensure that the play reaches out across different linguistic barriers to different parts of our own vast country. In addition, a foreign readership can also have access to it. Do we ourselves not read the plays by the great Greek dramatists in translation? The play begins with a hymn to Ganapati and Saraswati and the translators have tried to keep to the rhythm of the original: 'Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance. We the Poona Brahmans bow and prance' (p.2). The rhyming adds to the musical quality. Culture specific words as 'Bhatji buwa', 'sindur', 'lavani', 'kirtan' are retained as in the original. Instead of translating them, notes explaining these are given at the beginning of the text. The flavour of the idiom of the original is retained as in the abuse 'May you itch without cause' and 'I would have you riding backward on a donkey with **sindur** all over

your head'. The arrogant Nana refers to himself in the plural as 'we'. For example, he tells the servant 'We'll have you killed'. He promises Gauri 'But our devotion is – only to this graceful image...' This reference to oneself in the plural is a convention among the royalty in India as well as in the West. For example, Queen Victoria was often known to say 'We are not amused'.

You will have noticed that the dialogues are short and crisp. No long speeches but quick exchanges often laced with wit. The 'tamasha' convention of using abusive language is also used here. It is only the Sutradhar who has slightly longer dialogues. The Nana in a moderately long soliloquy reveals his evil intentions to use Ghashiram to serve his own infamous purpose. There is the use of colloquial language and a feel for the spoken word. When asked by Priya Adarkar about his craft of writing, Tendulkar said: 'But this is a question of my playing with various styles and levels rather than of conscious planning. I am in fact at ease in many styles of language' (Enact 49, 50 Jan-Feb 1971 ed. Rajinder Paul).

This irony and play with words is also evident in the following exchange:

Nana: Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

Ghashiram: Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter.

Wit and irony is also evident in the following:

There are several other examples of the use of pun in the play. Can you recognize the pun in:

There's only one Nana
The rest are na-na-na-na. (p. 21)

The element of slapstick comedy is clear in one of the early exchange between the Sutradhar and the Brahman:

Sutradhar: Ho Ho Ho Bhatji Buwa!
Wait now, wait now. Hold your horses! Must you go?
Brahman: Forces? Whose forces? Foreign? English?
Sutradhar: Not forces! Hold your horses!
Brahman: So I'm stopped. What do you have to say?
Sutradhar: Where is your honour going so late at night?
Brahman: Nowhere, nowhere. It's all right.
Sutradhar: Where is nowhere?
Brahman: Just near somewhere.
Sutradhar: Somewhere is near where?
Brahman: Go away. Don't wait. Its getting late. (p. 3)

This kind of exchange continues until the Brahman unwittingly reveals his destination. Note the use of pun and irony in this passage. The rhyming dialogues add a rhythmic quality and establish the light mood that this scene creates.

The Sutradhar's dialogues are full of tongue-in-cheek irony.

'The Brahmans have lost themselves in the cemetery, in kirtan; the Brahman women are sentenced to solitary confinement' (p. 8). We are shown a Brahman woman embracing her lover while the husband is away in Bavannakhani. Also consider his comment:

The thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves? (p. 16)

Sutradhar: Yes, this is the brutish city.

Stranger (not understanding): What, the British city?

Notice the pun on the word 'brutish' which is misunderstood as 'British'. In the eighteenth century, the British were a tangible presence in India and to use 'brutish' and 'British' exchangeably may offer a subtle comment on the nature of Empire.

In fact, there is another reference to the British in the play. You will recall that when Ghashiram is beaten up by Gulabi's thugs and the necklace given to him by Nana forcibly taken away from him we are told that a 'palanquin of a white man comes on the stage..... In front a Brahman with ash on his forehead shouts. 'The Sahib is coming. Get aside' (p. 12). Then the Brahman says – 'Get aside, you dog. Can't you see the Sahib is coming?..... (Turns to the Sahib). The natives of this country have lost all their manners nowadays, sir, I swear, no one has any self-respect or pride. Come on sir. Now you'll get to see the ceremony of the giving of royal gifts to the Brahmans, from the inside. I'll sneak you in. Only three silver rupees, sir'.

What is the significance of this scene? Is it introduced purely for spectacle value? It might seem so at first. But if we catch the underlying irony, we understand that the real function of the scene is to:

- a) prove the sycophantic character of the Brahman;
- b) expose his lack of manners which he confirms by abusing the humiliated Ghashiram and;
- c) his hypocrisy: while he blames others for the lack of self-respect and pride, he himself has none as he tries to wheedle and coax money out of the Sahib.

The presence of a white Sahib observing the execution of Ghashiram also urges us to analyse the phenomenon of his rise and fall more objectively.

But in addition to the dialogue, gestures and silence can sometimes speak more than a thousand words. Tendulkar makes effective use of mime – especially in the ordeal scene: 'Brahman yells. Mime of placing the ball forcibly in his hands. Brahman yells. Mime of the ball falling off (p. 35). This indicates the convention of not showing violent action on stage. And even though this is a very violent play, the audience would not be shocked whereas in the American production where the violence was depicted realistically, the effect was one of deep shock.

As we said in the first Unit of this Block, reading plays is a challenge. Not only does the reader have to visualize all the scenes but he/she has also to listen to the voices with all the modulations of tone and inflexion to catch the nuance of what is intended within a particular context. For example, if we say 'How wonderful!' to a person who tells us that she has stood first in a competitive exam our tone will be full of delight, wonder and appreciation. But if we respond in the same way to a person who has just failed an examination, it is clear that we mean to be sarcastic. Thus, it is important to relate the speech to the context and understand the significance of the meaning intended. For example, the sarcasm implicit in the Sutradhar's tone is evident in the following exchange:

Brahman: Oy. Oy. You son of a bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?

Sutradhar: I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

- Brahman: Don't you have any manners?
Sutradhar: I'm so sorry, O lordly Brahman.
Brahman: Don't you have any brains.
Sutradhar: I'm very sorry. O **honoured** Brahman (p. 4).

The abusive language, as you know, is part of the Tamasha convention that Tendulkar makes use of.

In this play we have poetic dialogues as well as prose exchanges alternating with the narration of the Sutradhar. In addition there are songs and humming, silence and mime. All these variations help to create a complex and rich dramatic piece.

26.3 DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

The first question that we so often ask about a novel or play or poem is "What is it about? This leads us to think about the theme of the play. We can also ask ourselves 'Does it have a message or function? Like all art, a play is usually not meant to objectively enquire after truth. It may aim 'to instruct by pleasing'. (*Studying Drama: An Intro*. Malcolm Kelsall, London: Edward Arnold, 1988, p. 57). As such it makes the audience angry or moves them to tears or to laughter and sometimes to think. Talking about the function of theatre the famous playwright Mohan Rakesh has said:

'To my mind the function of theatre today is not just to entertain, nor just to reveal certain ironies and contradictions of man's mind and behaviour nor just to philosophise or sermonize over certain socio-political issues. For me the major function of theatre today is to help man to know and discover himself in relation to his environment'. ('Changing Role of Words in Theatre', in an interview with M. Maharishi *Enact* 73-74 Jan-Feb. 1973). Thus a play has several dimensions and effects. How does the playwright achieve his/her effects? This is done by using the various techniques of his/her craft. Visual delight is contributed by the scenery, lighting, colours, costumes as well as special effects. In addition to all this, we have quick racy dialogues, often ironical and witty. Then there are songs, music and dances that add another dimension to the play. All these are part of the playwright's craft. Let us examine some of these techniques.

26.3.1 Music and Dance

Folk theatre, as we have seen, makes use of song, dance and music. No other major playwright before Tendulkar had made such extensive and innovative use of folk theatre. In addition to the songs and music, Dr. Jabbar Patel also made use of humming so that we have what Vasant Rao Deshpande, a classical singer and composer himself, calls 'the first sangeet natak in the real sense of the term'. (in Pushpa Bhawe, '*Contemporary Indian Theatre: Interviews with Playwrights and Directors*' (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1989, p. 47).

Ghashiram Kotwal begins with a devotional song and Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi come in dancing. This immediately establishes a link with Dashavatar (a form of folk theatre) which begins with these three deities. This opening ritual also has links with classical Sanskrit drama and likewise has a certain function, this is, to arouse the interest of the audience, instill a feeling of seriousness in them and to arrest their attention. Here we do not have music for its own sake. According to Pushpa Bhawe, 'The music and the dance numbers are not embellishments to the narrative... The changing musical notes express the changing mood'. (*Contemporary Indian Theatre* – p. 46). In a lecture, the music director of the successful Marathi production Bhaskar Chandavarkar has said that the music in the beginning of the

play was used innocuously in the Shri Ganaraya song. But after the Intermission, when Ghashiram has become the Kotwal, the music for the same song becomes much more revolutionary. Let us look at some of the functions performed by the use of music, song and dance. We note that

- the use of traditional songs and dances effectively sets the background of the decadence of the Peshwas' Poona of the eighteenth century;
- the strategic placement of songs and music help to provide dramatic relief after an unusually tense situation;
- music and dance sometimes serve to reinforce the tense atmosphere, as Satish Alekar assistant director to Dr. Jabbar Patel said, 'After the ordeal by fire the tempo tended to slow down a little. But with the introduction of the 'Malhari' song, the tense atmosphere created by the sequence was reinforced'. (Ghashiram Kotwal: A Production Casebook, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, xiv, xv);
- the lavani highlights the sensuous, passionate element but at the same time provides a comment on the social corruption;
- the juxtaposition of the **lavani** or love song with the **abhang**a or devotional song serves to bring out the contradiction in social values and norms;
- the musical form helps to 'deglamourize' history – history has an element of grandeur, distance, formality, which gets reduced by the introduction of song and dance, visible in the great Nana who struck terror in the hearts of many but is made to look ridiculous in the play.

We have also seen that at a deeper level, *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a serious play, a satire on the hollowness of society. Do you think the music weakens the thrust of the satire? Tendulkar himself admits: 'The criticism has a point... the form had a certain inevitability'. Are we to agree with Tendulkar? Trust the tale and not the teller, we are often told. And as we know, the play has been considered extremely disturbing. In this play we have seen that laughter can be as much an element of subversion and change as anger. The grotesque figure of the Nana dancing effeminately demystified the power he represents and thereby shows the hollowness of what he represents so that we are made aware of the fact that the possibility of change exists. The form and content subvert logical and authoritarian structures. We have seen in the play how folk forms with the abusiveness represent irrepressible vitality and freedom, and as we can see in *Ghashiram* it very subtly subverts the hierarchy of caste in the following exchange:

Brahman: Oy. Oy. You son of a bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?

Sutradhar: I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

Brahman: Don't you have any manners?

Sutradhar: I'm so sorry, O lordly Brahman.

Brahman: Don't you have any brains?

Sutradhar: I'm very sorry, O honoured Brahman.

Brahman: You bumped me, you son of a bastard.

Sutradhar: I touch your feet, O Brahman.

Brahman: 'Oh you monkey! Is this the Peshvai or the Mughal Kingdom?
Bumps a holy Brahman'.

Sutradhar: But not a Brahman's wife! (p. 4).

You can note the sarcasm and insult intended in this exchange. Thus laughter can be seen as a political mode.

As we have also seen, music and dance have not been used for its own sake. The songs sung or hummed by the chorus establish the appropriate mood and comment on the action. What we have here is a blend of folk forms with mainstream urban drama which has created a unique landmark in the history of Indian theatre.

26.3.2 The Human Wall

We have already discussed the character of the Sutradhar in 25.3.1. Let us now briefly look at the function of the Human wall which is seen as ‘the basic structure of the play’. The play opens with the members of the human wall walking up to the stage from the hall. The twelve men dressed as brahmans form the human wall which can be used in diverse ways.

- Producer Rajinder Nath used this wall to form ‘kaleidoscopic patterns’. Reviewing the play, Rajinder Paul tells us:

“From an aesthetically clothed backdrop, he [Rajinder Nath] rhythmically removes one Brahman like a brick to make a cut-out window, from behind which emerges a female figure on the look-out for a noble catch”.

- The human wall is an innovation and takes the place of a curtain in a conventional stage. Here the stage is stark and empty without any props and when the members turn their backs, to the audience, the wall ceases to exist. As there is no conventional demarcation of the play into acts and scenes, the human wall helps in the transition from one scene to another.
- The wall serves as a chorus in the play. As you know the chorus is a convention found and used very effectively in ancient Greek drama also. It was usually a group of village elders, dressed in masks, who gave an account of the event that had happened either offstage or a long time ago. In Greek drama, the chorus moved from left to right and back again. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* the ‘Chorus’ of twelve men comprising the human wall sway in unison. Not only do they sing and dance establishing a link with folk theatre, but they also comment on the action of the play.

The Brahmans make a curtain with backs towards the audience. The curtain sings and sways:

Ram Shiva Hari....

The Street of Bavannakhani, became for a
while

The garden of Krishna. (p. 6).

The song exposes the debauchery of the Brahmans who in the name of God Krishna, in this case, wish to justify their erotic dancing with the courtesan.

- The human wall is also a binding factor that holds the different scenes together. The plot has several episodes which make it different from naturalistic plays in which one scene follows necessarily from another. Instead of artificially engineered exits and entrances, the play then assumes a semblance of continuity and motion. What cannot be represented realistically is projected through mime and the stage is never empty.
- The human wall also takes on individual roles. At times it is transformed into a group sitting in Gulabi’s hall; at others, they sneak off stealthily as individuals, in a hurry to get to Bavannakhani. At another the Brahmans form a human

god house round Ganapati, and when the Nana chases a girl, the human wall becomes a garden. Throughout the play you will notice the human wall assuming new and visually stimulating configurations. And finally at Ghashiram's execution, the human wall becomes the fierce mob of angry Brahmans shouting with sadistic glee.

The human wall is also a symbol of secrecy that conceals the various faces of human beings: their hypocrisy, double standards and tendencies to violence and oppression. This is amply demonstrated in the course of the play.

Thus we have seen that along with its tremendous potential as spectacle, the human wall performs several functions controlling and enhancing the flow of the story. In addition, the use of the human wall makes it as easy to put up the play on a conventional stage or in any open space in a village.

26.3.3 The Use of Folk Forms

We have seen that Tendulkar has made extensive use of folk forms in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Because of this the play is visually exciting. What effect does the play have? Folk theatre invites audience participation and in this play we have the Sutradhar and Ghashiram addressing the audience directly. According to Jabbar Patel, this is different from the effect that Brecht, the German playwright intended to create. But before we examine whether this is true, let us understand what Brecht had to say.

According to Brecht 'Modern theatre is epic theatre'. (quoted in John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (Lond) Eyre Methuen, 1981, p. 170). He further lists nineteen points of difference between dramatic and epic form of theatre in No. 2 of the new volumes in notes to *Mahagonny*, of which five are listed below:

Dramatic form of theatre	Epic form of theatre
• Implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer arouses
• wears down his power of action	
• the human being is taken for granted	the human being is an object of enquiry
• he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter.
• eyes on the finish	eyes on the course.

The aim of this Epic form of theatre for Brecht was 'to develop the means of entertainment into an object of instruction, and to change certain institutions from places of amusement into organs of public communication'. (p. 170). What Brecht tried to achieve through his plays was a feeling of alienation in the audience rather than identification or empathy with the characters. He achieved this by stressing the artificial nature of the stage but also demanded of his audience a critical appraisal of the social causes and results of their action. In order to achieve this 'alienation effect' Brecht punctuated the action with songs, montage, (the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images) captions (for example, a character could well carry a placard saying 'cousin' to indicate his/her status), verse, projections etc. These are meant to jolt the audience out of empathy so that he/she is distanced and begins to look at the situation in a new light. Brecht's objective is political – to make the audience unmask the contradictions of society and so help open up the possibilities for change.

From your reading of *Ghashiram Kotwal* do you think Tendulkar had any intention of creating Epic Theatre on Brechtian lines? According to Dr. Jabbar Patel, as

Ghashiram speaks directly to the audience, the effect achieved is the opposite of that usually created by Brecht. (Preface – Hindi translation of *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Vasant Dev).

In any case, this is a difficult question because the effect of a play is highly variable and different audiences respond to it in different ways. In fact the same production can have a new effect every time it is staged. Even Brecht's own productions sometimes failed to create the alienation effect.

However, the setting of the play in eighteenth century Poona helps to create a sense of distance. Characters in period costume produce the effect that the people portrayed are removed from us in time and space. Moreover, Nana depicted in the play is quite different from the revered Nana of history. This grotesque dancing character reinforces the fact that the spectator is watching a play rather than witnessing reality. Tendulkar has used the folk form which is predominantly interactive and ensures active audience participation. But here the folk form is used in mainstream theatre and the use of songs and dances further creates a sense of distance from the action.

In the first reading of the play, it seems that the personality clash between Nana and Ghashiram is the main theme. Nana promotes Ghashiram and when his protégé becomes a maniacal monster as is evident in the climactic ordeal-by-fire scene, the Nana decides that the time is ripe for destroying the creation that is now of no more use to him. But on a more careful reading, we realize it is the social system that throws up such aberrations that is being probed. So while the song, dance and visual configurations of the human wall provide for sheer entertainment, the juxtaposition of dialogue, verse, hymn, love song, dance, narration and mime make us probe beyond surface appearances to understand the subtle and complex social processes that dehumanize individuals. And unless the system is changed, such a situation will continue. The end of the play with its revellery may project the false illusion that all is now well with the world on one level but on another it is clear that this is a mere façade and the real danger continues to thrive. So, for such a complex play which operates on many different levels, it may not be suitable to pin down the effect to either 'empathy' or 'alienation'. It seems that the play veers between the two. And you will agree that the dominant impact is one of shock at the violence and cruelty depicted. Can it also be related to Antonin Artaud's 'The Theatre of Cruelty'?

What do we mean by the Theatre of Cruelty? According to Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theatre a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigour and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood'. ('Second Manifesto' *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. Eric Beaulieu ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1983, p. 66). Such a theatre must create a dynamic language of expressions that will arouse general attention. This would include the visual language of movements, attitudes, gestures, music, dance and mime. This language of theatre must transgress the usual limits of art and speech so that what results is 'a kind of total creation in which man must reassume his place between dream and events'. (p. 58). What are the themes of this Theatre of Cruelty? According to Artaud the subject and themes that will be chosen would correspond to the 'agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch'. (p. 66). If you look at the play in the light of such observations you will find that there are certain similarities between what Artaud proposed and what Tendulkar achieved.

As we have seen, *Ghashiram Kotwal* admits of several interpretations. Literature, as we know, contains a plurality of discourses, and it is this that allows us to read a text in different ways. It is not simply a case of taking up a particular aspect of what is in the text. Reading is an active process in which all aspects of our own personality also come into play. For example, a person reading this play twenty

years from now will look at it differently from the way we do now. Also a person from another culture will have a perspective that is not the same as ours. As reading and interpreting is a highly variable and subjective phenomenon, we should try to look at a text from different angles. For example, if there is a picture on the wall, you will find that it looks different if you stand on a table/stool/floor. Similarly there are different angles of looking at a literary text. This is something that we would like to encourage and would request you to inculcate. Let us now do the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Outline the role of the human wall giving examples from the text.

.....

ii) Tendulkar has made use of song, dance, music, mime, dialogue and narration in the play. Illustrate the extent to which these elements contribute to the total effect of the play.

.....

iii) Write a short note on the language and style of the play.

.....

26.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed:

- the language and style of the play, keeping in mind the fact that it has been translated from Marathi into English. The play works more by visuals rather than by words and it is here that we notice the effective use of folk forms by Tendulkar;
- song and dance are integral to the action of the play and not just superadded to provide entertainment alone. Rather than subverting the satirical thrust of the play, song and dance serve to make it more effective by overturning accepted norms in terms of theatrical forms;
- the human wall is an innovative-device that not only dissolves into visuals and exciting configurations but also serves to control the flow of the story;
- the effect produced by the play can be seen as neither of ‘empathy’ as in the dramatic form of theatre nor one of ‘alienation’ as in the Epic form of Theatre but also akin to the Theatre of Cruelty so that the audience can understand the social processes that lead to violence and cruelty, a malaise that Tendulkar studied as a research project and effectively depicted in artistic form in his plays.

26.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

For an introduction to modern theatre and drama, you could look at: Eric Bentley (ed) – *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)

Siegfriedn Melchinger, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Modern Drama* (New York: Horizon Press, 1964)

Venna Noble Dass, *Modern Indian Drama in English Translation* (Hyderabad, 1988).

26.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- i) To answer this question, you will need to go back to 26.3.2. In addition, you will have to go through the text and mark the examples. Then you will write down the answer in your own words.
- ii) This answer requires some thinking on your part. You will have to consult the text as well as the discussion in 26.2, and 26.3.2, 26.3.3. Remember that originality in interpretation will be appreciated.
- iii) Look at the discussion in Section 26.2, select suitable examples from the text and write down your answer in your own words.

UNIT 1 THE NOVEL: A LITERARY GENRE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Defining a Novel
- 1.3 Origins and Rise of the Novel
- 1.4 Types of the Novel
- 1.5 Literary Trends in 18th Century England
 - 1.5.1 Prominent Novelists of the Age
- 1.6 Literary Trends in 19th Century England
 - 1.6.1 Prominent Novelists of the Age
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Glossary
- 1.9 Answers to Self- Check Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to define a novel. We will also trace its origins and look at its development through the last three centuries briefly. Once you finish this unit you should be in a position to define a novel, to trace its origin, and development and to be able to distinguish the different types of novels.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The literary term 'novel' may be applicable to a great variety of prose writing particularly in this day and age. The 'novel' as a genre is not easy to define, due to its extremely open and flexible form. Not only this, the 'novel' also evades definition just as other literary terms that are also very difficult to define. However, since we are going to be talking about the novel and studying various types of novels in this course, we would still need to define a novel.

The novel is largely a creation of the west though there have been critics who have tried to locate it in the ancient writings of Egypt and the writings from the middle ages in Japan. The truth however, is that the novel as we know it today emerged in the 18th century in England.

Let us now try and work at defining a novel in the next section.

1.2 DEFINING A NOVEL

Edward Morgan Foster (1879 – 1970) in his critical work *Aspects of the Novel* published in 1928 states that a novel should have a minimum length of about 50,000 words. Anything in prose that is shorter than 50,000 words would be a novella or a short novel. A novel would therefore need to be longer than a long short story. We may also say that a novel should be longer than a folktale, a fable, or a short story. This definition that we have worked out

however, is merely a comprehensive definition of the term 'novel' and would not be applicable to each and every type of novel.

A novel has a story to tell but all stories do not usually develop into novels. The origins of the novel may be traced to the ancient epic and the medieval romance traditions.

Exercise I

Answer these questions in your own words, briefly, after reading the preceding sections carefully. Try not to refer to the earlier sections while writing these answers.

1. Why is it difficult to define a novel? Give three reasons.

i)

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ii)

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iii)

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2. Having said that it is difficult to define a novel can you, still provide a working definition of the term 'novel'?

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3. Is your working definition of the novel applicable to each and every type of novel? If not, then why do we still need such a definition?

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1.3 ORIGINS AND RISE OF THE NOVEL

Of the two ancestors of the novel – the epic is the order form. An epic is a long narrative poem about the deeds of brave warriors and heroes who are ‘larger than life’. The epic poem has a heroic story to narrate and incorporates within it the myth, the legend, folk tales as well as history. Epic poems deal with the history of a country/a clan. In the western tradition there are two types of epics –

- a) Primary
- b) Secondary/Literary

Primary epics by and large belong to the oral tradition whereas secondary or literary epics belong to the written form of literature. **Homer’s** *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf* and *Gilgamesh* are important examples of the primary epic, while **Virgil’s** *Aeneid* and **Milton’s** *Paradise Lost* are fine illustrations of the literary epic. In India we have the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as well as **Kalidasa’s** *Avigansh Shakuntalam* and *Meghdoot*, which are counted among the classics of world literatures. The epic tradition has come down to us in a very unique manner. For instance, in the last hundred years or so, the cinema has been the favoured media for narratives on an epic scale. Novels such as, **Herman Melville’s** *Moby Dick* (1851), **Tolystoy’s** *War and Peace* (1865 – 72), *Anna Karenina* (1875 – 76) and **James Joyce’s** *Finnegans Wake* (1939) have all been made into films.

Now, let us look at the second source of the modern novel – the romance. The romance was a literary form that was popular in medieval times. In the 13th Century a romance was an adventure story usually of love or chivalry, and it was written in verse. It must be remembered that the romance is primarily a European form, and about characters that live in a courtly world. The word romance itself is suggestive of the elements of fantasy, improbability and extravaganza, as well as love, adventure and the marvellous and it was written in verse. However, over time it came to be written in prose. During medieval times there were three cycles –

- a) The matter of Britain that dealt with the stories of the *Legend of King Arthur* and his Knights of the Round Table.

- b) The matter of Rome that told the stories of *Alexander the Great*, the Trojan wars and the *House of Thebes*.
- c) The matter of France that narrated the tales of the bravery and chivalry of *King Charlemagne* and his Knights.

We have tried to define both the *Epic* and the *Romance*, as they are the forefathers of the novel. Interestingly, the novel owes its name to the Italian word *novella* meaning a tale or a piece of news. The novel is called *roman* in French and is derived from the word *romance*. But before I conclude, let me also tell you that yet another important predecessor of the novel was the picaresque narrative that originated in Spain in the 16th Century.

Most of you may be aware of the novel *The History of Tom Jones, the Foundling* by **Henry Fielding**. This 18th century novel is written in the picaresque tradition with a 'picaro' or rogue for a hero/protagonist and the novel deals with his escapades. So essentially what I am trying to tell you is that the novel had three predecessors:

- a) The Epic
- b) The Romance and
- c) The Picaresque Narrative

A novel therefore, may be defined as a long story written and printed in book form, and dealing with imaginary people and situations, while creating an illusion of reality.

Exercise II

1. State whether the following statements are True or False:

- (a) Primary Epics belong to the written tradition. T F
- (b) *Odyssey* is an example of a Secondary Epic. T F
- (c) Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. T F
- (d) A Romance is a literary form of ancient times. T F
- (e) A 'picaro' is a rogue hero. T F

The novel was born in the west, primarily in the 17th century but its development took place largely in the 18th Century. Critics have tried to trace its origins to ancient Egypt, or even medieval Japan but the novel as a genre, was a creation of the west. Some critics like **Walter Raleigh** have even stated that:

With the works of Richardson and Fielding the career of the novel may be said to have begun. (The English Novel, Walter Raleigh, pp. 180)

This brings me to the next important point. Why did the novel flourish in 18th Century England? There were several reasons for that and let me tell you about them very quickly.

The industrial revolution had taken place in England and the rest of Europe. This meant that people had more leisure that could be dedicated to reading and writing. Moreover, industrialisation led to tremendous improvement in printing technology, as a result of which more books/novels could be printed and that too easily. Then book clubs and circulating libraries were gaining popularity as well. The other important reasons for the rise and development of the novel in 18th century England was the changing socio-political and socio-cultural milieu. The old system of patronage was gradually coming to an end. And the writers did not need to look towards the feudal lords for patronage. They could now turn to the readers/public for support. The 18th century was a century of relative peace and prosperity in England and England emerged as an international power with the strongest navy in the world. An economically powerful and dominant middle class began to emerge along with a steady increase in population. Literacy too saw a sharp rise.

Having given the various reasons behind the development of the novel in 18th century England let me now tell you about the different types of novels that were and are still being written in the next section.

Exercise III

Answer the following questions in your own words.

1. When was the novel born in England? Did its development take place in the same century or in the next?

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2. What in your opinion was the reason for the emergence of the novel in England? Answer briefly in point form.

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1.4 TYPES OF THE NOVEL

Critics down the ages have tried to classify novels into various types. If we are to enumerate all types of novels it may not be a useful endeavour as no rigid classification is possible as the same novel may belong to more than one type. However, we do need typologies for the simple reason that they are convenient as they provide for us with convenient labels that help us in knowing what to anticipate in a particular novel. Thus, in this section we try and give some shape to a variety of novels by classifying them on the basis of:

1. The **extra-disciplinary field** they are close to such as sociological novels, psychological novels, political novels, historical novels, religious novels, and science fiction.
2. Their subject matter such as **utopian novels**, crime novels, detective fiction, and **bildungsroman**.
3. Their literary style/structure/technique such as **epistolary novels**, realistic novels, naturalistic novels, **stream-of-consciousness novels**, psychological novels or the novel of character.
4. The particular emotions that they evoke such as romantic novels, sentimental novels, or the “escape” novels.
5. The particulars class interests that they evoke such as **bourgeois** novels, or the **proletarian** novels.
6. The geographical areas that they highlight such as **Westerns**, **local colour novels**, or the novels of the soil.
7. The geographical areas from which the novelists hail such as **Indo-Anglian** novels, **Commonwealth** novels, and **African** novels.

(The Novel: An Introduction, 1997, Dr A/K Raina and Dr Rana Nayar, IGNOU, Block 1, p. 9)

Apart from this there are other classifications as well. Let me begin by telling you about the **Novel of Incident** – good illustrations of this type of novel are the novels of **Daniel Defoe**, novels such as, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). Both these novels are of the picaresque narrative type as the structure of these novels is episodic rather than organised plot form, and both novels also have very convincing central protagonists. The next type under discussion is the **Novel of Character** that may also be known as the **Psychological Novel**. The focus in such a novel is the protagonist’s motives, on what s/he does or how s/he will turn out as a person. A good example is **Samuel Richardson’s** *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740).

Pamela may also be considered as an **Epistolary Novel** in which the narrative is communicated to us through letters. This type of novel is also to be found in more recent times such as, in **Alice Walker’s** *The Color Purple*. Then we also

have the **Realistic Novel** that is characterised largely by its fictional effect of realism. In such novels, the characters are often complex and they operate within developed social structures while interacting with a large number of characters.

The exponents of such realistic novels were **Defoe, Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot** and **Henry James** amongst others. From the writings of people such as, **Jane Austen** emerges the **Novel of Manners** – or a novel that focuses on the customs, conversation, and ways of thinking and valuing of a particular social class. The **Bildungsroman** and **Erziehungroman** meaning the **Novel of Formation** or **Novel of Education** (*M H Abrahams, p.193*). The main theme of such types of novel is the development of the main character's/the protagonist's mind and character through the narrative. **Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre** (1847) and **George Eliot's the Mill on the Floss** (1860) are examples of such types of novels.

Then there are other novels such as, **Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin**, or more recently **John Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath**; these are examples of the **Social Novel**. If we have read either of these novels we will find that such novels are influenced by the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the age in which these novels were written.

Sir Walter Scott's such as, *Ivanhoe* (1819) and **Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities** are examples of the **Historical Novel**. As is obvious from the term – historical novel, these novels deal with not only the characters but also the socio-political settings of a real historical age.

There are many different types of novels – for instance **Documentary Fiction, Non Fiction Novel, Regional Novel, Involved Novel, Anti Novel, Nouveauroman** (the new novel); **Magic Realism; Metafiction** and **Fabulation** to name just a few, but for our purpose, the types we have dealt with in some detail are sufficient.

In the next section we shall look at the literary trends in Eighteenth century England.

Exercise IV

- 1. Do we need to classify novels at all? Give a well thought out answer.

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- 2. Match the following:

- (a) Daniel Defoe (a) *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- (b) Psychological Novel (b) Novel of Formation
- (c) Jane Austen (c) *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded*

(d) Bildungsroman

(d) *Sense and Sensibility*

(e) Social Novels

(e) *Moll Flanders*

1.5 LITERARY TRENDS IN 18th CENTURY ENGLAND

Eighteenth Century England was the age of transition as **Edward Albert** puts it in his *History of English Literature*. This was the age when two distinct strands of influence were at work simultaneously. The first of these twin strands was the adherence, the allegiance or even the denying of the old order of classicism. The second strand was that of Romanticism. Romanticism meant a return to real nature and a new look at the human's positions and role in the midst of the natural world. It also meant a new way of looking at the poor and the oppressed and a drastic change in diction. Writers were now aiming for simplicity and sincerity in their words.

They were turning to the legends and the myths of old for their inspiration with such a trend in place, it became important for writers to revive ancient literary forms such as the ballad and as yet, there was also a general sense of inquiry and keen interest that began to create an entirely new spirit of thinking. Writers also began turning to history for their stories and in general there was sympathy and freshness in the writings of the period.

1.4.1 Prominent Novelists of the Age

Samuel Richardson (1689-17761) is one of the prominent novelists of this period. He was over fifty, when *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* was published in 1740. This novel is in the form of a series of letters/an epistolary novel. His next major novel was *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-48).

Henry Fielding (1707-54) His novel *Joseph Andrews* appeared in 1742. **Fielding** does away with the epistolary novel and creates a new and powerful novel that carries the reader away with "his broad and vivacious humour; the genial and half contemptuous insight into human nature" (Edward Albert, p. 258). His greatest novel however was *Tom Jones* (1749). Realism is the hallmark of **Fielding's** novels.

The other prominent novelists of the age were:

- a) **Tobias Smollette** (1721-71): *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748);
- b) **Laurence Sterne** (1713-68): *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent* (1760);
- c) **Horace Walpole** (1717-97): *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

1.6 LITERARY TRENDS IN 19th CENTURY ENGLAND

This period saw the actual flowering of Romanticism in all its abundance. As far as the novel was concerned the historical and the domestic novels were established very firmly by **Sir Walter Scott** and **Jane Austen**. It was however, a more fruitful period for poetry and produced great poets such as,

1.7.1 Prominent Novelists of the Age

- a) **Sir Walter Scott** (1771 – 32): *Guy Mannering* (1815); *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818);
- b) **Jane Austen** (1775 – 17): *Pride and Prejudice* (1798-97); *Sense and Sensibility* (1797-98);
- c) **William Makepeace Thackeray** (1811-63): *Vanity Fair* (1847-48); *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852);
- d) **Charles Dickens** (1812-70): *Sketches by Boz* (1836); *A Tale of two Cities* (1859);
- e) **George Eliot** (1819-80): *Adam Bede* (1859); *Middlemarch, a Study of Provincial Life* (1871-72);
- f) **Thomas Hardy** (1840-1928): *Desperate Remedies* (1871); *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874);

Exercise V

1. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) Samuel _____ Richardson _____ wrote _____ in 1740.
- (ii) _____ wrote *Tom Jones*.
- (iii) The Nineteenth Century saw the establishment of the _____ Novel and the Domestic Novel.
- (iv) _____, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, _____, Percy Byshee Shelley and Lord Byron were prominent nineteenth century poets.
- (v) Jane Austen wrote _____ and *Prejudice* and *Sense* and _____.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have defined the novel as a genre, looked at the origins of the novel and its rise as a literary genre in eighteenth century England. We have also defined the different types of novels and summarised the chief literary trends of eighteenth and nineteenth century England. Apart from that we have mentioned the prominent novelists of both the ages. Having read this unit carefully we expect you to be able to define a novel, to be able to recognise the novel as a genre and to be able to identify various types of novel.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Alexander the Great: (336-323 BC) was an ancient Greek King of Macedonia. He was one of the most successful military commanders in history, and was undefeated in battle. By the time of his death, he had conquered most of the world known to the ancient Greeks and had travelled as far as India, particularly the Indus area. His exploits are

the stuff of legends and folklore and the subject of many romances.

- Charlemagne: or Charles the Great; or Charles I of France and the Holy Roman Empire (742/747 – 28 January 814) was King of the Franks from 768 to his death. His rule is also associated with the Carolingian Renaissance, a revival of art, religion, and culture through the medium of the Catholic Church. His foreign conquests and internal reforms, helped define both Western Europe and the middle ages. Today he is not only regarded as the founding father of both French and German monarchies, but as the father of Europe: his empire united most of Western Europe for the first time since the Romans, and the Carolingian renaissance encouraged the formation of a common European identity (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*).
- Fable: a fictitious story meant to teach a moral lesson; the characters in fables are usually talking animals.
- Folk tale: the large body of oral literature belonging to a tribe, or nation, or ethnic group.
- House of Thebes: is a city in Greece, situated to the north of the Cithaeron range, which divides Boeotia from Attica, and on the southern edge of the Boeotian plain. It played an important role in the fabric of Greek myth, as the site of the stories of Cadmus, Oedipus, Dionysus and others. In ancient times, Thebes was the largest city of the region of Boeotia and was the leader of the Boeotian confederacy. It was a major rival of ancient Athens, and sided with the Persians during the 480 BC invasion of Xerxes. Thebes was a major force in Greek history, and was the most dominant city- state at the time of the Macedonian conquest of Greece. During the Byzantine period, the city was famous for its silks. (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*).
- King Arthur: King Arthur is believed to be a prominent English leader in Britain's legendary history, and the hero of many medieval tales and chronicles. He is said to have taken the mantle of a ruler over Britain and defended his land against Saxon invaders following the withdrawal of Rome. The stories of King Arthur include numerous elements of both the legend as well as folklore tradition, while some historians doubt his very existence. The legend that was to become King Arthur was largely developed as a result of the writings of **Geoffrey of Monmouth**, but it needs to be remembered that there were already a large number of Welsh as well as Breton stories and poems about King Arthur, way before **Geoffrey of Monmouth** ever wrote his *Prophetiae Merlini* or his *Historia Regum*

- Legend:** a story handed down for generations among a people and popularly believed to have a historical basis, although not verifiable, all such stories belonging to a particular group of people are also known as legends.
- Memoir:** a biography or biographical sketch, usually one written by someone who knew the subject well, an autobiography, especially one that is objective and anecdotal in emphasis rather than inward and subjective.
- Medieval:** characteristic of or congestive of the middle Ages.
- Myth:** a traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis, but securing usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man or the customer, institutions, religious sites, etc., of a people.
- Narrative(s):** of having the nature of, narration, in story form; a story; account
- Patronage:** the function or status of a patron; support, encouragement, sponsorship, etc given by a patron, goodwill, famous, courtesy etc., shown to people considered inferior; condescension
- Travelogue:** a lecture on travels, usually accompanied by the showing of pictures both still and moving or on slides.

1.9 ANSWERS TO SELF – CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

- (i) Literary genre are difficult to define.
(ii) The Novel is a very flexible form.
(iii) The novel has a very open form.
- A novel may be defined as a prose piece with a minimum length of about 50,000 words. It should be longer than a long short story.
- No, even the working definition of a novel is not applicable to each and every novel.

We still need to define a novel as our main aim is to arrive at a working definition / a comprehensive definition of the term.

Exercise II

- (a) F (d) F
(b) F (e) T
(c) T (f) T

**The Novel: An
Introduction**

2. (i) increase in population
- (ii) emergence and economic ascendance of the middle class
- (iii) availability of leisure time
- (iv) an increase in literacy
- (v) popularity of book clubs and circulating libraries
- (vi) improvement in printing technology

Exercise IV

1. Yes, we need to classify novels as these classifications help us in knowing what to expect in particular novel.
2. (a) Daniel Defoe – Moll Flanders
- (b) Psychological Novel – Pamela or Virtue Rewarded
- (c) Jane Austen – Sense and Sensibility
- (d) Bildungsroman – Novel of Formation
- (e) Social Novels – Uncle Tom's Cabin

Exercise V

1. Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded
2. Henry Fieldings
3. Historical
4. William Wordsworth; John Keats
5. Pride, Sensibility

UNIT 2 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL - I

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Plot
 - 2.2.1 Types of Plot
- 2.3 Character and Characterisation
 - 2.3.1.1 Types of Characters
 - 2.3.2 Characterisation
- 2.4 Narrative Modes
 - 2.4.1 Definition
 - 2.4.2 Types of Narrative Methods
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will look at the various aspects of the novel largely as understood by **E M Forster** in his 1924 work, *Aspects of the Novel*. After going through this unit you will come to know about three important aspects of the novel form. These three aspects that will be covered in this unit are:

- Plot
- Character/ Characterisation and
- Narrative Mode

This will help you in identifying, defining and classifying these varied critical concepts that are necessary for a better understanding of the novel. It will also aid you in reading the different novels.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we looked at the novel as a literary genre and we also realised after reading the unit that reading a novel is not that simple. It is not just about the story line but rather developing a perspective to the fine nuances that a novelist tries to make in his/ her work. We also looked at the definition of a novel and found that defining a novel is not as easy as we thought it to be. We then traced the beginnings of the novel as a genre and looked at the reasons behind the rise of the novel in eighteenth century England.

In this unit, we will be looking at three aspects of the novel that are crucial for a better reading and understanding of it. This unit is designed to help you perfect your skills and to equip you better for an intelligent reading of the novel as students of Literature. Here, we shall be talking about the concept of plot, character and characterisation and narrative mode, while we deal with the other aspects of the novel in the third unit. Essentially saying any literary work

would have two components – a) form and b) content. Form would imply the “**how**” of a literary genre while content would mean “**what**” a piece of literature has to say. These two components are very crucial to anyone who wishes to study any form of literature – be it the novel, poetry , prose or even drama. While we all know that a relationship exists between these two components and that these two components are inextricably linked together, opinion varies on the nature of the relationship between the two. However, we do know that the relationship between form and content cannot really be ignored if we are to develop critical skills in reading novels. It would be helpful to keep in mind our definition of the novel in Unit 1 when we are faced with this crisis of whether form or content is or is not important. For instance, if a novel is defined as a long prose narrative / a long story written in prose, then it goes without saying that anything written has some sort of shape, which implies form. The novel is anyway a written form and the novelist would therefore, be very careful about the way in which she/he presents his/ her matter. Moreover, the novelists would also have undergone rigorous writing and re-writing through the process of creating the novel, so in the case of the novel at least we might safely say that the form does have an important role to play and that we could also approach the novel via the form that encloses the content or the message of the novelist or even the ‘what’ she/ he has to convey.

But when we say something like this we do not mean to say that the novel can be approached only through the form or that the form is more important than the content. And for us to be able to understand form in all its dimensions, it is important that we are able to not only recognise but also be able to describe what the identifying markers of these categories are. That is what we intend to do in this unit and in the next section when we shall be talking about Plot.

Exercise I

Read the questions given below and answer in your own words.

1. What do we mean by aspects of the novel?

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2. What are the two main components of any literary work? Define each one of them.

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3. Is there a relationship between content and form?

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4. Is it advisable for us to approach a novel through the form rather than the content? If Yes, why? Give reasons.

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2.2 PLOT

The chief elements that comprise a novel according to Henry Hudson are, "Plot, characters, dialogue, time and place of action, style, and a stated or implied philosophy of life". Taking off from this point of intervention we really need to understand that the term plot as we know it today was mentioned for the first time by the Greek philosopher **Aristotle** in his famous work the *Poetics* in the 4th Century BC. But he used the term plot as one of the important constituents of a great tragedy as he was essentially talking about the dramatic form - tragedy. But his definition is equally applicable to the novel as a genre as well. He defines a plot as a, "combination of the incidents, events, situations and actions in a story". And another point that needs to be kept in mind is that Aristotle never differentiated or drew any distinction between 'plot' and 'story'. **Edward Morgan Forster** a much later writer and critic in his work *Aspects of the Novel*, draws a distinction between a plot and a story. In Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, he defines a story as a "narrative of events arranged in their time- sequence" (p. 87). He then goes on to say that a "plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality." Here, the keyword to remember is "Causality". He cites the oft quoted example ... "The King died, and then the Queen died" – as an instance of a story, and cites another example – "The King died, and then the Queen died of grief too" as plot. This has been quoted here to explain the difference that Forster tries to make between what he perceives as story and what he terms plot. He is quick to point out that even though in both instances, the "time- sequence is preserved" it is the acute "sense of causality" that actually overshadows it. Forster's emphasis therefore is on causality as making the crucial difference between a story and a plot. Notice for instance even how we speak. We hear people saying very often, "She/he told me the story of his/ her life." Or, "a plot was hatched to kidnap the child and demand a ransom". Even for us listeners (in this case), the second statement is definitely more intriguing and will catch our attention straight away, rather than the first one. Forster also looks upon plot as something organised, logically arranged, sequenced events unfolding one after the other in prose or verse or a narrative. He goes as far as

to say that the plot “is the novel in its logical, intellectual aspect; it requires mystery, but the mysteries are solved later on,” (p. 95).

Going back to Aristotle’s definition of what he termed plot we need to keep in mind that he never really maintained a distinction between a plot and a story. However, there are critics who claim that a line has to be drawn between a story, a plot and an incident. Having looked at Forster’s example wherein he makes clear the difference between plot and story I don’t think it is necessary for us to look at it again. We would however need to make a distinction between ‘story’, ‘plot’ and ‘incident’. An ‘incident’ may be looked upon as a single episode or an event. Aristotle had in the 4th Century BC defined the concept of plot as including both action as well as unity. Aristotle’s definition is important because it has been adapted, adopted and critics down the ages have emphasised upon different aspects of it.

Let us take a quick look at what some critics have had to say about plot. **Vladimir Propp** (1859- 1970) argues that narratives and drama, “ possess a particular construction which is immediately felt and which determines their category, even though we may not be aware of it,” (*The Columbian Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism, Eds., Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, Columbian University Press: New York, 1995, p. 231*). Now let’s look at **Henry James** (1843-1916) for instance, was of the opinion that “the representation of life/ mimesis is the essence of plot and the distinction between plot and story is superfluous. We already know Forster’s views on plot from our detailed discussion. However, modern critics and readers of the novel today look at story as what happens within the framework of a narrative or a drama and at plot as the way in which the events are presented.

In short, plot may be looked at as the sequencing or logical ordering of separate events in a narrative that is selected by the novelist him/herself in such a manner as to convey his/ her message and to hold the attention of the reader and to sustain his/ her interest. It is the plot that serves as the broad framework within which the theme of the novel, the author’s message, the characters/ people in the novel or story play their part. A plot should also be good and skilfully put together, and there should be no gaps or inconsistencies. There should be a sense of balance and proportion.

All said and done Aristotle’s identification of plot has served not also as a guide to novelists in the past but also given rise to many challenges to the way the novel is looked at and the manner in which plot has now come to be, in the last two centuries.

Kindly Note: The manner in which you relate or recall the events of a novel could be very different from the manner in which the author/ novelist would like you to remember or read the novel.

2.2.1 Types of Plots

Having said so much about the plot by way of definition and analysis, it is but obvious that there may be more than one way of ordering/ sequencing/ arranging a plot. For instance, the way in which you might approach a novel or even remember it may not be in keeping with the manner in which the novelists shapes his/ her novel or wants his/ her novel to be read or even understood. Hence, it is clear that we may need to look at the different types

of plots. One way of doing that would be by looking at what Hudson called the (a) Loose plot and the (b) Organic plot. Hudson makes a distinction between loose plot and organic plot. In the case of loosely constructed plot the story is composed of a number of detached incidents with very little necessary or logical connection among themselves. And the unity of the narrative depending not on the machinery of the action but on the person or hero, who is the only binding factor. The examples he gives of such loosely constructed plots are *Robinson Crusoe* By **Daniel Defoe**, *Vanity Fair* by **William Makepeace Thackeray** and *Nicholas Nickleby* by **Charles Dickens**.

When separate incidents are neatly dovetailed and not treated episodically and form the integral components of a definite plot - pattern then it is an example of an Organic Plot according to Hudson. The entire plan of the novel in this case, has to be in place – the story, the characters, the events and even the manner in which the novelist would like to combine or converge to bring about the catastrophe.

Aristotle made a distinction between simple plot and complex plot. He said that a simple plot is largely episodic in nature while a complex plot involves both a reversal of fortune or *peripetia* and recognition. Now if we remember in Unit 1 when we discussed the picaresque novel we said that it is based on a series of episodes loosely connected so this definition that Aristotle gave creates problems for us in a sense. Moreover, the reversal of fortune and recognition may also not exist in every novel and that is also problematic. We must bear in mind that Aristotle was talking about the Greek tragedy and not really about the novel as a genre.

Hudson also made a distinction between a simple plot and a complex plot as one in which only a single story is told and the other as one in which multiple stories work hand- in- hand to bring about a single unified whole. For instance, Hudson compares the two stories of Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp in **Thackeray's** *Vanity Fair* and says that these are not amalgamated properly whereas he says in **Charles Dickens's** the *Bleak House* all the three threads of Esther Summerson's story, the story of Lady Delock's sin and the story of the great Chancery Suit by Jarndyce V Jarndyce are interwoven skilfully together.

Another opinion is expressed by the American author **Nathaniel Hawthorne** a 19th Century novelist and author of *The Scarlet Letter*. He identifies four types of plots: tragic, comic, satiric or romantic and depending upon the subject matter/ content of the novel. Now, we had said earlier that a novel should or could be approached through its form and not content and this definition also creates problems in the sense that it leaves out other types of novels such as, the psychological novel, the political novel, the historical novel, crime thrillers among others.

So it is essential that we remember that all classifications/ typologies of either novels or plots have a limited degree of relevance and one rule does not apply to all. The reason we have discussed plot and the types of plot in detail here in this unit is to give you a broad idea of the different types of novels and plots and to help you understand how the construction of the plot varies from one novel to another. While it is also important for us to know about these classifications in order to have a good understanding of the novel, it is not recommended that these classifications be extended in a strict manner to your reading of the different novels both in this course and outside the course.

Kindly Note: It is important that you focus only on how the plot has been assembled together or constructed and not on what type of plot it is or could be.

Since we have said so much about plot and the different types of plots we would need to do a review exercise quickly next.

Exercise II

- 1. How does Aristotle define plot? Does his definition hold true for the novel as well?

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- 2. How would you define plot?

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- 3. Is it important to make a distinction between plot and story? What is the nature of difference between the two?

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- 4. Why and how do we identify different types of plots? Are there any limitations involved in such classifications?

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5. Does the knowledge about plot and the different types of plot help in our reading of the novel?

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2.3 CHARACTER AND CHARACTERISATION

Having examined the plot as the first aspect of the novel, let us now turn our attention to character and characterisation the second important aspect of the novel that we will be dealing with in this unit. Character very simply put would mean a figure in any literary piece of work. Characters could be, both human as well as non - human entities such as animals or even inanimate entities - that however, have been personified by the author/ novelist. The word character also connotes a sense of morality. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century England and France, the term character used to mean or refer to a literary genre. As far back as the late 4th Century and early 3rd Century BC, the term characters was used and it meant a genre in which a character type, rather than a truly individual being/ character was sketched in a brief work written in prose or verse.

Having begun with the 4th Century BC let us now look at what other critics have to say and at what character (s) has meant down the ages. A character may also be a personae in a novel/ a drama/ a poem who has been endowed with physical, moral and psychological attributes by the novelist in such a way as to ensure that we as readers come to look upon them as real. For a character to be good, the novelist would have to present him/ her in a very convincing, plausible and consistent manner and his/ her attitude should not appear to be self- contradictory. If at all such self - contradictions arise then it is crucial for us to look at and analyse why this has happened or what the novelist wanted us to understand from this. Some novelists could make the character stand out by exaggerating his or her physical demeanour while others may depict their characters subtle. If the physical demeanour is exaggerated then the character could emerge like a cartoon or in a very incongruous manner. In which case, she or he would not be a character but a caricature. **Dickens** has numerous caricatures in his novels.

Just as we drew a distinction between the types of plots we can do a similar exercise as far as characters are concerned and this we shall do keeping in mind what Forster had to say about Flat and Round Characters.

2.3.1 Types of Characters

There are several ways of classifying characters but ultimately it boils down to Forster's classification of Flat and Round characters that are easily and readily distinguishable and identifiable. Let us deal with flat characters first.

Flat Characters are usually built around a single idea or quality. They are often

presented rather cursorily in a single phrase or sentence and so does not go beyond a mere outline. They derive from a sense of collective identity from the type or group (social or literary) to which she/ he belongs. So, words, deeds and attitudes are dismissed as quirks of the class. And finally, flat characters are two- dimensional and so do not undergo change in the course of a novel.

Round characters on the other hand are a combination of several ideas or qualities. They are sketched in detail rather painstakingly and may require an extensive treatment. They do not derive from any group. They have a distinct sense of personal identity and are often responsible for their words, deeds and attitudes. And lastly, round characters are three- dimensional and have the power to surprise us through an unexpected (though not totally improbable) act of transformation.

Sr No	FLAT CHARACTERS	Sr No	ROUND CHARACTERS
1.	Flat Characters are usually built around a single idea or quality.	1.	Round characters on the other hand are a combination of several ideas or qualities.
2.	They are often presented rather cursorily in a single phrase or sentence and so does not go beyond a mere outline.	2.	They are sketched in detail rather painstakingly and may require an extensive treatment.
3.	They derive from a sense of collective identity from the type or group (social or literary) to which she/ he belongs. So, words, deeds and attitudes are dismissed as quirks of the class.	3.	They do not derive from any group. They have a distinct sense of personal identity and are often responsible for their words, deeds and attitudes.
4.	Flat characters are two- dimensional and so do not undergo change in the course of a novel.	4.	Round characters are three- dimensional and have the power to surprise us through an unexpected (though not totally improbable) act of transformation.

2.3.2 Characterisation

The reason why we are dealing with characterisation at length is because it is also inextricably linked with both character as well as plot. For a work of literature to be credible to its readers, the readers need to be convinced by the characters that are portrayed by the novelist in the novel and the characters should also be such that the reader can actually visualise them. The author could then either comment directly or indirectly on the characters, in which case, she would be employing direct characterisation or she/ he could use indirect characterisation. In the first instance, the author would be telling the readers about the characters, while in the second instance, she/ he would be showing the readers what the character is really like. For an author to have successful works of fiction, she/ he would need to make the plot convincing, the characters should be such that the readers can identify them/ oppose them or relate to them and the motivation for the character's belief should be

compelling. To take the definition of character a little further, we feel the need to point out that with most post structuralist critics and postmodern novelists – the character is supposed to be dead. In other words, they have “announced” the death of the character. For instance, the French theorist **Roland Barthes** in *S/Z* declares that “ what is” obsolescent in the contemporary novel “is the character; what can no longer be written is the Proper Name.” The character therefore, is now no longer discussed as a real person but as a literary construct.

What has to be remembered is that character and characterisation while being interrelated critical concepts are not synonymous. The term character generally refers to a person (not necessarily an individual), characterisation is a study of the different methods that a novelist may use to present a whole range of characters in a logically arranged manner. The choice of characters or methods of presenting them is entirely up to the novelists who may have a vision for them and is often guided by certain factors. Factors such as:

- (a) His / her choice of the narrative/ story and the way in which she/he wishes to develop it.
- (b) The idea/ ideas she/ he seeks to represent through the characters.
- (c) His/ her individual attitude to the ideas she/ he seeks to present through different characters in the novel.

The novelist once again has the choice of combination, meaning she/ he can chose to combine these factors in any way she/ he finds suitable to his/ her story/ narrative. But she/ he usually keeps in mind the following questions while deciding on the combination of factors to be arranged. These questions could be related to:

- (a) How much importance should be given to which character and how?
- (b) How should the characters be made to interact with each other, and why?
- (c) How and why should the characters be grouped together into different categories, viz. character/ caricature, individual/types, major/minor?

Kindly Note: Characterisation is essentially an art, a matter of conscious, judicious and discriminating use of certain strategies needed for the process of selection, grouping and presentation of different characters in a novel.

2.3.3 Methods of Characterisation

The manner in which or the technique employed by the novelist as far as characterisation is concerned varies from novel to novel and from novelist to novelist. However, for the sake of a broad classification, we can make two important categories, i.e., *Narrative* and *Dramatic* methods of characterisation. In the narrative method, the quality or trait of the character is described, narrated, evaluated or commented upon by the novelist. The novelist also offers the final assessment of a character’s motives, attitudes or behavioural oddities. In the dramatic method, the quality or trait of the character is shown or revealed through his/ her words, and actions in a series of dramatic situations. The reader is also allowed to draw his/ her own

conclusions about the character's motives, and attitudes.

Sr No	Narrative Method	Sr No	Dramatic Method
1.	The quality or trait of the character is described, narrated, evaluated or commented upon by the novelist.	1.	The quality or trait of the character is shown or revealed through his/ her words, and actions in a series of dramatic situations.
2.	The novelist also offers the final assessment of a character's motives, attitudes or behavioural oddities.	2.	The reader is also allowed to draw his/ her own conclusions about the character's motives, and attitudes.

When you read the different novels prescribed for you, you will realise that the novelist often uses both the methods in a novel and one method is not sacrificed in the interest of the other. What we are trying to really tell you is that all said and done, these two methods of characterisation are not really mutually exclusive but rather they are complementary to each other.

When you need to figure out either characters or the method of characterisation, it might be helpful for you to keep in mind the following questions:

- (i) What does the character say or do, and why?
- (ii) What do the other characters in the novel say about him/ her and why?
- (iii) What does a novelist have to say about a character and why?
- (iv) Which category does a character belong to, and why?

(The categories could be: major/ minor, individual/type). Before we move on to the next aspect of the novel that we wish to cover in this Unit, let us stop for a while and reflect on what we have done so far.

Exercise III

- 1. Define the term 'character'?

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2. Why is it important for a character to be consistent? Give reasons.

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3. What is the difference between a character and a caricature?

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4. Identify the two main types of characters. Compare and contrast the two.

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5. How is the term character different from characterisation? What factors if any, determine characterisation?

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6. What are the different methods of characterisation known to a novelist? Point out the main difference between the two important ones.

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7. Do you think the information given in Section 2.3 will help you in your reading of a novel? If so, how?

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2.4 NARRATIVE MODES

2.4.1 Definition

Before we begin talking about what narrative mode means or does we need to understand the meaning of the term *narrative per se*. Some people might say that narrative is just another, more sophisticated word for what is ordinarily known as a 'story'. This however, is a misconception that needs examining. A story is something that is merely told. Whereas, a narrative is not only the story but also how the story is told and in what manner it is told. In other words, a story is merely a component of the narrative whereas a narrative includes something more. But at the same time, a narrative is not the plot. Just as the story is but one component of the narrative, so to is a narrative just one of the several methods of giving shape to a plot. Narrative therefore, is an important strategy available to the novelist with the aid of which she/ he can create, describe or comment upon either the situations or characters or both. The study of the narrative modes can be of immense help top you in different ways such as,

- i) It can help you to understand how a novel is different from other genres such as a poem or a drama,
- ii) It can also help you to distinguish between different types of novels and to an extent, help you to understand the basic nature of these differences as well.

This would probably make more sense to you when you read about narrative methods in the next section.

Types of Narrative Methods

Novelists have, over a period of time developed a large variety of modes/ strategies to present a story. Considering the fact that the novel has been around since the 18th century, the scope for locating newer narrative methods has been immense. Generally, a novelist uses only one specific narrative mode suited to what she/ he wants to narrate and how she/ he wishes to do so. Sometimes, a novelist could use a combination of several narrative modes simultaneously in a work of fiction though, as you may discover, this is done only in some cases. The following types of narrative methods are well known:

1. Third Person Narrative

2. First Person Narrative

1. Third Person Narrative

In this narrative mode, the narrator is someone who is located outside the story and who refers to all the characters in the story by name or as 'she' or 'he'. **Chinua Achebe's** *Things Fall Apart* that we will be studying in Block 3 is a fine example of this type of narrative mode. Let's take a look at the opening lines of the novel *Things Fall Apart*:

Okonkwo was well-known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalmze the Cat...

In this case, you realise that the narrator is a know-all in the sense that he knows everything that needs to be known about the characters as well as the situations. He may appear to be god-like in the sense that he knows more about the characters than the characters themselves. He has an unchallenged monarchical presence in the novel as he surveys all. He has complete hold over and access to the character's thoughts, feelings, emotions, motives, speech and even actions. Whenever a third- person enjoys this privileged, almost sovereign status, we say, that the narrator is *omniscient* and that the narrative mode is the *third person omniscient mode*.

However, when the third person omniscient narrator chooses to focus on the thoughts, feelings or experiences of a single character or a limited number of characters within a story, then, we identify it as third person limited narrative mode. In such instances, a novelist seeks to impose certain limitations upon him/ herself so as to be able to present all situations / characters through the eyes/ perspective of a character she / he sympathises with the most. In your study of the different novels, you are not really likely to come across anything that can help you understand as to how this mode functions. However, at a later stage, if you do get to read the novels of **Henry James** in particular, you would be able to appreciate the *third person limited narrative mode* much better.

2. First Person Narrative

Very often, a novelist creates a character/ persona in first – person and attempts to view other characters / situations through his/ her eyes. When such a mode of narration is used in a sustained manner through a novel, we may say that it is an instance of the first person narrative mode. Sometimes the use of the first person narrative mode may mislead us to think that the narrator is the same as the author or at nest, an alter ego of the author. While in certain cases, especially in an autobiographical novel, the narrator/ author distinction may ultimately disappear, but it does not always happen in this manner. It would be wrong to say, then, that a novelist uses the first person narrator as a pretext for giving a fictional account of his/ her life or drawing upon his/ her personal experiences. In fact, even in an autobiographical novel, the facts/events/ situations are fictionalised to such an extent that the distance between the narrator and the author increases considerably. To give you some idea of how this mode of narration works, here is an example from **Charles Dickens'**

David Copperfield:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on Friday, at twelve o' clock at night...

Charles Dickens has made use of the first person narrative mode, the first – person mode certainly imposes more limitations. Since it perceives characters/ situations from the standpoint of a single character and not an omniscient narrator, it does offer a circumscribed view of whatever a novel may describe. However, it is generally preferred for the following reasons:

- i) It lends a degree of authenticity to the narrative as the reader gets a feeling that she/ he is listening to the story straight from the horse's mouth.
- ii) It lends a sense of immediacy to the narrative and therefore makes for a greater involvement on the part of the reader.

Exercise IV

1. What is the meaning of the word 'narrative'? How is it different from a story and a plot?

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2. Give a comprehensive definition of the term narrative mode. What are some of the advantages of studying the narrative mode of a novel?

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3. Identify the two main types of narrative modes. Make a detailed assessment of the merits and demerits of each of them.

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4. If you have to write a novel which narrative mode would you opt for and why?

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

Speaking very broadly any literary work may be said to have two major component- form and content. When studying novels it is always more helpful to study or look at the content of the novel from its form or from the point of view of having analysed the form. The form of a novel can in turn be examined with the aid of the several aspects of the novel such as the three we covered in this unit- plot, character and characterisation and narrative mode. It is also important that we are able to not only define but also understand what each of these aspects are and what they do or do not do in a literary work if you wish to have a sound understanding of the novel. Plot is the overall arrangement of characters, situations and events, in a novel and is different from the story that is simply the manner in which we like to remember the happenings in the novel. Character refers to a person with certain moral, physical and psychological attributes while characterisation is the use of various strategies available to the novelist for the purpose of presenting the character. Narratives modes, the third aspect we covered in this unit, is the different ways of narrating the sequence of events that unfold in a novel, or presenting the characters or action. By using different narrative modes an author is able to sustain the interest of the readers in the narrative and is also able to emphasise the different points of view presented in the novel.

2.6 GLOSSARY

alter ego:	the other self; an intimate friend
circumscribe:	lay down limits of, confine, restrict
constituent:	component, part of something bigger
demeanour:	bearing, outward behaviour
fictional mode:	method of narrating a story
narrative:	tale or story told in a particular manner
persona:	aspect of personality meant to be shown to others
per se:	by itself; considered alone and not in connection with other things

picaresque:	a type of story dealing with the adventures and travels of a character who is a sort of a good – hearted rogue
strategy:	art or skill of doing something

2.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read Section 2.1 and then write your answer.
2. Form and content. Form is the ‘how’ while content is the ‘what’ of a literary work.
3. Yes. Read Section 2.1, however, the nature of the relationship is debatable.
4. Yes, read, understand, reflect and then answer.

Exercise II

1. A combination of the incidents, events, situations and actions in a story.
2. Think about it carefully and then answer.
3. Section 2.2 has the answer.
4. In Sections 2.2, 2.2.1 lies the answer.
5. Yes it does – it gives a broad idea of the different types of novels and plots and the manner in which the plot is constructed.

Exercise III

1. Human and non- human, personae in a literary work endowed with some physical, moral and psychological attributes by the novelist.
2. For the character to be plausible and true to life.
3. While a character is endowed with physical, moral and psychological attributes by the novelist, a caricature is a character in whom certain traits are exaggerated to the extent that it makes him/ her appear incongruous.
4. Refer to Section 2.3.1
5. While character refers to a person or a non- human, or an inanimate entity, characterisation is a study of the methods that a novelist uses in order to present characters.
6. Refer to Section 2.3.3
7. Here you might need to pause and think about your answer.

Exercise IV

1. Refer to 2.4.1
2. Narrative mode is a novelist’s method by which she/ he can create, describe or comment upon situations and or characters. A study of the narrative mode can help us to understand how a novel is different from poetry or drama as well as to differentiate between different types of novels.
3. Refer to Section 2.4.2
4. You’ll have to really think before you answer this one.

UNIT 3 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL II

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Style
- 3.3 Time and Place
- 3.4 Themes
- 3.5 New Areas of Novel Writing
- 3.6 Third World Novels
- 3.7 Novels of the Diaspora
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Answers to Self Check Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall be looking at the other three aspects of the novel. These will include the aspect of style, time and place and themes. We already know why we need to look at the aspects of the novel carefully so we will not go into it here. Suffice it to say that these aspects of the novel that will be covered in this unit will help us understand the novel better. After looking closely at these aspects of the novel we will then turn to the new areas of novel writing, at the novels of the third world, novels of the diaspora.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In units 1 and 2 we were introduced to the novel as a literary genre and we also learnt that reading a novel is not as simple as merely reading and following the story line. It involves our mental abilities and makes us draw on all the critical knowledge we have in our possession to really appreciate or even express an opinion about a novel. What we are trying to say is that, reading a novel is a very specialised activity, an activity that makes us use a whole new set of vocabulary (words such as plot, character, characterisation, narrative, narrative modes, critical, criticism, critique), knowledge and understanding of different genres, and aspects of the novel. It also means that we need to be able to make fine distinctions and be well acquainted with the text/ novel and the novelist before we get around to talking about the novel. You must know what a novel is, the different types of novels that are there since the 18th century, the different types of novels being written in modern times, the various aspects of the novel and how these aspects ought to be studied. Putting it in another way, what we are really trying to tell you is that, studying a novel or reading the novel as the title of this course suggests is, in effect the ability to study the various aspects of the novel, hence, the focus on the aspects of the novel.

Studying the different aspects of the novel will help you in several ways:

- 1) You would know what to expect when you read a novel,

- 2) You will be in a position to read the novel intelligently and offer an informed opinion on it by developing the necessary critical skills and efficiency.

The earlier unit, Unit 2 and this Unit, have been prepared with the idea of helping you acquire the necessary critical skills and or improving (that is, assuming you already possess these skills) upon them, in order to read a novel intelligently. In this unit, we shall be talking about the three other aspects of the novel – style, time and place and themes, as well as looking at the new areas of novel writing, third world novels and the novel of the diaspora as these are newer trends in the area of the novel. Broadly speaking, every known literary work, the novel included, could be said to have two basic components: form and content. Simply put, content as mentioned in the earlier unit refers to ‘what’ a poem, or a novel says and form refers to ‘how’ the poem or the novel says whatever it does. These two questions related to the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of a literary work are of paramount importance to anyone who wishes to unlock the mysteries of the work. Everyone recognises that there is a very close relationship between the two aspects though opinion on the nature of the relationship differs. But we have discussed this to some extent in Unit 2. In this unit, we shall begin with examining style as another aspect of the novel.

3.2 STYLE

It is commonplace to say that all literary artists, novelists included, have to work within the available range of a specific language. A good novelist always strives to enrich the language she/ he decided to work with. What really distinguishes a good novelist from an indifferent one to some extent is the way in which language is either used or handled. In a manner of speaking, language is the ultimate material available to a novelist’s or writer. Style is essentially an aspect of language and is largely reflected in a novelist’s ability to turn language into an effective and imaginative vehicle for the purpose of narration and or, communication of his/ her ideas. Since each novelist is likely to use language differently or in his/ her own unique manner, the writing style of one novelist would obviously vary from that of the other. Style is a distinctive signature of a novelist, an expression of his/ her creative genius almost in the same manner in which your selection of a particular dress may be said to carry an imprint of your imagination or lack of it or reflect your personality. We would like to suggest that in view of a large variety of styles available, no classification is either possible or desirable.

If we are to study style more closely, it would refer to the way in which a literary work is written and the devices/ techniques or tools an author/ novelist uses or has at his/ her disposal to express his/ her opinion or message or thoughts. The manner in which the message and the choice of words, diction, he/she uses to present it gives rise to the aspect of style. Style therefore, is particular to a writer/ author/ novelist in this case and often it is the distinguishing factor that separates him/ her from the other writers/ authors/ novelists. Added to the use of words, language and the manner of presentation is also, the individual’s personal idiosyncrasies and quirks that obviously impact the writer and hence, also contribute to his/ her style of writing. Even though we have tried to define and explain what style is or does, we must remember that style too is a literary term and by rule is difficult to identify, define and analyse as well as extremely elusive too.

We can also look at style from various points of view. For instance, we could look at style from the point of view of creating an effect. If we do so, we as critics would need to focus our discussion on the diction, imagery and rhetorical devices that are used by a particular novelist. If we look at style from the point of view of whether or not it belongs to a certain literary age or movement or even when we talk about different authors, then we would need to identify and analyse only those aspects of a given work that reflects the general style in question. For instance, we could consider a work to be belonging to the Augustan age, or the Victorian age; or we could say that a work is “ornate”, “Coleridgean”, “transparent”, formal, low, high Renaissance, alliterative, Jamesian” etc., (*Murfin and Ray, p. 385*)

Style could also be divided into three major categories: the high/ grand, the middle/ mean, and the low/base/plain. **Northrop Frye** invented a new stylistic distinction that he based on whether a literary work makes use of “expressions and rhythms of ordinary speech or, instead makes use of formal devices and elaborates in order to differentiate its language from the quotidian”. He termed these two distinctions – the *demotic* and the *hieratic*. But at the same time he also identified a high, middle, and low level in each of these two classifications. Then there is the decorous style which implies that the language conforms to the speakers, or the subject matter as well as the readers, or simply put what it really means is that the language is in keeping with the literary genre in which it is written, the socio-economic class of those who are using it in the novel (in this case), and the socio-political/ socio-cultural context in which it is being used as well as the occasion for which it is being used. Decorum was an actual convention of writing in the 18th century that dictated that the style of a work should “match” or be consistent with all the aspects of the work.

When examining style we could also look at whether the sentences of a novel or any literary work are predominantly periodic/ loose (non periodic). A periodic sentence according to Murfin and Ray, “is not grammatically complete until its very end. Typically, several dependent clauses and parallel constructions precede the final independent clause in a periodic sentence, so the meaning of the sentence cannot be ascertained until the entire sentence has been read”. They then explain non periodic or loose sentences as, “typically contain (ing) a number of independent clauses joined only by coordinating conjunctions such as and or but” (p. 386). Periodic sentences appear to be more formal and the style that emerges as a result of using these types of sentences is said to be an elevated style whereas, in comparison the loose sentences or the non periodic sentences appear to be more informal and therefore conversational or base. We could go on explaining style through use of such terms but that might merely serve to confuse you and that would mean defeating our purpose of study. So, we will not go into details here at this point. Suffice it to say that there are various ways of creating style and stylistic devices are used by novelists to create their own particular and distinguishing style and critics too have various looking at style and they have done so down the ages.

That being so, you may wonder how you possibly could gain some understanding of a particular novelist’s style or his/ her creative use of language. Experts will suggest different ways of analysing the language that you may not find at all useful at this stage. For this reason, we suggest that

you base your impressions of a particular novelist's style on your ability to answer the following questions:

- 1) Does a novelist use the language in a manner familiar to you or does she/ he strive for novelty, richness or creativity?
- 2) Does this creative use of language lie in his/ her use of words, diction or his/ her sentence/ structure or all of them?
- 3) Can you identify some of the recurrent images and symbols in the novel? If so, make a list of each of them.
- 4) Do images and symbols make his/ her language 'obtuse' or transparent?

(Remember: Overuse of images and symbols will make the language rich and allusive, sometimes obtuse; while discriminating use of both will make for transparency)

- 5) Does she/ he use a simple style or a complex one?

(The answer to this question will depend upon how you answer the other four).

Exercise I

1. How would you like to define the term style?

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2. Why is it not possible to offer a neat classification of different styles?

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3. How can one assess the style of a particular novel? Can you suggest any method for it, other than the one outlined in section 3.2?

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3.3 TIME AND PLACE

The notion of the time and place is derived from the classical notions of the *unities* most often ascribed to Aristotle. Aristotle however, dealt only with the

unity of action in some detail when he was talking about tragedy. Whenever we discuss Aristotle, we need to remember that Aristotle always talked about drama/ tragedy and not about the novel. It is a different matter that we have chosen to adapt many of his insights on tragedy to other literary genres such as the novel. He also talks about the unity of time in the fictive world, when he is making a distinction between the epic and the tragic form. However, the classical unities of time, place and action have been attributed to Aristotle and the 16th and 17th century Italian and French critics expanded upon these unities.

Therefore, 17th century French Drama, particularly that of **Molière** and **Racine** were very strict observers of these unities and very regular. In sharp contrast are the English dramatists who wrote for the Jacobean stage. By the late 17th century however, even English dramatists had begun evaluating their own work according to the rules of the classical unities. Thus, we had a highly irregular **Shakespeare** who did not adhere to any of these rules or strictures and the conservative and regular **Jonson** who followed the rules of the classical unities very strictly. Till **Victor Hugo's** play *Hernani* (1844) was staged, the classical unities were very influential in dramatic criticism. This play created quite a stir at its debut because it violated the rules of classicism. It must be remembered that Greek and Latin drama were very strict in form and their stage presented a single place throughout the action, while the plot narrated the events of a single day and the action too took place on a single day.

The action of a novel, like that of any other human activity, has to be located in 'time' as well as 'place', if it has to make any sense to us. Both 'time' and 'place' as represented in a novel are, more often than not, imaginary not real categories. It is so because a novelist always likes to exercise his/ her prerogative of adding an element of fiction to whatever she/ he may choose to describe or narrate. As a matter of fact, this tendency towards the fictionalisation of time/ place categories as also the characters, situations or actions is what makes a work of fiction different from a historian's work on the one hand and a journalistic report on the other. Even when a novelist chooses to describe an actual or historical time/place category, as she/ may often do, she presents it in a manner that it appears strange or unfamiliar. Sometimes she or he may describe the real or known time/ place in such a manner that it might appear far removed from the way we may have either experienced, seen, heard or read about it. This is not to suggest that a novelist cannot or does not ever use time/place categories without fictionalising them. She/ he may often do so, and whenever she/ he does it the novel may either become historical in nature or take on the shape of reportage.

Since a novel presents action on a fairly broad scale, a number of 'time sequences' and 'locations' often into play. It needs to be pointed out here that the action of a novel can move either in a linear fashion or in a disjunction manner. It is said to move in a linear fashion when the chronology of events is consistently maintained in the act of narration and there is an onward movement from one place to another. Linear action follows the alphabetic order and if the action starts (in terms of both time and place) at say point A, it moves towards points B, C, and D... and ultimately Z.

Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is a good example of what we mean by linear movement of action. On the other hand, disjunctive action comes into play when the chronology of events is carefully and systematically disturbed for the purposes of narration and there is a movement back and forth in both

time and place. It often happens when a novelist either uses flashback techniques or makes a character reconstruct events in a random fashion. In this case, the action may start at point H, revert to point A and move towards B, C, D...G before it jumps forward to P... and so on. Such disruptions in time and place makes the action disjunctive and is often created consciously by the novelist with the explicit purpose of attracting the reader's attention through new ways of narrating or describing. The disjunctive mode is often associated with most of the 20th century novels written in the preceding centuries.

To help you out with your reading of different novels, we suggest that you keep the following questions in mind:

- i) When does the action begin and when does it end?
- ii) Do you find any disruptions in the time sequence of the novel? If so, how many? Identify all such disruptions and if possible, account for them as well.
- iii) Identify the total time sequence presented in a novel. Prepare a chart so as to show how it moves from one point to another.
- iv) Where does the novel begin and where does the novel end?
- v) Which are the different places mentioned in the novel? Identify them.
- vi) Prepare a comprehensive list of all the places named in the novel. While doing so, keep the following order in mind:
Country, town, parish, village, home, etc.
- vii) If possible, associate different characters with different places and different time sequences as well.

Exercise II

1. What are the two planes on which the action of a novel moves?

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1. Does a novelist always use time and place categories in a realistic manner? If not, why?

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3. What are the different ways in which time and place categories can be used in a novel? Identify, define and classify them.

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 4. Why is it important to know about a novelists specific use of time and place categories? How can one glean such information from a novel?

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3.4 THEMES

So far we have restricted our discussion to what we call the 'form' of a novel, its various manifestations or critical concepts/ strategies with the help of which the 'form' can be comprehended fully. You would perhaps recall our earlier suggestions made in Section 2.1 to the effect that the content of a novel should preferably be mediated through its form. Which is as much as to say that if you are able to put these critical strategies to an optimum and effective use, you may be able to decipher the 'content' as well. This brings us to a point where it becomes necessary to explain what we really mean by the term 'content'. In its broad sense, content would refer to the themes or ideas that run through the fabric of the novel.

Themes arise from the interplay of the various aspects of the novel such as, the plot/ setting, character, sometimes the element of conflict and the aspect of tone (under style). If we were to analyse the meaning of theme very simplistically we could say that theme of a piece of fiction/ novel is its views about life and about how people behave. The theme of a novel particularly these days is rarely didactic/ moralistic. In fact, most of the time it is not even presented directly. We locate the theme with the help of the characters, the action and the setting of the novel. In short what we really do is try and figure out or work out the themes ourselves. The novelist merely communicates his/ her message to the reader and it is up to the reader or us to decipher what the theme is. However, it is important to point out here that every idea a novel may seek to present does not necessarily develop into its theme. An idea becomes a theme only when it recurs through a novel in such a way as to demonstrate a novelist's preoccupation with it. A novelist often reveals his/ her concern or preoccupation with a theme or a set of themes in several different ways, some of which are as follows:

- i) Indirectly through the medium of character/ characters, as a character is widely held to be the chief vehicle of an idea or ideas in a novel.
- ii) Indirectly through certain patterns of imagery and symbolism that run through a novel.
- iii) Indirectly through key words or phrases that find a recurrent expression in a novel.
- iv) Directly through authorial comments that lie interspersed in a novel, where a novelist takes the liberty to comment on either the characters or situations or both.
- v) Through the title.
- vi) Through allusions that are made throughout the novel

- vii) Through details and particulars in the novel and the greater meaning that those details could contain.

This by itself would make clear to you how closely interrelated and interdependent both 'form' and 'content' are. In your search for different themes of a novel, you may focus specifically on this particular aspect of a novel.

Remember: theme, plot and the structure of the novels are interrelated and all help to inform and reflect back on each other. Moreover, the theme does not always tell us everything about the novel, and that it is simply one of the aspects of the novel.

Exercise III

- 1. What is the meaning of the term 'content'?

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- 2. What is the main difference between an idea and a theme?

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- 3. In what different ways does a novelist usually reveal the theme of a novel?

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- 4. What kind of relationship exists between 'content' and 'form' and why?

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3.5 NEW AREAS OF NOVEL WRITING

At the onset of the twentieth century, Western fiction grew modern and shed many images such as Victorian, realistic, and its image of what **Malcom Bradbury** calls “the great instrument of social representation”. It found a place for itself when paradigms were shifting, along with expectations, desires and imagination. At the end of the twentieth century different forms of the novel had taken centre stage. By the time we entered the new millennium the novel as a genre saw striking changes. A large number of writers who had contributed tremendously to post war British fiction had died. Novelists such as, **Graham Greene** (died in 1991), **William Golding** and **Anthony Burgess** (1993), **Kingsley Amis** (1995), **Iris Murdoch** (1999) and **Penelope Fitzgerald** in 2000, **Arthur C Clarke** in March, 2008. The millennium offered great cultural excitement and impetus to new writers. But what was also happening is that some essential notions of the novel and its Britishness were rapidly dissolving and getting lost and the stage was now set for writers from other cultures such as from Scotland, Ireland and India to name just a few.

Moreover, the changes also occurred in writing that began to emerge from different perspectives both on myth as well as reality and we saw fiction/novels from America, Australia, South America, Caribbean, India, Africa, Ireland and other postcolonial countries. By the mid - twentieth century most former British colonies had regained their independence from Britain. These former colonies were to be renamed Commonwealth countries, and later postcolonial countries and a vast body of writing emerged from these countries. The novel these days has taken on a vast “variety of voices, forms and manners”, and is randomly open “to all styles, all attitudes, all kinds of performances, along with equal randomness of judgement about what is serious, worthwhile, valuable, authoritative” (Malcolm Bradbury, p. 521).

The most striking feature of the novel today is its sheer plurality, its diversity and mixed origins. Bradbury finds the novel in the millennium dealing with history and the novelist’s relationship with the past and he gives the example of **A S Byatt**’s Booker novel *Possession: A Romance*. Other writers who were interested in the relationship between history and the fable include: **Penelope Fitzgerald** (*Innocence*, 1986, *The Blue Flower* (1995)), **Kazuo Ishiguro** (*The Unconsoled*, 1995), **Tibor Fischer** (*Under the Frog*, 1992, *The Collector Collector*, 1997). But all said and done, fiction or the novel is at its richest in the millennium. There are certain themes that recur through novels, (and the list is the one prepared by Bradbury):

apocalyptic cities, gender wars, gay and lesbian relations, marital collapse, feminist self- discovery, football fever, serial killers, child abuse, New age consciousness, laddish girls and girlish lads. (p. 539)

He also says that social comedy has replaced hard satire and that “dark horrors have replaced familiar lives”, that, “serious literary fiction in under profound pressure from the commercial”, and “Grand Narratives are giving way to more plural and playful themes”. Before we conclude it needs to be mentioned that the novel still survives, it proliferates and penetrates. It has seen many deaths

but it seems to be thriving and expanding its boundaries, cultures and horizons.

In the next section we shall talk about the novel of the diaspora very briefly as we will be studying it in detail in Block 6.

3.6 NOVELS OF THE DIASPORA

The word diaspora comes from an ancient Greek word – meaning “a scattering or sowing of seeds”) and it now refers to the entire process of forcing people or ethnic populations away from their own homelands, the dispersal of these people, and the ensuing developments in their culture including literature. The current usage of the word diaspora comes from the Hebrew Bible to refer to the population of Jews exiled from Judea in 586 BC by the Babylonians, and from Jerusalem in AD 136 by the Roman Empire. The term was assimilated from Greek into English in the mid-20th century. As an academic field, diaspora studies has been established relating to the wider modern meaning of the usage 'diaspora'.

The literature that developed as a result of the movement of people from their homelands to other countries for whatever reasons, economic, social, political, is what is known as diaspora writing or literature of the diaspora. Much of the writings tend to deal with as H C Narang puts it, with “the myths and legends, rites and rituals, songs and dances, faith and belief, philosophy and pragmatism, memory and amnesia, success and failures, and tears and smiles. In short, the lived experience —of not one but two communities”. I am not going to go into details here, as we will be looking at the novel of the diaspora at some length in Block 6. This is just to familiarise you with what is to come in later.

3.7 THIRD WORLD NOVELS

In a politico-economic sense the term ‘third world’ implies all the nations that were (and are still) generally considered to be underdeveloped economically in the 20th century. The term arose during the Cold War to refer to nations that did not belong to the First and Second Worlds. It was used for countries either still developing or under-developed, especially in Latin America, Africa, Oceania, and Asia. The term third world also has a reference to the Third Estate, the commoners of France during the French Revolution, as they were opposed to the clergy and the nobility who comprised the First Estate and the Second Estate.

The political birth of the term third world strictly speaking took place at the Bandung Conference (1955). The third world is culturally and economically diverse and includes the petroleum-rich countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, etc. and the new industrial countries such as, India, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Brazil, Mexico etc. and poor countries such as Haiti, Chad, Afghanistan, etc.

The literature that has emerged from these countries is what is popularly known as third world literature. However, these days the term third world is not really politically correct, hence, a more umbrella term such as literature from the margins is used to refer to these writings. In some cases, the term used is also new literatures or sometimes known as postcolonial literatures, if the writings happen to be from former colonies.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have covered the three other aspects of the novel – style, time and place and theme, as well as looked briefly at the definition of and implication of terms such as third world novels or new writings or even diaspora novels. You need to remember that this unit is only an introductory unit and the purpose behind this unit has been to expose you to new areas and terms in the study of the novel. In Unit 4 we begin looking at **Kate Chopin's** novel *The Awakening* keeping in mind whatever we have read so far on the novel as a genre, the different types of novels, the various aspects of the novel and we also begin an introductory look at critical approaches, which will be covered in detail in Block 6.

3.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Style is the unique way in which each novelist uses language to narrate the story or communicate his/ her ideas.
2. As each individual writer has his/ her own specific style, it is not possible to classify such a diverse range of available or possible styles.
3. Think before you write your response.

Exercise II

1. The novel moves through time and is set in a particular place.
2. Refer to Section 3.3
3. Time can be used either in a linear fashion or it can be made backwards and forwards in a disjunctive manner.
4. Refer to Section 3.3

Exercise III

1. The themes/ ideas found in a novel constitute its content.
2. An idea is not necessarily the theme of the novel. An idea becomes a theme when it recurs through a novel, demonstrating the novelist's preoccupation with it.
3. Refer to 3.4
4. For purposes of analysis, it is necessary to speak of 'form' and 'content' as separate categories. But as we know they are inseparable.

UNIT 4 CONTEXTUALISING KATE CHOPIN'S: *THE AWAKENING*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Contextualising *The Awakening*
- 4.3 Biographical Approach to *The Awakening*
- 4.4 Kate Chopin: Early Life and Background
- 4.5 The Creole Background
- 4.6 Edna Pontellier and Kate Chopin
 - 1.6.1 Kate Chopin
 - 1.6.2 Edna Pontellier
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Answers to Self Check Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are to help you:

- (a) understand what the biographical approach to literature is,
- (b) know some important facts about **Kate Chopin's** life so you can see for yourself if there are any similarities between them and what you find in the novel,
- (c) read *The Awakening* with the help of the biographical approach,
- (d) discuss the main themes, (i.e. a woman's awakening to sexual consciousness and desire, her need for personal autonomy and her rights to be an individual and not only a role such as, that of a wife or a mother, the obstacles that may come in the way during such a journey), in the light of the biographical approach

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section begins with an introduction to the novel so that the important themes can be presented to you. This will help you discuss and analyse them. You will also be introduced to the main characters, Edna Pontellier, her husband, Leonce Pontellier, Robert Lebrun, Alcee Arobin, Adele Ratignolle and her husband, Mademoiselle Reisz and some less important characters, like Victor Lebrun and Marquieta.

4.2 CONTEXTUALISING *THE AWAKENING*

The Awakening by **Kate Chopin** is the story of Edna Pontellier, a twenty eight year old Creole woman living in New Orleans. It is about her awakening to sexual consciousness, her discovery and assertion of this new 'self' through rebellion against conventional roles of being wife and mother and the

consequences thereof. The novel is about self-expression and a woman's right to be herself, and to be an individual.

Edna is locked in a typical marriage to Leonce Pontellier, a marriage of convenience made when she is very young, not made with love or romance though he is a good man and a caring husband. Her romantic urgings and physical longings have at this stage hardly been articulated and certainly not satisfied. The family goes to Grand Isle for the summer where she meets and spends a lot of time with Robert Lebrun, an unattached young bachelor, talking, swimming, being together (and of course the Creole husband is never jealous, but you will find out more about this in the section on Creole background). Before they know it both Edna and Robert begin to feel an attraction for each other and an intensity of emotion they perceive as unusual, unmanageable and somewhat threatening in the context of their lives and conventional reality. This emotion is passionate and all consuming, leaving no room for thought or sensible action. Robert realises the impossibility of the situation, and not knowing how to deal with it, flees to Mexico to 'make money' (we will discuss if he is an escapist, a coward or an honourable man, or all of the above). Once he's gone, the truth confronts Edna with further starkness and clarity. The summer, just like the flirtation, has come to an end and Edna and her family return to their posh home on Esplanade Street, in the city. But things can never be the same for Edna as she is a changed person, as a result of her encounter with Robert and her new self.

This new Edna is a painter. She does not care about her wifely responsibilities or about keeping up appearances by observing the customs. This new Edna refuses to stay home on Tuesdays to receive her callers, as her husband expects her to, but goes out just because she prefers to do so. Her husband complains about her lack of supervision of the servants, and he leaves in the middle of a badly cooked dinner to go out to the club to eat. She becomes careless and disinterested with regard to domestic affairs, letting everything on the home front slide as it is no longer of any significance to her. Her family by now is meaningless and distant for her, her desire to fiercely possess her identity and be her own person being now her primary focus. She wants to feel a sense of being financially independent, not answerable to anybody for her actions, in other words, completely autonomous. She refuses to go for her sister's wedding and has no thoughts about propriety or 'what the world will say' with regard to any of her actions. Mr Pontellier worries about his wife's health and her strange behaviour, consulting the doctor about both. Although she appears to be in robust health a disconnect has happened which gives the appearance that she's not quite all there.

Mr Pontellier leaves town on account of business, for a long period, and she refuses to accompany him. The grandmother takes the children away and she (Edna Pontellier) stays back alone in the house, perfectly happy to paint and do her own thing. During this time she also regularly visits Mademoiselle Reisz, a pianist of exceptional talent but also a strange character that few people like and whose acquaintance she had made during the summer at Grand Isle. Robert Lebrun writes on a regular basis to Mme Reisz, seeking information about Edna, letters that she shares with Edna. The letters suggest that he is in love with her, something Mme Reisz reiterates too. Mme Reisz's music evokes in Edna the nostalgic times spent with Robert while it also makes Edna remain in a state of perpetual anticipation and physical longing. She is alone and in the right frame of mind and body for a man of the world, a seducer such as, Alcee Arobin to come along and make her his prize. She is still very much in love with Robert but he is not there and her sexual

consciousness has been awakened.

Besides, she hardly cares about her actions because of her frustration at not being able to possess Robert. All this while Edna and Alcee Arobin become more and more physically intimate with each other, he visiting her regularly as she lives alone in the 'pigeon-house.' This is a much smaller house that she has moved into round the corner from her husband's posh, expensive and much bigger house on Esplanade Street. Her reasons for moving, which she plans and implements during her husband's absence, are to have a place of her own that she can feel she can independently deal with financially so, she can be an individual in her own right rather than being only Leonce Pontellier's wife.

Of course her husband disapproves, most bothered as he is about 'what people will say.' He saves face too, keeping up appearances by immediately putting up the big house for major repairs and renovations, thereby justifying Edna's move and trying to prevent the gossip mills from running. Before she moves into the 'pigeon-house' she throws a party for a small, select group of friends. This is an important event in the novel and we will discuss it in some detail later.

Somewhere inside her Edna Pontellier keeps waiting for Robert Lebrun, and then one day as she waits for Mme Rreisz in her home, he comes and they meet. She is disappointed and heartbroken that such an accidental meeting should have occurred between them, instead of one where Robert should seek her out intentionally as soon as he arrives in town. He walks her home and during the quiet evening spent together she forces him to articulate his real feelings towards her. Both express their emotion, albeit in a sad, resigned and nostalgic way. He tries his best to stay away from her, as from temptation, stating clearly enough that being a married woman she was not free to belong to him. However, as soon as they confess their love for each other Edna is called away by her friend Adele Ratignolle, to assist her during childbirth. She implores him to wait for her return but when she does, Robert is gone, having left her a note saying, 'goodbye-because I love you.'

Both, Adele's childbirth and then the note, are traumatic experiences for Edna as they reiterate with full clarity, to herself, that she can hardly live in this world by the strength of her own desires and convictions alone, that the fact of her being a mother has to determine her actions. After a despondent night spent in deep thought and reflection she goes back to Grand Isle the next morning, the location of her first awakening, and walks away into the waves of the sea, naked and alone, in search of her final home.

Having presented the outline of the novel, we hope you'll read in due course and ideally before you begin this block. Now let us quickly examine the biographical approach to Literature before we move further in our exploration of the text and the novel as a genre.

4.3 BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO *THE AWAKENING*

What is the biographical approach to reading a novel?

The biographical approach to reading a novel is when we read about the writer's own life in order to know her/his personal story so that we get some clues and insights into understanding the novel better. Just as it is important to

know about the society, culture and politics of the time when the novel was written and published it helps to know about the family background, views and beliefs of the writer. It would be interesting to know what Chopin's 'real' life was like, was she 'independent' and can we draw parallels between Edna Pontellier and the writer? What was Chopin's marriage like? The themes that *The Awakening* deals with are contemporary, feminist and were hardly addressed in her time by other writers. What in her own life gave her the experience and the abilities to discuss them so freely and successfully? The answer to some of these questions is what 'biographical criticism' is about. This information will help us make better sense of the events that take place in the text. In the next section we shall take a look at the early life and background of Kate O' Flaherty or Kate Chopin as she was later known as.

Exercise I

1. What do you understand by the term the biographical approach to Literature?

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4.4 KATE CHOPIN: EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Kate O' Flaherty was born in St Louis in 1850 and she was one of five children, but she was the only one who survived beyond the age of twenty-five. Her father died when she was very young, and although she had been sent away to boarding school when she was about five, later she lived at home surrounded by only women, all single and fiercely independent, all widows, her mother, grandmother, great-grandmother. She was taught French and Music and was a distinguished student winning medals and awards. Even in her youth she was cynical, writing in her diary, 'I dance with people I despise; amuse myself with men whose only talent is in their feet.' She was desperate to spend more time with 'my dear reading and writing that I love so well.'

In 1870 she married **Oscar Chopin**, the 'right man.' They shared similar values and tastes and had a special kinship of the kind that Edna, in the novel, does not find with her husband. (The portrayal of the Edna-Leonce Pontellier marriage, according to **Chopin's** biographer **Emily Toth**, has similarities with that of her parents, who too shared no common interests or spontaneous warmth).

During their European honeymoon, **Kate Chopin** was an emancipated woman, drinking, smoking publicly, walking alone, both she and her husband skipping church. During her New Orleans years, 1870-1879, she took long walks and streetcar rides alone, exploring the city and enjoying her own company. Notice what Edna says in chap 36, 'I always feel sorry for women who don't like to walk; they miss so much-so many rare glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of life on the whole.'

Kate Chopin was also constantly pregnant- and therefore not to be seen in public. Forced to stay indoors except for Grand Isle vacations,

Kate became a talented mimic, keen observer and even more a social critic.

Daniel S Rankin, "Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories" Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932, p.82

Oscar Chopin died suddenly in 1882 and she ran his store and plantation for a year. A married man whom she encouraged pursued her, but by 1884 she returned to St Louis to live with her mother. (Edna too goes to Adele, the 'mother-woman,' leaving Robert). When Kate's mother died the following year, and she had to be singly responsible in bringing up her six children, she turned to writing. Her first published story, "Wiser than a God" (1889), is about a woman who becomes a great artistic success, but only after her mother's death. Kate Chopin was immediately successful as a writer, had connections with writers, journalists, and literary figures. She was invited to give a reading at the Wednesday Club, the most prestigious intellectual women's club in St Louis. She remained, throughout her life, unconventional and emancipated, cherishing her freedom and her solitude, obvious from her decision not to marry again but devote her life to what she loved best, her writing. Like Edna, she was 'the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone.' Having discussed the life of Kate Chopin briefly, let us look at the Creole background next.

4.5 THE CREOLE BACKGROUND

This little note on the nineteenth century Louisiana Creole culture and people is important because it will help you understand the setting and socio-cultural contexts that Chopin uses in *The Awakening* better.

The Paris of Louisiana Creoles is New Orleans...

Daniel S Rankin, *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932, p.82

The city of New Orleans had two distinct parts, one American, the other French. Creoles are described as those descended from European ancestors, French and Spanish, and in Louisiana those descended from the French were many more. So the Creole in Louisiana would consider himself/herself to be basically of French descent. The picture of the 'artistic,' 'exotic,' life of social gatherings, musical soirees and fine dining painted in the novel is clearly drawn from the life led by the Creoles in New Orleans in the nineteenth century that Chopin was very much a part of. In the novel, the difference between the 'American' Edna, from a religious Kentucky background and the life on the Creole resort, on Grand Isle, comes through very clearly, as the Creoles are much more warm, free, open and flirtatious and she finds this atmosphere very strange. Let us now examine the similarities or otherwise between Edna Pontellier the protagonist of the novel *The Awakening* and Kate Chopin the author.

Exercise II

1. Who were the Creoles?

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2. What is your understanding of Creole culture?
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4.6 EDNA PONTELLIER AND KATE CHOPIN

In this section, we shall examine the biographical accounts of the life of **Kate Chopin** in connection with her novel *The Awakening* first and later look at the character of Edna Pontellier as a mouth - piece of **Kate Chopin**.

4.6.1 Kate Chopin

Chopin also went regularly for Grand Isle summer vacations with her family. Her lives in the city and in the resort on Grand Isle are replicated in the portrayal of Edna in the novel. In the novel, the resort of Grand Isle lies outside the 'norm,' that exotic, unconventional space where during the husband's frequent absences, her relationship with Robert grows, and her 'awakening' takes place. As a widow, at thirty-two, Chopin also did not follow convention. In fact, the images of bereaved women in her writing are those of widows feeling joy at new - found freedom and their desire/determination to pursue new and exciting interests. Her biographer, **Emily Toth** documents that as a young widow **Kate Chopin** had a passionate liaison with **Albert Sampire**, a married man. There are other such men in her fiction and they are all named Alcee, all "kindle desire and devote themselves to sexual pleasure."

Toth, 169 (quoted in sourcebook, p 9)

As in the novel so too in real life, **Chopin** leaves the lover and her life on the plantation, to go and live with her mother and take care of her children. However, we need to remember that the novel only has some input from her life and that it is NOT autobiography but a work of fiction. Edna Pontellier is **Kate Chopin's** heroine and they are certainly NOT the same person.

Chopin came from a traditional Southern family, her father being a religious Irishman. Although her education was geared to teaching virtues of duty and submissiveness, her upbringing by her great-grandmother who was forward thinking, unconventional and independent had much to do with the kind of personality and thinking **Chopin** developed. This duality in **Chopin's** life and in her 'self,' making a conventional marriage, following the expectations of society, went together with a fierce independence of spirit and a flouting of established norms (like exploring the city on her own, smoking in public, having an affair, not remarrying).

4.6.2 Edna Pontellier

Edna too seeks independence, expressing dissatisfaction with her marriage. She wishes above all to be an individual, not a mere role, such as a wife or and a mother. In fact she challenges the notion that all mothers have maternal instincts. There is a useful description of Mrs Pontellier as a woman and a mother in this chapter, the writer comparing her to another 'mother' in the story, Adele Ratignolle. Edna was not a 'mother-woman,' the children hardly

rushing into her arms to be comforted if they had a fall during play, for instance. Instead they would pull themselves together and get on. Mr Pontellier felt, rather than perceived, that his wife failed in her duty towards the children, a fact he was regretful about. The mother-women, of whom there were many at Grand Isle that summer, are described as follows:

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother- woman. The mother- woman seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.

The Awakening, (Ed., Margo Culley, 1994, Chapter IV, p. 9)

Adele Ratignolle is one such, 'delicious in the role,' 'embodiment of every womanly grace and charm.' Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years and had had a baby every two years, and on her way to having another one and always talking of her 'condition.' She is busy anticipating the future needs of her children, fashioning and sewing things while Mrs Pontellier does not see the usefulness or the point of that. Her 'uneven and impulsive' fondness for her children is described in the text and it shows quite clearly that she is not ideally fitted into the conventional role of the mother, hardly missing them when they are away and in fact feeling relieved and free. When she is happy she sends them presents and later in the novel when she lives alone in the city she goes to spend a week with them at their grandmother's place at Iberville, giving generously and freely of herself, 'filling herself with their young existence,' as they excitedly shared with her their present lives in the countryside, full of pigs and cows and fish and trees. She leaves them with a pang but by the time she reaches the city, the music of their lives she carries back no longer echoes inside her and she is alone again.

The writer comments about Edna: 'a certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, - the light which, showing the way, forbids it.' This new sensation confuses her, moving her to dreams and thoughtlessness and tears. For the first time in her life she begins to perceive herself positioned in the universe as a human being who has a relationship with the world around and within her. The narrative comment on such a realisation is that it was like a weight of wisdom that all women might not have the privilege of receiving. So far she has lived, and most women might do so for their entire lives, according to the rules and conventional norms of society and she is now discontented with this situation. She begins to feel the need to look for a 'self' that goes beyond her role as a wife and mother and this realisation is confusing, disturbing and destabilising for her.

The imagery of the sea describes the voices of the waters she hears as 'seductive,' murmuring to her invitingly to lose her being in mazes of contemplation and solitude. The voice of the sea speaks to her soul as its touch sensuously enfolds her body in a 'soft, close embrace.'

Mrs Pontellier has been described as a reserved and self-contained person, not given to confidences. But here at Grand Isle she began to lose some of her reserve under the influence of the beautiful, friendly and frank Adele

Ratignolle. Edna recalls and shares with her friend her memories of her childhood days when she walked in the green meadows, aimless and unthinking, just following an impulse. She says too that it was a similar state of mind, idle, uncertain and unguided, that she felt herself to be in now. Her early experiences of being passionately infatuated by a 'dignified and sad-eyed cavalry officer,' somewhat attracted by another young gentleman who used to visit a lady on a neighboring plantation, and then finally as a young lady going through the climax of emotion for the great tragedian, a well-known Shakespearean actor (note given later), are described by the narrator. Without meaning to, and even without realising it, Edna finds herself being talkative and sharing the events of her past with Adele, resting her head on her friend's shoulder, their faces turned to the sea. She felt 'flushed,' 'intoxicated,' by this unfamiliar mood of her own which, 'muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom.'

We are told about Edna's marriage to Leonce Pontellier too in this chapter, something that happened purely by accident, without any romantic dreaming on her part, and more like something that was decreed for her by destiny. The narrator describes the marriage and the relationship as follows: 'He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing...he pleased her, his absolute devotion flattered her...she fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. Add to this the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic, and we need seek no further for the motives which led her to accept Monsieur Pontellier for a husband.' All this shows us that Edna is a romantic at heart, a part of her wanting to live in a world of beauty, unreality, romance and dream. Also, she has a rebellious spirit and the objection of her family to the marriage convinces her that it is exactly what she herself wants to do. She decided to become the devoted wife of a man who worships her, and thereby 'take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams.'

Exercise III

1. Do you find any similarities between the author Kate Chopin and Edna Pontellier the protagonist of the novel?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

The story of **Kate Chopin's** life can be divided into two neat sections. She belonged to an upper-middle-class Irish and French family and was married to a young businessman with promising prospects. She became the mother of six children between the years 1871 and 1879. The second part of her life was devoted to writing. As one scholar writes about this clear division:

Chopin in her twenties and thirties, married and bearing six children, was living one sort of life but quite another through her forties and fifties, writing, publishing, and involved in literary society until her death in 1904.

Victoria Boynton, 'Kate Chopin,' *Nineteenth Century American Women Writers: A Bio- Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, Ed., Denise D Knight, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 50

Chopin writes in her diary, on 22 May 1894, about the changes that came into her life after the death of her husband in 1882 and her mother in 1885: 'if it were possible for my mother and husband to come back to earth, I feel I would unhesitatingly give up everything that has come into my life since they left... To do that, I would have to forget the past ten years of my growth-my real growth.' However, her early family life in Louisiana, both the cosmopolitan Creole life of New Orleans, and the rural, largely Cajun (Acadian) culture she was part of, contributed a great deal to her later life as a writer. When she moved to the intellectual circles of St Louis after her husband's death the life and society there encouraged her innate literary talents and abilities.

According to **Chopin's** brother-in-law, **Phanor Breazeale**, with whom she played cards and discussed religion, the inspiration and plot of *The Awakening* came from the true story of a New Orleans woman. In her own life, **Chopin** enjoyed being alone, independent and having an identity apart from her children. The novel *The Awakening* is about sexual freedom, infidelity, transgression of accepted codes of behaviour. Through the persona of Edna the above themes get displayed and discussed. In **Kate Chopin's** own personal life, we find the same streak of independence, the same beliefs in the rights of being an individual, and the very same determination to choose to have her own way.

4.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read section 4.3 carefully and then answer.

Exercise II

1. Creoles are the descendents of European namely, the French and Spanish. The Creole in Louisiana particularly would consider himself/herself to be of basically French descent.
2. The Creoles are believed to be artistic, even exotic, and they led lives of social gatherings complete with musical soirees, fine cuisine as depicted in the novel.

Exercise III

1. Read Section 4.6 both sub sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 carefully and then draft your answer carefully and then draft your answer.

UNIT 5 LOCATING *THE AWAKENING*: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTS

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 The Intellectual Setting of *The Awakening*
- 5.3 The Nineteenth Century: A Socio- Cultural Background
 - 5.3.1 Nineteenth Century Britain
- 5.4 Location: The Writer and the Novel
- 5.5 Symbolism in *The Awakening*
- 5.6 Kate Chopin's Oeuvre
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Answers to Self Check Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are, to discuss the times in which **Kate Chopin** lived and wrote *The Awakening* so that you get an idea of the social and cultural milieu in which the novel is located and that you comprehend the themes of the novel better. In the next section we shall look at the socio-cultural background of late nineteenth century Grand Isle and New Orleans.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

We will now look at and discuss the socio-cultural background and intellectual/ philosophical ideas of the late nineteenth century, as those are the contexts within which the novel is set. Besides, the actual location of Grand Isle and New Orleans, particularly the mix of American and French population, the Creole culture, where the action takes place is important, as they are crucial to the story. Most of the details of **Kate Chopin's** own life have been discussed in the Unit on biographical aspects (Unit 4), but information about the more general background and influences is given in this section. **Kate Chopin**, well read and intelligent, observed with keen irony and absorbed the mood of the ending of the century. She was familiar with the works of **Gustave Flaubert**, (French novelist who wrote *Madame Bovary*, and **Chopin's** novel has been compared with **Flaubert's** through reviews discussed in Unit 6), **Tolstoy** (Russian novelist who wrote *Anna Karenina*, to which also some critics have compared *The Awakening*), **Guy de Maupassant** (French writer whom she greatly admired). In fact, she was so inspired by his stories, many of which dealt with dark themes of suicide, infidelity, drowning etc that she translated eight of them, managing to sell only the three most conventional. It must also be mentioned that some of the same themes are also present in her works as well. She had also read the works of other modern European writers such as, **Ibsen** and **Swinburne**. Influences of American writers such as, **Walt Whitman** (*Leaves of Grass*), **Nathaniel Hawthorne** (*The Scarlet Letter*) and **Herman Melville** (*Moby Dick*) have been traced in her work. **Henry James** and the psychological novel (for instance, *Portrait of a Lady* (1881) was contemporaneous with **Chopin's** time. The dark vision of

the human condition as noted by German philosopher **Arthur Schopenhauer** influenced **Chopin**, as did the music of **Richard Wagner**, German composer of operas. The next section will examine the intellectual setting of the novel under study – *The Awakening*.

5.2 THE INTELLECTUAL SETTING OF *THE AWAKENING*

The decade in which *The Awakening* is published, namely, the 1890s, was a complex time, as it mirrored the unresolved tensions between the old world and the new, the transition time between the two centuries and the traditional vis a vie modern ways of thinking. Intellectual thought was at this time being redefined by the influential works of **Charles Darwin**, **Herbert Spencer** and **Aldous Huxley**, and at the end of the century by **Sigmund Freud**.

Theories of evolution and determinism were inspiring naturalistic ways of thinking (the ways in which women were locked into social roles from which there was no escape, except through death). On the one hand there was faith in the ways of destiny and pre-ordained kinds of living and then there was science that 'confirmed (**Chopin**) in her belief of the relativity of morals': 'Fixed truth in any form-moral or religious or scientific-seldom escaped **Chopin's** ironic glance.' (*Joyce Dyer, 1993, 5*)

The stories of a few strong women living at this time have been documented by historians, women who demonstrated independence in personal lives and those who campaigned for women's voting rights in the public realm. New terms for 'ideal marriage' were described as follows: '...let your *Dependence* be *mutual*, your *Independence*, *equal*, your *Obligations*, *reciprocal*.' **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** published her radical *The Woman's Bible* in 1895 and **Charlotte Perkins Gilman**, a member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, published *Women and Economics* in 1898.

Gilman argued the case for women's economic independence as the foundation for better marriages, equal relationships and more humanity for women: 'marriage is not perfect unless it is between class equals. There is no equality between those who do their share in the world's work in the largest, newest and highest ways and those who do theirs in the smallest, oldest, lowest ways.'

However, although there were some actual women in the last years of the nineteenth century who were redefining the meaning of freedom and equality, most of the representations, of single or divorced women, the new woman or the widow, offer only traditional and weak solutions, hardly being able to free themselves from the patterns of marriage and family.

Joyce Dyer states this as follows: 'Female passion was thought to be immoral and unhealthy by even some of the most aggressive proponents of realism and feminism in the last decades of the nineteenth century'. To suggest otherwise was to enter extremely perilous waters, the waters in which Edna swims. Consequently, female characters separated from men-by their unmarried status, their disillusionment with husbands, or divorce - seldom considered the avenue of liberated sexual behaviour an option. Even **Gilman**, mentioned in the last paragraph, spoke out strongly against female eroticism, sex in her views 'useful for reproduction only'...she argued for the 'sanctity of

marriage...monogamy and fidelity' claiming that the worst of all were 'promiscuous and temporary sex-relations.'

Thus, we need to understand that **Chopin** is writing against such a socio-cultural background where her Edna Pontellier is one of the first women to think, express herself, and act in the defiant manner in which she does. **Chopin's** Dr Mandelet, who shows insight into Edna's sexual psychology and is progressive in his ideas of therapy, is also advanced for her time as other physicians insisted on the values of domesticity as the cure for women's nervous and depressive conditions.

Critics have compared **Kate Chopin** to other American realist and naturalist writers who were her contemporaries, such as, **Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Henry James**. And Edna Pontellier to their heroines: 'all rather sexless compared to Edna, and their descriptions of sexual matters in general are tame'. Not only did **Chopin** draw a heroine who was not afraid to be a sexual being, she is honest and bold enough to articulate that extra-marital sex need not be accompanied by guilt and that a woman was perfectly justified in seeking selfhood and fulfillment outside the institutions of marriage and motherhood.

In addition, it is also clearly stated that Edna believes herself to be becoming more a spiritual being as she continues on her journey of awakening, descending alongside in the social scale. Both role models of womanhood, Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz are presented as alternative ways of being, rejected by Edna Pontellier as they are inappropriate for her. Adele is mother-woman, her identity subsumed within that of her children; with her husband too the sense of identification is so complete as to affect a strange kind of merging of selves. Mlle Reisz is the solitary artist, detached so completely from the real world that she appears to others as arrogant, or insane.

Edna is a solitary soul too, (and that was the original title of the novel), those moments in the novel many when she is enjoying her solitude with relish and abandon, when she takes pleasure in feeling her round arms, eating a hearty meal, seeing the material objects in her house as though for the first time when she is by herself, but her art does not sustain her completely; she needs her fantasies and delusions. When she swims out into the sea alone for the first time, feeling a sense of her new power and of course in the last scene when she is truly solitary without even the burden of a piece of clothing, only the hum of the bees and the fragrance of pinks to keep her company, she is also the hopeless romantic for whom the vision of the ideal world cannot be substituted by dreary reality. She is existentialist too, her vision of life - dark and sombre, presented as follows: '(there were days) when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly towards inevitable annihilation.'

The fact that **Chopin's** novel had the courage to embody such modernist themes through language and style that was both explicit and deeply symbolic makes *The Awakening* far ahead of other literary writing published in the late nineteenth century. The times were not prepared to receive it and thus it had to wait for another seventy years before it could claim its rightful place in the literary canon. Before we go any further we might need to look at the socio-cultural background/ context of the nineteenth century as well as it was during this period that the novel was written. This we shall do in the next section.

5.3 THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: A SOCIO CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Although *The Awakening* is an 'American' novel, some information about the general background of nineteenth century socio-cultural contexts, readership, and a more specific literary context may help you to situate and understand it better. Hence, some facts related to 'Victorian' England, and fiction written in the nineteenth century by British writers, (and you may know the work of some of them, such as, **George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, William Makepeace Thackeray** etc) may be useful to you and are given in this section.

5.3.1 Nineteenth Century Britain

This was a time of great transition, from the agricultural to industrial, a discrediting of old tradition and religious faith in favour of accepting a mechanical natural process, a new sense of empowerment for women and the working classes. Writing of fiction became a new form of commerce, readership becoming far more widespread, women accounting for a major share both as consumers and producers of fiction. Many novels were serialised in magazines and periodicals, and the readers often played an important role in deciding what the writer would write, thereby determining the text. Lending and circulating libraries mushroomed to satisfy growing demands. As regards subject matter, social comment and moral guidance were important aspects. Thematically, domestic/middle-class settings, and issues related to family, such as, marriage and morality in relationships were widely dealt with, but sex was taboo. The 'fallen woman' had to be punished, removed from society so the moral fabric was not compromised. However, by the last years of the century, there also began to emerge a picture of the New Woman, and novels engaged with feminist questions such as, employment for women. Still, sex and relationships that would challenge established moral codes were hardly discussed, and thus **Kate Chopin's** *The Awakening* would have been considered too transgressive and explicit to be acceptable. The next section will look at the location of the author/writer/ **Kate Chopin** and her work/novel/*The Awakening*.

Exercise I

1. Write a critical note on the nineteenth century background against which you may find it useful to read *The Awakening*.

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2. Discuss the influences upon Chopin that you think may have helped to shape her novel.

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3. Does this make more sense to you with your increased knowledge about the time in which Chopin lived and wrote? Give specific examples.

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4. How do you think the nineteenth century readership would have affected the novel?

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5.4 LOCATION: THE WRITER AND THE NOVEL

Another crucial aspect of the location of the writer and her novel is the setting within which the action takes place. It begins on Grand Isle, an island fifty miles south of New Orleans, a Creole summer resort, and goes on later to be situated in the city of New Orleans. The city was American, southern and Creole. The Creoles were the descendents of French and Spanish colonists of the eighteenth century. They were Catholics and believed in strong and conservative family values, spoke French, and felt a close sense of community to their own cultural group, (they formed approximately one-third of the population of New Orleans in 1860) thus, somewhat separate in identity to Anglo-American society. Their attitude towards life was easygoing, and they liked to live a life rich in sensual pleasure and enjoyment. Even so, Louisiana remained a very conservative state, the patriarchal family being the foundation of society, and even when the Creole women appeared to be frank, open and sensual, like Adele, they were in reality unquestionably chaste, religious and completely committed to their families.

In fact, this is what makes their open manner possible, and we get a sense of this contradiction reflected in the character of Adele who is openly flirtatious with Robert and is at the same time the true embodiment of the ideal devoted wife and mother. Edna is herself not from such a background, rather she is married to a Creole and at the start of the novel, seems to be thrown into an atmosphere to which she is a stranger. If you remember, when Adele notices Edna's 'awakening' in the presence of Robert, she warns him, asking him to keep away from her, stating clearly, 'she is not one of us...she may make the blunder of taking you seriously.' Edna is described as Kentucky Presbyterian by birth and her own reserved and rigid upbringing clashes with the open sensuality she finds here. Not only is she awakened and subsequently propelled by her infatuation for Robert to become an unthinking drifting thing who has no anchor to restrain her she is attracted to Adele and Mlle Reisz too in this strange seductive scenario where the inviting sea also plays a part. New Orleans was also American, Calvinistic and puritanical, and when Edna returns to the city at the end of her summer flirtation, newly awakened to selfhood and sexual consciousness, she has to succumb once more to the conservatism of her social roles, receiving guests every Tuesday and

supervising the husband's meals among other boring domestic chores. She does not wish to do any of this now, and thus, she simply doesn't. Robert has done the honourable thing by escaping to Mexico as he is too traditional to seriously imagine a relationship with a married woman. Even towards the end of the novel, when he returns, confessing he has been imagining making her his wife despite his best judgement, he cannot visualise the kind of free relationship based on Edna's ideas of liberty and self-definition that she suggests when she says, 'I give myself where I choose.' Thus, for the second time in the novel, he runs away, leaving behind a note saying, 'Good-bye-because I love you,' clearly indicating a clash of cultures. But that is something we shall examine in the next section when we discuss the use of symbolism in the novel.

5.5 SYMOLISM IN *THE AWAKENING*

In this section we shall define symbolism and then look at instances of symbolism in *The Awakening*. Symbolism, (according to **Ross Murfin**, and **Supriya M Ray** in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*), comes from the Greek *symballein*, meaning "to throw together", the serious and relatively sustained use of symbols to represent or suggest other things or ideas. They also suggest that along with the writer's "explicit use of a particular symbol in a literary work... the term symbolism sometimes refers to the presence, in a work or body of works, of suggestive associations giving rise to incremental, implied meaning." The French symbolist believed that writers "create and use subjective, or private symbols in order to convey very personal and intense emotional experiences and reactions." They were of the opinion that the "network of such symbols" form the core of any literary work. With this definition to guide us, we shall now take a look at the imagery of the sea and its symbolism next.

The clash of cultures mentioned in the earlier section is also represented through the imagery of the sea that forms the backdrop of Grand Isle, sensuously enveloping Edna in a warm embrace while it beckons her into contemplative mazes of solitude, and the harsh bleak reality that is her posh home on Esplanade Street in New Orleans where she is compelled to live on her husband's bounty, and thus remain one of his 'possessions.' Caught between these oppositional forces she loses herself, unable to adjust any longer to her role as wife and mother, not courageous enough to soar alone as an artist (like Mlle Reisz can), waiting for Robert who she thinks can set her free and falling into the arms of Alcee Arobin. Read the symbolism of the trip to Cheniere Chaminada, set in almost mysteriously idyllic setting where, finding the atmosphere of the church suffocating, Edna has to leave and goes into a deep sleep at Madame Antoine's. When she wakes up there are the fantasies of telling stories in which Edna and Robert wake up like lovers in a make-believe world. There is also the duo of the lovers always present, though nameless and faceless, symbolic in the way they are lost in each other but lost also to the rest of the world. And the woman in black, always preoccupied with the beads of her rosary. Having hinted at the symbolism in the novel we might also need to take a look at some of **Kate Chopin's** other works largely from the point of view of her oeuvre providing a context to *The Awakening*, and that we shall do presently in the next section.

Exercise II

1. Comment on the emerging 'New Woman' in the late nineteenth century. Does Edna Pontellier fit into the description?

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2. Do you think the Creole background is important in reading *The Awakening*? Give reasons for your answer.

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3. What role does the sea play in the novel? Use examples from the text to substantiate your answer.

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4. Discuss *The Awakening* as a symbolic novel.

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5.6 KATE CHOPIN'S OEUVRE

Some information about **Kate Chopin**'s other work will be a useful background and will help you to place *The Awakening* within the context of what she wrote before it and after. She began writing for publication only in 1890. **Kate Chopin** was well known by the readers of Louisiana for her, (what was termed) 'local colour stories' in *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). Her first novel, *At Fault* (1890) is also set mostly in Louisiana. Her collection of short stories *A Vocation and a Voice*, which was to be published after *The Awakening*, was cancelled, rejected by her publisher, though it is not certain if that happened as a result of the negative responses received by the novel or an independent decision on the part of the publisher. She did not send one of her stories, *The Storm*, for publication considering it to be too sexually explicit.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the philosophical ideas that were part of the atmosphere of the time during which **Kate Chopin** wrote. These contexts are important as such contexts provide a background to the literary text *The Awakening* in the case. The unit has also examined the various influences upon **Chopin** that helped to shape her novel, and attempt has been made to locate the novel within the American literary tradition, while tracing connections with some other well-known texts/ drawing significant parallels, to tell you a little about the 'Victorian' background and nineteenth century British writing so you can also read the novel against that literary tradition and analyse the significance of the sea since the Gulf waters make a critical contribution to the text, both as a setting as well as a symbol and have given some basic information about **Kate Chopin's** other writings as well.

5.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 carefully and cull out your answer from there.
2. The answer may be found in sections 5.1 and 5.2
3. Having read the sections mentioned above carefully, stop, and think about what has been said and then try and answer the question keeping in mind the location of the writer, the times in which she lived and wrote and her own life as well.
4. Section 5.3 and any other information you might have on particularly Victorian England could guide your answer.

Exercise II

1. The answer may be found in section 5.2
2. Section 5.4 provides the clue to your answer.
3. Section 5.5 discusses the role of the sea. You may also look at suitable quotes from the text.
4. Define symbolism briefly and then re-read section 5.5 and see how the sea is symbolic or whether there is anything else in the novel that may be read as symbolic when attempting this answer.

UNIT 6 CRITICAL RESPONSES TO *THE AWAKENING*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Critical History of *The Awakening*
- 6.3 Summary of 19th Century and Other Early Critical Responses
- 6.4 Mid - Century Critical Responses Until the Novel's Rebirth in 1969
- 6.5 Modern Critical Interpretations
 - 6.5.1 Interpreting *The Awakening*
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are, to briefly introduce to you, the facts around the publication and reception history of *The Awakening*. This unit also seeks to familiarise you with the critical history of *The Awakening* by providing brief commentaries and samples of the early reviews, published in the nineteenth century, when the novel first came out and a brief summary of the reviews in later years, after 1969, the year of publication of the first authoritative biography by Per Seyersted, which helped to give the novel new life and meaning for the modern reader.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The date of publication, 1899, of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, is significant. Perched dangerously in the last years of the nineteenth century it is also at the brink of the ushering in of the twentieth. The above fact becomes even more important when we look closely at the critical history of this novel.

6.2 CRITICAL HISTORY OF *THE AWAKENING*

Condemned immediately on publication, and later deliberately ignored due to its discussion of taboo themes – such as, infidelity, a woman's desire for self-definition, independence and sexual liberty, challenging the institution of motherhood - it is important to know that *The Awakening* has received enormous attention in later years. It is obvious that the writer and this novel were much ahead of the time they were historically located in and thus, *The Awakening* was considered completely transgressive and unacceptable in the nineteenth century.

In fact, when **Emily Toth**, Chopin's most recent biographer, first read the novel in 1970, she admits to having been 'astonished that a woman in 1899 had asked the same questions that we, in the newly revived women's movement were asking seventy years later.' **Cyrille Arnavon**, a French academic, re-discovered the novel, wrote about it in 1946 and translated it into French in 1953 (as *Edna*). Although he thought Edna to be 'regressive' and the suicide 'unjustified,' he claimed the

work was an American *Madame Bovary*.' (Willa Cather in 1899 had made the same comparison. In fact, several critics drew this parallel at different times). He also encouraged his young graduate student Per Seyersted to continue further research in this area, who in turn devoted long years of his academic life to this project, finally publishing both a *Critical Biography* and *Complete Works* in 1969.

The time of the novel's rebirth was also crucial as it coincided with the second wave of the feminist movement. The readership for **Kate Chopin** was now ready and the feminists claimed the novel immediately as they saw that it reflected in it all their important concerns such as, women's independence and liberty, self-definition and sexuality. It was reprinted several times in the 1970s and has inspired readers, scholars and critics to continue to engage with it ever since.

The Awakening has made a long journey from being completely forgotten and ignored to becoming vastly popular. It is now also canonized, that is, it is a part of several courses being taught to students all over the world - Literature courses, courses on feminist theory, women's writing, nineteenth century studies, American Studies, textual linguistics, folklore, women's studies etc. It is a part of the postgraduate syllabi at University of Delhi and now you, at IGNOU, are studying it too.

The next section briefly sums up some of the nineteenth century critical responses to the text before giving you some actual excerpts.

Exercise I

1. Do you think the date of publication of *The Awakening* is significant? Why?

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2. Why was Emily Toth astonished to read the book in 1970?

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6.3 SUMMARY OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AND OTHER EARLY CRITICAL RESPONSES

Almost all critics of *The Awakening* thought that Edna Pontellier was 'morally offensive.' **Frances Porcher**, who reviewed the novel for the *St Louis Mirror*, was full of praises for the style and description but termed Edna's passion 'an ugly, cruel, loathsome monster.' She continues, 'There is no fault to find with the telling of the story, there are no blemishes in its art, but it leaves one sick of human nature and so one feels-*cui bono!*' **Daniel Rankin**, **Chopin's** first biographer, said complimentary things about her art but thought the novel 'exotic in setting, morbid in theme, erotic in motivation.' Other critics too thought Edna was 'selfish' and the novel was about 'morbid psychology.'

In fact most of the reviews praised the novel for its skilful storytelling and style but almost all reviewers saw the theme as immoral and the portrayal of Edna as disagreeable, unrefined and vulgar....'flawless art...delicacy of touch of rare skill in construction, the subtle understanding of motive...lacks the high motive of tragedy...(is) not for the young person.' Some other comments are cited below and all the reviews from where these have been extracted are quoted in full so you will have all the publication details:

- *The worst of such stories is that they will fall into the hands of the youth, leading them to dwell on things that only matured persons can understand, and promoting unholy imaginations and unclean desires.*
- *It was not necessary that for a writer of so great refinement and poetic grace to enter the overworked field of sex fiction.*
- *...the story was not worth telling, and its disagreeable glimpses of sensuality are repellent.*
- *It is not a healthy book...the poison of passion seems to have entered her system, with her mother's milk.*

These comments do not carry the details of reviews/reviewers as the details form a part of the reading list at the end of this block.

C L Deyo, published in the *St Louis Post- Dispatch*, 20th May 1899, writes about **Kate Chopin's** craftsmanship as a novelist.

There may be many opinions touching other aspects of Mrs. Chopin's novel The Awakening, but all must concede its flawless art. The delicacy of touch are skill in construction, the subtle understanding of motive, the searching vision into the recesses of the heart – these are known to readers of 'Bayou Folk' and 'A Night in Acadie.' But in this new work power appears, power born of confidence. There is no uncertainty in the lines, so surely and firmly drawn. Complete mastery is apparent on every page.

Nineteenth - Century Responses, Contemporary Reviews, C L Deyo, St Louis Post – Dispatch, 20 May 1899, reprinted in, Margo Culley ed., The Awakening, New York: W W Norton & Company, 1994, p. 164

A little further on he offers his comments on the plot and the use of language in *The Awakening*.

Nothing is wanting to make a complete artistic whole. In delicious English, quick with life, never a word too much, simple and pure, the story proceeds with classic severity through a labyrinth of doubt and temptation and dumb despair.

Although a lot of writing exists on **Kate Chopin's** works, mostly her short stories are the subject of discussion. *The Awakening* disappears completely from the literary scene during the first half of the twentieth century. **Joseph Reilly** suggested that a dozen stories selected from **Chopin's** two collections of short fiction would create a single work 'which those most proud of American literature would gladly proclaim an addition to its masterpieces.' However, the novel is not mentioned by him, he does not even seem to be aware of it.

In fact, the manner of its absolute disappearance from the literary scene during this time gives a push to the theory that it was banned or taken off library shelves. But this was a rumour rather than the reality, as **Emily Toth** establishes through her research and interviews etc. It was also rumoured that **Chopin** was so heartbroken by the reception of this novel that she stopped writing altogether. This too has been disproved as she did write and publish more short fiction but all her work following *The Awakening* was more conventional, less significant, less vast. The publishers rejected *A Vocation and a Voice* although no reasons are offered in any of her papers there are controversial conjectures. **Daniel Rankin** assumes that it had a connection with the negative reception of the novel whereas her later biographers believe it was a business decision on the part of the publishers that was unrelated to **Chopin's** earlier work.

Exercise II

1. Imagine that you are asked to review *The Awakening* by a leading newspaper of the city. Write a short review, expressing your responses.

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6.4 MID-CENTURY CRITICAL RESPONSES UNTIL THE NOVEL'S REBIRTH IN 1969

In the 1950s, however, the scenario changed somewhat and American critics began to recognise that *The Awakening* was an important literary work. **Van Wyck Brooks** called the novel the 'one novel of the nineties in the South that should have been remembered, one small perfect book that mattered more than the life-work of many a prolific writer. 'In 1956, **Kenneth Eble** called it 'a first-rate novel,' (one that) 'deserves to be restored and to be given its place among novels worthy of preservation.' He praised 'its general excellence' and although he said also 'quite frankly, the book is about sex,' the comment was not disparaging as in the case of other critics before him.

The mid-century then saw many American critics engaging positively with *The Awakening*, calling **Chopin**'s text: 'an anachronistic, lonely, existential voice out of the mid-20th century'...'To discover a novel of such stature in the American past is both a happiness and an occasion for some shame. Not many readers would claim to know all of American literature, but some of us like to think that at least we know the best of it. *The Awakening* has been too much and too long neglected.'

And finally, came the invaluable work of rediscovery by **Per Seyersted**, that completed the retrieval of this novel from the recesses of oblivion, placing it clearly on the literary and feminist map...'(the novel is) as modern now as it probably will be in a still patriarchal tomorrow.'

Exercise II

1. What was the reaction of the early reviewers when the novel was published in 1899?

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2. Now that you have read the novel, do you think this reaction was justified?

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3. Critically comment on the journey this novel made from 1899 to 1969.

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6.5 MODERN CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS

I will try to sum up some important post 1970 responses to the novel so you get a fair idea about how the critical insights change and develop as new literary theories begin to shape thinking.

Although critics increasingly began to see *The Awakening* as a crucial literary statement about a woman's quest for emancipation from traditional and stereotypical gender roles leading to

her determination to live life on her own terms, there was an emphasis that it was not exactly a political work where the woman was a crusader for women's rights, that she was really a writer who held a moderate position and did not intend the work to be a feminist document. Some see her as trapped in a system to which she offers at best some personal rebellion and resistance. **Lawrence Thornton** perceives the text to be very political, as Edna is deceived 'by her private vision and by the society she discovers during the summer on Grand Isle,' speaking also of the 'labyrinth of social conventions, marriage, and motherhood that is closing around her like a vise.' **Linda Huff** believes Edna lives as 'new woman' in an " 'old' society, with its conventions, prejudices and superstitions," 'too small' though to be able to change anything.

In 1976, **Emily Toth** saw Edna as embodying nineteenth century feminist criticism though other feminist critics have seen her as not able to go beyond self-questioning to a larger engagement with the social structures of oppression. Critics have recognised Edna's articulations of important issues like childhood and motherhood as proving to be 'disastrous, causing insanity, death, and-of more significance to Chopin-a woman's loss of self'.

Several critics have viewed the novel as very 'modern' as it does not provide any final answers. Its ambiguity and mystery, its taking of many-sided perspectives, the withholding of judgment, are seen as being its real strengths, as this 'implicates us in its probing of such moral questions as the nature of sexuality, selfhood, and freedom, the meaning of adultery and suicide, and the relationship between biological destiny and personal choice'.

Elizabeth Fox – Genovese in her article '*The Awakening in the context of Experience, Culture and Values of Southern Women,*' *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening*, edited by **Bernard Koloski**, says:

The Awakening shocked Chopin's contemporaries for the same reason that it has earned the admiration of recent generations: it candidly acknowledges women's impulses. Modern readers [...] tend to view Edna's awakening to her sexuality as logically portending her struggle for liberation. Yet Chopin remains more ambiguous, thus inviting multiple, even contradictory, readings [...]

6.5.1 Interpreting *The Awakening*

The final section of this Unit, summarises a few important ways of reading and interpreting the novel, offered by critics during the late nineties and some even more recently for instance **Donald Pizer** in his '*A Note on Kate Chopin's The Awakening as Naturalistic Fiction,*' *Southern Literary Journal*, 33, No.2 (2001), pp. 5-13ⁱ **Pizer** reads the novel as an example of naturalistic fiction, which he describes as 'the principal innovative movement in American fiction of the 1890s.' He defines literary naturalism as 'the dramatization of the limitations placed upon the human will by the biological and social realities within which the will attempts to find its way.' He uses Darwinian theories in his essay, focusing upon Edna's 'inability to overcome the biological instincts of motherhood despite her repeated rejections of the socially imposed expectations of the role.'

This essay is particularly relevant as it compares once more **Gustave Flaubert's** *Emma Bovary* and **Kate Chopin's** *The Awakening*. Heath traces Emma's journey towards becoming Edna, 'the married woman (who) moves once more to suicide after weariness in marriage and knowledge of an adulterous passion.' He notices too, however, the sophistication of **Chopin**, the later writer, well - read in the works of **Charles Darwin**, **Aldous Huxley** and **Herbert Spencer** and thus, familiar with the intellectual thought of the time. Analysing the unconventional behaviour of both heroines (Emma Bovary and Edna Pontellier) as 'pathological,' he comments on the presence of a Dr Mandelet, who suggests she needs 'an inspired psychologist,' thus, anticipating the theories of **Freud**, whose work was just emerging at this time: 'In Emma Bovary's world there is no understanding; in Edna's a glimmering: her doctor at least shows some comprehension, even if ultimately held in the conventions of what **Freud** himself will continue to call 'the riddle' of woman.'

Stephen Heath points out the following: the theme of lesbianism, hinted at through the portrayal of Mademoiselle Reisz, the significance of story-telling, and in both novels the predominance of images of birds, and the motif of flight - Emma wishes to 'escape from life and fly away in an embrace,' Mlle Reisz speaks to Edna of 'the bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice.' He draws attention to the parrot, who speaks a 'language which nobody understood' suggesting the 'problem of representation that Chopin faces.' The novel ends with the voice of the sea, one to which Edna has responded throughout, and now awakened and attuned, identifies with. He locates both novels in the tradition of 'women's modernism' seeing the latter as a continuation of the modernist project: 'between the two, parrot and sea, there is the whole process - the substance - of **Chopin's** writing, the difficult course of Edna's desire for herself, reaching out 'for the unlimited'.

Ivy Schweitzer, in her *Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin's The Awakening*, *Boundary II*, vol.17, Part I, 1990, pp.158-86, reviews the novel in the tradition of American Literature being about a search for self, and the theme of conflict between the individual and society, but primarily as being a male concern (e.g. mainstream American texts like **Hawthorne's** *The Scarlet Letter*). In the case of this novel these themes are further problematised by the facts of maternity and motherhood: she writes, '(the novel) raises many genre questions about the differences in a romance written by a woman, and, most specifically, it raises the question of whether a woman may be the hero of romance.' **Schweitzer** uses feminist theory to examine the complex presentations of motherhood, responsibilities of the role of mother, 'metaphors of self-birth and the seductive, maternal sea which liberate (Edna.)' She perceives Edna's early awakenings as 'universal' and not merely 'gender-specific' and yet she also sees motherhood and individuality as 'mutually exclusive.' Edna's models of individuality are all male, apart from Mlle Reisz, who is also represented as somewhat strange. However, although she highlights the idea of male subjectivity in Edna following the 'pattern of the male hero of romance, defining herself as self through her desire for another,' she questions it too by the last image being one where Edna is starkly reminded of her womanhood (motherhood) while attending to Adele during childbirth.

Thus, her flight towards freedom (in seeking some kind of ideal relationship), she realises, has to take into account those 'antagonists' (the children). And unable to reconcile the two conflicting but equally powerful aspects of her 'self' she makes the only choice available to her at that time. Many readers who read the novel today may assert that the choices for women in Edna's situation have not increased remarkably in the century that has gone by, since the time of the publication of the novel in 1899. That I suppose is what makes *The Awakening* important today - modern, relevant, contemporary - and thus, constantly under discussion by readers, students and researchers. Contemporary criticism is continuously engaging with new approaches to reading *The Awakening*, perspectives informed by movements in literary theory such as, feminism, post structuralism, New Historicism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction and recent developments in the fields of history, economics, philosophy, sociology etc.

6.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit has tried to look at the late nineteenth century novel *The Awakening* from the point of view of the kind of critical comments and responses that it generated particularly at the time when the novel was published. From whatever has been discussed so far we do discern that the novel was not really welcomed or even liked at the time of its publication. But we have also come to realise through the course of this unit that the novel *The Awakening* was re-discovered and reborn in the 1970s and that feminists instantly claimed it as addressing issues of importance to them. Since then the novel has been in circulation, is even taught and is in fact canonised. All this to my mind, hints at the novel's potential appeal to even modern day readers.

Exercise II

1. How did the critics of the early twentieth century respond to *The Awakening*?

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2. Discuss the trends of critical opinion in the responses of the post-1970 readers of the novel. What are your views?

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3. Critically comment on the ending of *The Awakening*.

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4. Imagine Edna Pontellier living in the present time. Do you think her story would be any different? How?

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5. Do you think there is any difference between the nineteenth century reviews of the novel and those in our times? Discuss the difference and comment upon it?

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6.6 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. The date of the publication of *The Awakening* is significant as it was published at the very end of the 19th century. The world order was changing, literary trends were changing and above all Kate Chopin's novel was too early for that era.
2. Emily Toth was astonished to read the novel in 1970 as she felt that Kate Chopin had asked all the questions that women and feminists in the twentieth century were asking. She was amazed that Kate Chopin had the foresight to even raise these questions.
3. Pause and reflect on your answer.

Exercise II

1. Section 6.4 has the answer, read it carefully.
2. Pause and reflect.
3. Read Section 6.4 for the answer.
4. Read Section 6.5
5. Read Section 6.5.1
6. The ending of *The Awakening* is significant as it is symbolic of various things such as women's quest for freedom, the re-birth of Edna Pontellier or more significantly the re-birth of women in general.
7. Read the novel, read the block carefully and then think and write out a well reasoned answer.

UNIT 7 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO *THE AWAKENING*: FEMINIST, PSYCHOANALYTICAL, OTHERS

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 *The Awakening* and the Age
- 7.3 Feminist Approach to *The Awakening*
- 7.4 Psychoanalytical Approach to *The Awakening*
- 7.5 Symbolism in *The Awakening*
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises
- 7.8 Glossary

7.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarise you with a few critical approaches that may be pertinent to the analysis of **Kate Chopin's** novel *The Awakening*. We will however, not go into too many details on these approaches in this unit as several of these critical approaches will be discussed in Unit 33 in Block 6.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Critical approaches may be defined very simply as **David Daiches** does in the Introduction to the second edition of *Critical Approaches to Literature* as a way of illuminating “both the nature of literature and the nature of criticism” and as “important ways” in which literature (in our case the novel, *The Awakening*) can be discussed. Keeping this in mind let us begin by looking very briefly at the novel and then proceed to examining the feminist approach.

7.2 THE AWAKENING AND THE AGE

The novel as you already known was written and publishes towards the end of the nineteenth century, 1899 to be precise. It was literally the end of the nineteenth century and the nineteenth century as we are all aware was the Victorian age in England. Approximately a period of sixty years from the 1830s to the 1890s and an age defined by its moral stance and the extreme deference to conventions. It was an age when a man could not smoke in public (today smoking is banned by most countries including our own country due to health reasons, but during the Victorian age, it was thought of as indecorous) or a woman, ride a bicycle!

But it was also the age of relative peace in England while America was faced with the scars of the Civil War (1861-65) but, at the same time there was also interaction between the American and the European writers and it was an age of what Edward Albert calls “spacious intellectual horizons, noble endeavour, and bright aspirations. The novel as we have seen in the earlier unit (Unit 6)

was a controversial one as it dealt with issues then thought of to be taboo... and did not receive its due then. It was re-discovered nearly sixty years later and then promptly claimed by feminists. Given the theme of the novel it obviously lends itself to serious critical engagement as we may have discerned from the earlier units. In the next section, we will look at the feminist approach to literature in some detail as a way of examining the issues that is dealt with in this novel.

7.3 FEMINIST APPROACH TO *THE AWAKENING*

Let us begin this section by quoting Anand Prakash who says that,

...a significant area of suppressed identities in the contemporary novel relates to women in all societies, irrespective of race or class. Most of the novels in the twentieth century present women with a bias. Scarcely any light is shed on the question of women's exploitation under the pressure of home, marriage and the overarching patriarchy. (Unit 33, Block 6)

Such feeling was to create the feminist approach to literature that became a major contending force in the late 1970s when feminist theory came to be applied to linguistic and literary material. Much of feminist critical theory is derived from the works of the French feminist writer **Simone de Beauvoir** in particular her book *The Second Sex* or *Le Deuxième Sexe* published in 1949. **Beauvoir's** main contention was that when men were associated with humanity then women were very often relegated to a lesser space/ a lower/ inferior position in society. Critics after **Beauvoir** strengthened this debate by focusing on language as a tool of male dominance while looking at the manner in which the man's point of view was therefore, presented as the point of view. Then there were critics who felt that women not only have different experiences from men but also write differently. Critics such as **Hélène Cixous** tried to look at the "essential connection between women's body whose sexual pleasure has been repressed, and women's writing" (**Murfin and Ray**, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 1998, p 123).

This by the way is just the beginning of the discussion on the feminist critical approach to literature and *The Awakening*. You could read up more on feminist theory and feminist critical approaches if you would like to learn more about this approach. Coming back to the novel *The Awakening*, let us look at the feminist issues depicted through the character of Edna Pontellier.

Some of the issues that come to mind are, the notion of women being viewed as personal property by the men in the novel. For instance, if we look at the time period and the culture in which the novel has been set, there are innumerable instances that indicate the fact that men simply thought of their wives as personal property. It almost appears as if they did not know any better or could not even conceive of the fact that their wives were independent people with a mind of their own as is the case with Edna Pontellier. This may also be discerned when we look critically at what Lèonce Pontellier has to say about his wife Edna Pontellier as well as in the narrator's voice.

The woman in question (in this case, Edna) is of course helpless till she is awakened, and feels a sense of hopelessness and entrapment in her marriage as well as within the walls of domesticity. The awakening of Edna of course has disastrous consequences as it ultimately results in her suicide as we see

towards the end of the novel. *The Awakening* is also a very good illustration of how society too enforces the norms of conventionality by isolating anybody who dares defy its norms and particularly so a woman daring to do so. Moreover, the novel depicts very clearly how society imposes its norms and how some women such as, Adele Ratignolle find both economic as well as social reward in conforming whereas, Edna Pontellier does not do so and society finds this non-conformity a sign of rebellion and does not look upon these acts of transgression with sympathy.

In fact, society punishes these so called rebels through isolation fearing that such flawed characters might challenge society's very existence. Edna Pontellier after her awakening (in this case the first awakening, which may be looked upon as a sexual awakening, when she thinks of herself as a woman with desire) is a changed woman and for her, her artistic as well as sexual desire are important whereas, tradition and conventionality are seen as those imposed and therefore thrust upon women are not desirable. Then again, there are instances when Lèonce Pontellier thinks his wife's aspirations are merely trivial and frivolous and that he can actually make her conform to his way of life, which is in a sense a very difficult thing for Edna Pontellier to accept and she finds the whole exercise painful and frustrating.

The awakened (sexually awakened, at this stage) Edna also emerges as a character who, is seeking to take control of her own life and her own feelings as someone who wishes escape form the confines of marriage, domesticity and even mother hood more than cling to the safety of a husband, home and hearth. Moreover, Edna finds herself struggling with her feelings of motherhood or lack of it, as she also realises what society dictates as motherhood and being a mother. These instances that we have talked about are some points indicative of the manner in which feminists could approach the study of this text.

In the next section, we shall look at what the psychoanalytical approach to literature is about and we shall try and suggest pointers to examining the novel under study with this approach in mind.

Exercise I

1. What is the feminist approach to the study of literature?

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2. Can you use the feminist approach to analyse *The Awakening*?

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7.4 PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH TO *THE AWAKENING*

Critical Approaches to *The Awakening*: Feminist, Psychoanalytical, Others

The psychoanalytical approach to literature derives from the work of the Austrian **Sigmund Freud** (1856- 1939) a psychoanalyst by profession. He was the pioneer of psychoanalytical criticism. He developed “a language that described, a model that explained, a theory that encompassed human psychology,” (*The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 1998, **Murfin** and **Ray**, p. 311), all directly or indirectly related to the nature of the unconscious mind. Freud identified three components of the human psyche – the *id*, the *ego* and the *super ego*. The *id* according to **Freud** is the “predominantly passionate, irrational, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche.” The *ego* “which is predominantly rational, logical, orderly, and conscious.” The *ego* is also the mediator between the *id* and the *super ego*. The *super ego* according to **Freud** is that part of the human psyche that internalises the norms and mores of society. Implying, that a reflection of societal norms and mores may be looked at as “external” or “outside the self” and as a self check in- built mechanism that makes moral judgement and tells us to make sacrifices even if we know that such sacrifices may not be in our best interest.

Sigmund Freud also believed that as human beings we all have what he calls “repressed wishes and fears” (p. 312) that have been pushed under the carpet or the surface by the super ego in its capacity as moral guardian and that which has been pushed even further by the ego into the unconscious realm of the human psyche. These repressions are then manifested in the form of dreams, in language as the Freudian slip and in creative activity that, as **Freud** says, “may produce art (including literature), and in neurotic behaviour” (p.312). **Freud** also talks about the Oedipus complex, and used the analysis of dreams as “a tool for uncovering our repressed feelings and memories.” **Freud** was of the opinion that “repression” surfaces in dreams, masked in symbolic form.

Carl Gustav Jung an analytical psychologist developed a theory of “the collective unconscious, a repository of shared unconscious memories dating back to the origins of literature” (p. 313). According to Jungian theory, a great work of literature is not a disguised expression of its author’s repressed wishes (as thought by Freud), but “ a manifestation of desires once held by the whole human race (but that are now repressed because of the advent of civilisation) (p. 313). The French theorist **Jacques Lacan** “focuses more on language and language related issues. He extends **Freud**’s theory of dreams, literature and their interpretation; he has also added the element of language to **Freud**’s emphasis on psyche and gender. For **Lacan**, the unconscious is a language and dreams a form of discourse. “Thus, we may study dreams psychoanalytically in order to learn more about the unconscious. **Lacan** identifies three stages of development: (1) pre- Oedipal stage/ the pre- verbal stage, (2) the mirror stage/ imaginary stage and (3) the “I” stage/ stage of laws, language and society. (p. 310).

Exercise II

1. What is the contribution of Freud, Jung and Lacan to psychoanalytical studies?

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7.5 SYMBOLISM IN *THE AWAKENING*

The reason why I have chosen to talk about the psychoanalytical approach is essentially to draw your attention to symbols and symbolism in the novel *The Awakening*. Symbols stand for or suggest something else, something larger, something, more complex – often an idea or a range of inter- related ideas, attitudes and practices, (p. 319). The word symbolic as stated in Unit 5, section 5.5 comes from the Greek word *symballein* to mean, “throw together”. Keeping in mind what has been said about symbols and symbolism there, we shall now proceed to look at some of the symbols and their significance in *The Awakening*.

Simply put, symbols may be recognised as objects, characters, figures, or colours used to represent abstract ideas/ concepts. There are several symbols that come to mind when I think of *The Awakening*. You may have noticed these as well but may or may not have recognised them or looked at them as symbols. Or you may have already recognised them as symbols and gone ahead and analysed them as well! In any case, let me begin by talking about the symbol of birds in the novel. Birds stand for something in this novel. The birds that have been described, discussed and any bird imagery that is drawn up represents images of entrapment in *The Awakening*. The caged birds signify Edna Pontellier’s own entrapment within the confines of her marriage and children. It could also be indicative of the entrapment of all women or women in general in the Victorian Age, as we do know the position of women then. Madam Lebrun’s parrot and the mocking bird could be looked upon as signifying Edna Pontellier and Madame Reisz as well. Since both the birds are in captivity their movements are restricted, similarly, the movement of the women in the novel too are restricted and limited by the conventions and traditions laid down by society and particularly a rigid one at that. They are so severely restricted in their movement that at times, they fail to even communicate with the world around them. For instance, Edna Pontellier is not able to articulate her innermost anguish clearly even to her husband or to herself for that matters, or any other character in the novel. She tries to escape from the narrow confines of society, the domesticity of her marriage and her children. She sets up a place entirely for herself away from her husband and her children: the pigeon house, and finds solace in the fact that her new home is symbolic of her independence, but we as readers are aware that the pigeon house is in fact, just “two steps away” and really indicative of her own innate inability to remove herself entirely from her former life.

Her friend Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna Pontellier that she will need to have very strong wings in order to survive the turmoil that she’ll face if she intends

to act on her love for Robert Lebrun. By the time she sets up the pigeon house, we know that she has gone away to Mexico. Mademoiselle Reisz warns Edna Pontellier saying:

The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weakling bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth" (Chapter XXVII, p. 79, Edited by Margo Culley, Wordsworth Norton & C: New York, 1994).

Then there are the critics of the novel who also use the final imagery of the bird to argue that Edna Pontellier's suicide at the end of the novel is, in fact, a sign of defeat, both for her as an individual as well as for all women in general.

A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water."

While these critics cite this quotation from Ch XXXIX, p. 108 of the text, as an example of Edna's and women's defeat in general, some other critics argue that if the symbol of the birds is to signify not Edna Pontellier's individual defeat but that of the collective defeat of the women in the Victorian age, then Edna Pontellier's suicide/ final awakening may also be looked upon as representing the fall, tradition/ convention that in a sense, may be said to have been achieved by Edna Pontellier's suicide.

We have already talked about the symbolism of the sea in Unit 5, but we can always take another look at the sea that is a major symbol in the novel, here as well. The sea has been used as a symbol by many authors and of course we must not forget the images of the sea in our own myths as well as the images in the Bible. In particular I am talking about two major works that you must have read or if not, you must have definitely heard about – **Herman Melville's** *Moby Dick* (1851) and **Ernest Hemingway's** *The Old Man and the Sea* (written in Cuba in 1951 and published in 1952). Both these novels (actually the latter is a novella or a short novel or a long short story, just under a hundred pages) use symbolism and the sea also figures in these novels in a big way. The sea may be said to be signalling a sense of space, boundless and timeless, a sense of freedom from life's shores and hence, from life's trials and temptations as well. It is interesting to note that Edna Pontellier has tried learning swimming unsuccessfully earlier on but she is taught by Robert Lebrun and learns to swim and feels the sea and the surf beckoning her throughout the novel. She is said to be seduced by the sound of the surf, "The voice of the surf is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamouring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (Chapter VI, p. 14), and she succumbs to the temptation only when she has actually been empowered (by her act of learning to swim successfully). She is also aware of her and by extension human being's place in the scheme of things as is obvious from the next quote in the same chapter, "In short, Mrs Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual in the world within and about her" (p.14). Throughout the novel there is a sense of the unknown, the wild, - the sea and the surf calling out to her. Moreover, if we look at the sea not as sea *per se* but as water then we get another picture of the symbolism of the sea in *The Awakening*. If we look at the sea as water then we would realise that the sea

then symbolises ritual cleansing/ the Christian concept of baptism/ re-birth. And it is therefore apt that Edna Pontellier should drown or swim away to her death symbolising her re-birth – a re-birth of sorts.

The Awakening is very rich in symbolism as mentioned earlier and it is now up to you to take the initiative and look at symbols in the novel. We have merely pointed out what symbolism is and shown you examples of how symbolism works. We expect you to look for other symbols in the novel as you read it. However, we'd still like to point out a few major symbols to help you in your task but we expect you to explore the symbolism behind these. For instance, look at the way in which Edna Pontellier and women in the novel are presented to us (the readers) in the novel. ...The mother- women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (Chapter IV, p.9).

Then look at the treatment of art by **Kate Chopin** in *The Awakening*. Art seems to awaken Edna Pontellier. Take the case of the bird imagery in the novel. Birds and clothes are other symbols that you could locate and analyse. Then there is the whole symbolism generated by food/ meals, the symbolism of the house, Edna Pontellier's desire to learn swimming, the symbol of the moon and finally the ocean, the gulf or the sea. Your list could also include music, or the playing of the piano and sleep as a symbol.

Exercise III

1. Analyse *The Awakening* from the point of view of symbolism.

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7.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to look at several critical approaches to literature and in particular to the novel, in this case, *The Awakening*. We have also defined three major approaches and summarised these approaches very briefly while pointing out instances from the novel or indicating how we could analyse or approach the novel from the perspectives of these approaches. In particular, we have dealt with the symbolic approach to the study of *The Awakening* in great detail.

7.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Critical Approaches to *The Awakening*: Feminist, Psychoanalytical, Others

Exercise I

1. Feminist approach to the study of literature is when we approach a text using a woman's perspective and raise questions about women's issues. Section 7.3 should be read carefully.
2. Section 7.3 should be read carefully.

Exercise II

1. Read Section 7.4 and then write your answer.

Exercise III

1. Read Section 7.5, then read the novel again and answer this question. You could begin by defining symbolism and then locating various symbols in the text, after which you could examine and analyse these symbols.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 8 INTRODUCTORY: *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Charles Dickens: Life and Works
- 8.2 *A Tale of Two Cities*: Background
- 8.3 *A Tale of Two Cities* in relation to Dickens's other Works
 - 8.3.1 Dickens's Portrayal of Women
 - 8.3.2 Theme of Burial and Resurrection
 - 8.3.3 Dickens and Revolution
 - 8.3.4 *A Tale of Two Cities* and Dickens's Later Novel
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Glossary
- 8.6 Answers to Self Check Exercises



Charles Dickens (1812-70)

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, the material provided is chiefly of an introductory nature. It is intended to place the text within the context of the writer's life, the times in which he lived, his other works, his other interests, and his major thematic preoccupations as no text exists in isolation from such a context. *A Tale of Two Cities*, in addition, also requires some knowledge of the French Revolution, which was an actual historical event that **Dickens** used as background and material for his novel. This background will be provided in a later Unit (Unit 12). Read this Unit quickly through at first; you can then go back to it for further information and clarification.

8.1 CHARLES DICKENS: LIFE AND WORKS

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 at Portsea, England. His father was a naval pay clerk who was **improvident** and frequently in debt. When **Dickens** was eleven, family circumstances forced him to leave school and find employment in a blacking factory. His father was sent to the debtors' prison in Marshalsea. These were happenings that left a deep scar in his mind. He never forgot the humiliation of sinking into the working – class so suddenly, or the betrayal at being left to fend for himself. The deep sympathy of the child, and the protest against social injustices that we find in his work were born out of this childhood **trauma**.

After a few months, however, John Dickens was released, and the young Charles was able to resume schooling, he started work in a law firm as clerk, became a legal reporter, and subsequently, due to his skill in shorthand, a newspaper reporter of parliamentary proceedings. As a journalist he wrote a number of short descriptive "sketches" of city life, which were so popular that they were collected into a book entitled *Sketches by Boz* (1843). (Boz was the pen name adopted by **Dickens**). His first novel was the immensely popular comic novel *Pickwick Papers*. It was originally intended to serve merely as the text to accompany the sporting plates of the famous artist **Seymour**, but due to the former's death, **Dickens** went on to write it as his own book.

A Tale of Two Cities



'No words can express the secret agony of my soul'

Dickens's success as a novelist after this was swift. He wrote *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Nicholas Nickleby* almost simultaneously between 1837 and 1841. In these early novels **Dickens** attacked various contemporary social evils and called for their reform. *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), which came next, was one of his only two historical novels (the other being the much later *A Tale of Two Cities*). In 1842 he visited America with his wife (he had married **Catherine Hogarth** in 1836). *American Notes* (1848) was based on this visit. The novels of his "middle" period were *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), the Christmas Books including *Christmas Carol* (1843), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and the autobiographical *David Copperfield* (1850).



Dickens's greatest novels were written, arguably, in the decade that followed: *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* (1857) are, like his last novels, *Great Expectations* (1861) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), great novels of social criticism. In these novels, Dickens is no longer attacking specific social ills, but is dealing with the issue of the "condition of England" itself through his satiric representation of such national institutions as the court of Chancery, the "Circumlocution Office", the factory system, the class system, the great financial schemes and money systems, and middle-class philistinism and jingoism. In 1859 he wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*, going back to the eighteenth century for his matter.

In the 1850s Dickens was also editor successively of two immensely successful magazines. He was at the height of his success, and had become a man of great wealth and fame. In 1858 he began to give public readings from his books, which were very popular. But they proved to be a great physical strain, and he died following a stroke in 1870. He was buried in Westminster Abbey in the Poets' Corner, an honour reserved for the great English writers.

Dickens is the author of fourteen novels and numerous other works. His work is marked by extreme energy and virtuosity, whether he is being satirical, humorous, sentimental, or polemical. Dickens's popularity and literary greatness are not at odds with one another - he remains one of the few widely read "classics."

Exercise 1

1. Which event in his life affected Dickens greatly?

2. List a few of Dickens's major novels.

8.2 A TALE OF TWO CITIES: BACKGROUND

Dickens wrote during the Victorian age, when Queen Victoria was ruler of England. It was above all the age of great social change, marked by the dates of the two Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867 – the period of Dickens's literary production as well. The Reform Bills gave franchise to working-class men in response to movements like Chartism, which made demands for greater democratic participation in the government. A number of other legislations were enacted in such areas as factory reform, wages, education, public health, divorce and inheritance for women, trade and agriculture. The success in achieving reform measures in England was directly related to revolutionary movements in the rest of Europe, particularly France. Dickens was an active campaigner for reform, arguing, like many other Victorian thinkers, that this was the only way of staving off violent social upheavals like revolutions. This connection will be discussed in greater detail in Unit- 12, in the specific context of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The Victorian age - especially after the 1850s - was also an age of progress: it was a period of rapid industrialisation, imperial expansion and population increase, all of which led to overall material prosperity. The resulting feeling of nationalist pride could often sound complacent and jingoistic. Therefore many of the writers of the time, like **Carlyle**, **Ruskin**, **Dickens** and **Morris** directed their social criticism towards the materialism, the continuing economic and social disparities, the philistinism and the aggressive temper of the age, though at the same time these writers often shared the contemporary belief in progress.

Dickens was a recorder of the Victorian age, both celebrating and criticising it. This double attitude is well exemplified in his description of the coming of the railways in *Dombey and Son*: he views it both as a sign of progress as well as a threat posed by change. Similarly in *A Tale of Two Cities*, he says, 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'. Though *A Tale of Two Cities* is a historical novel we must not forget that **Dickens** writes of an earlier time from the perspective of his own historical position (see Unit7).

Exercise II

1. Identify two important aspects of the Victorian period described above.

2. What is Dickens's relation to the period in which he wrote?

8.3 A TALE OF TWO CITIES IN RELATION TO DICKENS'S OTHER WORKS

A Tale of Two Cities has always been treated as something of an **aberration** among **Dickens's** novels. **Edgar Johnson** calls it **Dickens's** "least characteristic" book, and many standard critical works have little or nothing to say about the novel. In this Unit we shall argue that though *A Tale of Two Cities* shares some common preoccupations with **Dickens's** other novels, it goes, in a fundamental sense, against the grain of **Dickens's** development.

You can see this in the self-congratulatory celebration of "Englishness" that underlies the novel. Let us look at the continuities first.

8.3.1 Dickens's Portrayal of Women

Dickens's chief women characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* follow the pattern set in many of his other novels. **Dickens's** heroines are not among his major character creations. He both used and constructed the Victorian stereotype of the woman as the "angel in the house." Such a woman is above all a good homemaker, a good wife, daughter, and mother, always patient, submissive, and acceptably "feminine". The figure of Agnes in *David Copperfield* is a well-known example of such a heroine; Florence Dombey (*Dombey and Son*), Esther Summerson (*Bleak House*), Amy Dorrit (*Little Dorrit*), are very similar. Thus Lucie Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities* may be viewed as a typical **Dickens** heroine. She is **deprecatingly** described in the novel

itself (by Sidney Carton, who does not perhaps really mean it) as a "golden-haired doll".

In contrast and often in opposition to the "fair" heroine there is also, in many of **Dickens's** novels, the "dark" woman who is passionate, vengeful, and troublesome. She is outside the pale of the domestic, an outsider, a criminal, a woman with a past, or a foreigner. Mme. Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* is based on this type, but she also breaks, in significant ways, from **Dickens's** other "dark" women. What distinguishes Mme. Defarge is her commitment to the revolutionary cause. Mme Defarge is, as we shall see, a highly talented woman, whose outstanding intellectual abilities and organisational skills make her the natural leader among the masses of St. Antoine. **Dickens**, it would seem, is actually afraid of her commitment and her abilities. **Dickens** had consistently disapproved of work-oriented anti-domestic women, but the school -teacher Miss Blimber (*Dombey and Son*) or the professional philanthropist Mrs. Jelleby (*Bleak House*) are the only ones clearly satirised. In *A Tale of Two Cities* on the other hand, the threat that Mme Defarge poses not just to domesticity but also to the larger social organisations, is so strong that she has to be actually killed.

8.3.2 The Theme of Burial and Resurrection

Dickens uses the ideas of death and resurrection, with the associated concept of death-in-life, in a central way in *A Tale of Two Cities*. These themes are then developed in some of the later novels that follow it. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, one of the major centres of interest is the story of Dr. Manette, a man deeply traumatised by eighteen years in prison, a form of "burial" alive. He recovers his energies and interests after his release though not without occasional relapses into a condition of withdrawal. In *Great Expectations*, which followed soon after, **Dickens** shows in the figure of Miss Havisham a character outside this mode who, refuses to emerge from her self -imposed burial, and becomes a warped and unhealthy person as a result. In *Our Mutual Friend*, **Dickens's** last completed novel, the theme of resurrection is explored most fully. The hero, John Harmon, believed dead, is in fact rescued, and assumes another name and identity in his "resurrected" life.

The theme interested **Dickens** because it allowed him to explore questions of human identity through such devices and psychological case studies as the "double", the **schizophrenic**, and the obsessive. The famous "twins" in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay, are anticipated and developed in other **Dickens's** novels, though not in terms of actual physical resemblance. Thus critics have noted that Pip, the hero of *Great Expectations*, and Orlick, the villain, are aspects of a single person, similarly we have Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone In *Our Mutual Friend*, united by their mutual, antagonism and their love for the same woman. The "double" serves the function of surrogacy and scapegoating, which have implication that we shall examine later in the specific context of *A Tale of Two Cities* (in Unit 11).

8.3.3 Dickens and Revolution

Although **Dickens** subjected virtually every institution of the English state to radical criticism, he was always deeply apprehensive about the prospect of a revolutionary upsurge in England. During the 1830s, which **Dickens** first began writing, the prospect of a revolution in England was very real. The economy was extremely unstable; and the living conditions of the working classes unbearable. The result was consecutive waves of working class agitations that culminated in the Chartist movement.

In his early novels, **Dickens** shared with many of his reform - minded contemporaries the conviction that the government had failed badly in providing the working classes with even the minimum decencies of life. But he also believed in the deeply

entrenched middle-class image of any form of plebian uprising as anarchic and mindlessly violent. In *The Chimes* Dickens himself depicts with great vividness the process by which one of the characters - Will Fern - is driven to total penury. But when Fern speaks of participating in an uprising against an oppressive state Dickens's imagery increasingly highlights the anarchic, destructive dimensions of such events. When Dickens turned to the happenings in France in *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was from the safety of the 1860s. Accordingly, as we shall see in the entire Unit we devote to Dickens's representation of the French Revolution - Dickens is able to project the revolution as a mad orgy of bloodletting without the anxiety that had underlain the world of Dickens's early novels where revolution had been a real possibility.

8.3.4 *A Tale of Two Cities* and Dickens's Later Novels

In spite of the continuities we have noted above, *A Tale of Two Cities* differs in one fundamental sense from the other novels of Dickens's later period. In order to respond to these differences we need to look a little more closely at the society to which the later Dickens was reacting as a novelist. Dickens's later novels were written in what has often been described as the "Age of Improvement" or "The Age of Progress". This period which began roughly around 1850 witnessed sustained economic growth, social and political stability, and rising standards of living for the majority. One of the great achievements of Dickens's later works is that they refuse to rest contented with "progress", and continue to expose to radical scrutiny the vital institutions of the Age of Improvement - its laws, its bureaucracy, its stock market, and its great metropolitan city.

Seen against this background *A Tale of Two Cities* is deficient in two important respects. Firstly, removed as it is in time from mid - Victorian England, the world of *A Tale of Two Cities* lacks the social density of *Dombey and Son* or *Little Dorrit* and is as such incapable of providing Dickens with the context where his social imagination might find full expression. Thus *A Tale of Two Cities* has nothing that can compare with Dickens's treatment of the railway in *Dombey and Son*, or the idea of gentlemanliness in *Great Expectations*. Even more seriously, unlike *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectation* or *Our Mutual Friend*, which are deeply, fundamentally critical of the society of which they are a product, *A Tale of Two Cities* is imbued with a very uncharacteristic sense of smugness. Thus if the idea of "Englishness" is an object of contempt in *Our Mutual Friend*, in *A Tale of Two Cities* it is portrayed as an orderly and moderate mindset whose virtues are highlighted by the anarchic excesses of France.

Exercise III

1. What are the two contrasted types of women characters found in Dickens's novels, and how can you relate the central female figures in *A Tale of Two Cities* to them?

2. Relate the theme of burial and resurrection in *A Tale of Two Cities* to its use in some of Dickens's other novels.

3. How does Dickens use the "double" in *A Tale of Two Cities*? What purpose does it serve in his fiction in general?

8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have looked at the life of **Dickens** against the backdrop of the Victorian Age. **Dickens** was a prolific writer who wrote fourteen novels most of which are now considered 'classics'. Although he celebrated the great progress made by Victorian England, **Dickens** was a critic of the economic and social disparities that he saw around him. *A Tale of Two Cities* shares some similarities with the other novels of **Dickens**: in his portrayal of women, in his use of the themes of burial and resurrection and in his faith in reform rather than revolution. Yet despite these similarities, *A Tale of Two Cities* is different because it projects an uncharacteristic sense of smug faith in 'Englishness' as opposed to what are seen as the excesses of the French. We shall discuss this further in the subsequent Units.

8.5 GLOSSARY

aberration	a usually sudden change away from the habitual way of thinking or acting
bloodletting	bloodshed
deprecating	to feel and express disapproval of, plead against
improvident	someone who wastes money, not preparing for the future
jingoism	blind admiration of one's country; proud belief that one's country is politically, and morally better than all others
orgy	excessive indulgence in any activity
penury	state of being very poor
philistinism	condition of disliking art, music or beautiful things
plebian	member of the common people of the lower social classes
polemical	in the habit of arguing, attacking or defending opinions, ideas, etc.
scapegoat	person or thing taking the blame for the fault of others
schizophrenic	dementia marked by introversion and loss of connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions
surrogate	acting or used in place of another substitute
trauma	damage to the mind caused by some shock or command or some terrible experience
virtuosity	a very high degree of skill in performance in one of the arts

8.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. Refer to Section 8.1
2. Refer to Section 8.1, paragraph 3&4

Exercise 2

1. Refer to Section 8.2, paragraph 1&2
2. Refer to Section 8.2, paragraph 3

Exercise 3

1. Refer to Section 8.3.1
2. Refer to Section 8.3.2, paragraph 1
3. Refer to Section 8.3.2, paragraph 2

UNIT 9 READING THE TEXT – BOOKS I & II

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Book I, Introduction
- 9.2 Book I, Chapters 1-4
- 9.3 Book I, Chapters 5-6
 - 9.3.1 Book I, Summary
- 9.4 Book II, Introduction
- 9.5 Book II, Chapters 1-6
 - 9.5.1 Five Years Later
 - 9.5.2 A Sight
 - 9.5.3 A Disappointment
 - 9.5.4 Congratulatory
 - 9.5.5 The Jackal
 - 9.5.6 Hundreds of People
- 9.6 Book II, Chapters 7 –9
- 9.7 Book II, Chapters 10-14
 - 9.7.1 Two Promises
 - 9.7.2 A Companion Picture
 - 9.7.3 The Fellow of Delicacy
 - 9.7.4 The Fellow of No Delicacy
 - 9.7.5 The Honest Tradesman
- 9.8 Book II, Chapters 15-16
- 9.9 Book II, Chapters 17 –20
 - 9.9.1 One Night
 - 9.9.2 Nine Days
 - 9.9.3 An Opinion
 - 9.9.4 A Plea
- 9.10 Book II, Chapters 21-24
 - 9.10.1 Book II, Summary
- 9.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.12 Glossary
- 9.13 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will try to help you read Books I, and II of the novel. We break up the novel into sections of two or more chapters, and try to give you

- a) An account of what happens in each section;
- b) A critical commentary on the action; and
- c) Where necessary, quotations from the text, so that you recognise the passages when we later refer to them-.

Please read this unit carefully because it is here that you will find the raw material for all our subsequent discussions.

9.1 BOOK I, INTRODUCTION

The short first Book begins with a chapter (analysed in detail below, in 9.2) that specifies the historical period in the last quarter of the eighteenth century), and the settings (England and France), of the novel. The narrative begins with the dangerous

journey of Mr. Jarvis Lorry, an English banker, from England to Paris, accompanied by a young girl, Lucie Manette. In Paris they meet her father whom she has never seen before; Dr. Edward Manette, a prisoner of the *Bastille* now released after eighteen years of solitary confinement. He was kept hidden in a loft over the wine-shop of the Defarges. Manette is withdrawn and confused, and clings to his cobbler's bench and tools, which had given him solace in prison. He is gently persuaded to return to England with them.

9.2 BOOK I, CHAPTERS 1 – 4

Summary: The novel begins on a dark and dangerous night with a man called Jarvis Lorry embarking on a strange mission. His mission is to help with the rehabilitation of Dr. Manette, a French physician who had been unjustly imprisoned in the most terrible prison in France – the *Bastille* – for eighteen years and is now, finally, released. Lorry arranges a meeting between Manette and his daughter Lucie who has never seen her father. Dr. Manette finds it impossible to believe that he has been "recalled to life". Defarge an old servant offers him accommodation in a loft that resembles his old prison cell. Mr. Lorry has broken the news of her father's release to Lucie and has now accompanied her from England to France to meet him.

Comment: The first important thing to note about these early chapters is the novel's famous opening paragraph:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity

We guess from this that the novel is going to be about "the ...times", that is, it is going to talk about a historical era as much as about individuals and families which are the normal preoccupations of novels. The age that the novel dramatises is that of the French Revolution (i.e., the last quarter of the eighteenth century). **Dickens's** opening paragraph suggests that the revolutionary period was a complex one, and that there were many ways of looking at it as the best of times as well as the worst of times, as wise as well as foolish, as idealistic belief as well as false consciousness. In a later unit (Unit 12), which will discuss the topic at length, we will try to gauge whether **Dickens** does in fact treat the French Revolution with the complexity that is promised in the opening paragraph – and which it deserves as a crucial political event in the history of Europe.

The opening paragraphs can also be examined as an example of **Dickens's** stylistic virtuosity, as in this analysis by the critic **Martin Fido**:

In this magnificent opening Dickens seeks to hold the reader's attention by reducing chaos to disguised order. His opening sentence – really a series of unpunctuated sentences – gives the appearance of chaos by its speedy contradictions; actually it is almost blatantly ordered in that the pairs of opposites make every second clause completely predictable.

Parallel pairs are extended in the second paragraph to present the comparison between the two countries. In the third paragraph **Dickens** sets up a slightly supercilious ironical tone of moral condemnation, which is to be used throughout the book with reference to England. The fourth paragraph provides the grim irony, which is to be used for France, and predicts the subject of the book. The fifth paragraph shows that England is certainly not going to be held up as a perfect moral **exemplar** to France; indicates the theme of lawlessness which is to be peculiarly English in the book, and returns to the suggestion of anarchy which the opening sentence appeared to indicate. And the last paragraph leads back to the notion of specific people

directing their individual lives through this historical climate, and so prepares us for the opening of the action.



London and Paris in the eighteenth century

The opening chapters are important for another reason as well. They tell us of the terrible circumstances surrounding one of the important characters of the novel Dr. Manette. The experience of being imprisoned for eighteen years in the prison, the *Bastille*, has a terrible impact upon his character and affects it in strange ways even after his release, as we shall see.

Exercise I

1. Who are the characters we have met so far? Who is the most important and why?

2. What historical era does the novel dramatise? How does Dickens describe this era in the opening paragraph of the novel?

9.3 BOOK I, CHAPTERS 5 & 6

Summary: The action moves to a suburb of Paris – St. Antoine – where Dr. Manette has been sheltered in a dark loft by his former servant Defarge. The loft is located over a wine-shop presided over by the wife of Defarge. At this place a group of three men, all addressed as "Jacques", mysteriously gather to peep at the poor prisoner. An emotional meeting between father and daughter takes place. Manette is bewildered and withdrawn, and clings to his cobbler's tools and bench since he has been accustomed to the occupation of shoe making in prison. Lucie shows great compassion and resilience in dealing with the situation. It is decided that Mr. Lorry, Dr. Manette, and Lucie should leave Paris without delay, and soon they embark on their journey to London.

Comment: We see Dr. Manette constantly engaged in making shoes as it prevents him or as he later explains, from going mad under the pressure of his loneliness. Even after he has gained a great deal of normality under Lucie's loving care, he reverts to his shoe making whenever he finds himself unable to cope with mental tension. Dr. Manette's personality is split as he fluctuates between being the caring parent and doctor at most times, and the prisoner who obsessively makes shoes **to stave off** the horrors of his past life at certain other times. We would call his condition

schizophrenia today. We shall see later how not only Dr. Manette, but many other characters may be viewed as divided personalities.

You should now go on to read Chapter 5 very carefully. Set in St. Antoine, a suburb, of Paris which became the epicenter of the revolution, Chapter 5 introduces themes, ideas, and images that are absolutely crucial to **Dickens's** representation of the French Revolution. The first striking thing about St. Antoine is its poverty, manifest in the eagerness with which the local inhabitants rush to scoop up the red wine that has spilled on the streets from a broken cask. When a "tall joker" dips his finger in the muddy wine and scrawls the word "Blood" on the wall, a connection is suggested between a poverty-stricken people and a bloody revolution. But the blood-wine connection also connects the impending revolution to the horrible idea of blood drinking. Further, the incident subverts the traditional religious symbolism of wine as Christ's blood in the Roman Catholic sacrament. So from the very, beginning, **Dickens's** attitude to the French Revolution is marked by duplicity. While on the one hand he shows that the French poor have good reason to revolt, on the other he suggests that the actual revolution will be an orgy of blood-letting.

In this section we are briefly introduced to one of the novel's chief characters. Mme. Defarge, who stays in the shadows, knitting. Both Mme. Defarge and her knitting will gain in significance as the novel progresses.

9.3.1 Book I, Summary

See Introduction (9.1)

Exercise II

1. What is Manette doing when Lucie first sees him? What significance did this activity have when he was in prison, and what does it mean now that he is free?

2. Try to write two sentences about the significance of the blood-wine imagery.

9.4 BOOK II, INTRODUCTION

Book II is given the title "The Golden Thread". (You will have to consider whether this title is an appropriate one). The events narrated in this section cover a period of approximately nine years. The narrative begins at a point five years after the release of Dr. Manette, and ends with the onset of the Revolution and Charles Darnay's return to France soon after. The greater part of the twenty-four chapters in this section is set in London and centres around the residence of Dr. Manette in the Soho district. These chapters tell us of Dr. Manette's slow recovery, Lucie Manette's courtship by three men, her acceptance of Charles Darnay, and the happiness of this tranquil family set-up. But this account is interrupted every now and then by chapters set in France which remind us of the growing discontent of the poor and the threat of revolution in that country. These chapters tell us of the sins of the aristocracy,

especially of the attitude and actions of the Marquis d'Evremonde (uncle of Charles Darnay), his murder, and the consequences of the act. Thus Book II both provides a contrast between the "home" (set in England), and the "nation" (the events in France), as well as shows us the interconnectedness of the two. **Dickens** wishes to convey a sense of inexorability or doom in the progress of events in both the stories.

9.5 BOOK II, CHAPTERS 1- 6

9.5.1 Chapter 1: Five Years Later

Summary: Tellson's Bank, where Mr. Lorry is employed, is described as an "old-fashioned place", in this respect like England itself. Jerry Cruncher is employed by Tellson's as an odd-job man and porter. Cruncher's home-life is described – his wife is a meek, hard-working woman whom Jerry scolds constantly for "praying agin me". His son admires and imitates Jerry.

Comment: **Dickens** is gently satirical of Tellson's Bank. The main point for you to note is his criticism of England, whose resistance to change is a sign of complacency. He also remarks on the barbarity of the laws in eighteenth-century England, which invoked the death sentence for even minor crimes. The scenes of the Cruncher household are among the few comic interludes in this novel. Jerry is a typical household tyrant and bully who uses his wife as a scapegoat.

9.5.2 Chapter 2: A Sight

Summary: Charles Darnay, a French immigrant, is tried for treason at the Old Bailey. **Dickens** describes Darnay as follows: "...a young man of about five and twenty, well grown and well-looking, with a sunburnt cheek and a dark eye". There is a large crowd at the trial, chiefly because of the widespread public interest at the time in witnessing the death of a criminal. Among the witnesses are Dr. Manette and his daughter.

Comment: Chapter 2 introduces us in a dramatic way to Charles Darnay who may be considered the "hero" of the novel. (You may wish to begin thinking at this point about the nature of a hero, and about the kind of hero we may expect to find in a historical novel). Darnay attracts Lucie Manette's interest and sympathy, as he does ours. **Dickens** also satirises in this chapter the barbarity of the English laws of the time, as well as the "ogreish" interest of the "mob" in such spectacles as hanging and



Illustration from an early edition of a *A Tale of Two Cities*

quartering. He wishes us to note that in this respect the English people are no different from the bloodthirsty French populace that later will gather in such large numbers to watch the deaths of the aristocrats at the Guillotine. (Note the different connotations of the words "crowd", "mob", and "rabble", all of which describe a gathering of people).

9.5.3 Chapter 3: A Disappointment

At the end of a long and suspenseful trial, Darnay is acquitted, thanks mainly to the efforts of Sydney Carton, an assistant to the defence attorney. Carton's most effective strategy is his demonstration of his own close resemblance to the prisoner - he thereby confuses one of the opposition's witnesses. Jerry, a spectator at the court, thinks that the phrase "recalled to life" (earlier applied by Mr. Lorry to Dr. Manette's rescue), would aptly apply to Darnay now.

Comment: This chapter marks the first appearance of Sydney Carton, who may also be regarded as the hero - or one of the heroes - of the novel. His appearance is described as "careless and slovenly if not debauched" - in contrast to Darnay's gentlemanly appearance. Yet the resemblance between the two, noted and pointed out by Carton himself, is of great significance in the acquittal of Darnay, and anticipates the ending of the book. The theme of the "double" engages **Dickens** in many of his books. At this point in *A Tale of Two Cities* it is used merely as a striking and useful coincidence.

9.5.4 Chapter 4: Congratulatory

Dr. Manette, five years after his release, has recovered, but occasionally the "shadow of the *Bastille*" is still visible upon him. Lucie's role in saving him is described by the metaphor of the "golden thread". Lucie connects the earliest part of Dr. Manette's life with the present, both happy times: hence she herself is the "golden thread". Carton and Darnay dine together, and we are called upon to note their mutual antipathy. The chapter ends with Carton's reflections upon his sense of a wasted life (Read the Chapter carefully).

Comment: One of the major centers of interest in the novel is **Dickens's** psychological analysis of Dr. Manette, a man released after eighteen years of unjust solitary confinement. **Dickens** wishes to make Sydney Carton also a complex character, but he never quite explains the reasons for Carton's failure. Carton therefore strikes us as a person full of self-pity, rather than as a truly tragic figure.

9.5.5 Chapter 5: The Jackal

Summary: The "jackal" refers to Sydney Carton, since he "rendered suit and service" to Stryver the "lion". In conversation with Stryver, he disparages Lucie as a "golden-harried Doll" (In your opinion how apt is this description?). When Carton returns home in the early hours of the morning, he perceives the darkness as symbolic of "the waste forces within him" (Refer to Chapter 5).

Comment: **Dickens** develops the portrait of an anti-hero (a character whose qualities are the reverse of a hero's even though he possesses all the abilities of a hero - such as courage, intelligence, good looks, talents). The mood and symbolism of the last paragraphs of the chapter will be recalled at the novel's end when Carton decides upon his sacrifice (see Book III, Chapter 9).

9.5.6 Chapter 6: Hundreds of People

Summary: We are introduced in this chapter to Dr. Manette's quiet and pleasant house in Soho, a district in London. Miss Pross, Lucie's devoted companion, and, Mr. Lorry, now a family friend, discuss Dr. Manette's condition, and remark with concern

on his need to retain his cobbler's bench and tools in his room, Lucie expresses a fanciful thought to her visitors: that the echoes of street sounds are the "footsteps of the people who are to come into my life, and my father's". Dr. Manette is upset when he hears a story about a prisoner in the Tower. Soon after, a storm breaks out. **Dickens** prophesies another, symbolic, storm when "a great crowd of people with its rush and roar" shall bear down upon them.

Comment: Miss Pross and Mr. Lorry take on their roles of devoted friends of the Manettes. We also see the progress of the two young men's interest in Lucie. **Dickens** describes the house as a "harbour from the raging streets". In all his books **Dickens** praises the home as a refuge, and the woman as the maker of the home. Thus, Lucie's skill in home-making is an important aspect of the tranquil domesticity that **Dickens** contrasts with the world outside. And, yet the "home" cannot entirely keep the "world" out. The place attracts echoes and these seem symbolic to Lucie of coming events; so too, to **Dickens**, is the storm that breaks out. In what ways can you interpret these symbols?

Exercise III

1. What is Darnay tried for, and how is his acquittal brought about?

2. Comment on the significance of the resemblance between Carton and Darnay.

3. How does Lucie serve as a "golden thread" in Dr. Manette's life?

4. Comment on Dr. Manette's psychological condition five years after his release.

5. What hints of the coming revolution do we get in Chapter 6?

9.6 BOOK II, CHAPTERS 7 – 9

Summary: The action moves back to Paris, this time to the world of the aristocracy. **Dickens's** attitude to this class is satirical. He introduces us to one of its members by his title – Monseigneur, or Lord – rather than by his name, as if it was only the former that truly identified him. This Monseigneur is a decadent, parasitical creature. It requires four men, all "ablaze with gorgeous decorations" to feed him his evening beverage, **Dickens** tells us. Another aristocrat, the Marquis d'Evremonde, is seen in attendance at his court. The Marquis is a cold-bloodedly cruel man, as we discover when his coach runs over a poor child in the streets of the crowded St. Antoine district. In response to the father's grief, the Marquis contemptuously tosses a coin into the crowd, as the residents of St. Antoine watch in silent anger. At home, the Marquis receives a guest late at night who turns out to be none other than Charles Darnay. From their conversation we learn that Darnay is the Marquis's nephew and heir. But Darnay has renounced his name, his title, and his class. He condemns the greed and cruelty of the aristocracy, and gives up all claims to his inheritance. The Marquis reacts contemptuously, but his contempt does not last long. That very night he is murdered; he is discovered in the morning with a knife driven through his heart with a message that says: "Drive him fast to his tomb"!

Comment: In this unit we perceive a pattern of violence and counter-violence, which will emerge as an important underlying theme in **Dickens's** interpretation of the French Revolution. Unlike **Burke**, many of whose images **Dickens** uses in *A Tale of Two Cities*, **Dickens** sees the French aristocracy not as noble victims but as cold-blooded oppressors. But the Marquis's violent death is also a foretaste of the violence that will later be unleashed by the Revolution. This becomes **Dickens's** primary mode of representing this historical event, rather than any more deliberative analysis. Both images and rhetoric are employed emotively in depicting the violence of events. Thus the blood red reflection of the rising sun as it is reflected in the "chateau fountain" is another symbol of the blood that will be spilt during the Revolution, like the wine in the previous chapters.

The other important symbol that **Dickens** develops is the motif of knitting. Mme. Defarge knits continuously as she watches – the killing of the little child, the Marquis's arrogant compensation for the death that he has caused, the silent helplessness of the crowd. She knitted, says **Dickens**, with the "steadfastness of fate". Through her knitting Mme. Defarge keeps an account of all the crimes perpetrated by the aristocracy. The inevitable retribution, when it does come, will be extremely violent. Knitting has a traditional association in Greek myth with the steady pattern and progress of Fate, and thus Mme. Defarge becomes a larger-than-life figure, representing fate itself. At the same time knitting is a "feminine" and commonplace domestic activity, one that it would be natural for a woman in Mme. Defarge's position to do. We notice how she consciously subverts this association by using it instead for her own sinister purposes. Her knitted register is doubly coded because it appears to be an **innocuous** routine activity, and it uses symbols that only Mme. Defarge can interpret. Thus it serves as the perfect cover for Mme. Defarge's secret revolutionary activities.

Exercise IV

- 1. After reading the two chapters in this unit carefully, make a list of the qualities that Dickens associates with the French aristocracy.

2. What is the significance of Mme. Defarge's knitting?

9.7 BOOK II, CHAPTERS 10 –14

9.7.1 Chapter 10: Two Promises

Summary: Charles Darnay's modest profession as a teacher of French in London and Cambridge is described. He is in love with Lucie Manette, and meets Dr. Manette to seek his permission to court her. He analyses the unique relationship between this father and daughter, as "I know that when she is clinging to you, the hands of baby, girl, and woman, all in one, are round your neck".

Two promises are demanded and made in this chapter. Darnay requests Dr. Manette to say nothing against him if Lucie should ever confide her love for him. When he offers to reveal his real identity, Dr. Manette in turn makes him promise that he will only tell him when, or if, their marriage should take place.

Comment: The dramatic irony of Darnay's falling in love with Lucie becomes clear only later in the book when the Evremondes' role in Dr. Manette's arrest is disclosed. Nevertheless, Dr. Manette's apprehensions are clearly due to more than his unusually close relationship with his daughter – hence the promise he demands of Darnay. Darnay's understanding of this relationship is idealised but is accurate in many respects.

9.7.2 Chapter 11: A Companion Picture

Summary: Stryver confides to Carton his decision to propose marriage to Lucie.
Comment: This is a comic scene, which shows Stryver's conceit and pomposity.

9.7.3 Chapter 12: The Fellow of Delicacy

Summary: When Mr. Lorry advises Stryver against proposing, Stryver saves face by pretending to have lost interest in Lucie himself.

Comment: This comic chapter brings Stryver's "courtship" to an end. Stryver's tactic is a classic example of saying "sour grapes" in order to reconcile oneself to the unattainable.

9.7.4 Chapter 13: The Fellow of No Delicacy

Summary: Sydney Carton proposes to Lucie and is gently and regretfully rejected by her.

Comment: Dickens intends a contrast between Lucie's two suitors, "the fellow of delicacy" (Stryver), and "the fellow of no delicacy" (Carton). He uses these designations ironically. The chapter is an example of Dickens's well-known sentimentality. Carton's promise to help Lucie at this point becomes prophetic. The Victorian ideal of the woman as one who redeems mankind is set forth here.

9.7.5 Chapter 14: The Honest Tradesman

Summary: The chapter begins with a "crowd" scene, of the kind that *A Tale of Two Cities* is famous for. A crowd attacks a funeral procession since the dead man is

rumoured to be a spy. Jerry Cruncher and his son join the crowd and attend the burial. Cruncher sets out secretly in the dead of night, followed by his curious son and attended by two other friends, to steal the corpse of the "spy", Roger Cly. They find the grave empty. Young Jerry runs away in fright, with the "strong idea that the coffin he had seen was running after him". Cruncher takes out his disappointment on his wife. Jerry explains to his son that a "Resurrection Man" is a "tradesman" whose "goods is a branch of Scientific goods".

Comment: The theme of "resurrection", or being "recalled to life" is an important one in this novel. By making Jerry Cruncher a secret grave-robber (who sells his corpses to medical students), **Dickens** treats the theme in a gruesomely comic fashion. The chapter also reveals **Dickens's** attitude to the "mob", or "rabble", as he calls it: an attitude of simultaneous revulsion and fascination. The irrationality and violence of the mob makes him describe it as "a monster much dreaded".

Exercise V

1. Who are the three men in love with Lucie? What are the differences in their ways of courting her?

2. What is a "Resurrection Man"?

9.8 BOOK II, CHAPTERS 15 & 16

Summary: These chapters are set in Defarge's gloomy wine shop. Chapter 15 begins with a roadmender's eyewitness account of the execution of a man called Gaspard as narrated to Defarge and his friends. Gaspard, in fact, is the man whose son had been run over by the Marquis's carriage and who had then revenged himself by stabbing the Marquis. As punishment by the law, he is arrested, paraded through the streets, tortured and publicly hanged. While Defarge and his friends listen to the roadmender's account with rising indignation, Mme. Defarge, standing in the shadows, calmly continues her knitting. It would be impossible, **Dickens** says, to erase one letter from "the knitted register" that Mme. Defarge keeps on the crimes of the aristocracy.

After Defarge's guests depart, a state spy named Barsad enters the wine shop. The Defarges show great skill in countering Barsad's attempts to extract information from them. Before his departure, Barsad reveals that the daughter of Defarge's old master, Dr. Manette, has married the aristocrat Evremonde who now calls himself Darnay in England. Defarge and his wife have faith in a people's revolution in France, but they have different attitudes to the class enemy, the aristocrats. Defarge shows a semblance of feeling for his former master when he expresses the hope that his son-in-law will never venture into post-revolutionary France; but Mme. Defarge more dispassionately holds that Danay's fate should have nothing to do with their personal feelings for Dr. Manette.

Comment: The pattern of violence and counter-violence that, we have seen, underlying **Dickens's** interpretation of the events in France is reinforced in Chapters 15 and 16. We can now unravel the pattern: the Marquis kills a child accidentally and then, treats the child's parents with utter contempt; Gaspard (the child's father) avenges himself on the Marquis; Gaspard is arrested, tortured and publicly executed by the laws of a State that is ruled by the members of the Marquis's class, the aristocracy; these atrocities are recorded in Mme. Defarge's register and will no doubt trigger off counter atrocities when the revolutionaries seize power.

The chapters we are discussing are important also because they give us an inside view of the thinking of the revolutionaries and of Mme. Defarge. **Dickens's** attitude to the revolutionaries is, it seems to us, split. On the one hand he sees them as "dark, revengeful, repressed", capable of unleashing unlimited violence if ever they should gain access to power. Of Mme. Defarge **Dickens** even says that "the world would do well" never to breed the likes of her again.

But, on the other hand, under this condemnation lies a very real if somewhat frightened admiration as well. The revolutionaries are a determined lot and have a strong secret organisation. The Defarges show their experience and their ability to survive as underground political activists through the skill with which they handle the spy Barsad. The natural leader of the St. Antoine revolutionaries is, of course, Mme. Defarge. It is her unswerving confidence in the inevitability of the revolution that keeps alive the hopes of Defarge and his friends, and it is her razor sharp powers of observation and her unfailing memory which documents these acts of oppression. What is more, Mme. Defarge is an extraordinary organiser who is in constant touch with the people of St. Antoine, and channelises the anger of their miserable lives into the cause of the revolution:

In the evening, at which season of all others, St. Antoine turned itself inside out, and sat on doorsteps and window-ledges – Mme. Defarge with her work in hand was accustomed to pass from place to place, group to group... They knitted worthless things but the mechanical work was a mechanical substitute for eating and drinking if the bony fingers had been still, the stomachs would have been more famine pinched.

Knitting now gains another meaning. It has grown into a symbol of the solidarity that is developing increasingly among the hungry and the poor – and the person who contributes most to bringing about this solidarity is Mme. Defarge. Consider also the therapeutic function of knitting as a mechanical activity, and consider whether it resembles Dr. Manette's shoe-making in this respect.

Exercise VI

1. Write five lines about Mme. Defarge, and bring out the ambiguity with which Dickens treats her.

2. List at least three meanings that the image of knitting acquires in the novel.

9.9 BOOK II, CHAPTERS 17 -20

9.9.1 Chapter 17: One Night

Summary: On the night before Lucie's wedding, Dr. Manette accepts her reassurances of continuing love and duty whole-heartedly, recalling his prison days by way of contrast to his present happiness. **Dickens** offers a comment on the kind of strength of character displayed by Dr. Manette in, overcoming the trauma of the past.

Comment: This chapter provides further insight into Dr. Manette's character, and into the unique nature of the relationship between father and daughter.

9.9.2 Chapter 18: Nine Days

Summary: As soon as Lucie leaves on her honeymoon with her husband, Dr. Manette breaks down as a result of Charles Darnay's disclosures to him. This takes the form of a relapse into his old pastime of making shoes. Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross are dismayed and helpless.

Comment: **Dickens's** psychological insight into the nature of trauma is an acute one. His account of Dr. Manette's breakdown is chillingly accurate.

9.9.3 Chapter 19: An Opinion

Summary: After nine days in this condition, Dr. Manette spontaneously recovers, to his friends' amazement. At Mr. Lorry's urging, he analyses his condition, expresses his confidence that such a relapse will not occur again and, as a safeguard against its recurrence, agrees – though reluctantly – to give up his workbench and tools. Accordingly, Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross destroy them, feeling irrationally guilty as they do so.

Comment: The analysis of Dr. Manette is continued in this chapter. Dr. Manette's self-knowledge comes from his fear of the "delicate organisation of the mind", but is also informed by the, "confidence of a man who had slowly won his assurance out of personal endurance and distress". His explanation of his attachment to the occupation of shoe-making as a form of therapy is worth noting (Chapter, 19).

9.9.4 Chapter 20: A Plea

Summary: Carton gets permission from Darnay to continue to visit the family. Lucie expresses to her husband her faith in Carton.

Comment: By providing this explanation of the relationship between Lucie and Sydney Carton, **Dickens** makes Carton's sacrifice at the end more credible to the reader.

Exercise VII

1. Under what circumstances does Dr. Manette's breakdown occur, and what form does it take?

2. How do Dr. Manette and his friends cope with it?

9.10 BOOK II, CHAPTERS 21 - 24

Summary: In this section that comprises the last four chapter of Book II, the action moves rapidly back and forth between England and France. It begins in England with an **evocation** of the peace, and bliss that envelopes Lucie's home. Lucie's home represents in miniature the peace and stability that England itself enjoys. In contrast, across the Channel a great revolution has broken out in France and its **reverberations** echo even in Lucie's protected home. Then the action shifts to France and we are given a direct first-hand account of the revolution. A great armed crowd (of which the Defarges are a part) has gathered on the streets of Paris and proceeds to storm the *Bastille*. Defarge finds the cell where Dr. Manette had been imprisoned, and finds a hidden document there. The crowd then moves through the length and breadth of Paris killing and arresting anyone who is even remotely suspected of being an enemy of the revolution. One such victim is the notorious speculator Foulon, whom the crowd gleefully hangs with a handful of grass stuffed in his mouth. Another victim is Gabelle, an employee of Darnay's who finds himself on the wrong side of the revolutionary council precisely because of this. Darnay decides to come to Paris in response to Gabelle's plea for help.

Comment: Chapters 21, 22, 23 give us the first extended and direct descriptions of the French Revolution in this narrative. As we might expect, **Dickens's** attitude to the revolution is almost entirely negative. He shows it as bloodthirsty, anarchic, and ultimately self-destructive since it brings, not a period of abundance, but only famine and drought. The revolutionaries are depicted again as a hungry mob who find compensation for their material impoverishment in the cruelty that they inflict upon their perceived enemies, and who are so fanatical that they laugh when heads are chopped off. What are the means by which **Dickens** manages to give a negative colouring to his depiction of the revolution while seemingly providing an objective account? Partly by direct statement – i.e. by describing or stating outright the cruelty or arbitrariness of the revolutionaries. More important is his use of a specific kind of language and imagery for these accounts. We shall later discuss at greater length the rhetorical strategies by which **Dickens** manages to make us see the French Revolution as a terrible event.

Exercise VIII

1. Why is Darnay forced to go to Paris? Has the possibility of his being in Paris during revolutionary times been discussed before?

2. What are qualities that Dickens connects with the revolution and the revolutionaries?

9.10.1 Book II: Summary

Book II begins five years after the release of Dr. Manette and covers a period of approximately nine years. The scenes are set alternately in England and France. Dr

Manette recovers, Lucie marries a French immigrant, Charles Darnay, and they lead a contented life in London in the midst of their friends, Mr. Lorry, Miss Pross, and Sydney Carton. Meanwhile events in France move towards the Revolution. The Marquis d'Evremonde runs down a poor child in the streets and the child's father Gaspard murders him in revenge. Gaspard is hanged. The Defarges, husband and wife, owners of a wine-shop in Paris, are revolutionary leaders. The *Bastille* is stormed, and Foulon, a hated speculator, is hanged by the "mob". The Marquis's castle is burned down, and the revolutionary Tribunal arrests his manager Gabelle. Darnay, concerned about events in France decides to go to Paris.

9.11 LET US SUM UP

In this fairly long Unit, we have discussed what happens in Books I, and II of the novel as well as looked critically at some of the specific features of Dickens's art. Set in London and Paris in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, we read about how personal relationships are affected by larger political and social upheavals. We have seen how Lucy meets her father, whom she has never seen before, after his release from the dreaded *Bastille* where he had been in solitary confinement for eighteen years. On their return to England, while Dr Manette recovers slowly from his trauma Lucy is courted by three men of whom she accepts Charles Darnay. Meanwhile the revolution is beginning to simmer in France and the atrocities perpetrated by the French aristocracy impinge on the tranquillity of the Manette household, as Charles Darnay happens to be the nephew of the notorious Marquis d'Evremonde. After the *Bastille* is stormed and the castle of the Marquis is burned down his manager Gabelle is arrested by the revolutionary Tribunal. In response to Gabelle's pleas for help, Darnay decides to return to France.

Let us see what happens to Darnay in the next Unit in which we shall look at Book III in some detail.

9.12 GLOSSARY

evocation	calling up a feeling or its expression
exemplar	suitable to be copied as an example
innocuous	harmless
reverberations	repeated echoes
supercilious	haughty, scornful
to stave off	to fend off; to keep away

9.13 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. Refer to Section 9.2
2. Refer to Section 9.2

Exercise 2

1. Refer to Section 9.3
2. Refer to Section 9.3

Exercise 3

1. Refer to Section 9.5.2
2. Refer to Section 9.5.3
3. Refer to Section 9.5.4
4. Refer to Section 9.5.4
5. Refer to Section 9.5.6

Exercise 4

1. Refer to Section 9.6
2. Refer to Section 9.6, paragraph 2 of the comment on the chapter

Exercise 5

1. Refer to Sections 9.7.1, 9.7.2 and 9.7.4
2. Refer to Section 9.7.5

Exercise 6

1. Refer to Section 9.8 paragraphs 1 and 2
2.
 - i. Knitting as Fate
 - ii. Knitting as a domestic pastime/occupation
 - iii. Knitting as a symbol of the solidarity of the revolutionaries.

UNIT 10 READING THE TEXT: BOOK III

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Book III: Introduction
- 10.2 Book III: Chapters 1-6
- 10.3 Book III: Chapters 7-10
- 10.4 Book III: Chapters 11-15
 - 10.4.1 Book III: Summary
- 10.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.6 Glossary
- 10.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we continue our reading of *A Tale of Two Cities*. We shall look at Book III in some detail. As in the previous Unit, we shall group the chapters into separate sections and look briefly at how the action proceeds. We shall also give you a critical commentary in each section so as to draw your attention to certain features in the novel. As you read this Unit, we hope you will keep the novel with you for ready reference.

After completing this Unit, you will be able to summarise the novel and will be able to understand the discussion in the next three units that follow.

10.1 BOOK III, INTRODUCTION

Book III describes Darnay's arrival in Paris, the arrival of Dr. Manette and Lucie in search of him, Dr. Manette's efforts on his behalf, his release, and immediate re-arrest. At Darnay's re-trial by the tribunal, the chief evidence against him is an account written by Dr. Manette in prison many years ago which had fallen into the hands of Defarge. In it, he reveals the crimes – the rape and murder of a peasant girl and her family – committed by the Evremonde brothers, Darnay's father and uncle. Darnay is condemned to death. Sydney Carton, however, plots his rescue by substituting himself in Darnay's place in prison, and finally going to the guillotine in his stead. Mme. Defarge dies in a struggle with Miss Pross, and Darnay, Lucie and the others manage to escape to England and safety.

Book III is set entirely in revolutionary France, and gives us vivid and entirely negative pictures of the French mob, such as their frenzied dances, their travestied trials, their bloodthirsty killings, their spying and plotting, and their avid enjoyment of the spectacle of the guillotine. In Book III, **Dickens** reinforces the pattern of violence and counter-violence, turning them into an almost autonomous process as if destined by some impersonal Fate rather than by human agents. We also note how **Dickens** resolves the triangular love-plot by arranging the sacrificial death of Carton at the guillotine. The novel ends with his optimistic vision of the future, and his famous words of farewell.

10.2 BOOK III, CHAPTERS 1-6

Summary: Darnay enters Paris and is soon arrested. As an ex- aristocrat and an emigre Darnay has no rights at all. Lucie and her family arrive in Paris, frantically in

search of Darnay. Now a small English community is set up in the very midst of revolutionary Paris which replicates the ordered life of the Soho home. As an ex-prisoner of the *Bastille*, and therefore by implication a victim of the oppression of the aristocracy, Dr. Manette enjoys the goodwill of the revolution. He uses this to advantage. Using great resilience and perseverance, he manages to gain access to the inner circle of the revolutionary committees. He is able to at least ensure that Darnay will not be arbitrarily executed. He then sends the good news to Lucie.

Comment: In this section the action moves entirely to France. The country is seen to be entirely in the grip of what **Dickens** represents as revolutionary anarchy. The almost mythical aura of horror with which **Dickens** surrounds the revolution is achieved through various means – such as the **inexorable** process by which Darnay finds himself arrested by the very people whose cause he has always supported; by the incessant crash of the guillotine blade as it chops off heads; by the mad and orgiastic frenzy of the dance of the Carmagnole; and by the hellish scenes of the turning of the grindstone (see Chapter 2).

As against this mad behaviour of the French, the English group are shown to be full of fortitude and calm. The contrast is one between two nations, or races, as well as an opposition between the "home" and the "nation", in which the former possesses moral value, while the latter possesses power. Thus we see the fragile Lucie running her household in as orderly and caring a manner as in England, in spite of being under great emotional stress; Mr. Lorry, similarly, places Tellson's interests above all else, even refusing to stay with his dear friends the Manettes in order not to **jeopardise** its safety; Miss Pross and even the surly Jerry, become models of the English spirit. The contrast between the resilient, orderly, moderate English, and the volatile, violent, anarchic French is, in fact, one of the underlying themes of the novel and, in this sense, we may detect a smug, self-congratulatory nuance in the very title of the novel with its invitation to compare two cities, two cultures, two ways of life.

Exercise I

1. What are the different ways in which Dickens manages to depict the French Revolution as horrific?

2. How, and why, does Dickens contrast the English with the French people? Who are the representatives of each group?

10.3 BOOK III, CHAPTERS 7-10

Summary: Dr. Manette successfully stakes his very high reputation among the revolutionaries to procure Darnay's release. But almost immediately after Darnay's reunion with his family, he is re-arrested in the name of the Republic by a delegation of citizens. No reasons are given for his re-arrest, but the delegation assures Dr. Manette and his daughter that a full case against him would be made the following day.

Meanwhile Miss Pross who is out for a walk with Jerry Cruncher suddenly encounters her long-lost brother Solomon who now calls himself Barsad. Solomon had fled England under dubious circumstances, and had begun a shady career in France as a spy of the *ancien regime*. After the Revolution he had managed to switch loyalties and become a functionary in one of the revolutionary councils. The selfish Barsad is embarrassed at meeting his English sister and tries to get away, but before he can do so Sydney Carton finds them. The latter has come to Paris apparently on official business, but in fact to find out if he can help his beloved Lucie and her husband in some way.

Carton immediately senses that Barsad can be useful to him. He persuades Barsad to come with him to Mr. Lorry's residence by threatening to reveal Barsad's past as a small-time crook in England and later as a spy for the *ancien regime* unless he helps Carton gain access to Darnay's cell whenever he wishes. Carton then visits a chemist and buys a mysterious powder.

The next day Darnay is on trial again, and we might say that the plot of *A Tale of Two Cities* reaches its climax in this scene. The most damning evidence against Darnay comes from none other than his father-in-law, Dr. Manette in the form of an account that he maintained of the circumstances leading up to his imprisonment. Defarge had ferreted out the loose sheets where Dr. Manette had written his account during the storming of the *Bastille* and he now presents his "evidence" to the revolutionary council court.

Dr. Manette, by his own account, had accidentally become witness to a most appalling crime perpetrated by two aristocratic brothers. The brothers had brought Dr. Manette in the dead of the night to examine two patients. One was a beautiful peasant woman who had been beaten brutally and raped by the brothers. The other was her brother who had been stabbed repeatedly, presumably because he had tried to protect her honour. Both patients were dying. Dr. Manette had done what he could, refused to accept payment from the brothers, and, in order to appease his conscience, had written to a Minister detailing all he had seen. Dr. Manette is arrested late at night and cast, without the semblance of a trial, into the *Bastille*.

What makes Dr. Manette's evidence absolutely damning for his son-in-law is that the villains of Dr. Manette's story turn out to be Darnay's father and uncle. What is more, the victimised woman had a sister who grew up vowing revenge on anyone who had any connection with the aristocracy. That woman's name, we learn soon enough, is Mme. Defarge.

Comment: This section sets into motion the plot that will finally culminate in Darnay's release and Carton's supreme sacrifice. But more important, from the point of view of the novel's overall preoccupation, is the revelation of the circumstance leading to Dr. Manette's imprisonment. These circumstances, which are at the source of so much of the action of the novel, make the ideas – which have been frequently stressed through both imagery and authorial commentary as we have seen – concrete and vivid to the readers.

Thus Dr. Manette's story dramatises in the most vivid form the utter ruthlessness of an aristocracy that is not held accountable even for its worst crimes. On the other hand, this oppression leads to an anti-aristocratic feeling so impeccable that it overrides all human and personal considerations. The pattern of violence and counter violence has, it would seem, become an almost autonomous process: it seems to work with the inexorability of fate in Greek tragedy to perpetuate the most terrible ironies.

Thus Darnay's mother – aware of what her husband had done – had sought, from her heart, to help the sister of the dead woman, but the very sister – Mme. Defarge –

seeks Darnay's blood. Again Dr. Manette's indictment of the aristocracy becomes the means of damning his own son-in-law who had long ago rejected the class into which he had been born. In **Dickens's** representation, then, the French Revolution seems to have created a topsy turvy world where men's best intentions turn in on themselves creating the most unforeseen and devastating of effects.

Exercise II

1. How does Dr. Manette become the unwitting means of condemning his son-in-law?

2. What other ironies do we note in these chapters (chapters 7 -10)?

3. What purpose does the strategy of irony, or reversal, serve in Dickens's interpretation of the Revolution?

10.4 BOOK III, CHAPTERS 11-15

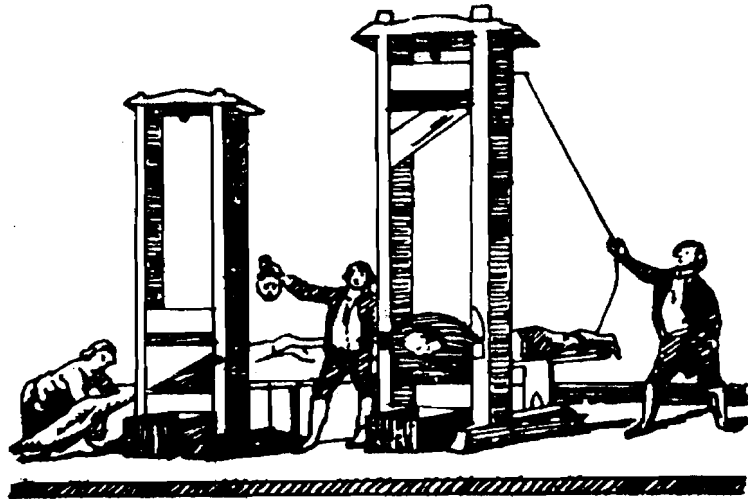
Summary: The novel draws to a swift climax in these chapters. In Chapter 11 ("Dusk"), Lucie bids farewell to her husband after the trial. The next chapter is entitled "Darkness", for two reasons: one, Carton discovers from a visit to Defarge's wine-shop that Mme. Defarge intends to indict Lucie, her child, and Dr. Manette shortly, as part of her scheme of "extermination" of the entire Evremonde family; and two, Dr. Manette relapses into his old condition as a result of the shock of his failure. The reason for Mme. Defarge's implacable enmity is revealed—she is the sister of the girl who had been raped and killed by the Evremonde brothers. Sydney Carton and Mr. Lorry plan the swift escape of Lucie and her family in view of the danger they are in. Chapter 13 ("Fifty-two"), shifts to the prison where Darnay awaits his death with fifty-one others. He makes his final preparations. **Dickens** writes of his irrational obsession with the guillotine, a fascination with which he appears to identify.

Carton enters Darnay's cell, overpowers him, exchanges clothes with him, and has him carried out. In the concluding part of the chapter we see Darnay successfully escaping with the others to England. Carton's plan has succeeded. Chapter 14 describes the death of Mme. Defarge, accidentally shot by Miss Pross while they are struggling with each other in the rooms of Dr. Manette where Mme. Defarge had gone to seek out Lucie. Miss Pross's loyalty saves Lucie but results in Miss Pross losing her hearing as a result of the gun's going off too close to her. In the famous concluding chapter, **Dickens** describes the noble and martyred death of Sydney Carton. Carton offers his support and protection to a young seamstress also condemned to die. He recalls again the words of Christ :

I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

Dickens allows Carton a prophetic vision by means of which he is able to tell us of the future fate of all the principal characters: the good prosper, and the wicked perish (Defarge is among those who will die by the guillotine). Carton dies with the thought:

It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.



The guillotine was introduced to France during the French Revolution By Joseph Ignace Guillotin, a physician, who believed this to be a less painful way of execution

Comment: The debate between Defarge and his wife (Chapter 12) is significant for showing us the greater determination and ferocity of her character. **Dickens** explains her motivation with a mixture of understanding and bafflement. The struggle between Mme. Defarge and Miss Pross that **Dickens** describes in this chapter (14) may be perceived as a struggle between Good and Evil in which Good triumphs, in however unlikely a way. Mme. Defarge must also be shown to die by violence – hence this somewhat comic fight. **Dickens** also shows himself to be a skilful story-teller, since he is able to create and maintain suspense about the escape throughout the chapter. The dominant figure in these last chapters is, however, Sydney Carton who shows great resourcefulness, mastery, and courage in planning the escape. **Dickens** introduces a minor new character at this stage, the nameless little seamstress, a kind of replacement for Lucie and her daughter, who serves to show up the indiscriminate ruthlessness of the revolutionaries and thereby indicts them. **Dickens's** analysis of the Revolution in Chapter 15 views it as a form of just retribution for the excesses committed by the aristocrats in earlier times. Only magic, he suggests, can restore their previous glory.

This analysis contradicts the implications of his previous metaphor for the Revolution as a disease that indiscriminately devours the guilty as well as the innocent, as well as the meaninglessness of the innocent seamstress's death. Finally, we must note how the theme of resurrection is extended by **Dickens** to apply to the Revolution as well. After the death of these new oppressors, Carton prophesies, there will arise a new order which he describes as a "rising from this abyss", so that, in the course of time, there will be:

a beautiful city and a brilliant people and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.

In **Dickens's** earlier diagnosis of the Revolution, we have not seen any sign of the possibility of such a hopeful outcome. The ending thus strikes us as a false resolution. Carton's death ~~too~~ loses some of its tragic force since **Dickens** sees his death as duly compensated by the happy future of Lucie and her family. His invocation of "rest" suggests Carton's weariness and his longing for death; so we do not question the tragic abbreviation of a young life. (You may like to consider why the last lines of the novel, spoken by Sydney Carton, have become so famous).

Exercise III

1. Why is Chapter 12 entitled "Darkness"?

2. What is the reason for Mme. Defarge's hatred of the Evremondes?

3. How does Carton effect Darnay's rescue?

4. Described the death of Mme. Defarge. What significance does it have?

5. Express your opinions about the ending of the novel.

10.4.1 Book III: Summary

In the last part of the novel, the events are set entirely in revolutionary France. Darnay is arrested soon after his arrival in France. Dr. Manette and Lucie arrive in Paris in search of him. The events of the Revolution during the "Terror" are described: the executions, the "grindstone", the mad dances, the trials, and the general chaos. After much effort and persistence, Dr. Manette secures Darnay's acquittal. But he is arrested immediately, on the basis of an account written by (his father-in-law) Dr. Manette, who had hidden it in the *Bastille* cell when he was imprisoned. Defarge later discovers the written account that had been hidden earlier in Dr Manette's cell in the *Bastille*. In it Dr. Manette has exposed the Evremonde brothers as rapists and murderers. Mme. Defarge plots the arrest of the others also, but is thwarted by Miss Pross who accidentally kills her. Carton enters the prison, drugs and overpowers

Darnay, changes clothes with him, and helps him to escape. He goes to the guillotine in the guise of Darnay, making this great sacrifice willingly for Lucie's sake. He prophesies a "resurrection": of himself in Lucie's future son, and of the city of Paris itself after the revolution has run its course.

10.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed Book III that is set entirely in Paris. Darnay arrives in France in order to rescue his uncle, the Marquis of Evremonde's manager Gabelle, who has been arrested by the revolutionary Tribunal. But we find that as a relation of the aristocracy, he is arrested, released and re-arrested. Ironically it is the written account of Dr. Manette that records the rape and murder of a beautiful peasant girl by Darnay's father and uncle. Because of this, Darnay is condemned to death. However, Sydney Carton plots Darnay's rescue, going to the guillotine in his place, with the thought: "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done".

10.6 GLOSSARY

ancien regime	the older order comprising the king, the nobles and the clergy
emigre	person who leaves his/her own country usually for political reasons
expiation	the payment for a crime or wicked action by accepting punishment readily and by doing something to show that one is sorry
inexorable	whose actions or effects cannot be changed or prevented by one's efforts
jeopardize	to endanger
to ferret out	to discover something by searching
travestied	completely misrepresented

10.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. Refer to paragraph 2 of Section 10.1
2. Refer to the comment of Section 10.2

Exercise 2

1. Refer to Section 10.3
2. Refer to Section 10.3
3. Refer to Section 10.3

Exercise 3

1. Refer to Section 10.4, under sub-heading summary
2. Refer to Section 10.4
3. Refer to Section 10.4, paragraph 2
4. Refer to Section 10.4
5. Refer to Section 10.4

UNIT 11 THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 France in the Last Decade of the Eighteenth Century
- 11.2 The French Revolution and the Conservative English Press
- 11.3 Burke and the Revolution in France
- 11.4 Carlyle and the French Revolution
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Glossary
- 11.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, you will think of the French Revolution as an orgiastic outburst of violence and anarchy that hit the French nation with the suddenness of a tornado or an earthquake. Actually, *A Tale of Two Cities* is only one among many books – both fictional and non-fictional – that treat the French Revolution as an event so cataclysmic that it defies all understanding. In this Unit we will give you an account of what actually happened in France as well as of the ideals that inspired the makers of the one of the great revolutions of European history. We will also discuss how the conservative English press, and two individual writers – **Burke** and **Carlyle** generated the images and attitudes that were to influence in a major way **Dickens's** representation of the French Revolution. However, we shall also try to point to the ways in which **Dickens** departs from his sources. We hope that after going through this Unit you will be able to critically compare *A Tale of Two Cities* with both what actually happened in France and the conservative discourse that these happenings generated.

11.1 FRANCE IN THE LAST DECADE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Origins of the Revolution

The French Revolution was not a sudden event at all but something that developed over at least five years. Its origins may be located in 1787 in the "aristocratic attempt to capture state power" at a time when France under the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI faced unresolvable political and economic crises. The aristocratic attempt to gain absolute dominance bitterly antagonised the middle class which had fought long and hard to gain adequate representation in the French Parliament. They now demanded that issues in parliament be decided by majority voting rather than by the older feudal method of voting by "order".

This issue precipitated the first confrontation between the *ancien regime* (the older order comprising the king, the nobles, the clergy and the men who were later to lead the Revolution). Six weeks after the Parliament opened – the middle class deputies constituted themselves and all who were prepared to join them as the National Assembly with the right to recast the constitution.



Louis XVI in a painting produced during the early phase of the Revolution. He is depicted as accepting the laws of the people

If the middle class was able to hold its own against the combined opposition of the king, lords and the clergy, it was because they had behind them the French masses – the labouring poor in the cities, as well as the peasantry. The latter sections had, as many historians have shown, very good reasons to be discontented with the *ancien regime*. Successive economic crises, prolonged drought conditions, and brutal governance had made the life of the large majority almost unbearable.

The entry of the radicalised French masses into the political processes of the era pushed these beyond what the middle class had originally anticipated. The storming of the *Bastille* – a hated state prison symbolising royal authority – in July 1789, suggested that the movement for reform had swelled into a full-fledged popular revolution.

Reign of Terror

It was the popularisation of the French Revolution that first sowed the seeds of future conflict among the revolutionaries. Around 1790 – not earlier, certainly not concurrently with the storming of the *Bastille*, as **Dickens** seems to imply in *A Tale of Two Cities* – these conflicts burst out into the open. Between 1790 and 1794, mass executions were common as a section of the middle class backed by the urban poor and the peasantry tried to consolidate its hold over a fragmenting nation. In the process the **Jacobin** regime persecuted not only aristocrats but also ex-revolutionaries, who frightened or dissatisfied by the direction in which the revolution was moving had dissociated themselves from it. It is this "Jacobin" phase of the revolution – often designated as "the reign of terror" – that is in many accounts including **Dickens's** made to stand for the French Revolution as a whole. Associated with widespread bloodshed, with the guillotines and the **tumbrills**, and above all with the "Sans culottes" the vast if shapeless movement of urban shopkeepers, tiny entrepreneurs and the poor (the Defarges and the other inhabitants of St. Antoine in *A Tale of Two Cities*), Jacobinism has been surrounded by conservative commentators in a permanent aura of almost mythological horror.



Two figures representing the French clergy and nobility crushing the life of a peasant

But of course this mythification was only the means of shutting off a cooler and more objective analysis of the achievements and failures of the Jacobins. The Sansculottes themselves, who have so often been represented as pathological killers, may also be seen as committed political activists who used violence in the interests of the "little men". Again while the Jacobins did rule by terror (until their methods turned in on themselves and precipitated their own downfall) – their achievements have been described by one of the historians of the French Revolution as "superhuman".

Towards an Egalitarian Society

Finally of course the French Revolution for all its excesses was above all a revolution against feudalism and for the establishment of an egalitarian society. It gave the world not only the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", but also the idea of a secular state where "all citizens (would) have the right to cooperate in the formation of the law".

Exercise I

1. Briefly outline the origin of the French Revolution.

2. Describe the role of the Jacobins in the revolution.

3. What did the French Revolution stand for?

11.2 THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE CONSERVATIVE ENGLISH PRESS

At the risk of sounding simplistic, we might say that the extreme reactions that the French Revolution aroused in England, may be symbolised in two books – **Burke's** *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, (1790) and **Tom Paine's** stirring refutation of **Burke** in his *The Rights of Man* (1791). Here, we do not have the space to go into the ways in which the French Revolution provided the ideas and inspiration for the radical artisans and workers of England. What is important for our purposes is that the Revolution in France as well as the radicalisation of the working classes in England in the first half of the nineteenth century made official England deeply apprehensive and that this created a whole discourse which sought to paint the events in France in the most horrific terms.

Perhaps the most powerful if nameless source of propaganda against the French Revolution was the conservative English press. It created the destructively violent imagery that was to be central to all subsequent depictions of the Revolution, and its comparisons between the anarchic French and the moderate and orderly British were to find an echo in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The most far-reaching images that the conservative English Press created of the French Revolution centred around violence. A political print of 1803 entitled "The Arms of France" features a guillotine dripping with blood, and in a horrible variation the political cartoonist Gilray depicted a family of Sansculottes feasting on dismembered bodies. The idea of orgiastic bloodletting is of course central to the way that the revolution is depicted in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens's treatment of the revolutionaries, however, differs from the stereotypes that appeared in the conservative press. In the newspapers and political pamphlets, typically, the revolutionary was a withered man or woman, disrespectful, hysterical, laughing cynically when heads rolled and always in a "violent haste" to pull everything down. We might recognise in this a source for the Defarges and the other revolutionaries of St. Antoine, but as we shall see the Defarges and especially Mme. Defarge, is treated with greater complexity in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Finally, an important theme articulated in the conservative English press, and one that has a direct bearing on *A Tale of Two Cities* is the self-congratulatory pitting of English moderation against French anarchy. A handbill published in 1793 sums up this smug attitude. Entitled "The Contrast", it figures "British Liberty" seated calmly with "Religion" and "Morality" while "French Liberty" identified with Atheism, Rebellion and Madness, runs through a scene of corpses.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* **Dickens** is never quite as simplistic or as crude as this. He does speak of Paris as "a beautiful city" and of the French as "a brilliant people", and there is an underlying admiration beneath his hatred of Mme. Defarge. Again although the contempt that the later **Dickens** had for the mid-Victorian establishment is muted in *A Tale of Two Cities*, it does occasionally break through – in the portrayal of Stryver, for instance. Despite these qualifications however, a sense of relief and even smugness about England's stability, its capacity to remain unaffected by the happenings in France does seem to inform the novel.

Exercise II

1. How did the English press respond to the French Revolution?

2. How far does Dickens's treatment of the French Revolution coincide with or depart from the images created by the English press?

11.3 BURKE AND THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

The most influential single work against the French Revolution, and one that was responsible for transforming the images of violence, cannibalism and unnaturalness scattered throughout the writings on France into "common wisdom" was **Burke's** *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Written in 1790, it attained instant popularity (or notoriety among the radical supporters of the revolution) and as **Marilyn Butler** says, "its phrasing passed immediately into the English political discourse".

The most striking thing about *Reflections* is indeed its phrasing – the skill with which it is able to use language to distort facts and to imbue the happenings in France with a mythological sense of horror that defies analysis. **Burke** was a rhetorician (a skilful user of language) by education and practice and he was a very effective speaker in parliament. He brought all these skills to bear on *Reflections*, enticing readers with the magic of his words and blinding them to what actually happened. In his reply to the *Reflections* **Tom Paine** angrily wrote that **Burke's** account was calculated "more for theatre than for argument" and instead of history or truth, **Burke** gave his readers oratory – "the spouting rant of high-toned declamation".

The distorting power of rhetoric will be an important theme in our discussion of **Dickens's** representation of the French Revolution. As we shall see, **Dickens** uses imagery and language to dramatise a point of view that does not square up with what actually happened in France.

But **Dickens's** response to the French Revolution does differ from **Burke's** in one very important respect. If **Burke** reacts to the revolutionaries with venom, he is lyrical when he speaks of the aristocracy and especially the king and the queen. Indeed **Burke's** book may be seen to be an attempt to mobilise opinion in favour of the aristocracy in England, and its ideological underpinnings are basically the feudal notions of hierarchy and chivalry. On the other hand, **Dickens**, who was consistently anti-aristocratic throughout his career holds the aristocracy primarily responsible for precipitating the revolution. The aristocratic Evremondes in *A Tale of Two Cities* are far worse than the Defarges, and the king, far from being an object of lyrical adulation, is described simply as "a man with a square jaw".

11.4 CARLYLE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The strongest single influence on the writing of *A Tale of Two Cities* was undoubtedly **Carlyle's** *The French Revolution, A History* (1837). **Dickens** said that he had read **Carlyle's** book about 500 times, he visited the places that **Carlyle** had talked about, and he incorporated, without too much alteration, some episodes from the *French Revolution*. (**Dickens's** depiction of the execution of Foulon is an example of such incorporation). But more important than these is the impact that **Carlyle's** conceptualisation of the French Revolution had on the novel.

One of the basic features of **Carlyle's** delineation of the French Revolution was that he saw it not so much as something that could be understood in terms of class or economics as an outbreak of incomprehensible cataclysmic forces. As in *A Tale of Two Cities* the revolution in **Carlyle's** work is often compared to an earthquake or a tempest. Again, the behaviour of the mobs and especially of the Sansculottes is an expression of what happens when "the fountains of the great deep boil forth" after "the mad man" confined within "everyman" bursts through "the Earth rind of Habit".

In *The French Revolution* the most horrific form of this elemental-release is the act of devouring. We might recognise in this the familiar Burkean tactic by which the revolution is sought to be enveloped in an impenetrable aura of horror that defies analysis or understanding. But in fact the way **Carlyle** uses the idea of devouring points to a larger difference between him and **Burke**.

Burke had proclaimed his support of the aristocracy in every page of *Reflections*: while moving from the "mobs" to the aristocracy his whole mode of description had shifted from the satiric to the lyrical. In *The French Revolution* on the other hand, the metaphor of devouring applies as much to the aristocracy as to the revolutionaries. **Carlyle** constantly draws the reader's attention to the oppressiveness and decadence of the aristocracy, and in fact holds the aristocracy responsible for precipitating the revolution: "They have sown the wind", he says of the aristocracy, "and they shall reap the whirlwind". **Carlyle**, however can see nothing liberating or exhilarating in the "whirlwind". On the contrary, aristocratic oppression and revolutionary retribution are the main links in an endless chain of violence and counter-violence. It is this idea that **Carlyle's** metaphors seek, above all, to dramatise. In **Carlyle's** conception of things the *ancien regime* devoured the flesh of the people, the revolution then devoured the *ancien regime* and finally the revolution devoured itself.

If you have gone through Unit 9 carefully you will immediately see that the Carlylean depiction of the events in France as a chain of violence and counter-violence – a self-perpetuating system where those in power devour those who are not, is at the heart of **Dickens's** representation of the French Revolution too.

Despite the very basic ways in which **Carlyle's** work influenced **Dickens's**, there is one important way in which the two differ. This has to do with the way in which the two view relationships between the French Revolution and the situation in England. Writing in the 1830s when conditions in England were, as we have seen, turbulent, **Carlyle** obsessively drew parallels between the situation in France in the 1790s and England in the 1830s. **Dickens**, on the other hand, wrote of the revolution in France from the safe distance of the 1860s when, as we have seen, the turbulence of the 30s and 40s had given way to peace and prosperity. Accordingly, **Dickens** seems far less anxious about the possibility of the events in France repeating in England. In fact **Dickens** is, as we have seen, much closer to that strand within the discourse on *The French Revolution* that contrasts rather than compares the situations in France and England.

Exercise III

1. How did Burke depict the Revolution in *Reflections on the French Revolution*?

2. How does Carlyle's account of the French Revolution differ from Burke's?

3. In which important respect does Dickens's view of the revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* differ from Carlyle's in *The French Revolution*?

11.5 LET US SUM UP

Summing up then, we hope, you can now see that the French Revolution was a protracted and complex phenomenon and not a spontaneous cataclysm that **Carlyle** and other British writers made it out to be. The constant comparisons between the French Revolution and a tempest or an earthquake, however were not innocent, since these implied that the events in France defied all forms of understanding. Moreover, writers as diverse as **Burke** and **Carlyle** never hesitated to use metaphors and images and heightened language to **subsume** the facts and the achievements of the French Revolution in an almost mythological sense of horror.

Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* comes basically out of this matrix of attitudes, but we hope you have noted how **Dickens** both draws on but also departs from the writings that taken together constitute the conservative English response to the French Revolution.

11.6 GLOSSARY

Burke	Edmund Burke (1729-97) British statesman and political theorist, wrote <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> (1790)
Carlyle	Thomas Carlyle (1795'-1881) British social critic and historian, author of <i>The French Revolution, A History</i> (1837)
Cataclysm	violent and sudden change or event
Ideology	ideas of a social or political group
Jacobin	member of a radical, democratic party during the French Revolution. The party drew support from the lower classes of Paris and from a network of over 31000 affiliated clubs throughout France.
Matrix	an arrangement
Paine	Thomas Paine (1773-1809), intellectual, revolutionary, idealist, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Wrote <i>The Rights of Man</i> (1791), both as a reply to Burke's view of the French Revolution and as a general political philosophy treatise
Subsume	to include as a member of a group or type

Tumbrill	a type of simple cart used for taking prisoners to the guillotine in the French Revolution
Underpin	support or give strength to

11.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. Refer to Section 11.1
2. Refer to Section 11.1, under Reign to Terror
3. Refer to Section 11.1, under towards an Egalitarian Society

Exercise 2

1. Refer to Section 11.2
2. Refer to Section 11.2

Exercise 3

1. Refer to Section 11.4
2. Refer to Section 11.4
3. Refer to Section 11.4

UNIT 12 DICKENS'S TREATMENT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 The Aristocracy and the Poor in *A Tale of Two Cities*
- 12.2 Dickens's Representation of the Revolution
- 12.3 The Revolutionaries in *A Tale of Two Cities*
- 12.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.5 Glossary

12.0 OBJECTIVES

Let us now focus directly on **Dickens's** treatment of the French Revolution. The first striking thing in **Dickens's** account is that unlike **Burke**, he draws our attention to the oppressiveness of the aristocracy and indeed holds them primarily responsible for precipitating the upheaval. But **Dickens's** attitude to the revolution is not sympathetic either – he associates it with bloodshed, revengefulness and the propensity for indiscriminate levelling. We shall see, however that **Dickens's** treatment of the revolutionaries and especially of Mme. Defarge is more complex, containing as it does, a real element of admiration together with fear and loathing. We hope that after you have gone through this Unit you will be in a position to tackle what is self-evidently one of the most important topics in the study of *A Tale of Two Cities*: **Dickens's** treatment of the French Revolution in the novel.

12.1 THE ARISTOCRACY AND THE POOR IN *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

We might begin our discussion of **Dickens** and the French Revolution by quoting a sentence from one of **Dickens's** letters. "If there is anything certain on earth", **Dickens** wrote to his friend Forster "I take it, it is that the condition of the French peasantry generally at the day [during the time of the French Revolution] was intolerable". Although the peasantry never directly enters the world of *A Tale of Two Cities*, **Dickens** draws our attention to the terrible situation of the French urban poor. Here is a description of St. Antoine:

Hunger – was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon lines. Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood that the man sawed off; Hunger- stared from the filthy street that had no offal among its refuse of anything to eat. (Book I, Chapter 5)

What is more, the suffering of the poor in *A Tale of Two Cities* is directly related to the exploitativeness of the aristocracy.

Thus while the inhabitants of St. Antoine fight with each other to lap up the red wine spilt on the street, one of the great lords in power at the court drinks his evening chocolate with the help of four men "all ablaze with gorgeous-decoration". The luxurious lifestyle of the noble lords is not just contrasted against the miseries of the poor, but it is also depicted as being sustained directly by exploitation. As a state dignitary, **Dickens** tells us, the Monsiegnur had one noble idea on the art of governance that was to "tend to his own pocket and power".

Aristocratic oppression in *A Tale of Two Cities* directly fuels revolutionary fires, and may, in fact, be said to actually create revolutionaries. Thus it is the contempt and arrogance with which Monsieur Evremonde treats the parents of the child whose death he has caused, that sparks off the first act of revolutionary violence. Even more significant is the Monsieur's other crime revealed late in the novel. The Monsieur's rape of Mme. Defarge's sister does not just signify the oppression of the poor by the aristocracy. It also creates in Mme. Defarge that implacable hatred of the aristocracy that emerges as one of the most frightening aspects of the revolutionary consciousness.

The reckless exploitativeness of the aristocracy, the terrible condition of the poor makes the revolution almost inevitable. In *A Tale of Two Cities* this inevitability is suggested in many ways, by direct commentary, by the imagery and especially by Mme. Defarge's symbolic knitting, which anticipates the revolution with "the steadfastness of fate".

12.2 DICKENS'S REPRESENTATION OF THE REVOLUTION

Despite recognising its inevitability and the aristocracy's responsibility in precipitating it, **Dickens** does not justify the revolution, far less sympathise with it. On the contrary, **Dickens** conceptualises the events culminating in the revolution almost entirely in Carlylean terms. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, as in **Carlyle's** work the revolution is above all a *reaction* to aristocratic oppression; the terrible crop that grows out of the seed that the aristocracy have sown, and as such incorporates the worst features of what it seeks to overthrow. As **Dickens** puts it in the last chapter of the novel:

Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious licence and oppression once again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind. (BK. III. Ch. 18)

In *A Tale of Two Cities* **Dickens** uses a whole range of techniques to paint the revolution in the most lurid of colours. At the most familiar level he draws on the blood-drinking, devouring imagery that informs so much of the nineteenth century English writing on the French Revolution, from the conservative pamphlets and newspapers to **Carlyle's** better-known account. In *A Tale of Two Cities* the blood-wine imagery is introduced somewhat ambiguously. When the impoverished inhabitants of St. Antoine rush to lap up the red wine spilt on the street, we respond above all to their poverty and when a "tall joker", dips his finger in the red wine and scrawls the word "Blood" on a nearby wall we assume that a justifiable connection is being made between an oppressed people and a bloody revolution. On the other hand, however, the new connotation that wine acquires already implicates the people in the act of blood drinking, and when **Dickens** speaks of "the tigerish smear about the mouth" of one of the revelers it becomes impossible to separate the notion of the revolutionary masses from the idea of cannibalism.

As the novel progresses, the blood imagery is systematically de-linked from its more positive connotations, such as liberation, sacrifice or the idea that revolution is a justifiable response to oppression, and is associated more and more with predatoriness. In **Dickens's** direct descriptions of the events in France, blood becomes the staple diet of La Guillotine:

Lovely girls, bright women, brown haired, dark haired and grey youths; stalwart men and old; gentleborn and peasant born; all red wine for La Guillotine, all daily brought into light from dark cellars of loathsome prisons, and carried to her through the streets, to slake her devouring thirst. (Bk III, Ch.5)

This conception of the revolution as nothing more than a protracted orgy of bloodletting, provides **Dickens** with the justification of projecting the revolution not as a sequence of real events but as a nightmare. In the scene in which the men and women come to the grindstone to sharpen their weapons, **Dickens** is interested not in leaving behind for posterity a description of life in Paris during the revolutionary times, as in orchestrating images that create a sense of hell on earth:

The grindstone had a double handle, and turning at it madly were two men, whose faces, as their long hair flapped back when the whirling of the grindstone brought their faces up, were more horrible and cruel than the visages of the wildest savages in the most barbarous disguise – As these ruffians turned and turned – some women held wine to their mouths that they might drink; and what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with them stream of sparks struck out of the stones, all the wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire. (Book III. Ch. 2)

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, as in so much of the conservative writing on the French Revolution, the events of the 1790s are associated not just with blood and gore but also with the complete breakdown of order, both civic and natural. The idea that the revolutionary legislators were in "a violent haste" to pull everything down was of course at the heart of **Burke's** Idea of the revolution. In *A Tale of Two Cities* this breakdown of "order" is manifest in the functioning of the revolutionary courts. **Dickens** describes the jury that tries Darnay as follows:

Looking at the jury and the turbulent audience, he might have thought that the usual order of things was reversed, and that the felons were trying the honest men. (Book III)

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the jury precipitates the most "unnatural" of situation where the testimony of Darnay's own father-in-law becomes the means of condemning him.

The idea of "unnaturalness" in fact underlies a great deal of what **Dickens** has to say about the French Revolution. It is manifest in **Dickens's** frequent references to the drought conditions which is in fact seen by historians as one of the *causes* of the revolution but which **Dickens** insinuates as one of its *effects*, in the macabre jokes that grow around the guillotine, but above all in a blurring of gender distinctions which the French Revolution seems to have brought about. Almost all the conservative writers on the French Revolution had reacted with horror at the "desexualizing" of women during the revolution. **Burke** had written with loathing about the unnatural acts of women "lost to all shame", and **Carlyle** of the violent speech and gestures, of the "manly women" from whose girdle "pistols are seen sticking". In *A Tale of Two Cities* the embodiment of this kind of "unnatural" woman is of course M^{me} Defarge, but as we shall see; **Dickens's** treatment of the revolutionaries and especially of M^{me}. Defarge is more complex than his treatment of the revolution.

12.3 THE REVOLUTIONARIES IN *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

On the face of it **Dickens** 's treatment of the revolutionaries is consistent with his treatment of the Revolution, The revolutionaries are, in fact, seen as part of the drought-stricken post-Revolution landscape – their upraised arms are compared at

one point to "shrivelled branches of trees in a winter wind". This is one of the many instances when **Dickens** dramatises the poverty of the revolutionary masses not in order to evoke our sympathy but in order to associate Mme. Defrags and her comrades, as well as their enterprise with a sense of unhealthiness. For **Dickens** as for many of his middle class contemporaries, the most frightening feature of a revolution based on deprivation is its propensity to destroy rather than build:

The raggedest nightcap, awry on the wretchedest head, had this crooked significance in it: I know how hard it has grown for me, the wearer of this to support life in myself; do you know how easy it has grown for me the wearer of this to betray life in you? Every lean bear arm that had been without work before, had this work always ready for it now, that it could strike. (Bk.II Ch. 22)

In these circumstances it is not surprising at all that **Dickens** sees the revolutionaries as "dark, revengeful and repressed", and that he sees the revolution leading directly to the reign of terror.

Yet lurking behind this obvious dislike for the revolutionaries is a very real, if somewhat frightened admiration. The men and women who gather at the Defarge wine shop are committed to their cause, and confident about their ultimate success; and there is enough evidence in the novel to suggest that the Defarges are not just outstanding organisers but also capable of surviving the onslaughts of a hostile administration.

The most striking figure among the revolutionaries is of course Mme. Defarge. Quite apart from her personal qualities which we will discuss later, what makes **Dickens's** portrayal of Mme. Defarge so remarkable, is that it is not imprisoned within the prejudices that had determined the portrayal of the non-domestic women in the writing of **Burke** and **Carlyle**. Thus far from being cast in the Burkean/Carlylean mould of the violent, "mad" revolutionary woman, Mme. Defarge is characterised by her clam determination, her razor sharp powers of observation and her complete dedication. In this sense Mme. Defarge's refusal to stay within the bounds of domesticity suggests not her revolutionary perversity but her independence.

Mme. Defarge has been compared to Lady Macbeth in **Shakespeare's** play *Macbeth*. But unlike Lady Macbeth, her role is never confined to that of a mere instigator or advisor. On the contrary, she is an equal and even dominant partner in the revolutionary enterprise; always capable of overruling her husband at public forums. What sustains Mme. Defarge's independence is her outstanding leadership qualities. As we saw in Unit 9, nothing that has a bearing on the revolution escapes her, and she moves about in St. Antoine like a "missionary", channelising the discontentment of its miserable folk for the cause of the revolution. With his deep antipathy to the revolution, **Dickens** hates Mme. Defarge for her very strengths. He sees in her unwavering dedication to the revolution, the propensity to sacrifice all human considerations for an abstract cause, and in her determination a cold pitilessness. But the truly remarkable thing is that despite hating her **Dickens** is still able to pay Mme. Defarge a tribute such as the following:

Of strong and fearless character, of shrewd sense and readiness, of great determination, of that kind of beauty that not only seems to possess to its possessor firmness and animosity, but to strike in others an instinctive recognition of those qualities. (Bk III, Ch. .4)

12.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have seen in what respects **Dickens's** treatment of the French Revolution differs from that of **Burke** and **Carlyle** whose views we discussed in Unit-11. We have seen that while **Dickens** holds the aristocracy responsible for

precipitating the Revolution, he is not sympathetic to the revolutionaries either. He depicts them in diabolical terms, associating them with indiscriminate bloodshed and vengeance. **Dickens's** treatment of Mme Dearge, however, is more complex as he treats her with fear and hatred as well as with admiration.

**Dickens's
Treatment of the
French Revolution**

12.5 GLOSSARY

implacable	which cannot be satisfied
perversity	unreasonable opposition to the wishes of others; difference from what is right or reasonable.
propensity	natural tendency towards a particular (usually undesirable) kind of behaviour

UNIT 13 THE TWO WORLDS OF *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction: The Two Worlds of *A Tale of Two Cities*
- 13.2 Women in the French Revolution
- 13.3 The Home and the Streets
- 13.4 The Family and Society
- 13.5 The Personal and Political Dimensions of the Novel
- 13.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.7 Glossary
- 13.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we discuss a topic that explores "the two worlds of *A Tale of Two Cities*". In the next section (13.1) the main argument is set forth, and in subsequent sections (13.2 to 13.5), various aspects of the topic are covered.

At the end of this Unit you should be able to

- relate different aspects of the novel;
- begin to think critically about the *contradictions* that we find in a writer's work; and
- ask what these mean.

13.1 INTRODUCTION: THE TWO WORLDS OF *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

As you have already no doubt deduced from your reading of the novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* is about two worlds (or two "cities", as the title indicates). These are the worlds of England and France, which are compared and contrasted in the opening chapter of the novel. The two nations represent, political stability and revolution.

The opposition between these two worlds represents an opposition as well, between two sets of conditions which correspond to England and France, respectively: order and chaos; safety and danger; freedom and imprisonment; life and death. The novel's structure itself is organised around these settings. The central group of characters (Dr. Manette, Lucie, Charles Darnay, and their friends) move from one world to another and in doing so, they pass from one set of conditions to its opposite. Hence, England serves as an escape and refuge from revolutionary France. This opposition has already been explored in detail in a previous Unit (Unit 11); so we need not develop it any further here.

Here we shall notice more closely how **Dickens's** representation of *women* not only corresponds to these oppositions but, in fact defines them. Each "world" is represented by a woman: the world of England (stability, order, safety, freedom, and life) represented by Lucie Manette; and the world of France depicting the revolution, chaos, danger imprisonment, and death represented by Mme. Defarge. In Section 9.3.1 we provided a brief background note on the female "types" in **Dickens's** fiction, and observed how Lucie Manette and Therese Defarge correspond to these types. Here we see further how each is made to stand for the national/cultural/racial

character. Each has a companion – Miss Pross (Lucie's) and "Vengeance" (Mme. Defarge's) – who more fully exemplifies the characteristics of her national type. (You could try to identify what these characteristics are. Read Book III, Chapters 3 and 14).

The representation of this central pair of opposed women characters corresponds to and structures other oppositions that we shall examine in detail. The values of England, as exemplified by Lucie Manette, are associated with the home, the family, and with individual or personal relationships; whereas revolutionary France, as exemplified by Mme. Defarge, is identified with the streets, with "society" at large, and with impersonal or historical events and forces.

But it becomes obvious to us as readers that these oppositions are not, and cannot be sustained. As the novel's opening chapter itself showed, eighteenth-century England is not a perfect society, or an exemplar for Europe. We see the dangers of travel on the highways in England in Book I; we see the wild behaviour of the English "mob" at Darnay's trial (Book II, Ch.2), and at Roger Cly's funeral (Book II, Ch.14); we see **Dickens's** direct attack upon the English complacency displayed by Stryver (Book II, Ch.24).

Tellson's Bank, which is the microcosmic representation of England – in its resistance to change, its stability, its health, its conservatism is imaged in an ambivalent way. Its building in London is small, dark, underground, **claustrophobic** (See Book II, Chapter 1). (It is of course the repository of the wealth of the fleeing French aristocracy, and the French refugees themselves gather there). Tellson's London building resembles the womb, and as such stands for security. But the description also suggests a prison; even Mr. Lorry's service to the bank, though **Dickens** often praises it, can be seen as a life-sentence. So we see **Dickens's** ambivalent attitude towards Tellson's and, by extension, towards England. Similarly, as we shall see, all the other values associated with England *via* Lucie are called into question, and their opposition to France and the Revolution often breaks down.

Conclusion: Apparently, we see two separate worlds in *A Tale of Two Cities*. They are also not identified as separate but are in fact contrasted. At the same time, Dickens does not unnecessarily praise England since he makes it resemble France in a number of important aspects. Central to this blurring of boundaries is the role that women played. We shall look at it in the next section.

Exercise 1

1. What are the two "worlds" represented in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

2. What do these opposed worlds stand for?

3. What is significant about Dickens's representation of women in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

4. What values do Lucie Manette and Mme. Defarge exemplify?

5. How is the opposition between England and France broken down?

6. How does Dickens's double attitude towards Tellson's bank emerge?

13.2 WOMEN IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

In most social arrangements, women and men traditionally occupy separate "spheres" of activity: women's sphere is the personal and private world of the home and the family, and their activities are reproductive and domestic (childbearing, childrearing, running a house), while men's sphere is the public world of the streets and the workplace and their activities are productive and political (labour, manufacture, government). In Victorian literature and value-systems, this separation of the spheres was strictly enforced, and the place of women in the home – while it reduced and trivialised women's roles – also idealised and elevated it. This is the place that Lucie Manette is given in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in line with the heroines of most of **Dickens's** other novels.

But at times of historical crisis – like war, revolution and struggle – women's participation in public events becomes crucial, as happened in the French Revolution. Several historians have noted that women played a key role in revolutionary activities, especially since the popular agitations often centred on lack of food and women were the most hard – hit by this deprivation. The historian **George Rude** notes, for instance, that "a leading part" in the agitation of September 1789, was played by "the women of the markets and *faubourgs*", "it was they who gave a lead to their men folk in the great march to Versailles on 5 October". For his portrait of Mme. Defarge, **Dickens** relied to a certain extent on **Carlyle's** historical portrait of Demoiselle Theroigne; and there were other well-known women leaders of the Revolution from whom he could draw for the figure of Mme. Defarge.

Thus women were no longer confined to the world of home and family but became actors in the larger world of public affairs. What fascinated and repelled English historians of the Revolution like **Burke** and **Carlyle** was the violence of women in the "Terror". This seemed to them to go against nature itself, to de-sex women, to strip them of their "feminine" qualities of passivity and pity, and to reverse the order of things. Hence their descriptions of women revolutionaries as shrill and their angry denunciations of them as "monsters," "witches", "harpies", or "vampires".

Dickens follows **Burke** and **Carlyle** in his descriptive accounts. In the account of the hanging of Foulon, for instance, we have this long paragraph that highlights the women's attitudes and actions:

...the women were a sight to chill the boldest. From such household occupations as their base poverty yielded, from their children, from their aged and their sick crouching on the bare ground famished and naked, they ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions. Villain Foulon taken, my sister. Old Foulon taken, my mother. Miscreant Foulon taken, my daughter. Then, a score of others ran into the midst of these beating their breasts, tearing their hair, and screaming, Foulon alive. Foulon who told the starving people they might eat grass. Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him. Foulon who told my baby it might suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want... give us the blood of Foulon, give us the body and soul of Foulon, rend Foulon to pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him. With these cries, numbers of the women, lashed into blind frenzy, whirled about, striking and tearing at their own friends until they dropped into a passionate swoon....

In other places, as in the description of the storming of the *Bastille*, **Dickens** focused on Mme. Defarge's bloodthirsty behaviour (Book II, Ch.21). What other similar examples can you find in the text?

But **Dickens** never loses sight of the *reasons* for the women's violence, as the passage, quoted above, shows. They have borne the brunt of the oppression of the *ancien regime* precisely as women, in their domestic and familial roles; as women who have seen their children starve, and their husbands, fathers and lovers imprisoned or killed, (See Mme. Defarge's retort to Lucie in Book III, Ch.3: "All our lives, we have seen our sister-women suffer, in themselves and in their children, poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, sickness, misery, oppression and neglect of all kinds".) In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the very first act of injustice perpetrated by the aristocracy that we see is the Marquis's coach running over a child in the streets.

He is completely indifferent to the grief of the child's parents, and simply tosses a coin to the **distraught** father as compensation for the loss. It is this act that sets off a chain of violence and counter-violence in the narrative (Go back to Unit 10, for recapitulation).

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, women are shown also as the sexual victims of the aristocracy. The originating act of the action of the novel is the rape of a poor peasant girl by the Evremonde twins; and it is as her sister that Mme. Defarge seeks revenge upon the entire Evremonde clan.

Therefore, **Dickens** on one level seems to suggest that women are *biologically* "red in tooth and claw" (that "the female of the species is deadlier than the male" – a claim borne out by Mme. Defarge seen in comparison with her husband). But at a deeper analytic level he also shows that it is their "natural" feelings as women – as sexual victims, as grieving mothers and wives – that provokes them into committing "unnatural" acts of violence and revenge.

Whenever we see Mme. Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities*, it is not within the home, but standing in her wine-shop, or in doorways, or out on the streets; she is not shown as a mother and daughter; even her knitting is a revolutionary act (a secret register), not a domestic or feminine activity. (For the significance of knitting, see Unit 10). She is active, dynamic, a leader. In all this she is a contrast to Lucie Manette, as we shall see.

Yet **Dickens** wants to "demystify" this awful woman (i.e. take away the aura of mystery and **inscrutability** around her). He shows us the crowd of men and women going back to their homes after the hanging of Foulon, to their normal family relations and affections:

Fathers and mothers who had had their full share in the worst of the day, played gently with their meager children; and lovers, with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped (Block II, Chapter 22).

Similarly, at the end of the novel Mme. Defarge is revealed as a woman seeking revenge for her family's death at the hands of the Evremondes. Though this reduces her stature as a political figure fighting for an abstract cause and her impact as an impersonal force of retribution that **Dickens** had built up throughout the narrative, it gives her actions a certain sympathetic colouring.

Conclusion: **Dickens's** ambivalent attitude to the French Revolution – his acceptance and rejection of it – may be partly located in his double attitude towards the women of the revolution, and is explained by his extremely complex depiction of Mme. Defarge as their representative.

Exercise II

1. What are the separate spheres occupied by women and men in most societies?

2. What was women's role in the revolution?

3. How did English historians view the French women who participated in the "Terror"?

4. Give some examples of Dickens's negative view of French women in his descriptions of the revolution.

5. What explanation does Dickens offer for the women's acts of violence?

6. How is Mme. Defarge represented in *A Tale of Two Cities*? How does Dickens give her actions a sympathetic colouring?

13.3 THE HOME AND THE STREETS

The "home" in *A Tale of Two Cities* is associated with England and Lucie Manette, and symbolises family affections, safety, security, order, comfort – an "inner" world that is a refuge against the world outside. This is how the home that Lucie and her father set up in London is described:

*A quainter corner than the corner where the Doctor lived, was not to be found in London. There was no way through it, and the front window of the Doctor's lodgings commanded a pleasant little vista of street that had a congenial air of retirement on it... The summer light struck into the corner brilliantly in the earlier part of the day; but, when the streets grew hot, the corner was in shadow.
....It was a cool spot, staid but cheerful, a wonderful place for echoes, and a very harbour from the raging streets (Block II, Ch.6).*

Lucie is generally associated with England and her English mother; but as the child also of a French father, she shows the French ability "to make much of little means", as seen in her home – making skills, her use of "many little adornments, of no value but for their taste and fancy ...its effect was delightful". In this house Lucie tends to her father and he slowly recovers from the trauma of his long imprisonment, Lucie was the 'Golden' thread that united him to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery; and the sound of her voice, the light of her face, the touch of her hand, had a strong beneficial influence with him almost always. (Compare the image of the Golden thread with Mme. Defarge's coarse, grey knitting, and the different symbolic associations that the two images have).

Thus Lucie's predominant qualities relate to the home: She is a good home-maker, a dutiful daughter, a good wife and mother, a very traditional representation of the Victorian fictional heroine, especially as she is found in **Dickens's** novels.

Yet, this home in London is **beset** by the forces outside. Lucie herself draws attention to the significance of the echoes and footsteps that she hears in the house: "I have made the echoes out to be the echoes of all the footsteps that are coming by-and-by into our lives". (Book II, Ch.6). As **John Gross** has pointed out: "Footsteps suggest other people, and in *A Tale of Two Cities* other people are primarily a threat and a source of danger. The little group around Dr. Manette is as self-contained as any in **Dickens**, but it enjoys only a precarious safety".

As we see later the inmates of this house become sucked into the vortex of events in France. Lucie enacts the journey from her home twice: the first time to fetch her father back from pre-revolutionary France, the second to rescue her husband from revolutionary France. In Paris Lucie bravely builds a home that is a replica of her English household in the midst of the chaos all around her, (See Book III, Ch.5). But it cannot save and hold her husband: no sooner is he released from prison than he is re-arrested and imprisoned again. Once again footsteps signal the invasion of the world; Lucy hears "strange feet upon the stairs", and they are those of "four tough men in red caps, armed with sabers and pistols" come to arrest Darnay. Thus **Dickens**

shows the frailty and precariousness of the "home" as a refuge from the "world" outside.

There is yet another unsettling suggestion of the limitations of the home: we find this in **Dickens's** depiction of Darnay's dilemma: Darnay as an Evremonde by birth and inheritance and yet hating both, seeks refuge in England. But in fact it is the Manette household in Soho—Lucie's love, and the peace he finds there – that lures him away from his responsibilities as he himself realises (Book II, Chapter 24). In some ways then the home – as a private retreat – is a false option to the world of events in which men (and women) must participate under historic compulsion.

Dickens marks the differences between women of different classes and circumstances very forcefully in Bk. III, Ch.3. Lucie appeals to Mme. Defarge to save her husband: "O sister woman, think of me. As a wife, and mother." "She kissed one of the hands that knitted. It was a passionate, loving, thankful, womanly action, but the hand made no response - dropped cold and heavy, and took to its knitting again". Mme. Defarge insists on the differences between their positions

The wives and mothers we have been used to see ... have not been greatly considered? We have known their husbands and fathers laid in prison and kept from them, often enough? ...Is it likely that the trouble of one wife and mother would be much to us now?

Between Lucie and Mme Defarge there is the difference of class and nation and the historical roles that these dictate which override their common gendered identities as "wives and mothers".

Conclusion: *A Tale of Two Cities* is an unusual Victorian novel in so far as it marks the limits of the "home" in several ways. Yet ultimately **Dickens** makes Lucie the victor; Mme. Defarge is destroyed and defeated. In Carton's vision at the end of the novel, the Revolution passes away, and it is Lucie and her children and grandchildren who endure. This resolution may not seem to us to be in keeping with **Dickens's** own depiction of "the home and the streets", but it is by this means that he "saves" the values of the home.

Exercise III

1. How does Lucie Manette symbolise the "home"? What qualities of hers does Dickens admire most?

2. How safe and strong is the refuge of the home in Dickens's depiction of it in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

3. In Darnay's dilemma what importance does the influence of the home have?

4. Why does Mme. Defarge refuse the appeals of a "sister-woman"?

5. How does Dickens assert the values of the home finally in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

13.4 THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

The family is a group of closely-related individuals who occupy the private world of the home; 'society' is a large, loose collection of unrelated individuals who constitute the public world of community. **Dickens** explores the opposition and conflict between the two, and poses the question of human identity in that context: is one's identity to be defined in terms of one's personal and family relationships, or in terms of one's class and social position?

The question is central to Darnay's dilemma in the novel. Which is his "real" identity, the name he is born to, or the name he chooses? When he is arrested, indicted and condemned to die for the crimes of his ancestors, the Biblical saying that "The sins of the father are visited upon the sons", comes true. Ironically, Dr. Manette who fights hard to save Darnay as the husband of his beloved daughter, unwittingly betrays him as the son and nephew of the hated aristocratic twins who had him imprisoned in the *Bastille*. In the case of Lucie too it is a question, as Mme Defarge points out, whether she is to be saved as the daughter of her father or condemned as the wife of her husband. For the revolutionaries it is not the individual's actions that decide his/her guilt or innocence, but his/her social position.

Dickens also regarded the family as the constitutive unit of society (i.e. that which makes it up or forms it). Just as a stone dropped in a pond will cause ripples that irresistibly spread outward, the disruption of the family will lead to larger social disturbances. In *A Tale of Two Cities* the two major criminal acts committed by the aristocracy (both in the person of the Marquis d' Evremoode) – the killing of the poor child, the rape of the peasant girl – are acts that disregard family bonds and feelings among the poor. The third crime, the unjust imprisonment of Dr. Manette also tears a young man away from his wife and unborn child. The Marquis does not consider these to be serious crimes.

The possession by a high-placed person of any woman of the peasant class was a traditional aristocratic privilege (known as *le droit du seigneur*). But the brother of the raped girl, and later her sister (Mme. Defarge), question this privilege. Speaking

the new language of rights, justice and equality, they attack the Evremondes. (See Bk. III, Ch.10). Similarly the poor man, Gaspard, kills the Marquis in revenge for the latter's causing his child's death, thus setting off a seemingly never-ending cycle of violence.

The revolt of the peasantry is viewed in the light of generational revolt. This is the reason why Gaspard's crime is compared to **parricide**. (Bk: II, Ch.15). **Dickens**, like many other historians of the time, diagnosed the chief cause of the French Revolution as the breakdown of the old feudal order, in which the relationship between the classes was imaged as a paternal one. "Two revolutions, one generational and the other political, determine the structure of *A Tale of Two Cities*," as a critic, observes (**Albert D Hutter**). The father-son conflict that is depicted in Charles Darnay's quarrel with his uncle the Marquis portends the social upheaval that is to follow.

Conclusion: **Dickens** does not undertake any deeper analysis of the large-scale historical forces that caused the French Revolution. Questions of identity and images of generational conflict – located within the matrix of the family as social structure – serve his fictional purposes adequately. He is forced to rely upon a number of coincidences and forced connections in order to compress this vast historical phenomenon within the novel: thus Mme. Defarge must be revealed as none other than the sister of the peasant girl raped by the Evremonde brothers; Dr. Manette's son-in-law is the son and nephew of the very men who had sent him to prison; Defarge is Dr. Manette's old servant and the one who finds his hidden document in the *Bastille* and so on. When Mme. Defarge argues with her husband that the revolutionary must rise above personal loyalty and affection for the individual who may be a 'class-enemy' (see Bk. II, Ch.16), **Dickens** is able to discredit her as a cold and heartless woman. But the novel nonetheless leaves us with the disturbing possibility that Mme. Defarge raises: that identities and loyalties may extend beyond the family into that larger community called "society".

Exercise IV

1. How is the definition of human identity divided between the individual's relationships to the family and to society?

2. What is Darnay's dilemma? On what basis do the revolutionaries indict him?

3. What according to Dickens are the consequences of a crime committed against the family?

4. What do you understand by 'generational revolt'? What example or examples of generational revolt do we see in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

5. Why does Dickens rely on coincidences and 'forced connections' to such a great extent in the novel?

6. What is Mme. Defarge's position in the debate between the claims of family and society upon the revolutionary?

7. How does Dickens attack her position?

8. In your view who is right, Dickens or Mme. Defarge?

13.5 THE PERSONAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE NOVEL

We are now led to ask how far the two narrative lines in the novel, the personal and the political (i.e. the story of Dr. Manette and his family on the one hand, and the events of the French Revolution on the other) are integrated.

What are the connections between the two? How does **Dickens** use one to throw light upon the other? Are they merged or kept distinct from each other? Which is given prominence? We are led to think of *A Tale of Two Cities* as a historical novel since its events are laid in a period much earlier than the date of the book. **Dickens** is one of the great bourgeois realist novelists and as such, as **Lawrence Frank** puts it, "he imagines historical situations in domestic, familial terms". He places a group of characters at the centre of the events in France in the last three decades of the 18th century. But their roles are largely those of victims than agents. The agents of the Revolution – i.e. the leaders and participants, the revolutionaries – are only lightly sketched, except for the Defarges. **Dickens** uses two distinctively different narrative

techniques for the two stories - in the Manette story he shows psychological depth in characterisation, interesting plot development, and subtle moral schema; whereas for the narrative of the Revolution he uses descriptive set-pieces (the breaking of the wine-cask, the storming of the *Bastille*, the hanging of Foulon, etc.), rhetorical writing, and satirical portraits (Monseigneur, the Marquis, the wood-sawyer, the three Jacques), etc.

The effect of this separation results in the kind of opposition that we are now familiar with in *A Tale of Two Cities*. But this opposition does not really result in a mutual critique of the personal and the political as we might expect it to. By way of contrast we can look at two other works that undertake this kind of critique. In a great poem of the Victorian period, "*Dover Beach*", the poet **Matthew Arnold** posits the love of two human beings for each other as the only reality in the face of war and destruction. In a novel of a later period, *A Passage to India* (1922), **E M Forster** shows, on the contrary, that the friendship of two well-meaning men, one English and the other Indian, is not possible under conditions of imperial conquest and rule. In these works a genuine engagement between the values of personal life and the forces of history takes place; but we do not find this in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens's analysis of the Revolution is phrased in terms of a moral disease, or viewed as a cycle of action and reaction. Such a cycle logically could have no end, i.e. there could be no resolution for it in its own terms within fictional representation. **Dickens's** social criticism was always based upon moral premises; and when he thought of social change it was not in revolutionary terms, but in terms of a "change of spirit" (as **George Orwell** argued). Therefore, as **George Woodcock** points out, in *A Tale of Two Cities* the alternatives to the political saga of "oppression and upheaval" are to be found only in the examples of "human decency and human brotherhood" that the personal narrative provides. Therefore **Dickens** seems to suggest that if Darnay's acute conscience, Dr. Manette's integrity, Lucie's domestic steadfastness, Carton's heroic sacrifice, Mr. Lorry's and Miss Pross's loyalty – prevailed, then revolutions would not take place.

It is a weak "solution" to the deep-seated social problems posed by the Revolution. Only Carton's sacrifice has a transcendent religious significance: the endless cycle of evil can be ended only if a Christ-like figure emerges to assume the burdens of all lesser human beings. But Carton's death is too closely linked to his love for Lucie and to his own *ennui* to be a true "sacrifice" in this superhuman sense; and it strikes us also as being more an element of plot resolution than an essential aspect of the novel's meaning.

Therefore, critics have by and large remained critical of the integration of the two strands of the novel. **Georg Lukacs** noted dissociation between the moral-political and the personal psychological dimensions of the novel, and felt that **Dickens** weakened the connections between the character's lives and the events of the French Revolution. **Edgar Johnson** criticised the ending of the novel as a poor display of **Dickens's** radicalism: "Instead of merging, the truth of revolution and the sacrifice are made to appear in conflict." The personal crisis, he argues, usurps the political message. The revolution becomes "simply the agency of death". Another critic, **Alexander Welsh**, also argues that our interest at the end is made to shift to the fate of the main characters, and ignores the larger movement of the Revolution that goes on unaltered. **Lawrence Frank** points to the implications of the limits of the "family drama": "Dickens (in depicting) a national struggle as a generational one, obscures the significance of ideology and class".

We may be dissatisfied with other aspects of the ending as well, such as the death of Mme. Defarge. The rescue of Charles Darnay, and the family's escape to England, have all the elements of suspense and thrill that a good adventure story does. The popularity of *A Tale of Two Cities* has depended in large part on its success as a

romance, melodrama and adventure, with the Revolution ultimately serving only as a backdrop to the story of the chief characters.

The Two Worlds of *A Tale of Two Cities*

Though **Dickens** raises interesting and important questions about oppression, revolution and social change in *A Tale of Two Cities*, he finally abandons these questions. In the personal stories of Dr. Manette, and Charles Darnay, there are real possibilities of connecting personal and political issues; but instead **Dickens** shifts the 'focus of interest' at the end to Sydney Carton (who has little to do with the Revolution). He suggestively critiques the conservative values of "home," family, the traditional domestic heroine, and the state of England by drawing their limits and exposing their limitations. But at the end of the novel he re-asserts these values by killing Mme. Defarge ignobly, Sydney Carton nobly, and effecting the Darnay's and Manette's escape to England.

Exercise V

1. What are the two narrative lines that we find in *A Tale Of Two Cities*?

2. What effect does the separation of the personal and the political stores produce in *A Tale Of Two Cities*?

3. How did Dickens envisage social change? What alternatives to the "disease" of revolution do we find in the novel?

4. How far is Sydney Carton's death a resolution of the political dilemma that the novel poses, how far is it a resolution of a plot the requires at the end the saving of Charles Darnay?

5. In the views of the critics quoted in 13.5, does Dickens succeed in integrating the two strands of the novel?

6. What accounts for the popularity of *A Tale Of Two Cities*? At what level does it succeed best?

7. Sum up the problems that Dickens raises in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and comment on his "solutions".

13.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have seen how the novel operates between two worlds; the worlds of England and France, safety and danger; life and death; order and chaos; freedom and imprisonment. We have also discussed how these oppositions are reflected in **Dickens's** depiction of the main women characters in the novel – Lucie Manette and Mme Defarge. However, these differences are not described in simple black and white terms but in subtle shades of grey. This unit has also focused on how **Dickens** has used different narrative techniques to develop the two strands in the novel, that is, the personal and the political.

And finally we have seen that even though **Dickens** raises important questions about oppression, revolution and social change, he shifts the focus in the end from the political to the personal.

13.7 GLOSSARY

beset	attached from all directions
claustrophobia	fear of being enclosed in a small limited space
distraught	disturbed and troubled almost to the point of madness
ennui	tiredness caused by lack of interest; boredom
inscrutable	mysterious
parricide	murder of one's own parent especially father or other near relative
portend	sign of warning
unwittingly	without knowing or intending to

13.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. The worlds of England and France and all that these two countries signify through the novel.
2. Section 13.1, paragraphs 2&3

3. The women correspond to and symbolise the two worlds of the novel
4. Lucie – the values of England, and Mme. Defarge – revolutionary France
5. Refer to the paragraph before the conclusion under section 13.1
6. Refer to the paragraph before the conclusion under section 13.1

Exercise 2

1. Refer to section 13.2
2. Refer to section 13.2
3. Refer to section 13.2
4. Refer to section 13.2
5. Refer to section 13.2
6. Refer to section 13.2

Exercise 3

1. Refer to section 13.3
2. Refer to section 13.3
3. Refer to section 13.3
4. Refer to section 13.3
5. Refer to section 13.3

Exercise 4

1. Refer to section 13.4
2. Refer to section 13.4
3. Refer to section 13.4
4. Refer to section 13.4
5. Refer to section 13.4
6. Refer to section 13.4
7. Refer to section 13.4
8. Refer to section 13.4

Exercise 5

1. Refer to section 13.5
2. Refer to section 13.5
3. Refer to section 13.5
4. Refer to section 13.5
5. Refer to section 13.5
6. Refer to section 13.5
7. Refer to section 13.5

UNIT 14 DICKENS'S HUMANISM AND SOCIAL CONCERNS

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Humanism: The Beginnings
- 14.3 The Age of Reason and Humanism
- 14.4 Humanistic Concerns in Dickens
 - 14.4.1 *Oliver Twist*
- 14.5 Humanism and the Portrayal of Poverty
 - 14.5.1 Humanistic Concerns in *No. 1 Branch Line: The Signalman*
 - 14.5.2 Dehumanisation in Dickens
- 14.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall define humanism as a doctrine that challenged perception in the Eighteenth Century and shall also look at **Charles Dickens** and his humanistic concerns in two of his works. We hope to have explained the concept of humanism (theoretical) as well as examined the way it works in an author like **Dickens** (practically).

14.1 INTRODUCTION

First of all we need to understand the nature of the term **humanism** – what it is and how it is relevant to our times. Let us begin by saying that humanism is a doctrine at the centre of which lies the interests of human beings in our world. This doctrine has its basis in the understanding that human beings have the capability of grasping the truth of their environment, both natural and social. Moreover, this doctrine believes that human beings can challenge, the state of affairs around them if they are convinced that it is not conducive to the principles of equality and dignity in society.

How is humanism pertinent to us today? Faced, as we are with rampant inequality, injustice and exploitation, humanism would put on us the responsibility of questioning the might of the ruling forces in our midst. We note today that a large number of countries in the world are driven by a small section of economically powerful men and women. We find it needless to mention that these countries are led by what we may call imperialist powers today. Having said that, let us trace the origins of humanism.

14.2 HUMANISM: THE BEGINNINGS

The doctrine of humanism emerged in Europe in a big way in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it had a long and inspiring history linked with the onset of capitalism much earlier. Do you know when capitalism struck roots in Europe? Of course, no one can give you a definitive date when capitalism began. Faint steps of approaching capitalism can be heard in English literature as early as the fourteenth century when

Geoffrey Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*. In this poem, he talks of the existence of certain social groups that have asserted their economic influence against medievalist notions of rigid hierarchy and religious stranglehold. These groups can be seen in *The Canterbury Tales* as stressing their individual importance against one and all, riding rough shod as it were over the ones who stand in their way. This also is the beginning of the humanist approach in Europe.

But these are only faint echoes of the phenomenon we are talking about. A couple of centuries later, however, England and other countries of Europe became witness to a strong class of merchants and traders who offered a great challenge to aristocracy and Kingship. The merchants and traders of Europe worked very hard at this time to produce goods and earn profit through their buying and selling. They also at the same time ran a mighty campaign against the ideology of orthodoxy and medievalist interests, giving the lie to the popular belief that aristocrats and kings were made of a different stuff, that they were superior to the rest of the people. **Shakespeare**, one of the greatest humanist writers, presented kings as given to pettiness, trickery and intrigue. One could hardly see any 'divinity' in their deeds and actions. At the same time, **Shakespeare** depicted in his plays the ups and downs of ordinary life and showed that the lowest of the low in society hid in their hearts great treasures of human experience. A large number of 'minor' characters in **Shakespeare's** plays, particularly comedies, exhibit the trait of honesty, simplicity and goodness in face of the masters who usurp, cheat and kill. In fact, **Shakespeare's** delineation of Kings as carrying ordinary traits of guile, trickery and double-dealing goes to prove that they were nothing more than ordinary mortals. This insight into human behaviour, irrespective of where men and women were born, in high class or low, soon gave rise to widespread criticism and rejection of the concept of high birth. As capitalism grew all over Europe from strength to strength, with the accompanying fall of the nobility on the wayside, conditions were created in society to pave the way for the realisation of true equality among human beings.

Exercise 1:

1. What do you understand by the term *humanism*?

2. How is Shakespeare one of the greatest humanistic writers of all times?

14.3 THE AGE OF REASON AND HUMANISM

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought in the wake of their prosperity and increased productivity a new phenomenon of radical change. **Raymond Williams** in his *The Nineteenth Century Novel* has emphatically stated that such a change decisively occurred in the year 1848, the year of social upheavals, revolutions and the publication of **Karl Marx's** *Communist Manifesto*. These happenings reflected the rise of the humanist belief that equality and classlessness could alone ensure a lasting happiness on the earth, and not any divine intervention from above. Humanism, in this sense, also indicated the likely fall of divinity and religion from the high pedestal on which they had been placed till then.

Two things have been said so far. **First**, the term 'humanism' dates back to the Renaissance in Europe. A derivative from 'human,' humanism stands for the common bond of humanity, a bond that exists among human beings. In this thought-system, the human occupies primary importance, not the divine. It places the bond of fellowship even above the filial bond. Hence, individual strength and will receive great stress in Renaissance humanism. **Second**, there is a specific kind of humanism emerging in the nineteenth century. Humanism in the nineteenth century has undergone a major change and due to the specific historical condition in the nineteenth century it acquires a different meaning in this period, far away from the sixteenth or seventeenth century sense of the word.

Between these two, it is the second variety of humanism that is significant in **Dickens's** case. Taking this up, we see that among many, there are *two major* conflicting forces in nineteenth century Europe – forces of commercialism and those of humanism. In such a state of affairs, there would be no escape, as indeed there wasn't, for the individual who was caught in this conflict as if this were a condition of one's life. Life in the nineteenth century is subsumed by the new phenomenon threatening the domestic sphere. In fact, gradually or fast, all bonds belonging to the private sphere of the individual are corroded by the effect of commercialism. As a consequence, humanism appears to be in a state of crisis in the nineteenth century, locked as it finds itself in a life-and-death struggle with the governing forces of the day.

How do individuals respond to this new 'condition of life' that on the one hand promises prosperity and on the other devastates human efforts? This is precisely the dialectic of nineteenth century Europe. The age is dynamic, yet it offers no constructive vision since the ruling forces of the day constantly check the urge to realise equality in life. This problem is the root cause of the crisis in Europe in the nineteenth century. It is not strange that one finds this issue at the centre of **Dickens's** novels.

14.4 HUMANISTIC CONCERNS IN DICKENS

It is not for nothing that **Dickens** portrays a gloomy world in almost all of his novels. It is the actual living condition of people that **Dickens** captures in his fiction. There really are 'hard times,' there really is a 'bleak house' coexisting with 'great expectations.' One can witness in **Dickens** an awareness of this dialectic of his age. The author is also acutely aware of the crisis fast approaching and destroying the life supporting systems of the day. **Dickens** sharply responds to this phenomenon through his novels, with a variety of characters – good and bad and mixed. *Great Expectations* would be an adequate example to bring out the truth of the above statement. What one confronts in this novel are a whole range of characters belonging to almost all streams of life. What is interesting is that the distinction between the good and evil is consciously blurred in the text. This deliberate act of the author aims to reject the canonised conventional notion of good and evil. The state machinery is no longer benevolent/good and the criminals no longer evil or malicious. We get a Magwitch in the text who, if a criminal is also one of the most humane characters portrayed by **Dickens**. It is more than evident in the text that people involved in the existing affairs have lost faith in the newly emerged social trends. *Great Expectations* turns out to be a political statement against industrial England. Thus we see **Dickens** as a major writer of broader concerns in the nineteenth century – we are face-to-face with the fact that he struggles to restore faith in humanism through strong literary effort.

Whether this humanism is evolved in the course of action or works as an overarching presence in the text is a difficult question to answer. Here is an author who is constantly haunted by the idea of a mechanised life, devoid of feelings and emotions. In the beginning of *Great Expectations*, the reader finds it difficult to grasp the intention of the author. What should one do to connect meaningfully the countryside and the marshes with a character like Joe? It is only later, that this side of the world shines bright when contrasted with the city life of London. With these two contrasted worlds one actually gets a view of the time – from the countryside to the main city; from personal to an entirely professional relationship at work; from the early social relations to the ones presented later. Pip's movement in the text is precisely a movement towards a new tempting and corrupting age from the warm domestic corners of an old one. It is in this perspective offered to us that we witness **Dickens's** attitude towards his society, an attitude informed by **Dickens's** deep humanism.

In his novels, **Dickens** directly addresses the issues and questions related with humanism in the nineteenth century. There seems a plan behind what **Dickens** attempts in his fiction. This explains the overarching presence of humanism in **Dickens's** works. Wedded as **Dickens** is to the bond of love and fellowship in life, he skips no effort to assert their significance in his representation. More importantly, humanism evolves in **Dickens's** novels as a positive vision for the future. In addition to being a statement of purpose made through one's writing, as it were, it is a creatively worked-out phenomenon, built in as it is in the fabric of the text – in the pattern of events, episodes and situations. Thus, there is no conflict between the authorial intention and actual rendering, with the author ever succeeding to depict the crisis inherent in nineteenth century society. **Dickens** clearly notes that endangered by the progressive commercialism of the day, there is hardly any scope left for the survival of human feelings. **Dickens's** world stands completely overpowered by the market forces. This 'professional' (as against natural and spontaneous), narrow and self-seeking way of life demands revision, if not the extinction of the humanist ideals in the social environment. Nineteenth century Europe/England witnessed this inevitable crisis and it is this inevitability of circumstances that introduces in **Dickens's** novels a strong streak of sentimentalism. The latter arises from the pessimism inherent in the age itself, where humanism becomes almost unachievable and remains a vision of the writer. The loss of a clear closely-knit familial life and the fear of the fast devouring market forces make the atmosphere grim, the situations and characters sentimental in **Dickens's** novels. Hence, humanism stands as a dream difficult to realise or only possible of partial fulfilment in **Dickens**.

Humanism is not static, it grows and it develops. It learns from social experience and is aware that people imbibe as much from the world they live in as they contribute to it. Humanism also faces tough challenges from those in society whose conduct it critiques and counters. The process of doubt and self-doubt within humanism equips it with the power to examine and analyse itself. Such a process is at work in **Dickens's** fiction. Let us have a look at this process to grasp the nature of humanism in evolution in **Dickens's** fiction next.

Exercise 2:

1. Write a short note (250 words) on Dickens's humanism.

Since we have already read discussed *A Tale of Two Cities* at great lengths in the earlier units (8-13), I shall take up two of his other novels *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations* and a short story to discuss a few aspects of **Dickens's** humanism.

14.4.1 *Oliver Twist*

Here, the young child Oliver finds himself thrown into the company of petty thieves – their planned activity overseen and supervised by Fagin. **Dickens** does not spare any effort to show these criminals as the most crooked and insensitive in the world. They encircle Oliver to make him understand that he has no option but to work as a member of their team. Oliver's misery is further compounded by the fact that he remains ever the target of their ridicule. Gradually, this pack of cut purses/snatchers assumes proportions of well-managed social endeavour with its own laws of governance, profit making and hierarchy. For a time we forget the specific operation of the crime-machine run by Fagin and wonder whether **Dickens** is pointing an accusing finger at the larger goings-on in the city of London. There appears in *Oliver Twist* a close similarity between Fagin the criminal and an entrepreneur pursuing his business of profit making with meticulous care. The more we watch the doings of Fagin's associates, the more we realise that they represent a ruthless chain of activity extremely harmful to the majority of simple and honest members of English society. In this novel, we see **Dickens's** humanism in a number of layers.

The first layer is that of Oliver's oppression by a small group of people. Here, our sympathy lies with the child Oliver who is physically as well as mentally unequal to the rest of the people at Fagin's place. We relate well with a child who is helpless before a cynical band of robbers and pickpockets. At a few places in this depiction, however, we become conscious of the relative helplessness of the second rung of the gang before Fagin. We start thinking that some time in the past, the present members of the group were also brought here as young children and made to undergo the fate Oliver is now facing. This implies that Oliver also at a later date might become a burglar efficient in his job of robbing people. By placing ourselves in the position of these gang-members, we might even appreciate the compulsions of the trade Fagin's followers finally joined.

14.5 HUMANISM AND THE PORTRAYAL OF POVERTY IN DICKENS

Dickens presents poverty with a seriousness not generally witnessed in the writing of his contemporaries. It comes across as a large phenomenon in which all the people of England, rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, are actors. They are depicted by **Dickens** as interlinked, one responsible for the position of the other. It is interesting to see in **Dickens** a passionate involvement with the fate of the deprived – he is sympathetic towards them and identifies himself with their cause. For **Dickens**, the poor are born to circumstances beyond their control, the circumstances being seen as strong structures of social life with entrenched codes of loyalty, obedience and fatalistic acceptance of the ways of existence.

Depiction of poverty in **Dickens** is actually a depiction of the English reality. This aspect of the English life is captured in **Dickens** from almost all angles. Poverty becomes a reality in **Dickens's** novels, more so because **Dickens** focuses it from the perspective of the rich as well as the poor. This is what makes **Dickens's** depiction of poverty a reality as if the characters were real living men under real circumstances, hence, **Dickens's** realism.

It is precisely from this point of **Dickens's** realism that the depiction of English life becomes approachable, specifically the portrayal of society's underbelly. The way **Dickens** portrays the underpinning community points towards the author's special concern for this part of the society. There are innumerable cases in **Dickens's** novels where the countryside, the lower quarters are focused and are brought in sharp comparison with the city and the mainstream sectors of the society. When contrasted,

one can clearly grasp the nature of life in the 'dingy' areas and in the highly affluent ones. What is visible through **Dickens's** depiction of these two life-styles, poles apart from each other, is the author's tender concern towards the poor and his abhorrence for the rich. In **Dickens**, the tendencies related to commercialism are associated with the well-to-do class and in the same manner in which the values of humanism are clearly a part of the commoner's way of life.

It is significant to note that **Dickens** in his novels attaches the qualities of sentiment and the faculty of imagination with the 'unimportant' insignificant people. On the other hand, the rich and wealthy are portrayed in **Dickens** as people of 'palpable facts' and nothing more. Here again, one can notice the mechanical life of a class fast emerging and consolidating itself, threatening at the same time the life of imagination and fiction which belongs to the oppressed in society. In this sense, one can gauge **Dickens's** affiliation with the poor in his novels. This special concern for the author comes across through the very phenomenon that **Dickens** attempts to delineate in his works – the clash of two perspectives in nineteenth century England and the author's own position in this whole affair. As mentioned before poverty is a major issue in **Dickens**. It is a living reality of the time – one that the author tries to confront in his novels. While representing in his works this aspect of English life, a class of people getting crushed under the new way of life, which appears glorious and tempting but which only devours their person and their set of people. This is the hard reality, which **Dickens** projects in his writings. As a consequence, one witnesses an obvious sentimentalisation in **Dickens**. It also speaks of the writer's own fails to alter situations. In the next sections we shall examine **Dickens's** humanistic concern in one of his short stories – *Branch Line 1: The Signal Man*.

Dickens knows poverty and deprivation quite closely, to the extent in fact that he presents its disorienting and distorting ways in the realm of social life – he reveals a number of shocking features and characteristics of the behaviour of the poor folk, linking them up with broader trends of society. But does he, in his fiction, offer evidence of grasping the manner in which poverty is produced as a necessary consequence of individually controlled economic growth? Does he establish an unmistakable connection between the workers who collectively produce wealth and the individual entrepreneur who takes away the surplus produce? In answer to this, one can say that **Dickens** has a workable knowledge of this phenomenon in which the gap between the rich and the poor is shown as gradually increasing. Also, **Dickens** puts the blame of unequal economic distribution squarely on the greed of the rich, their narrow vision of life and limited value system. In this phenomenon, however, the potentiality of a class vision on which a strong social resistance to counter developing trends, either among the entrepreneurs or the working masses, is overlooked.

The poor in **Dickens** are shown as kind, tolerant, sympathetic and humane, but not as struggling to make a unified sense of the world surrounding them. The hardworking individual among the deprived lot is shown as more or less isolated from the general developments in the environment. Still more, even the general developments in question have a kind of static character about them, they emerge in a similar manner across the breadth of his fiction as if the author had recognised it in terms of a given, Fate-like condition. In the latter fiction, **Dickens** appears more and more 'helpless,' finding, as it were, the emerging scenario too complex to rationally handle. There is that overarching capitalism which leaves no scope to the weak and wretched for ease and comfort. The different structures – legal, bureaucratic and social – that English capitalism has evolved over a couple of centuries become in later **Dickens** still more daunting than before. Why?

Is it since **Dickens** depicts them as somewhat neutral, outside the pale of social endeavour, or that the growing menace has the dimension of inevitability about it? In front of these structures in **Dickens's** fiction, the innocent hardworking multitudes get projected as beings not constituting the human collectivism of a strong potential

easy victims of the social machinery. Where is the solution in, if any, in this scenario? **Dickens** the humanist would not accept the idea of Fate that controls peoples and societies in modern times. He finds the desired solution, an adequate answer to the challenge, outside capitalism, rejecting capitalism as inhuman, value-free and deeply individualistic. Capitalism reduces everything to the level of a dead entity, to be explored and manipulated for individual gain. Trading in death and destruction, capitalism becomes in **Dickens** synonymous with wealth that devours all.

We notice that it is beyond **Dickens** to grasp the truth of wealth as the product of human labour that is to be regulated along lines of needs and requirements of society at a given time. Thus, poverty for **Dickens** becomes one of the means of escaping capitalism. **Dickens's** humanist concerns have a streak of transcendence and romanticism under which wealth becomes associated with evil and conversely poverty becomes the repository of virtue. **Dickens** understands the prevalent trends quite intimidating but in a sociological sort of a way where only the present is a matter of a realistic visualisation. One sees a great of sincere engagement with the issues in **Dickens**. However, **Dickens** looks neither at the past which contributes to the present trends nor to the future which the present contains in its embryo. **Dickens's** vision is not historical. In fact, there is little in **Dickens** that indicates the possibility of replacement of the current trends with radically different ones in the approaching times.

Exercise 3:

1. How does Dickens portray poverty or the poor in his novels?

14.5.1 Humanistic Concerns in No. 1 Branch Line : The Signal Man

In order to explain another dimension of **Dickens's** humanism, I take an example from a short story written by him. Look at the following quotation to have a view of the peculiar aesthetic and experience-related representation in **Dickens's** fiction:

Had he much to do there? Yes, that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him and of actual work – manual labour – he had next to none. To change the signal, to trim those lights and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here – if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of pronunciation, could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a hand at figures. Was it necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from below those high stone walls.

"Had he much to do there" refers to the signalman by the narrator. "There" is used for the Branchline where the signalman works. The description of the line in the story makes it appear as a dark, dingy, gloomy place. Here, too, it is described as "that channel of damp air". In such an atmosphere, the narrator finds the signalman looking as ghostly as the place itself. The dead atmosphere is created from the very beginning. A correlative can be found between the environment that is decaying and the life of the Signalman. There is a sense of deterioration in both. The surroundings in which the Signalman lives are withering and so is his life. What constitutes the life of this man is his routine work of "exactness" and "watchfulness." One witnesses a

total isolation of the man from society. In course of time, he seems to have developed his own "crude ideas of pronunciation." The only association he seems to have with society is through the narrator, who in turn becomes a contrast to the signalman. The narrator seems to represent society confronting unsocial alienated life of the signalman. The question is: What causes this 'alienation' in the signalman's life?

As it is indicated in the passage, it is his duty that keeps him away from 'sunshine.' Sunshine here almost becomes symptomatic of the bright progressive society. What is significant to note here is that this world of sunshine thrives on the efforts and the duty of people like the signalman. This set of society lives in "damp air" and performs its dull mechanical work with exactness, in order to provide an enriched society. It is unfortunate that because they remain at the periphery, their efforts are hardly ever acknowledged.

Dickens deals extensively with the issue of dehumanisation in this short narrative. The mechanical way of life is focused in this story, which in turn speaks volumes of the lack of the humanistic way of life. What the narrator tells us is one story and what we read ourselves in the text – if we keep in mind the context of dehumanisation – is totally another. At the surface level, there is an enormous amount of the supernatural in the story. However, these abstract and unknown happenings become utterly real when read from a particular perspective that delves deep into the matter of the story. This transformation from the supernatural to the essential makes reality offered in the story grave and hard to bear. Another way of saying it would be that a first reading of the story acquaints us with the aspects of suspense and to the element of Gothic in it, whereas a second reading brings us to the more real aspects of the story that somehow go unnoticed in an initial reading of the narrative.

It is given, for instance, that the branch line "below" the post of the signalman is "a solitary and dismal place." On either side, there are huge walls that offer no view except for a strip of sky. The description of the signalman himself is no less grisly. The narrator is close to thinking him a spirit rather than a man. All these observations of the narrator help in the building of an environment for the events about to take place as the story proceeds. Nevertheless, they become concrete examples of dehumanisation of the lower masses in society. Obviously, the cause is nothing but the sheer commercialisation that is taking place in society at the time.

Dickens in his writing projects a mechanical world. A mechanical world inhabited by mechanical beings. The technique of dehumanisation is too frequently found in **Dickens**. This is because the life of the time shows almost no trace of living-feeling individuals. It is by showing the dehumanisation of individuals that **Dickens** is able to point towards the lack of humanism in his surroundings. Such instances are common in **Dickens**. Wemmick in *Great Expectations* and the signalman in *No. 1 Branch Line: The Signalman* are the case in point.

In the next section we shall examine the issue of dehumanisation in Dickens. We shall begin by looking at *Great Expectations* and then go on to talk about *No. 1 Branch Line: The Signalman*.

14.5.2 Dehumanisation in Dickens

What one gets in *Great Expectations* is a grave scenario of the city of London. Situated in the city are characters without any sense of fellow feeling. What binds individuals together is the personal interest in profit. It is a society based on values of profit and self-centeredness. Here, we come across a peculiar character – Wemmick who is everything that symbolises commercialism. However, these traits in him are limited to the place of his work in the city. His home is away from the city. Wemmick is a transformed identity. He characterises all humanistic traits in his place of living. Hence a double life led by Wemmick.

What is at issue here is the contrast between the machine-like society and an idealistic way of life. **Dickens** is able to present this through the character of Wemmick. Wemmick is equated to a post office in the text. This emphasises the lifelessness of English society of which **Dickens** is sharply critical.

Again, in the short story discussed above, **Dickens** attempts to convey a similar kind of lifelessness that exists at the meanest level. The range of commercialism and its consequences and effects are what **Dickens** focuses upon in the story. Just as Wemmick is equated to a post office by Pip in *Great Expectations*, the narrator also equates the signalman to a spirit. As a result, these characters cease to come across as human beings. They are seen as anything but living individuals. When people turn into objects, the situation automatically becomes grim. It is just the case in the short story where the signalman stands as just another dead part of the dead system. He contributes to society just as much as a machine does. That is all he is worth in the contemporary social system.

The signalman views death on its way taking lives and causing miseries. It is the horror of helplessness and impending disaster that makes the story so grim. One finds an exact parallel of this helplessness in the life of nineteenth century Europe, particularly England. The signalman becomes symbolic of a nineteenth century individual viewing death in the commercial way of life that is fast devouring people. A sense of helplessness is evident in **Dickens** himself who as a writer is faced with the calamity caused by Industrialism that has made life horrifying. It is precisely this that **Dickens** seems to convey through this story of the signalman. In this sense, **Dickens** seems to relate himself with the painful and distressing circumstances faced by the signalman in '*No. 1 Branch Line: The Signalman.*' The author's sensibility comes across in this story more so through the character of the signalman than the narrator. **Dickens** is not an observer but a co-sufferer.

Exercise 4:

1. Examine the issue of dehumanisation with reference to *No. 1 Branch Line: The Signalman.*

2. Does the narrator share the humanistic concerns of Dickens?

14.6 LET US SUM UP

Finally, what is at issue in **Dickens** is the very fact of his time, the corrosive effect of commercialism over the striving forces of humanism. **Dickens** confronts this state of affairs through his writing. Even his short stories are compact with the hardcore problem of how to sustain a humanistic way of life, when everything around including one is turning into dead objects. There is a reversal of values in the nineteenth century where the profit motive overpowers all. When circumstances offer no rescue, when efforts yield nothing productive, there remains only remorse, pathos, horror and fatalism. Such emotions are common in **Dickens**. The problematic

question is: Is it a weakness in a writer to be sentimental and fatalistic in times that offer no constructive vision? There are problems indeed with **Dickens's** humanism, particularly with respect to the way he relates to the society of his time.

Placed in the context of nineteenth century England, **Dickens** comes out as a powerful voice of Humanism that negates capitalism. But the problem of a realistic grasp of social forces remains – **Dickens** falls short of meeting the requirement of visualising sections of people as forces and classes. In consequence, his response remains subjective, idealistic and emotional. A social historian of England in fiction to an extent, **Dickens** falls short of approaching those humanistic heights reached by his literary counterparts in French, American and Russian fiction.

14.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1:

1. Refer to Section 14.1
2. Refer to Section 14.4

Exercise 2:

1. Refer to Section 14.6

Exercise 3:

1. Refer to Section 14.6.1

Exercise 4:

1. Refer to Section 14.5.3
2. Refer to Section 14.5.3

SUGGESTED READING

You may like to consult the following books if you are interested in further reading on the novel.

1. Cross, John, *A Tale of Two Cities* in Tyson, A.E, ed., *Dickens; Modern Judgments*, London; Macmillan, 1968.
2. Fido, Martin, *Charles Dickens*, London; RKP, 1968.
3. Fielding, K.J. *Charles Dickens*, London: Longmans, 1958
4. Hobsbaum, Philip, *A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1972.

For material on the French Revolution, you may like to look at:

1. Cobban, Alfred, *Aspects of the French Revolution*, London: Paladin, 1971.
2. Rude', George, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*, London: Fontana, 1964.

Other Background Material:

1. Goldberg, Michael, *Carlyle and Dickens*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972.
2. Lukacs, Georg, *The Historical Novel*, London: Merlin, 1962.

UNIT 15 AFRICA : A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Pre-colonial Africa
- 15.3 Recent History : First Contacts With the Outside World
- 15.4 Africa under Colonialism
- 15.5 The Decolonising of Africa
- 15.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.7 Glossary
- 15.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

15.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to trace, very briefly, the history of the African continent since pre-historic times. Special attention will be paid to life under colonialism and also the process of decolonisation. This will help us understand African literature in general and *Things Fall Apart* better because, as we know, there is a close relationship between literature and the society, which produces it.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

In most books of history written by Europeans, the continent of Africa is referred to as 'the dark continent'. This expression – the dark continent – was most probably first used by travellers and missionaries who happened to visit the African continent much before political claims on its territory were made and it was colonised by various European powers. The term 'dark' has been used for describing the continent of Africa because, firstly, these early travellers as well as missionaries considered anything mysterious that they did not understand much about. Secondly, and more importantly, these first visitors considered Africa to be inhabited by people who were primitive, uncivilised and savages. The colour of ignorance, as we know, is black. According to these early missionaries, the Africans believed in magic another irrational rituals and customs. Once again, magic is associated with the colour black for example, the term 'black magic'. Finally, there was the most obvious reason for calling Africa the black continent its inhabitants had very dark skins. These opinions, particularly about the Africans being primitive and uncivilised were accepted blindly by most Europeans who entered the continent either for trade or for colonisation. In fact, the colonial administrations built upon this myth of primitivism of the Africans by stating that Africa had no history, no culture, no past.

There was a sound reason behind accepting such an image of the Africans. The European powers used the excuse of 'civilising' these savages for entering Africa and for staying on for the economic and political exploitation of its people.

However, as later researches into the history, political and social organisation and cultural achievements have shown, Africa was neither primitive nor uncivilised before the Europeans occupied it. Civilisation, as we know, is much more than technological progress and cannot be equated with the possession of fly-by-wire aircrafts, coloured television sets, personal computers, cordless mobile telephones, air-conditioned cars and microwave ovens. If this were so, people belonging to the most ancient civilisations like the Indian, the Chinese, the Egyptian and the South

American, would all be primitive and uncivilised. Like these, ancient Africa also boasted of various centres of civilisation with well-organised social and political systems and significant achievements in the fields of fine arts like music and dance.

Let us now look at the pre-colonial history of Africa in the next section.

15.2 PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA

15.2.1 Africa and the Evolution of Man

By now enough *archeological* and *anthropological* evidence is available to show that during the evolutionary process our ancestor – *Australopithecus Africans* or man-ape, as he was called – first emerged on the African continent. The Rift valley region in East Africa was the most probable place where it happened. Excavations at the Oldwvai Gorge in what is now called Tanzania have produced ample evidence of it being one of the oldest sites of world culture. Discovery of primitive tools of hunting like the hand axe in not only East Africa but also in the Congo Basin and Zimbabwe shows a parallel development of this culture. This also compares well with the developments in other similar centres in India, China and parts of Europe.

15.2.2 Africa and the Ancient Egyptian Civilisation

However, the most fascinating evidence about the cultural development in Africa is provided by a Senegalese scholar – **Cheikh Anta Diop** – who claims that the ancient Egyptian civilisation was set up and nurtured by black Africans more than ten thousand years ago. Relying upon evidence from various sources including historical accounts, **Cheikh Anta Diop** convinces us that when the great Sahara started drying up about 7000 B.C., before which it was a huge lake, a section of Africans began to trek along the route of the river Nile. They finally settled in the valley at the mouth of the Nile delta before it empties its water into the Mediterranean. Here they set up the great ancient Egyptian civilisation with unprecedented progress in speculative scientific research. This cycle of the civilisation progress lasted many thousands of years during the course of which these black Africans colonised neighbouring territories inhabited by whites. The *Semitic* world of today is perhaps a result of a free crossbreeding between the two races.

15.2.3 Africa after the End of the Egyptian Civilisation

However, like many other ancient civilisations, this civilisation set up by black Africans in the valley of the Nile also ran out of steam. In the course of time it was overrun by the Persians. Then came the Macedonians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks in that order. More recently, the French and the English occupied the territory. This prolonged colonisation resulted in the snapping of the links between the delta and the original centres of the civilisation back in Africa. These centres lost touch with not only the Egyptian part but with one another as well, surviving for some time as isolated pockets during which period they concentrated more on the social, political and moral organisation of their societies rather than on material development. In the meantime, Europe benefited from the ancient Egyptian civilisation via the Greeks and the Romans. Thus while Africa lagged behind in technological progress, Europe marched ahead full steam. The great empires of Ghana, Mali and Ife in West Africa, Ethiopia in the East, Zimbabwe in the West and Congo in South West are a testimony to the great civilisation that the Africans built thousands of years ago.

Whether this **hypothesis** of **Cheikh Anta Diop** is wholly true or partially false is really not so important for us for the time being. What matters is the fact that it establishes, beyond any doubt, that Ancient Africa at that time was as much primitive or developed, as much barbaric or civilised as any other part of the world, including Europe. It, therefore, proves as false the opinion of the European powers that when they arrived in Africa they found its people to be primitive savages with no history,

15.3 RECENT HISTORY: FIRST CONTACTS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

15.3.1 Africa: Ancient Contacts with Asia and the Middle East

While there is evidence of the ancient Africans having trade links with India and China, more recent links with the outside world were established when during the eighth century Arabs came to the east coast with the mission of spreading Islam. They, however, stayed on not only to trade, particularly in ivory and gold but they also occupied territories to set up their own political control over them. The Sultanate of Zanzibar on the Zanzibar Island near what is now Tanzania is an example of such an occupation of African territory by the Arabs.

15.3.2 Africa and Europe: Early Contacts

African contacts with Europe were made on its west coast during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Countries like Holland, Spain and Portugal, which had, become strong naval powers launched big missions for discovering sea routes to the near and far eastern parts of the world. As we know through our own history, these missions were launched for eventual control of the riches of India and China about which they had heard stories from European and Arab travellers. Believing the earth to be round, such naval missions were launched in opposite directions in the Atlantic Ocean. One of these was to go along the west coast of Africa, go round what is now known as the Cape of Good Hope and come out in the Indian Ocean on the eastern side. We also know that it was on one such mission that **Vasco Da Gama** had reached Calicut on the Southern coast of India.

Since the primary aim of these missions was to reach the near and far east, no attempts were made to occupy African territories *en route*, except some small strips of land that were occupied on the coast to set up military garrisons. These were meant to provide replenishment of supplies to the ships and to provide recuperation facilities to the sailors and also ensure safe passage. Once again, the activities of these Europeans, like those of the Arabs on the east coast, were confined to areas close to the ocean and no major attempts were made to strike inland and occupy territories in the heart of the African continent.

15.3.3 Africa and the Slave Trade

However, things changed dramatically for Africa because of something, which happened thousands of miles away. At the other end of the Atlantic Ocean **Columbus** discovered America. It was feasible to annex the vast virgin lands from the American natives and develop them for large-scale economic gains. This, however, needed a very large input of labour. It was then decided by the kings of Spain, Portugal, etc. to take away, by force, people from Africa and use them for developing American lands. Thus began one of the darkest phases in the history of not only Africa but the whole of humanity. Millions of black African were forcibly captured by the Arabs, the Spaniards, the British, the French and the Portuguese and sold as slaves to be taken away to America. Millions more died either resisting capture or braving extremely inhuman conditions of shipment.

15.3.4 Africa and European Colonial Powers

Africa therefore suffered a colossal **decimation** of its population. This in turn led to weakening their resistance further, particularly when greedy traders, adventurers and religious missionaries swarmed the continent during the 18th and 19th centuries. Their stories of rich mineral wealth, huge hoards of game and miles of virgin fertile land whetted the commercial appetites of their mother governments back home. These

also included the English and the French who had, in the meantime, supplanted the Spanish, the Dutch and the Portuguese as superior naval powers. The alibi of stopping the inhuman slave trade came in handy for making their entry into the continent. Rival political claims were made on various African territories by the English, the French, the Germans, the Dutch, the Portuguese and many other European powers. The French claimed northern parts of Africa, as also territories in equatorial and West Africa. The British preferred claims to parts of east, west and South Africa, while the Dutch confined themselves to the south only. The Germans claimed parts of east and South Africa while the Belgians rushed to the southwest parts of the Continent. This led to, at times, military clashes between these powers. For instance, the Dutch and the British fought a war for supremacy over Southern Africa. During all this time, none of these powers cared at all about the original inhabitants of the continent, namely the black Africans who were pushed out of these territories with the help of superior gun-power. The discovery of diamond and gold in the last quarter of the 19th century in South Africa accelerated the pace of such interventions. In fact the scramble for Africa began in right earnest after these discoveries were made.

Exercise I

Answer the following questions briefly on the basis of what you have read in the preceding sections of this unit.

- 1. Why is Africa referred to as 'the dark continent'?

- 2. What was the reason given by Europeans for 'entering' Africa?

- 3. Was ancient Africa 'primitive'? If not, what were the various centres of civilisation in ancient Africa?

- 4. In what way did the discovery of America affect the fate of Africa?

15.4 AFRICA UNDER COLONIALISM

15.4.1 Division of Africa

As stated in the previous section many European countries came to clash with one another during their scramble to grab as much African territory as possible. In order

to put an end to this, a conference of the various contending powers was held in Berlin in 1884-85 where the continent of Africa was **apportioned** among them by earmarking the area of influence of each one of them. Once again, no attention was paid to the possible fate of black Africans as a result of this act of the Europeans.

15.4.2 Africa: Two Models of Colonialism

Once the division had taken place, two kinds of models were practised for exploiting these territories. One was to take over the administration of these areas in the name of the mother country and govern through a colonial administration. The other was to invite people from abroad, primarily from the mother country to come and settle there. As an incentive they were promised land for cultivation or for mining either free or for a very nominal sum of money. France, for instance, followed the first model in territories like Senegal and the British followed the latter model in Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa.

15.4.3 Africa and Foreign Settlers

The induction of foreign settlers created quite a complicated situation in countries where this model was followed. For skilled labour work they could not rely on the native Africans and so they imported **indentured** labour from another colony of theirs. In Kenya, for example, such labour was imported from the Indian sub-continent for constructing the railways. The Africans were, however, used for working on the farms or in the mines. But, first they were ousted from the areas which were most fertile or minerally rich and forcibly taken away to far flung semi-arid areas called 'reserves' or 'locations' where they were herded together in the most inhuman conditions. Blatantly discriminatory laws were passed to legalise such forcible removal of the Black Africans. In Kenya, for instance, the *Gikuyu* tribe was removed from the most fertile area called the Rift valley region and their land was 'appropriated' to the crown of England. They were removed from these areas where they had lived for thousands of years and taken away to arid areas up north. Since the *Gikuyu* are primarily agriculturists, their social organisation was completely disrupted: Similarly, the *Masai* tribe, who are primarily cattle breeders were also removed from Masailand, which was full of green pastures. Other tribes which suffered as a result of this policy in Kenya were the *Kamba* and the *Nandi* tribes. In South Africa, the **Native Areas Act of 1913**, disallowed the *Xhosa*, the *Zulu* and scores of other tribes from land rights anywhere in the country, leading to unprecedented misery for the black South Africans who at times had no land – literally – even to bury their dead.

15.4.4 Black Africans as Bonded Labour

However, the settlers needed large inputs of labour to work on their farms. Therefore, they pressurised their respective colonial administrations to force the Africans out of the 'reserves' or 'locations' and to work for them. As a result the colonial administrations passed laws, levying all kinds of taxes on the black people of Africa for which they had to earn money and this money could be earned only by working for white settlers. Moreover, since such supply of labour had to be continuous and for a long period of time, additional primitive laws were enacted whereby monetary fines could be imposed on them on the most flimsy grounds and the Africans would have to earn their living by working on the farms or the mines. As if that were not enough, carrying an identity card and a certificate about the status of his/her employment duly signed by the employer was made compulsory for every black African. Since in most cases such certificates were not issued by the employers, most Africans were forced to stay on the farms and work, salary or no salary. In case they were found without such certificates, they were arrested on charges of running away illegally from employment. This was in effect nothing but bonded labour.

15.4.5 Disruption of Social Life

Long absences away from the family also caused complete disruption of family life in which each member had a certain role -social as well as economic – cut out for him

or her. Women were forced to work on the family fields in place of their men as also able-bodied male members of the clan were forced to become wage-earners on farms or in factories and mines instead of remaining farmers or cattle-breeders. The orientation of the entire socio-economic organisation of such societies, which was subsistence-oriented, with barter as the major form of trade, was now changed into market economy with money becoming the basis of trade. In the course of time women too were made victims of the disruption of their system of social organisation when they too had to look for jobs.

15.4.6 Colonising the African Mind

The colonising forces of Europe were well aware that their hold on the people of the continent would not be complete without a hold over their minds. A slave can remain a slave perpetually only when his/her mind is enslaved, only when s/he acquires the mentality of a slave. In order to achieve this objective the colonising countries of Europe introduced into the African territories under their control, their own religion, their own cultural traditions, their own language, and above all their own system of education. Christianity replaced the African's own religious practices which were generally called animism and condemned by the Europeans as barbaric, inferior forms of religion which could not save the souls of the people. All rituals, social customs and various kinds of ceremonies were similarly labelled as 'savage' and most of them were disallowed. The practice of polygamy, that is having more than one legal wife, which was a common practice among Africans, was disallowed by condemning it as inhuman. Similarly, circumcision of girls, which was a kind of initiation ceremony for girls at the onset of puberty, was condemned as savagery and was disallowed. In certain communities, the performance of certain types of dances and singing of certain kinds of songs was condemned as obscene and uncivilised and therefore banned.

15.4.7 European Languages and European Systems of Education in Africa

Finally, the western system of education was introduced in place of the native system of education, which was quite different from the European system of institutions. A policy of carrot and stick was used for popularising the western systems of education. That is to say, those with such education were preferred for petty jobs. Once it had been impressed upon the African's minds that western religion and the western system of education were better, those practising African social customs like polygamy and circumcision of girls were denied access to either church or school. Above all, Africans were disallowed from speaking their own mother tongues in school situations and they were forced to speak the languages of their colonial masters, namely English, French or Portuguese, as the case may be. In the case of the French, the use of French language was made compulsory for pupils even outside the school situations and the black African students were encouraged to complain against one another for disobeying this rule. Thus the cultural imperialism, as this imposition of foreign European culture has been called, was enforced on the black African with extreme intention of controlling their minds and perpetuating the colonial rule of their territories. Such all imposition resulted successfully in filling the minds of most Africans with an extreme form of inferiority complex about everything, which was African. It created the myth of the white man's superiority and invincibility in the minds of most Africans thereby making them sceptical about their being capable of managing their own affairs ever. Colonialism to them appeared to be their only salvation. The African's misery under colonialism was thus complete and there seemed to be no way out of it. Such was the situation of most African colonies towards the end of the twenties and early thirties of the twentieth century. Their economic and political exploitation at the hands of the European powers was at their worst.

15.5 THE DECOLONISING OF AFRICA

15.5.1 Early Resistance Against Colonial Rule

Historical records bear testimony to the fact that Africans began resisting foreign attempts to occupy their lands as soon as such attempts were made. For instance, the *Xhosa*, the *Zulu* and the *Shona* in Southern Africa and the *Mazrui* in eastern Africa led to violent resistance against the European powers. However, as stated earlier, these attempts failed primarily because of the military and technological superiority of the Europeans. Although such resistance was never given up completely, it definitely received serious setbacks as the grip of the colonising powers tightened over the various African territories.

15.5.2 Africans and World War II

In the twenties and the thirties as the atrocities on the Africans increased, such resistance began to gain strength. In the meantime great political upheavals were taking place in Europe and towards the end of the thirties – in 1939 to be precise – Europe plunged into a war of unprecedented intensity. **Hitler** together with Italy and some other friendly nations after overrunning neighbouring countries had declared war on Britain and France. Africa was once again drawn into World War II as Britain and France began to draw upon the African's resources – human as well as material – to support its war efforts. Africans were recruited in large numbers as combatants to fight in Europe, the near east and the far east to fight on behalf of their colonial masters. Thus a lull occurred in the struggles by the Africans against their respective colonial regimes.

15.5.3 Struggles for Freedom

The end of World War II saw an unprecedented increase in the misery of the Africans. Large-scale **demobilisation** of Africans from the colonial armed forces led to large-scale unemployment, which was already rampant due to post-war recession in the world economy. As the war-ravaged European nations began to reconstruct their economies at the expense of their colonies by increasing the imports of food and agricultural products, the misery of Africans increased manifold due to scarcity of food items and steep price-rise. This fuelled further the simmering discontent among the people and the struggles by Africans now broke into full-fledged freedom struggles.

15.5.4 Asia and African Struggles for Independence

African combatants who had fought together with the soldiers from the colonising countries in various theatres of war brought back the impressions that their white masters were not invincible. Moreover, they had also seen for themselves similar struggles for national independence being waged in other parts of the world, particularly Asia. The success of the Indian struggle for independence soon after the end of World War II inspired similar struggles in Africa. As it is, the weakened European nations were finding it difficult to run the administration of the colonies. Intensified struggles compounded their problems further and put additional financial burdens on their fragile economies

15.5.5 Colonial Responses to African Struggles for Independence

These intensified struggles for independence in various parts of Africa immediately after World War II elicited two kinds of response from the colonial administrations. One, the administrations cracked down on such movements resulting in such struggles becoming not only long and drawn out but also more violent and bloody. This, for instance, was the case with Kenya, Zimbabwe, Algeria and Congo. Two, the administrations, seeing the writing on the wall, initiated talks with the leaders of the

movements leading to their freedom with relative ease. This, for instance, was the case with Ghana and Nigeria. The process of decolonisation of Africa began with the independence of Ghana in 1956. Soon more African countries became free. The sixties came to be known as the decade of decolonisation of Africa and by the early seventies most of Africa was free with the exception of Southern Africa. However, soon the people of Africa had to wage other struggles, this time against their governments, which denied them basic democratic rights and failed to provide them with the basic necessities of life like employment, food and shelter.

Exercise II

1. What were the two different ways in which Africa was colonised?

2. What were the two ways in which the colonial powers responded to the freedom struggle launched by Africans in various countries?

15.6 LET US SUM UP

Contrary to the propaganda by Europeans, ancient Africa was a very vibrant society. It boasted of significant developments in the fields of socio-political organisation as well as culture. In fact, ancient Egyptian civilisation was the gift of Africa to the world. However, African civilisation fell into a decline around the beginning of the Christian era. Building on its achievements, Europe progressed to a scientific and technologically superior society. As a result, most parts of Africa were colonised by a number of European powers between the 16th and 19th centuries and exploited for the economic development of Europe. The Europeans also tried to dominate the minds of Africans by imposing their own religion, their language, their systems of education and their culture. At the same time they filled the African's mind with an inferiority complex by condemning the African's religious and cultural practices as savage and barbaric. The real aim behind all this was to hold on to Africa forever and exploit it perpetually.

This exploitation was resisted by the Africans right from the beginning but organised resistance was offered after World War II. Such struggles soon became the struggles for national independence. In the early sixties a number of African nations gained independence and by the end of the seventies most of Africa with the exception of Southern Africa was free. However, the African people had to once again wage struggle against their own governments for democratic rights and the basic needs of life.

15.7 GLOSSARY

anthropological	pertaining to the science of man, especially the beginnings, development, customs and beliefs of mankind
apportioned	divided, distributed
archaeological	pertaining to the study of ancient things especially remains of prehistoric times e.g. tombs, buried cities
decimation	killing or destroying one-tenth or a larger part of
demobilising	release from military service
hypothesis	idea or suggestion put forward as a starting point for reasoning or explanation
indenture	agreement binding an apprentice to his/her master
recession	slackening of business or industrial activity
recuperation	recovering one's strength or health becoming strong again
replenishment	fill up again

15.8 ANSWER TO EXERCISES

Exercise I

- 1) Africa is referred to, as the dark continent because its people are considered to be primitive and uncivilised. Secondly, its socio-culture activities were considered to be related to irrationality and magic by early Europeans. Finally, its inhabitants have dark skins. Refer to section 20.1 in this unit.
- 2) They 'entered' Africa on the pretext or excuse of 'civilising' its people. The real reason, of course, was the economic exploitation of its human and material resources.
- 3) No. Contrary to the false stories spread deliberately by the Europeans, Africa is neither primitive nor savage. It had built not only the ancient Egyptian civilisation but also many other well-known centres of such development. The empires of Ghana, Mali, Ife and Zimbabwe are some of these. Refer to sections 20.2.1 and 20.2.2.
- 4) After America was discovered by Europeans, Africans were taken there by millions as slaves for developing those virgin territories for economic exploitation by Europeans. This led to not only a very inhuman treatment of Africans but also the depopulation of the African continent, which made its subsequent conquest by Europeans easier.

Exercise II

- 1) The two distinct models of colonisation of Africa were one, by settling Europeans in the occupied territories as was done in the case of Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa and two, by administering the territories directly in the name of the mother country as was the case with Nigeria and Senegal.
- 2) In some countries the colonial powers initiated negotiations for handing over power to the Africans as was done in the case of Ghana and Nigeria while in the case of some others the administrations cracked down on the freedom movements.

UNIT 16 THE AFRICAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 African Writings: The Beginnings
- 16.3 African Novel in English : The Beginnings
- 16.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.5 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

16.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to survey briefly the tradition of creative writing in different regions of Africa since the pre-colonial era. While we would like to examine the nature and forms of literature composed before the arrival of Europeans, our primary focus would be on the development of the novel as a form of literature in Africa. This will help us place **Chinua Achebe's** *Things Fall Apart* in a proper literary perspective and it will also help us in evaluating it in relation to other similar texts.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

To state that there was no literature in various parts of Africa before the advent of Europeans is as false as the statement that Africa had no history and no past before the arrival of the Europeans. And yet both these statements have been made by many responsible European scholars and unfortunately many Europeans have believed them to be true as well.

The misconception about the lack of any literary achievements on the part of Africa could have arisen because of the fact that a large number of African languages lacked the tradition of a script or a writing system. In fact out of seven hundred odd languages spoken in Africa, there are no more than forty-four, which have been used for written literary expression. The literate western societies equated literature with literacy and the absence of literacy in a number of African societies was interpreted as their having no literary tradition at all.

It is said that story telling is as old as man himself. If this is true, story telling must also have originated in Africa because, as stated in Unit 15, the origin of man can be traced to Africa. In the following sections, we shall look at the content and form of literary efforts in different parts of Africa through the ages.

16.2 AFRICAN WRITINGS: THE BEGINNINGS

16.2.1 The Beginnings: Oral Literature

Telling stories and singing songs are amongst the oldest forms of literary activity and have existed in human societies since most primitive times. This is true of not only Africa but of centres of human development in other parts of the world as well. Accumulated over a period of time these songs and stories became a part of the

cultural heritage of a particular society. This body of literature, which was oral, had a 'functional' role to play and was used on social occasions like birth, initiation, wedding and death. Since most of such societies did not have a script or system of writing down their languages, such literature was preserved and passed on to succeeding generations through professional singers or narrators. In one part of Africa these were called *griot* and in another they were known as *babalawo*.

16.2.2 Beginnings of Written Literature

Most of the written literary activity began with the arrival of the Europeans, although some African languages did have a tradition of written literature even before their coming into contact with Europeans. It was missionaries who took the initiative in setting up the first printing presses and undertook the translation of the Bible and other religious books. It is not surprising that the first efforts were made in the southern regions of Africa because, of the seven hundred odd major languages in Africa, only forty-nine have a writing system and some literary output. Eighteen of these languages are from Southern Africa alone. However, other regions were not far behind in following this lead. We detail below, region-wise, such initial efforts at creating written literature.

16.2.3 Southern Africa

European influence was the most pronounced in Southern Africa comprising of Sesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The first language to come under the European influence was **Sesotho** whose first major writers were **Segoete** and **Mangoela** both of whom drew heavily on folk literature and folk poetry. They, however, combined it with Christian moral ideas. But the most prominent synthesis of this tradition was **Thomas Mfolo** who was also the greatest writer of this early period. In 1906, **Mfolo** wrote a novel, which was later, translated as *The Traveller to the East*, which is a kind of hero-quest story about Fekisi who seeks the Christian ideal giving up his tribal way of life. However, **Mfolo's** most famous work is *Chaka*, which was published in 1925 and translated in 1931. It is the story of the great warrior king Chaka and his tragic life. **Sol T Plaatje** is another major writer whose books *Native Life in South Africa* and *Mhudi* were well received.

Xhosa was the next language to come under European influence and its pioneer writers were **Tiyo Soga** and **William Gqaba** who were also influenced by the Bible and **John Bunyan's** *The Pilgrim's Progress*. However, the most important *Xhosa* writer of the period was **S E K Mqhayi** who tried to assert the independence of the artist from the patronage of Christian religious bodies. Other prominent *Xhosa* writers include **L Kakaza**, **J R Jalobe** and **D D T Jabavu**.

More literary efforts were visible in Southern African languages such as *Shona* and *Ndebele* of what is now called Zimbabwe. Its most important writers of the initial phase were **Mutswairof** and **Chivaura**. The last to be drawn to the tradition was the *Zulu* language. In the poems of **B W Vilakazi**, who is its most prominent writer, can be discerned anger and protest against the European settler' exploitation of the Africans. Other well-known *Zulu* writers include **J L Dube**, and **R R R Duloma**.

16.2.4 Western Africa

In western Africa, *Yoruba*, *Ibo* and *Hausa* languages from Nigeria and *Twi*, *Ewe* and *Fanti* languages from Ghana came under the influence of foreign missionaries around the middle of the 19th century and a tradition of written literary efforts was under way by the beginning of the twentieth century. **Isaac Thomas** is the first *Yoruba* writer and his book *The Autobiography of Segilola* is centred around life in Lagos. The book is an interesting blend of serious morality and hilarious comedy. However, a more important *Yoruba* writer of this phase is **D D Fagunwa** who while intending to moralise to his readers under the influence of Christianity, also borrowed heavily from The very rich *Yoruba* tradition of folk tales and fantasy. His prominent books

include *The Brave Hunter in the Forest of the Four Hundred Gods* and *The Forests of Oldumareo*. Other well-known Yoruba writers are **Isaac Delano** and **Adeboye Babalola**.

Hausa language, which is spoken in the northern parts of Nigeria, came under the influence of Arabic language around the eighth century but written literature in *Hausa* appeared only in the seventeenth century. Early literature was in praise of Islam and prominent *Hausa* poets were **Tahir Ibrahim** and **Shahu Usman Dan Fodio**.

Ibo was the last major Nigerian language to be drawn into the orbit of written creative literature and the first important *Ibo* writer was **Pita Nwana** whose short novel *Omenuko* was published in 1935. More than a hero quest story, *Omenuko* examines conflicting loyalties and the psychology of crime. In many ways, **Nwana's** book resembles **Bunyan's** *Pilgrim's Progress*. **L B Gam** is another early *Ibo* writer whose novels were based on *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Another important *Ibo* writer of the early phase is **D N Achara** whose novel *Ala Bingo* is an allegory.

The written literature in Ghana has been within the oral tradition, borrowing heavily from the art of speaking and singing. This is obviously evident in the poems of **J J Adaye** and **Ephraim Amu**. The same strain is visible in the writings of *Fanti* writer **R Gaddiel Acquah** whose *Oguaa Aban* describes the wanderings of the *Fanti*, their contacts with other tribes, the *Ashanti* war and the coming of the Christian missionaries. Other prominent *Fanti* writer is *Joseph Ghartey Ewe*, the third major language from Ghana showed a strain of pervasive sadness in its early poetry as can be seen in the works of **Kofu Hoh** and **Kofi Awonoor**.

16.2.5 Eastern Africa

Written literature in eastern Africa has existed since the eighteenth century when verses were composed in *Swahili* language, a language spoken in the coastal regions of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The *Swahili* language, which developed as a result of trade contacts between the Arabs and the coastal people of east Africa, has verses which are sung or recited on public occasions and are called *mashairi* which is the same as the tradition of *mushaira* in Urdu in our own country. Early *Swahili* poetry has a strong element of Islam and its most prominent writers were **Muyka bin Haji** and **Mwana Kupona**.

Literature in other east African languages begins with *Gikuyu* writer **John Mbiti** whose book *Mutunga and His Story* appeared as late as 1954. Of The Ugandans, **Timothy Bazaarabusa** writing in *Runyoro* is the most important writer whose well-known books include *I will Never Die*, *At the point of Death* and *Kalyaki and Marunga*. In the *Luganda* language, the poems of **Y B Labumbula** caught the attention of the people quite early because of his successful inclusion of the narrative tale into his verse. *Kintu* is an important example of this.

16.2.6 Central Africa

In Malawi in central Africa, literary attempts were made in *Nyanja* language only in the early fifties and **S A Paliani** and **Samuel Ntara** are important writers. Once again, the influence of Christian morality is quite evident in the writings of these two. **Jacob Zulu's** stories also touch on moral issues in a quite superficial manner.

16.2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion we would like to observe that most of the literary efforts in African languages were made primarily in British colonies and hardly any worthwhile efforts in this direction were made in either French or Portuguese colonies. The reasons for this are not difficult to seek. Encouraging Africans to develop their own languages

and literatures was contrary to the French and Portuguese policies of assimilation, which had the aims of absorbing the Africans completely into the culture of the colonising nations, namely French and Portuguese cultures respectively. They encouraged the Africans to learn French and Portuguese respectively and write in them. In course of time, African writings appeared in not only these two languages but also in English which we examine in the next section, with special reference to the novel in English since that will help us place **Chinua Achebe's** *Things Fall Apart* in the proper context of the African novel in English.

16.3 AFRICAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH: THE BEGINNINGS

As we have seen in the earlier section, the earliest literary forms in which the Africans expressed themselves were stories, plays and poems. There were two basic reasons for these: one, all the three genres, that is poems, plays and stories, suited the oral form of literature since it is easier to memorise them and two, once again these three could be easily associated with the community-oriented aspects of life. That is to say, they could be recited, acted or narrated on specific social occasions.

However, with the coming of Europeans and their system of education, everything in African societies including the socio-economic as well as cultural aspects of their lives was completely disrupted. Urbanisation, shift to a market oriented economy and emphasis on literacy led to the emergence of a new genre of literature which was alien to African soil. This new genre was called the novel. Unlike story-telling, verse-reciting or play-acting, novel-reading cannot be associated with any community-oriented activity since it is not possible to narrate it, or act it or to recite it. The novel as a literary form is a typical product of a society in which the emphasis is not on community-oriented cultural activities but on those activities, which can be enjoyed by an individual in isolation within the four-walls of his/her room.

As we have seen in the earlier section, some of the attempts made in creating written literature in African languages was also in the direction of writing novels. For instance, **Thomas Mfola's** *The Traveller to the East Pitsang* and *Chaka* and **Plaatje's** *Mhudi* could be called novels. Similarly, the writings of **Fagunwa** also fall into the category of novels. So are the writings of those from east African territories. After these attempts had been made in African languages, it was only natural that soon some Africans would attempt to use this newly acquired literary genre of the novel — writing for expressing themselves in the languages of their colonial master.

Unlike the fiction in African languages which originated in Southern Africa, the beginnings in African fiction in English were made in Western Africa. Two novelists from Ghana — **E Casely Hayford** and **R E Obeng** — were pioneers in this regard. In 1911, **Casely Hayford** had published a narrative called *Ethiopia Unbound*, which is an amalgam of documentation and fantasy. Events in the life of Kwamankra, the hero, take him to London, West Africa and even to the underworld. Education, Christianity, colonialism and of course love are the focal points of the book into which *Fanti* beliefs and customs have been blended beautifully.

R E Obeng's *Eighteenpence* is in many ways similar to **Casely-Hayford's** *Ethiopia Unbound*, particularly in its moral preachings and detailed documentation which in this case is the legal system of Ghana. *Eighteenpence* is written as an allegory in which Akron, the principal character, borrows eighteenpence for buying a cutlass — a kind of sword — in lieu of which he agrees to work free for his creditor, farmer Owusu. Owusu's wife accuses Akron of attempting to rape her and thereafter begin a series of legal wrangles. Like *Ethiopia Unbound*, *Eighteenpence* too shows the influence of the **Bible** not only in terms of a moral message but also in terms of language and style. However, unlike **Casely Hayford's** book, **Obeng's** *Eighteenpence* shows signs of humour too.

16.3.1 Beginnings in Nigeria

Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* published in 1952, is the first major attempt by a Nigerian to write a novel in English and it was an instant success, primarily due to its unusual and largely ungrammatical use of English. Critics saw in it, the birth of a new variety of English. However, they were not sure if Tutuola's subsequent writings in the same style would be as successful. However, Tutuola repeated his success many times to show that there was more to his writings than just 'wrong English'. In fact, Tutuola had, like D D Fagunwa before him, blended reality with fantasy. He had also drawn heavily from Yoruba folklore material, transforming its myths to their modern versions. It is in this new use of Yoruba folklore that the intrinsic significance of *Palm-Wine Drinkard* lies. Tutuola was well received internationally and his writings were translated into many languages of Europe.

Other major Nigerian novelists include Cyprian Ekwensi, T M Aluko, Gabriel Okara, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Ben Okri and of course Chinua Achebe, whose works we shall discuss in subsequent Units.

16.3.2 East Central and South African Novelists in English

Writers in English from East, Central and South Africa, unlike their counterparts in West Africa, were considered rebels and the element of rebellion against the colonial authority in their writings was due to the additional presence of the settler population in these regions. As we have seen in the first Unit of this Block, settlers added to the problems of Africans suffering under colonial administrations. This led to a kind of writing in West Africa where, as we have seen above, a lot of emphasis was laid on documentation. In East, Central and South African novels we find writers condemning the European's superiority complex, particularly in the fields of art, culture and education.

16.3.3 East African Novel

Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya is the most important novelist from this region whose first novel *Weep Not Child* was published in 1964. It is the story of the break up of a Gikuyu family in the background of the Mau Mau struggle for independence. Through the character of Njoroge, Ngugi explores the relevance of the western system of education. His next novel *The River Between* highlights the conflict between the two cultures – the Gikuyu and the European through their attitude towards the African custom of circumcising female children at the age of puberty.

Once again, Ngugi explores the relative merit of the African system of education and African socio-religious practices vis-a-vis the European systems of education and Christianity. He links this up with their impact on the Kenyan freedom struggle, lending a distinct political flavour to his novel.

Ngugi continued to explore: the same theme of confrontation between the two cultures and its impact on various classes of Kenyan society in his subsequent novels – *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* – giving him the status of not only the foremost political novelist of this part of Africa but of Africa as a whole. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has been greatly influenced, particularly in his early phase, by the writings of Chinua Achebe.

Other East African novelists of significance include Leonard Kibera, Charles Mangua, Meja Mwangi, Stephen Ngunyah, Grace Ogot and Okello Oculi.

Prominent Central African novelists include Legson Kayira whose novels *The Looming Shadow* and *Jingala* explore the same themes of conflict between the two cultures, particularly the tradition of Africa and the modernity of Europe. Another important novelist is Khadarnbi Asalache whose *A Calabash of Life* is more in the style of a praise poem.

Major South African writers include Nobel prize winning — **Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Peter Abrahams, and Ezekiel Mphahlele**. The most important single factor affecting all South African writers including the novelists is the obnoxious policy of *apartheid* pursued by the racist South African government. While this policy of apartheid affected their day-to-day lives, each of these novelists also felt handicapped in discharging her or his duties as a writer. **Nadine Gordimer**, for instance, talks of 'unscalable limits' in understanding the black South Africans because being a white she lives on the other side of the colour barrier. Similarly, **Alex La Guma**, another outstanding novelist is pushed into the slot of a coloured novelist because his themes are primarily centred around the problems of coloured people in a society which is divided three ways into whites, blacks and the people of Asian origin. Also because of severe repression on the people in general and writers and artists in particular, a number of South African novelists had been forced to leave the country and go into exile. **Alex La Guma** and **Bessie Head** are the most prominent examples while **Nadine Gordimer** is the only exception. Their early writings were naturally full of the themes of protest against this segregation on the basis of the colour of one's skin.

However, a number of these South African novelists have made a deliberate effort to rise above the colour bar by adopting a political philosophy, which believes in the equality of all South Africans. Writers like **Alex La Guma, Nadine Gordimer** and **Alan Paton** have succeeded in doing so and are therefore no more sectarian writers representing their own racial constituency. **Nadine Gordimer's** *July's People* and *My Son's Story*, for example, are centred around black and coloured principal characters respectively. These writers can now even satirise or criticise aspects of the lives of black South Africans without running the danger of being dubbed as racists. **Peter Abrahams, Alex La Guma's** and **Nadine Gordimer** do it ever so often.

Dominic Mulaisho is perhaps the only novelist worth mentioning from Zambia and his novel *The Tongue of the Dumb* (1971) is an impressive novel depicting the power struggle in an African village.

West African novels are centred primarily around the clan or the tribe because there were no white settlers to make life miserable for them. In the case of the east, central or southern Africa, on the other hand, since a large number of white settlers had made their homes there the struggles for freedom were bitter and violent, which is amply reflected in their novels.

Attempts have been made to divide the African novel into four types based on the themes of the novels. It is, therefore, no clearcut division and there are overlaps. Their order is the chronological order in which African fiction is considered to have evolved over the years. These five types are:

- 1) Novels, which portray the initial exposure to the West and the confrontation with Christianity. **Achebe's** *Things Fall Apart* and **Ngugi's** *The River Between* represent this type. Since these novels also describe in detail the social aspects of the life of their people, customs, rituals and kinship, they have also been called anthropological or sociological novels.
- 2) The second category of novels consists of problems relating to the adoption of the western system of education. *Weep Not Child* by **Ngugi wa Thiong'o** and *Ambiguous Adventurer* by **Cheikh Hamidou Kane** fall under this category.
- 3) The third type of novels are those that portray problems relating to the process of urbanisation or the development of a city culture. *Jagua Nana* by **Cyprian Ekwensi** is an important example of a novel of this type.
- 4) In the fourth category are novels which deal with the problems of politics in a more pronounced manner. **Peter Abraham's** *Wreath for Udomo*, **Ngugi's** *Devil on the Cross* and **Achebe's** *A Man of the People* are examples of novels of this type.

- 5) The fourth and the last category consists of novels dealing with more individual life styles. **Armah's *Fragments*** and **Mphahlele's *The Wanderers*** fall in this category.

Exercise I

Answer the following questions, based on your reading of the various sections in this unit.

- 1) What was the most prevalent form of literature in Africa before the arrival of Europeans?

- 2) Why was the novel not included in the popular genres of literature in Africa at that time?

- 3) What were the reasons for the beginnings of written literature in Africa in its southern region?

- 4) What are the various factors responsible for the development of novel-writing in Africa.

- 5) Where were the first beginnings of novel writing made in Africa and who were its pioneers?

16.4 LET US SUM UP

Most literature in Africa before the arrival of the Europeans existed in oral form while in some languages, particularly in southern Africa there did exist a tradition of writing. Most of the literary activities in Africa were confined to the genres of poetry, drama and stories since these suited the oral form of literature better. Novel as a genre of literature is alien to Africa.

Most literary writings in Africa in the written form began after the European colonial powers had introduced their own systems of education and their own religion — Christianity — on the continent. The influence of the **Bible** is quite pronounced on these early writings.

African novel writing in English is a direct result of the process of urbanisation, introduction of market economy and the emphasis on literacy. The initiative in writing novels in English came from the Western parts of Africa – Ghana and Nigeria. South Africa was perhaps the last to draw Africans to writing novels in English primarily due to the government's policy of denying the Africans access to European languages.

The tradition of African novel writing can be divided into four major groups based on the manner in which various themes have been treated in these books.

16.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

- 1) Literary efforts in most parts of Africa before the arrival of the Europeans were oral because only a few languages of Africa had developed their own writing systems. The most prevalent forms of literary creation were poetry, drama and stories because these suited the oral tradition more.
- 2) These forms did not include the novel because most of the literary activities were community and performance-oriented. For example, while poems could be read aloud plays could be performed and stories narrated before a large audience, it was not possible to do so in the case of novels which needed just a single individual in isolated conditions of the four walls of a reader's room.
- 3) The beginnings of written literary efforts in Africa were made in its southern parts because a number of languages spoken in these areas had already developed writing systems that is to say they had scripts for writing their languages.
- 4) Novel-writing developed as a direct result of the introduction of the European education systems with more emphasis on literacy or written aspects of education. Secondly, the introduction of market economy and the process of urbanisation disrupted the community-oriented life including the cultural life in which people participated in groups rather than individually. Novel reading is primarily an individual activity.
- 5) The beginnings of novel writing in English were made in Ghana in West Africa and its pioneers were Casely-Hayford and R E Obeng whose novel *Ethiopia Unbound* and *Eighteenpence* respectively were the first efforts in this direction. Both of these novels, as also many others later, were influenced by the **Bible** in both morals and style.

UNIT 17 LITERATURE AND SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Nigeria : Socio-Political Development Through the Ages
- 17.3 Early Nigerian Writings
- 17.4 Nigerian Novel in English
- 17.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

17.0 OBJECTIVES

The twin objectives of this unit are to survey, briefly, the history and social organisation in Nigeria through the ages as also to look at the tradition of writing in Nigeria including the tradition of writing novels. This will help us understand not only the *Ibo* society in Nigeria about which **Chinua Achebe** writes in his novels, including *Things Fall Apart* but it will also help us know more about other ethnic groups in Nigeria and the contribution these groups have made to the development of Nigerian literary writings, particularly the novel written in English.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Republic of Nigeria lies in the Gulf of Guinea on the West Coast of Africa, that is to say on the Atlantic coast. In terms of population, Nigeria is the fourth largest African country with the *Hausa*, the *Fulani*, the *Yoruba* and the *Ibo* as its principal ethnic groups.

Surrounded by two other famous seats of ancient civilisations, namely Ghana and Mali, Nigeria has been one of the oldest seats of human habitation where human organisation reached significant levels of social and technical development. Excavations at the Nok village in the Province of Zaria have shown that the Nigerians made good pottery and used baked clay for making figures of humans and animals. They also worked in iron and bronze and the world famous 'The Bronzes' and 'Benin Heads' are Nigeria's gift to the sculptural world of today.

Since most of the Nigerian languages which number about three hundred were without a developed script, not much is known about the literary achievements of this ancient seat of civilisation. However, a fair guess about its developed state can be made from the folk literature, sayings and proverbs as also the customs and rituals which survive even today.

Besides the various African languages, Nigeria today has two more languages in its linguistic profile. These are English which is its official language and pidgin, which is a fascinating blend of English and some of the African languages.

17.2 NIGERIA: SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE AGES

17.2.1 North -West: The *Hausa* people

The Northern part of Nigeria is very different from the south and the east and this difference is not due to geography and climatic conditions alone. The people living in

the northern parts of Nigeria were called the *Hausa* people and were primarily farmers. They were conquered by the Berber people from further north around the eighth century A D. As we have stated in Unit 15, it was around this time that people from the Middle East and northern Africa came into the continent, primarily with the aim of spreading Islam. Another group of *Berbers* came to the area a little later and completed the task of conquering the remaining states of northern Nigeria. Around AD 1000, these *Berbers* even ventured to the south, which is the land of the *Yorubas* and conquered part of it as well. However, they could impose on the *Yoruba* people neither their language nor their religion.

In the early parts of nineteenth century, the *Hausa* people in the north were overrun by the *Fulani* who waged a holy war against them in the name of a purer and truer Islam under the leadership of *Usman dan Fodio*. The *Fulani* divided the area into small states called emirates and ruled over them through emirs. These emirs also conquered Ilorin in the south and began to trade in slaves towards the end of the nineteenth century, thereby providing the British who were present on the west coast with an excuse to intervene. By 1903, the northern part of Nigeria had been brought under the British protectorate and was ruled through the emirs without any interference in the social, cultural, religious and educational affairs of the *Hausa* people.

17.2.2 South -West: The *Yorubas*

The southern part of Nigeria was inhabited by the *Yoruba* people who were primarily farmers by profession and pagan in terms of religion. As stated above, the *Berbers* had conquered parts of their territory around the year 1000 A D but they had failed to impose their religion or their language on the *Yoruba* people. Soon the *Fulani*, who had overrun the north also came down south and conquered Ilorin. They joined in the slave trade that had been operating from the west coast by capturing the *Yoruba* and selling them to the Europeans. Once again the British intervened and by 1861, the island state of Lagos had been annexed. Instead of trading in slaves, they introduced trading in palm oil. They, however, were scared of malaria, which was rampant in the region and had therefore no intention of setting up a permanent political structure. However, the presence of the French and the Dutch in the vicinity forced them to conclude treaties with many local chiefs and the *Yoruba* territory too had been annexed. The missionaries followed suit and soon the "pagan", *Yoruba* had been converted into Christianity in very large numbers.

17.2.3 South East: The *Ibo* people

The east which was inhabited by the *Ibo* people has had a less advanced socio-political organisation than the *Hausa* and the *Yoruba*. Lesser material progress could be a possible reason for this. In modern political jargon, *Ibo* socio-political organisation could be described as comprising 'village democracies' with the clan as the basic unit. Like the *Yoruba*, the *Ibos* too were pagan in their religious beliefs. We can learn more about the socio-cultural life of the *Ibo* people from our reading of *Things Fall Apart*, which is a novel, based on the life of *Ibos*.

17.2.4 Nigeria: Independence and After

As stated in Unit 15, the end of World War II saw the rise of nationalism in various parts of Africa, including Nigeria, primarily due to increased economic hardships faced by the people in European colonies. Unemployment was rampant and inflation runaway. Three major political parties emerged on the political scene in Nigeria. These were the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) backed by the *Ibo* people and led by *Zik*, the NPC backed by the *Hausa* and the *Fulani* people and led by *Abubaker Tafawa Balewa* and the Action Group backed by the *Yoruba* and led by *Obafemi Awolowo*.

Internal autonomy was granted to the Eastern and Western Regions in 1957 and to the Northern Region in 1959. A year later, that is on October 1, 1960, Nigeria

attained independence and **Abubaker Tafawa Balewa** became its first Prime Minister heading a coalition government. However, internal struggle started soon after for the control of power, since there were not only various ethnic groups but also there was a big difference between the developed south and the underdeveloped north.

In 1966, the army intervened. **Tafawa Balewa** was killed and the power passed into the hands of the army. Simultaneously, large-scale killings of *Ibo* people at the hands of the *Hausa* people started, leading to the declaration of independence by the *Ibo* people calling their eastern land Biafra. The civil war, which ended only in 1970, claimed more than 150,000 lives. The Biafran cause was lost. Nigerian economy boomed with the soaring oil prices in the seventies and the early eighties but slumped later. Today Nigeria is back in the hands of the armed forces.

17.3 EARLY NIGERIAN WRITINGS

17.3.1 The Transformation – From Oral to Written

As has been stated in Unit 16 and also elsewhere, literary efforts in various Nigerian languages were oral because the languages lacked scripts or systems for writing them down. The tradition of written literature begins in the middle of the nineteenth century with the arrival of the missionaries who introduced the British system of education, which laid sufficient emphasis on learning with the help of books. The printing press was introduced and translations of the *Bible*, other religious books as well as some creative literature were introduced. **Bunyan's** *Pilgrim's Progress* was a favourite prescribed text. The only exception to this paradigm was the northern region where Arabic had been introduced and some written literature in it had existed since the fourteenth century.

The introduction of the British education system, Christianity, the market economy together with the development of towns led to the complete disruption of the homogeneous socio-cultural lives of Africans which favoured oral forms of literary compositions—stories, plays and poems.

17.3.2 Early Writings in Yoruba

Isaac Thomas's *The Autobiography of Segilola: The Lady with the Delicate Eye-Balls* was perhaps the first attempt at imaginative writing in *Yoruba*. It was written in the form of letters written by a prostitute to the editor of a newspaper, describing her plight in Lagos. Later, the book was to inspire **Cyprian Ekwensi** to write about metropolitan life, particularly of Lagos, in his novels of which *Jagua Nana* is the most well known. **Ekwensi** writes in English.

D D Fagunwa is the most important *Yoruba* writer whose blend of reality and fantasy in *The Brave Hunter in the Forest Of The Four Hundred Gods* and *The Forests of Oldumare* are adventure stories with heavy doses of morality. **Fagunwa** has inspired a number of writers to follow his style of mixing reality with fantasy. Among the better known of such writers is **Amos Tutuola** whose novel *The Palm Wine Drinkard* has already been referred to in Unit 16. Didacticism is a distinctive feature of **Fagunwa's** writings.

17.3.3 Written literature in Hausa

As stated in some parts of this very Unit, the Arabs had come to the land of the *Hausa* people in northern Nigeria around the eighth century. By the fourteenth century, Arabic had established itself in the region and learned written texts had appeared on government and religion. By the seventeenth century early attempts at

creating literature in Arabic were made and these were in the form of praise poems. **Dan Marina, Muhammad B Muhammad** and **Usuman Dan Fodio** were pioneers in this respect. Among the prose writers in *Hausa*, who came much later, are **Muhammadu Bello** and **Abubaker Bello**. The first Prime Minister of Nigeria **Abubaker Tafawa Balewa** was also a prominent *Hausa* novelist.

17.3.4 Ibo Literature

In 1935, **Pita Nwana's** short novelette *Omenuko* was published after it had won a prize in a literary competition and it became the first *Ibo* literary effort in writing. The story of a slave trader who after various adventures and misfortunes finally repents for his sins, it is full of didacticism. The book was to inspire **Chinua Achebe** to write about the life of the *Ibo* people in English.

L B Gam's adventure story *Odumodu's Travels* is modelled on *Gulliver's Travels* and has allegorical implications. **D N Achara's** *Ala Bingo* is an allegory too.

17.4 NIGERIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

The novel, as stated in Unit 16, is a form alien to Africa. It is a literary import from Europe. However, being a form, which is a kind of hold — all, the novel is easily adaptable and thus the Africans have adopted it to serve their artistic needs. Since the oral story was the dominant form of literary expression in Africa, a number of Nigerian novelists have very skilfully made use of that form while writing novels. Take the case of **D D Fagunwa** and **Amos Tutuola**. Both of them bind together, very skilfully, a number of short narratives to create a longer tale. In fact, most Nigerian novelists in English, like their counterparts writing in other African regions, have continued to write short stories along with novels. The names of **Chinua Achebe**, **Cyprian Ekwensi** and **Flora Nwapa** spring to one's mind immediately.

17.4.1 Amos Tutuola

Amos Tutuola, as we have stated earlier, is the first major Nigerian novelist in English whose *The Palm Wine Drinkard* published in 1952 sent European critics into raptures. While they praised it sky-high for its novel use of English, particularly his deliberate ignoring of the regular structure of the language, **Tutuola's** fellow Nigerian writers were embarrassed by his 'incorrect' use of English.

However, **Tutuola's** novel which is the story of the adventures of a palm-wine addict in search of his dead palm-wine tapper, is a serious attempt to fuse folklore with modern life and **Tutuola** succeeds fully in doing so. In fact, therein lies the intrinsic value and strength of his book and not in his 'new' use of English as had been made out by his European critics. **Tutuola** repeated his success in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle*, *The Brave African Huntress*, and *Feather Woman of the Jungle*.

17.4.2 Cyprian Ekwensi

Cyprian Ekwensi began as a writer of cheap, love stories meant primarily for titillating the young. *When Love Whispers* belongs to this phase. **Ekwensi** soon graduated to the realm of serious novelists and has specialised in exposing the seamy side of city life. *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana*, *The Drummer Boy* and *An African Night's Entertainment* all deal with the theme of city life.

17.4.3 T M Aluko

T M Aluko, unlike **Chinua Achebe** whose work we shall not discuss in this Unit but in the next Unit, believes in debunking the tradition. He believes that all was not well with many traditional aspects of Nigerian life. *One Man, One Wife* and *One Man*,

One Matchet are his well-known novels. To **Aluko** nothing is sacrosanct, nothing above criticism and in a typical style of African humour, **Aluko** satirises the whole gamut of African traditions and beliefs. *Kinsmen and Foremen* and *Chief the Honourable Minister* are his other novels.

17.4.4 **Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa**

Buchi Emecheta and **Flora Nwapa** are among a host of women writers who have enriched the Nigerian novel in English by highlighting the problems of women both in pre-independence and post-independence Nigeria. They have also provided the necessary women's perspective to various aspects of Nigerian social, political and cultural life. While *Destination Biafra*, *Joys of Motherhood*, *Bride Price* and *Second Class Citizen* are well-known works of **Buchi Emecheta** who lives in London and publishes from there, *Efuru*, *Idu* and *One is enough* are well-known novels by **Flora Nwapa**.

17.4.5 **John Munyone and others**

John Munyone's *Only Son* and *Obi* and **Nkem Nwanko's** *Danda* are powerful statements about the clash between the two cultures – European and African. **Ben Okri**, who has been awarded the *Booker Prize* for his *Famished Road*, uses the *Yoruba* myth of children who are unwilling to be born, to survey and critically evaluate the whole gamut of contemporary Nigerian life and its history. **Wole Soyinka** who won the *Nobel Prize* for Literature a few years ago and who is primarily a poet and a playwright has also written a few novels.

Exercise I

Answer the following questions in your own words:

- 1) What are major ethnic groups in Nigeria and which parts of the country do they live in?

- 2) What kind of socio-political organisation did the Ibos have? How was it different from the political organisation among the Hausa and the Yoruba people?

- 3) What factors helped in the development of the written form of literature in Nigeria?

- 4) How is the novel as a literary form different from the other literary forms, which were prevalent in pre-European Africa's?

- 5) Which literary form from the oral literary tradition helped Nigerians in novel writing and how?

17.5 LET US SUM UP

Nigeria has been the seat of a famous ancient civilisation. It is inhabited by four principal ethnic groups -the *Hausa*, the *Fulani*, the *Yoruba* and the *Ibo*. The *Hausa* and the *Fulani* are primarily Muslim by religious faith and live in the north while the *Yoruba* and the *Ibo* are Christian or pagan by religious faith and live in the southern and eastern parts of Nigeria respectively.

Since the British missionaries first came to the south and the east and established schools there, the *Yoruba* and the *Ibo* concerned a greater share in development and occupied important positions in the administration, leaving the *Hausa* and the *Fulani* far behind. This led to inter-ethnic tensions in the post-independence era leading to a civil war – The Biafran war – from 1967 to 1970 in which over 150,000 people lost their lives.

Early Nigerian writing showed the influence of Christianity. Although novel writing was foreign to African literary traditions, Nigerians have adapted themselves well to this new form. **Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, T M Aluko, Ben Okri, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa** are well-known Nigerian novelists.

17.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

- 1) The Hausa, the Fulani, the Yoruba and the Ibo are the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Hausa and the Fulani live in the north, the Yoruba in the south and the Ibo in the east.
- 2) The socio-political organisation of the Ibos was village based and each unit was a small autonomous village democracy. Unlike them, the Yoruba, the Hausa and the Fulani had much larger socio-political units with a strong central authority.
- 3) The written form of literature developed primarily because of the introduction of the British education system in Nigeria. Conversion to Christianity and the introduction of the printing press facilitated the change over from oral to written form of literature. The process of urbanisation and the introduction of a market economy also played their role in it.
- 4) Stories, poems and plays were the prevalent literary forms in pre-European Nigeria and were all suited to the community-oriented cultural activities, which were primarily oral. Novel, on the other hand, is more suitable to written form and does not need group participation.
- 5) Oral story is the form, which helped Nigerians in taking to novel writing. Early novels were a string of stories bound together skilfully. Tutuola and Fagunwa are well known examples of these kinds of writings.

UNIT 18 CHINUA ACHEBE - LIFE AND WORKS

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 The Beginning: Ancestor Worshipper
- 18.3 Later Novels : The Contemporary Scene
- 18.4 Other Writings
- 18.5 Literature, Society and the Writer
- 18.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.7 Answers to Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this Unit is to familiarise you with major events in the life and the literary career of **Chinua Achebe**. This will help us understand him better as a writer. We shall also summarise briefly the themes of his writings, which will help us in understanding his development as a writer. Finally, we shall examine his views about literature, society and the role of a writer as expressed in his book of essays called *Morning Yet On Creation Day*.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe is the best-known novelist not only from Nigeria but from the entire continent of Africa. He is perhaps the first African writer whose books have been prescribed as a part of the curriculum in Africa, although his earlier writings were definitely aimed at foreign audiences in Europe and America. As the first black novelist from Africa, not only has he got an appreciative global readership but also an acclaim which is richly deserved. He is now not only one of the most widely translated novelists in the world but is also one of the most universally respected ones too. For example *Things Fall Apart* is an important part of the heritage of world literature and is considered a classic.



Achebe was born in Ogidi near Onitsha on the banks of the river Niger in 1930. His father was a missionary, one of the earliest *Ibos* to take to that profession. By the time **Achebe** went to school major changes due to the intervention of colonialism had already taken place and were a reality.

His school education was at Umuahia Govt. Secondary school. After having been selected for medicine and after spending a year in that course, **Achebe** strayed back to University College of Ibadan to take a graduate degree in humanities. This brought him in close contact with European culture and particularly the European literary traditions. Simultaneously, his interest in the history of Nigeria grew and he started filling the gaps in his readings by asking questions about the pre-colonial society, although remnants of it were still around in the day-to-day lives of the people.

However, when **Achebe** began to write in the latter part of the fifties, he was quite conscious of the fact that he was writing about a part of the world with which his foreign readers in Europe and America would be quite unfamiliar. While analysing

the details of societies and assessing their cultural worth, which were strange to the modern world, **Achebe** evokes values, which go beyond the narrow confines of space and time.

Like his other fellow African writers **Achebe** too finds himself in a unique situation as an interpreter of a society whose traditions have been disrupted by the intervention of colonialism. His novels, therefore, reflect on the changes which have come about in *Ibo* society in particular and Nigerian life in general as a result of what he calls a 'chance encounter' between Europe and Africa during the colonial period.

Achebe's novels, therefore, are unique and quite different from those written by his counterparts in England, although attempts have been made to fit them into the tradition of novel writing in England. While it is true that his formative years were saturated with the influence of Christianity as well as the English school system and while he has acknowledged that a number of European writers, particularly **Joseph Conrad**, **Graham Greene** and **Evelyn Waugh**, have influenced his development as a writer, it would be unfair to put him in the tradition of anyone of these or any other European writer, for that matter. This is because **Achebe**, once again like other African novelists, has modified the form of novel as a genre while adopting it for the specific needs of his society where the tradition of literature has been primarily oral and has been entrenched for hundreds of years.

Honoured with scores of awards, medals, honorary degrees, fellowships and the editorship of a series of publications of African literature, seventy-five year old **Chinua Achebe** is still active and busy writing, despite a serious accident more than a decade ago which has restricted his physical movement severely.

18.2 THE BEGINNING: ANCESTOR WORSHIPPER

Once asked to describe himself, **Achebe** called himself an ancestor worshipper'. On another occasion he stated that, "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach the readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery."

Chinua Achebe's first three novels – *Things Fall Apart*, (1958) *No Longer At Ease*, (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964) – may also be read as a trilogy of related themes, as all are about societies and persons which/who were divided between past and present, between the old world and the new and between Europe and Africa. All the three novels are about the people of 'the two worlds' who were bewildered by both the scale and the suddenness of these changes. While attempting to come to terms with them, they meet their tragic ends.

Although **Achebe** was a child of colonialism who began to write when Nigeria was almost free, **Achebe's** veneration for the past is very transparent in all the three novels. However, **Achebe's** respect for the past is not uncritical. As he himself put it, 'we cannot pretend that our past was one long technicolour idyll'. In fact, in this lies the strength of **Achebe** as a novelist.

18.2.1 *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958 and was an instant success with his readers. In fact, it was the first novel written by an African that put the literature from the continent immediately on the map of world literature.

While we shall analyse the text in greater details in the next Unit, it will be sufficient to outline here that the novel is about Iboland, in the eastern region of present day Nigeria in the period between 1850-1900. This was the period just prior to and after the arrival of white men in this part of West Africa. Expressed in the idiom of the *Ibo*

villagers, which he translates into standard Nigerian English, the conflict is highlighted through the fate of Okonkwo, the protagonist and other villagers of Umuofia and its neighbourhood who are out manoeuvred by white-men representing a technologically superior European culture. Finally, *Ibo* society falls apart and is annihilated by European colonialism.

18.2.2 *No Longer at Ease*

No Longer at Ease is a sequel to *Things Fall Apart* in the sense that its protagonist Obi is the grandson of Okonkwo who was the hero of *Things Fall Apart*. He is the son of Nwoye who had converted to Christianity and had taken the name Isaac. The action takes place partly in the same village of Umuofia and partly in Lagos the big city, the likes of which had developed all over Nigeria since the days of Okonkwo.

The theme of the novel is public corruption – a phenomenon, which like many other ills, is the direct offshoot of the introduction of colonialism in Nigeria. Obi Okonkwo has returned from England after obtaining a BA degree and is excitedly looking forward to some responsible position in the Civil Service. However, he is soon caught in a web of pressures of various kinds – from the people of his own village who had financed his trip to England and who now want special favours in return, from his girlfriend Clara who wants to legitimise their relationship through marriage, from his parents who refuse to permit him to marry outside the clan and finally from the people at large. Pressed from all sides, Obi succumbs to temptation and accepts a bribe. He is caught and is awaiting trial, public humiliation and punishment.

As we can see, once again **Achebe** is concerned with changes, which have been brought about in *Ibo* society after its encounter with colonialism. Once again, he highlights it through the havoc colonialism has wrought on the people's lives through bribery, graft and corruption. The major difference between the fate of Obi and Okonkwo, his grandfather in *Things Fall Apart*, is that while Okonkwo dies for his convictions however rigid and unreasonable those might be, Obi totally lacks the moral courage in sustaining whatever convictions he has. In fact, **Achebe** had hinted at the shape of things to come at the end of *Things Fall Apart* itself when he had shown the villagers of Umuofia, rich with money from the sale of palm-oil and kernels, refusing to support Okonkwo's killing of the District Commissioner's emissary who brings the message that their meeting had been disallowed by the District Commissioner. The moral rot has set in since then and has hollowed the society completely. Once again, **Achebe's** sense of loss of a simple but morally vibrant *Ibo* society of pre-European days is quite evident throughout the novel.

18.2.3 *Arrow of God*

Arrow of God is **Achebe's** third novel of the series in which he further explores the 'encounter' theme at greater length since it is the most voluminous of the three books. In terms of time frame, it is located somewhere between *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. It is a period when colonialism has become well established in Nigeria. The locale is Umuaro, which like Umuofia earlier, is a cluster of villages – this time six instead of the nine in the earlier book. While commenting on his repeated return to the past, **Achebe** had remarked that he felt that 'My first book is no longer adequate. I have learned a lot more about these particular people ...my ancestors' and something ...has to be done before I move on to the contemporary scene'. In *Arrow of God*, like in *Things Fall Apart* earlier, the forces of a primitive, self-sufficient society are pitted against the forces of colonialism – church, government and trade. Once again, the resultant crisis destroys not only the protagonist but also the very roots of tribal life. The protagonist – Ezeulu – is a more complex character. He is the chief priest of Ulu – a newly created god by the people of those six villages of Umuaro. Ezeulu has to fight simultaneously on two fronts – one, the internal strife represented by Nwake, a powerful chief and Ezidemili, chief priest of another god Idemili, and two, the European culture and religion represented by **Captain Winter Bottom**, the head of the local colonial political administration. So Ezeulu loses at the end.

Achebe's Ezeulu, although similar to Okonkwo, is a more complex character. He thinks about the causes of various events and has an open mind. He is even ready to come to terms with Europeans, Christianity and colonialism but only upto a certain point so that his dignity and self-respect is not compromised. Pushed beyond that, he fights and meets the same tragic fate as Okonkwo did in *Things Fall Apart*. While dealing with this *more* complex situation, Achebe also invokes more complex details of tribal life – births, deaths, marriages, celebrations, religious ceremonies. Customs and rituals which may, at times, appear to have been introduced for their own sake, but like the details in *Things Fall Apart* are an integral part of the life of the people which is what he intended to highlight through his protagonist.

Achebe's first three novels, therefore, enliven very dramatically and powerfully both in personal and societal terms the past of the *Ibo* people. However, the manner in which Achebe tells the tragic tale of those people raises it to a higher level, making it a part of the ebb and flow of human history, which, incidentally, is the real 'hero' of all the three novels.

18.3 LATER NOVELS: THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

As stated by Achebe himself, he was ready to move over to the contemporary scene after writing *Arrow of God*, which was a kind of swan song tribute to the *Ibo* way of life that was.

18.3.1 *A Man of the People*

With the publication of *A Man of the People* in 1966, Achebe plunged into the contemporary way of life in Nigeria. Glossing over the period in which the freedom struggle was launched and the independence achieved after quite an intricate interplay of conflicting ethnic sentiments egged on by the colonial and imperialist forces, Achebe makes post- independence Nigeria the theme of *A Man of the People*. It is a Nigeria in which, like in many other newly independent nations in Africa and elsewhere, a nexus between politician and criminals had emerged and entrenched itself to loot the national wealth in collaboration with imperialist forces represented by powerful transnationals. And all this is done by befooling the people in the name of democracy, which in effect is only a facade for a coterie of vested interests. Media too plays a major role in dividing the people in the name of ethnic loyalties and by diverting their attention from the real issues facing the people.

The chief characters in the novel are Chief M A Nanga, who has risen from being a band - master in a school to a minister's position by jumping on to the political bandwagon at an appropriate time and Odili a young teacher who is full of idealism and is determined to expose the likes of Chief Nanga. Full of details of political intrigues within the ruling party and even the cabinet, the role of money and muscle power in elections including murders, political confrontations and compromises in the name of ideology, exploitation of the ordinary people, particularly of women in the name of both tradition and modernity, the novel could be located in any other modern nation-state by merely changing names of Nigeria immediately by predicting the shape of things to come. The ending of *A Man of the People* shows the military intervening in the sordid political affairs of the country – something which was unthinkable in Nigerian polity at that time. However, within a few months of the publication of the novel, a military coup had actually taken place in Nigeria and political power had passed into the hands of the army with which it has stayed more or less continuously since then.

18.3.2 *Anthills of the Savannah*

Achebe's next novel *Anthills of the Savannah* was published in 1987, after a gap of more than twenty years – twenty-one to be precise after the publication of *A Man of*

the People. So much had happened in Nigeria during this time. Nigeria had gone through a very bloody civil war – the Biafran war – in which more than 150,000 people had been killed. The worst sufferers were the *Ibo* people – the ethnic group to which **Achebe** also belongs. **Achebe** himself had to suffer for allegedly aiding the secessionists. During this time, Nigeria had also seen the bubble of material prosperity bloom and burst as oil prices rose and crashed in the international market. During this period, Nigeria also had a brief brush with democracy before things went out of hand. Once again the military intervened. *Anthills of the Savannah* is, therefore, a result of the literary maturation of **Chinua Achebe** subsequent to all this.

The theme of the novel is the now familiar theme of a Nigeria plagued with inequality, poverty, social injustice, public betrayal and political and military intrigues, with repression, intimidation and calculated murder being the order of the day. Since violence begets violence, those trying to remedy the situation are also forced to resort to violence. So we have a military coup in order to get rid of a military coup.

The locale this time is an imaginary Republic of Kangan and the dictator is President Sam. Pitted against him are Ikem, Chris and Beatrice. By showing a woman – Beatrice – take over the leadership, **Achebe** seems to be suggesting that women could perhaps prove to be better leaders and better managers of political affairs too.

18.4 OTHER WRITINGS

It has been mentioned in another Unit earlier that story telling was the forte of African literature before the arrival of Europeans and literate culture. It has also been mentioned that it came in very handy while African writers took to novel-writing which was a form of writing alien to Africa. The result was that most African novelists also continued to tell stories, this time in writing. **Achebe** too has written and published stories all this while. Some of these like *Chike and the River* (1966) are exclusively for children in the tradition of the father telling stories every evening to his children whom he called to his obi. There are others like *Girls at War* (1973), which portray both the traditional and the modern life. **Chinua Achebe** is a poet too. His collection *Beware Soul Brother* (1971) is a very moving portrayal of the tragedy of the Biafran war. **Achebe** has also written a book about the problems of Nigeria – *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984).

18.5 LITERATURE, SOCIETY AND THE WRITER

A large number of African writers like **Ngugi Wa Thiong'o**, **Senghor**, **Wole Soyinka**, **Alex La Guma** and **Nadine Gordimer** have expressed their well-thought out views about the relationship between literature and society, the role of a writer in society, the choice of a particular language as the medium of creative writing and a host of other related matters. While **Nadine Gordimer** talks of the 'unshakable limits' imposed on a writer's creativity by the policy of apartheid, **Ngugi Wa Thiong'o** pleads for decolonising the mind. While **Senghor** would like the superiority of the black African asserted through a concept like 'negritude', **Wole Soyinka** would like to join issue with him by dubbing his concept of 'negritude' as racist. All these views and opinions are a part of another struggle being waged by African writers – to free African literary criticism or evaluation of African literature from the bondage of European theories of literary criticism. These writers would like African literary texts to be judged by a different set of criteria primarily because Europeans, having never been colonised, are simply incapable of evaluating adequately literary responses of societies where colonialism has been a fact of life for prolonged periods of time. In other words these writers are pleading for a different aesthetics – either an exclusive one for Africa or one which it shares with other former European colonies in Asia and Latin America. **Chinua Achebe** too has expressed his views about some of these

very significant matters, some of which have been collected in his book of essays called *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, which we summarise below:

18.5.1 *Morning Yet on Creation Day*

Writing about the role of art – and this includes literature – in society, **Achebe** says that 'Art for art's sake is just another piece of deodorised dog-shit'. **Achebe** believes that art is, as it has always been, 'in the service of man'. All myths, legends and stories have been created for 'a human purpose'. Artists – and that includes writers – created their works 'for the good of that society'. This is what **Achebe** writes in *Africa and her Writers*, a leading essay in the collection.

As for Europe, **Achebe** says that 'somewhere in the history of European civilisation the idea that art should be accountable to no one and needed to justify itself to nobody except itself, began to emerge'. On the other extreme, **Achebe** tells us, is yet another stream in Europe where 'a poet is not a poet until the writers' Union tells him so'.

Achebe pleads with African writers to look to their own sources for a definition of art. 'The making of art is not the exclusive concern of a particular caste or secret societies'. Art belongs to all and is a 'function' of the society.

We have stated in Units 15 and 16 that Europeans condemned everything African as barbaric, savage and uncivilised. And this was not confined to their customs and rituals alone but applied as much to their dances and songs and dresses. The result was that over the years Africans developed an inferiority complex of extreme sorts. They were ashamed of everything that was African – even the African weather. Now **Achebe** thinks that as a novelist it is his duty and also of other fellow novelists, to 'educate' such Africans and restore their faith and confidence in themselves, their heritage and help them 'decolonise' their minds. According to **Chinua Achebe**, therefore, a novelist is primarily a teacher.

A controversy has been raging among African writers for quite some time now about the choice of language in which they should express themselves creatively. There are those who would have nothing to do with the languages of the former colonial masters. They are for shedding the legacy of colonialism completely and going back to their own 'tongues'. Then there are others who shout that language is not the private property of any single community or nation. **Achebe** defends his use of English by saying that for him it is a matter of pragmatism and not principle. 'A language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself.' 'I feel', says **Achebe**, 'that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English still in full communication with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings'.

Exercise I

(1) Why does Achebe call himself an 'ancestor worshipper'?

(2) Which major changes brought about by colonialism in traditional Ibo society are highlighted by Chinua Achebe in his novels?

- (3) Why had Achebe's *A Man of the People* suddenly catch the attention of the people in Nigeria?

- (4) Why have most African writers including Chinua Achebe expressed their opinion about the relationship between literature and society?

18.6 LET US SUM UP

Achebe's choice of writing about the pre-colonial *Ibo* society has been a deliberate one. His respect for the positive aspects of that society is reflected very clearly in his first three novels – *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. The tragic loss of that society occurred because of their encounter with a technologically superior society. Also there were some inherent weaknesses like rigidity in *Ibo* society.

The themes of those novels based on the post-independence situation in Nigeria have been political intrigue and thuggery and the exploitation of the people through a nexus between the politician and the criminal. Since this is true of most newly liberated nations of the world, **Achebe's** novels have found an appeal, which goes much beyond the confines of Nigeria or Africa.

Achebe views the role of a writer in a society similar to that of a teacher. This is so because literature in Africa, unlike its counterpart in Europe, still affects people in their day-to-day life. It is still 'functional'. **Achebe** does not feel any pangs of guilt for using the English language as the medium for his literary activities instead of the use of his mother tongue because he feels that he has modified English sufficiently to serve his purpose.

18.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

- (1) Achebe calls himself an 'ancestor worshipper', because of his love and respect for the positive aspects of the pre-European *Ibo* society. This is quite evident from his first three novels.
- (2) Achebe highlights primarily the clash between Christianity and African religious practices, *Ibo* ways of socio-political organisation and the European manner of government and finally the *Ibo* system of economic organisation and the European concept of trade. Naturally these clashes also led to a clash between the socio-cultural values as well.
- (3) Achebe's *A Man of the People* caught the attention of the Nigerian people because of its prophetic prediction about Nigeria's first-ever military coup. It took place within a few months of the publication of the book.

- (4) Achebe, like many other African writers, believes that because of different socio- political circumstances between Europe and Africa, European criteria for evaluating African literary texts are grossly inadequate. The basic difference of Europe having never been colonised makes all the difference. Hence these writers, including Chinua Achebe have expressed their opinions to highlight the need for a new aesthetics for Africa and other newly-liberated nations of Asia and Latin America.

**Chinua Achebe :
Life and Work**

UNIT 19 *THINGS FALL APART*: DETAILED ANALYSIS

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Things Fall Apart: Detailed Analysis
- 19.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.4 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

19.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this Unit is to analyse chronologically and in detail *Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. This is being done with the express aim of supplementing your reading of the novel and is not, in any way, a substitute for your reading of the novel. Additionally, an attempt will be made to highlight those aspects of the novel – events as well as characterisation – which are significant and will help us in evaluating the novel critically.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958 and it was this novel, which put African Writing in English on the map of world literatures in English. It inspired scores of writers across the continent of Africa who shed their diffidence and began to write in European languages in a big way. Since then *Achebe's Things Fall Apart* has been translated in about forty languages across the world and has sold millions of copies which is an adequate testimony to its significance not only as a great African novel but as part of the human heritage. Although **Chinua Achebe** wrote two more novels in continuation of *Things Fall Apart* to form a trilogy, yet *Things Fall Apart* remains a class apart.

19.2 *THINGS FALL APART*: DETAILED ANALYSIS

19.2.1 Part One

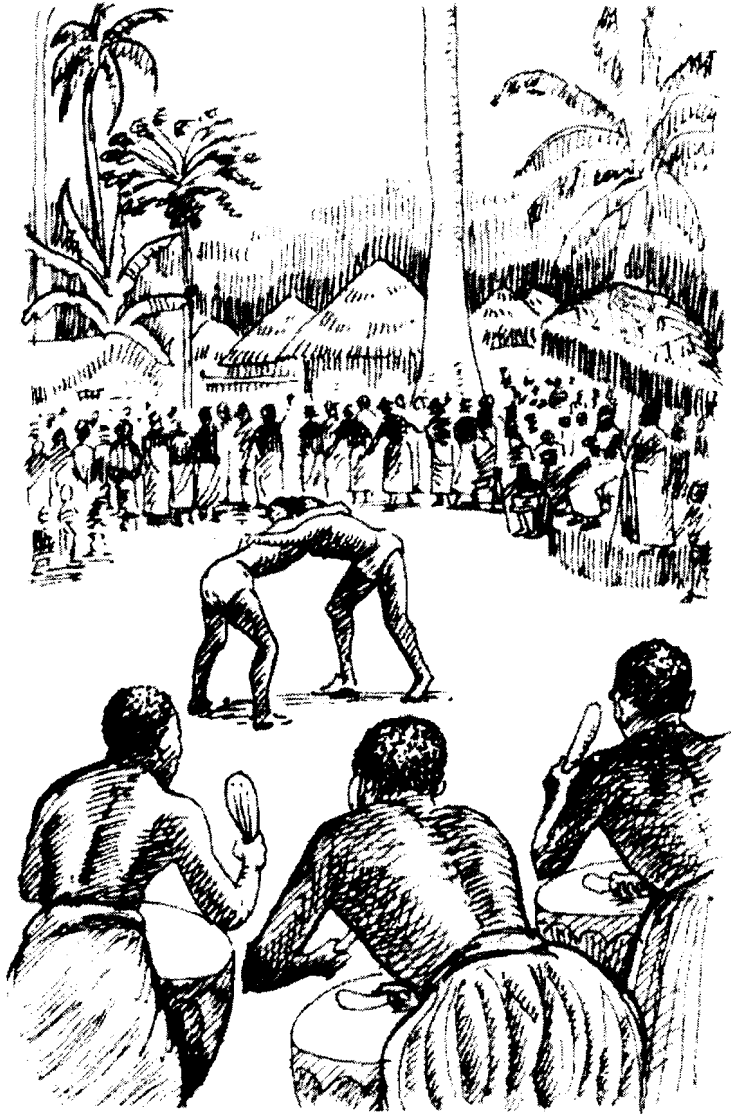
Things Fall Apart which is divided into two parts and twenty-five chapters opens with a description of Okonkwo, a resident of a cluster of villages called Umuofia. Okonkwo, as we come to know on reading the novel, is the principal character around whom the whole plot of the novel is woven. The author tells us in the very first chapter that Okonkwo was a famous person, primarily because of his physical powers. He had defeated the strongest man – Amalinze – in a wrestling contest when he was only eighteen. Now he is thirty-eight and he is still considered a very strong person.

The author further reveals to us that Okonkwo was a man of short temper and very little patience. He had no respect for people who were physically weak. His own father was one such person and therefore Okonkwo did not have much respect for his father Unoka.

The author draws a contrast between the father and the son, between Okonkwo and Unoka, by stating that not only was Unoko very weak but he was also lazy and

managed his household affairs very badly. However, like his son, Unoko too was a famous person. While the son Okonkwo was known for his physical strength and powers his father Unoka was well known for his musical qualities.

Unoka was perpetually in debt to his neighbours and friends. And he was quite unashamed in acknowledging this. He was also a bad payee as the author shows through a conversation between Unoka and his friend Okoyo who had lent Unoka some money. Unlike his father, Okonkwo was not only physically strong but he also managed his household affairs well, as a result of which he had become quite rich.



Who will wrestle for our village ?

The first chapter also gives us a good peep into the *Ibo* society of the times. It was a society in which people were respected and publicly honoured for physical strength. It was a society in which people judged a person on his or her own performance and not on the basis of the status of the parents. It was a society in which a person's wealth could be judged from the number of public titles he possessed or the number of wives he had because for acquiring both – a title as well as a wife – a person had to pay a substantial amount of money. Okonkwo had both – a number of titles as well as a number of wives. We also come to know that the *Ibo* were quite fond of speaking in proverbs, that is to say, they liked saying things indirectly by referring to anecdotes and stories. This is a sign of a culturally sophisticated society.

Achebe ends the first chapter by referring to an ill fated child named Ikemefuna who comes to stay with Okonkwo thereby creating the necessary suspense and curiosity for what follows in the next chapters.

The second chapter opens with the crier informing the residents of Umuofia to gather at the market place the next day. Okonkwo discerned a distinct tragic note in the voice of the crier and wondered as to what could have happened. The next morning saw about ten thousand men gathered to listen to Ezeugo, who was a powerful narrator. Ezeugo soon informed the audience that a woman of Umuofia, the wife of Ogbuefi Udo, had been murdered by residents of Mbaino, a neighbouring cluster of villages. As was the custom in such situations, it was decided to serve an ultimatum to Mbaino that they choose between a compensation of a virgin and a young man or the onslaught of a war. Since Umuofia had the reputation of being very strong both in terms of warriors as well as casting magic spells, neighbours were afraid of going to war with it. So Mbaino also decided to pay the compensation. The girl was to replace the murdered wife of Udo while the boy's fate would be decided by the residents of Umuofia later. This is how Ikemefuna, the ill-fated boy from Mbaino came to live in Okonkwo's house during the interim period. It is once again emphasised that Okonkwo was a strong man who created a sense of fear even among his wives and children. Okonkwo handed over Ikemefuna to the charge of his second wife whose own son Nwoye was of the same age. Ikemefuna was completely at a loss about the reasons of his having been taken away from his parents and brought to a far-off strange place together with a girl whom he never saw again after reaching the new place.

Once again, we come to know more things about the *Ibo* people and their customs. Apart from the description of the manner in which public gatherings are held and households managed, we come to know that the society was very rigid and cruel in many ways. Justice was based on the principle of revenge as is clear from the surrendering of a virgin girl and an innocent boy as a compensation for a murdered woman. An individual's life, therefore, was completely in the hands of the clan or the tribe. That is why an innocent Ikemefuna is surrendered to the residents of Umuofia although he had nothing to do with the murder of the woman personally.

Chapter three recalls the struggle Okonkwo had to go through to set himself up as an independent farmer even when his father Unoka was alive. Since Okonkwo did not have resources of his own, he went and borrowed 800 yam seeds from a wealthy farmer Nwakibie and four hundred more from another friend of his father's. As per the practice of sharecropping prevalent in that society, Okonkwo would be entitled to only one third of the total crop. But he had no choice since his father had nothing to support him, which made Okonkwo quite angry.

That year the crops failed badly since it did not rain at the right time. After Okonkwo had sown the first part of his seeds of yam, instead of rains, a scorching sun shone, burning the seedlings. Half of his seeds had been lost. When he sowed the other half after clearing the fields once again, it was excessive rains, which destroyed everything this time. Okonkwo was ruined. But he was a die-hard optimist and an extremely hard-working young man. He said to himself that if he had been able to survive that particular year, he would be able to survive subsequently because nothing could be worse than what had happened that year.

The chapter also tells us more about the social organisation of the society: how to honour guests and how to please elders. It also tells us that the *Ibo* people believe in the spirits of ancestors as well as an almighty oracle or God whom they consult in times of need. Certain superstitions are also referred to. For instance, anyone struck with the disease of swelling of the stomach or other limbs was abandoned to die in the jungle. Unoka, Okonkwo's father had been struck with this disease and left to die like that. The chapter has a number of proverbs as manners of expression for certain specific situations.

Chapter four brings the story back to the present and shows how after initial resistance, Ikemefuna came to accept Okonkwo's household as his home. Not only did he become quite friendly with Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, but he also earned the love of Okonkwo himself, although Okonkwo never showed his emotions openly. That he considered to be weakness in a man. Ikemefuna even called Okonkwo his father.

The chapter also describes in detail how preparations are made for the sowing season of yam, which is a kind of tuber plant of the root family. *Ibo* people observe a week of peace before the sowing begins. This was done to be in the right frame of mind for the hard work. This year Okonkwo had disturbed the peace by beating one of his wives during the week and he had to appease the god and his priest.

The next chapter describes the Feast of the New Yam in Umuofia, which is held just before the harvesting begins and it also coincides with the beginning of the new year. It is held to honour Ani, the goddess of earth and fertility. There is a lot of feasting on this occasion. Okonkwo's household also celebrated the feast with a lot of pomp and show and the most excited was Ikemefuna. The second day of the celebrations was reserved for wrestling which also generated a lot of enthusiasm. It was on one of these occasions that Okonkwo had defeated Amalinze, the Cat and had won the heart of Ekwefi, who had become his second wife, deserting her husband. The chapter once again describes in great detail the household chores as well as the manner in which various wives of a man manage their respective duties.

Chapter six gives an extensive account of the wrestling match and also a brief conversation between Ekwefi and another woman named Chielo who also doubled as the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle or the God.

Chapter seven is a very crucial section of the novel, which describes first, how Ikemefuna's stay in Okonkwo's home for three years has had a very positive influence on Nwoye. Nwoye whom Okonkwo had earlier considered to be lazy like his own father Unoka, was now quite enthused about undertaking difficult masculine tasks like splitting wood or pounding food. Okonkwo considered this change to be a result of Ikemefuna's company. He had grown quite fond of Ikemefuna.

Okonkwo often called them to his obi—his hut – and told them the stories of the land. Since the harvest season was over, Okonkwo had enough time for this.

During one of those days Ogbuezi Ezeudu came to visit him and brought him the unhappy news that the clan had finally decided to kill Ikemefuna. He, however, warned Okonkwo not to have a hand in Ikemefuna's death since the boy loved him so much and even called him father.

The next day it was all worked out by the elders in Okonkwo's house and Ikemefuna was informed that he would be taken home the following day. The next morning, the men set out with Ikemefuna. Okonkwo was one of them. Ikemefuna was made to carry a pot of wine. At sunset they were in the midst of a jungle. Although apprehensive, Ikemefuna was oblivious of any harm because Okonkwo walked right behind him, Okonkwo whom he loved as his own father. He started thinking of his mother and sister, as he had seen them three years ago. He had very vague mental pictures of them. He was not sure if his mother would be alive.

Suddenly a man drew Ikemefuna's attention by clearing his throat and as the child looked back, the man struck him with his matchet which is a kind of sword. As Ikemefuna cried and appealed to Okonkwo for help, Okonkwo himself struck him down with his matchet. This he did lest his fellowmen consider him to be 'weak'. This ends an important section of the novel.

Chapter eight begins with Okonkwo feeling completely disoriented for a couple of days after the killing of Ikemefuna and at his own role in the killing.

Soon his friend Obierika came to invite him as his daughter's suitor was coming to them to settle the bride price. In most African societies, it is customary for the young man to pay a mutually agreed price to his in-laws for asking a girl's hand in marriage. While they discussed the relative merits of their sons, Obierika told Okonkwo that he had not done well by taking part in Ikemefuna's killing and the goddess of earth might punish him for that.



For whom is it well, for whom is it well ?

The chapter then describes in detail the custom of settling the bride price and feasting after it has been settled. This is done when the bride price for Akueka, Obierika's daughter is being settled. In the concluding conversation it is hinted that some white men had been seen passing through their area, particularly a man named Amadi. This appears to be the first contact the area has had with the people with the 'white skin'.

Chapter nine begins with his favourite daughter Ezinma suddenly becoming ill with shiverings. Okonkwo goes out looking for some medicinal leaves, grass and barks of trees, which could cure this disease, which he calls *iba*, a kind of fever. While he is out looking for those herbs, the author gives us a background about the life of Ezinma and her mother Ekwefi. Ekwefi had lost nine of her children in infancy. When a woman loses her children one after another, the *Ibo* people believe that it is the same wicked child entering its mother's womb again and again. The cure lies in the hands of a medicine man. A medicine man is like an astrologer or a Tantrik in Indian societies who finds a solution to a problem through various ritualistic practices. One such medicine man named Okogbue had cured the mother of the curse and the next child, Ezinma, had survived.

Soon Okonkwo returned with the required leaves and barks which were boiled to a certain specified limit and Ezinma was given a steam bath which cured her of her shiverings and fever.

The next chapter tells us of the details of another ritual among the *Ibo*. It shows how disputes between the people of nine villages of Umuofia are resolved at the hands of a group of nine adjudicators who represent the spirits of the ancestors collectively and who are called *egwugwu*. The adjudicators are from amongst the people and are transformed into *egwugwu* after performing some rituals including the wearing of masks.

Chapter eleven describes yet another ritual – that of the *Agbala*, or the Oracle. Chielo a woman from the village who was *Agbala's* priestess came out on this particular night and went to Okonkwo's hut saying that the Oracle wanted to see Ezinma, his daughter. She put the child on her back and disappeared in the dark of the night screaming the name of *Agbala*. *Ekwefi*, Ezinma's mother was scared to death about the well being of her child and she followed her till the mouth of the cave of the Oracle into which the *Agbala's* priestess had disappeared with the child. *Ekwefi* waited outside the cave and was pleasantly surprised to find Okonkwo coming there with his sword and both of them waited outside till Chielo came out of the cave.

In chapter twelve which opens on the day after Ezinma's visit to the Oracle, Obierika, Okonkwo's friend is celebrating his daughter's *Uri* which is a kind of engagement ceremony. Okonkwo had been invited to Obierika's compound along with his entire family. A lot of cooking for the feast was going on. Soon the in-laws arrived with fifty pots full of palm-wine. The ceremony ended with a lot of eating, drinking and singing and also a dance by the bride.

Chapter thirteen which is the last in Part One, begins with the news that Ezeudu, a village elder universally respected had died. Since his was a warrior's funeral, guns were fired as the time for the burial drew near. Suddenly an accident happened: the dead man's sixteen year old son was killed by Okonkwo's gun going off accidentally.

Ibo people believed that manslaughter was a major crime against the earth goddess and the man had to flee from his home and clan along with his entire family. Since Okonkwo's crime was inadvertent, he could return after seven years of exile. Okonkwo fled to Mbanta, a nearby village of his mother's kinsmen. His house was then ransacked and burnt as a part of the ritual of revenge for the earth goddess.

We find Obierika musing over the fate of people suffering for doing something inadvertently. He recalled his having thrown away his twin newborn children for such was the custom in their society.

19.2.2 Part Two

Chapter fourteen which is the first chapter in Part Two, opens with Okonkwo beginning his life afresh in Mbanta where he is given a piece of land for building his compound and another two or three pieces of land for farming. His uncle and his cousins helped him by giving him seed-yams.

Okonkwo worked hard but his heart was not in it. He had hoped to become one of the lords of the clan and had worked towards it but this accident had shattered his hopes and had forced him to flee from his clan. His *chi* or personal god had not destined him to do great things. However, Okonkwo's mother's brother – Uchendu – comforted him and asked him to realise that his was not the greatest suffering in the world.

Chapter fifteen opens with Obierika, Okonkwo's friend paying him a visit at the end of the second year of his exile. He brought the shocking news that the village of

Abame nearby had been wiped out by white men and some of the survivors had fled into Umuofia. He then went on to narrate how a white man on an iron horse had come to Abame. Scared, the villagers of Abame had killed him and had tied his iron horse to a tree. In retaliation, three white men and some Africans who had come after many days had fired and killed most villagers on a market day. While they are all disturbed at the news, Obierika also told them that he had heard stories about the white men making very powerful guns and taking away Africans and selling them as slaves across the seas.

About two years passed and the white missionaries were already in Umuofia. This was the news which Obierika brought on his next visit about which we read in chapter sixteen. There was already a church and also a few converts although these converts were not important people. Obierika remarked that Okonkwo's son Nwoye had been seen with the missionaries in Umuofia.

Soon we discover that a white man accompanied by some Africans had come to Mbanta and had persuaded the villagers to adopt his religion. He had appealed to them stating that the gods they believed in were all 'false gods'. While most villagers had made fun of the white man's views about their gods, there was one amongst them who had appeared to be impressed – not so much by the lecture of the white man as by the singing which had followed the lecture. That young man was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. While listening to the hymns, Nwoye had recalled the harrowing experience of Ikemefuna's killing as well as the throwing away of twin new-borns both of which were a part of the African's religion. The hymns had given him a strange sense of relief and peace.

Chapter seventeen continues with the story of the preaching of the Christian gospel by the missionaries in Mbanta. When they had asked the villagers for a piece of land for building their place of worship, the villagers had given them a piece in the 'evil forest', which was a place where no one lived because it was there that those who had died of dreadful diseases like leprosy and small pox were buried. The people believed that any one inhabiting such a place would himself be dead before long. However, when nothing happened to the missionaries after living there for many days, a whisper started that perhaps the god of the white men was more powerful than that of the Africans. A couple of Africans had also converted to the white man's religion. When Okonkwo discovered that Nwoye too had become a convert, he threatened him as a result of which Nwoye left home and went to work in the missionary school for the converts at Umuofia. This was a big blow to Okonkwo and his male ego but he could do nothing except sulk.

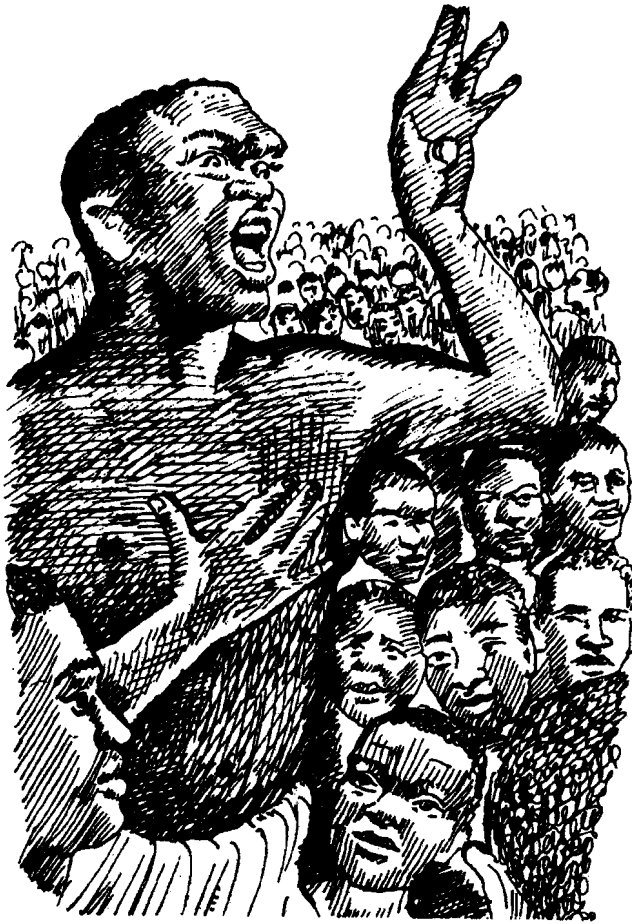
The next chapter opens with the news that the white men had brought not only their religion but also a government. They had built a place of judgement in Umuofia for protecting the converts to the religion of 'Jesu Kristi'. There was also the story that an African had been hanged for killing a missionary. In Mbanta a crisis arose when the converts from the village refused to sit with Osu converts, who were some kind of outcasts. As the missionary Mr. Kiaga questioned such beliefs he and the mission staff as well as the converts clashed with the people.

Chapter nineteen opens with Okonkwo making preparations to leave Mbanta for Umuofia since his seven years of exile were coming to an end. He organised a big thanksgiving feast where after the feasting and expression of gratitude, one of the elders warned them against the impact of the new religion on their children and their lives. 'I fear for you; I fear for the clan;' is the warning he gives and as subsequent events show his words prove to be prophetic.

24.2.3 Part Three

Chapter twenty which is the first of Part Three, opens when Okonkwo has returned to Umuofia. He, however, was a sad man because he knew he had lost his chance of

taking the highest title of the clan and also of leading his fellow men in the war against the new religion. He had been struck a major blow when his son Nwoye had converted to the white man's religion. He had found that the Umuofia he had returned to was a different place with a court of justice having been set up by the white man where a district commissioner judged cases of dispute. There was even a jail where African employees of the white man's government, Kotma, as they were called, beat people mercilessly irrespective of their status in the clan. People were punished for obeying their African customs and rituals.



His return should be marked by his people

While Okonkwo had advocated that they fight back the white man and was confident that they would be able to defeat him, his friend Obierika was not so sure because they had been hopelessly divided. The clan did not act in unison any more since the converted people from the clan sided with the white man. 'He has put a knife on things that held us together and we have fallen apart', Obierika had said to Okonkwo and both had fallen into silence.

Chapter twenty-two shows how the white man had gradually changed the entire life in Umuofia. Besides the religion and the government, there was also a trading store where palm oil and kernels could be sold for money. Umuofia had become rich.

Mr. Brown, the white missionary, had also exercised restraint upon his followers by asking them not to provoke those who had still not converted to Christianity. He had, therefore, come to be respected even by the clan. Clever as he was, he wanted to win them indirectly and not through a frontal attack. So he had a hospital built in Umuofia and also had a school built for the children of the people. He also told them that if their children did not come to the school and learn to read and write, Africans from outside would come and rule them by serving the District Commissioner like the Kotma who had come from Umuru on the banks of River Niger.

Things Fall Apart

Mr. Brown had succeeded in bringing people and their children to his school. Thus church and education went hand in hand in Umuofia and the neighbouring villages. However, Mr. Brown had failed to make a dent in Okonkwo's mind despite the fact that Okonkwo's son Nwoye, now called Isaac, had been sent to a training college for teachers in Umuru. Okonkwo had turned Mr. Brown out of his *obi* when Mr. Brown had come to see him. Soon Mr. Brown had left Umuofia due to bad health. The chapter closes with Okonkwo feeling grieved not only for himself but 'for the clan which he saw breaking up and falling apart'.

The next chapter shows Reverend James Smith, Mr. Brown's successor, condemning his policy of 'compromise and accommodation'. He believed in open confrontation between evil and good, between black and white. He encouraged overzealous converts like Enoch who had once killed and eaten the python whom the villagers considered sacred.

Enoch had unmasked an egwugwu during the annual ceremony in honour of the earth deity. He had 'killed' an ancestral spirit. Next day, the egwugwu from the entire area of nine villages had descended in Umuofia and destroyed the church.



Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold...

Okonkwo felt very happy at these developments. This is how chapter twenty-three begins. But his happiness was short-lived because soon the leaders – six of them – were summoned by the District Commissioner for discussion and were arrested. Okonkwo was one of them. They were ill treated and beaten in the lock-up by the African guards. The village was asked to pay a fine of 250 bags of cowries (small shell used as money in parts of Africa) to save them from hanging.

Chapter twenty-four finds them released since the village had paid the fine. However, the six men were sullen from the humiliation they had suffered while in the lock-up. Okonkwo was seething with anger for revenge. At the next day's meeting the people of Umuofia were horrified to hear a group of messengers come and tell them to stop the meeting since it had been declared illegal by the District Commissioner. Okonkwo was furious and in a fit of anger he drew his machet and beheaded the messenger. There were murmurs among the people, asking: 'Why did he do it'?

The last chapter shows the body of Okonkwo hanging from a tree when the District Commissioner comes to arrest him. Finding himself completely isolated from the villagers, Okonkwo had committed suicide. However, his fellow villagers had refused to even touch his body since it is sinful to touch someone who had taken his own life. In fact, he could not even be buried as per the normal customs and rituals. Thus Okonkwo's tragedy was complete: once an aspirant to the highest title, of the land, he had now died the death of a pariah dog. As his friend Obierika put it to the District Commissioner – ‘That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog...’

The District Commissioner, however, was busy thinking about his book on the *Ibos*. He decided to devote a whole chapter to the story of this man who had killed the messenger and then had committed suicide.

Exercise II

Answer the following questions on the basis of your reading of the text of *Things Fall Apart* and this Unit.

(1) What do the following expressions mean:

(a) Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. (chapter one)

(b) If a child washed his hands he could eat with the kings. (chapter three)

(c) A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing. (chapter four)

(d) Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble. (chapter four)

(e) When a man says yes, his chi says yes. (chapter four)

(2) Why was Okonkwo ashamed of his father Unoka?

(3) Why did Ezeudu advise Okonkwo not to have a hand in the killing of Ikemefuna? Why did Okonkwo not heed his advice?

(4) Who were egwugwu? What was their specific function in Ibo society?

(5) In what way did the Christian missionaries confront the Africans in Mbanta?

(6) What were the consequences of the white man's arrival in Umuofia?

(7) List the major traits of Okonkwo's personality.

19.3 LET US SUM UP

The first part of the novel describes how Okonkwo was able to go up in life through sheer hard work although his father had the reputation of being both physically weak and lazy. It also describes the circumstances under which a boy from one of the neighbouring villages comes to Umuofia and is assigned to stay in Okonkwo's house. It also describes how Ikemefuna was finally killed by the villagers of Umuofia as revenge for one of their own women having been killed by a person from the village to which Ikemefuna belonged.

The closing chapter of Part One also describes how Okonkwo had to flee from his village and clan because he had killed a boy from the village accidentally.

Part two of the novel describes primarily Okonkwo's life in Mbanta during his exile for seven years. It also describes how during those years the white man – first the missionaries and later the administrators – had come and entrenched themselves in Umuofia and its neighbouring villages.

The last part of the novel describes how Okonkwo, disappointed at his not being able to earn the highest title of the land through a quirk of fate, decides to show his personal valour and courage by confronting the white man's administration. Finding himself isolated after he has killed the white man's messenger, Okonkwo commits suicide. In the *Ibo* code of ethics, committing suicide is so abominable a sin that he cannot get even a proper burial. Thus ends the tragic tale of an individual who at one time was the most respected individual in Umuofia but who had been defeated by his temperament as well the changed circumstances. So was the *Ibo* society which too like Okonkwo had grown too rigid to recognise the need for adapting itself to changing circumstances. Both of them are swept away by the onslaught of a more powerful and cunning - the European - way of life.

19.3 LET US SUM UP

- (a) Proverbs facilitate expression; they help us express things better and more effectively.
- (b) If one works hard and prepares himself/herself well, one can achieve the highest goal in life.
- (c) Unusual events arise because of significant reasons.
- (d) One should be grateful for good-luck.
- (e) God helps those who help themselves
- (2) Because his father was a weak and lazy person and in the *Ibo* society only physically strong and hardworking people were respected
- (3) Because Okonkwo had brought up the boy for three years and Ikemefuna looked up to Okonkwo as his own father. As per *Ibo* customs, this would be a crime against the earth goddess. Okonkwo did not heed the advice of his friend Ezeudu because he was afraid that others would consider him a coward.
- 4) Egwugwu were the adjudicators representing the spirits of the ancestors of the clan. They were members of the clan itself in whom the spirits of the ancestors were - believed to have entered after the performing of certain rituals. Their specific task was to dispense justice in cases of dispute among the members of the clan.
- 5) The Christian missionaries successfully challenged the superstitious beliefs of the *Ibo* traditional society thereby claiming a superiority for their own religion – Christianity – over the traditional religious practices of the *Ibos*.
- 6) The society was divided among the converts and the non-converts. Once the clan stopped speaking in a unified voice, the white man took over the function of the administrator of the society. The white man also introduced trade by way of monetary incentive, thereby further dividing the hitherto homogeneous *Ibo* society
- 7) Okonkwo was physically very strong and hardworking. However, he was impatient and short tempered, often resorting to physical violence to assert his superiority. He was very conscious of his public image and did everything to guard it. Okonkwo was very rigid in his views and outlook and refused to adjust himself to the changed situations. While imposing his will and views upon others, he refused to grant them the freedom to have an independent opinion or outlook. As a result of this inflexibility in his character, Okonkwo failed to view and assess a situation realistically and this proved to be the primary reason of his isolation from fellow Umuofians and his tragic end.

UNIT 20 SPECIFIC FEATURES OF *THINGS FALL APART*

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Simplicity
- 20.3 Universality
- 20.4 Man- Woman Relationships
- 20.5 Folk Material : Proverbs, Sayings and Metaphors
- 20.6 Language and Style
- 20.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

20.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this Unit is to highlight those specific aspects of *Things Fall Apart* which have made it a favourite text of not only readers all over the world, but also of critics, translators and teachers of literature.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's first novel - *Things Fall Apart* – remains the most favourite of his novel with his readers and critics, despite the fact that he himself considers *Arrow of God* as his most powerful work -his *tour de force*. Since the publication of *Things Fall Apart* more than thirty years ago, **Achebe** has written four more novels, a book of short stories, a couple of story books for children, a book of poems and a book of essays. And yet his reputation as a writer rests most firmly on *Things Fall Apart*. It is one of the most widely discussed novels of our times. If one were to collect all the critical material published on *Things Fall Apart*, it would run into scores of volumes if not more, there would perhaps be hardly any expression from the book which would have been left without a comment. Such has been the impact of *Things Fall Apart* on the modern literary scene.

Things Fall Apart derives its mesmerising strength from a number of specific features which make it an ideal text. **Achebe**'s sensitive perception of an ancient society at the crossroads of history, his artful mastery of telling a complex story quite simply and his effective blending of the techniques of oral narration with written discourse is the strength of the novel and makes it what it is a modern classic. Some of these features are: simplicity, universality and the language as well as the style of narration. Let us examine each one of these in detail.

20.2 SIMPLICITY

Things Fall Apart appears to be, on the face of it, a simple tale of the rise and fall of an obstinate man, Okonkwo, who was also impatient and short-tempered. His insistence on participating in the killing of Ikemefuna whom he had treated like his own son for a number of years is an example of Okonkwo's obstinacy. Again, the author tells us in the very first chapter about Okonkwo's impatience with people who

were physically weak. It is because of this that Okonkwo had no patience with his own father. A typical example of Okonkwo's short-temper is his beating his wife during the week of peace which the people of Umuofia observed immediately before the beginning of the sowing season for yams.

The novel appears to have no complexity by way of either depth of character portrayal or plot construction. These virtues have been considered essential for any novel of significance and have been extolled by almost all western critics of the novel as an art form, ranging from **Henry James** to **E M Forster**. It appears that the character of Okonkwo is portrayed by the author with the help of a few incidents like winning a wrestling match, killing Ikemefuna, beating one of his wives, killing his friend Obierika's son accidentally and his beheading the white man's messenger. There is no attempt, it is suggested, to delve deep into the psyche of Okonkwo to find out if there are any hesitations and dilemmas, hopes and fears or regrets and elations about some of these acts of his. In short, the author appears to have provided no psychological dimension to the character of Okonkwo. As for the other characters, they are simply peripheral and they have not been provided with any major roles even in events and happenings. Finally, it has been suggested that at the level of style, *Things Fall Apart* is primarily told in simple structures and with very few words.

However, this quality of simplicity is quite deceptive in the case of *Things Fall Apart*. It is not, as has been made out to be, the story of the rise and fall of a single individual namely Okonkwo. It is, in fact, the story of a whole clan, a whole society, a whole way of life which met its tragic end at the crossroads of history. The *Ibo* society on the eve of colonial takeover is 'the real hero' of **Achebe's** *Things Fall Apart*. It is because of this that **Achebe** has included a number of incidents which have no direct bearing as Okonkwo's character but which are very significant from the point of view of depicting the *Ibo* society at Umuofia.

We must, therefore, look for the depth of character in this 'real hero' rather than in Okonkwo or Obierika and others, although this is not to say that there is no depth of character in Okonkwo. The complex society that the pre-European *Ibo* world was, it is presented in its awe-inspiring glory through details of its various customs and rituals, its daily chores, its travails and jublations, through its mournings and celebrations. In the first chapter itself we are told about the society and its norms – respecting those who have physical strength and pitying those who had none. The contrast between Okonkwo and his father Unoka has been presented to highlight the difference in character. While the father Unoka is lazy and physically weak, the son Okonkwo is strong both physically and mentally. The mental strength of Okonkwo is brought to light through an incident in which occurs the death of a woman of Umuofia at the hands of residents of Mbaino and the demand for a virgin and a young boy as compensation – the latter for killing – which has been described in details in the second chapter. This incident highlights yet another aspect of the *Ibo* society namely, blood for blood. It also highlights the plight of ordinary people who were in total control of their leaders. Thus Ikemefuna has to pay with his life for a crime in which he had no hand. As the novel progresses we see **Achebe** describe in detail the manner in which justice was publicly dispensed with the help of egwugwu masks, how fertility gods were propitiated by the observance of a peace week before the sowing season and how a man had to pay a very heavy price even for accidentally killing someone. **Achebe** gives us enough evidence of various other customs and rituals connected with marriage and death. (All these details have been provided by **Achebe** for that matter – was not primitive but quite complex. It is this society rather than individuals like Okonkwo who are the focus of **Achebe's** study in *Things Fall Apart*.)

As for individual characters like Okonkwo, we have already listed in the last Unit the traits of his personality. He is strong, he is hardworking, he is impatient, he is short tempered, he is 'correct' in behaviour, he is conscious of his public image and he is rigid in his views. This makes him quite a complex character. However, **Achebe** follows a different technique in character building. Instead of dilating on the details

of each of these qualities, **Achebe** reveals them through brief references to certain episodes. *Things Fall Apart* has, therefore, a deceptive aura of simplicity around itself, only half revealing a very complex text within, which is a major strength of the novel.

20.3 UNIVERSALITY

Achebe has stated in one of his essays called *Novelist as Teacher* (included in *Morning Yet On Creation Day*) that one of the primary purpose of his novels is to educate his readers about the glory of their past, pre-colonial life. This he does with the intention of 'correcting' the distortions which were deliberately introduced by Europeans into the history and culture of Africa in order to create an inferiority complex in the minds of Africans. It is with this aim in mind that they went on repeating the statement that Africa had no culture, no history, no past. They justified their colonisation of Africa by stating that they had come to Africa to 'civilise' them. The frequent use of the expression 'white man's burden' for black Africans shows the same frame of mind of whiteman's superiority as well as his philanthropic spirit. Obviously, this statement about the African being without any history, or culture is blatantly false. In fact, this was a strategy to perpetuate their hold over the minds of the colonised people. In this respect, *Things Fall Apart* is a text about a specific society – the *Ibo* people – with a specific aim of restoring their self-confidence.

However, *Things Fall Apart* is more than that. It is, at another level, the story of individuals or societies who/which grow rigid in their outlook with the passage of time and refuse to recognise changes in their circumstances, let alone coming to terms with them. This in turn puts them out of tune with contemporary reality, leading to their tragic end. This is true not only of Okonkwo and the *Ibo* society of the late nineteenth century but also of any other society at any other time. This is, for instance, equally true of ancient Chinese, Indian, Greek and Egyptian civilisations. In this sense the novel is about the human predicament itself and is universal in character. It is not that **Achebe** is unaware of this dimension of his novel or that this universal element has 'crept' into the text unintentionally. Let us not forget that when it came to choosing a title for his book, **Achebe** chose it from a poem – *The Second Coming* – by the famous Irish poet **William Butler Yeats** which talks about the cyclic movement of human history in terms of order and anarchy. This shows quite clearly that the idea of creating a text that, although beginning with the story of a specific people but expanding to encompass mankind at large was very much present in **Achebe's** mind from the very beginning.

20.4 MAN- WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Achebe portrays man-woman relationship in *Ibo* society primarily through Okonkwo and his three wives. In the very beginning of the novel, we are told that Okonkwo

...ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did the little children. (p.9)

We get a proof of this when Okonkwo befores Nwoye's mother:

"Do what you are told, woman", Okonkwo thundered and stammered. And so, Nwoye's mother took Ikemefuna to her hut and asked no more questions. (pp.10-11)

This behaviour on the part of Okonkwo was because Okonkwo as a member of the *Ibo* social organisation, believed that –

No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and children (and especially his women) he was not really a man. (p.37)

Okonkwo is portrayed by Achebe to be a man of short temper but he is particularly harsh with women. There is an episode in the novel in which he is preparing some herbal medicine for his daughter Ezinma. Ekwefi, his wife and Ezinma's mother brings him a pot full of water and pours some on the herbs and asks Okonkwo, "Is that enough?" He shouts at her... "A little more...I said a *little*. Are you deaf?" (p.60) Apparently, the shouting is absolutely unnecessary but is in keeping with Okonkwo's belief about 'ruling his household with a heavy hand'.

In fact, Okonkwo even resorts to beating his wives. He beats Ojiugo, his youngest wife, during the Peace Week for failing to cook his afternoon meal on time. On another occasion, his second wife is beaten for killing a banana tree. This practice of wife beating, however seems to be common among the Ibos.

While we may draw a conclusion from the above that man is the undisputed boss in the family, it may not be wholly correct to deduce that women were forced to submit completely to men in the *Ibo* societal organisation. For instance, women in most ethnic groups in Nigeria, including among the *Ibo*, did enjoy economic independence. Again, educated urban women could not be dominated as completely as their uneducated rural sisters.

20.5 FOLK MATERIAL: PROVERBS, SAYINGS AND METAPHORS

One of the unique strengths of *Things Fall Apart* is the use of folk material employed by Achebe in his narration. As stated elsewhere in this block, *Ibos* were renowned for the extensive use of proverbs, sayings and metaphors in the communication. In fact communication had been fine tuned to be an art and there were contests held to choose outstanding communicators. In fact, the art of conversation itself is described with the help of the following proverb:

Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.

Achebe builds this into his own narrative by weaving these folk elements into the tapestry of his narrative.

Among the *Ibo*, proverbs are used to describe a person's interaction and relations with others, focusing especially on his/her status or place in the society. Among them, for instance, they had a saying—if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings—meaning thereby that one could raise one's social status by one's behaviour. Okonkwo is shown to be such a person. Another proverb that fits Okonkwo is – *A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness*. Okonkwo's potential is recognised by his fellow villagers because you can tell a ripe corn by its look. While his father could not raise a loan because lending him was *full like pouring grains of corn into a bag of holes*, Okonkwo had no such difficulty when he went to borrow yams for planting.

When showing temper to an untitled person, Okonkwo is reminded by an Elder that *those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble*.

In another situation when Okonkwo is being dissuaded from participating in the killing of Ikemefuna, especially because he called him 'father', Okonkwo use the following saying to allay the fears of those who were apprehensive that retributive wrath would be on him:

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A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm. The implication is that it was only his societal obligations that he was fulfilling by participating in the killing of Ikemefuna.

Okonkwo is disappointed in his son Nwoye who does not show signs of aggressively pursuing the goals of life as he himself had done. He tells his friend Obierika, *A chick that can grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches.*

When the bride price for Akueke, Obierika's daughter is being settled, the suitor's brother uses the following expression:

As the dog says, 'If it fall down for you and you fall down for me, it's play.

The implication is that there should be a happy compromise in all such matters.

Given below are more such proverbs and sayings that **Achebe** uses in *Things Fall Apart*.

A child cannot pay for its mother's milk.

Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch. If one says no to the other, let his wing break.

An animal rubs its aching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him.

A toad does not run in the day time for nothing.

Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching.

I have learnt that a man who makes troubles for other is also making trouble for himself, said the Tortoise.

The clan is like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another.

Achebe makes clear that these proverbs and sayings are a part of the inherited wisdom of the *Ibhos*, by preceding the proverbs of sayings by words such as "As our elders say", "as the saying goes among our people", etc.

To drive home the full import of the sayings, **Achebe** translates them directly in a very simple language. This way he is able to convey the linguistic prowess of his people. This is also one of the most powerful aspects of the narrative strategies employed in *Things Fall Apart*.

20.6 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

One of the strongest virtues of *Things Fall Apart* is its style and the use that **Achebe** makes of the English language to weave this apparently simple but highly sophisticated story of the passing away of a way of life.

The language is very simple, and direct and so is the syntax. This is very much in keeping with firstly, the art of oral narration which was a significant feature of the society **Achebe** describes in the novel and secondly, with the 'educational' role that **Achebe** assigns to his novel.

However, as in the case of the story and the characterisation this simplicity at the level of style is also very deceptive. Look at the ease with which **Achebe** builds a large number of *Ibo* words into his English language structures. While it is true that **Achebe** provides a glossary of such terms at the end of the novel, it is also true that in most cases a reader is able to 'guess' the meaning from the context. Let me take a couple of examples. In chapter one, the following sentence occurs:

He could hear in his minds ear the blood-stirring and intricate rhythms of the ekwe and the udu and the ogene and he could hear his own flute weaving in and out of them decorating them with colourful and plaintive tune.

It is not difficult to guess as to what the *Ibo* words *ekwe*, *ude* and *ogene* stand for. They must be musical instruments. The ease with which we are able to make the guess is not only because of their being juxtaposed with words like 'rhythm' and 'tune' but also because of the naming of one of the instruments – flute - in English. Let us take another example, this time from chapter twelve:

On the following morning the entire neighbourhood wore a festive air because Okonkwo's friend, Obierika, was celebrating his daughter's uri. It was the day on which her suitor (having already paid the great part of her bride-price) would bring palm-wine not only for her parents and immediate relatives but to the wide and extensive kinsmen called umunna.

We can immediately 'guess' that *uri* must refer to some kind of an engagement ceremony. However, as stated above in 25.5, the most important feature of **Achebe's** style in *Things Fall Apart* is the use of *Ibo* proverbs. Even a cursory reading of the novel draws one's attention to a very extensive use of proverbs by **Achebe** as an important stylistic device. First, their use lends authenticity to **Achebe's** portrayal of the *Ibo* society in which not only is the use of proverbs in day-to-day life quite popular but it is highly prized as well. Those who can use these proverbs frequently during a conversation are considered to be better speakers. This is also true of the *Yoruba* people in Nigeria itself and the *Ashante* people in Ghana. Secondly the use of proverbs fits in well with **Achebe's** didactic function that he assigns to every novelist. Every proverb, as we know, has some kind of amoral or lesson to draw from. Finally, proverbs lend an element of precision to **Achebe's** style of writing. What may need paragraphs of elaboration may be put more easily and effectively through the use of a proverb. Here is an – example: instead of saying that to coexist is a virtue and it is advisable to do so without coming into conflict with another person, an *Ibo* would simply say – 'let the kite perch and let the eagle perch', or, signifying the importance of appropriate behaviour, the *Ibos* say. 'If a child washed his hands, he could eat with the kings.' Again, *Ibos* believe that circumstances are favourable to only those who try to do things themselves and this they say in the following manner: when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes. *Chi* incidentally is the personal god or spirit assigned to every *Ibo* individual at the time of his/her birth and is supposed to stay at his/her shoulder all the time.

Thus **Achebe's** use of *Ibo* words, *Ibo* proverbs translated into English and the use of simple structures that are a characteristic of the oral style of narration make up the style of *Things Fall Apart*. Add to this his frequent use of irony and you have quite a formidable style of writing.

Exercise I

(1) *Things Fall Apart* is both specific and universal in character. How?

- (2) Is it correct to call the style of *Things fall Apart* simple? If not, why?

20.7 LET US SUM UP

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been a favourite book with reader, critics and translators all over the world. It is sometimes suggested that the book is a very simplistic account of the life of a character that lacks depth of complexity. This impression of *Things all Apart* is erroneous. The novel, in fact, is quite a complex portrayal of a society that is in it self quite complex. In fact, this society-the *Ibos* towards the end of nineteenth century – is the 'real subject' of the book.

Achebe also builds into his analysis of the society a universal element that sets the book free from the fetters of time and place. The novel is about the human predicament itself. This makes *Things Fall Apart* specific and universal at the same time.

It is also suggested that the style and the language of the book, like its structure and characterisation, is very simple. Once again, this is not true. **Achebe** has borrowed a large part of his technique from the oral art of narration which is quite common among the *Ibos* and which gives the impression of being simple but is not really so. **Achebe** makes use of *Ibo* words quite frequently, weaving them skilfully into his structures of English. Again, extensive use of proverbs which he translates from *Ibo* – sometimes literally, sometimes after modifying them significantly – also lends complexity to his style and the use of language.

It is because of these specific features that *Things Fall Apart* is considered a modern classic.

20.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

- (1) *Things Fall Apart* is both specific and universal because while dealing with specific characters in a specific society at a specific point of time. Achebe invokes the very predicament of man. The novel thus transcends the barriers of time and place.
- (2) The style of *Things Fall Apart* is simple in appearance only. It is so because Achebe adopts the style of oral narration. However, on closer scrutiny we find many features of style and uses of language, which make it quite sophisticated. The use of *Ibo* words and proverbs is the most prominent of these features.

SUGGESTED READING

Specific Features of
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UNIT 21 INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITER AND THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Beginnings of Indian Writing in English
 - 21.2.1 Growth of English
 - 21.2.2 Beginnings of Indian English Poetry
 - 21.2.3 Beginnings of the Indian English Novel
- 21.3 Macaulay's Minute on Education, 1835
- 21.4 Language and Social Change
- 21.5 The Indian Novel in English
 - 21.5.1 Mulk Raj Anand
 - 21.5.2 Raja Rao
 - 21.5.3 R K Narayan
 - 21.5.4 The Contributions of These Three Writers
- 21.6 Women Writers of the Mid-Twentieth Century
 - 21.6.1 Shanta Rama Rao
 - 21.6.2 Kamala Markandaya
 - 21.6.3 Nayantara Sahgal
 - 21.6.4 Anita Desai
- 21.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

In this first unit of the block on **Attia Hosain's** novel *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961), we shall introduce you to a short biography of the writer, the education policy adopted by the British Government and its impact on writing, a brief history of the beginnings of Indian writing in English, a brief account of the major writers of the 1930s and the contribution of women writers who preceded **Attia Hosain** or were her contemporaries.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

Attia Hosain was born in 1913 in a family of *taluqdars*. *Taluqdars* had a higher status than landlords or *zamindars*. While a landlord or *zamindar* was located in a village, a *taluqdar* had control over several villages for the purposes of collecting revenue. A *taluqdar* also had magisterial power and the right to an audience with royalty. **Attia Hosain** was the fourth child in a family of five children. Her youngest brother was fourteen years her junior. She was the youngest of three sisters. Her parents were both educated. Her father, **Shahid Husain Kidwai**, hailed from Gadia (Dist Barabanki) in Uttar Pradesh and had been educated at Cambridge. Her mother **Nisar** knew both Arabic and Persian and came from a highly intellectual and religious family.

Education: The family was an aristocratic and a traditional one, yet **Attia Hosain** received an English education, first at *La Martiniere* and later at *Isabella Thorburn College*. She became the first woman graduate from among the *taluqdar* families.

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Later, after her marriage, she first moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) and then to London where her husband was posted. At the time of the country's partition they were in London and decided to retain British citizenship rather than seek either Pakistani or Indian nationality.

In London, she worked for the Urdu programme of the British Broadcasting Service (BBC) and also published her two books - *Phoenix Fled* (1953), which is a collection of short stories, and the novel *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961). During the years she made frequent visits home. **Attia Hosain** died in January 1998. In the next section we shall examine the beginnings of Indian Writing in English.

Exercise 1

1. Name the two works by **Attia Hosain**
.....
2. In about 30 words describe the difference between *taluqdars* and *zamindars*.
.....
.....
.....

21.2 BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

The history of Indian writing in English is both brief and varied. It is marked in its early years by a strong need to communicate. Thus it is either political prose addressed to the colonial rulers, or a socio-cultural projection for the foreigner, or translations from Indian Languages. Amongst the early writers are men like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**. This was in the 1830s. Later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, writers like **Michael Madhusudan Dutt**, **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee**, **Toru Dutt**, **Romesh Chandra Dutt**, **Pundita Ramabai**, **Swami Vivekananda**, **Rabindranath Tagore** also wrote in English specially when they wrote on culture, education, history and social reform.

21.2.1 Growth of English

Three things that helped the growth and propagation of English as a language of communication and writing were (a) English as the language of education (b) the printing press at Serampore, (c) and the setting up of journals and newspapers. During the 1830s Hindu College was one centre from where several of the ideological debates ensued.

21.2.2 Beginnings of Indian English Poetry

Poetry and prose came to be written at about the same time. One of the earliest poets is **Henry Derozio** who was a younger contemporary of **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**. **Derozio** was a teacher in Hindu College and died very young. Many writers (of the nineteenth century) were bilingual. They wrote both in English and in Bengali or Marathi or some other Indian language.

21.2.3 Beginnings of the Indian English Novel

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is believed to be the first novel in English. **Toru Dutt** also wrote two novels, one of them *Bianca* was in English and the other *Mademoiselle d'Arvors* was in French. **Krupabai Sathianadhan** also wrote two novels in English. These were *Saguna* (1892) and *Kamala* (1894). There were several other writers who wrote novels in English. Two

worthy of mention are **R C Dutt** who wrote historical novels and **Chandu Menon** who wrote *Indulekha*. But the Indian novel matured only in the twentieth century, in the 1930s to be precise. The beginnings of Indian Writing in English cannot really be understood till we look at the reason behind the introduction of English as the medium of instruction in India. This was the result of **Lord Macaulay's** *Minute* on Education, 1835. Let us look briefly at the implications of this *Minute* next.

Exercise 2

1. List the three factors that helped the growth and propagation of English in India.
.....
.....
.....
.....
2. List the names of the early Indian writers in English.
.....

21.3 MACAULAY'S *MINUTE ON EDUCATION*, 1835

English was chosen as the medium of instruction in India after **Macaulay** presented his *Minute on Education* in 1835. At that time, a debate was on between the Orientalists, who wanted local cultures to be reflected in the educational policy, and the anglicists, who wanted education to be based on its utility for employment. **Thomas Babington Macaulay** was the Law member of the Governor General's Council. In February 1835, he placed a *Minute* before the Council in his capacity as Presiding officer of the Committee for Public Instruction.

In the Council, **Macaulay** stressed the linkages between language, employment and progress. **Macaulay's** policy was guided by Britain's political needs and was aimed at eliminating the possibility of conflict and political unrest. Language was a major channel of controlling and influencing ideas. **Macaulay's** policy had a long-term effect on Indian society and intellectual life.

Given below are some extracts from the *Minute* that consists of nearly 5,000 words and 32 paragraphs.

Para: 10:

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic – But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit texts I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature of Indian and Arabia.

Para 30:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in moral, and in class....

In the next section we shall look at the socio-economic and socio-political changes that were brought about as a result of English being the medium of instruction, that eventually became the bedrock of the freedom struggle.

Exercise 3

1. Write on the importance of the *Minute on Education* in about 50 words.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

21.4 LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

With English being chosen as the medium of instruction, a double-edged movement for change was initiated. One, English education and the propagation of the language gave a new spur to social change. Several movements for social and religious reform like the **Brahmo Samaj** and **Arya Samaj** gained momentum. Second, it opened out new avenues both for employment and ideas.

English as the language of education also introduced new literary influences. A whole generation of intellectuals in the mid-nineteenth century grew up on the poetry of **Byron** and the ideas of **Thomas Paine**. Towards the last two decades of the century, religious revivalism began to grow, in an effort to create cultural pride and project cultural identities. The freedom struggle also gathered momentum during this period. This is reflected in the literary work of this period in the different Indian languages. **Premchand's** short stories and novels in Hindi and Urdu, **Rabindranath Tagore's** in Bengali belong to the early decades of the twentieth century though **Tagore's** early work began to appear at the close of the nineteenth century.

Let us look at the Indian novel in English in some detail next as it will help us to provide a social context to the novel under study- *Sunlight On A Broken Column*.

Exercise 4

1. Name 2 reform movements of the 19th century.
.....
.....
2. When did Premchand and Tagore write? Which languages did they write in?
.....
.....
.....

21.5 THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

As already mentioned, the novel in English came into its own in the 1930s when three different writers from different parts of India, and two of them educated abroad, began to write in English. These three writers were **Mulk Raj Anand** whose first novel *Untouchable* (1935), **Raja Rao** whose, first novel *Kanthapura* (1938), and **R K Narayan** whose *Swami and Friends* (1935) all appeared in the thirties. They are often referred to as the 'Big Three'. You should try and read their novels. These novels are easily available in bookstalls all over the country or even in Public Libraries.

21.5.1 Mulk Raj Anand

Anand has strong Marxist leanings. Protest is one of his main themes and he normally takes up rural life. His novels are concerned with social injustice, caste and class problems and the exploitation indulged in by the capitalists whether it is as contractors, plantation owners or upper castes. *Untouchable* (1935) is the story of Bakha, a young sweeper boy and his sensitiveness to social treatment. Several possible solutions are offered for the caste problem: Gandhian humanism, religious conversion and technology.

21.5.2 Raja Rao

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is a masterpiece. It is the story of Murthy who is the Little Gandhi of the village. The story is narrated through the recollection of an old woman, who describes the manner in which the village participates in the freedom struggle, the way in which the women practice *satyagraha* and how during the process social taboos related to gender where learning and education are concerned are violated. They are motivated partly through conviction and partly through the use of their own cultural modes for communicating ideas.

Raja Rao has gone on to write several other novels. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is a well-known novel. **Rao's** Preface to *Kanthapura* should be read. Below are given a couple of extracts for your perusal. Referring to the writing of his novel *Kanthapura*, he writes:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own (English) is the language of our intellectual make-up ... but not of our emotional make-up. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.....

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly and when we move, we move quickly Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.

21.5.3 R K Narayan

R K Narayan's major contribution has been to the comic vision. His first novel, *Swami and Friends* (1935) is about a ten year old boy who is naturally curious, mischievous, interested in games and always in search of reasons to avoid homework. His encounters with the adult world are studies in human psychology. **Narayan** creates an imaginary locale - *Malgudi* – that has been immortalised as a setting for many of his later novels.

21.5.4 The Contribution of these Three Writers

Mulk Raj Anand consciously introduced the hero-anti-hero and graphic descriptions of the life of poverty and struggle. The novel for him, was, a 'weapon of humanism' and protests a 'source of renewal' for the human person. At another level the eternal conflict between good and evil held a similar possibility of being turned into a subject matter of the new realistic novel. **R K Narayan** worked with mythical and oral structures in his novels often taking up contemporary issues like unemployment, the influence of western culture, family planning, Gandhian ideals, the urge for romance and the urban-rural encounter.

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Raja Rao carried on this engagement with Indian philosophy and culture, his novels adapting them to the modern consciousness. In the process he took up family relationships, cultural conflicts and the complexity of the individual consciousness.

Having studied the contributions of the 'Big Three' as they are called, let us now take a look at the women writers of the mid-twentieth century. Writers like **Shanta Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal** and **Anita Desai** who were either **Attia Hosain's** predecessors or her contemporaries.

Exercise 5

1. Who are the writers known as the Big Three?

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2. List the title of their novels published in 1930s?

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3. Write a short note on their contribution.

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21.6 WOMEN WRITERS OF THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

When **Attia Hosain** appeared on the literary scene, there were already several women writers. Main among them were **Santha Rama Rau**, whose early work appeared in the 40s, **Kamala Markandaya** whose first novel *Nectar In A Sieve* came out in 1954, **Nayantara Sahgal** followed with *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) and *A Time To Be Happy* (1958) and **Anita Desai's** first novel *Cry, the Peacock* appeared in 1963. Each one of these writers added a new dimension to the novel.

21.6.1 Shanta Rama Rau

Rau has mainly written travelogues but her novel *Remember the House* (1956) is an autobiographical one and expresses the cultural conflict and the need for a woman's freedom. She has also written a *Memoir – A Princess Remembers* with **Maharani Gayatri Devi**, on the Maharani herself who is the widow of **Maharaja Man Singh** of Jaipur.

21.6.2 Kamala Markandaya

Kamala Markandaya, has written extensively on the encounters between the East and the West and on the different roles of women. Her fiction is largely about the effects of the processes of modernisation and urbanisation. In her successive novels, she has written about the nationalist movement, poverty and human relationships.

Her other works include *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possessions* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), and *Two Virgins* (1973).

21.6.3 Nayantara Sahgal

It is with the work of **Nayantara Sahgal** that the 'new woman' is firmly installed. Her earlier work is autobiographical and is also deeply infused with political history. Read in a sequence her novels are about growing up, choices that women have to make, marriage, family life and relationships. Her later novels take up a close and critical look at India's past, the freedom struggle and India's place in the international scene in this capitalist world.

Her works include *A Time To Be Happy* (1958), *This Time Of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day In Shadow* (1971), *A Situation In New Delhi* (1977), *Rich Like Us* (1985) and *Plans For Departure* (1986).

21.6.3 Anita Desai

Anita Desai who is a younger contemporary in this foursome, adds a new psychological depth to her characters as in novel after novel she works on personal relationships, disappointments and frustrations. Her early work is about characters that are introverts by nature, of their loneliness and inability to fit into traditional roles.

Her works include novels such as *Bye- Bye Black Bird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire On The Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light Of Day* (1980), *Voices In The City* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1989) to name but a few.

Exercise 6

1. Give a brief account of the women writers of the mid-twentieth century in about 100 words or so.

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21.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit being the introductory unit to the Block on **Attia Hosain's** *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961), has highlighted the debate between the Anglicists and the Orientalists on the introduction of English in India. It has traced briefly the beginnings of Indian English Poetry and the Indian English Novel. The unit has also identified the major writers of the Indian English novel and offered comments on the manner in which English has been not only adopted but also adapted by the Indian English writers. The unit also gives an account of the leading women writers of the mid twentieth century.

21.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. *Phoenix Fled* and *Sunlight On A Broken Column*
2. *Taluqdars* had several villages under their authority for purposes of revenue. They also had magisterial power and could ask for an audience with the British royalty.

Exercise 2

1. The printing press at Serampore, English as the medium of education and the publishing of journals and newspapers
2. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Toru Dutt, Henry Derozio, Pundita Ramabai, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore.

Exercise 3

1. Macaulay clinched the argument in favour of the Anglicists and the Minute was instrumental (i) in making English the medium of education and (ii) in sidelining the value of Indian literature.

Exercise 4

1. Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj
2. Tagore started writing toward the end of the nineteenth century. His major work is in Bengali. Premchand began writing in Urdu but his major work is in Hindi.

Exercise 5

1. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan.
2. Swami and Friends (1935), Untouchable (1935), Kanthapura (1938)
3. Read 26.5.4 carefully and work out your response.

Exercise 6

You should discuss Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Santha Rama Rau and Anita Desai and highlight the main features of their novels; Markandaya writes about both rural and urban India, East-West encounter and poverty and deprivation; Nayantara Sahgal is a political writer, writing autobiographical fiction and later political novels. Her work projects the new woman and she writes about the choices women have to make. Santha Rama Rau has written only one novel that is autobiographical. Anita Desai works through psychological processes and the fears and doubts which the characters face.

UNIT 22 READING THE NOVEL

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
 - 22.1.1 The City of Lucknow
 - 22.1.2 Lucknawi Culture
- 22.2 Introduction to the Novel
 - 22.2.1 First Person Narration
 - 22.2.2 Social History
 - 22.2.3 Networking of Relationships
- 22.3 Outline of the Novel
- 22.4 Title of the Novel
- 22.5 Chapter wise Summary
 - 22.5.1 Part-I
 - 22.5.2 Part-II
 - 22.5.3 Part-III
 - 22.5.4 Part-IV
- 22.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

22.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to the novel, its outline and its background. It also takes you through the narrative chapter by chapter. At the end of this unit you should be in a position to give a brief account of the events, understand the first person narrative technique, be acquainted with the major characters in the novel and perceive the relationships which develop or end in the novel. This unit also lays the foundation for the subsequent units in this block.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

The main narrative of the novel is set in Lucknow, a city, known for its sophistication, *Nawabi* lifestyle and *nazakat*. It is also known for its composite culture and courtesy. Lucknow was the capital of Oudh also known as Awadh and its aristocracy was a major power centre. The historian **Michael Fisher** has described the lifestyle of the *taluqdars* as follows:

Each landholder formed a political center of his own, locally based world. Each held court and employed symbols such as a throne of his own and courtiers who made his court in some ways a microcosm of the Mughal and Awadh courts (Fisher 4).

This description is based on the lifestyle prevalent in the nineteenth century. The aristocratic world represented a feudalistic pattern where power was not shared but controlled through allegiances and loyalties of the lower ranks to the upper ranks. The rulers of Awadh were known for their pride as well as their decadence. You may have seen several Hindi films that take Lucknow as a background. **Satyajit Ray's** film *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* based on the short story by **Premchand** is one such film. You may recall others.

Wajid Ali Shah, the last King of Awadh preferred to live in exile in Calcutta, rather than sell his sovereignty to the British. The kingdom of Awadh was however, annexed on February 7, 1856 and the British army took charge of the area. But within eighteen months the province was aflame with rebellion. Most of you would be aware of the Revolt of 1857, which is also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, or as some historians call it, the first war of independence.

22.1.1 The City of Lucknow

Lucknow is a city with an ancient culture, with Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit centres of learning. It has a history of being a cultural centre of Islamic studies and in the nineteenth century it attracted poets and writers from all over the country.

The city enters the novel in several ways both direct and indirect. Asad and Zahid go to watch the *Moharrum* procession; Laila and Ameer meet in the city and go for a drive; the family goes for the *taluqdars'* reception given to the Viceroy; the approach to Aashiana is described in the last section when Laila comes to pay a last visit to the family home. But on one occasion the city is described at great length. This is when the family goes to Hasanpur, at the end of Part-I, for Baba Jan's burial. Zahra and Laila's drive in the carriage through the city. As the carriage moves through the city, the palaces and gardens are described. In contrast to the wilderness of nature, the gardens and parks give evidence of planning and control. They are well laid out. This is clearly an Islamic influence. Muslim architecture and landscaping introduced formal planning of parks and gardens.

Other monuments that are mentioned are the statue of **Queen Victoria**, **Aurangzeb's** mosque, the *Imambaras* of the **Nawab-Viziers** and the distant clock tower surrounded by a park.

22.1.2 Lucknawi culture

Lucknawi culture supported a tradition of harmony and upheld the ideals of secularism. The elaborate court manners filtered down to people in the lower ranks. A sense of decorum and control governed social behaviour. In fact, courtesans taught the sons of the aristocracy their first lessons in courtesy. In the novel, Laila recalls her father's visit to Mushtari Bai.

At another level it is also a city of artisans and craftsmen and of festivals, of kite flying, cock fights and bangle sellers representative of the traditional crafts. Lucknow is known for its fine embroidery and *Lucknawi Kurtas*.

Amongst the Muslim population *purdah* was a common practice. *Purdah* is the social custom of the seclusion of women from the male gaze. It should be remembered that the practice of *purdah* was instrumental in maintaining hierarchy both within the family as well as that of patriarchy. Though considered to be largely an Islamic observance, Hindu high-born women too practiced the *purdah* as is evident also from **Rama Mehta's** novel *Inside the Haveli*. Houses, like the Antahpura in Hindu households, had the women's quarters, known as the '*zenana*' and the men's quarters known as the '*mardana*.' Marriages, throughout Indian society were mostly arranged. Amongst the Muslims marriages between first cousins was socially permitted.

Exercise 1

1. Fill in the blanks:
 - a) Lucknow was the capital of _____
 - b) Awadh was annexed in 1856 by the _____
 - c) Wajid Ali Shah was the _____ of Awadh
 - d) He lived in _____ in Calcutta.
 - e) Mushtari Bai is a _____

2. Write a short note on the culture of Lucknow (50 words)

.....

22.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL

Sunlight On A Broken Column is a novel with a strong autobiographical base. It gives an account of nearly twenty years of a young girl's life as she steps into womanhood, gets married against the wishes of her family, becomes a mother and later a widow.

At the same time it is a story about India's struggle for freedom - the last stage of the 40s – the coming of freedom along with the partition of the country and the dilemma facing the Indian Muslim as to where she belongs.

The novel is also a record of social history and the changing social structures as the old feudalistic patterns give way to more individualised life styles. The joint family system collapses, education, modernisation, travel and politics all have some effect or the other on the existing social system and bring about this change.

The novel is divided into four parts. The first three parts of the novel move chronologically and project continuity. The last part is a return to the narrative after fourteen years and is a looking back at the events that have happened during this interval. The political events that are important are the election of 1937, World War II, the Quit India Movement and Independence along with the partition.

Sunlight On A Broken Column can be read in several ways some of which are as a 'Purdah' novel; a Partition novel; an autobiographical novel of growing up; a resistance novel. Let us examine two of these ways of reading *Sunlight On A Broken Column* in some detail next. The novel as one of growing up and as a partition novel will be dealt with in the next unit under the heading Themes in the novel. (refer to Unit 23, section 23.1.1 and 23.1.2).

22.2.1 First Person Narration

Sunlight On A Broken Column is a novel written in the first person and the happenings are recorded through the consciousness of the young girl Laila, who turns fifteen at the beginning of the novel (in the second chapter).

First person narration has certain advantages as well as certain limitations. It focuses on everything through a single consciousness, thus it is the responses and the observations of this one person that are central to the narrative. Events and happenings that take place elsewhere have to be introduced through indirect narration or through conversations or reports given by other characters. It becomes necessary for this central character to give importance to a host of minor characters, as this character cannot possibly be everywhere. The main disadvantages of a first person narrative are that the area that is outside the character's experience or range has to be left out. A writer, very often, has to find other ways and means of bringing in other perceptions and voices.

A first person narration may often have an autobiographical base and the dominant point of view that emerges is that of this central character.

22.2.3 Networking of Relationships

Laila's family is a sprawling joint family with a number of relatives and family retainers living in it. At the beginning of the novel, the author has provided a list of principal characters. The relationships are reproduced in the form of a chart given below:

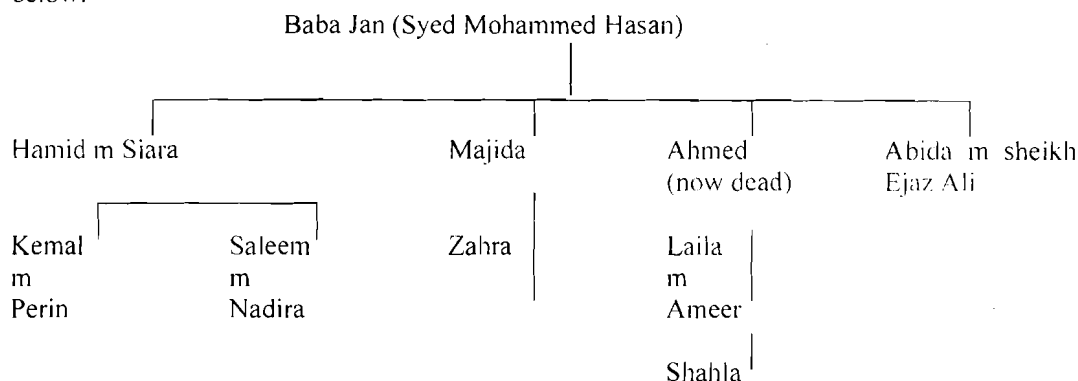


Figure –1

As the narrative voice is that of Laila, the relationships acquire meaning in that context:

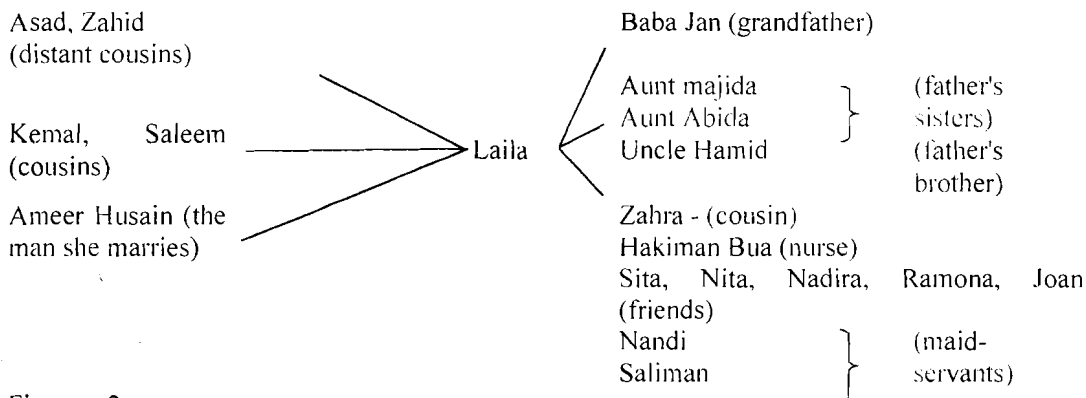


Figure – 2

Laila's uncle wants her to marry one of his sons, so that the property does not have to be divided. But she marries Ameer Husain and at the end of the novel, after she has been widowed, we find that her attachment to Asad is resurfacing.

Exercise 3

1. Name the principal character. _____
2. Who is her uncle? _____
3. Who does she marry? _____

22.3 OUTLINE OF THE NOVEL

By now you would have started reading the novel or already finished reading it. But to help you along the way, here is an account of the main events:

- Part-I.** Baba Jan is ill, almost on his deathbed. Laila his orphaned granddaughter narrates the story. On Baba Jan's death, the family goes briefly to the ancestral home at Hasanpur for the burial rites. Laila's Uncle Hamid comes home to take charge of the family. And the joint family is dispersed. Aunt Abida and Zahra both are married off. Laila is permitted to go to college for higher education.
- Part-II.** The reader is introduced to Laila's college friends. The *taluqdars* give a reception for the Viceroy in which Laila makes her entry into society and also meets Ameer Husain, the man she later decides to marry. The non-co-operation movement led by Gandhi has begun and Laila is advised not to take part in politics.
- Part-III.** Uncle Hamid's sons come home after completing their education abroad. They are offered as suitors for Laila. Uncle Hamid is busy preparing for the elections of 1937. His son Saleem canvasses for the opposite side, for the Muslim League. Uncle Hamid wins the elections. Laila marries Ameer in defiance of her family's wishes. Saleem marries Nadira.
- Part-IV.** Laila visits the now abandoned Aashiana after a gap of fourteen years. The house is to be sold. She has lost her husband in World War II and as she moves through the house she recollects the events of the past. Asad comes to the house to take her away, hopefully to a happier life.

22.4 TITLE OF THE NOVEL

The title of the novel has been taken from a poem of T S Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. Some lines from the poem have been used as an epigraph in the novel. The line '*Sunlight On A Broken Column*' suggests the falling of rays of hope on something that has suffered. 'Sunlight' stands for hope, for light, for happier times. The 'broken column', here literally implies a pillar that has been damaged and the phrase is used as a metaphor for the past that is now no more. The old order with its stability and certainty which is no more, the family house which is now abandoned, the young Laila, now a widow of thirty five, the orderly garden now growing wild – the sunlight is now falling on this world.

The last section of the novel works consistently with the image of sunlight. First the sun breaks through the clouds, then it warms up to touch the last drops of dew from the leaves and finally it leaves her standing in the 'cold shadows of the sightless house with its locked doors'. As the day ends, another day is promised. Asad has come to take her away.

Exercise 4

1. Fill in the Blanks:
 - a) Baba Jan is buried at _____.
 - b) Why is the reception to the Viceroy important for Laila? _____
 - c) Name one important event of part-III of the novel. _____
 - d) After how many years does Laila visit Aashiana? _____

2. Write a short note on the title.
.....
.....
.....

Sunlight On A Broken Column is divided into four parts, each part signifying some kind of break with the past. The narrative voice is that of Laila, a fifteen-year old girl who is part of a large family and is, in the initial parts, a bewildered observer.

22.5.1 Part-I

Chapter-1

The first chapter is a very short one, but it sets the mood of the novel. The novel opens at a moment of crisis in the life of the household. Baba Jan, who has been seriously ill for three months, is on his deathbed and his daughter Abida moves from the women's quarters to the front of the house in order to be close to her father.

This move signifies a break with the past and the members of the household move about in hushed silence uncertain as to what the future would bring. Laila and Zahra both are introduced. Though they are cousins, they are very different from each other. Laila is fond of reading and looks forward to going to college; Zahra is cast in a more traditional mode and is afraid of the future.

The patriarchal control and the feudalistic structure both are manifested in this chapter.

Chapter-2

Laila turns fifteen. There is no real celebration of her birthday. Pay careful attention to Hakimian Bua, she has a typical way of dating events in relation to happenings like floods and other major events, a practice very common in the oral culture of the uneducated. Once again, the contrast between Laila and Zahra is stressed. While one thinks of education, the other dreams of marriage. Similarly the two sisters Abida and Majida are contrasted.

In this chapter, the issue of marriage is raised, an event which shapes a woman's life. This reflects on the limited control women have over their lives in a traditional society and also on the excessive freedom men have in their relationships with and visits to dancing girls.

Into the midst of this discussion is brought in Nandi, the washerman's daughter, who is accused of being caught with the cleaner in compromising circumstances. The confrontation between her and Mohsin Bhai (a male relative) indicates not only sexual double standards but also the exploitation of the poor by the rich.

Chapter -3

Already three different strands have been introduced: (1) the need for education and women's desire for it; (2) the issue of marriage as a matter to be decided by the family; and (3) the exploitation of the poor and the control the rich have over their lives.

All the themes mentioned here are taken forward in this chapter, which, however is about Baba Jan. As the family surrounds his deathbed, Laila recalls Baba Jan's past, his active years and his various friends. They are a mixed group - Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur who was called Motey Dada, Thakur Balbir Singh referred to as Hasntey Dada and Mr. Freemantle, an Englishman who was more Indian than the Indians known as Gorey Dada. They formed a foursome and enjoyed poetry and music.

Chapter-4

All along the reader is familiarised with the kind of behaviour expected from women of respectable families: soft, subdued voices, gentle laughter, observing *purdah* in front of strangers, and courtesy. Respect for elders is also the accepted traditional code. Aunt Abida tells Laila, 'Never forget the family, into which you are born'.

Chapter-5

Nandi has been sent to the village. The girls are busy dyeing their *dupattas*. They receive a visit from Mrs. Martin, one of Laila's teachers. Rich, upper class Indian families often employed poor British women and Anglo-Indians as governesses or teachers.

Mrs. Martin's visit brings in references to the non-co-operation movement led by Gandhi and the other congress leaders.

Chapter-6

As Zahra's marriage negotiations are taking place, Asad, who is in love with her, is unhappy and frustrated. He wants to do something, "to become part of something greater" than him and is inspired by the freedom struggle.

On the political front, the connection between religious beliefs and riots is brought to the fore as the differences between *Shias* and *Sunnis* and between Hindus and Muslim are pointed out.

Chapter-7

Baba Jan's health shows some improvement. Life returns to some kind of normalcy. Kariman the bangle seller visits the household. This offers a glimpse of the occupations of women and the extent of their contact with the outer world.

Chapter-8

Preparations for Zahra's wedding are afoot and Ram Das, the jeweller, is summoned. The control and power of the *taluqdars* is also demonstrated through reference to their handling of the tenants who were unable to pay their rent. Personal relationships, feelings, compassion have no place here.

Chapter-9

The reader is introduced to the various kinds of women visitors, the family receives. Amongst them are women like the Hakim's wife, the wives of Baba Jan's friends and Mushtari Bai, the courtesan who now wears Khaddar.

Mushtari Bai was a courtesan in her youth and the young men had been sent to her to be taught courtesy and etiquette. But now old and abandoned, she has distributed her ill-earned wealth and is reduced to want.

Chapter-10

Baba Jan's health suffers a setback. Uncle Hamid is sent for. This is the first week of *Moharram*.

Chapter-11

They are told that they cannot go to see the *Moharram* procession because it is feared that there will be disturbances in the city. Laila and Zahra spend a day with the servant girls.

Chapter-12

Reading the Novel

News of the riots between the Hindus and the Muslims reach them. Asad and Zahid are both missing. Zahid returns at four unaccompanied by Asad. The sounds of firing raise the level of their anxiety. An hour later, Asad arrives home with a bandaged head. He has seen murder and violence at close quarters. Asad is ill and in his feverish delirium he expresses his love for Zahra. Aunt Majida overhears this confession and is very angry. From that moment onwards, Asad is an outsider.

Chapter-13

The end comes soon after. Baba Jan dies shortly after *Moharram*.

Chapter-14

The family moves to Hasanpur, the family's ancestral village, where Baba Jan is to be buried.

Chapter-15

Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira arrive. He was a civil servant and fairly westernised in his speech and behaviour.

Chapter-16

The journey to Hasanpur is described in great detail. It gives a description of the route and the monuments of Lucknow as they travel past gardens and houses to move to the village.

Chapter-17

People from all over the neighbouring areas gather together to pay their homage to Baba Jan. They also meet Nandi. Laila shows kindness to her. Zahra rules out marriage with Asad because he is not her equal. Marriage to her is not an abstract romantic idea, but ensuring a decent living in the practical world.

Chapter-18

They meet other relatives. Aligarh University features in the background. Universities were the hotbed of politics. The question of Laila's education crops up once again.

Chapter-19

The girls spend a great deal of time together and discuss the impositions on women and the strict code of behaviour.

Chapter-20

Uncle Hamid gets the family together to take decisions regarding their future. Marriage is proposed for Zahra, and Laila is permitted to go for studies. Asad and Zahid are to be sent to a hostel. Asad wishes to go to Jamia Millia, the University of moderate, nationalist Muslims (as compared to Aligarh which was more revolutionary and religious).

Chapter-21

Within the year two marriages take place. Both Aunt Abida and Zahra are married. Abida is married to an elderly widower, a 'tall, thin negative man' and Zahra is married to Naseer. With this chapter the first part of the novel ends. Baba Jan, after lingering for several months, is now dead and his son is in command.

Exercise 5

1. Why does Aunt Abida shift to the front of the house in the first chapter?
.....
2. Which birthday does Laila celebrate in the second chapter?
.....
3. Who is Nandi?
.....
4. Describe Baba Jan's friends (in 2 or 3 sentences)
.....
.....
5. What is the expected code of behaviour of respectable women?
.....
6. Who is Asad?
.....
7. Why is the family stopped from going to see the *Moharrum* procession?
.....
8. Why does the family go to Hasanpur?
.....
9. Why does Zahra rule out marriage to Asad?
.....
10. What is decided about Laila's future?
.....
.....

22.5.2 Part-II

Chapter-1

Life in Aashiana has now changed completely. Asad is in Delhi. Hakiman Bua has accompanied Aunt Abida to her new home; Nandi has run away with a peddler. Everything is desolate and lonely.

Chapter-2

The house is renovated according to Uncle Hamid's taste and a new nameplate is fixed. Everything, including the furniture, is changed and only a few of the old servants retained. Laila is left very much on her own.

Chapter-3

This chapter describes her college friends - Nita Chatterjee, Nadira, Joan and Romana. Nita is a serious girl, Nadira is deeply religious, Joan is good at music and Romana is different from all of them, beautiful in a very pleasant way.

Chapter-4

Begum Waheed (Nadira's mother) and Mrs. Wadia pay a visit to Aunt Saira. Even as these women pretend to be modern, they are conventional and

orthodox. Laila is viewed as a prospective bride for Begum Waheed's son but her unorthodox views displease the Begum.

Chapter-5

Nandi's mother falls ill and dies and Nandi returns home.

Chapter-6

The earlier resistance of Laila to injustice and intolerance is fast developing into a rebellious attitude. Zahra visits home after a trip to Europe and is now adept in the ways of the upper class society. Aunt Abida also pays a brief visit. She is now a changed person, more withdrawn and motivated primarily by a sense of duty.

Chapter-7

There is excitement in the air about a reception at the *Baradari* for the Viceroy and Zahra is keen to take Laila to it. Asad comes home and meets both Zahra and her husband.

Chapter-8

Laila and Zahra have a discussion about marriage and the social freedom that accompanies marriage. Laila questions all along Zahra's acceptance of this kind of social life where she has no identity of her own and is always dressed to please others. But Zahra does not mind it. She is conscious of her role as a wife and proud of her good breeding. Zahra tells Laila that if she looks the mirror, she will see the face of the man who will marry her. Just then Asad enters the room and his face is reflected in the mirror.

Laila is nervous about going to the reception. She had rather watch from the *pardah* gallery. But Zahra is insistent that she join them and thus be introduced to this kind of social life.

Chapter-9

Laila has to wear a sari and dress up for the reception. This is her first formal entry into society. The reception at the *baradari* is a huge affair with the members of the aristocracy gathered there to receive the Viceroy. One man, however, creates a scene in his drunken state. Running away in fear, Laila runs into the arms of a stranger who helps her trace Zahra and Naseer. (This stranger turns out to be Ameer whom she later marries).

Chapter-10

While there is official display of loyalty to the crown, there is widespread resentment against the British rule amongst the students. This conflict, which has been talked about earlier as well, is an ongoing one in the novel. There is unrest in the city, an encounter between the police and the students in the University and an atmosphere of tension and excitement. Laila and her friends Nadira, Joan, Nita, and Romana discuss the issue. They have different views based on their individual backgrounds and ideas.

Chapter-11

This chapter is important. Laila is summoned by her uncle and advised not to take part in the students' agitation and the non-co-operation movement. The anti-British agitation gathers momentum and the sound of the slogans can be

heard from the house. Asad comes home with a head injury, the result of a policeman's blow. Asad by now is very much a part of the struggle.

While one half of the nation is struggling to be free, the other half is still servile to the British. Uncle Hamid is busy carving out his political future. Ameer pays a visit to Asad. Ameer is the man who had come to Laila's rescue and aid at the reception.

Chapter-12

Nita is one of the agitating students, involved in the political movement, and is sent home but she dies soon after. Romana is asked to return home in order to be married off by her family.

Chapter-13

Saliman is sent away because of her affair with Ghulam Ali, just as Nandi had been despatched earlier. The men are not punished. It is always the women who are blamed and punished.

Exercise 6

1. Write a note on the changes Uncle Hamid's return introduces in the family house. (3 or 4 sentences)
.....
.....
.....
.....
2. Describe Laila's college friends. (2 or 3 sentences)
.....
.....
.....
3. How do Laila and Zahra respond to the institution of marriage? (2 or 3 sentences)
.....
.....
.....
4. Describe the Reception for the Viceroy in about 50 words.
.....
.....
.....
.....
5. Why do the students agitate against the British? What happens to Nita?
.....
.....
.....

22.5.3 Part-III

While the first part was about Baba Jan's illness and death, the second about the changes in the household after Uncle Hamid's return, Laila's college life and the

political conflict. The third part is about the return of Kemal and Saleem, Uncle Hamid's sons and the marriages of some of the main characters.

Chapter-1

Kemal and Saleem return home after their education in England. They are opposites both in appearance and in ideas. Kemal has joined the civil services while Saleem is a barrister with strong religious leanings. In the company of her cousins Laila's life moves outside the restricted life of the *zenana*. The family visits Hasanpur where both the boys are welcomed warmly.

Chapter-2

They all go to the hills to escape the summer heat. There is growing understanding between Kemal and Laila. They can share their thoughts with each other. The family wants them to get married. Kemal thinks of Laila as a sister and Saleem wants to marry for love, so the wishes and desires of the family to see Laila wed one of Uncle Hamid's sons cannot be fulfilled.

Chapter-3

Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira throw a grand party while Kemal is on leave. Both Nadira and Sita also come as guests. Sita, who has been abroad, is now extremely attractive. Ameer is also one of the guests. Future meetings are planned between the young people.

Chapter-4

The friendship between Ameer and Laila develops into a love relationship. The preparations for the elections are in full swing. Kemal and Sita are in love with each other but marriage does not seem to be possible.

Chapter-5

Aunt Saira disapproves of Ameer, as in her opinion, he belongs to an ordinary family and is not good enough to socialise with the aristocracy. He is a teacher of history at Aligarh University but Aunt Saira attaches more importance to the family background rather than to individual worth.

Chapter-6

There is continued social activity with frequent parties and outings to the cinema.

Chapter-7

Three letters arrive at Aashiana and each one of them bears unhappy news and messages of concern, which reflect on the callous attitude towards women. One bears the news of Saliman's death, another of Aunt Abida's illness and the third more details about Aunt Abida. Aunt Abida's ill health turns Laila's attention from her youthful concerns back to her beloved aunt. She wants to go to her aunt but is persuaded not to do so by her own desire to be with Ameer as far as possible.

Chapter-8

Laila's love relationship with Ameer develops and Saleem is interested in Nadira. Kemal and Sita dance together at a farewell party where all the young

people meet. They are very much in love but are painfully aware that they cannot get married across religious boundaries.

Chapter-9

Laila and Ameer meet the next day and as they go riding together, he declares his love for her. As he is to leave the next day he wants to know whether she will wait for him.

Chapter-10

Laila joins a post-graduate course and her uncle is busy with the elections motivated by his need for political power.

Chapter-11

Nandi uses her charm to attract Ghulam Ali, the man who had seduced Saliman and engineers his ouster.

Chapter-12

Uncle Hamid and Saleem are on opposite sides in the political struggle. Uncle Hamid is primarily interested in retaining his position of power, while Saleem thinks along religious lines. He is with the Muslim League and is helping Begum Waheed in her election campaign. He intends marrying Nadira.

Chapter-13

Laila postpones going to see Aunt Abida as Ameer is likely to come to Lucknow for a week. When he comes they contrive to spend as much time together as possible.

Chapter-14

Asad comes home in order to campaign for Begum Waheed's opponent. Laila confides in him, her intention to marry Ameer. There is natural bonding and friendship between Laila and her Asad who is a poorer relative.

Chapter-15

Laila pays a visit to Aunt Abida. It is a strange railway journey reflecting the power of the rich. Aunt Abida lives in a small village with her husband's family. Laila relives her childhood in Aunt Abida's private apartments but in the joint family she senses tension and conflict and the resentment the others show towards Aunt Abida, who accepts this treatment as part of her duty.

She tells Laila that obedience to the wishes of her elders should come before any consideration of the self. (This view sadly contrasts with Laila's own dreams of marriage and her need for individual expression).

Chapter-16

Nandi is in trouble again with Ghulam Ali who, threatens to take revenge by cutting off her nose. He does succeed in scarring her face though.

Chapter-17

The elections (of 1937) take place. Kemal is home for the event while Saleem is busy working for the opposite camp. Women from aristocratic classes come to cast their vote but some are as illiterate as the peasants. This is the

beginning of democracy. Laila also meets Ameer who comes to their home on Kemal's invitation.

Chapter-18

Uncle Hamid wins the elections and celebrations are afoot. The Congress has won a majority but the rich are afraid of the land reform policy of the Congress that would divest the *taluqdars* and *zamindars* of their power and property.

Both Ameer and Laila sense Aunt Saira's hostility and are aware that the family will oppose their marriage. When Aunt Saira surprises them at a moment of intimacy, then their love is discovered and the inevitable, the moment of discovery that they had been postponing happens.

Exercise 7

1. Name the two sons of Uncle Hamid.
.....
2. Why are they happy that Laila does not want to marry them?
.....
3. Why does Aunt Saira disapprove of Ameer?
.....
.....
4. Which political party does Saleem belong to?
.....
5. Describe Laila's visit to Aunt Abida's home (in 3 or 4 sentences)
.....
.....
.....
.....
6. Describe the events that take place in chapter 18. (2 or 3 sentences)
.....
.....
.....

22.5.4 Part-IV

The fourth part of the novel functions primarily through recollections and flashbacks, as Laila drives back to Aashiana after a gap of fourteen years. A host of events have taken place during this period both in her personal life and on the political scene.

Chapter-1

As Laila drives towards Aashiana, she sees the refugee colonies that have sprung up after the partition of the country in 1947. The city has acquired a different look, the old magnificence and splendour is on the way out.

This visit to the house is a farewell visit, which takes place in 1952. She had left this house fourteen years ago when she married Ameer. She now has a daughter Shahla. Uncle Hamid has been dead for five years. Neighbours watch her with curious eyes as she encircles the house and enters it from the back door.

Chapter-2

The reader is informed about what has happened in the intervening years. Saleem had opted for Pakistan and Kemal now has to carry the responsibility of the family on his shoulders. The house has to be sold in order to buy up Saleem's share in the Hasanpur house, where Aunt Saira now lives.

Chapter-3

This chapter is a flashback. It gives us an account of Laila's interview with her Uncle Hamid, before her marriage, fills us up on the details of her marriage, the birth of her child and Ameer's imprisonment and subsequent death. There had been a rift in the family on account of her marriage but later her uncle attempts reconciliation through his affection for the child.

The years between 1937 and 1946 have been years of World War II (1939-1945) and social and political unrest with the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the pre-partition riots.

Chapter-4

Laila moves through the different rooms of the house, recollecting the people and the events of the past. As she reflects on those who have opted for Pakistan it becomes evident that the decision has often been motivated by the prospects of a better economic life.

Chapter-5

The journey through memory continues with Laila's visit to the pantry, she moves on to memories of Nandi and the other servants. This is also a narrative strategy to give the reader information about the period that has not been narrated. Nandi is now with Laila, looking after Laila's child. Nandi is also a mother she has a son - a love child - the son of a *Pathan* who was temporarily in the city. The child is studying at a Jesuit School.

Chapter-6

Laila now moves to the garden. Sita and her father Agarwal feature in their lives in different ways.

Agarwal is seen as a typical representative of the coarse, materialistic businessman, who has constructed ugly buildings and is occupied with money making. Sita is remembered with affection, she is a leader in the new social world. She plays the role of a married woman but her love for Kemal is always a pain in her heart.

Chapter-7

Saleem has come to India after two years and the family has visited Hasanpur together. Laila also recounts an ugly incident that took place at the club between people of different communities – an expression of the hatred partition had left in the minds of the people.

The narration also reflects upon the changes that take place when people belong to different nations.

Chapter-8

Reading the Novel

The novel ties up the different strands of the story, tells the reader what happened to Zainab, Romana and Joan, narrates the details of Aunt Abida's death. Laila had not visited her ever since her marriage to Ameer and had not responded to her letter of consolation after Ameer's death.

Chapter-9

This is the last chapter of the novel. Gives a brief account of Laila's brief married life. Ameer had joined the army for reasons of economic security. He had been taken prisoner in the war and killed during an attempt to escape.

Zahid is dead and Asad now a promising Congress leader. As Laila is lost in her memories and recollections, Asad comes looking for her. The end promises a coming together of Laila and Asad.

Exercise 8

1. Why does Laila return to Aashiana?
.....
2. When does it take place?
.....
3. Describe the events of the in between period. (Not more than 100 words)
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
4. Who is Sita? What has happened to her?
.....
.....
.....
5. Why is the house to be sold?
.....
6. Who comes to meet Laila?
.....

22.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit the novel *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961), has been introduced to you. We have traced the background to the novel and also guided you through the narrative chapter by chapter. You must have read the novel by now and are well informed about the events that take place, the characters in the novel and the various relationships that are born, develop and end in the novel. This unit provides the background to the next few units, as we delve deeper into the novel.

22.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. a) Awadh b) British c) last king d) exile e) courtesan
2. Confluence of several cultures, centre of learning, tradition of harmony, secular living, courtesy and utmost politeness. Historic city with beautiful architecture and monuments. (Expand and make sentences which are grammatical complete)

Exercise 2

1. There is a central narrator. All other accounts are reported or acquired second hand. A single point of view dominates.
2. (a) Elections (b) Quit India Movement (c) Independence
3. See 22.2.2 para 2 and para 3 to locate the answer

Exercise 3

1. Laila
2. Uncle Hamid
3. Ameer Husain

Exercise 4

1. (a) Hasanpur (b) She makes her debut into society (c) elections of 1937 (d) fourteen years
2. Refer to 22.4

Exercise 5

(Only the points are mentioned; you are expected to write complete sentences)

1. Baba Jan's illness;
2. Fifteenth;
3. The washer man's daughter;
4. See summary of chapter 3;
5. See Chapter 4;
6. Their cousin;
7. Because of the riots;
8. For Baba Jan's burial;
9. She thinks he is not her equal;
10. She is allowed to go to college.

Exercise 6

1. See Chapter 2;
2. Nadira, Nita, Joan and Romana. See summary of chapter 3 for more details.
3. Laila has a romantic attitude towards marriage while Zahra considers it to be a social institution. One seeks self-fulfilment and love in it while Zahra is prepared to forego her sense of identity and perform a role. Marriage also means greater social freedom for her.
4. See summary chapter 9 for the answer.
5. They want the country to be free of British rule. There is a lathi-charge and Nita is hit on the head. Subsequently she succumbs to her injuries.

Exercise 7

1. Saleem and Kemal
2. Kemal thinks of her as a sister and Saleem is keen on marrying Nadira.

3. She does not consider him to be a suitable match for Laila as she thinks he does not belong to a family worthy of their aristocratic background for Ameer is beneath Laila socially.
4. Muslim League
5. See summary of chapter 15
6. Uncle Hamid's election victory and the discovery of Laila-Ameer relationship.

Exercise 8

1. To pay a farewell visit.
2. In 1952
3. Laila's marriage, her daughter's birth, World War II, her husband's death; India's freedom and the partition of the country, the family's division.
4. Laila's friend. She and Kemal were in love but could not get married. She has accepted this but is emotionally dead. Nevertheless she does provide support to Laila in her hour of need.
5. The house is to be sold to compensate Saleem and save the house at Hasanpur. The property is to be divided between the brothers, one of whom is now in Pakistan.
6. Asad.

UNIT 23 THEMES AND WOMEN CHARACTERS

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
 - 23.1.1 Novel of Growing Up
 - 23.1.2 Tradition to Modernity
 - 23.1.3 The Theme of Partition
- 23.2 Role of Education
 - 23.2.1 Education and Women
 - 23.2.2. Education, Equality and Justice
- 23.3 Gender Relationships: Exploitation of Women
 - 23.3.1 Aunt Abida
 - 23.3.2 Nandi
 - 23.3.3 Saliman
 - 23.3.4 Zahra
 - 23.3.5 Laila
- 23.4 Patriarchy and Arranged Marriages
 - 23.4.1 Property
- 23.5 Hindu-Muslim Relationships
 - 23.5.1 *Moharrum Riots*
 - 23.5.2 Political Interests
 - 23.5.3 Kemal-Sita Relationship
- 23.6 Ideals of Secularism
 - 23.6.1 Baba Jan's Friends
 - 23.6.2 Laila's Friends
 - 23.6.3 The Household Servants
- 23.7 Tradition and Change
- 23.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.9 Answer to Self-Check Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will comment upon the main themes of the novel and will take up various issues for discussion. It is also hoped that you will be in a position to (a) assess the different characters and (b) examine the different influences that form their characters (c) examine the role they play in highlighting the themes and (d) carrying the plot forward. It should be kept in mind that characters and the events in the novel are in constant interplay as each responds to the other and influences it.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

Sunlight On A Broken Column is a novel covering a period of about twenty years, approximately 1932 to 1952. This period was an important one in India's history. Several events of significance took place. The freedom struggle was at its peak; the **Government of India Act, 1935** was enacted enabling the elections to be held in several provinces in 1937 thus beginning the process of democratic participation and self-government. In 1942 the **Quit India Movement** began against the background of World War II. In 1947 India was divided into two countries and granted independence. All these happenings are reflected in the novel and they constitute at least two main strands in its narrative. These are (i) the political struggle (ii) Hindu-Muslim relationships.

23.1.1 Novel of Growing up

As the story progresses, the heroine Laila steps from girlhood into womanhood, falls in love, marries in defiance of her guardian's wishes, becomes a mother and later a widow. This 'growing-up' is another main strand that makes it possible for the writer to discuss the relationship between women and the patriarchal (male-dominated) society. A novel of growing up is often referred to as a *bildungsroman*, a novel of becoming. This can happen in several ways. An individual is tested by circumstances or a situation of crisis, and is required to take action. In the process the individual begins to ask questions and develops an awareness of inner strength. Laila is an orphan; Baba Jan's death exposes her to the new regime of her uncle; the question as to who she ought to marry also acquires importance. Later her husband's death, places her in another critical situation. At each juncture she has to depend on her own resources and at times go against the wishes of her guardians. But through all these trials her individuality is developed.

23.1.2 Tradition to Modernity

The personal and political themes also mark the change from tradition to modernity. Education is one of the major factors in this course. The political upheavals firstly, the freedom struggle and secondly, the partition caused is another. Joint families, *pardah*, social restrictions and arranged marriages give way to nuclear families, freedom of movement and personal freedom of choice. And feudalistic power structures are weakened. No longer do the *taluqdars* have the same authority, and heads of aristocratic families have to yield to the claims of their children. Participation in democratic processes compels the powerful to make concessions and share their power. Thus this mid-century period is a period of social and political change. This is also one of the important themes.

23.1.3 The Theme of Partition

One of the major themes in the novel is the partition of the country into India and Pakistan. The events of the 1930s reflect upon the widening schism between Hindus and Muslims and the antagonism that begins to acquire a dangerous form. The partition, it becomes increasingly clear, is not necessarily a religious issue. It is a power struggle between two communities and the exodus of Muslims from India to Pakistan (and of Hindus from Pakistan to India, though this novel deals with the exodus of Muslims to Pakistan) is also an economic struggle as the Indian Muslims are squeezed out of the mainstream. The manner in which the political leaders exploit the religious sentiments of the people that too reveals the dangers of nationalism when it runs wild.

In the novel there are several events that reflect upon this. One is the violence of the *Mohurram* riots that hits the people in various ways. Another event that is not developed at length is World War II in the background. There is an awareness of the Fascist trends of the European dictators.

Ironically enough those who are assisting the British at this point are fighting for the freedom of the western world from its internal enemies while at the same time being instrumental in controlling the agitation for freedom by their own countrymen. This point perhaps needs a little more explanation. The Indians who are fighting for the British in the World War II (as Ameer, Laila's husband also does), the police and the whole administrative setup of the British that is being run by Indians in India, support the war effort of the Allies against the German invasions. Through their loyalty and service to the British these people are also used by them for putting down the demonstrations against British rule as we see in the *lathicharge* on the students when the *taluqdars* give a reception to the Viceroy.

The *taluqdars* have traditionally exercised political supremacy and control through bargaining power with the British and thus they had come to occupy positions of authority. The new democratic forces, and the promised-land reforms by the

Congress are going to affect this power. They are going to be divested of their authority. It is necessary to look at the non-co-operation movement against the role of the British loyalists in the country, as it is equally necessary to view the partition as a power struggle between the two communities. Laila and her college friends discuss this issue in Chapter 3 of Part-II. Read that carefully. Also turn to Unit 29 for a discussion on the impact of partition.

In the next section we shall analyse the role of education in propelling social change.

Exercise 1

1. Identify any three main themes of the novel.
.....
2. What role does World War II play in the novel?
.....
3. Why can the novel be called a 'novel of growing-up'?
.....
.....
.....

23.2 ROLE OF EDUCATION

One of the main themes in the novel is the need for female education. Education does not necessarily perform miracles but it does open up the mind to new ideas and experiences and prepares the individual for taking independent decisions and coping with crisis. Education plays an important role in making an individual conscious of himself or herself as a person. It is a major formative influence on the character and personality of a person.

23.2.1 Education and Women

It is not only, the simple process of education but the method, basis and institutional environment that also matter. In the novel we have two cousins Zahra and Laila. They are given two different types of education and they both shape up differently. Their attitudes to themselves as persons are very different. Zahra never really learns to think of herself as a person or as a woman who can relate independently to society. She grows up to accept traditional values and the restrictive code of conduct for women. Marriage for her is not a relationship to a person but a means of escape from family restrictions and the way to a more open life, the permission to wear good clothes and jewellery. But Laila thinks of herself as a person and begins to assert herself and takes her own decisions.

23.2.2 Education, Equality and Justice

Institutional environment and social environment are also important influences on character formation. Brothers like Asad and Zahid are contrasted, and Saleem and Kemal are also very different from each other. Asad goes to Delhi in order to study in a liberal institution where religion is not treated as a way of separation or antagonism. Kemal also has a more open mind. They relate to others on an individual footing as person to person and do not slot people according to their caste or religion or social position.

Education plays a significant role where the fight against injustice and inequality is concerned. Uneducated and illiterate people are forced to submit to domination and control. When they oppose this domination, this opposition may often lead to violence and brutality. Nandi avenges the wrong done to Saliman by tricking Ghulam Ali with her feminine charms.

The whole process of modernisation is dependent on the level of education as the young college students learn to participate in democratic processes and political struggles and the feudalistic control is compelled to give way to greater openness and discussion.

The question of gender equality and the exploitation of women is another aspect that is dealt with in the novel. The next section will comment on the gender relationships in the novel.

Exercise 2

1. Please indicate whether the following statements are True or False:

(a) Education can perform miracles.	T/F
(b) It matters what kind of an education we receive.	T/F
(c) All types of education is equal.	T/F
(d) Education teaches us to take decisions.	T/F
(e) Education is necessary for effective democracy.	T/F
(f) Spread of education helps in the process of modernisation.	T/F
(g) The uneducated cannot fight injustice.	T/F

2. Mention any two advantages of education.
.....
.....
.....

23.3 GENDER RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

Feudalistic society is both hierarchical and patriarchal. It is hierarchical in the sense that power lies in the hands of the rich people, the aristocracy, the propertied men and the landowners. People are subordinated in accordance with their social status, economic power and category of jobs. Within a family the male head of the family exercises authority. And in the relationships between men and women, women are subordinated.

We see this structure in the *Sunlight On A Broken Column*. Baba Jan is the head of the family. On his death Uncle Hamid acquires the same authority and he has the power to decide for the members of the family. At a social level, the less affluent or not so well placed members of their own extended family are considered inferior just as Asad and Zahid are not considered suitable husbands for the daughters of the family. Ameer Husain is also treated as an inferior. The lower sections of society, like the workers and servants, are all considered subordinate.

While the above hierarchical relationships are pointed out throughout the novel, it is the exploitation of women that still constitutes one of the main themes of the novel. The total control that the male members exercise over them is frightening. Their personal feelings and desires are not recognised. The social code of behaviour laid down for respectable women requires them to be obedient and docile. In this Muslim household of the 1930s and 40s, their social interaction is also limited. In social conversation too, they are not expected to voice independent opinions. In the choice of a marriage partner they have no say. Thus the attention is shifted from the person one is to be married to, towards the institution. What does marriage promise that women should get married to strangers?

Marriage promises social security and greater freedom as it does to Zahra; respectability and obedience to Aunt Abida; self-punishment to Sita; economic security to Zainab. But it does not necessarily recognise them as individuals.

There are two other women who are seen in a different light than these women of respectable, well-to-do families – Nandi and Saliman. Both of them suffer and are subdued first by parental control and later by the men who use their bodies and leave them to cope with the problems. Both these women do not have any social or economic security. Instead their vulnerability is exposed they are made into victims and pay heavily for every little moment of happiness.

Patriarchy also controls women through the whole notion of respectability. Any violation of this code is seen as bringing disgrace to the woman. In the novel we are exposed to two kinds of suffering – the suffering of those who submit to the code and pay for it in some way or the other. There is also the suffering of those who are considered outside this code but they also suffer as we see Saliman and Nandi suffer. Zahra is seen to be quite self-content. But she does not grow as a person. And Sita who cannot marry the man she loves because of social boundaries, punishes herself through marriage, through reducing herself to a mere body. Laila succeeds in moving outside the arranged marriage syndrome but her defiance alienates her from her family.

23.3.1 Aunt Abida

Although the story is narrated through the consciousness of Laila, Aunt Abida plays an important role in the novel. Her life is the life of an independent-minded woman who is deprived of the full expression of her personality and talent primarily because of the restrictions placed on women.

Laila adores this aunt of hers who in every way appears to be a strong woman, sensitive to the need of others, capable of taking charge and coping with crisis. But as the novel progresses the reader finds this woman submitting to her brother's desires. When Baba Jan dies, she is married off to a widower with grown up children, a man who is described as a 'negative man'. Once married she is placed outside Laila's immediate circle but the relationship continues at various levels and in various ways.

There are at least three occasions when Aunt Abida's life and Laila's life cross each other's and their relationship is tested. Once when Aunt Abida is ill and needs Laila but Laila postpones going to her primarily because she is distracted by Ameer's presence. On another occasion when Laila looks for Aunt Abida's support and understanding at the time of her marriage, Aunt Abida fails her by withholding her approval. She disapproves of Laila's defiance of her uncle's wishes. Later, when Laila's husband dies, the words of comfort which Aunt Abida offers could have brought about a reconciliation but, it fails to do so because Laila is too far gone in her own life to turn back to the warmth of a lost relationship.

Their relationship is that of one between two strong characters who disagree on the way by which traditional structures can be confronted. They belong to two different generations. But despite the difference of age and attitude they are alike in their approach to problems though different in their way of handling them.

Aunt Abida's life has its tragic undertones. It is a story of how a young, intelligent woman is subjected to a traditional lifestyle and her individuality suppressed, first through the male right to control her life and later through ignorance and prejudice that hinders medical aid from being given in time. The two parts of her life form a contrast to each other. The first period is when she is in her father's house and in control of things, able and efficient, capable of taking decisions. Her father's death and her brother's return change all that. She has to accept his decision to get her married off. No serious effort is made to find her a husband who can offer her happiness, instead she is married off to an elderly person who has for all practical purposes lived his life. He is now a widower with a family of adult children.

Laila does visit her aunt and goes and stays with her for a short period. This visit is described in chapter 15 of Part-III. Aunt Abida's house is in a tiny village. It is almost a state of exile from society. Aunt Abida's part of the house is austere in its

appearance, her rooms are up 'steep and narrow stairs' and the windows are 'iron-barred'. As they talk to each other to catch up with the missed years, Laila finds a withdrawn, settled sadness in her aunt, a sadness which has become a permanent feature, an acceptance of the limits of her life. Marriage apparently had not given her any of the satisfaction that young people often dream of. Her stepdaughter and mother-in-law are hostile towards her:

They resented the sensitiveness of a character beyond their reach and understanding. They attacked what was bigger than their comprehension with petty thrusts. (Part III ch.15).

Aunt Abida's life makes one see the extent to which men controlled women's lives. Her brother, who is keen to wash his hands off her after their father's death, decides her marriage. No consideration is given to her character, her personality or her progressive views, not even to the strength in her character. She gives in submissively because she feels bound by the code of behaviour prescribed for women, that they allow the men to take decisions on their behalf. Later, we witness her brave efforts to make some meaning of her life, but these efforts are met with hostility and antagonism. Her husband's attempts to come to her help relieve the situation only partially. Aunt Abida's life strikes one as a tremendous sacrifice made at the altar of tradition.

23.3.2 Nandi

Nandi is the washerman's daughter. She is a rebel through and through, and of all the household servants she features in the novel as a positive character capable of taking action. But time and again she comes up against male control and opposition and is punished or victimised. Right in the beginning of the novel, there is an incident when Nandi is brought before the family as a culprit. Her father has caught her with the cleaner in the garage. When Uncle Mohsin, a male relative, accuses her of being a harlot, a woman without any morals and free with her body, Nandi retorts that he is in no position say so. Apparently, Uncle Mohsin has, on some earlier occasion also made advances on her. Angry with her at her insolent reply, Uncle Mohsin strikes her with a stick. Laila intervenes to protect her and is reprimanded by Aunt Abida for doing so.

Uncle Mohsin is able to strike Nandi simply because (a) he is a man (b) and he belongs to a higher class than her. Nandi being a servant is treated as the lowest of the low. Her wishes and her body are of no significance. She is doubly oppressed. Being a woman she is subject to male control, and being a servant she is subject to the control of her masters.

Nandi's life interacts with Laila's at several points in the novel. To list a few of these events, we need to go back to the beginning. When Nandi is brought before the family and Uncle Mohsin strikes her, Laila rises to her defense and displeases Aunt Abida. Later when Nandi is exiled to the village, Laila is instrumental in getting her back to Aashiana. During the period when Ameer is courting Laila, Nandi intuitively guesses her involvement with Ameer and is of great moral support to Laila. Still later, when Laila retreats to the house in the hills, Nandi keeps her company and brings up her daughter.

Nandi is a strong, rebellious character, very much like Laila, and she cannot tolerate injustice. She goes out of her way to avenge the wrong done to Saliman and gets Ghulam Ali thrown out, though Ghulam Ali cuts off her nose to avenge himself. She is married off to an old man and when she can no longer endure the relationship, she has a relationship with a *Pathan* who is briefly in the city and bears his child.

In many ways, Nandi's life represents the wrongs to which the lower classes are subjected. Her life also gives an indication of the moral freedom which women in the lower classes can avail of provided they know how to manipulate the rules. In contrast, Laila's subjection cannot be so callous nor, her rebellion so extreme. She can resist within limits and has to live in accordance with the social code. Love and

sexuality do not have the same free rein in her life that we find in Nandi's life. Respectability has its own constraints, as one can observe from Aunt Abida's life.

Laila, Abida and Nandi are all women of the same mettle. Their generation, class and education affect the differences in their lives and their responses to the events in their lives.

23.3.3 Saliman

Saliman's life is one of abject suffering. She has none of the spirit and strength of Nandi. Both are maid servants in the family house Aashiana and together with Zahra and Laila, the girls make a foursome as they grow up together sharing their secrets and fears.

Her role in the novel is subdued like her character. She makes rather a late appearance in the novel, in Chapter 2 of Part-I. Saliman and Ramzano are the daughters of a woman who had been sold to the family during a famine. Laila's grandmother, Baba Jan's wife, had brought her up and got her married. But her husband has run away with another woman and has abandoned Saliman and their two daughters. Saliman thus has known no freedom or independence coming as she does from this background of slavery and submission. She has no control over her life. Later when Ghulam Ali seduces her and she becomes pregnant, it is she who is sent away and not Ghulam Ali and she dies delivering the child. Her life is an example of abject suffering, brought upon her partly through the circumstances of her life and partly through her own sheer passivity and inactivity, her inability to rebel.

23.3.4 Zahra

Zahra is Laila's cousin, and the two girls of nearly the same age are growing up together in their grandfather's house. But both the girls have been brought up quite differently. The education imparted to them is different and the courses their lives take are also different. Zahra is given an education in Arabic and Persian; she is kept away from modern ways. She is not sent to college and is married off at an early age. She accepts marriage as her destiny and shows no wish to be educated. In several ways, Zahra represents the average woman who submits unresistingly to her fate.

Does this attitude necessarily give her any happiness or peace? How does her character shape up as she steps into marriage and adulthood? The reader realises that there is a definite loss of personhood. She does not relate to her husband as a person. Marriage is a means to a different kind of life, a stepping-stone to an outer world, to wearing good clothes and attending parties. She is quite clear in her mind that she will not marry Asad, primarily because he is not in a position to provide her with any of the worldly things that make marriage desirable.

Zahra's character is that of an ordinary woman who is brought up to accept traditional practices without any questioning. She goes through none of the conflicts and rebellions that Laila goes through. Despite this difference in their attitudes Laila and Zahra are fairly good friends and set off each other. Through Zahra's character and to some extent Sita's character, the writer is criticising marriages that are entered into for reasons of social respectability or convenience.

23.3.5 Laila

Laila is the protagonist of the novel, which is focused on the years of her girlhood and adult life and her constant resistance to the impositions of traditional value structures. She is also the narrator of the novel, thus what she tells us about herself is given in more detail. When the behaviour or ideas of other characters are conveyed to us, these are also reported and commented upon by her. The narrative technique that the writer uses to counteract a totally subjective view is by presenting events and not necessarily always commenting upon them. Thus the contrasts with Zahra, and the

parallels with Aunt Abida and Nandi speak for themselves. Similarly her conversations and interactions with her college friends also reflect upon her character.

She is an orphan as both her parents are dead. But she has not been abandoned. Aunt Abida is a surrogate mother to her. While her grandfather respects her dead father's wishes to impart education to her along the western pattern. She is allowed a greater degree of freedom both by her grandfather and Uncle Hamid than what the two patriarchs allow her cousin Zahra.

There are several aspects of Laila's character that are worthy of admiration. She is sensitive and emotional and tends to be impulsive. She gets along well with people like Asad and Kemal much better than she gets along with Saleem or Zahid. She has inherited some of her grandfather and father's liberal views and having been exposed to a broader education she is more open-minded than the conservative Zahra.

Laila is a rebel in many ways. She questions the right of men to take charge of women's lives and cannot tolerate injustice. There are several incidents that indicate this. She rushes to protect Nandi against Uncle Mohsin's attack on her, and sympathises with her when she is sent to the village.

She has the courage to resist the offer of marrying any one of her cousins, Saleem and Kemal. And later she confronts her uncle in order to get permission to marry Ameer. Marriage to her means a relationship that has its basis on understanding and equality. This marriage practically implies an ouster from the family and she puts up with this by moving to the hills.

There is also a stubborn streak in her. When Aunt Abida offers her comfort after Ameer's death, she does not respond to Aunt Abida's gestures.

Her views of personal relationships and of marriage allow her to sympathise with Asad as also with Kemal and Sita. Thus her emotional side is well developed.

The excitements and uncertainties of girlhood are clearly reflected in her behaviour as she celebrates the different festivals with the family, responds to her ex-governess in a critical manner, dresses up in all finery for the reception to the Viceroy and joins in the many escapades the girls plan both in Aashiana and Hasanpur. On a couple of occasions the reader may disapprove of her behaviour, especially when she steals to the bookshop to keep her appointment with Ameer. But that too is part of a young girl's growing up as she moves between traditional structures and individual desires.

Laila's questioning of tyrannical authority is also reflected in her nationalist views. She is not as brave or vocal as Nita, nor as active as Asad, but she is also not a loyalist like Joan or a passive follower like Nadira. She follows the middle path of loyalty to a country rather than to the British King or to religion. Would it, be possible to call her a radical? Perhaps not! She does not violate any strong moral conventions but is keen to find space for her personal freedom and enter into meaningful relationships.

By the end of the novel, Laila appears a wiser and subdued person as she has experienced both separation and suffering, seen the collapse of a world which had offered her security but had demanded strict obedience, struggled with her memories, bereavements, losses and loneliness. The farewell visit to Aashiana is a kind of cleansing as well as a new beginning as she turns to Asad for personal fulfilment.

Exercise 3

1. Discuss Laila's character in comparison with:

(a) Zahra

(b) Nandi (100 words)

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Column*

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2. Write a short note on Aunt Abida (100 words)

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Having discussed gender relationships in the novel, we need to look at the whole notion of patriarchy that is one of the primal themes of this novel as also to examine the concept of arranged marriages. This we shall do so in the next section.

23.4 PATRIARCHY AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES

One of the themes of *Sunlight On A Broken Column* is the questioning of patriarchal structures. Marriage is one institution that is controlled and governed by male privilege and by social customs, privilege the man. Family, status, education and conformity to social practice are some of the main considerations. A woman's personal desires, dreams and the idea of romance do not necessarily fit into this framework. She is required to adjust to her husband's wishes, interact with others also according to his wishes and work or not work outside the house in accordance with his wishes.

In the novel, as it is about an aristocratic family and located in the first half of the twentieth century, there are no cases of working or professional women though women like Begum Waheed do move into political roles and contest elections. Most of the women characters are located within families and as married women, unmarried daughters or dependent windows. It is true that their status differs according to their education, income group and religious/caste background but in the main they are placed within family structures. The three aunts - Abida, Saira, and Majida - belong to the older generation while Laila, Zahra, Sita, Nadira, Perin, Zainab and Nandi represent the younger women. Of these Laila exercises her choice, Zahra follows the advice of her elders, Sita loves Kemal but is unable to take the final step of marrying him as they belong to different religions and marriage has to relate to society. It is not purely a matter between two individuals. Zainab falls into a set pattern and Nandi violates the rule of marital fidelity. In fact both Zahra and Sita end up thinking of their bodies as simply a means for occupying a social status, though they do it in different ways and for different reasons. Of the older women, Aunt Majida's personality is totally confined and traditional, Aunt Saira looks for satisfaction in selling up a good house but we find Aunt Abida constantly fluttering against the confined role and finally being sacrificed to it.

The different attitudes toward marriage and the kind of relationships that emerge offer a strong critique of patriarchal control that brushes aside all emotional and personal considerations and sustains itself upon the docile submission of women.

23.4.1 Property

Property is a major concern in marriage. It is part of the social status and power. Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira are keen that Laila marries either Saleem or Kemal so that the family property is not divided. Laila has half-a-claim on the family property and thus she is an heiress and desirable as a wife. But she is unwilling to do so as she is in love with Ameer. Fortunately both the young men also are not inclined to enter into this kind of a marriage of convenience. Later, when Laila is on a visit to Aunt Abida, Aunt Abida's stepdaughter and mother-in-law discuss the issue. To them it does not make sense to marry outside the family if there are eligible young men in the family.

They view marriage as an arrangement to facilitate other transactions.

Exercise 4

1. Why does Laila refuse to marry either Saleem or Kemal?
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2. Why is Laila an heiress and Zahra not?
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This novel also comments upon Hindu – Muslim relationships. Let us examine this theme in the next section.

23.5 HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONSHIPS

As the novel covers a very traumatic period of India's history of the partition of the country in 1947, it automatically focuses on the Hindu-Muslim relationships. The Hindus and the Muslims live in the same country, share several cultural values, celebrate each other's festivals, form common friendship yet they are driven apart by other factors. One of these is religion. The religious codes are very different and part of the trouble arises when the public aspects of religion clash, like a procession or a building or an object venerated by one community and considered sacred by it but not by the other come in each other's way.

Another difference is the kind of food each community eats and permits. In another novel which some of you may have read, **Rahi Masoom Raza's** *Aadha Gaon*, the difference in food habits are pointed out and **Raza** goes on to observe that members of the two communities do not eat food cooked by the other. The concept of 'purity' interferes.

A third area where there is likelihood of conflict is interpersonal relationships, especially marriage. Kemal and Sita love each other but decide not to go against the social rule.

On the political scene the major divisionary force is political power. At such a time the question of a majority versus minority arises. Political power is closely linked with economic conditions. The Muslims do not look forward to being ruled by a Hindu majority because of the apprehension that the opportunities for jobs and economic betterment will be denied to them.

23.5.1 Moharram Riots

Moharram signifies a period of mourning which is spread over a period of ten days at the end of which *tazias* are taken out in a procession. In the novel this period coincides with Baba Jan's illness (Part I Chapter 1, 10). During this period elegies

(*marsiya*s) are read out and a passionate identification takes place with the martyrdom of *Hazrat Husain* and his family. The participants in the *Moharram* procession beat their breast and practice self-flagellation while moving in time with a frenzied incantatory rhythm. For many personal grief becomes part of the general sorrow, *Moharram* is observed largely by the *Shia* Muslims, *Sunnis* do not necessarily observe it in the same way.

In the novel, *Moharram* plays an important role. First, it brings the family together as the *marsiya*s are recited; second as the servants also constitute an audience, the class barrier is removed in this community mourning. Third, in the novel, it provides the occasion for religion and attitudes to religion to be discussed. Asad is deeply religious but he is a liberal thus proving that religious faith need not shut out others. Everyone is keen to go and see the procession. Mrs. Martin, Laila's ex-governess is also keen to go along with the rest to see the procession, but, because there are rumours of likely disturbances, the programme is cancelled (Part-I, Chapter -II). The women are disappointed but the men manage to go.

The rumour regarding the disturbance turns into a reality. Riots break out and many people are killed. The cook reports that a *tazia* got stuck in the branch of a *peepul* tree and as the branch of the sacred tree could not be cut, the clash took place (Part-I, ch12). Asad too is injured in the clash, not because he has joined a violent crowd but because he wanted to help people who were being beaten.

This kind of a flare-up was very common in British India and continues to be even now. Most riots are begun by rumours or by some mischievous planning or rigidity on part of the parties concerned, and then by anger and religious frenzy taking over reason and common sense.

The riot is important for several other reasons in the novel. Firstly, because it gives the reader an insight into Asad's character and secondly, because he is injured and consequently lapses into a state of delirium, his feverish condition becomes a means of revealing his love for Zahra, a fact that he would not have consciously stated. Asad is a believer of non-violence but is caught up in this violent episode. He is deeply disturbed by it and is increasingly conscious of his helplessness. The fact that Asad reveals his love for Zahra in his delirium gives an important turn to the novel as Aunt Majida's attitude towards Asad's and his position in the house is upset. It also allows us to understand Zahra's character better. And finally, the riots in themselves allow the reader to realise how flimsy the basis of religious disagreement actually are.

23.5.2 Political Interests

The Hindu-Muslim relationship is also affected by the struggle for political power. Uncle Hamid decides to contest the elections primarily because of this feeling. In Awadh the landlords and aristocracy are mostly Muslim, but with the elections power could pass to the Hindus.

Further to this the relationship has been vitiated by the presence of the British and the manner by which they have been playing one against the other. The dominant feeling is that Muslims are aliens. Joan voices this feeling but Nadira resents this (Part II, ch. 3). India is divided according to the political weightage that the British gives every community. The Anglo-Indians are loyal to the British. And Muslims like Begum Waheed, her daughter Nadira and Laila's cousin Saleem, all think they have to defend their heritage. Thus rather than work together against a common enemy, they go to make the enemy the arbitrator and contest against each other's power.

The Muslims are further divided into nationalist Muslims who think of India as their country and the Muslim League that had begun to demand a separate homeland. Some of these nationalist Muslims are members of the Congress, other contest the election as Unionists. But at the social level, they have been living together as friends and neighbours and Uncle Hamid still firmly believes that they can.

23.5.3 Kemal-Sita Relationship

Kemal is one of the two sons of Uncle Hamid. When their parents want one of them to choose Laila as a bride, Kemal refuses to do so because he thinks of her as a sister. Kemal is a sensitive person, he gets along quite well with his cousin but marriage is another thing. Later when Laila's school friend Sita enters the scene, he is strangely attracted to her and proposes marriage but Sita refuses his offer though very much in love with him. As she tells Laila:

I, Sita, loved him, Kemal, and still do. Two individual human beings. But it would have been the daughter of my father and mother marrying the son of his parents, with different backgrounds and different religions, two small cogs in a huge machine.

When Laila asks her, "How could you think like that if you loved him?" Sita tells her that marriage is a relationship between two families and social set-ups and just because she loves Kemal very much, it is not possible for her to thrust him into a life-long conflict. Sita says:

I could because I loved him. Our love is our own, inside us, but our marriage would have been outside ourselves, everyone else's. I thought about it until it seemed easier to die. (Part III Chapter 8).

But the sacrifice demands its toll. Sita turns into a mere body and a society woman, well decked and dressed up, but one who has lost her emotional self. They continue to meet even after Sita's marriage but when Kemal decides to get married, Sita tells him that they must stop meeting each other.

The Kemal-Sita relationship is a painful one of unfulfilled love. In the novel it serves the purpose of contrasting Sita's behaviour with that of Laila's. Laila who has the courage to defy her guardians and marry Ameer while Sita accepts that her love must remain unfulfilled as a result of religious and social boundaries. But there is a major difference in their situations. Sita a Hindu girl is in love with Kemal a Muslim youth when the country is about to gain independence and to be divided along religious lines. Laila on the other hand is a Muslim girl in love with a Muslim youth who however, is beneath her socially. The Sita-Kemal relationship also reflects upon the Hindu-Muslim relationships. It is not that real-life marriages between the two communities did not take place. There are several instances of that but at this particular point of Indian history, it indicates the tension and separatist feelings that at that time were tearing them apart.

The relationship also allows us to understand the sensitiveness of Kemal's character. He is very different from his brother Saleem. He joins the Civil Service like his father before him and after the partition, chooses to stay in India. And when he marries, he marries Perin, who again is not a Muslim but a Parsi. Parsi women lose their religion once they get married outside their community. Thus Kemal in the final instance is not tied to his community. Emotionally and intellectually he has risen above the narrow confines of religion and community.

This relationship, like Aunt Abida's life, strikes a serious note in the novel and makes the reader think about events that often lie outside one's control and decisions that impact the future course of life.

Exercise 5

1. Give brief answers to the following questions:
What triggers off the Moharrum riots?
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2. Why does the Muslim League demand a separate homeland?
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3. Write a short note on the Hindu-Muslim relationship.

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4. Why does Sita refuse Kemal's offer of marriage (100 words)

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Apart from the themes of partition, patriarchy and gender, the novel also addresses the question of secularism. The next section examines the ideals of secularism.

23.6 IDEALS OF SECULARISM

As opposed to the portrayal of separatist tendencies, the author also presents a picture of secular ideals. Uncle Hamid tells his sons that Hindus and Muslims have for centuries lived together and shared their cultures.

23.6.1 Baba Jan's Friends

Baba Jan's friends consist of people of all communities and Laila recalls with fondness the memories of Gorey Dada, Mr. Freemantle, Hanstey Dada, Thakur Balbir Singh and Motey Dada, Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur (Part I Chapter 3). These four men were different from each other, had widely different talents, represented different religions, cultures and power structures yet there was a bond of friendship between them. They loved the city to which they belonged.

23.6.2 Laila's friends

Like her grandfather, Laila's friendships also move across religion and community. Her college friends are an assorted group and her school friends are equally so. Her close friends include Nita, Ramona, Nadira, Sita, and Joan. Social relationships and social institutions like schools and colleges enable people to think more openly and relate to people.

23.6.3 The Household Servants

The household servants are also a mixed group. They are people from all castes and religions. Nandi is a Hindu but she serves Laila with devotion. The Hindu servants feel free to observe their religious practices and go on pilgrimages. At the same time they join in the celebration of the Muslim festivals with enthusiasm. These relationships, loyalties and concerns indicate the possibility of living together in harmony.

Exercise 6

1. Write short notes on (i) Baba Jan's friends, and (ii) Laila's friends

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2. What role do these groups perform in the novel?

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23.7 TRADITION AND CHANGE

Sunlight On A Broken Column traces not only the entry into adulthood of Laila, the heroine, but also marks the change from tradition to modernity. Several changes take place during the course of the years. Some of these are as follows:

- Society moves from feudalistic structures towards democracy
- The joint family system yields to nuclear families
- There is the spread of education
- Individuals and their choices begin to count.

All change, however, is not for the betterment of society some are sad and disturbing. For instance Aunt Saira's dislocation, the coming up of ugly apartments, and the replacement of a sense of refinement by vulgar commercialisation – all these indicate a downward journey. But modernity, like tradition is a mixed bag. It has both its good aspects and bad ones.

Exercise 7

1. Write a note on the transition from tradition to modernity. What are the indications of modernity in the novel? (50 words)

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23.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the various women characters, the influences that shape their characters and the manner in which they impact and shed light on the various thematic strands of the novel. The various themes include: the change from tradition to modernity and commercialisation, the theme of partition and how it affected people, and changed their lives forever, the theme of patriarchy amongst others. We have also looked at the need for female education and the changes that education can bring about. This unit has examined gender relationships as well as ideas of secularism that are prevalent in the novel. We have also tried to show the relationship between patriarchy and exploitation in the novel.

If you have not read the novel till now, kindly ensure that you do so as these discussions would be meaningless without a proper reading and understanding of the novel.

23.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. (a) The Freedom Struggle
(b) The Novel of Growing Up
(c) A Partition Novel
2. World War II is discussed in the background as Ameer, Laila's husband joins the Imperial/ British Army along with several other Indian men, to fight the German Nazis for the British Allies. Yet, it is the same Army, the same men who fight the Axis powers (i.e, the Germans, Italians and Russians) so bravely are the same men suppressing the freedom struggle in their own land because of their loyalty to the British Army.

3. Because it is the story of Laila's life from the age of fifteen till the age of thirty-five when she enters into womanhood, marriage, motherhood etc.

Exercise 2

1. (a) F (b) T (c) F (d) T (e) T (f) T (g) F
2. Individual growth / personhood and social change / responsibility

Exercise 3

- 1 (a) Laila: resistance to patriarchy; marries according to her wishes, brave and courageous, nationalist in her political ideas, intolerant of injustice.
Zahra: a traditional girl who accepts patriarchal control and social conventions; considers marriage a social event rather than a personal relationship. More interested in status rather than in love or personal fulfillment.
(b) Nandi: rebellious, conscious of her desires. Pays for her rebellion, yields to marriage with an old man but finally has a relationship outside marriage and bears a child. Fiercely independent and fiercely loyal to Laila. An uneducated and unrefined version of Laila.
2. Refer 23.3.1 and work out your response.

Exercise 4

1. Because she wants to marry Ameer whom she loves.
2. Laila's father is a son of the house and she has a right to inheritance whereas Zahra is a daughter's daughter.

Exercise 5

1. The branch of a *peepul* tree that comes in the way of the *tazia*. The branch of the sacred tree cannot be cut.
2. Because the Muslims feel threatened by the Hindu majority
3. See 23.5.2. It is a relationship of hostility because of the way the British rulers have divided them and also because it is a struggle for political power.
4. See 23.5.3. Sita refuses Kemal's offer of marriage because marriage is a social relationship and they come from different backgrounds and religions.

Exercise 6

1. They form a heterogeneous group and indicate the possibility of friendship amongst people of different religions and temperaments. Gorey Dada is an Englishman, Hanstey Dada, a Hindu, and Motey Dada a Muslim. Similarly Laila's friends belong to different economic and religious groups and represent different political opinions - Nita, Joan, Nadira, Sita and Ramona. But in personal relationships, they easily overcome these differences
2. These friendships uphold the ideals of secularism and remind one of the possibility of living together peacefully and in harmony. They also remind us that religion need not be a cause for social disturbance or hatred amongst communities.

Exercise 7

1. The change is inevitable due to passage of time and implies a change in the way of thinking, living and relating to others. The individual has more place in a modern society and hierarchical structures are replaced by more democratic and equal ones. Also people are more mobile as they move out in search of jobs and this breaks the joint family structure.

UNIT 24 STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
 - 24.1.1 Structure and Form
 - 24.1.2 Juxtapositions
 - 24.1.3 Space
 - 24.1.4 Aashiana
- 24.2 Time and Memory
- 24.3 The Last Section
- 24.4 The Role of Minor Characters
 - 24.4.1 Male Characters
 - 24.4.2 Asad
 - 24.4.3 Kemal
 - 24.4.4 Saleem
- 24.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses with you the manner in which the events in a novel are put together to lead the reader to the meaning. It hopes that you will be able to see that nothing in the novel is surplus or meaningless. And also that no narrative is entirely linear or its meaning limited to what is said by the writer or the characters.

At the end of this unit, you should be in a position to comment upon the significance of the structure and the importance of the minor characters.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

Structure and form are often used as synonyms, primarily because both are concerned with the organisation of material. In a novel or any other piece of art it implies the method by which events have been arranged, how parallels are drawn and the manner in which the happenings fall together to make some kind of meaning. It also means the way in which meaning is created and separate events or narratives come together in a coherent manner to form a pattern. This arrangement of events is also referred to on occasion, as plot.

24.1.1 Structure and Form

There is, however, a degree of difference between 'structure' and 'form'. 'Form' normally means the finished shape, the outward form, the image that emerges and the impression that is made. 'Form' is also used to distinguish the shape from 'content', in this case, the story or the material of the story. Structure is concerned more with the fragments, the sections, inter-weavings, the connections, in fact, the manner events are arranged or constructed. The literary form also has another dimension. That is the dimension of time. Do events take place in a chronological linear order? Or are there some points where other events are used to create comparisons? Does time move backward through memory and flashbacks? Or, does time move through letters, diaries and newspaper cuttings? At times linearity is interrupted because of some sudden happening. At other times the character indulges in personal recollections and moves into self-introspection. And sometimes dreams and hallucinations may interrupt the linear flow of the narrative.

24.1.1 Juxtapositions

Sunlight On A Broken Column works through juxtapositions, parallels and polarities. There are two of everything: Laila and Zahra, Asad and Zahid, Saleem and Kemal, Uncle Hamid and Laila's father, Aunt Abida and Aunt Majida. There are even two houses – Aashiana and Hasanpur, and two maidservants Saliman and Nandi. These pairs are all contrasted with each other. They bring out the differences. Laila and Zahra, like Majida and Abida are closely related but think differently and lead different kinds of life. The brothers Saleem and Kemal are also different and adopt different political stands, finally they opt for two different countries. Of the two houses Aashiana is a big house and city-centred, and Hasanpur has a smaller, ancestral house. Finally it is Aashiana that is rendered desolate and is sold, the family dispersed while Hasanpur still continues to offer refuge to the old and the abandoned.

What purpose do these juxtapositions serve? They bring out the differences, emphasise the difference education can make; they also show how political ideas are rooted in social situations of discrimination and hostility. Further, the house Aashiana becomes a metaphor for the nation as power centres shift, members feel alienated and move away and memories become a substitute for living relationships.

24.1.2 Space

The use of space becomes an important part of the narrative of the novel. Space of different kinds is used and serves different purposes. For instance Aashiana is a house and this space is an enclosed private space while palaces are public space and gardens are open space. The city, Lucknow, itself is historical space.

Public spaces, the gardens and the city tell the tale of history. The city itself has been a place where different cultures have converged from different parts of the country – Hindu, Islamic and now British. The gardens indicate Islamic influence. Muslim landscaping and architecture brought with it formal planning of parks and gardens. Other monuments like *Aurengzeb's* mosque, the *Imambaras* of *Nawab-Viziers* and the clock tower trace the history of Lucknow. The old city that, which is also the centre where the riots take place is the heart of the city with its crowded streets and decadent houses of the impoverished nobility.

Another important public place is the *Baradari* where the *taluqdars* hold the reception for the Viceroy. It becomes a place for the display of royal grandeur, festivity and feasting. People with different political histories and lineages meet for this display of loyalty to the British. In the novel this reception serves several purposes. One, the power of the British is evident; this is an occasion for Laila to make her first formal social entry; it is here that she meets Ameer for the first time. And in the very next chapter we have the agitating students being *lathi-charged*. The students' agitation highlights the resentment against the British, whereas the Reception highlights the interests of the aristocratic class who still cling to the authority they derive from their loyalty to the British.

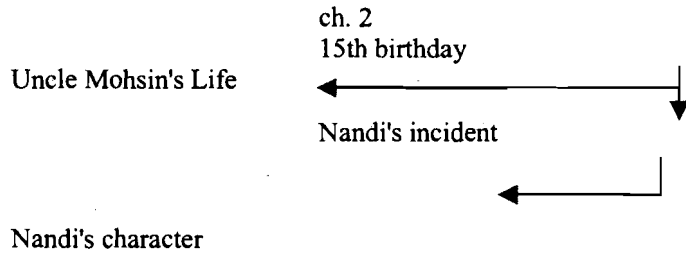
24.1.3 Aashiana

The house Aashiana symbolises space. It houses a family and is the background for the whole of Part-I and the whole of Part-IV. In Part-II & III the house plays a role, but the lifestyle, its membership and its decorations have all changed and it is no longer a protective roof. In fact the house despite the temporary moves away from it first to Hasanpur and then to the house in the hills, continues to be a strong strand in the novel; its changing appearance and significance also indicate the changing patterns of tradition and of political relationship.

direction like →, the last part works in the reverse direction like ←. But neither the linearity nor its reversal are straight, direct routes or journeys. Look at the following figure:

Part-I

Time present
 ch. 1 Baba Jan's illness



ch. 3 Laila summoned

fear of Baba Jan's death →

Baba Jan's friends ←

Ch. 4 meal time

Ustaniji & memories of childhood ←

Figure 3

This demonstration will make it abundantly clear that time does not standstill. It is constantly in a flux. Memories, stories, descriptions, fear of future happenings, reported events all pull time into different directions and fill up the novel with events.

Exercise 2

1. Give the meaning of (i) linear (ii) flashback

24.3 THE LAST SECTION

Part IV of the novel has come in for criticism. Is it relevant to the growing up of Laila or is it only a record of history? Are the events that are recalled in Part IV, necessary for the interpretation of the novel? Part IV serves many useful functions. It moves the novel out of the framework of an autobiographical narrative and places it in the nation's history. It also enhances the use of the house as a metaphor for the nation; it underplays the role of romance and turns our attention to the concerns of real life. Further, the events of Laila's life bring out Nandi's character and throw light on Sita's conflict with herself. Ameer's joining the Army, being taken prisoner and subsequently being killed draw attention to the World War II and to the economic necessity of earning a living. Ameer's death also punctures the idea of a fairy tale

romance of the 'they lived happily ever after' variety. Aunt Abida's death strikes the tragic note of a wasted life and comments upon the subordination of women. It also critiques the role of tradition when it constrains and destroys the individual.

The last part of the novel gives way to memory and recollection rather than work through participation and narration. Laila mentions very early in Part IV 'I was nearly home' (Part IV, ch 1). It is symbolic of a homecoming for her after her alienation from the family in the intervening years, after her rejection of the family's sympathy. She is now finally there - more mature and more at peace with herself, with her uncertainties smoothed out.

This section also tells us about the partition towards which the earlier power struggle has been leading. And it further tells us about the agony, the pain and the heartbreak the partition caused. It not only divided the country, it divided families, and the right of inheritance was interfered with by international law. Saleem and Kemal both are their father's heirs, but as one of them has gone to Pakistan, he claims his share there. In order to pay him the money, Kemal has to sell the house so that he can buy off Saleem's share in the Hasanpur house. Zainab's marriage and later her husband's posting abroad in a Pakistani mission also hints at the economic opportunities the new nation offers its citizens and contrasts with the squeezing of the public space for Indian Muslims in India. The refugees are a symbol of the national tragedy, the wholesale dislocation that had taken place in several parts of India, not only at the borders, but right at the heart of the country.

Thus Part IV is important for a number of reasons, all of which are connected with its dominant themes, the theme of partition, of growing up, the recording of history, the movement towards social change and the forces which brought it about, and the critiquing of patriarchy. It also makes it possible for Asad to be rehabilitated. He had been ousted from favour after Aunt Majida finds out that he loved Zahra. A sensitive young man, a believer in non-violence, socially committed and caring, the reader senses a coming together of Asad and Laila, which is a new beginning for both of them.

Exercise 3

1. Is Part-IV essential to the novel? Why? (100 words)

24.4 THE ROLE OF MINOR CHARACTERS

There are several clusters of characters in the novel that are not really developed. Many of them simply perform some roles. Some of them we only hear about but never meet, as for instance, the *Pathan* who is the father of Nandi's child, or her old husband, or Uncle Mohsin's family. But there are others who play a significant role like Nandi, Saliman, Zainab, Jumman dhobi etc. Still others who appear in passing but are used for purposes of contrast like Perin Wadia, the woman who marries Kemal. Being a *Parsi*, the marriage is a bold step for her as well.

From amongst the main relationships, even Ameer's character is underdeveloped. In fact, following the autobiographical mode, it is Laila's character that is fully developed. Next in line are Aunt Abida, Zahra, Sita, Asad, Kemal and Nandi. Baba Jan, Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira are treated as characters representative of roles and mindsets, not really developed as individual characters. The other relatives, friends and employees are used to represent views and attitudes as for instance Laila's friends. The family at Hasanpur is used to create an atmosphere and provide social history.

From amongst the characters in the second line, it is Nandi's role that is of significance. She is an unrefined, uneducated Laila, courageous, bold and independent. Her role in the novel is to highlight Laila's controlled rebellion and provide Laila with the support that is no longer forthcoming from Aunt Abida (Her character has been discussed in detail in **Unit 23**).

The minor characters also provide parallels, create an atmosphere, carry news and bring information. Ustaniji and Mrs. Martin, Mustari Bai all are important facets of a lifestyle as are Begum Waheed and Mrs. Wadia of a social world.

24.4.1 Male Characters

As the novel is written from a woman's point of view, the men are viewed mainly through her eyes and experiences. They are important because they relate to her and either advice and protect her, or support her in her resistance to conventions. They also help her to discover her strengths and limitations and find some kind of a self-realisation for herself. To begin with the men from the older generation, Baba Jan and his friends provide her with a sense of a protected, happy, harmonious world. Baba Jan, who controls the household even during his illness, and is seen as a strong patriarch is kind to her and follows her dead father's wishes in sending her to an English school. Uncle Hamid, even when he is not too keen to send her to college, does so and allows her to continue her studies at the postgraduate level as well.

24.4.2 Asad

Asad is an important character in the novel for several reasons. He is involved in the freedom struggle and presents a contrast to Saleem. Being a poor relative, he is edged out of the family house on Uncle Hamid's return. At that time he decides to go to Jamia Millia University and study there. Jamia Millia represents the secular ideals which Asad follows and is inspired by.

The reader learns early in the novel that Asad is a believer in non-violence. But ironically enough he does get caught in incidents of violence. The first time it is in the *Moharram* riots when he is pained that he can render no help to the helpless victims of the riot and where he himself receives a head injury. The second time it is during the student's agitation against the Viceroy's visit.

Asad comes across as a sensitive and shy person inclined towards poetry. He cherishes the finer values of life. In his early youth, he is attracted to Zahra, who considers him unworthy of herself and beneath her notice. Later we find that Zainab finds him attractive but Asad does not reciprocate.

Throughout the novel, whether he is present or not, his presence as an understanding ally can be felt. In Part IV when Laila goes over the house from room to room and recollects the happenings of the in-between years, it is Asad who finally comes to take her away. The relationship between Asad and Laila has never really been acknowledged or developed but he, apparently, is the anchor that she is looking for. Both have been through a lot of suffering and pain and are people who have come through the storm.

24.4.3 Kemal

Kemal is another character that is cast in the same mould as Asad and Laila. He too is sensitive and secular and cannot comprehend violence and separatist feelings. He is unwilling to marry Laila as he thinks of her as a sister.

Kemal falls in love with Sita. The relationship between Sita and Kemal is like a game played out in public. Kemal flirts with Mrs. Lall and Sita flirts with other men but both are all the time longing to be with each other. There are a couple of poignant scenes between them that are heartrending. They throw light on the contrary directions that the heart and political reality follow. One clashes with the other. Kemal proposes marriage to Sita but she refuses to marry him because marriage, for her, is a social event and a relationship between families and communities.

Later Kemal marries Perin. This marriage is also a significant move. For it shows the reader that he still does not necessarily look for a bride from the same religion. There is a crossing of boundaries that helps to sustain his humanistic values.

Kemal and Saleem together play an important part in Laila's growing up. She is allowed to go out with them when they insist upon it. Kemal also acts as her confidant from time to time. He supports her wish to marry Ameer. And he is the one who stays in India and holds the family together or whatever is now left of the family.

24.4.4 Saleem

Saleem is the second son of Uncle Hamid. He too, like Kemal, has been educated abroad. He is a year younger than Kemal. Saleem and Kemal are quite different both in appearance as well as attitude. He is stocky and slow of movement, not good at games but a person given to reading and intellectual pursuits. His early love affair in England had come to naught. Studying for the law, Saleem gradually turned from a Marxist to a Muslim Leaguer. He campaigns for Begum Waheed as opposed to helping his own father in the elections. Considering it imperative to protect the Muslim heritage, he marries Nadira and on the division of the country, opts for Pakistan. Saleem's move to Pakistan finally divides the family and necessitates a disposal of Aashiana.

Exercise 4

1. Write short notes on (i) the role of the minor characters (ii) Asad (iii) Kemal and (iv) Saleem.

.....

24.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at the structure and the form of the novel *Sunlight On A Broken Column*. We have also looked at the various juxtapositions and parallels at work and at the use of space as an important part of the narrative of the novel. We have examined the movement of time and the role memory plays in the novel as well as looked closely at the ending of the novel. Apart from that we have also provided an insight into the role of the minor characters. Having read the unit carefully we

expect you to be able to comment on the significance of the structure of the novels as well as on the importance of the minor characters in *Sunlight On A Broken Column*.

24.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Hints

1. (a) Structure is the process.
(b) Form the finished shape/image.
2. It is a symbol of the nation, represents tradition, comfort, a sense of belonging. The changes and the final sale indicate the division of the nation.
3. These descriptions create an atmosphere of the city, indicate its history as well as the Islamic influence

Exercise 2

1. (i) Linear is chronological sequence and (ii) flashback, recollection through memory, turn to the past.

Exercise 3

1. Yes. It fills up the 14 years interval, sums up the events, it shows Laila's mature self, it reflects upon the consequences of the partition and the refugee influx. It also shows the change from tradition to modernity.

Exercise 4

1. Go through the character sketches provided and discuss their (a) nature (b) political views (c) relationships.

UNIT 25 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Attia Hosain's Writing
 - 25.2.1 The Novel as History
 - 25.2.2 A Family Saga
 - 25.2.3 Other Family Sagas
 - 25.2.4 Social History
 - 25.2.5 Political History
- 25.3 Realism: An Introduction
 - 25.3.1 The Realistic Method
 - 25.3.2 Language and Imagery
- 25.4 Other Partition Novels
- 25.5 Other Muslim Writers
- 25.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.7 Answers to Exercises

25.0 OBJECTIVES

In the preceding units we have looked at some of the features of the novel – first person narration, the structure and form of the novel, reflections on the freedom struggle, the alienation of the Muslims, family relationships, marriages and losses – in fact, we have gone through the various aspects of the novel and have also seen how the characters are formed, how they interrelate and how they function in the novel. We have also looked at some of the main themes: the disintegration of the feudal structure, the beginnings of democracy, the power struggle, partition, exploitation of women in a patriarchal society amongst other things.

In this unit, it is proposed to discuss the importance of the novel, the writer's use of the realistic method, the manner in which this realism is disrupted – as well as the writer's use of recurring images in the novel as reflective of political and social history and the novel as a family saga. It is also proposed to locate it in the mainstream by discussing some other contemporary Muslim women writers, other partition novels and other similar works.

At the end of the unit you should be able to discuss the importance of the novel, its narrative technique and also be able to comment on its form and the parallels or differences that are available in other novels. You should also be able to comment on the reflections on historical reality and social environment.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

Attia Hosain has only two completed works to her credit, *Phoenix Fled* (1953) a collection of short stories and *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961), yet she is remembered as a writer of significance. One of the main reasons for this is her fine and sensitive portrayal of a Muslim family living through a particularly difficult period of India's history and the anguish she brings to this tale of the division of a family as the nation is divided.

25.2 ATTIA HOSAIN'S WRITING

Biographical information on **Attia Hosain** comes to one in bits and pieces. **Mulk Raj Anand's** introduction to the 1979 Heinemann edition of the novel and **Anita Desai's** to *Phoenix Fled* (1988) and *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1988) are two short biographical notes that trace the influences on her of intellectuals and writers like **Sajjid Zaheer**, **Rashid Jehan** and **D P Mukjerjee**. There are now several articles and interviews which throw light on the writer, her life and work. **Lakshmi Holmström's** two pieces one in 1992 and another in 1999 are two important ones.

Attia Hosain came from a family where the men were keenly involved in the politics of the time and she shared the idealistic vision and humanistic values of her generation, the ideas propagated through freedom, friendship and secularism. But she was not active in politics, her mother-in-law was a Muslim Leaguer and she herself was constrained by the division and conflict of the times.

25.2.1 The Novel as History

Sunlight On A Broken Column lends itself to multiple ways of reading. It has a strong autographical base. **Mulk Raj Anand** viewed it as a 'jigsaw puzzle of her memories'. An early review by **David McCutcheon** referred to the novel as a 'period piece', as a novel that reflected the social reality with accuracy and minuteness, recording the customs, lifestyles and events. Several critics have looked at it as a 'purdah novel'. **Uma Parameswaram** values it for its 'authentic glimpse of *purdah* at both literal and metaphorical levels'. Still others have looked at it as a 'regional' novel, which captures the history of Lucknow. **M K Naik** has described the novel as 'a nostalgic account of aristocratic life in pre-partition Lucknow'.

But over the years, the novel has outgrown these boundaries and descriptions. **Lakshmi Holmström** has described it as a 'personal story counterpointed against the family's and the nation's stories', thus at once reading it simultaneously in three different ways: personal and autographical, social and familial, and national. **Mushirul Hasan**, a leading intellectual of our times, has looked at the novel as a political expression of the 'the heart-in-pieces generation'. He, in an article in the *Indian Express* in 1988 (21 Feb, 1988), writes, it is "a classic so far as it illuminates, quite perceptively, aspects of a feudal society trying to come to terms with the changes. It records the cracking of India."

For our purposes we need to look at the novel as (i) a family saga, (ii) a novel of social history and (iii) of the partition.

25.2.2 A Family Saga

Sunlight On A Broken Column, on the face of it is a novel about twenty years in a girl's life but it stretches itself to become a family saga of three generations. It moves both vertically and horizontally. Vertically in the sense of lineage: grandfather, son, grandson and horizontally through the extended family of cousins, uncles, other relatives and the like.

Right in the beginning we have the house ruled by **Baba Jan's** strong personality. Nobody dares disobey him. He is the centre of the house, even as he lies ill on his deathbed. His two daughters and his absent son represent the second generation while his grandchildren stand, for the third generation.

Through the memories and associations related to **Baba Jan** we get to know about his friends and his social standing, his control over the household, his respect for tradition and also about his affection for his children. He allows **Laila** to be educated

according to her dead father's wishes and does not force his daughter Abida to get married.

It is during the period when the second generation is in control that we find the old structures being dismantled and crumbling down. Some of it is wilful and desired, it is the effect of modernisation and some of it is inevitable. It simply happens because life is like that, it has to change and grow. We get to know about the inheritance rights. Laila has a claim to paternal property while Zahra does not have any. We also get to know about the *purdah* customs. Old servants are allowed into the house and womenfolk move freely before them but otherwise *purdah* is observed from all men folk of all classes.

We also get to know about the friendliness and jealousies that exist in the household. The young girls cross the class boundaries as they dye their *dupattas*, share confidences and celebrate festivals.

With the third generation the family spreads far and wide. Zahra travels with her husband, Saleem later moves to Pakistan and Kemal joins the Civil Services, Laila has moved to the house in the hills. Aashiana is to be sold. Satellite establishments have come into existence. Gradually the image of the house as a central place disintegrates. The house which has symbolised for Laila 'the fulfilment of a deep need to belong', a completeness, a continuity between now, before and after, is now to be handed over to strangers.

25.2.3 Other Family Sagas

Several novels of the mid-twentieth century are family sagas as they represent a period of history when joint families were the rule rather than the exception. Life was more community-centred than it is now.

Of among the work of that period **Santha Rama Rau's** *Remember the House* (1956) like *Sunlight On A Broken Column* uses a house as a central metaphor for describing family life. **Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's** *The Heart Divided* (1957) is also a family saga.

Closer to our times, **Nina Sibal's** *Yatra*, **Gurcharan Das's** *A Fine Family* and even **Manju Kapur's** *Difficult Daughters* are in the form of family sagas. Several of these novels carry the story forward through family narratives and record the social change as projected through the changing relationships.

25.2.4 Social History

Sunlight On A Broken Column was early on classified as a 'period' piece. A period piece is a novel or a film that captures the atmosphere of a particular period. This description is also true of the novel, because it tells us in detail about the lifestyle, customs, relationships, kinship patterns, household organisations, *purdah* traditions of aristocratic Muslim families. It also tells us about the changes which western education was instrumental in bringing in their lives as well as the manner in which women undergo a transformation after marriage and travel. Zahra is one example and Sita is another. Moving outside the Muslim family, it also comments on the interpersonal relationships across religion as through the cluster of Baba Jan's friends and Laila's college friends, across class as the young girls are friendly with Saliman and Nandi, and across wealth as we see when Ameer's social standing or Asad's status cease to matter.

The novel also captures vividly the celebration of festivals and of everyday pleasures, through shared social activities whether they be cooking meals or dyeing *dupattas* or attending the reception at the *Baradari* or celebrating the victory in the elections. It further goes on to describe the gossip sessions of the young girls in Hasanpur. As it

goes on to record the political conflicts and uncertainties it develops into a novel of political history, which presents the prelude to partition and its aftermath.

25.2.5 Political History

Sunlight On A Broken Column is a novel of the partition, of the years 1932 to 1952, of the growing rift between Hindus and Muslims and describes it from the point of view of a liberal, secular Muslim family that wants to hold on to its Islamic identity and yet belong to the nation. The characters at various times express their fear of dislocation and exile; they also express their fear of Hindu domination. Freedom is not merely a change of rulers, it has to first establish and then function within a more equal one between communities.

The novel works through several historical situations:

- The freedom struggle, the Gandhian impact on the students, the resentment against the British rule symbolised by the Viceroy's visit and the agitation against him.
- There is also an awareness of the power struggle and the conflict of interests of the monied class, the *taluqdars* and landlords and the interests of the common man. The Congress's proposal of bringing in land reforms is not acceptable to the wealthy landowners.
- The whole procedure of nominations, campaigning and elections is also described. The elections divide loyalties, and friends and even families. Saleem canvasses for Begum Waheed rather than for his own father. World War II is used as a backdrop. Ameer joins the army, is taken prisoner and finally dies while trying to escape.

Finally, it is a partition novel that looks at the event from an Indian Muslim's point of view. A point of view where the Indian Muslim finds his social and economic space shrinking right before his eyes. It goes on to describe the anguish, dislocation and tragedy of everyone concerned, the exile who has left the country, the refugee who has been un-housed and the one who stays back is also dislodged and disturbed.

In the next section, we shall look at the concept of realism and at whether the novel is an illustration of realistic fiction or otherwise.

Exercise 1

1. Write a short note on the novel as social history (50 words)

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2. What aspects of political history does the novel deal with? (50 words)

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3. Can we treat *Sunlight On A Broken Column* as a family saga? (50 words)

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25.3 REALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

'Realism' is a difficult term to define. What does it mean? The 'real' is close to life. It means being factual and presenting reality as one sees it. But very often if we do not move beyond the visible, we fail to see the 'real' the actual meaning of a word or a happening. To be 'realistic' is to be practical, to look and work for solutions, compromises and adjustments. It is opposed to fantasy, or the dream world. It is not experimental or abstract. Thus a working definition, which one can use for 'realism-in art' would imply the following:

- Description of social life with its problems, handicaps and difficulties;
- Working in a network of relationships, thus taking note of social atmosphere; environment, practices and events;
- To be as close to the commonly accepted version as is humanly possible;
- To try to be objective and present the different views on the same subject and not to represent a dominantly personal view.

25.3.1 The Realistic Method

Having arrived at a working definition, let us examine *Sunlight On A Broken Column* as a realist novel. It does meet most of the requirements as we have seen on the sections on social history and political history. Further, very often Laila turns herself into a listener and an observer, and does not project her personal point of view. Specially when we come to Part-IV, all the major events of her adult life are presented in retrospect after a certain distancing has taken place. The isolation, loneliness or happiness she may have experienced is not described at length. Other characters like Sita, Zahra, Joan, Nadira, Asad or Kemal are all revealed through social interaction, dialogue and their actions. No attempt is made to get into the conflicting psychological situations that are only hinted at. By locating it in a specific place - Lucknow - and by placing it in the years 1932 to 1952 it is firmly rooted in time and place.

Yet, the novel does not stay throughout on a realistic plane. The environmental reality is disturbed by unconscious fears. There is the delirium which Asad experiences after his injury in the riots. It is then that he expresses his love for Zahra, an expression that affects his place in the family. On another occasion as the girls drive through the city towards Hasanpur they go through the zoo where they see the tiger, a sight that makes them talk about their fear. Laila tells Zahra, "I am frightened too. I dream about it; I dream it is free and I am trying to lock the doors of the house but there is always one door I cannot lock ..." (Part I, Chapter 16)

Laila refers to other dreams (Part-II, Chapter 13), where her inner conflicts are revealed. She is torn between Aunt Abida's wisdom, submissiveness and restraint and the rebelliousness of Nandi, she is also torn between her conscious love for Ameer and an unconscious pull towards Asad. Thus these dreams move beyond realism to trace out other conflicts.

The house itself, the manner in which it is used as a symbol of unity and harmony, becomes a symbol of the nation. The use of space widens the area of a realistic approach.

25.3.2 Language and Imagery

Another aspect of writing is language. **Attia Hosain** wrote in English not in Urdu. But she describes an Urdu speaking society. There is always an element of loss when a culture is described in a language not its own. But to overcome this, the writer,

**Attia Hosain:
Sunlight On A Broken
Column**

provides a glossary, and uses certain terms from the original like Baba Jan or Ustaniji etc. The language accommodates the Indian situation with a fair amount of ease, the fact that it is a household with members who are educated, some of them abroad, and mix with upper class society also helps.

The images are worth remarking upon. There is a mirror image which is a recurring one and which consciously disrupts the notion of reality. It reappears every now and then; when Laila is fifteen, when she is twenty and when she is thirty-five. It is a reflection, and at the same time it is an external view of the self. When she sees her reflection in the mirror she looks at it as it appears to others, it leads to self-knowledge. When she returns to Aashiana for a farewell visit in the final chapter, she looks at her image in the mirror and feels that though outwardly she may remain the same, it is very different from her real self. Earlier in the novel there is a scene when Zahra tells her to look in the mirror for the reflection of the man she will marry and at that moment Asad enters the room and is reflected in the mirror. In the final section there is an indication that this is now going to happen.

Exercise 2

1. Write a short note on **Attia Hosain's** use of realism as a narrative technique (50 words)
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2. What significance do the dreams have in the novel? (30 words)
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3. Why does the writer provide a glossary?
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25.4 OTHER PARTITION NOVELS

The partition of the country was a traumatic experience for the people and has thrown up a large body of literature – novels, short stories, autobiographies, memoirs, poetry and histories. You may be familiar with some of them or seen their movie versions like *A Train to Pakistan* or *Pinjar*. You may have read **Rahi Masoom Raza's** *Aadha Gaon* that is a powerful story about a divided village.

The novels about the mid-century happenings can be divided into three main kinds. First there are the ones that take up the freedom struggle and do not focus either on religion or on partition. Many of them deal with **Gandhi** and his impact on the nation, like **Raja Rao's** *Kanthapura*, or interpret his character like **Chaman Nahal's** *Azadi*, or his ideology like **Manohar Malgaonkar's** *Bend in the Ganges* or **R K Narayan's** *Waiting for the Mahatma*. In Hindi, many of **Premchand's** novels of the 1930s fall into this category.

There is a second category that deals with the revolutionary aspect of the freedom struggle and focuses on the struggle of the revolutionaries. **Yashpal's** *Jhoota Sach* and **Sarat Chandra's** novels like *Path Ke Davedar* (*The Right of Passage*) are such novels.

Then there are the novels that deal with the Partition – the making of the Partition and its aftermath. They write about the refugees, the dislocation, abduction of women, exile from the homeland and the pain of separation. In fact in recent years, after India completed fifty years of freedom, a spate of work has come up in this connection. I will mention only a couple. There is **Mukul Kesavan's** *Looking Through Glass*, **Bhisham Sahni's** *Tamas* and **Shauna Singh Baldwin's** *The Body Remembers*. Several TV serials have been based on this theme, as for instance *Buniyaad*. You simply have to try and recollect and you will recall many of these.

What is unique about *Sunlight On A Broken Column* is that it presents the story of a Muslim household, written by a Muslim woman from Lucknow. **Attia Hosain** wrote the novel in the fifties while in London. The novel was a fairly lengthy one and had a great deal more on the partition but was heavily edited before its publication in 1961. There is another novel written soon after partition, in 1948 but published posthumously in 1957, *The Heart Divided*. This novel is by a Pakistani's woman, **Mumtaz Shah Nawaz**. This novel is also from a woman's point of view and reflects the conflict of the Muslim identity in the years before the partition yet the two novels work very differently. First, it is located in Lahore and is much more deeply concerned with the freedom movement, with agitations and demonstration, *lathi-charges* and prison stays than *Sunlight On A Broken Column*. Further it also takes up Hindu-Muslim relations in greater depth and works with Zohra's brother Habib and her friend Mohini's relationship in greater detail. It is also not a first person narrative, though Zohra who is the central character and is a college-going girl of sixteen, is rebellious and intelligent like Laila.

The Heart Divided works with political and social history and discusses both patriarchal structures and *purdah* practices in greater detail than *Sunlight On A Broken Column*. The regional differences both in the political atmosphere and the power struggle can be seen when we read the two novels together. Together, the two novels present a detailed and comprehensive picture of Muslim society and conflicts in the 40s.

It is important to look at the past from multiple perspectives in order to understand the complexity of the political events. It is not without a struggle that a separate homeland was demanded. The reader shares the pain of the characters as they are pulled apart by the opposing requirements of national identity and religious community, as the struggle becomes one for survival.

Other partition novels like *A Train to Pakistan* also work through personal relationships. The dacoit Jagga is in love with a Muslim girl Nooran, and finally lays down his life in order to save her. In fact, a large number of these novel stress, the loss of human values as the political leaders instigate separation, and violence. Some, again like **Khushwant Singh** in *A Train to Pakistan* and **Bapsi Sidhwa** in *Ice-Candy Man* also comment upon the role the authorities and their representatives played in inflaming the riots.

25.5 OTHER MUSLIM WRITERS

There were several Muslim writers also writing about the partition. Both **Attia Hosain** and **Mumtaz Shah Nawaz** were Muslims. **Ahmed Ali** who wrote *Twilight in Delhi* (1946) a year before the partition was also a Muslim. Later he migrated to Pakistan. *Twilight in Delhi* is located in old Delhi and describes roughly the same period as **Attia Hosain's** novel.

Of the people writing in Urdu, names that you may have come across are names like **Ismat Chughtai**, **Sadaat Hasan Manto** and **Intezar Husain**. A lesser-known name is of **Zeenuth Futehally**. **Ismat Chughtai** wrote both novels and short stories. One of

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Sunlight On A Broken Column

her well-known novels is *Tehri Lakeer* (translated as *The Crooked Line*) that is about the 30s and the life of a Muslim girl from a large household. **Zeenuth Futehally** wrote *Zohra* in 1951, a novel located in Hyderabad. *Zohra* depicts a period before the rise of the Muslim League.

Both **Ahmed Ali** and **Zeenuth Futehally** look back at 1857 as an important event. This is the point from which the British gained real power, their rule became more ruthless and brutal than ever before and they began playing the Hindu against the Muslim in real earnest.

25.6 LET US SUM UP

We have gone through the various aspects of *Sunlight On A Broken Column*, step by step. Is it not remarkable the way a work of fiction can spread out in so many different ways? It tells us about histories and societies, conflicts and identities, hopes and failures and nation construction. Also it is equally remarkable the manner in which ideas cohere and come together and gradually unfold themselves in a piece of art. There is no short cut to the real enjoyment of art, or to understanding your own history and past. We hope you have enjoyed reading the novel.

Exercise 3

- Do you recall any TV serial or film about the Partition? Name two.
(a)
(b)
- When was *Sunlight On A Broken Column* published?
.....
- Give the dates of publications of:
(a) *Twilight in Delhi*:.....
(b) *Zohra*:.....
- How is *Sunlight On A Broken Column* different from other partition novels?
.....
.....
.....

25.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1 and 2 read the relevant section carefully and work out your answers.

Exercise 3

- (a) *Buniyaad*,
(b) *Tamas* (There are many films as for instance *A Train to Pakistan*, *Pinjar* and *Garam Hawa*).
- 1961
- (i) 1946 (ii) 1951
- It is unique in the sense that it is a first person narration, of an aristocratic Muslim Taluqdar family in Lucknow (other novels are neither first person narration nor located in Lucknow).

SUGGESTED READING

Unit 21

1. Fisher, Michael H., (1987), *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals*, (Manohar: New Delhi)
2. Hosain, Attia., (1953), *Phoenix Fled*, (Rupa and Co: Calcutta, 1993)
(1961), *Sunlight On A Broken Column*, (Arnold Heinmann: New Delhi, 1979)
3. Iyengar, Srinivas., (1962), *Indian Writing in English*, (Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd.,: New Delhi)
4. Mukherjee, Meenakshi., (1971), *The Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*, (Arnold Heinemann: New Delhi)

Unit 22

1. Ali, Ahmed., (1946), *Twilight in Delhi*, (Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 1991)
2. Amin, Amina., (1995), "Tension Between Restriction and Freedom: The Purdah Motif in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight On A Broken Column*", *Margins of Erasure*, Eds, Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin, (Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd: NewDelhi)
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Unit 23

1. Amin, Amina., (1995), "Tensions Between Restriction and Freedom: The Purdah Motif in Attia Hosains *Sunlight On A Broken Column*", *Margins of Erasure*, Eds, Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin, (Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd: New Delhi)

Unit 24

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2. Paramaswaran, Uma., (1995), "Purdah in Salman Rushdie, Attia Hosain and Rama Mehta", *Margins of Erasure*, Eds, Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin, (Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd: New Delhi)

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*Sunlight On A Broken
Column***

3. Baldwin, Shauna Singh., (1999), *What the Body Remembers*, (Harper Collins Publishers: New Delhi).
4. Begum, Jameela., (1995), "Reconstructing Personal History: The *Purdah* in Twilight in Delhi and *Sunlight On A Broken Column*". *Margins of Erasure*, Eds. Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin, (Sterling Publishing Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi).
5. Bharucha, Nilufer E., (1998), " 'I am universalist humanist': Conversation with Attia Hosain". *Biblio*, July-Aug. 1998. Vol. III, No. 7-8.
6. Desai, Anita., (1993), "Introduction". *Phoenix Fled*, (Rupa and Co.: Calcutta).
7. Fisher, Michael H., (1987), *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals*, (Manohar: New Delhi).
8. Hosain, Attia., (1953), *Phoenix Fled*, (Rupa & Co.: Calcutta).
_____ *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961), Arnold Heinemann: New Delhi, 1979).
9. Iyengar, Srinivas., (1962), *Indian Writing in English*, (Sterling Publisher: New Delhi).
10. Kaul R.K., and Jain Jasbir., (2001), *Attia Hosain*, (Rawat Publications: Jaipur).
11. Kesavan, Mukul., 1995, *Looking Through Glass*, (Ravi Dayal Publishers: New Delhi).
12. Mehta, Rama.,(1977), *Inside the Haveli*, (Arnold Heinemann: New Delhi).
13. Mukherjee, Meenakshi., (1971), *The Twice-born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the 14 Indian Novels in English*, (Heinemann: New Delhi).
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UNIT 26 *PARAJA* : AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Gopinath Mohanty: Biographical Details
- 26.3 The Oriya Novel
- 26.4 *Parajai*: The Story in Outline
- 26.5 *Paraja*: Detailed Summary
- 26.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.7 Glossary
- 26.8 Answers to Self Check Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit an attempt has been made to provide you with:

- A brief profile of the writer;
- The background of the Oriya novel;
- The outline story of the novel and
- A detailed critical summary of the novel followed by a glossary of terms and at the end a recapitulation of what has been covered in this unit.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel *Paraja* was written originally in Oriya in 1945 and later translated into English by **Bikram K Das** in 1987. The writer in his acknowledgement writes that he is "deeply indebted to **Dr Bikram K Das**, Professor of English in the SEAMO Regional Language Center, Singapore, for translating *Paraja*", as none of his fiction had ever before appeared in English. The translator writes that no translation can capture the "varied riches of **Gopinath Mohanty**'s Oriya prose vigorously colloquial and forthright at one moment and sublimely effervescent and lyrical at the next." This sad tale about the life of aboriginal *Paraja* tribe of Koraput, Orissa is the story of many such tribes who live such secluded lives. **Bikram Das**, the translator labels it as a sociological and anthropological documentation, and its sociological, philosophical and novel concerns are contemporary even though the novel was written way back in 1945. "The choice of the tribal canvas becomes singularly appropriate to **Mohanty**'s theme: the primeval consciousness of his tribal protagonists, reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being "(vi). In the citation of the *Jnanpith Award* it was said: "in Mohanty's hands, the social is lifted to the level of the metaphysical" (vi). Though a pessimistic novel, yet the pathos highlights existence, innocence, human endurance, and the will to wage war against a hostile world. Life is celebrated through dances and songs, festivals and rituals, marriages and relationships.

Let us now look at the biographical details of the author **Gopinath Mohanty**, as a proper understanding of the author, his life, and his works would be crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the novel *Paraja*.

26.2 GOPINATH MOHANTY: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Gopinath Mohanty (1924-93) belonged to a village called Nagabali in the Cuttack District of Orissa. After his post-graduation in English literature from Patna University he joined the Orissa Administrative Services and retired as Officer on Special Duty, Tribal Development Project. He was awarded the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1955, the *Jnanpith Award* in 1974 and the *Padmabhushan* in 1981. He has written more than twenty novels and dozens of short stories in Oriya. He is also a prolific translator of literature into Oriya. His award winning novels are *Amurtar Santan (Children of Immortality)*, and *Mati Matala*. His other works are *Paraja*, *Dadi Budha*, *Siba Bhai*, *Apahncha* and *Harjana*. All these novels deal with various aspects of tribal life and the exploited, downtrodden people. His other novels that tread into the realm of psychology and spirituality are *Darapani*, *Mara Gahirara Chashe*, *Rahura Chhaya*, *Laya Bilaya*, and *Duie Pahara*. He is considered to be one of the most well known novelists of Oriya literature.

In the next section we shall look at the development of the Oriya Novel before we move on to *Paraja*.

26.3 THE ORIYA NOVEL

The Oriya Novel has been under the influence of Western literature and the literature from the neighbourhood. Bengali and British literature have played a vital role in shaping Oriya literature as it is today. The Oriya language and the state of Orissa had been denied independent status till 1936 and it was only after this landmark in Oriya history that its literature started gaining importance.

Although attempts had been made at writing Oriya novels by authors like **Ramshankar Ray** and **Umesh Sarkar** in the late nineteenth century the rise of the Oriya novel was with the contribution by **Fakir Mohan Senapati** (1843-1918). His trend setting novel was *Chhanana Atha Guntha* (1897). After **Fakir Mohan Senapati** however, there was no significant input by any other writer. The first Oriya novel on tribals *Bhima Bhuyan* by **Gopal Ballav Das** was written in 1898 and published in 1908. The novel was based on the life of a tribal hero Bhima belonging to the Bhuyan tribe of Keonjhar District in Orissa. It was in 1931 that **Kalindi Charan Panigrahi's** *Matina Manisha* gained popularity as it was based on Gandhian principles and ideals. **Pratibha Ray's** *Adhibhumi* is about the Bonda Tribals struggling for survival in free India. Thereafter, there was an upsurge in the field of Oriya novel. **Gopinath Mohanty** emerged as the most successful writer. His novels focused on social issues, the life and the cultural practices of the preliterate and the tribal, the pain, the suffering, the anguish and the agony of the protagonists who are either from poor or middle economic strata of society. His most popular

novels are *Paraja* and *Amrutas Santan*. In the next section we shall look at the story in outline of *Paraja*.

Exercise I

1. Which literatures have influenced the Oriya novel?
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. What were the themes of the early Oriya novels?
.....
.....
.....

3. Write a brief note on Gopinath Mohanty.
.....
.....
.....
.....

26.4 PARAJA: THE STORY IN OUTLINE

The novel deals with the life of the Parajas, a tribe in the Koraput District of Orissa. The protagonist of the novel is Sukru Jani, a widower who has two sons – Mandia and Tikra, and two daughters – Jili and Bili. Life is not a bed of roses for this simple man, as he has to work hard to make both ends meet. Despite all these hardships he is happy. But his happiness is short-lived and a train of misfortune befalls him and his family. The Forest Guard takes his vengeance on the family after Jili refuses his advances. The Forest Guard's hostility compels Sukru Jani to take a loan and in doing so he becomes a *goti*, as he has been implicated for illegal felling of trees. Gradually, the money - lender usurps his land, his daughter and both the sons work as *gotis* for him and there is no end to the harassment that takes place. Sukru Jani's and his sons' patience gives way to anger and pent up feelings when they are duped in court. The subaltern voice that has not been heard before anywhere is raised only through the murderous act committed by the elder son who hacks the *Sahukar*, the trouble - maker. After the incident they go to the police station to surrender. Thus, it is an endless tale of woes and suffering.

The tribals of Sarsupadar are forced to resort to violence due to their abject poverty, their loneliness and alienation, the loss of their lands, and the degradation of human relationships. It is a realistic story where the protagonist Sukru Jani lives in a domain of death-in-life realities. And it becomes evident from the story that in the presence of hunger and poverty, notions of crime, sin and morality are denounced.

If we appreciate the theme of the story in totality then we realise that the answers to various questions on exploitation of the tribals by the so-called civilised world is embedded in the questions itself. The solution is in not

being marginalised but in raising a voice against the exploitative, oppressive state apparatus and the social system. The novel is neither a romantic story, nor a tragic tale; it has neither a revenge theme nor is it about betrayals. It is a novel about existence, about the hard realities of life that people face; about life and living; about survival and an undying hope. The next section provides a detailed summary of the novel *Paraja*.

26.5 PARAJA: DETAILED SUMMARY

The novel consists of 114 chapters; each more emphatically portraying the life and culture of the tribe Paraja. The events in the novel begin in winter and trace the misfortunes of Sukru Jani and his family through a span of a full year till next December. This enables the reader to complete one complete cycle of year, festivals, crops and other activities of the region.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to the mountain pass known as the 'Dharam Dooar' – 'The Gate of Truth' at the foot of which lies the hamlet of Sarsupadar in the Eastern Ghats. The road links the town of Koraput and Rayagada. The hamlet consists of two clusters of thatched huts – the two separate streets of the Paraja tribe and the Dombs. The chapter enhances our knowledge about the life of the Paraja tribe inclusive of their food habits, their clothes and their residential accommodations and all description spells out simplicity. In this chapter we are introduced to the protagonist Sukru Jani and his family who have been living in peace. Their needs are simple and their desires limited. Sukru Jani's wife Sombari is dead. A man-eating tiger had carried her away and thereafter the husband – Sukru Jani has been living with his sons – Mandia and Tikra, and his daughters - Jili and Bili.

Chapter 2 further broadens our vision about the life style of the Paraja. If men worked in the fields and forests, the women of the house took care of the daily household chores, whether it was cooking or washing. This chapter introduces us to the Forest Guard who may be seen loitering on the bank of the stream with a shot - gun on his shoulder. He is easily recognisable as one from the civilised world, because in those hills, where people went about half-naked, he is dressed in shirts and shorts. In the eyes of the hill folk he is a person of high authority, for he is a forest guard and it is his job to catch people felling trees in the jungle. (9). The chapter describes the political structure of the village with *Naika* as the headman, *Ribini*, the Revenue Inspector, *Barik* the village watchman and the Forest Guard. Whenever the Forest Guard arrives, every villager brings offerings to him to please him so that none are in his list of offenders. He is the 'arm of law'. Sukru Jani too visits the Forest Guard to pay his obeisance. As an offering he takes two fat hens and three big jackfruits. Sukru Jani wants a favour from the Forest Guard, that favour is granted and this is to fell trees and to clear the jungle on the flat - topped hill where two men of the Domb caste have already cleared ten acres of land. At the same time the forest guard starts desiring Sukru Jani's daughter Jili. Jili's bosom friend Kajodi is betrothed to Mandia and Bagla, son of Rengu Paraja is in love with Jili.

Chapter 3 opens with Sukru Jani's announcement to his family that permission to clear the forest and fell trees on the Mali Damaka Hill has been granted.

Thereafter, the children leave for their dormitories that are in the centre of the village. Unmarried girls and boys sleep in their respective dormitories. The chapter also introduces us to the folk and tribal songs sung to the accompaniment of the *dungudunga*/the drums.

The next chapter pinpoints two things – one, the hard work and labour of the tribal's in eeking out their hand-to-mouth existence and two, their ignorance about environmental conservation, Sukru Jani would often think:

How vast the Forest is! And how nice it would be if all these trees could be cut down and the ground completely cleared and made ready to raise our crops. Land! That is what we want What beautiful lands they are ! And all these forest lands can be reclaimed and crops raised on them! Why there should be forests when they mean nothing to us, and not crops? Sukru Jani knew nothing of soil conservation or the dangers of destroying forests... .. He was concerned with the present and with his small personal interests.

(pp. 22-23)

Chapter 5 further highlights the authority of the Forest Guard. He bullies Jili who is both surprised and shocked but is unable to express her resentment. Her unhappiness is reflected through her eyes, her face and her behaviour. He indirectly threatens the two girls Jili and Bili by entering their house in the absence of their father.

The next chapter introduces us to yet another character in the story and in the tribal's life - the headman's *goti* – Kau Paraja. It is he who carries the message of the Forest Guard to Sukru Jani. The Forest Guard desires Jili and her father Sukru Jani obviously refuses the offer.

Chapter 7 depicts very clearly the exploitation of the poor, the ignorant and the illiterate in the hands of the conniving powerful few. The chapter also shows us how the civilised people capitalise on the simplicity and illiteracy of tribal folk. The Forest Guard returns after a month with officials who question Sukru Jani about clearing the patch of land for which permission had been sought from and granted by the Forest Guard. The Forest Guard obviously denies that he had ever given such permission. Evidences are recorded and as each tribal and non tribal wishes to save himself, falsehood is recorded with great conviction. Sukru Jani is terrified by all the paper work that is going on. The verdict is that Sukru Jani is guilty and has caused a loss of a few score of rupees to the Raja and he must pay for his crime.

Thereafter, in the next chapter the misery of the family is described. The people of the village advise Sukru Jani to raise a loan from the money - lender Ram Bisoi and in exchange become a debt bound *goti* or a bonded labourer. Sukru Jani is not ready to exchange his shelter and freedom as he has never questioned the legality of his actions, and has not realised that he is not the owner of the land he has been tilling as his own.

The despair and misery of the Sukru Jani stretches into the next chapter as well. The past and present visions merge in front of Sukru Jani's eyes. But by the next day he is aware that he has no choice except to go to the money - lender.

The tragic drama that will unfold as a result of his decision to borrow money mortgaging himself as a *goti* or a bonded labourer to *Sahukar* Ramchandra Bisoi starts in Chapter 10 and continues through Chapter 11 as well. The

tribal folk seek loans from him for the bride price that the Paraja men have to pay and for buying grain etc. In Sukru Jani's case a loan of fifty rupees is raised, an agreement signed and smeared with thumb impressions; a deed of which Sukru Jani does not understand a word. And that day spells doomsday for Sukru Jani's family.

From today we are gotis, my son; we have signed the agreement and from today we are gotis! 'His eyes filled with tears and his chest heaved with great sighs. The ageing father threw his arms round his son, broke into sobs and said:

'Gotis, Tikra! From today we are gotis, slaves!'

Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15 inform us about the details of the bargain between the Forest Guard, *Naika*, and the others who make a part payment to the Forest Guard with the money raised by Sukru Jani who puts himself and his sons' freedom at stake, and they distribute the rest of the money among themselves. The cloud that passes over Sukru Jani's family brings tears, sorrow and unhappiness but saves him from being sent to jail. Sukru Jani and Tikra have to work as *gotis* for the money - lender Ram Bisoi who lives eight miles away from Sarsupadar. For a debt bound labourer each day is of hard labour and the days are never ending.

Chapters 16-19, once again take us back to the life of the Paraja tribe, to the Sarsupadar village, and to Sukru Jani's family members who are left behind. Mandia Jani takes charge of the house and the fields. He intends getting married to Kajodi, his sister's friend, but for that he has to pay a bride price and he wants to offer the bride price only after the harvest. It is not only Mandia who dreams of getting married to Kajodi but also Sukru Jani who approves of this match. Then, Mandia plans to brew liquor and in exchange gets labourers to reap paddy for them, he suggest to his sisters to collect mahua flowers, and they in return ask for combs. Subtly the author also refers to the difficult ways of life that these Paraja folk undergo. Their plight can be clearly visualised - Father and son become *gotis* for no fault of theirs; there is no labour to reap the harvest; liquor is brewed illegally; and the daughters grow chillies to earn money by selling them and with each passing day life starts becoming tougher and tougher.

Chapters 20 and 21 reveal the growth of friendship between Mandia and Kajodi; and Jili and Bagla. Chapter 22 takes us to the homestead of the money - lender and the lives of the *gotis* where Tikra works. The girls who work there look at Tikra with great admiration and interest. Tikra and the girls work and sing together. Sukru Jani asks for leave but is refused.

The next chapter is a description of the market day at Podagod - a weekly market that takes place on Wednesdays. The day becomes a social event as women dress up in their brightest clothes and their gaudiest beads; and the place is meant for meeting friends and exchanging gossip.

The chapter following this is about the home coming of Sukru Jani. He has returned at the last moment for the harvest festival. He had not been allowed to return in time to harvest his fields. Chapter 25 and 26 are about the harvest festival. Despite the cold, misty morning the spirits of the people are high. From early morning they are busy with the preparations for the harvest festival. After an early meal the men have gone to the jungle to collect wood for the bonfire and the young women are busy cleaning and painting the

house. Some are even busy with laundering clothes. Thereafter the personal grooming and dressing starts from the best of saris to the brightest of bangles and the beautification aspect occupies the minds of the women. Everywhere in the village there is feverish fun and activity taking place, except for Sukru Jani's house. He feels he has no home, no family to either rejoice with or to even share his sorrows. For him Tikra is still a child; Mandia too young to be entrusted with the responsibility of running the household; Jili is too busy dreaming of Bagla and Bili keeps fantasising about young men. For him the house that was once in perfect order is now in complete shambles and his safe secure house has fallen apart. The festival begins at dusk and the dance and the rituals have started. The next day the 'Saltu - the Salt and Excise Department' (p 100) catches Mandia red-handed brewing and selling liquor illicitly. The articles are seized and statements are recorded. Thus the festival ends on an unhappy note for Sukru Jani and his family.

Mandia Jani's becoming a *goti* is narrated in the next two chapters. Mandia is tried and found guilty and is fined fifty rupees. Once again in order to raise a loan, and to avoid being jailed, a *goti* is born. The following chapters are a sad story of the aftermath of Sukru Jani and his sons becoming *gotis*. They live a life of not only poverty but also of exploitation and abuse. Jili and Bili too face the brunt of a harsh life. Initially there is food at home but gradually the stores start running low. We have to keep in mind the fact that these are people eeking out an existence. Life is no longer beautiful for the young girls. It is mere drudgery and a burden.

Chapter 32 describes the house of Ramchandra Bisoi. His house and the description thereof are a sharp contrast to the poverty of the Parajas. There are bullock-carts in front of his house. To enter the house, one has to first pass through his warehouses stuffed with grains that are stored in either jute bags or bamboo netted containers. In the inner courtyard oil seeds, chillies etc. are left drying in the Sun and then one reaches the rooms that he and his family occupy. The veranda is stocked with bags of grain; a weighing scale, piles of old chairs and accumulated junk. The entrance is a big wooden door with huge iron knobs. He is the owner of the fields, orchards, granaries and houses. On either side of the *Sahukar's* empire lies the village of these tribesmen. The villages are a cluster of ragged, mud-walled huts and half blown thatched roofs, there is dust all around and the only sound that can be heard is of wailing hungry children. These huts have their own tales of woes to narrate. The *gotis* once were hard-working peasants living lives of dignity. Their ancestors had owned all the land. The first distillery came up and the money-lender started obliging the tribesmen even without money and after a few days he would insist either on the accumulated debt or demand land from them in return for the loan. The Government took away the liquor shop but the land belonged to the money-lenders. Thus, grew the power and money of the money-lender. The occupants of the huts live in perpetual terror as the officials and the police constantly harass them. Many stories of the brutality of the money-lender travel by word of mouth. His hired labour have to perform all odd jobs and sometimes even the tribal girls are called to dance for him.

The next ten chapters are about the Spring Festival, the activities that take place during that time, and the rituals and the marriages. The days before the festival are of activity for everyone – firewood to be collected, jungles to be

cleared, fields to be ploughed for sowing rice by applying manure; and women have 'n' number of jobs to be completed because once the festivities begin no one will work and all that remains to be done is dancing, singing, drinking, hunting and feasting. Everyone in the village works except Bili and Jili who are deeply engrossed in their sorrow and their hand-to-mouth existence. No one helps them except Kau Paraja. His appearance is ugly but his talents are many. He has a wonderful memory for details and therefore is employed as a messenger. He gradually starts dreaming of Jili as the eligible bride for himself.

The soothsayer calculates the day and the time when the Spring Festival should start and the traditional prayers, rituals and customs begin. The incantations to the gods are sung, ceremonies performed and the festival inaugurated. The night is awake and bright with festivity and dance. It is on this night that Bagla lifts Kajodi and rushes off into the jungle, a signal of their inclination to get married. Jili feels desolate, ditched and lonely. The next day the hunt in the jungle for animals starts. Mandia proposes to Kajodi who refuses to marry him. Chapters 45 and 49 describe the marriage customs of the Paraja tribe. Bagla and Kajodi decide to marry. The in-between chapters reflect on the sorrowful state of Sukru Jani's family. He and his sons have to return to the money - lender's house. Jili feels dejected and Bili is still very immature. In the following chapters Sukru Jani decides to mortgage his land to free themselves from the money - lender as *gotis*. Even to decide such a thing was a difficult task for Sukru Jani. The *Sahukar* shows no interest at all in his pleas.

Chapter 52 is an eye opener on how the rich and powerful usurp the land of the Parajas in particular and of all tribal people in general. The *Sahukar's* mentor is Garaja Surdara, the Ribini or the Revenue Inspector. Ramachandra Bisoi has modelled himself into a carbon copy of the Ribini. They plan to repossess the land lost to the Kondhs and the *Sahukar* is successful in obtaining the land through illegal machinations. Chapter 53 onwards we witness a turn of events in the lives of Sukru Jani's family members. Sukru Jani's fields lie fallow; Jili grieves over her first love and Bagla and Kajodi are in the prime of their youth and marriage. It is the neighbour Diptomani, daughter of the Domb Barik or village messenger who informs Jili about the new highway that is being built and that the contractor's agents are looking for labourers to hire them and that they are being paid in advances on wages. People have to live in camps. Both the sisters decide to lock up the house and leave. *She cried out: 'I don't care about what father will say! What does he care about us?' (204)*. When Sukru Jani comes to know about this he feels betrayed and is thoroughly confused. Sukru Jani once again asks the *Sahukar* to mortgage his land and free one of his sons. The *Sahukar* is furious and refuses to talk about the land. Sukru Jani's house and fields lay fallow and desolate.

Chapter 60 describes the lives of the labourers on the highway. People from distant villages have come to work there. The contractor is a Kutchee (Gujarati) and the young supervisor moves around noting details. The labourers work, laugh and sing as their hands and feet move with a natural rhythm. Fires are lit in the evenings for the preparation of meals but after that the *dungudungas* become silent and the fires grow cold as the labour camp settles for the night. New acquaintances turn into friendships as the surroundings become familiar. Pay - day comes once a week and the camp is

transformed into a festival. In the afternoon, the labourers gather in front of the Supervisor's hut for their wages. Questions about morality or sexuality are of no importance here given the situation of the labour camp. It is a common sight to see men and women together. The Supervisor takes a fancy to Jili. Rami from Champi village works for the supervisor and she takes the initiative in helping the supervisor meet his wants. Bili too follows in Jili's footsteps and the supervisor and other young men give presents to the two girls for their favours. The gifts are in the form of coins, saris, cakes of perfumed soap, scented oil, beads and rings. Life is full of work, dance, song and little assets.

With Chapter 63 once again the reader rolls back into the premises of *Sahukar*, Sukru Jani, Mandia and Tikra. The *Sahukar* is clever enough to send the Domb Barik to survey the land and it is evaluated as valuable land. Thereafter, the *Sahukar* calls upon Sukru Jani and decides to settle the matter of Sukru Jani's land. Later the *Sahukar* inspects the land and decides to frame an oral agreement that indicated that Sukru Jani would be released but his sons would remain *gotis*. The land could be redeemed when Sukru Jani paid twenty-five rupees to the *Sahukar*, but until then it would be the *Sahukar's*. There are no witnesses. Sukru Jani is set free but this lonely old, helpless man's heart weighs heavy with the fact that his sons are still *gotis*. He returns to his house in the village but is at a loss as he finds his hut locked and his two daughters missing.

A few days later he decides to search for his daughters and after an endless search finds them. He wants his daughters to accompany him back to the village but they have realised that it is futile to do so as there is not enough food for them. The Supervisor offers work to Sukru Jani as well which he refuses. Jili and Bili have to pack their belongings and return with their father. Back home they help their father. Kau Paraja and their friendship grows. Chapter 72 introduces us to a new character, Nandibali Paraja who has set out to find himself a bride. He is a young orphan, with no land and owns nothing except his strong, muscular limbs. He wants a wife, but as bride price is ready to work as a *goti* for the bride's father. It is at this point of time that he meets Bili. He approaches Sukru Jani who agrees to his proposal and Nandibali becomes a new member of the family.

In the following chapters the *Sahukar's* visit to the village is described. He has bought land and has decided to plant an orange orchard on it, and has therefore, camped in the village. The *Sahukar* starts desiring Jili and then one evening Jili is rounded up by Madhu Ghasi who used to come with the *Sahukar's* proposal and presents, and who takes her to what used to be the young mens' dormitory. Jili's night outs become a regular phenomenon. In the meanwhile Mandia and Tikra are planning to rid themselves off the *Sahukar* and they have decided to sell liquor, earn money and repay the debt. It is Kau Paraja who discovers that Jili visits the *Sahukar's* house and in utter frustration Kau Paraja informs Sukru Jani about it. Sukru Jani is furious and throws Jili out of his house. Jili has no place to go to and no one to turn to except the *Sahukar's* and his house. The *Sahukar* cleverly proposes marriage to Jili and pays the bride price to Sukru Jani, but Sukru Jani is not ready to accept the situation. Meanwhile, Jili adjusts herself to her new house. For a few days the *Sahukar* plays the role of the infatuated lover and then he decides to leave Jili behind and go back to his village. He sweetly tells her to take care of everything, making her feel important. In unfamiliar surroundings i.e.

at Kadamjholla where she lives with the *Sahukar*, she is lonely and unhappy. She cannot even understand the Kondh dialect. Meanwhile, Mandia and Tikra begin distilling liquor and selling it illicitly to earn money.

Chapter 103 onwards the preparation for the final blow, the catastrophe for Sukru Jani's family begins. Mandia and Tikra through Sukru Jani offer money to the *Sahukar* for their freedom and their land. Instead of freeing them he threatens them with the police claiming the money to be stolen. He refuses to give back their land as decided in the oral agreement. According to him the land has been mortgaged for thirty years. Nandibali suggests that they move the court. The world of law courts is a place they have but seen from a distance and the tribesmen live in terror of the court. They walk to Koraput town. They meet the Petition Writer in the court who suggests that they get a written petition and engage a lawyer. They wait to talk to the magistrate but fail in their efforts. Then they go back to the Petition Writer who demands two rupees for the paper, five rupees for the stamp, etc. At last the petition is written and filed. He fills the simple tribal folk with confidence that they'll be able to win back their land. The *Sahukar* meanwhile bribes and threatens the Paraja tribesmen of Sarsupadar. By this time Sukru Jani is full of self-pity and is getting tired of the misfortunes that keep befalling his family, though he tries hard to put up a brave front. He calls on the Gods:

O Dadi Budha, Soul of my first ancestor; Almighty Dharmu,; Dharatini, Mother Earth: have pity on me! Do not trouble me any more, and I will sacrifice as many pigeons and fowl as you wish.

(p. 355)

Sukru Jani is given the next date for the hearing of the case for when he has to bring his witnesses. Simultaneously money changes hands between the *Sahukar* and the petition writer as well. Sukru Jani along with his witnesses go to Koraput on the fixed date but discover to their horror and shock that the case has been dismissed as Sukru Jani had not appeared at the hearing. He is duped once again. By this time Sukru Jani is in a state of frenzy. They decide to talk to the *Sahukar*. Sukru Jani and his two sons go to the *Sahukar's* place where Jili stays and pleads for their land. The *Sahukar* refuses to help them. In a state of anger Mandia axes the *Sahukar* and he, his brother and father also are accomplices to this heinous crime. Jili runs away and the three go to Lachhimpur police station to admit their crime and to surrender before the police.

It is on this sad note that the tragic tale of Sukru Jani and his family end. From sustenance to bondage, from happiness to grief, the lives of Sukru Jani and many such tribal peasants are constantly eroded and become tales of suffering.

Exercise II

1. Write an outline story of *Paraja*.

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2. Who are the main characters in the novel and what is their relationship?

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3. Write a brief character sketch of Sukru Jani.

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4. What is the theme of the novel?

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5. Do you think the novel throws light on tribal life? Support your answer.

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26.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have given you a brief outline of the Oriya novel; we have introduced the author **Gopinath Mohanty** and his works; and an accounted initially an overview of the story of *Paraja*, and later a detailed summary of the text to familiarise you with the novel in brief. Though the novel deals with the life of the Parajas at large; yet it narrates the sad tale of exploitation, misery and despair of Sukru Jani and his family in particular. The ruthless system of oppression destroys and completely ruins many tribal peasants like Sukru Jani. The novel sensitises the reader to the lives of millions of tortured people.

26.7 GLOSSARY

Paraja:	Aboriginal tribe which has its home among the rugged mountains of Koraput in Orissa.
Naika:	The headman of the village
Ribini:	The Revenue Inspector

Barik:	The village watchman
Lord Jhakar:	The All – Pervading One (God of the tribe)
Nisani Munda:	The Earth Goddess
<i>Goti</i> :	Bonded labourer
Kondh, Gadaba, Jhodia:	Names of tribes
Saltu:	The Salt and Excise department
Kurayi Mahua:	Flowers
Kadamba:	Tree
Disari:	The diviner or the sooth sayer
Beju:	A human medium used by Disari for prophecy
Jani:	The village priest
Dharmu:	The Just One (God)
Basumati:	The Earth Goddess
Jhakar:	The God for all seasons
Bagh-Debta:	The Tiger God
Kutchee:	Gujarati, a person belonging to the Kutch region of Gujarat
<i>Sahukar</i> :	The money - lender
Subaltern:	Of inferior rank (includes peasants workers and other group denied access to hegemonic power of the ruling classes)

26.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Western and Bengali Literature.
2. The novels were largely based on the life and culture of the tribal people and sometimes on Gandhian principles and social issues.
3. Gopinath Mohanty was born in 1924 and is a highly acclaimed writer. His novels deal with various aspects of tribal life and the exploited down trodden people.

Exercise II

1. The Praja are a group of tribals who were constantly exploited then and are still today and the novel deals with the destruction of the family of Sukru Jani and how out of sheer helplessness and frustration they hack a man to death.
2. The father Sukru Jani, his two sons Mandia and Tikra, his two daughters- Jii and Bili, the Forest Guard, the Naika, Kajodia- the betrothed of Mandia, Bagla – the beloved of Jili, Ram Chand Bisoi, and the *Sahukar* who is instrumental in destroying their lives.
3. Sukru Jani is an honest, God fearing man who has the misfortune of being born a tribal and illiterate at that, he is weak in terms of material possession and knowledge of the law, and is gullible as he can be misguided very easily, but he is also a man of great integrity, has great love for his family and immense self respect.

4. The theme of the novel is the exploitation of the tribesmen in Orissa but it could be applicable everywhere and the destruction of a way of life by the corrupting forces of material society.
5. The novel Paraja deals with the customs, the culture, the festivals and the songs and dances of the Paraja tribes. It also sheds light on their way of life and their thinking.

***Paraja: An
Introduction***

UNIT 27 THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF *PARAJA*

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Economic Plight of the Tribals
- 27.3 Social and Political Structure
- 27.4 The Subaltern Voice
- 27.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.6 Glossary
- 27.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

On reading this Unit carefully you will be able to:

- Understand the socio-economic condition of the tribals.
- Place the tribals in a social and political hierarchy.
- Glimpse the life of the tribals.
- And evaluate, whether or not a tribal has any voice or any say in the socio- cultural context.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will go through a discussion that aims to highlight a few important factors about tribal life in general, and about the Paraja community especially the protagonist and his family in particular. Fiction is considered to be a mirror of society, as it depicts the political, economic, socio - cultural, ethical and religious perspective of the society. This form of writing is used as a medium for the dissemination of ideas and thoughts. A socio - cultural novel is an interaction between socio - economic and political implications, and moral and cultural values. Frenchman **Taine** said, 'literature is the consequence of the moment, race and milieu.' Thus, the geographical conditions, the historical moment and the social milieu influence creative writing.

Mohanty's *Paraja* is one such text where the local geographical details, the feudal background, the economic and material resources and the unremarkable bond between man and nature are manifest in its social custom, rituals and rites are fore - grounded effectively. **Mohanty** leaves no space and no opportunity to fore – ground his point. The cultural phenomenon thrives on the politics, economic power structures and socio - cultural practices that give meaning to particular society. An in-depth analysis and interpretations reveal the meaning, embedded in this phenomenon, which are the product of social forces and conventions. Culture is alive and changing rather than static and monolithic. Hence, culture is the 'practice of everyday life'

This unit as a whole and the block overall will help you in understanding *Paraja* as a novel on tribal life and you'll be able to understand the text in its cultural context. In the following section, we shall examine the economic plight of the tribals as reflected in *Paraja*.

27.2 ECONOMIC PLIGHT OF THE TRIBALS

The novel *Paraja* gives ethnographic details about poverty in the Koraput district of Orissa, especially amongst the tribals of Sarsupadar. At the onset of the story, on the very first page itself – we have a description of the hamlet – 'thatched huts'; 'patches of green sown with maize, chillies or tobacco'; 'mandia, olsi and kandula staple food of these tribes.' The description is a tell-tale about the poor living conditions of the Paraja folk: single room divided into compartments with not many accessories, containers made of leaves, clothes that hang are just loin cloths of men and cotton saris of girls; dried bottle gourds to carry mandia gruel to the fields; and umbrellas made of dried palm leaves. They earn their living by working on their small 'patches of green' or as labour/*gotis* for someone especially the money - lender. Neither their ambitions are high nor their desires too many. They are basically God-fearing people and believe in Gods and Goddesses associated with nature. They have firm faith in their own efforts. Women bathe, and wash at the stream and carry water for their homes. Their dress is mainly a sari and their jewellery consists of bead necklaces, bangles, etc.

And thus it was that in this land of hills and forests in an unmapped corner of the wide world, luckless men and women who lived on castaway mango stones and hid their nakedness in bits of rag huddled together under the torrent of misery pouring down on their heads, and wept.
(p. 37)

But who listens to the cries of these people or sees the tears that roll down their cheeks? To raise a loan of fifty rupees, a tribal has to become a *goti* (bonded labourer) for a life – time. It is evident that uneducated, economically poor tribals are thoroughly exploited. Chapter 32 brings up the various, horrifying aspects of bonded labour. The *gotis* live in ragged and tattered huts and men, women, children, chickens, dogs and swine grovelled in the same dust. Women are exploited constantly as a result of the economic instability of the Paraja menfolk.

For the *goti* it was fruitless labour as he earns no wages, is paid no salary, but has to sweat his life away in trying to work off the loan.

A clear comparison has been made between the rich and poor in Chapter 32. The chapter defines distinctly the residential palace like the house of the money - lender and the miserable huts of the *gotis*. This chapter lays bare the story of how the money - lender becomes the feudal lord and master. Chapter 79 highlights the callousness of these money-minded people. When Dasru Paraja wails that his brother Sania has been carried off by the tiger, the *Sahukar* immediately thinks of his money and tells Dasru Paraja to repay the debt of his brother or he'll take him to the court and confiscate his land and ox.

Poverty is horrifying and more so when it leads to exploitation and the exploited do not feel or even realise that they are being used, exploited. Thus, Chapters 60 and 61 are a description of the life of the people living on the highway. The labourers on the highway are better off in comparison to the *gotis* and the supervisor is better off in comparison to the *Sahukar*. At least the workers are paid for their hard work and the poor people can get their daughters married into families that can pay a good bride price.

Poverty has been well portrayed by **Mohanty**:

An entity not seen but actually felt, for everywhere he is a part of human existence. He lives in derelict houses, empty cooking pots, in heaps of tattered clothing; he lurks in the dark of the evening. He fills the minds of men with dreams, wave upon wave; he shows them new paths to follow, pricking them into wakefulness as they lie curled up in sleep by the fireside. He pushes them out of doors and slams the door shut after them. He guides men to the prison-cell or to the gallows. He inspires women to sell themselves in the market place. In him, all want and hunger are incarnated. (pp. 207-08).

Poverty makes people shun all notions of morality. The demarcating line and the parameters between right and wrong vanishes. For Jili sex has no meaning as she has been forced unwillingly into it; Mandia does not want to axe the *Sahukar* but is forced to perform the hacking act because of the illegal methods that the vile *Sahukar* has employed in refusing to return the land; the tribal villagers who betray Sukru Jani unknowingly, have been conditioned to live in terror of the officials and therefore, they do not have the strength to stand up for Sukru Jani. The journey to the courts is also an exploitative venture. The witness demand money, meat, liquor, tobacco etc. and all this weighs heavily on Sukru Jani. Their offerings to high officials are mainly hens, eggs, jackfruits or bananas. If on the one hand, the novel reflects the miserable condition of the tribals in the village then on the other it highlights the equally gloomy state of affairs at the road construction site. While they earn money, they (particularly the women) also fall prey to other forms of exploitation. Isolation, ignorance and a one - day – at - a - time attitude make the migrant labourers victims of vicious romance and material life.

Thus, we see that at every step poverty, poor economic conditions and deficit understanding of legal matters makes the life of these Parajas miserable. On reading the novel carefully we get the impression that we need to empower the Parajas, alleviate their poverty, provide education, better health facilities and more job opportunities. This will gradually reduce the feudal structure as well as change the mental attitude of the people. The socio-political structures in the novel *Paraja* will be taken up in the next section.

Exercise I

- 1 What do you understand about the economic conditions of the tribals?
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2. Do you think local geography has any impact on the people?
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- 3 Explain the political structure existing in Sarsupadar.
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- 4 What is the end result of any social structure? (Hint: Growth of a human being.).
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5. Do you agree that contentment within the tribals crumbles with the intrusion of non-tribal people?
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27.3 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The social and political structure is well defined both in the text and the Paraja community. The nexus between village officials, the feudal masters (the moneylenders) and the government officials are well knit. The only people who remain on the outer margins or the people who benefit the least are the Paraja tribesmen. They neither know the law nor are they educated enough to understand the complexities of pen and paper. They are unaware of their – rights and duties. The fear of officials, paper work, prison, court is so terrifying that they shirk away on mention of any of these and are ready to undergo any punishment, any suffering than to even hear these words. Little do they realise that their own people are a part of the nexus. The rich and clever of the village are a party to the exploitative system that operates within the larger socio-economic and socio-political structures. The *Naika* collects the rent on behalf of the Raja, delivers it to *Ribini* the Revenue Inspector. Every villager has to pay a plough tax to the Forest Guard who collects the tax and is the only man of law that they see or know. Then there are feudal masters like the *Sahukar* who lend money and in return ask for the services of tribal folk as bonded labourers and even usurp their lands. For any religious

matter the priests are there and for all social matters the elders of the village sit together to sort out all the problems.

The manner in which each one dresses too displays the importance of the individual's status. The Naika wears only a loin - cloth below the waist but in addition to that he also wears a coat, and a puggaree. The Forest Guard is dressed in a shirt and shorts and carries a shot -gun on his shoulders. He is known as the *Guard* or *Jaman*. Whereas, poor people like Sukru Jani spend their entire lives in a strip of cloth four fingers wide used as a loin - cloth and the women are draped in cotton saris, bead necklaces and bangles, and they oil their hair at times especially on festive occasions.

The social life of the people is the usual routine agricultural life. Most of the men work in the fields and the women take care of the household chores. On market days the women too go to sell their produce like chillies etc. There is nothing like inhibition or pretence in these tribesmen and women. They all lead simple lives. Their dreams and ambitions are to lead a happy life with two meals a day, a small piece of land to cultivate and a small thatched hut to cover their heads with. They do not aspire for too much. Their lives are full of songs, dances and festivity. Even while they work they sing songs in a chorus. Every evening the men play on their *dungudungas* and the women dance. Their songs are of all kinds. Religious festivals such as the Harvest festival or the Spring festival are celebrated as community festivals and each one participates reverently in it. For, it is not in the blood of these tribal people to annoy their Gods by being disrespectful in any way.

A sense of helping, sharing and caring as well as reciprocation is a reflection of the expression of their human emotions. The concern they have for each other is only restricted by the fact that each one wants his/her share of material wealth and that is the only limitation. It is Jili's neighbour Diptimoni who wants to borrow embers from the fire when she apprises Jili about the information divulged by Mathia the Christian preacher, that many people are migrating to Assam as a new road is being built there and the contractor's agent is looking for labourers to hire and that the labourers will be paid advance wages. The men are to be paid three annas and women two annas. This information is like a life saving drug for the two sisters because by then their store of misery has grown considerably, as the food has all gone and their clothes have turned to rags. The only deciding factor as to whether they should join or not join the contractor's bandwagon of labourers is their own mind and behind it, how is their poverty.

Thus, we see how the economic plight of the tribals intervenes into their social set-up as well. A Paraja 'never sells his labour for wages', but here the forced economic conditions compels him/her to sell his/her labour for wages, for loans etc. This erodes the ideas of brother-hood and camaraderie and there is decay and degeneration in tribal attitudes and values. One of the main reasons behind this phenomenon is tribal migration due to various socio-economic factors such as misfortunes and non-tribal intervention into tribal territories. The Forest Guard and the *Sahukar* are an example of the latter and Jili and Billi's shift to the highway an illustration of the former. Tribal manpower is treated as mechanical with no mind or heart, either to think or to feel. Contrarily, the tribals are deeply rooted to the socio-cultural and geographical

background and it is painful and humiliating for them to be uprooted. For them their land is their life – the only means to live.

Socio - cultural, economic and political problems of tribal territories cannot be understood in isolation. These problems are interrelated and the environment also makes another undeniable contribution to this dilemma. Nature in the life of the tribals assures its true significance in worship, rituals, customs and day-to-day lives. The novel is about jungles, forests, mountains, land and crops; flora – mahua, sowing and reaping; hunting and distilling country liquor; marriage and rituals all enveloped by pastoral, idyllic, picturesque surroundings. There is not just a physical presence of the above but a spiritual bonding to it and an emotional support to the inhabitants residing in these panoramic surroundings. Thus, local geography merges with the emotional geography of the people and this helps in building the social structure of any place, any tribe, and any community. Let us look at the tribals as the subaltern in the next section.

27.4 THE SUBALTERN VOICE

The term *Subaltern* means 'of inferior rank', a term adopted by **Antonio Gramsci** to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Hegemonic notions help the ruling forces to dominate the suppressed classes by couching and cushioning their imperial power in words like social order, stability and advancement. Some of the hegemonic central methods are social discriminations, racial prejudices, gender biases, cultural differences and a split in humanistic values. Subaltern groups are fragmented and marginalised because they have either little or no access to the means of control both in social and cultural institutions. Their dissent or resistance is crushed and their voice remains unheard. The subaltern is a standard term designating a subject that has been constructed, colonised and internalised by the authoritative forces. The marginalised person does try to resist and rebel, but to what extent, is questionable and debatable.

In the novel *Paraja* we witness the Paraja or the tribals as the subalterns who are manipulated by the ruling feudal forces operative in that area. They are the marginalised people who are unable to raise their fist or voice and even if they try, their fate is as of Sukru Jani. They are doomed forever. Their resistance is meaningless. They are devoid of the basic facilities required by a human being. Sukru Jani an illiterate, is roped into the nexus of moneylenders and officials for no fault of his. He asks for permission from the Forest Guard to clear a patch of land in the forest for agricultural purposes, which is duly given, but verbally. Let us not forget that in tribal cultures the oral word carries more weight. Oral tradition and orature is part and parcel of their lives. Later when Sukru Jani's daughter Jili refuses the advances of the Forest Guard, he (Sukru Jani) is harassed and persecuted by the nexus of officials including the people of the village. He and his son become bonded labourers; his other son is caught brewing liquor illegally and to pay off his fine he too has to surrender his services to the money - lender. The suffering does not end here. Jili is sexually exploited by the money - lender. Whenever Sukru Jani raises his voice in protest either for land or money, it is suppressed and with the passage of time he neither has land, nor money nor a family. Sukru Jani is a representative of many such people who are faced with similar problems or

at times suffer more than him. When Sukru Jani knocks on the door of the court, here too, because of his being uneducated and unaware of the law, he is at the losing end. Money changes hands and once again he is defeated and feels horribly cheated. The constant oppression and enslavement enforced by the rich and the socially higher ups results in the apparent action of his sons when they hack the money – lender to pieces. And at a sub - conscious level they make people hear their voices. **Lenin** had said that 'the proletariat has nothing to lose and nothing to gain'. Sukru Jani is a figure who has nothing to lose in life and he is aware that there is nothing much that he can achieve or gain either. So he becomes a rebel. The voice of the subaltern is in rebellion. The speech of the marginalised is in his/her actions. The fighting spirit of these peripheral people of society is their stand against oppression.

Exercise II

1. Define the term Subaltern.
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2. Can tribals be categorised as Subaltern? Support your answers.
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3. How does Sukru Jani, our protagonist, represent the marginalised?
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4. What do you understand by 'Voice of the Subaltern'?
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5. Write an elaborate account of socio-cultural conditions existing in Sarsupadar, Koraput (Orissa).
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6. Examine the economic structure, as discussed by Mohanty, in any feudal system.
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7. List out the tribal issues that need to be taken care of even today.

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8. The Subaltern voice is in rebellion / revolution / reform? Elucidate your view.

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9. 'The novel *Paraja* is about human existence.' Explain

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27.5 LET US SUM UP

The novel when categorised in the cultural context impels the reader to classify it as a novel about class struggle. It paints a clear picture of the economic organisation in a tribal society where the tribal man is on the lowest rung because he is uneducated, poor and powerless, and therefore, not only suffers but also is the most exploited person. The interests of the dominant, rich and powerful groups are safeguarded and the marginalised suffer perpetually. Culture is a partial reflection of the economic paraphernalia because hegemony penetrates so deeply that the subordinate classes unquestioningly accept their own oppression.

The novel under study is the story of a marginalised, tribal man Sukru Jani who has lost every thing – land, family, money – to the rich, powerful class and is left with a sad tale of suffering.

In this unit, an attempt has been made to define culture and along with that one needs to understand the economic pyramidal structure that exists in society. The social and political structures are interlinked to the economic organisation, and all are interactive except the peripheral man-the tribal. S/he remains at the receiving end. The novel also hints at the fact that the tyrants cannot suppress and exploit people for long and ultimately the only answer to this is rebellion and sometimes rebellion can take a gruesome turn as in the

case of Sukru Jani. If his/her pleas cannot be heard then his/her actions would be seen by all which appear fearful. Sukru Jani and his family suffered for a long time but, in the end the act of killing is an external manifestation of their anger, hatred, agony and its voices: 'Stop Exploiting!' 'Stop Harassing!'

The novel is not only a tale of human emotions, struggles and suffering but also is an account of a tribal family's helplessness. A multifaceted observation of socio-cultural network reveals that tribal identity is closely related to ignorance, innocence and isolation. Poverty, deprivation and exploitation by non-tribals have sapped tribal strength and solidarity

27.6 GLOSSARY

Culture:	The arts, customs and institutions of a nation, people or group
Feudalism:	The dominant social system in which the nobility held lands for military services and the lower orders of society worked for the nobles.
Gramsci Antonio (1891-1937):	Italian Marxist thinker and one of the representatives of Western Marxism. His major contribution to theory is the ground -breaking work he has done on hegemony.
Hierarchy:	A system in which people are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.
Hegemony:	Is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is exercised not by force but in a more subtle way.
Proletariat:	Workers or Working class people.
Lenin:	(1870-1924) the chief figure in the Russian Revolution who introduced policies based on Marxist principle.
Marginal:	On the periphery, with respect to and access to power.

27.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read section 27.2.
They are poor, illiterate, exploited, and caught in the vicious circle of poverty.

2. They live close to nature – draw sustenance from the local flora and fauna.
3. Raja, Ribbi, Saltu, Jaman, Sahukar, tribals and the gotis. Power nexus between the rich and the powerful, while the poor are exploited.
4. Social structures are meant to empower people with education, better health facilities, job opportunities, but these rarely happen.
5. Yes, tribals as shown in *Paraja*, appear to be simple people with very few desires and hopes, and are hence, quite contented but, with the infusion of non-tribals such as the antagonists in the novel, they to have needs that can be fulfilled only with the aid of the former and that is their undoing.

Exercise II

1. The term subaltern means ‘of inferior rank’. (Read section 27.4)
2. Yes. They have often been suppressed and dominated by the non-tribals through the ages.
3. Read paragraph 2, on page 22, section 27.4
4. The subaltern were/ are marginalised people, implying that they are voiceless/ that that they are unheard. The ‘voice of the subaltern’ refers to the resistance by these hitherto marginalised people.
For questions 5-8, read section 27.4 carefully.

UNIT 28 TRIBAL LIFE AS REFLECTED IN *PARAJA*

Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction
- 28.2 A Novel on Tribal Life
- 28.3 Tribal Life as Reflected in *Paraja*
- 28.4 The Relevance of Songs in *Paraja*
- 28.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.6 Suggested Questions
- 28.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises

28.0 OBJECTIVES

If you read this unit carefully you'll be able to:

- Identify the tribals and their characteristic features, their life style inclusive of food habits and language.
- Understand tribal customs, myths and rituals especially those of the Paraja tribe of Orissa.
- Assess the relevance of songs and dances in the lives of tribals.

28.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will find a discussion that conceptualises the Paraja tribe on the Indian tribal scene, traces their life style and highlights the importance of songs and dances. The aim of the unit is to help you to understand not only Paraja as a novel about tribal life but also on the larger canvass the tribe Paraja. We shall try to provide you the required information regarding tribal life as interpreted through **Mohanty's** text.

28.2 A NOVEL ON TRIBAL LIFE

The very word 'tribe' means a social group in a traditional society consisting of linked families or communities sharing customs and beliefs. In different parts of India, varied tribes live in their own – cocooned worlds and thus are labelled as either uncivilised or backward. Let us not forget that the definition of what is civilised too is biased and is based on the hegemonic views of the ruling forces. The White British categorised the Indian Sub-continent people as browns who had to learn the ways of the modern world through them; they stamped the Africans as blacks who were tribals, thus savages, barbarous and uncivilised who were in need of education. The Whites entered with the Bible in one hand and the gun in the other. Thus, the tentacles of colonialism spread into the cultures of colonised nations and crippled the existing system. New

definitions, new meaning, new interpretations replaced the old existing order. Apparently colonialism is no more but evidently in the form of neo-colonialism, through economic and military dominations and more emphatically through cultural colonisation, the domination and its impact persists. The imperial culture appropriates the colonial and postcolonial culture and identity.

In the postcolonial set up, the subaltern suffers and remains the exploited lot. These include peasants, workers and other groups including tribals who are denied power and the benefits of mainstream culture. These people remain on the margins, the periphery of both i.e. power and benefits.

Thus, we see that the tribals are people who are beyond the mainstream culture and prefer to reside and live their lives in remote geographical territories, in the mountains as the tribes of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh, in Uttranchal, in the North Eastern states of India, in the plains of Bihar and deserts of Rajasthan, in Madhya Pradesh, Bengal and Orissa. The tribals of different regions speak their own specific language; they believe in supernatural forces, spirits and myths, and follow their own customs and rituals. Though they are poor educationally and economically, yet they are rich in the zest and love of life.

There is an immense body of tribal literature and many novelists have made successful attempts at depicting tribal life through their works. Most of the novels are written in the so-called regional languages or what the *Sahitya Akademi* calls 'Bhasha Literature' and then translated into English for the benefit of a wider readership. To list a few: **Mahashweta Devi's** *Aranyer Adhikar* (Bengali) or *Jungle Ke Davedar* (Hindi) or *Rights of the Forest* (English); **Mahashweta's** story "Kunti and the Nishadin"; **Shaani's** *Sal Vanoan Ke Desh Mein* (Hindi) or *An Island of Sal*; **Verrier Elwin's** *A Cloud that is Dragonish*; **Sankrityayan's** travelogue *Kinnar Desh Mein*; **Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's** *Mrityunjay*. Leave alone novels, many films have been made on tribal life depicting their association with the natural environment and the external modern world. Cutting across mediums, tribal dances are being popularised, art and sculpture on tribals is encouraged and clothes and jewellery are fashionable ethnic nowadays.

Gopinath Mohanty's novel *Paraja* discusses at length the life of the Paraja tribe. Let us recall that one-fourth of the people of Orissa are tribals and one of the prominent aboriginal tribes is the Paraja tribe that has its home among the rugged mountains and forests of Koraput district. In the near vicinity other tribes too reside and these are the Kondh, Gadaba and Jhodia. Thus, Paraja also refers to a conglomeration of three-four tribes who live together, celebrate festivals together, speak a similar language and share similar rituals and customs. **Mohanty** through his novel *Paraja* and through the protagonist of the novel Sukru Jani narrates the story of this tribe. Sukru Jani thus, universalises not only his tribe but is also a representative of many such tribes who prefer to stay in their limited world but are being encroached upon by materialistic civilisation to gain power. Hence, the novel is an anthropological documentation as it reveals the past socio-cultural history of that place and people, and the compulsory changes that keep taking place time-to-time. Woven in between this simple turn of events of life to a complex narration of evolution, is the tale of human emotions and theme of human endurance.

Tribal life as depicted in the novel can be broadly categorised into two parts: (i) the infrastructure (ii) the rituals, customs and myths.

Let us first discuss the infrastructure. **Mohanty** at the very onset of the novel describes vividly the hamlet of Sarsupadar in the Eastern Ghats that consists of two clusters of thatched huts of the Paraja tribe and the Dombs. He describes that twenty-two families live in the village. Their profession is agriculture and their staple diet is mandia, olsi and kandula (different kinds of millets). Men wear just loin – cloth and women wear saris. A description of Sukru Jani's house reveals the simple living of these tribal folk. Sukru Jani's hut has a single room divided into three compartments. The central compartment is used both as a living room and as a store. The two compartments on either side are only tiny cells. The hut is a low roofed shelter. Preserved in the house are mango seeds to be crushed into powder, boiled and eaten; seeds of wild hedge – plant bai-gaba crushed for oil; ten measure of mandia kept in containers made of leaves sown together and dried bottle gourds used as flasks.

The Headman of the village known as *Naiki* collects all rent on behalf of the Raja and delivers it to the Revenue Inspector or the *Ribini*. The Forest Guard the only arm of law collects the tax. Every villager owning a pair of bullocks has to pay a 'plough tax' for the privilege of grazing his cattle in the forest. He was the only person who was dressed in shirt and shorts. Another dignitary, a Domb – known as 'Barik', the village watchman is always present when either the Forest Guard or any other official arrives. The Headman's 'goti' is somebody who had borrowed money and had bound himself to serve his creditor as a slave for as long as the debt remains unpaid.

Tribals live under the constant threat of official persecution and no existence in the jungle is possible unless one learns to play hide and seek and is able to lie with great moral conviction. Thus, they live in constant fear and insecurity. They have an instinctive dread of paper work or documentation. They are unable to displease officials as they are aware that the so called civilised people, the powerful ones can handcuff them on some pretext or the other, and that too in no time. Not only this, but also the whole tribe pays a price for one man's obstinacy. The officials terrorise the poor tribals by threatening them. They would handcuff the tribals and take away their belongings, pull down their houses, recover fines or just maltreat them. Among the tribals if one is sent to prison one has to lose one's caste that is their prized possession.

A piece of doggerel oft quoted by hill folk was:

*The Forest Guard's the rider,
The tribesman is the horse,
And always it's the rider who
Decides upon their course.*

At the centre of the village is a hut that is the dormitory for all unmarried girls while a little way away is the men's dormitory. It has been an ancient Paraja

custom for all unmarried boys and girls to sleep in their respective dormitories. Men – young and old - having no education or material wealth believed in their strong and sturdy limbs and their weather- proof skin; and their bodies that were sickness resistant. They worked hard either on their lands or earned wages by carrying loads etc. Women enjoyed dressing up, oiling their hair, singing songs, exchanging jokes, chatting and laughing either at the stream where they went to bathe or to fetch water or when at home busy cooking or cleaning and completing house-hold chores. They even went to the forest to collect edible roots, herbal plants and fruits etc.

The temple priest is known as Jani and the Gods of the tribe are *Lord Jhakar* – the All Pervading One and *Nisani Munda* the Earth Goddess.

Mohanty's infrastructure of the village of the Parajas merges with the fictional landscape. The informative account of tribal geography combines, well with the detailed analysis of festival and customs as depicted in the novel. Living within a feudal system the people of the primitive/traditional world are like the Mother earth – patient and enduring, who recoil and withdraw at the slightest interference from any materialistic quarter, as they are unaware of the designs of the town/city people. The protagonist of our novel *Paraja*, Sukru Jani too suffers on this account. As we have already read his daughters Bili and Jili are ensnared in the web woven by the Forest Guard and the money – lender, and Sukru Jani's sons Mandia and Tikra also suffer on this account. In the second part we shall now discuss the customs, ritual and myths associated with the Paraja tribe as depicted in the novel.

As has already been discussed there were no taboos or restraints imposed on the younger generations in the village and though the unmarried boys and girls slept in their respective dormitories yet they met each other outside the hut and if something were to go wrong the elders would sit together in a conclave and the culprits would be penalised by being made to offer four annas worth of liquor to all the villagers; and then they would drink and dance and sing before the altar of the Earth Goddess and there the matter would end. They believed that God was a witness to their honesty and sincerity. Boys and girls had the right to elope, and in order to legalise their relationship the boy had to pay about forty rupees to the girl's father as the customary bride price. While courting, the names by which the people addressed each other – both men and women – were *Flower of the Sand*, *Fire Sand*, *Lovely Rice*, *Lovely Flower*, *Red Sand*, etc. Thus, a Paraja marriage required a minimum of formality. As soon as a boy and girl agreed to live together as man and wife, the marriage was solemnised by tribal custom. Only the conventional ritual remained; the *Disari*, or Soothsayer, would select an auspicious day for the rites; a tiny roof woven from twigs, would be propped up on supporting sticks three feet above the ground, and pigeons and fowls would be sacrificed to the sound of drums and bugles. Then the wedding feast, (a custom that seals the marriage bond) would be given and the ceremonies would be over. There are only four months in the year when people of the Paraja tribe may marry, the months being: February, March, April and May. Chapter 49 has a detailed description of Kajodi and Bagala's marriage. A smear of turmeric from the man's body and a smear of castor oil from his hair are rubbed on the woman and the ritual is repeated vice-versa. Symbolically, it represents the union of two people. Thereafter, the man presses the left foot of the woman with his right foot and spits three times on her face and the woman repeats it. Necklaces and rings are

exchanged; ends of clothes knotted; and each takes a ritual dip in the stream. The priest offers eggs in sacrifice. After this they go to the square of the ancestral stones, offering sacrifices to God en-route. Spirits of ancestors are propitiated with eggs, rice and mahua wine. The bride and groom bow low in obeisance before going to the new house. Rice and turmeric paste is scattered on the heads of the couple amidst mantra chanting by the priest. A black rooster pecks at the grain of rice on the head before being sacrificed. The bride is adorned in a silver necklace, gold ear – rings and a gold nose ring before the ceremonial wedding feast starts. A Paraja girl has the right to choose any man that she likes and to cast him off and take another if she wants to. She has the right to make, break and build another home, as she likes and whenever she wills to do so.

Belonging to the land of the forests and associated with the agricultural profession most of the festivals of the tribal people are invariably related to the harvest. During the **Spring Festival** they not only anoint scarlet powder on their faces but also colour other villagers. Such a festival amongst the Paraja is very similar to our festival of Holi. It is time for revelry, dancing, hunting and feasting. November is called the month of the festival of lights. In December, the tribes jointly observe one of their major festivals to mark the gathering of the harvest that is followed fifteen days later, by the ritual eating of the new grain. At the time of the **Harvest Festival**, all men return to their villages to celebrate the festival with family and friends. On the morning of the festival, people arise early, full of enthusiasm and start the day – long preparation for the evening. After an early mandia gruel meal the men go to the jungle to collect wood for the bonfire and the women daub their houses with colours – walls are painted in white and red, verandas are plastered in black and yellow and the floors inside are smeared with varied hued designs, the wooden frames of the doors and windows are painted with powdered charcoal mixed in oil. Some women are busy with laundering, boiling clothes with wood ash to make them white. Thereafter, they busy themselves in dressing up. They wash and dress up in colourful saris, tuck flowers in oiled hair, wear bangles and necklaces and are ready for the evening.

At dusk the festivities begin with loud cries of ‘Thief!’ ‘Thief!’ Young ones stealing from their neighbour’s houses initiate the fun, though the next day the stolen object is restored to the owner. Thereafter, there is singing and dancing. Another ritual performed during this festival at the time of the dance is that, a black rooster is killed in front of a pile of logs, and the fresh blood is allowed to ooze into the soil. Then some liquor, freshly distilled from mahua flowers, is poured on the same spot and is mingled with the blood. This is the libation to the Earth Goddess, sealed with an offering of flowers. Next, the rooster still dripping blood, is held over the pile of wood; a few flowers are placed ceremonially on the logs, some more liquor is poured on, and the flame is lit. A great shout goes up as the logs crack and blaze. The next day children paint their cheeks white and black, their clothes multicoloured and with sticks in hand they go begging for alms from house to house and they are given handful of rice or mandia. The festival continues for a month.

The **Spring festival** has to be carefully calculated by the soothsayers of all the tribes. The Kondh astrologer makes his calculations from the stars; the Paraja Disari consults his almanacs. The ‘Disari’ is all knowing for the Paraja tribesmen. The God of Spring has to be invoked; the Kondhs desire the rites

to be performed at the exact moment when two stars appear over Elephant Hill, while the Paraja wait for the appropriate moment that is commenced by the call of three barking deers in the forest and the village priest or 'Jani' sacrifices a barking deer at the altar; thereafter, a pigeon is sacrificed on the appearance of the two stars. During the interval between the two sacrifices, the headman prostrates before the god's altar, with his face to the ground, a bit of straw held between his teeth and a halter round his neck, as a mark of humility. After the invocation, the festival begins. All villagers must walk in a procession to the god's shrine (men in one file and women in the other) and beg him to grace their festival. For them, God lives in the deep jungle, far away from human breath, walks on un-trodden soils, lives in a shrine housed by hills, overgrown thick forest, and his divine neighbours are: *Basumati*, the Earth Goddess; *Jhakar*, the god for all seasons – and *Bagh Debta*, the tiger god. The shrine is an ancient and enormous mango tree. The villagers smear the tree trunk with sacred vermilion paste, pigeon and fowl are sacrificed and offerings of liquor are poured into the soil that is then decorated with patterns drawn in coloured powders. The drummers beat furiously on their drums. Suddenly all noise ceases and the priest climbs on top of a huge boulder facing the tree, raises his torch to the sky and then begins the incantation to the Gods. The parajas then shake various blossoms and tender mango fruits in order to make them fall to the ground in a carpet like manner. Men and women sing and dance and with this the ceremony ends. The village folk form ranks and climb up the hill once again. Later at night in the open square of the village, a bonfire is lit, erect stones representing men, flat ones representing women are placed in honour of the ancestors and the dance begins.

Death ceremony too in the Paraja tribe is solemnised by planting a stone vertically for men and laying it flat for women. In a corner of the open space in the center of the village where the tribal dances and assemblies are held, sheltered by the shade of an old mango tree is a memorial to all the dead of the village.

The novel describes the lives of tribals in jungles that is not very adventurous when it is a question of survival. Poisonous plants and ravenously hungry animals pose a constant threat to these people who have to visit the interior of forests either as herdsmen or as labourers. In *Paraja Mohanty* highlights various issues of the Paraja tribe subtly. A number of questions related to the identity and life style of tribals are raised. For a tribal, his/her life is his/her land, his/her forests, his/her natural environment. For him/her ecological issues and environmental concerns mean little, as s/he is still unaware of these issues. The novel also exposes a pertinent fact that the tribals are still being exploited in this world and because of extreme illiteracy and poverty they are forced to live in sub-human conditions. The second half of the novel discusses at length the moving away of the tribals, their migration to other states, legal difficulties, tribal rights and the question and nature of identity. The writer emphatically points at the unscrupulous means adopted by non-tribals to usurp tribal land through unfair methods. The attitudes are changing as commercialisation infiltrates into the lives of tribals. More and more tribal folk are getting displaced due to economic and legal reasons. Inequality and slavery has led to pain, anguish and humiliation of these simple tribal people. Their ignorance adds to their woes, making them easy victims of exploitation.

Thus, the novel if, on the one hand acquaints us with life style, culture, rituals and customs of tribal folk, then, on the other it highlights the problems being faced by the tribals.

28.4 THE RELEVANCE OF SONGS IN *PARAJA*

Songs and dance are a vital part of the oral tradition and of tribal life. The songs in oral literature are narrative and reflective as they broaden our horizons on the traditions and folklore of that tribe and the age as well. The songs are also termed as 'oral formulaic poetry' that means 'poetry that is composed and transmitted by singers or reciters.' Its origins are pre-historic and it continues to flourish amongst population that is illiterate. Additions and deletions take place in the narrative as it is passed mouth- to- mouth and from one generation- to another. Despite the fact that these oral compositions have no fixed variation yet these poems or songs incorporate verbal formulas - set words, word patterns, and refrains which help to recall, repeat and readjust to changing times. Themes of songs vary from traditional folk epic subjects like tribal heroes, to love and romance and day- to- day routine chores.

Orality and literacy are interrelated and mutually interactive. **Mohanty** incorporates songs in his novel *Paraja* about the Paraja tribe as they form an inevitable part of tribal life and culture. The songs touch upon all areas of tribal life. These songs underline the deep-rooted-ness of the tribal's relationship with his/her surroundings, rituals, customs, Gods and supernatural forces. Their simplicity is reflected through these songs and their intentions are mirrored in these orations. The songs are an inseparable part of the text and one has to understand the theoretic concerns highlighted through them. These songs correspond to the lives of the various characters of the novel and exhibit their emotions. They help to build the atmosphere of the novel. The novel makes use of love songs, ritual songs, festival songs, work songs, seasonal songs and miscellaneous songs. The songs are an expression of the deepest emotions – the *ras* and *bhava* – love, fear, hope, hatred, anguish, pain, ecstasy, be it at work or in relationships; be it at the altar of God or at the change of seasons or celebration of festivals.

Songs are not solely a part of the Paraja community but all over the world in tribes or in non-tribes as well, they are an expression of feelings on different occasions; an external manifestation of internal, hidden, unsaid emotions. The words voice the flow of thoughts. Let us read through these songs:

Love Songs:

*The garment of many colours which you wear,
That sari woven in Lower Maliguda,
Wash it clean again, wash it quickly
For my sake, beloved, come out in your very best,
Wear your bangles around your wrists.
Come out quickly; come, my love.
Let us romp together, let us dance.
In this village of our forefathers,
That village of your mother's brother,*

*The village of your grandfather.
There is no shame,
There is no fear,
You have caught no fish,
You have caught no crab. (20)*

This is the song that Bagla sang for Jili and played on his *dungudunga*. The song set all kinds of visions in his mind.

*O my darling jayi flower!
My Sweet malli bud!
Come with star-white in your dark hair;
I wait.
I know that you will come, beloved;
For you are as unfailing
As death is.*

*There are only two things I know to be true -
Your love, and the fear of death.*

*I play each day with death
And so I know that you will come -
Mingling your black hair with the dark clouds;
For the rains have come.*

*The sky grows dark,
My eyes are blinded by the lightning
The moon's fire is extinguished, the stars are put out.
The earth gropes in the dark.*

*The raindrops patter on the thatch-eaves;
The river sings and the mountains join the chorus,
And the frogs make music,
And the kadamba tree listens in ecstasy -
Its flowers bristle, like hairs standing on end.
And your coming to me in the rain
Is the bride's home-coming.
For the new bride washes the feet of her elders
In the custom of our tribe.*

*You are the rain, the new bride.
The raindrops fill my heart with joy. (135-136)*

This was a love song that the Paraja men sang on the coming of rains.

Work Songs

*Daily we labour in this field of mandia
And pour our sweat on this land;
And the crops ripen and are harvested,
Are loaded in carts and taken away and stored.
For whom are they preserved, my love?
They are for you, darling of my heart.
For you, the maizes in my garden,
And the mandia in my fields;*

*When, drunk with home-brewed beer,
My eyes are flushed and unsteady,
I shall call to you, my darling,
And you must come.
But come secretly, my love,
When the moon is in the sky,
Treading softly on the shadowy patches under the trees;
For though I shall be waiting for you
I have my shame and fear,
In this village of my mother's brother,
In this village of my father's brother,
And if I am exposed
I shall run away in fear.
But O, my darling,
We have turned our blood into water
And coaxed the mandia to bear fruits;
It is all for you, my beloved,
It is all for you.* (58-59)

Festival Songs

*Let the bangles on your wrists ring together,
Let them clash, O my beloved!
Let us all join in the dance of the Clashing of the Bangles,
As it was danced by our fathers long ago.
Let his ancient village ring again with the sound of your bangles -
This Village of the Mango Fruit or Village of the Blackberry,
Whatever we choose to name it. So dance, and make merry, and laugh,
Till the belly begins to ache.* (93-94)

This song was sung when the young men and women performed the dance of the **Clashing of the Bangles**.

*O god of joy, god of dance and song,
God of the hunt,
Come, make us gay.
Be our guest:
Drink the liquor we have brewed for you,
Accept the fowl and chicken that we offer.
Then, when the few days of the feast are spent,
You may return to your home.
Only come, come, come.* (144)

*O mighty god of Spring.
Awake!
Shake off your sleep.
See, the trees are heavy with flowers.
The Chaitra moon is in the sky.
We are all dressed up for the dance
In your honour.
And the young men and girls are waiting.
Wake up, and come!*

*It is you that the young man remembers
As he stands with his sweetheart*

*Under the liquor-palm tree,
Arms linked together.
You inspire their songs,
You are the light in lovers' eyes.
You bring the newborn babies to our land,
Like a welcome shower of young mango fruits,
So that we may never lack strong arms
To plough our barren and rocky lands.*

*Wake up, god of the hunt!
For the trees are beginning to shed their leaves,
And there are fires in the forest
And the wild beasts are driven out of hiding.
The wild boar swarm in the sandy river-beds;
The spotted deer,
And the king – deer with big, branching horns,
Roam everywhere in the glens.
Of the wild hare also no count can be made.
Come, lead us in the hunting.
And we shall feast together.
Those who were old are dead,
But we shall not mourn them.
For such is life,
And each must go in his turn.*

*But every year, when Spring comes,
Every year, in the month of Chaitra,
Your rites will be celebrated.
In this sacred valley where you live,
And through your grace
The mango shall blossom again
The crops shall grow in our fields,
And our cattle grow fat,
And men shall prosper
In this land of forests and hills.
This is our sacred pledge,
O god of spring!*

(146- 48)

These were the songs sung at the time of the Spring festival.

Miscellaneous Songs

Old Ballad

Old ballads in the Paraja dialect

*Now come, my darling,
Are you as strong as the walls of a stoutly built house?
Are you as strong as the veranda of the brewer's house?
Come, let me see how robust you are in your youth.* (26)

*Here today and gone tomorrow,
And money cannot buy it.* (186)

It was a song about young love. It continued.

No one can find it,

Paraja

*Though many die searching.
One moment you may see it
By the winding jungle trail;
But it quickly hides again.
Money can buy everything.
But love it cannot buy.*

And then the chorus again:

*Here today and gone tomorrow,
And money cannot buy it.* (186)

Paraja Song

*Are you as strong as the veranda of the Sundhi's house?
Come, my girl, let me test how strong and young you are.* (281)

The writer does not explain these self-explanatory songs, but informs the reader that they are an indivisible part of the people. We understand the contextual meaning of the song and not the background or historical significance. These songs can be understood better by those who know and understand the Paraja custom and language, and is accustomed to their way of living. It is not easy for the translator to translate songs as the un-translatability factor for certain expressions and words cannot be ignored. To translate poetry, songs or music is the most difficult thing. The rhythm, the intensity and sometimes the meaning are lost in the process of translation. Yet, the translator has made his best efforts to translate these Paraja songs into English from the source language - Oriya, for the benefit of a wide readership.

28.5 LET US SUM UP

Mohanty's deep concern for and his association with the Paraja tribe is highlighted in the novel. He has taken care of the natural environment in which the Paraja tribe lives – the geography and the landscape, and the life of these tribals beyond the scenic beauty.

This unit, discusses at length tribal life as depicted by **Mohanty** in the novel, both from the point of infrastructure as well as rituals and customs. The unit also emphasises the relevance of songs that are customary to tribal life as they live and relive the oral tradition. The unit depicts the world of the tribals who are content with the limited resources they have and do not aspire for more.

28.6 SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

Exercise I Short Questions

- (a) Write a short note on the distinctive features of the tribals.
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- (b) Is tribal literature mainstream literature?
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- (c) Where do the Paraja live? Do they live exclusively?
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- (d) Describe the homes of Paraja tribesmen?
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- (e) Describe the unmarried lives of the boys and the girls of the Paraja tribe.
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- (f) Are women given the freedom to marry and make their homes?
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- (g) Outline the different kinds of songs in the novel.
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- (h) Highlight the significance of songs and dances in tribal life.
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- (i) Describe the Spring Festival and the Harvest Festival.
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- (j) Write a short note on the Gods/Goddesses of the Paraja tribe.
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Exercise II. Long Questions

- (a) Discuss the infrastructure of the Paraja tribe.
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- (b) Elaborate on the Paraja tribe's customs and rituals.
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- (c) 'Songs depict life.' Illustrate the statement with reference to the novel under study.
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- (d) Write a note on tribal life as depicted by Mohanty.
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- (e) Do you think that the tribals live a happy life and their arena should not be disturbed? Expatriate with valid reasons.
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28.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercises I & II

Read Sections 28.3 and 28.4 and frame your answers accordingly.

UNIT 29 *PARAJA*: A NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 Translating a Literary Text
- 29.3 *Paraja* (English) as a Translated Novel
- 29.4 Translation from Other Languages
- 29.5 Let us Sum Up
- 29.6 Glossary
- 29.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises

29.0 OBJECTIVES

If you read this unit carefully you should be able to:

- Outline the process of literary translation with specific reference to the novel.
- Assess *Paraja* (English) as a translated novel.

29.1 INTRODUCTION

A distinct aspect of the novel *Paraja* is the fact that it is not a novel originally written in English; it has been translated from the original Oriya. A translated text is never the same as the original, for in the very process of translation the text undergoes certain changes. Therefore, a reading of a text in the originally written language is not the same as reading a translated work. Translating non-literary texts are easier because they basically deal with facts, figures and information. On the other hand, in a literary text, each word carries a multitude of meanings as the language of literature is packed with meanings beyond the literal interpretation.

In this unit, we intend to acquaint you with the process involved in literary translation in general, focusing specifically on *Paraja*. All of you certainly don't have access to the original version in Oriya. It is for this reason that, we look into the original text in Oriya as well, in order to compare the two versions, so that we may be able to observe the differences as well as the correspondence.

While translation does have a significant role to play, some of the best works of literature defy translation. However, in world literatures, some of the best classics such as, **Flaubert's** *Madame Bovary* (French), **Gunter Grass's** *Tin Drum* (German), **Gabriel Garcias Marquez's** *Hundred Years of Solitude* (Spanish), **Boccaccio's** *Decameron* (Italian), **Dostoevski's** *Crime and Punishment* (Russian) are available to an audience across the world only in translation in various languages such as English, Spanish, French, Hindi etc. I'm sure you agree with us that these texts, which are available in translation to a huge audience across the world, have greatly enriched our understanding

and awareness of the human condition. However, the fact remains that, in the process of translation lots of subtleties get lost; yet, a good translation captures a lot of the sense and essence of the original texts.

In a multilingual and multicultural country like India, works such as **Thakazee Shiva Shankar Pillai's** *Chemeen* (Malayalam), **U R Anatha Moorthy's** *Samskara* (Kannada), **Phaniswar Nath Renu's** *Maila Aanchal* (Hindi), **Manik Bandhopadhyas's** *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (Bengali), **Amrita Pritam's** *Pinjar* (Punjabi) would perhaps languish within the regional language boundaries had they not been translated into other languages. And these works have enriched literature - both nationally as well as internationally.

Paraja by **Gopinath Mohanty** published way back in 1946 came to the attention of the world only in the 1980s when it was translated into English.

29.2 TRANSLATING A LITERARY TEXT

What happens in literary translation?

The act of literary translation involves two languages basically a text is translated from one language to another (i.e.,) from the source language to the target language. But language has deeper implications in the sense that it involves the culture of a people. **Helen Rapp** (BBC) said: "When you translate from one language to another, you are translating in however subtle a way, the historical, geographical, climatic, religious, emotional experience of one group of people for the benefit of another group". The task of the translator is to be alive to both the languages and their background. Once a text gets translated into other languages, it instantly finds a larger audience and its horizon stretches further – resulting in the understanding between different sections of people. The story of *Paraja* set somewhere in a remote corner of Orissa seeks parallels in literature all over the world. The people in a novel represent the fragments of consciousness of humanity and a proper translation of the text does achieve the desired goal of reaching out to people of different cultures and linguistic groups.

The whole procedure of translation is contingent on several variables like the translator's command of the source language and the target language, his/her 'decisions', 'assumption', the ease and facility with the target language, availability of equivalents for terms concerned mostly with cultural matters in the text of the source language.

Particularly in literary translation, the task and responsibility of the translator is immense because, the words and expressions carry resonances beyond their surface meaning, and in translations all these meanings cannot be brought over to the target language. The translator will have to negotiate meaning and information between the source language and target language, s/he will have to decide as to how much to carry and how much to leave, though the endeavour would always be to carry all the nuances, if possible.

As the original text is born out of a creative process so also is the translated one. The translator is free to choose meaning for the target text, but s/he does not have absolute freedom to translate as, s/he likes, the main criterion for translation being faithfulness to the original text.

Taking into consideration the creative factor involved in literary translation, it is also called 'transcreation'. But too much of freedom on the part of the translator can bring about a distortion which might prove to be an entirely new creation but that would never be a good and sincere translation. There are points in literary texts that defy translation. If some of the sections get translated with ease, certain other sections remain untranslatable.

Certain culture-specific expressions cannot be rendered in another language due to lack of equivalents in the target language, hence, they remain untranslated and it results in the loss of some of the strength of the words in the original text.

As a literary text, a novel poses all the problems that any literary text poses for purposes of translation, unlike poetry or drama, a novel, since it has larger scope, narrates, describes and dramatises. Though language remains a significant aspect in the craft of fiction, plot, characterisation, narration, description, theme, and point of view, certain other features too play an important role.

Moreover, even in prose-fiction some writers follow a very poetic and lyrical style and in such cases, the problems in translating the text amounts to translating poetry. At times, a novel makes deliberate use of verse, mantras, songs and lyrics. A novel is no doubt a prose narrative but then it does not do away with the possibilities of drama or poetry.

Translating a novel therefore, calls for a similar experience of and effort of understanding as do all literary translations. If you have gone through *Paraja* you must have realised that there is an inter-play of various modes of literature – fiction, poetry and drama. And these overlap in complex ways.

Exercise I

Answer the following questions, in your own words, in the space provided below:

1. How is a non-literary translation different from a literary translation?
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2. Name at least three translated literary works from world literatures.
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3. Name at least three literary works from Indian literatures that have been translated from Indian languages into English.

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4. When was *Paraja* (Oriya) published? When was the English version published?

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5. How does a literary work gain on being translated?

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6. What are the variables on which a translation depends?

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7. What is the criterion for good translation?

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We shall devote this section to an examination of *Paraja* (English) as a translated text with reference to the Oriya original. Have certain things, that couldn't be translated, been left untranslated? Which are the areas where the original text has defied translation? In what ways does this text written originally in Oriya pose problems for the translator? What follows is a comparative assessment of both the texts keeping in view the issue of translation.

LANGUAGE:

In *Paraja*, a novel written originally in Oriya, one of the most significant aspects for observation is the use of various kinds of language. The language of the preliterates contrasts with the language of the literates, the colloquial language rubs shoulders with the refined literary language and prose tends towards poetry. By and large the role that language plays in structuring the novel is in fact considerable.

The language of the preliterates is totally different from that of the literate characters, and **Gopinath Mohanty** makes use of a number of expressions from the tribal language; he sometimes inserts into the text a couple of sentences, a phrase, a few words and expressions taken from the tribal language. At many points he has carefully explained some of these expressions and at certain other points he leaves it to the reader's imagination, and in such situations the context provides the explanation. Imagine a sentence where half of it is in tribal dialect and the other half in standard Oriya; pitted against each other both the languages by emphasis on each other's importance and identity go a long way in enhancing the meaningful possibilities of the situation in question. These snatches of tribal language occur naturally in the text but this kind of an effect cannot possibly be brought over to the translated version. Let us look into a couple of examples from the original text and the translated one.

At almost all the points where there is an illustration from the translated text, we have taken care to provide the corresponding original sections in transliteration and underlined the words, phrases or sentences for discussion. Besides when you look at the transliterated lines, the organisation of the sentences, words, phrases, punctuations too communicate a great deal. Even if you don't understand the language, go through the lines, you will perhaps sense a certain rhythm, certain music, and through that you can decipher some meaning.

Let us look into some of these examples through which we seek to find answers to some of the queries raised in the initial section.

Here we provide you a transliterated section from Chapter – 2 that, deals with the conversation between the forest guard and the tribal girl - Jili. This passage includes expression in the tribal language, colloquial Oriya and standard Oriya and thus, creates a text that remains intimate to the sense and sensibility the author intends to convey and the effect is dramatic. Section A2 represents the

translation of Section A1. The lines have been numbered so that it is easier for you to draw parallels for discussion.

A1

- 1 Bojha uthila, bujuli uthila, Kandhore bandhuka pokaie jungla
- 2 jaman uthila, Chhaie Leuta bela Ganna tuthare Jili 'gurdi'
- 3 saga dhouthila
- 4 ...jhola se pakhe ataki rahi jaman
- 5 hankila
- 6 "*Aye Nuni* (Toki) Kaaen Karoole (Kona 'Karuchhu')?"
- 7 Saag – Babu -
- 8 "*Deiesa?* (Debuki?)
- 9 Ete saag nelu gurdi saag kona koribu Babu?
- 10 Jili Hosila, Ahuri Kete toki paniki
- 11 Olheibaku atadaru godile, Jaman bhabila
- 12 "Aaji Etiki" Se Bato dhorila. (7-8)

A2

- 1 As the party waded through the stream the
- 2 Forest Guard fell back and paused near the
- 3 bank; then in a bantering tone he hailed the
- 4 girl in her own dialect and asked:
- 5 'What are you doing, Girl?'
- 6 'These are leaves for cooking, Sir'.
- 7 Jili replied.
- 8 '*Will you let me have some?*' he asked,
- 9 meaningfully, Jili laughed.
- 10 '*Didn't you take enough vegetables from*
- 11 *our village? What do you want wild*
- 12 *gurdi leaves for?*', She said.
- 13 He could see other girls coming down the slope
- 14 towards the pool and realised that it was
- 15 time to go; but he felt at least he had
- 16 made a start. He turned on his heel and
- 17 went. (Chapter – 2, EP 13)

In A1 look at lines 6,7 and 8 the italicised words are in the tribal dialect, the words that you find inside the brackets beside the words in tribal language are meanings provided by the author in standard Oriya. The English translation says that 'he hailed the girl in her own dialect and asked', and then provides the translation of these lines. Do you get the feel of the tribal language in the translation? Certainly not!

What you get is only the sense/meaning. Suddenly line '9' in Oriya corresponding to lines '10' – '11' and '12' in English turns colloquial and when you reach lines 10,11,12 and A1 corresponding to lines '13' to '17' in A2, it is standard Oriya and the contrasting effect that emerges does not escape your notice, but the lines in the English version fail to display the contradistinction. All the lines find a homogenised expression in the English language.

In the following passage the purpose is to show you how the author inserts snatches of colloquial language even while we find colloquial words in the same sentence. Apart from that, here it is also indicated that the translator leaves some specific expressions as they are in order to enable the readers of the target language get a feel of code mixing and also for the purpose of achieving precision.

B1

1 Puni pani Chhinchadi – “Kaha kotha etey bhabuchhulo,
2 aye Bagli!”
3 “Bhak!”
4 “Kotha Kahibu nahin?”
5 Jili Kohila, “Kona Kahuchhiu, aye bhauja?”
6 Mo garaja podichhi yanka bhauja hebaku-“
7 Joma tikie ichha nothibo para-“
8 Kajodi muhan jhadi jhadi kohilla,
9 *“Aame nichu nichu (amora darakar nahin)*
10 amora *“bhato”* (bhinoie) Katha Kaha,
11 *Sunibaku bhola lagibo”* (8)

B2

1 She splashed more water at Jili and asked:
2 Tell me, Mrs. Bagla, of whom you are
3 thinking so deeply?
4 “Oh, do be quiet!”
5 “No, tell me!”
6 Jili laughed and returned.
7 Why don’t you tell me what I can do for
8 you, my dear sister-in-law?
9 ‘Who wants to be her sister-in-law?’
10 Kajodi muttered.
11 “Who indeed!” Jili said
12 *“Nothing could be further more from your thought”.* (EP – 14)

In passage B1, look at the 9th and 10th lines. The italicised phrase and the italicised words are in tribal language and the rest of the words in the sentence are in standard Oriya. Can the same effect be created in the English version of the text? As you find in this sentence, similarly all over the text you will find a number of words and phrases taken from the language of the *Parajas* incorporated in the fabric of the novel on purpose for effect. If you look at the translated lines in B2 that effect is simply not there.

We have chosen this passage in order to point out another fact – how a translator skips some of the specific expressions while trying to capture the essential meaning. If the original lines in 9 to 11 in B1 are translated literally with word for word correspondence then it would perhaps read like this: “ We don’t want, don’t want, tell me about your brother-in-law, I would like to listen to that”. In the translated version it has been rendered in a single line “Nothing could be further from your thought”. The specific reference to the brother-in-law in the original lines is not there; the particular mention in the original disappears into the pervasive sense of the whole sentence in a very

precise manner. It is one of the facts to be noticed, however it is not to say that this is a flaw. May we remind you that this is the manner in which in a literary translation, the translator negotiates meaning between the source and the target language. We leave it to your imagination as to how effective it would be if the original tribal words and expressions were retained in transliteration along with the literal translation of these lines under consideration.

In the following section we present to you a passage where you find a couple of sentences presented in the tribal dialect. Earlier too we have considered these expressions. The only differences here is that he leaves sentences in their original words without giving their sense in standard Oriya, leaving the readers to think creatively about them.

C1

- 1 Sukru Jani Torani Pujhariku pocharila,
- 2 *"Tuie Koiluski naien babu, panchata Mangalabar dina*
- 3 *Sakshi lokankue neyie kocheriki asibaku?*
- 4 *"Lekhuku"*
- 5 *"Aau tuie misha Koilusha Babu -?"* (434-435)

C2

- 1 Sukru Jani turned to the Pujari
- 2 and said: *'Didn't you tell us, Sir, that we*
- 3 *should come here in the sixth Tuesday?'*
- 4 He turned to the writer and said: *And you*
- 5 *told us the same thing!* (365-366)

In Section C1 the italicised sentences '4' - '5' refer to the unexplained words from the tribal language, corresponding to lines '2', '4' and '5' in Section C2, the translated version. Probably these unexplained words make an attempt towards bringing the character closer to the reader. These words seem to reduce the distance between the reader and the character though they come in flashes; put the same words not in tribal language but in standard Oriya or English and the magic is probably gone.

COLLOQUIAL

Colloquial language refers to words and expressions that belong to familiar speech and not to standardised or elevated speech. In dialogues between different characters in the novel you find innumerable colloquial expressions that are deeply rooted in the culture of the place, and the translator can at best make an effort towards approximation due to the lack of equivalents in the target language. If some of the colloquial words and expressions are given in literal translation, then there might be misrepresentation, the import and its effect remaining in the original. To render colloquial expressions that have their roots deep in the tradition and culture of a people into another language is in fact, extremely difficult because another language means another people, another culture, another tradition.

Here are some illustrations from the text:

D1

- 1 'Uth, bhak, bhak pala bhumi Chhadi Devi'
2 Potkar qyalpamane, hoiere scholae, daba
3 pokai thilo mo upore?' (444)

D2

- 1 The Sahukar felw into a rage kicking them
2 away and roaring. 'get up; get out'. I'm
3 to give you the land back, am I? *You rascals?*
4 Take me to court, would you? And what did
5 the court decide? Are you going or shall I
6 have you sent to jail?" (372)

E1

- 1 *Ja ja baya qualap* – gali kole adhikari
2 agoku taninibi, dekhibu setebele - (435)

E2

1. 'Go you idiot.' The writer, shouted back.
2. If you make trouble, I'll drag you to the
3. magistrate and then you'll feel". (429)

F1

1. Sukrujani Kohilla,
2. "Haan ghara bhitoro *oichha kuch kuchakori* hanibo se." (429)

F2

1. 'Certainly,' Sukru Jani said,
2. He'll *hack him to pieces* inside our own house.' (361)

These are sections that provide snatches of conversation from the novel. The colloquial expressions contrast sharply with the language of the tribals on the one hand, and with standard Oriya on the other. In the English rendering the translator cannot provide the features of the colloquial, but can only try to provide the meaning of these words without the colloquial dimension. Even if Oriya is spoken throughout Orissa, the dialect spoken in the coastal belt is not the same as that spoken in the Western part, nor is it the same in the south in the Koraput district. Therefore, it is evident that the colloquial language gives a sense of place too.

In section D1 – line 2, the phrase 'patkar gyalpamane' has been rendered as "you rascals" whereas, the very same phrase in E1- line 1, has been rendered as "you idiot" and this expression in slang, a feature of the colloquial language cannot possibly be translated exactly as in the original. In section D1 – line 2, the word "*Salae*" means "brother-in-law", but if the translator, renders it literally in the target language, the word would loose its sting, and so here, the

translator has included it in the sense of 'you rascals'. When the author switches over from the tribal language to the colloquial and from the colloquial to standard Oriya and from the standard Oriya to deep poetic lines—the effect that emerges remains untranslatable. The colloquial tongue is spoken in the tribal dialect but we cannot possibly point out that a certain conversation is going on in the colloquial language. Besides, there is also a lot of interplay of these varieties of language in the fabric of the text.

POETIC PROSE

Gopinath Mohanty follows a lyrical style in his novel. At times it becomes difficult to distinguish the borderline between poetry and prose. In the text, we find profuse use of songs, lyrics, and incantations (mantras). In addition, the text itself is poetic in style. And the poetic segments of the novel fit into the narrative with felicity and ease while posing problems, as does the translation of poetry. At times the narrative while portraying situations and contexts turns very deep. Even in prose one feels a certain rhythm, and resonance achieved through diction, images, symbolism and metaphors. Whatever best could be taken in translation in terms of images and metaphors and symbols come to the English translation but the nuances of contrast, parallels, echoes remains in the source text, that is to say, in the Oriya text.

Go through the passages that follow:

A1

Eka funkake sabu udigola, chutia mushara
sabu dhana daulata gala. (25)

A2

In the same way, a single puff of wind can
destroy what has taken a field mouse a lifetime to amass. (36)

B1

Kintu bayasa ashe, jeteble tiki
ghara chatia chadheiti madhay basa bandhibaku
unchhonna hue, ethu sethu kathi kuta neie pokae
Setebele prajapatira melakhola saukhin
jeevan bhala lage nahin, Kandha aape
juali khoje..... (91-92)

B2

But the time comes when every sparrow begins to build
its nest, when the butterfly grows tired of its flight,
and human shoulders ache for the yoke.

C1

Kuhudi chiri chiri dura kondha gaanra
jodi boienfire goetae purana kondah ragini
duietara, Khudi upare Khali godia godi- (427)

C2

Through the mist came the sound of two
Kondh flutes played together, the notes
chase each other through the mist... (359)

While going through the textual illustrations look at the images, analogies, thoughts, emotions and imagination involved in shaping the lines. When he talks of the field mouse's wealth getting blown off by a single puff of wind in A1/A2, when he tries to draw an analogy between a certain stage in human life and in the life of the butterfly, when he describes the notes of the Kondh flutes chasing each other, don't you sense poetry? Do these lines tell you something deep through poetic devices? Look at the transliterated lines and see the organisation of the words. For in poetry, the choice and organisation of the words means much. It is nothing but poetry. That is the feel of the original. Can these sharp contrasts and their subtle nuances ever be realised in a translation?

As we have pointed out even in the prose passages by **Gopinath Mohanty** you discover some rhythm, some music that remains one of the most important aspects of poetry. Look into these following lines, read them aloud and then look at the translation. Listen to these lines:

M1

Phaguna –

Kheta Khan Khan akashare poshe boli
Kuhudi nahin, hau hauan akashatole hau hauan kheta
podichhi
jete durokukiba akhi podichhi, kudo kudo abu 'abuka
pahadora
chulo upare nalicha nalicha nuan patra menchi menchi
jungle,
dhadi dhadi denga denga sondhi gochha, jaha dura gaan
bhitore
sarahada, au jungle tole tole Kasora Kheta, gochha
nahin patra nahin

(83)

M2

It was the month of Phaguna – that is February – and spring had arrived. The fields still bare after the harvest, gaped at the sky, which was unrelieved by even a single cloud. The hilltops were almost bald; a few vivid red leaves were beginning to sprout on the slender trees.

Make a comparison between the translated and the original just by reading and listening to the words. Do you miss anything, in the translated text? Is it the music? Or is it the rhythm? It is clear that the intentionality of the original sentences has not been achieved fully. These translated lines lose much of their communicative power and strength. In fact, it is near impossible for the translator to reconstruct the exact *import* and *effect* of the original words.

WORDS AND ECHOES

In the translated text you will find quite a few terms and expressions either in Oriya or in tribal language, terms like –Goti, Gotinood, Putti, Sahukar, Dharmu, Dhartino, Garod, Duduma – have been explained in the translated text in the most of these cases or they can be easily understood from the context. *Dharmu* has been explained as: *the Just One*, '*Duduma*' has been

explained as waterfalls, *Goti* – debt-bound slave. The meanings have been provided, though the words have been retained. Some of the phrases, expressions and allusions are peculiar to the experience of a people and in some deep way they convey meaning and message that may not be available in another tongue.

F1

Pruthibira Keun ajanata konare jungle bhitare

‘*monishachhua*’, mencha menchi hole

Koieh Koien Kandile’ antare dora

Kaupuni, Khaibaku, mondae amba

Koieli jaau, motha upare asaranti dukhara

dhara. Debota hasile, monisha Kandile.

(25)

F2

And thus it was that in this land of hills and

forests in an unmapped corner of the wide world,
luckless men and women who lived on castaway
mango stones and hid their nakedness in bits of
rag huddled together under the *tyranny* of misery
pouring down on their heads, and wept.

(37)

G1

Dosha jona ekathi hoie raa dhari “rabile”

jaha bujhanti tohinre biswas ashe.

(419)

G2

When ten people join in shouting a slogan
they begin to believe in it. While convincing
each other they begin to convince themselves.

(354)

In Section F1 we would like to draw your attention to the word – ‘*monisha-chhua*’, *monisha* – means human and ‘*chhua*’ means ‘*baby*’ or ‘*babies*’ in Oriya. This is a rare combination, one normally talks about “*kukura chhua*”, which means puppies, or “*bagha chhua*” which means tiger cubs; almost always the young ones of birds, beasts and animals are referred to as “*Chhua*” along with the name of the species, but normally nobody says “*monisha chhua*”, if at all human babies are referred to, then, they are simply called “*Chhua*”. The picture that the author provides in this context instantly evokes the images of ‘crying puppies’ huddled together as one finds them in the chill of winter. And this peculiar turn of phrase calls for echoes and suggestions beyond its surface meaning.

Similarly in passage *G1*, the use of the verb ‘*rabile*’ – seems interesting. This Oriya verb refers generally to the call of birds and specifically to the cawing of crows but in the given context the word has been used for *men*, thus, connecting picturesquely the habit of the crows with that of human beings. In the English version – there is no reference to the crow or no kind of association is generated from its use. It becomes a simple expression “shouting a slogan”. So in these kinds of usage too the translated text loses *something*.

SONGS

The novel makes use of a number of songs and song-poems at different junctures. In Unit 28 they have been pointed out clearly. Musicality is probably the most dominant ingredient of songs and song-poems, and when they are read out in original form this aspect can be realised very distinctly but in translation, we hardly find the music. That is why the reader of the English version of the novel does miss the music of the songs used in the text.

The translator would indicate as – That that was the song they sang : and then s/he will provide the translated version of the songs; but when you go through the lines you feel, despite the best efforts of the translator – that the lines are not musical and you would probably, ask – “Where is the song?”

Many other expressions and phrases, sentences and words from the tribal languages used in the novel have not been explained at many points; in the case of songs too the author has left them unexplained at certain points. It is true that neither the sonorous expression of the incantations nor the rhythm or cadence of the bangles – clashing dance-song could be rendered in English. But when the author intends even in the original version to keep certain songs unexplained in prose translation, in standard Oriya he certainly means to keep it on purpose and an attempt to render it in translation is to annihilate its very purpose.

Shelley said, “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts”, and here we present a somewhat sad song that Mandia sings for his lost beloved. In the original version, unlike other songs, this song has not been rendered in prose. The descriptions that precede and follow the song expresses a heaviness turning in the breast of Mandia – the lovelorn lover. And here is the song in transliteration. Go through it:

Jaie Hulu bolimi molli dadu bolimi,

*Baandunia juloie elutio kosoien
Heendi deku tobeni begi kachu abeni,
Koienu kelu rubeku sodikelu rubeni,
Maranaru bosidu dungaraku tosiru, aro gururu*

*Jetu anu maruli barasha juli ashuli
Andaru ho molukoien bijuliho jutukoien
Sodamari gitire nerka mari gitire.*

*Lipu jona lipuli lipu tara lipuli,
Jotaru ho hienti goduru ho chendili.
Sone pani jhipuli ruhlih jhipuli,
Gadu goli Kunnani jodi goli kunnani.*

*Janu raye rabuna sunu kedi kodommu,
Bichule ho midule nede panikadule
Jotaru ho hiertie goduru ho chendillee.*

(242-43)

It is said that a song communicates even before it is understood. Having gone through the song you must have realised something of its significance. The translated text provides only one translated stanza:

*O my darling jayi flower,
slender and sweet;
my darling malli bud,
Sparkling and fragrant
Your thick, black, glossy hair
Interlaced with star-white flower;
I know you will come to me:*

(229-230)

So, you mark very well the evident gap between the original text and the translated one. You, perhaps, don't get the exact meaning of those words but the overall effect is overwhelming when you recite the words of the tribal song aloud.

CONSIDERATION

No translation is complete, and no translation is perfect in the sense that all the intentions of the original text cannot be carried over to the target language text. And it is more so with a novel like *Paraja* that makes use of the tribal language in a text written in a regional language along with colloquialisms, and **Mohanty's** use of deep dense poetic language makes it even more difficult. In translating this novel one of the toughest tasks lies in retaining the distinction between the varieties of language used for effect quite in keeping with the characters and their background. That apart, some other dimensions like the musicality of the songs, the deep poetic language, the turn of phrases peculiar to a people, too pose problems for purposes of translation.

With that realisation and understanding the translator aptly remarks – “No, translation can hope to capture the varied riches of **Gopinath Mohanty's** Oriya prose, vigorously colloquial and forthright at one moment and sublimely effervescent and lyrical at the next. Perhaps like every translation of great literature, all that this English rendering can do is place before a wider audience something of the flavour of the original work”. Maybe the process of translation some of the subtleties and potentialities of the novel have been lost resulting in the erosion of its communicative power, but the objectives of the author have been met with as far as the novel reads like an English novel. The story has been told, the message and meaning have been brought home, attempts have been made to retain all the features of the original in the English rendering though the fact remains that the original narrative does all that with even more strength and power.

29.5 TRANSLATIONS FROM OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES

In the multi-lingual context of India, translation has a vital role to play in bringing about an understanding among people belonging to various language areas. Unless an Oriya text is translated into other Indian languages, it is bound to stay confined to the borders of *Orissa*. If a text written in a regional language is translated to a language like English then on being translated it reaches out to people and places beyond our country. One vital example that could be cited here is the fact that **Tagore's** *Gitanjali* was originally composed in Bengali. But when translated into English, it found a large audience all over the world.

You must have come across some of the translations into English from various 'regional' languages or 'bhasha' languages like Oriya, Kannada, Bengalee, Marathi, Assamese, Tamil, Malayali, Hindi etc. On examining some of the translations from the 'regional'/'bhasha' languages you will realise the resistance of the original text and the responsibility involved in the act of translation. You can also observe how a literary text belongs to the whole of humanity while belonging at the same time to a certain people, culture and language.

Find a novel in an Indian language, you know, that has been translated into English and then look into it to appreciate the translated text at hand. Premchand's *Godan* could be a possible choice!

Exercise II

1. Outline the kinds of language used in *Paraja* (Oriya). (150 words)
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2. How do you define colloquial language?
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3. Why do you think Gopinath Mohanty's prose is poetic?
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4. What does a literary text lose in the process of literary translation?
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29.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed:

- the difficulties involved in literary translation keeping in view the translation of a novel.
- The difference between *Paraja* (Oriya) and *Paraja* (English) with reference to some of the vital points in the text along with illustrations.

29.8 GLOSSARY

Analogy:	agreement, similarly, process of reasoning from parallels
Diction:	choice of words and phrases in speech or writing
Import:	implication, meaning, importance
Source Language Text:	the language from which translation is done
Target Language Text:	the language to which translation is done

29.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. There are not many problems in translating non-literary texts because they basically contain facts, figures and information and a word-for-word translation serves the purpose, but in case of literary translation each word is packed with meaningful possibilities and the translator finds it difficult to carry over all the possibilities to the translated text.
2. A number of classics in world literature written originally in various European languages are available to an audience across the world in translation only. Works like Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* (French), Gunter Grass' *Tin Drum* (German), Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Spanish) are some of the examples.
3. In the multilingual context of India some of the best works written in our 'regional'/'bhasha' languages are available in English translation. To name some of them – Thakajee Shivashankar Pilli's – *Chemeen* (Malayalam) U R Anatha Moorthy's *Samakara* (Kannada), Manik Bandopadhyay's *Putul Nacher Hi Katha* (Bengalee).
4. *Paraja* (Oriya) was published in 1946 and *Paraja* (English) was published in 1984.
5. When a literary text is translated into other language it finds a larger audience that leads to understanding between different communities of people.
6. A translation depends on variables like – the translator's command of the languages involved in translation; his/her decisions in choosing and leaving meanings, availability of equivalents for terms in the source language text in the target language, the ease and facility for the target language.
7. The criteria for considering a translated work as good or poor is – faithfulness to the intentions of the original text.

Exercise II

***Paraja: A Novel in
Translation***

1. Refer to Section 3.4 (language) for your answer.
2. 'Colloquial' language refers to words and expressions that belong to familiar speech and not to standard speech.
3. In Gopinath Mohanty's prose we often come across poetic features such as – analogies, images, metaphors, symbolism, rhythm, music, and diction densely packed with meaning. It becomes difficult to distinguish his prose from poetry when his words are filled with possibilities.
4. In the process of translation a literary text loses some of its subtleties and potentialities resulting in the loss of its communicative power.

UNIT 30 THEME AND PLOT

Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Definition and Meaning of Theme
- 30.3 The Theme of *Paraja*
- 30.4 What is *Paraja* About?
- 30.5 Defining Plot
- 30.6 The Plot of *Paraja*
- 30.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.8 Answers to Self Check Exercises

30.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall try to identify certain important aspects of a work of fiction. After closely analysing the unit, you should be able to understand the concept and meaning of the following things:

- theme and plot of *Paraja*
- the role theme plays in *Paraja* in determining our understanding of the novel
- the significance of plot in *Paraja* for a satisfactory appreciation of the complex issues dealt with, in the narrative.

30.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units, you have read in some detail about the history and development of the Oriya novel. You have also learned about the writer, Gopinath Mohanty, his life and his career as a creative author in Unit 26. Units 26, 27 and 28 were also devoted to the novel *Paraja* and gave you the story of the novel in brief. For a meaningful understanding of the novel, these expository units are crucial. But for a more nuanced and closer reading of a fictional work - one must adopt some more critical approaches. It is in this context that we shall define theme very simply and then look at the theme of *Paraja* as reflected in the novel.

30.2 DEFINITION AND MEANING OF THEME

Every work of art – literature, painting, sculpture or the performing arts such as music or drama deals with some specific fragment of human experience. We feel pleasure in reading a work of literature because in it we find the reflection of our own joys, sorrows, aspirations and dreams. Since a writer holds up a mirror to life in his/her work of artistic composition, the readers should feel that the emotions or ideas expressed in it corresponds to our own.

There is thus, a level of identification with the work with reference to the central idea developed in the text. It also enables the readers to participate in those experiences that they themselves may never have interacted with.

However, it has to be accepted that life is a continuous process involving a multiplicity of events, episodes, people and points of view. Thus, life as a whole cannot be included in any work of art since any artistic work must have a complete and cohesive structure. It has to portray the inception, growth and development of a certain episode, incident or happening. The characters have to participate in that event, as part and parcel of a structured experience seen through the perspective of the individual author. This automatically ensures the fact that the readers must share the experience from the beginning to the end leading to enrichment of and fulfillment of character.

A work of art therefore, must be developed around a single, central idea that encompasses the philosophy and vision of the creative artist in a seminal form. By organising the work around a central idea and by giving it a carefully conceived structural design the novelist gives it an aesthetic dimension that helps the readers derive maximum aesthetic pleasure.

The theme therefore refers not merely to the subject of a literary work but rather a statement that the text seems to be making about that subject. Major novels of the English literary tradition centre round specific central concerns. For instance, **Jane Austen's** *Pride and Prejudice* is said to deal with the theme of money and marriage, **Charles Dickens's** *David Copperfield* traces the fortunes of the central character in the midst of chaotic circumstances. **Charlotte Bronte's** *Jane Eyre* portrays a woman's quest for identity in a patriarchal world.

30.3 THE THEME OF PARAJA

Let us now focus our critical attention on the primary strands of narrative in *Paraja* to come to an understanding on the major preoccupation of the novel. *Paraja* is a novel that centres round the joys, aspirations, hopes and failures of the aboriginal *Paraja* tribe that has its home among the rugged mountains and forests of Koraput in Orissa. The novel explores the diverse layers of their lives, primarily emphasising on their perpetual struggle with hostile forces in nature and society. In course of reading the novel, we get to witness their way of life; customs and mores, festivals and religious practices, social interactions and cultural attitude. The novelist highlights in a realistic manner their exploitation at the hands of the money leaders and officers of law, the excruciating pain arising out of their yearning for love and fulfillment of their dreams. Their desire to live as free human beings on the land they own, to till it and live off the sweat of their labour with dignity is constantly thwarted by complex social forces.

Gopinath Mohanty portrays diverse aspects of the lives of a *Paraja* family through a multiplicity of situations. Sukru Jani longs to plough more and more land to ensure the economic security of his family, in the pursuit of his longings, he gets enmeshed in a web of inexplicable economic rules in the hand of the moneylender, his dreams are unfulfilled and he and his sons take

revenge by butchering the villainous *Sahukar*. The novelist lyrically depicts the flowering of human emotions as he shows the young men and women falling in love (Mandia Jani and Kajodi, Jili and Bagla).

However, though **Mohanty** delineates so many interesting aspects of human relationships in the form of emotions such as ambition, revenge, love and exploitation, he does not concentrate on any single idea or notion to highlight it as the predominant theme of the novel. What do you think?

30.4 WHAT IS *PARAJA* ABOUT?

A close analysis of the novel will tell us that the predominant idea of the novel – the central one that pervades through the entire novel – is the crucial matter of human existence at the face of antagonistic social constraints. Despite their uncomplicated and zestful life, the life of the Parajas is characterised by the shadow of some unseen and inscrutable power whose wrath drives the characters relentlessly to death and destruction. Sukru Jani always dreams of a hopeful future:

He feels happy with life. It has been as he wanted it to be, and some kind and benevolent spirit has made everything bright and beautiful for him. And when he thinks of his future he has no doubt that it will be brighter still. He fancies that he can even see it in the far distance, in vivid detail. A number of houses have been built for him and his sons and his grand sons. Yes, they are all there.

But his vision is not transformed into reality. Ambition, greed and internal conflict within the tribe create insurmountable odds for Sukru Jani and his family to procure any help at the dire moment of crisis. The novelist powerfully depicts two facets of the Paraja community's life – Firstly, Sukru Jani's aspirations for a fulfilling future are disturbed and doomed due to the indefinable and complex process by which he and his children are transformed from free men into 'gotis' or serfs, bound to the *Sahukar* for life. Secondly, **Mohanty** seeks to portray the undaunted courage, outstanding resilience and never-say-die attitude of Sukru Jani and each member of his family. In spite of the influx of problems that overwhelm them at various junctures of their life, they do not give up hope.

Mandia had adjusted to the life of a goti far more easily than the others; perhaps it was because of his greater resilience. He rarely brooded like his father. The shock had worn off and he had grown buoyant again. He never bothered to count his tomorrows, for he was sure that his time would come. Optimism comes naturally to the tribesman; he is never quite cured of it. p. 106

The Parajas as a community and as the individual members of the community that we come across in the course of the narrative believe in the act of living life to the full. They toil hard to improve their lot, seek out love and follow their dreams. The novel constantly focuses on the joy and peace that govern the lives of the tribals through the narrative. Their buoyant optimism and undying hope do not desert them even after they go through a series of misfortunes. On the other hand **Mohanty's** protagonist Sukru Jani is not

merely the primitive tribesman ensnared by the predatory moneylender from the city. He is also the quintessential man who wages a heroic but futile war against extra-cosmic and invisible powers but ultimately has to accept and adjust. He fights hard to undo the decree, but his endless struggle is of no avail. His plight reminds us of **Aeschylus**'s comment in *Agamemnon* that "as fate has willed so shall it be fulfilled."

Exercise-1

1. Besides the story of the novel, what are the important aspects in the study of a novel?

2. What role does theme play in a novel?

3. What, according to you is the theme of *Paraja*?

30.5 DEFINING PLOT

A close interpretation of the theme of the novel should help us understand an author's narrative purpose and authorial vision better. It offers us a better perception of the content of the novel that we are studying. Another significant aspect of the novel that we must be acquainted with is the plot of the novel.

Plot in the context of the novel may be defined as the schematic structure including the major events in the narrative. It is important at this point to distinguish between plot and story. Story refers to a narrative of events, ordered chronologically but a plot is much more than this. The story is the raw material from which the plot is constructed. Crafting a plot requires choosing not only the elements of a story to be included – and the order in which they are to be narrated – but also relating the events of a story to one another so that causality may be established convincingly. This cause and effect relationship between interrelated events is always taken into critical

consideration by a novelist. A novelist structures his/her narrative by closely linking character and motivation into the fabric of his/her work. A story can merely arouse a sense of suspense in the readers' mind as to what happens next in the narrative. A novel demands a more careful and nuanced interpretation of psychology, motivation and human behaviour as we have to follow why a particular character behaves in a specific manner that ultimately leads to a turn in the sequence of events. A plot is the skeletal structure that gives vital support to the very fabric of the story.

The plot as we may understand finally, is the pattern of events and situations in a narrative work, as selected and arranged both to emphasise relationships – usually of cause and effect – between incidents and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience such as surprise or suspense. In the next section, we shall discuss the plot of *Paraja*.

30.6 THE PLOT OF *PARAJA*

By now you should have read the novel *Paraja*. We shall now try and trace the pattern of the plot in the novel. As we have discussed earlier, causality is the most important ingredient in the plot of a novel. In short, all episodes, actions and events are closely connected with each other in a novel. One action leads to another action in a chain of interrelated events, determining the lives of the characters in the narrative. The shadow of an inscrutable power that overwhelms the life of the Parajas is not comparable to the issue of chance and coincidence as in a **Hardy** novel. In fact, **Gopinath Mohanty** lays the basis of the narrative structure in the desire and consequent action of the central characters of the novel thereby, leading to the intricacies of the plot.

The novel revolves around Sukru Jani, a patriarch of the Paraja tribe whose life represents the tragic degeneration of a close-knit community. The members of the Paraja tribe live their lives according to the primary laws of nature and pursue their lives without higher ambitions. In spite of the simple and uncomplicated nature of their lives, Sukru Jani commits an error that initiates a chain of interrelated events finally culminating in the murder of the *Sahukar*. The forest guard, presented in terms of a predator is an alien to the native community, nursing lecherous desires for the young women of the tribe. In spite of his knowledge of the intrinsic evil lurking in the character of the forest guard, Sukru Jani asks for illegal permission to fell trees in order to follow his dream of owing a piece of cleared land for agricultural purposes. His innocent desire for more land leads him into the trap of the forest guard most unwittingly. The guard gives his permission for clearing the land only to boldly express his sexual desires for Jili, Sukru Jani's elder daughter. Refused by both father and daughter, the guard wreaks vengeance on the family by imposing undue and heavy fines on him. The guard's manipulations persuades Sukru Jani to borrow money from the *Sahukar* that finally leads him and his sons into becoming *gotis* or bonded labourers of the money lender.

The novelist traces the pitiable degradation of the family unit as the male members of the family are forced to leave the two daughters without any means to look after themselves. After a period of waiting and employing all strategies of physical and emotional survival, Jili and Bili become labourers for the town contractor. Economic depravity, alienation from the tribal way of

life and loss of her lover, goads Jili into becoming the mistress of the contractor. Their father, Sukru Jani persuades them to come away with him to their dilapidated house, eventually rescuing both sisters. In course of time Bili manages to find a bridegroom for herself, while, Jili becomes the concubine of the despicable *Sahukar*. Jili barter out her beauty and youth in lieu of cheap luxuries and comforts given to her by the *Sahukar*. The novel ends in the brutal act of murder, as Sukru Jani and his sons finally butcher the *Sahukar* for years of indescribable exploitation and for shattering the Paraja's sense of honour by taking the daughter of their family as his mistress.

After having traced the main events in the plot, let us try to answer a question. How is the plot of the novel helpful in highlighting the significance of the theme? The structural mosaic of the plot consists of a strategic arrangement of events and episodes and explains how the author wants his readers to assess the motives of the characters. We are led to reflect on whether **Gopinath Mohanty** wishes us to interpret the Parajas as powerless individuals suffering untold miseries at the hands of a few social exploiters, or does he believe in the dictum that "Character is destiny" to suggest human beings are ultimately responsible for their own individual actions? The movement of the plot suggests that we pay close attention to the development of episodes in order to establish effective connections and finally internalise the vision that the novelist conveys through the plot. The plot then may be defined as that crucial element of the narrative that holds the action together.

Exercise – II

1. How would you distinguish 'story' from 'plot'?

2. What strategy does the novelist adopt to transform mere actions of a story into a formal plot?

3. How is the theme of the novel *Paraja* related to its plot?

30.7 LET US SUM UP

As we have understood from the earlier sections of the unit, the two most significant aspects of a work of literature are theme and plot. The theme of a novel is the salient, central idea that emerges from a literary work's treatment of its subject matter embodying the novelist's vision of life. A plot offers the structural foundation on which a novel is built. A well-structured plot is inextricably connected to the theme of the narrative.

30.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise – I

1. Two other aspects of the novel besides the story are theme and plot.
2. The theme helps the novelist give a formal shape to his/her ideas that s/he conveys through his/her work.
3. *Paraja* depicts the rise and fall in fortunes of a tribal patriarch, Sukru Jani and his family due to a complex network of social and economic circumstances.

Exercise – II

1. Whereas a story is a mere chronology of events, a plot is a complex mosaic of episodes linked to each other in causal relation.
2. The novelist organises his events in a manner that they may relate to one another in a logical sequence.
3. The theme of gradual degeneration of fortunes of a tribal family is delineated through a careful choice of interrelated episodes in the novel, *Paraja*.

UNIT 31 *PARAJA* IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Structure

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 The Indian Cultural Context of *Paraja*
- 31.3 *Paraja* as an Indian Tale of Survival
- 31.4 Mohanty's Approach to the Art of Characterisation
- 31.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.6 Answers to Self Check Exercises.

31.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall attempt to place *Paraja* in the tradition of the Indian novel in English. For a critical understanding of the narrative in a specific socio-cultural context, it is imperative to have an overview of the Indian novel in English. We shall then identify the Indian elements in *Paraja* within the broader context of the novel. This will be related to our reading of *Paraja* as a tale of survival, and in order to understand the author's perspective better, we shall carefully analyse **Mohanty's** art of characterisation. After studying this unit closely, you will be able to perceive the following:

- The status of *Paraja* as an Indian novel in English.
- The manner in which characters contribute to the Indianness of the theme.
- The way in which *Paraja* transcends the limitations of its cultural context to have a universal appeal to a larger cross section of readers.

31.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section, we shall focus our attention on a brief survey of the Indian novel in English in the post-independence period. In this regard, we have to keep in mind the significant contributions made in this area by the major trio: **Mulk Raj Anand**, **R K Narayan** and **Raja Rao**. **Mul Raj Anand**, in his novels, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) portrayed the plight of the underprivileged in Indian Society. **R K Narayan** depicts diverse aspects of the social order with a delicate blend of gentle irony and sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy in such representative works such as *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938) and other novels. **Raja Rao** delineates the complex processes of change that overwhelmed the social order in such sensitive works as *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and other novels.

Post-Independence Indian English fiction retains the momentum that the novel had gained during the Gandhian age. The tradition of social realism

established earlier on a sound footing by authors such as: **Mulk Raj Anand**, **R K Narayan** and **Raja Rao** is continued by novelists like **Bhabani Bhattacharya**, **Manohar Malgonkar** and **Khushwant Singh**. **Bhabani Bhattacharya's** *So Many Hungers* (1947) **Malgonkar's** *A Bend in the Ganges* and **Khushwant Singh's** *A Train to Pakistan* significantly portrays the post-independence, post-partition world from a sensitive perspective.

A notable development in the tradition is also the emergence of an entire school of women novelists among whom the leading figures are **Ruth Pravar Jhabwala**, **Kamala Markandya**, **Nayantara Sahgal** and **Anita Desai**. **Jhabwala's** *The Nature of Passion* (1956), **Kamala Markandaya's** *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), **Nayantara Sahgal's** *A Time to Be Happy* (1958) and **Anita Desai's** *Voices in the City* (1965), among many other novels portray the circumscribed status of the woman, her yearning to transcend the limitations of the domestic space and her longing for an individual identity.

The novel form has developed interestingly in the hands of later writers such as **Amitabh Ghosh**, **Arun Joshi**, **Salman Rushdie**, **Shashi Tharoor**, **Upamanyu Chatterjee**, **Arundhati Roy** and more recently **Kiran Desai**. Our primary emphasis in this section was to particularly relate the developments of the Indian novel in English in the pre-independence and early phases of post-independence period with **Gopinath Mohanty's** novel that was written originally in Oriya in 1945.

31.2 THE INDIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT OF PARAJA

Paraja essentially presents the pitiable plight of the aboriginal Paraja tribe in the hands of such social exploiters as the forest guard, the *Sahukar* and some members of the native community. What is striking about the background of the novel is the way in which the specifically Indian theme has been developed with particular reference to the social and cultural elements of its context. The novelist establishes the Indian identity of the novel in three ways – first, he provides a vivid description of the physical landscape that forms the setting of the novel –

The huts in each of the two settlements stand in parallel rows, flanked by patches of green – tiny squares of land sown with maize, chilies or tobacco and fenced in by hedges of the wild tania shrub. Beyond the hedges are fields of mandia, olsi and kandula – different kinds of millet which form the staple food of these tribes. (p.2)

After having evoked a realistic image of the fauna and flora of the place, **Mohanty** depicts the peculiarities of the tribal social background with a close eye for such details as inter-personal relations among tribe members, cultural practices of the community and religious beliefs of the native people, as he writes:

He sits wondering who those magical spirits might be, and which of them created the sky, the forests, the evening and the night, which spirit confers happiness and good fortune on man, and which brings storms and misery and evil days. (p.4)

Thirdly, **Mohanty** also depicts the social hierarchy of the Parajas – the opposition between the Parajas and the Doms, meticulous portrayal of the village power structure with *Naika*, the headman at the apex of power as he related everything to the Revenue Inspector, locally known as *Ribini*. Another important figure was the *Barik* or the village watchman. He shows the crucial role played by such powerful non-tribal entities as the Forest guard and the *Sahukar*.

Each element of the gender relations, the exploitation of the powerless villagers at the hands of the non-tribals and even members of their own tribe unfold in a subtle manner the cultural and social identity of every character of the tribe.

31.3 PARAJA AS AN INDIAN TALE OF SURVIVAL

As we have discussed earlier, *Paraja* can be linked to the tradition of social novels written in the pre-Independent period in the Indian English tradition, such as **Mulk Raj Anand's** *Untouchable* (1935) or **Raja Rao's** *Kanthapura* (1938). These novels, like *Paraja* seem to suggest that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader a relevant issue related to the social context. **Mohanty's** *Paraja* exposes the oppressive nature of the social hierarchy where the *Sahukar*, the forest guard or even the contractor can be looked upon as fountainheads of exploitation in the village. The artist in **Mohanty** can go beyond the limitations of simplifying ideologies to touch the polymorphous truth of rural life.

Sukru Jani is caught up in a complex network of irremediable circumstances that actually begins with his asking for permission to clear a piece of land from the villainous forest guard. In course of time, his entire family is reduced to a state of abject poverty, suffering inexplicable misery and treated like pawns in a game of power. Yet, **Mohanty** does not diminish the traces of hope in the hearts of the innocent villagers. As long as they live, each individual survives with the hope for a better life.

31.4 MOHANTY'S APPROACH TO THE ART OF CHARACTERISATION

Let us now see how we can apply **Forster's** concept of characterisation to *Paraja*. If you recall this was discussed in **Unit 1 of Block 1**. To begin with, there are a few characters in the novel that may be identified as flat characters. We learn about such characters only through the scanty information that is provided in the narrative. In fact we are told more about the action s/he is involved in than anything about him/her as an individual. The forest guard, for example is a character created with a very limited purpose. He is a non-tribal who has his eyes on the beautiful young women of the tribe. Similarly, the characters of the *Naika*, the *Barik* or *Dhepu Chalan* are flat for all narrative purposes.

Some of the major characters in the novel are developed at great length and in great detail. Sukru Jani is one such character. In fact the entire novel develops around the life of Sukru Jani – Sukru Jani has been portrayed in meticulous

detail throughout the novel. Sukru Jani is presented as the patriarch of the tribe whose life represents the fortunes of the entire community. At the beginning of the narrative, Sukru Jani is portrayed as an aspiring tribesman who commits an unpardonable error by asking for illegal permission from the forest guard to clear a piece of land. Henceforth, he is enmeshed in a network of difficult hardships – in the process we get to view Sukru Jani not only as a tribal patriarch but also as a grief-stricken father, a helpless ‘goti’ and a bereaved husband.

Mandia, the elder and Tikra the younger son work with him and pledge themselves as bonded slaves when they are caught by the guard felling trees and later when Mandia is caught brewing liquor. Both the sons of Sukru Jani are delineated as passive sufferers caught in indescribably oppressive circumstances. Though Mohanty traces some finer moments in Mandia’s thoughts as he dreams for his beloved Kajodi, Tikra receives no such graphic treatment in the narrative.

Jili, Sukru Jani’s elder daughter is a young, beautiful and vibrant Paraja girl who nurtures dreams of a fulfilling conjugal life with Bagla, a young tribesman. But Mohanty depicts the tragic circumstances that repress Jili’s dreams and reduces her to be initially a silent sufferer in the first half of the novel, later to be transformed into an opportunist strategist who willfully becomes the Sahukar’s mistress. We get to see the various shades in Jili’s subtle metamorphosis from an innocent tribal girl to a coquettish yet self-questioning, pathetic victim of circumstances. Bili, Jili’s younger sister suffers with her sister but finds a soul mate in Nandbali at the end of the novel. For the greater part of the novel, Bili is overshadowed by Jili’s powerful presence.

The moneylender – Sahukar Ramchandra Bisoi occupies a central position in the text though he comes across to us as a flat character, chiefly on account of his rather unchanging attitude to life. He seems to be entirely pre-occupied with wealth, expansion of landed property through continuous exploitation and gratification of his sexual appetite.

There are other characters that make a limited contribution to the narrative such as Nandibali, the Naika and Kau Paraja.

Exercise – I

1. What type of characters has Mohanty created in *Paraja*?
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2. What role does Sukru Jani play in the narrative?
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3. How has Mohanty portrayed the women characters in the novel?

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4. Has Mohanty succeeded in making his characters come alive?

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31.5 LET US SUM UP

Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* is a most significant contribution to Indian English literature. Like other social novels in the pre-independence period, *Paraja* is 'born out of passionate social awareness' **Mohanty** uniquely portrays the manner in which urban, material civilisation encroaches upon and gradually destroys a primordial way of life. **Mohanty** however does not merely narrate a tale of suffering. On the contrary, it is a tale of survival. In spite of the decline in the fortunes of Sukru Jani and his family, we as readers admire his heroic resilience and never-say-die attitude to life. The novel bears an unmistakable Indian identity as **Mohanty** graphically delineates each and every detail of the physical landscape and social background of the characters. Yet, the novel is not essentially culture-specific in nature as in its final reading, it transcends the barriers of time and space and has universal appeal. Sukru Jani represents the dilemma of the quintessential man, waging a heroic but futile war against social forces, like Sisyphus rolling up the stone against the steep slope of the hill. Ultimately **Mohanty** conveys his vision of life through an interesting range of complex characters. It is through the vital life of each character that we get to visualise, feel and experience the essence of **Mohanty's** philosophy of life.

31.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise – II

1. Mohanty has created an interesting range of characters both flat and round in *Paraja*. He portrays such round and complex characters as Sukru Jani, Jili and Mandia and flat characters as the forest guard, Nandbali and others.
2. Sukru Jani plays a central role in the narrative as the novel centers around the rise and fall of fortunes of the tribal patriarch.

3. Jili is presented as a round character as she undergoes subtle transformation through the course of the narrative. Bili and Kajodi represent the joys and sorrows of the innocent tribal girls in a close-knit tribal community.
4. A novelist can make his/her characters lively by not merely describing their physical attributes but by offering us a glimpse of their inner thoughts and emotions.

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UNIT 32 THE NOVEL : A CONCLUSION

Structure

- 32.0 Objectives
- 32.1 Introduction
- 32.2 Narrative
- 32.3 The Language of Fiction
- 32.4 Style
- 32.5 Characterisation
- 32.6 Author-Text - Reader Dialogue
- 32.7 Social Concerns
- 32.8 Analysing the Novel
- 32.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 32.10 Answers to Self Check Exercises

32.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully, you should be able to:

- describe how different novelists use different methods and styles;
- outline how characterisation contributes to effective story-telling;
- explain how the novelist has the autonomy to project his/her social concerns through the story; and
- understand that reading a novel involves a three-way interaction: between the author, the text and the reader.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading novels has been a form of popular entertainment for more than three hundred years. The origin of the novel may be traced to the prose writings of seventeenth century Europe. It was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century that the novel came to India. Though it was the Europeans who introduced the form as it existed in their languages, there were traditions of longer prose narratives in many Indian languages. However, Indian writers soon began to experiment with the new form as well in their own languages. In a country where the literacy rate is not so high, novels generally find a place in the bookshelves of only those who are literate. You will find ordinary people reading the novel in very ordinary situations. We see people reading the novel while travelling, or for a little relaxation after dinner. Some of them are even addicted to novels, specially crime thrillers. In fact, today if you were denied access to cinema, video and television, you would probably be reading a novel. It is true that to a large extent cinema, television or video has displaced the novel as a form of popular entertainment but you may have noticed that the most popular television serials or films are generally based on a significant and popular novel. In simple terms, the novel is a literary way of telling a story, whereas the film is an audio visual method of story-telling. Therefore, 'story-telling' is a crucial aspect of the film as well as the novel. The popularity of the novel or the film rests primarily in this inner desire that perhaps we all share, to be a part of a 'story-telling' session. The weaving of a story and its narration is an integral aspect of the culture of any society. Most

cultures of the world are replete with a rich matrix of epics, myths, fables, legends and fantasies. These stories are not only an expression of the human imagination but serve the purpose of providing a moral and ethical code. These stories and their essence were passed on from one generation to another over a period of time and a cultural bridge was established between the past and the present. Initially the communication was oral, but with the invention of the written word, and subsequently writing, the communication became literary. The four novels that you have studied (and five that you've read) are essentially five different stories. You may have wondered why you were studying these novels and not say, a *James Hadley Chase* novel. After all even a crime thriller is a story. You may have also wondered if, reading a popular novel in a railway carriage is the same as studying the novel for a course, (the way you have studied these five novels). The answer to both the questions lies in the fact that even though the 'story' aspect is central to a novel, it is not the only thing that the novel offers. What else does the novel offer?

32.2 NARRATIVE

Firstly, there is the novelist, or the story-teller. The manner in which s/he tells us the story is what we may understand as narration. We have seen that there are many narrative methods and styles that the novelists employ. For example, the way **Dickens** tells the story of *The Tale of Two Cities* is not similar to the narrative methods of **Gopinath Mohanty** in *Paraja*. The skills of the story-teller are as important as the story. In fact, a poor story-teller may ruin a good story by not being able to create and sustain enough interest in his/her readers. The novelist is often able to make ordinary and simple aspects of life seem extraordinary and remarkable by employing and exploiting various narrative methods. S/he may tell the story in the first person, or use one of his/her characters to narrate the story, s/he may use the present tense and take you into the past through flashbacks. S/he may disappear from the text completely and let the characters and the situation take over completely. Each of the texts that you have read employ various narrative techniques sometimes, within the same text and it would be an interesting exercise to identify these techniques and to chart out the similarities and differences in each novel.

32.3 THE LANGUAGE OF FICTION

For long, critics have made a distinction between poetry and prose on the basis of the use of language in them. **I A Richard**, for instance, spoke of the two uses of language: scientific and emotive. The former, to which the form of novel comes nearer, is used for reference, for 'creating the impact of something being true or false'. The emotive use of language, on the other hand, is used 'for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude', as in poetry.

According to **Northrop Frye**, the use of language in poetry is 'inward or centripetal in which we try to develop from the words a sense of the larger verbal pattern they make' whereas in prose it is outward or centrifugal, 'in which we keep on going outside our reading, from the individual words to the

things they mean, or in practice to our memory of the conventional associations between them'.

For **Coleridge**, 'the definition of good prose is - proper words in their proper places; of good verse - the most proper words in their proper places'. This, according to him, is the general rule. However, some prose verses may border on mere narrative, and there the style may be simpler.

Building on this, **Paul Valery**, has used the difference between walking and dancing as the analogy for drawing a distinction between prose and poetry. According to him, 'walking, like prose, always has a definite object. It is an act directed towards some object that we aim to reach'. Dancing is quite different. 'It goes no where'.

The most appropriate statement of such a distinctive description, however, comes from **Christopher Caudwell** who observes that the poem and the story both use sounds which awake images of outer reality. Elaborating on this, he states that poetry, through the use of language "continually distorts and denies the stature of reality to exalt the structure of the self. By means of rhyme, associations or alliteration, it couples together words which have no rational connection, that is no nexus through the world of external reality". The novel too, blots out external reality by substituting a more or less consistent mock reality which has sufficient 'stuff' to stand between the reader and reality. This does not mean that in the novel the emotional associations are attached to words but to the moving current of mock reality symbolised by the words. This is why rhythm 'preciousness' and style are alien to the novel; why the novel translates so well; why novels are not composed of words; they are composed of scenes, action, stuff, people, just as plays are'.

For more discussion on this, you may consult *Language of Fiction* by **David Lodge**.

32.4 STYLE

The manner in which the story is told often determines the style of its narration. Is the novelist going to adopt a serious tone or is s/he going to be humourous? S/he may be prophetic in style or satirical. In fact, you have perhaps noticed that each novelist has a different way of telling a story. The style and tone of the novel is not only determined by its socio-historical context but also by the subject matter of the novel. **Attia Hosain** uses a lyrical style to evoke a sense of tragedy that lies intertwined in time. **Dickens** employs a style which is reportorial and journalistic and involves his readers in the immediacy of the drama that unfolds in each event that he narrates. Each novelist employs a style by which s/he is able to successfully communicate the essence of the story to the readers.

32.5 CHARACTERISATION

A novelist must create characters in order to tell his/her story. How characters are realised in the minds of novelists is a fascinating question. In the five novels that you have read you have come across characters, each unique in

his/her own way. You may have not experienced the life of a tribal as it exists in a remote corner of Orissa or in the heart of Africa, or you may have read about life as it was in the Victorian Age in England, but when you read the novels you feel as if each character was alive and real and you are in complete empathy with the characters as you share their experiences. Actually, the novelist is able to take you close to the character and you are a kind of witness to the intricate and complex manner in which the mind of a particular character works. In fact, the more complex the mind seems to be, the more fascinating and real the character. Sometimes novelists create characters who are 'types'. These are easily recognisable. The novelist is assured that the readers will be able to anticipate some of the actions of this character because s/he would be doing something typical. **Charles Dickens** was a master in creating such characters and made them unforgettable by sketching them boldly and never missing out on the important details. This way **Dickens** was able to establish his characters quickly in the minds of his readers and then go on to focus their attention to more serious issues of social concern.

32.6 AUTHOR-TEXT-READER DIALOGUE

Coming back to our original question as to what does a novel offer other than a story, we may say that a novel provides an opportunity for an interaction and dialogue between the novelist, characters and the readers. The reading of a novel is in some ways a drama that is enacted out between three parties. The novelist, is the master puppeteer who not only controls the destinies of the characters but also plays with the emotions and feelings of the readers. The second party in this dialogue are the characters, who seem to become almost independent as soon as their creator has given life to them. They also establish rapport with the readers irrespective of the novelist. In fact, so real is the relation between a character and a reader that sometimes we compare real people with characters from novels. In the novels that you have read, have you discovered any character whom you could compare with someone you know? Finally, the third party in this drama is the reader who not only interacts with the characters, but also indirectly interacts with the novelist. There are many ways that a reader may respond to the novel. The reader may find the characters fascinating but not the plot, or vice versa; the theme of the novel may have an appeal but not the narration. As readers, you have also responded to the novels in your course. Don't you think different readers may respond to the same novel in different ways? For example, an Englishman's response to *Paraja* would not be the same as yours, just as your response to the reading of *Things Fall Apart* is different from the way an African would understand that novel. The reader has certain advantages and disadvantages. S/he has the advantage of a spectator who views things from a vantage point, but s/he may also have the disadvantage of certain prejudices and limitations of knowledge that might colour his/her perceptions. For example, is it really possible for an urban readership that has no experience of rural and tribal life to actually understand and appreciate the life that has been described in **Mohanty's** novel *Paraja*? You have a valid argument if you say that it is not essential to experience rural and tribal life at first hand in order to understand the tensions, the drama, the emotions and the struggle in *Paraja* because it is so universal. But as urban people with a particular kind of educational background, it is quite possible that we harbour some preconceived notions and ideas about

tribal life that might influence our reading. In fact, even the novelist may have some preconceived notions about his/her subject which may influence his/her creative output. The reader has the advantage of changing his /her opinion but the novelist cannot change the novel once it has been published. It is only in his/her next novel (that is if s/her writes one) that s/he gets an opportunity to revise his/her opinion about something. So, if you read more than one novel of a novelist, you may discover that the novelist has changed and altered his/her opinions and attitudes from one novel to another. There are many such interesting questions which may tease the reader. The broader the novel's spectrum in terms of characterisation, social relevance and artistic endeavour, the more would be its ability to pose question to its readers.

32.7 SOCIAL CONCERNS

A good novel has yet another very important thing to offer. It is through the novel that the novelist is able to express his/her social concern. If you study the genesis of the novel you will find that the central impetus for the novelist to write was his/her urge to diagnose the society s/he lived in the expose his/her readers to the various ills that afflicted society. What s/he thought was immoral and wrong, s/he protested against and upheld those values s/he thought would make society healthy. This is true of the novels you have read. **Attia Hosian** analyses the life of a woman caught in the twilight of a feudal society. **Mohanty** and **Achebe** make a study of tribal society and focus on those external influences that disturbs and often destroys the delicate pattern of tribal life. **Dickens** is concerned with those larger forces that operate in society and have a bearing on individual life and human relationships. Similarly, **Kate Chopin** examines the question of a woman and her role in a male dominated society. Reading a novel would directly involve you in a study of a social structure and involve you in a debate about what is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, just and unjust. But let us also remember that all this comes to us filtered through the eyes of the writer and becomes his/her social vision.

32.8 ANALYSING THE NOVEL

A crime thriller like a **James Hadley Chase**, or a *Mills and Boon* romance provides you with just a story and perhaps nothing else and sometimes even the story may not be able to sustain your interest for long. If you were looking for any of the things we have discussed above, these novels will fail to satisfy you. But the person who is travelling in a train or a bus, reads a novel only as a diversion so, for him/her just a story would be enough. You, on the other hand are studying the novel, which means you are looking in your text for all those aspects of the novel that we have discussed above and will not be satisfied with just a story. *Studying a novel means a critical appreciation of the text.* A critic uses perspectives to critically examine a text. In the next Unit we shall have a look at some of the different critical perspectives that are available to you. You may apply them to the novels that you have read and discover for yourself that though the novels are independent texts, written by different people at different points in time and place, yet they are all

interrelated in various ways. The similarities as well as the differences that you may have come across can then become meaningful.

Exercise I

1. Make a list of all the Indian novelists that you know of who write in English, Hindi or another Indian language. Mark the regions to which they belong on the map given below.



2. Draw up a list of the women characters from the five novels in your course. Do they all suffer? Is there any difference in the degree of their suffering? Who do you think is responsible for their suffering?

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3. Which of the five novels did you like the most? Why? Which one did you like the least? Give reasons.

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4. List some of the important novels written in English by Indian writers according to the year of publication.

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32.9 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has been a quick recapitulation of the aspects of the novel that you have studied in Block 1. But here we have discussed the novels in your course in relation to these aspects. While all novels tell a story, it is the novelist's craft that creates a text which we are able to read and re-read. We may read a crime thriller or a romance with great delight but it is purely for the story - line that we read these books. Once we know 'what happens next', there is very little incentive to return and re-read the book. On the other hand, Edna

Pontellier or Madame Defarge lives with us long after we have put down the novels. Some novels we enjoy because of the memorable characterisation, others for their narrative structure and yet others for their social concerns. As readers, we are individuals living in a certain moment in time, in a particular society and these specific aspects about our individual histories are bound to affect the way we read a particular novel. Thus a reader, in a way, recreates the text for him/herself.

32.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

1. Your list could be very different from ours. However, let us give you some names.

Amrita Pritam, Mulk Raj Anand – Punjab; Munshi Prem Chand – Uttar Pradesh; Nayantara Sahgal – Uttaranchal; Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahashweta Devi – West Bengal; U R Anantha Murthy, Raja Rao, R K Narayan – Karnataka; T Siva Sankara Pillai, Kamala Das – Kerala; Krishna Sobti, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal – Delhi

2. You can look at Blocks 1, 2, 3 4, and 5 once more and then write the answer in your own words.
3. In your answer, you can mention any novel that you may have read in English or Hindi or any other Indian language and explain why you enjoyed reading it or otherwise.
4. Some of the important novels written in English by Indian Writers are listed below in chronological order:

Mulk Raj Anand:	<i>Untouchable</i>	(1935)
Raja Rao:	<i>Kanthapura</i>	(1945)
R K Narayan:	<i>The English Teacher</i>	(1945)
	<i>The Guide</i>	(1958)
Kamala Markandaya:	<i>A Nectar in a Sieve</i>	(1954)
Arun Joshi:	<i>The Foreigners</i>	(1968)
Chaman Nahal:	<i>Azadi</i>	(1975)
Anita Desai:	<i>Clear Light of Day</i>	(1980)
Nayantara Sahgal:	<i>Rich Like Us</i>	(1985)
Amitav Ghosh:	<i>Shadow Lines</i>	(1988)
Shashi Deshpande:	<i>That Long Silence</i>	(1988)
Githa Hariharan:	<i>The Thousand Faces of Night</i>	(1992)
Vikram Seth:	<i>A Suitable Boy</i>	(1993)
Arundhati Roy:	<i>God of Small Things</i>	(1997)
Manju Kapur:	<i>Difficult Daughters</i>	(1998)
	<i>A Married Woman</i>	(2004)
Jhumpa Lahiri	<i>The Namesake</i>	(2003)

UNIT 33 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE NOVEL

Structure

- 33.0 Objectives
- 33.1 Introduction
- 33.2 The Writer/Author of the Text
- 33.3 Initial Perspectives on the Novel
- 33.4 Realism and Naturalism
- 33.5 Psychological Perspective
- 33.6. Modernism/Fragmentation/Identity
- 33.7 Postcolonial Perspective
- 33.8 Feminism
- 33.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 33.10 Answers to Self Check Exercise

33.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will provide a general understanding of critical perspectives. From a general background on critical thinking and analysing of a text/novel, we will be examining certain critical perspectives at some length. After going through this unit, you should be able to examine the novels in your course critically.

33.1 INTRODUCTION

Most of the critical perspectives that we are going to consider in this unit were formed and formulated by literary critics of the twentieth century. Under the various perspectives forged in the twentieth century, the novel became more a subject of study than a matter of entertainment. Here, the word 'study' refers to the opposite practice of 'reading' a novel for pleasure. In the twentieth century every reader of literature has become in fact a 'specialist' reader, a critic or a would-be critic who listens to discussions about texts and authors in the classroom. Taking it further, it is not just the classroom practice but the examination system that controls the study of fiction. The same has happened vis-à-vis the world of journals, magazines and books of criticism where fiction seems to have become a social science discipline rather than an entertainment-giving exercise. Today, we have so many different ways of approaching the novel. One happy outcome of this trend is that the novel has become a matter of serious consideration and debate. Thus, we have the social (of contemporary use); the realist/ historical (to be understood as a part of long human history); the cultural (to be thought of as a cultural activity stressing values); the psychological (taking note of the workings of the mind and psychological state of the central figure/ figures in the work); the linguistic (taking up the words in the work to be the sole guiding factors of understanding); the sociological/ structuralist/ poststructuralist (studying along with linguistic, the thought and value structures of a work); the philosophical/ interdisciplinary/ deconstructionist/ postcolonial (stressing the unstable and

constantly changing field of literary writing); feminist (underlining the role of patriarchy as a system aimed to subjugate the population of women socially, culturally and emotionally), etc. perspectives on the novel.

These, as said above, have been the dominant perspectives on the novel in the twentieth century. They also at the same time reflect upon novel writing from the point of view of the reader/ 'student'/ critic/ interpreter who is constrained to make sense of a fictional text in one's own surroundings. These different perspectives enable the contemporary interpreter to ask specific questions to elicit useful answers from the author/ text so that the fictional text communicates an understanding of the world in which the interpreter lives.

33.2 THE WRITER/AUTHOR OF THE TEXT

What about the writer or author of the novel? From the structuralist or deconstructionist perspective, the author doesn't exist – 'the author is dead.' However, from other perspectives such as the social, cultural and historical, the author is not only alive in the text and the world in which the text was written, but also as an active participant in the process of moving on in life along with the rest of humanity. Viewed from this angle, the novelist is a producer of the text in the complex domain of the market, the printing press and the worker caught in the web of buying and selling. Does the market not necessitate a particular kind of novel writing that helps the publisher and distributor reap hefty profits from the sale of fiction? If that indeed is the case, the novel as well as different perspectives on it are themselves forged in the social domain in a particular historical epoch. Thus, it is that, perspectives themselves are a product of circumstances in which they actively participate to assist formation of attitudes – it is difficult to separate perspectives from social attitudes. To extend the argument, we can assert that perspectives also are forged at the hands of the writers of fiction in their specific times. Conversely, critics respond to the prevailing author-perspectives as they respond to other questions and challenges in life. Our job in the present unit thus, is to make you think about the way in which critical perspectives emerge in history at different points and the way in which at the level of both writers and readers, they contribute to the enrichment of the novel as a literary form. As you move along the discussion in this unit, you would realise that one or other of the critical perspectives gets evolved under specific social pressures and requirements and that the twentieth or twenty-first century in which we confront this issue has also its own preferences and biases regarding the way the novel is to be examined and assessed.

In Unit I titled 'Introduction to the Novel', you have read that the novel as a form originated in the eighteenth century in England under circumstances that set themselves apart from anything that had existed before. In eighteenth century Europe, ordinary men and women broke away from the shackles of feudalism and realised that they themselves were the arbiters of their fate. This made their outlook secular as well as rational, something that drew attention to the real world comprising human relations on which alone stood the edifice of society. The most important aspect of life in the eighteenth century was that it bore characteristics of the democratic ethos, a phenomenon entirely different from what the earlier aristocratic or feudal systems had produced till then in

different parts of Europe. The first signs of democracy, as you know were witnessed in England where, in the 1740s England had been the scene of the tumultuous happenings of the Cromwellian Revolution – the English King with supposedly divine backing was beheaded and the supremacy of the Parliament was established in the country. What made this possible in an essentially religious country with its own social norms and spiritual temperament? Here is not the space to go into this question, my aim being only to make you aware that literary forms and thought-patterns as well as perspectives have their roots in socio-historical circumstances. Also, this broad information about the emergence of democratic ethos in Europe is sufficient for this Unit, where we shall mainly focus upon how the novel appeals to the audience and in what imaginative-critical process its significance can be grasped by the reader.

33.3 INITIAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE NOVEL

Initially, novels were written to entertain, their sole purpose being to engage the attention of the reader and take him/her on an imaginative trip of wish-fulfillment. If you read a novel, you became oblivious of your immediate surroundings, their demands and pressures and remain face to face with things of your happy choice – life of love, comfort, romance and beauty. Novel reading is one of the important ways in which our mind becomes free from the heavy consideration of life's responsibilities. But closely connected with this aspect of novel reading is the fact of human life asserting itself in the mind of the reader in a different manner. That is how love, comfort, romance and beauty gradually become reminders of what we lack in life. In the course of reading about happy and fulfilling things in the novel, we are made to wonder as to why it is that we are so troubled and worried in real life. This is what precisely happened in the eighteenth century when the readers of literature increasingly questioned the popular notions of behaviour even as they also turned inwards to examine their moral, spiritual and psychological propensities. Thus, the novel became a space in which the simple and complex issues of life confronted the reader and where s/he thought, felt, agonised, became curious and impatient with oneself on a number of occasions. Since the novel used the medium of prose to communicate to the reader its message, the reader found it truly easy to compare and contrast the environment of the novel with her/ his own. Would it not be correct, therefore, to say that for the reader of the eighteenth century, this literary form became a virtual classroom where discussions about behaviour, manners and current ideological issues happened? This I call the initial perspective on the novel, initial but not elementary. In fact, the novel in the eighteenth century proved to be a true teacher, friend and guide of the reader, unlike that familiar figure of the preacher who talked from the high platform of religious morality about the mighty issues of divine expectations. Also, the novel familiarised the reader with serious responsibilities of life, not merely in the arena of moral thought but also where the real action happened – the society of the time. Do I need remind you that many of the political and social lessons of the day were learnt by the reader in the pages of the novel?

Let us look at this 'initial' critical perspective of the novel in theoretical terms. In an extremely important sense, the novel made the reader an interpreter and a critic, an interpreter of morals and a critic of rigid conventions. What does an interpreter do, if not to explain unto oneself and others the logic of a moral

principle, for instance? This is not done in a dry and dull manner as by a philosopher but one who is deeply involved in some problem. All of us as members of a community are intellectuals, as the Italian thinker **Antonio Gramsci** has said in his essay '*Formation of Intellectuals.*' We are intellectuals precisely for the reason that we have the mental capability to sort out our issues. Thinking and understanding constitute that basic skill of criticism with which all humans are equipped. The novel in the eighteenth century became such a vehicle of criticism.

The other connotation of criticism is rejection of an idea or view. It is in this arena that the eighteenth century novel performed the vital function of instilling the critical, 'rejectional' attitude into its readers. Thus, in the hey-day of fiction, one read novels and became increasingly critical of ideological structures, social institutions and political regimes. Today, you cannot imagine the furor some writers created in their own time when it was felt by the authorities that curbing the novelists was required. And if that did not work in a direct sense, such writers were most ferociously attacked through pamphlets and journals of the day. Consider that **Jonathan Swift** and **Henry Fielding**, both prose writers of the eighteenth century, had to face vitriolic criticism from their opponents. This only proved the potential might of this literary weapon called the novel – it became a sort of institution, like the parliament, through which the interests of a specific social formation, the bourgeois class, feudal aristocracy, landed gentry, etc. could be effectively promoted or blocked.

It was the perspective of the novelist and the reader equally, that worked in tandem to confront their world to know and improve it, to take it forward. In fact, this relationship of togetherness between the novelist and the reader was so clear at the time that, as I have said before, the reader learnt from the novel almost directly. However, there were questions at this time that made the reader uncomfortable in the course of reading. How do we sort out this difficulty that the reader came across? A working answer perhaps would be that for such a discomfort this novelist wasn't to blame but the overall environment in which both the novelist and the reader lived. That is to say, both the novelist and the reader were to think of the emerging problematic environment and realise that the discomfort was an intellectual challenge. Thus, the initial perspective of curiosity about one's world and daring to understand it as it actually worked brought the novel very close to the reader's heart, as it were.

However, debates about what the novel was, how it helped the reader know one's world and form an opinion of it and how it had to work further in the social domain started significantly in the nineteenth century. By that time, the novel had emerged as an institution that constantly drew the attention of the reading community compelling them to still more sharply, interrogate the domain of their homes, neighbourhoods, regions and the country in general. As we know, the reading community of the novel in England consisted largely of women, it made this important section of the society quite aware and enlightened. We have no space here to go into this aspect of the issue except to broadly note that a number of women came forward to write in this fictional mode. And it was truly amazing to see the world from their point of view. None had so far known what went on in the minds of women while doing their chores, deciding about marriage, interpreting religion and social morals.

Obviously, this 'shook' the male-dominated world that believed the social structure existing at the time to be more or less safe in their hands. But was it actually safe, since events and happenings of the day had unfolded in an unexpected way?

Perhaps the eighteen forties was the turning point in the history of novel-reading, as **Raymond Williams** in his book *The English Novel* has argued. Discussions began about the role and function of the novel in a big way. The major aspect of these discussions revolved around 'Realism.' This meant that the novel as a form aimed to capture the world in its real state. I am talking mainly of fiction in England. But it is interesting to see that the novel in France had stolen the march over the English novel. French novelists such as **Balzac**, **Stendhal** and **Flaubert** had touched new heights in novel writing and also begun considering the nature and function of the novel form. But time wise, these discussions happened more or less simultaneously in England and France with just a little gap of a decade or two as you will know later.

33.4 REALISM AND NATURALISM

Let us see the parameters of the aforementioned debate since this formed the basis of a distinct critical perspective. 'Realism' and 'Naturalism' were the two major parameters of this debate. In the beginning, the two terms meant broadly the same thing – the society of the time had to be reflected in as natural and real a way as it existed. But was 'natural' real? To begin with, what did 'natural' mean? In this context, let us remind ourselves that science had taken truly long strides in the nineteenth century with its reliance on the material basis of the universe. The planet earth and everything existing on it or around it was of interest as well as an object of study for science. At the same time, science used the method of forming a hypothesis (a statement made on perception) and testing that hypothesis against facts in real life. **Balzac's** method in his novel was not as 'naturalist' or 'scientific' as this since he did not merely believe in observable facts of life. For him, the important thing was the domain of social life in which many things were present but hidden, not perceptible to the senses – eye, ear, etc. Instead of the 'observable' or to be 'tested against facts' phenomenon, he aimed to present the types and individualities of his characters in the novels he wrote. In his opinion, the reality of life could be grasped through focusing on history in its process of change that was seen as crystallised in the behaviour of the men and women of the day as types and individuals simultaneously. The Naturalist authors, on the other hand, trusted their eyes and ears more than their broader understanding which in their opinion was formed by socio-cultural trends and therefore, subjective. Their slogan would be, keep the understanding out of the purview of the novel and write only that which you 'see'. Clearly, you can see only that which is present before you. Then, it would indeed be difficult to relate your presentation to the past happenings that have a link with the present. Thus, the basic difference between the realistic and naturalistic approach was that the former claimed knowing society in history and the latter knowing society as it existed at the time, not in relation to history.

The good thing about this discussion was that both sides participating in it referred to something outside the author. In this sense, both could be called objective and impersonal. This discussion also gave a chance to the reader to compare his/ her perceptions with those given in the novels and accept or

critique that which they read. Such a perspective on the novel kept alive the already established tradition of the novel, since it visualised the novel as playing a role vis-à-vis society. In fact, the role of the novel became still more important in the nineteenth century than the eighteenth century in view of the emerging social conflicts and antagonisms in the wake of the growth of industrial capitalism and democratic thought.

Why do we use such indicators such as 'objective' and 'impersonal' in the context of the nineteenth century when we know that this century was marked significantly by the Romantic movement across Europe? Romanticism did not approve of the impersonal and objective in life; it gave credence to the subjective and the personal. My answer to this question is that Romanticism did indeed stress the 'personal' and 'subjective' but the personal and subjective in the novels of the day were seen at the time as reflecting upon what actually existed. For this reason, at least the perspective of realistic fiction would accept the personal as the 'individual' character's response to a given phenomenon. But in another sense, the Romantic aspect of writing could also pave the way for a different perspective called the psychological perspective.

33.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Above, we have linked up the psychological perspective with the Romantic Movement in literature in the nineteenth century. This is debatable. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, psychology had established itself as a science with its own method of using observation, testing and preparing/analysing case histories, etc. Still, I connect the emerging interest in psychology in the nineteenth century with that of writing under Romanticism which brought in imagination, fantasy, etc. to elaborate the creative side of novel writing. How do we find a novel such as **Emily Bronte's** *Wuthering Heights* realistic in many of its aspects in spite of the fact that it uses dreams, subjective impressions, and overall fantasy to project a view of the nineteenth century society?

The psychological perspective demanded that the novel be true to the mental processes of individual characters presented in it. This required not just the dialogues that the characters spoke in the novels but also 'monologues'. I use 'monologue' descriptively to suggest that people in life talk many a time to themselves and that this is meant to be more authentic than the so-called dialogues where the speaker is conscious of the constraints of the situation confronting her/ him. In the same manner, the presentation of a dream or dream-sequence is more authentic than a speech that a character might deliver for the benefit of an audience. This growing importance of the knowledge of mental processes made readers curious about the mysteries behind an individual's assertion of himself/ herself against odds. The novel was supposed from now onwards to be 'psychologically' convincing with respect to the behaviour of characters in novels. The novels of **Henry James** are a case in point. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, **James** had established the tradition of psychological authenticity of depiction in the novel.

Henry James also drew the attention of the author and reader alike to the use of the narrator in the novel. For **James**, a character in the novel could play this role of a narrator where the picture painted would be from the point of view of the particular character and not necessarily reflect the opinion or bias of the author. **James** was quite clearly a 'conscious' writer, considering that he knew his job well to communicate effectively not just what had been called 'action' but also mental states and attitudes of the different characters portrayed in his novels. A thinker and a theorist, **James** would lay bare the 'art' of the author and talk about the novel form. From here onwards in English fiction would begin a journey in the direction of perspectives, a journey rich in the knowledge of the aesthetic principle as well as involving the alert reader or critic in a debate about the function of the novel in a fast-changing world.

Thus, we see in the beginning of the twentieth century a tremendous rise in the number of perspectives. Add to this the fact that the novel became increasingly aware of the demands and expectations of the critic as the new century progressed. And it all began with the consideration of a new element in both novel writing and its appreciation at the hands of the critic.

The first thing, of course, was the act of the narrator in the novel. Apart from **James's** own writing, this act was quite pronounced in the novels of **Joseph Conrad**, a towering figure in the world of European fiction at the turn of the century. **Conrad** was Polish by birth and an author in English by choice. Such things rarely happen in literature – an individual growing up in and imbibing the culture of one country, in this case Poland, and migrating to another to interact with an entirely different audience. Still more interesting is that the person in question is a writer who would perforce write in an alien language. Where would he draw his characters from and which aspect of life would he choose to depict in his writing? More important than an 'aspect of life' here is the selection of theme or issue that the writer would take up for representation.

A migrant from Poland to England, **Conrad** faced the question of identity – of which cultural reality was he a product and what it was that he could do for self-affirmation. Had a split occurred in his personality regarding culture and nationality? Still more, would he not look quite critically at a country which was unlike his own in terms of ethos and politics? Would he be able to relate in positive terms to an economic power a major chunk of whose wealth was produced away from its national boundaries? The last years of the nineteenth century had been witness to the emergence of imperialism that divided the world into two categories – the mighty imperialist bloc with all the attendant impress of superior development and a big cluster of hapless nations huddled in a corner as it were as inferior communities. In a major way, **Conrad** had to come to terms with this issue of inequality at the international level. Let us also not forget that **Conrad** was compelled to watch a phenomenon outside the boundaries of one nation – if he failed to do this, he would miss out on the new scenario unfolding itself. **Henry James**, too, had contended with the complexity of issues beyond national boundaries that touched different societies unequally. But **James's** attention had not been caught by the weak position of a colony vis-à-vis the metropolitan centre that determined its fate.

Thus, we see in the novels of **Conrad** the representation of sharp injustices meted out to subject nations by their colonial masters. Was the novel equipped enough as a form to do justice to this complex phenomenon? The problem manifested in the making and visualisation of the typical **Conrad** character as constantly haunted by a crisis of identity. Indeed, the manifestation went

beyond characterisation to the depiction of clash between cultures, visions or ways of life. For the first time, the reader of the novel saw the clash between two perspectives, the perspective of the exploiting nation and the perspective of the weak country suffering in the process of being exploited. **Conrad's** novels are a difficult read since they exhibit a multiplicity of opinions and attitudes. They also take the reader along the path of a new discovery in the dark recesses of the characters' minds. Consider that **Conrad** is aware of what he is up against, a world that can be grasped only when the reference to the clash we have hinted at is kept in view.

Exercise I

1. What do you understand by the term 'Realism' in literature?
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2. What is the psychological approach to literature/a novel? Write a short note giving suitable examples from the texts in your course.
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33.6 MODERNISM/ FRAGMENTATION/ IDENTITY

Along with **Conrad** in the domain of fiction comes Modernism, a point of view setting much store by representation of the human condition – the passivity and helplessness of the modern man in the face of a world governed by its own non-human laws. Modernism looked only at the existing situation in which the world was moving inexorably towards destruction since it had no logic of its own. In the modernist novel, one came across the human figure as only thinking or brooding – eyeing the phenomenon from outside as it were. The central figure of the modernist novel, exemplified by **Joyce, Lawrence** or **Virginia Woolf** who, explored Time not historically where it communicated the human urge to go forward but in universalist terms. For the modernist writer of fiction, it did not matter which way one tended to move, since s/he thought of the movement as a sort of illusion assiduously created by a dreamer, a being only superficially linked with the reality of the day. This persisted broadly till the end of World War II.

The novel became a difficult genre to hold on to after World War II. How far could it be relevant to the world newly emerged from the dance of large scale violence and destruction? Was the rationalist/ humanist discourse of any value in the new situation? Also, did 'the human condition' of the modernist fiction

convey anything significant to the post-World War reader? The 'new' world stood fragmented, uncertain of itself. With the national boundaries of a host of countries redrawn, people scarcely knew where to look for identity and affirmation. A victorious and highly inspiring phenomenon in the nineteen twenties, socialism in the new context had lost much of its sheen as it emerged bruised and battered from the experience of fight with imperialist capitalism. In the new scenario, the novel faced the task of comprehending countries not as separated entities but unified under blocs ideologically grasped and defined – imperialist/capitalist bloc, socialist bloc and the countries of the 'third world.'

Traditionally, the novel had been a literary form drawing its strength from aspects of life of ordinary masses and given to depicting their issues in the rationalist discourse of prose. The new novel, however, found itself unable to state things clearly and straightforwardly. This problem of stating things straightforwardly had been partially addressed by Modernism that took recourse to the use of symbols to project incomprehensible points of human behaviour. In the new situation, however, even symbolism was of limited value. Add to this the fact that the central figure/figures available for depiction in the novel ceased to be the fractured sensibilities they were in the fiction of **Conrad** – they became illusory, not present or alive at the time the reader was made aware of their existence. I have in mind the fictional works of the French novelist **Robbe Grille**. Possibly, the centre of focus of the post-World War II novel had shifted from Europe to the countries of the third world or those of the Socialist bloc. In the third world itself, there were voices of potential resistance or protest against both the capitalist first world and the indigenous rulers. This further increased difficulties of the novel in Europe. But these difficulties could be seen embedded in the structures of representation of the fictional works written by European novelists.

33.7 POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

As we approach the end of our discussion, let me take up in some detail one of the most important perspectives of today – the Postcolonial perspective. The word 'post' in this term is descriptive and doesn't necessarily mean that colonialism has ended; colonialism is indeed quite active in our midst in a variety of ways. The perspective in question is connected with some fresh issues we face. Take 'Nationalism', for instance. Many societies the world over, sense a threat from an overbearing capitalism that came into being with the emergence of Renaissance in Europe. They feel that Renaissance thought and value system takes away from the rest of the world its independence and subsumes its identities. The aspect of modernisation is considered nothing less than 'westernisation' that has entered all communities of the world. The interesting part of this trend of thinking is that in the name of modernisation, it also equates Socialism with modern capitalism. In this manner, the threat seems to be coming both from Capitalism and Socialism.

The postcolonial perspective impels the novelists of the day to focus upon 'difference' than similarity and present the latter as danger. The postcolonial perspective has also compounded the problem of characterisation in contemporary fiction. The novel is supposed to take cognisance of a world that lacks centre, a world in which the human subject doesn't find a home. Where do we have a 'home', a point of belonging in an ex-colony? In our country of origin or in that other western country the values of which we have

unconsciously adopted? What about the question of diaspora that tells migrants from a country to another land that their roots lie elsewhere? The home and the country remind the modern individual of the language s/he is supposed to use for communication. The migrants to another country are forced to use a multiplicity of languages – their own native tongue, the languages of other migrants to the new country and the country's own language or dialect. The individual in the middle of such a world doesn't see a home and a point of belonging we have referred to. In this context, the novels of **V S Naipaul**, **Salman Rushdie**, **J M Coetzee**, **Amitav Ghosh** and others come to mind. These novelists struggle to define the identity of their protagonists in vain.

The novel in the postcolonial period aims to identify new socio-political issues, too. The South African novelist **Nadine Gordimer** in her novel *My Son's Story* shows the clash between the South African natives and the white population that assumes a number of significant dimensions – socio-cultural, ethnic and political. Under the political dimension, she grapples with Socialism in the post-War era. In the novel, she is at pains to stress suffering individuals that are unable to relate not merely to one another but also to the principles they have adopted.

In these and other works of fiction in this category, the reader comes across hidden and submerged areas of vitality. In fact, such areas have been there in all the novels written since the eighteenth century. The postcolonial perspective on the novel makes us aware of this. **Edward Said**, a committed anti-imperialist theorist of our time, drew attention to the existence, too, of such areas in **Jane Austen's** early nineteenth century novel *Mansfield Park*. He has said that **Austen** kept under the wraps the conduct of a major figure Sir Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and presented him only as an impressive patriarchal figure. **Austen** did it under the ideological pressures (these pressures worked unconsciously) from her environment – she had to cater to the English readership fed upon family values and the idea of a resurgent England.

Exercise II

1. Can you examine one of the novels in your course from a postcolonial perspective?

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33.8 FEMINISM

Another significant area of suppressed sections and identities in the contemporary novel relates to women in all societies, irrespective of race or class. Most of the novels in the twentieth century present women with a bias.

Scarcely any light is shed on the question of women's exploitation under the pressure of home, marriage and overarching patriarchy. This has been brought into sharp focus by the feminist perspective that emerged prominently in the nineteen eighties. Under feminist perspective, what is brought to light is the shocking way in which faulty representation of women has all along occurred in fiction, where we find women projected as objects of desire or prisoners of the domain of emotion and sentiment. Women are broadly kept away from where societies are shaped, economically, socially and politically. The feminist trend in novel criticism compels readers and critics to closely watch the 'fumbles' and 'silences' in the novels written by women. Language is also used differently by the female author; she avoids assertion in her expression. Things vary substantially even at the level of conceptualisation of characters in works of women's fiction. This obviously is rooted in the culture of the time when the female author chooses to represent the world from her point of view.

At the same time, there are a few meeting points in the way women view the contemporary surroundings and how the underprivileged among the males react to the issues posed by the same world. A significant part of feminist criticism highlights the potentiality of a meaningful alliance between women and other exploited sections in society. A number of modern day feminists see possibilities of liberation in a joint struggle against forces that subjugate not just women but also nationalities, regional identities and ethnicities across the world. With crises of one kind or another overtaking the post-War world, the feminist perspective has turned increasingly political in its emphases and pronouncements.

33.9 LET US SUM UP

Lastly, we note a great deal of experimentation in the contemporary novel. From this emerges the strong trend in Latin American writing of a new kind of Realism – 'Magic Realism.' The term takes us back to the hey-day of the perspective of Realism in the nineteenth century European fiction. Is there a fundamental difference between these two 'realisms'? The answer would be 'yes' and 'no'. The difference would be from the point of view of time. The late twentieth century fiction has to address the issues of poverty, illiteracy, racial difference, war and violence in a manner unthinkable in the nineteenth century. Most of the nineteenth century fiction treated societies within national boundaries, even when some important works of fiction such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* showed conflicts involving two countries. It also made sense at that time. Not any longer. We live in a world that is highly integrated economically. There is a connection between the 'developed' economies of the affluent West and the weaker or underdeveloped economies of the rest of the world. This has made twentieth century fiction highly complex in its form and mode. And yet, the perspective of Realism of the nineteenth century makes sense in our context because it makes authors connect various aspects of a phenomenon under a humanist framework (Georg Lukacs is a proponent of this view). In spite of its 'magical' mode, Latin American fiction is focused like its nineteenth century counterpart on the trends of injustice, violence and inequality.

33.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read Section 33.5 carefully and then work out your answer.

Exercise II

1. You could examine *Things Fall Apart* or *Paraja* from a postcolonial perspective.

UNIT 34 THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

Structure

- 34.0 Objectives
- 34.1 Introduction
- 34.2 Early Indian Writers in English
- 34.3 Three Significant Novelists
- 34.4 Post Independence Novelists
- 34.5 Women Novelists
- 34.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 34.7 Answers to Self Check Exercises

34.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal with the Indian English novel. It will introduce you to the various phases of the development of the Indian English novel. To give you an overview of the development of the Indian English novel, we also give you a brief idea of the life and works of the major contributions to the development of this genre. By the end of the unit you will have a fair understanding of the phases in the development of the Indian English novel.

34.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel as a literary phenomenon is new to India. The novel came to life in Bengal and then to other parts of India i.e. Madras and Bombay. Today Indian English novelists (whether living in India or abroad) are in the forefront of New English Literatures worldwide. The names that immediately come to mind are **Salman Rushdie**, **Vikram Seth**, **Amitabh Ghosh**, **Arundhati Roy**, **Upamanyu Chatterjee**, **Amit Chaudhari** and from the older lot **Anita Desai** and **Nayantara Sehgal**.

34.2 EARLY INDIAN WRITERS IN ENGLISH

Rajmohan's Wife (1864) was the first and only English novel that **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee** (1838-94) wrote. Though *Rajmohan's Wife* is not considered a very good novel, it established **Bankim's** place as the father of the novel in India. His novels *Durgesh Nandini*, *Kapal Kundala*, *Vishavriksha*, *Krishana Kantar*, *Anandmath*, *Devi Chaudhrani* along with others appeared between 1866 and 1886 and some of them appeared later in English versions.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) began writing by imitating **Bankim** before he found his own voice. He achieved popularity more as a poet than as a novelist. His poem *Gitanjali* was his finest achievement in English verse writing. His novels *Naukakhadubi* (1905) appeared as *The Wreck* in the English version, *Gora* (1910) retained the same title in English. *Ghare Baire* (1916) was given the title *The Home and the World* in its English translation. *Ghare Baire/ The Home and the World* is set in revolutionary Bengal in 1905.

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) also experimented with the novel in *Bianca /The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) around the same period. She wrote a number of poems and tried her hand in novel writing with *Bianca* soon after **Bankim** wrote the first Indian English novel *Rajmohan's Wife*. Hence, **Toru Dutt** is also considered to have contributed to the birth of the novel in India. Though the novel was not very successful it is considered a significant contribution to the birth of novel writing in India.

From the middle of the nineteenth century up to the end there were some stray novels that continued to appear, mostly by writers from Bengal and Madras. With the beginning of the 20th Century some substantial novelists began to appear. One of them **Romesh Chander Dutt** cousin of **Toru Dutt** began writing novels in Bengali as advised by **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee**. He was born in 1848 and chose civil services as his career, at the same time found time for his scholarly undertakings. His contribution to Indian historical fiction is very significant. He translated two of his Bengali novels into English *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave-girl of Agra* (1902).

K S Venkataramani (1891-1952) from the Madras Presidency wrote *Murugan the Tiller* published in (1927) which won great popularity in India. The theme, and characters in this novel reminds us of the earlier novels of **Premchand**. *Murugan the Tiller* portrays the life of peasants, idealises the Indian village and propagates Gandhian ideas.

Exercise I

1. Name the first novel written in English in India. Who was its author?
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2. When was *Ghare Baire* written? What was its title in the English translation?
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3. Which novel of Toru Dutt is considered to have also contributed to the birth of the novel in India? Who is the protagonist of the novel?
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4. Who influenced Romesh Chander Dutt to write novels in Bengali? Which were the two novels he translated into English?
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34.3 THREE SIGNIFICANT NOVELISTS

The most significant event in the history of Indian English fiction in the nineteen thirties was the appearance of the major trio: **Mulk Raj Anand**, **R K Narayan** and **Raja Rao**. **Mulk Raj Anand** has to his credit, sixteen novels,

twelve collections of short stories, more than twenty-five books on art and other general subjects and a large number of articles. He was a novelist with a social commitment. Contemporary writers in Indian languages influenced him largely. Here **Premchand** and **Tagore's** writing come to mind. His philosophical training had made him receptive to the thoughts of a number of western thinkers of his time. **Anand's** love for working people is seen in his creative works where his protagonists are sweepers, coolies and plantation workers. This was a new phenomenon in Indian Literature. His characters, homeless Munoo in *Coolie*, an untouchable in *Bakha* or an indentured labourer like Gangu are all victims of cruelty and exploitation portraying the grim working conditions of the people, a true picture of contemporary India.

Untouchable published in 1935 describes the single day in the life of Bakha living in an outcaste' colony of a north Indian Cantonment town. The single day brings him his torments and makes the reader realise the painful life of the down trodden, suggesting in the end alternative solutions to his problems. The novel ends with Bakha alone in his thoughts, very confused.

In his novel *Coolie* (1936) **Anand** turns another class of the under-privileged, the poor. His *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) is essentially a dramatic novel, set in a plantation in Assam. His other important novels are *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953).

R K Narayan (1961-2001) born in Mysore in 1907 was a full time writer all his life making a living only through writing. His literary output is rich and varied with fifteen novels, five collections of short stories, two travel books, four collection of essays, a memoir through his popularity largely came from his novels. He is essentially an apolitical novelist who simply likes to capture life in its richness and variety. His novels offer a blend of gentle irony and fellow feeling. **Narayan's** novels are seemingly simple in surface but they conceal sad complexity. His writing is mostly comic but once in a while somber moments also come in from time to time. There is a philosophical side also to his novels because the Indian world-view is mostly reflected in them. Most of his novels and stories are set in the fictional town of Malgudi, his imaginary landscape inhabited by the characters of his novels. This small town of Malgudi is a reflection of an Indian society with a variety of cultures, superstitions and values with features of most of the towns of southern India. His story *Swami and friends* set in this small town received recognition in India as well as publicity in England and the United States of America. His other novel adding to his reputation is the *Vendor of Sweets* (1967).

R K Narayan's other novels are *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampat-The Printer of Malgudi* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for The Mahatma* (1955), *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *Talkative Man* (1986), *The World of Nagaraj* (1990) and *Grand Mother's Tale* (1993).

Raja Rao (1909-) was born in 1909 in a Brahmin family and educated in Mysore, Madras and Europe. For many years he divided his time in India, Europe and United States. Both his novels *Kanthapura* (1938) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) talk about the national movement.

The Cat and Shakespeare (1965) is a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions put in the earlier novels. His novel *Comrade Killer*

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(1976) deals with a South Indian Brahmin Kirtlev's views on communism, the British War the Indian Freedom Struggle etc. In his last novel *The Chess Master and His Moves* (1988) Rao uses his metaphor of the chess game to animate philosophical ideas.

In his first novel *Kanthapura Raja Rao*, is able to successfully bring out the impact of Gandhi and his ideas in a small Mysore village. The narrator an old woman tells us about life in the village, narrating the story in garrulous and digressive style bringing in narration, description, religious discourses, poetry, folk lore, history and legend together. *Kanthapura* in a sense is a work of realism in fiction yet it is not purely realistic. It is combined with myths, gods and goddesses, blind superstitions and mysterious insights. This novel is an excellent piece of work that includes few significant events of history in contemporary India like *Salt March* of Gandhi his hunger strikes, his arrest and the brutal massacre by the police of the people participating in the *Satya Graha*, thus giving them a sense of immorality.

Exercise II

1. Name the three significant novelists writing in English in the nineteen thirties.
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2. What are the various themes that Mulk Raj Anand dealt with, in his novels?
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3. What does Malgudi imply in R K Narayan's novels and stories?
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4. Can you mention some of the significant events of history included in the novel *Kanthapura*?
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34.4 POST INDEPENDENCE NOVELISTS

Bhabhani Bhattacharya was the earliest novelist of this period. His first novel, *So Many Hungers* was published in 1947 and was followed by *Music for Mohini* (1952). His novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1952) was his finest

novel. His other novels were *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) *Shadow From Ladakh* (1966), and *A Dream in Hawai* (1978). **Manohar Malgonkar** (b.1913) began his career as a novelist with *Distant Drum* (1960). *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) are his other works.

Khushwant Singh (b.1915) who became well known by *A Train to Pakistan* which is among the most well known partition novel written by an Indian. Born in Hadali now in Pakistan he was educated in Lahore and London. He worked as a lawyer in Lahore for several years before joining the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. He started with a journalistic career in 1951 and has worked with several reputed newspapers and magazines. He has written a few short stories, a couple of novels and is famous for the prose fiction *History of the Sikhs* (which appeared in two volumes in 1963 and 1966). *Train to Pakistan* is his best-known work in fiction and brought him literary fame. He has portrayed the theme of partition excellently in this novel and the horror, suspense and the violence of the terror stricken days of 1947 are dealt with precision. Set in Punjab in the fictional village of Mano Majra situated on the border of Pakistan, Mano Majra is a microcosm of the communal temper of the country during the days of partition. The novel delves into the harmonious life of the Muslim and Sikh inhabitants disrupted by the communal massacres that occurred in 1947 in the wake of the partition. This novel sensitively and skillfully balances violence and compassion, sacrifice and revenge thus making it one of the most memorable novels about the tragic events of partition.

G V Desani (b.1909) another novelist of the same generation also known as the master of the absurd wrote *All About Hatter*, a novel greatly admired and highly praised of being a difficult novel not lending itself easily to interpretation. Novelist **Arun Joshi** (b.1939) was brought to fame with his first novel *The Foreigner* (1968). His other fine novel was *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. He had the direct influence of the French writer **Camus** and wrote existentialist novels portraying the aimless existence of men who are indifferent and alien with everybody and everything. He wrote on the problems of east and west encounter in the Post Independent Indian society. Another contemporary novelist **Chaman Nahal** rose to fame with his novel on Partition, *Azadi* (1975) that won the *Sahitya Akademi Award* for the year 1977.

As **Richard Cronin** in his article "India" says 'Modern Indian Literature was born in 1981, when Rushdie published *Midnight's Children*'. The most important writer of the second half of the twentieth century, **Salman Rushdie** (b.1947) grew up in Mumbai, went to Rugby School Warwickshire, followed by King's College, Cambridge in England. Although a British citizen most of his novels were set in India. His narrative style has blending of myth and fantasy with real life. His writing career began with a partly science fiction *Grimus* (1975) that was scarcely noticed because of the excessive element of fantasy in it.

In his next novel *Shame* (1983) he depicts the political turmoil in Pakistan. The *Satanic Verses* (1988) his allegorical novel had portions that was sacrilegious and enraged Muslims. **Ayatollah Khomeini** issued a *Fatwa* in 1989 sentencing **Rushdie** to death as a result he went into hiding. *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) examines India's recent history through the life of a Jewish Christian family. **Rushdie's** next novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999)

has both myth and reality. *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) is his newest novel and has attracted significant attention.

Midnight's Children (1980) is his finest novel and is considered his best work and also significantly shaped the course of other Indian writings in English. The work was awarded the *Booker Prize* in 1991 followed by the *Booker of Booker* prize in 1993. The book portrays the history of India from 1910 to the Declaration of Emergency in 1976 through the eyes of Saleem Sinai, a telepath with a nasal defect. Rushdie uses the technique of magical realism throughout the novel. The elements of this technique can also be found in his later fiction. *Midnight's Children* is brilliantly written with a blend of comedy and tragedy. The novel presents a historical understanding and a historical vision of the Indian subcontinent with great skill and subtlety. *Midnight's Children* was a departure from conventional Indian English writing by viewing native Indian languages with English language. Thus paving the way for Indian English writers to follow his flexible and innovative use of the English language in the next decade. With the appearance of *Midnight's Children* in 1980 a remarkable group of young novelists emerged, highly influenced by his writing.

Boman Desai (b.1950) uses certain elements like expostulatory technique, and contemporary dialogue to make the plots in his novels effective. His novel *The Memory of Elephants* (1988) is tautological in nature. The protagonist Homi Seervai a Parsi Scientist from Bombay invents a machine that can scan his brain for memories of the good time. But the machine goes wrong and he experiences ancestral and racial memories. He encounters ancestors and relatives both dead and living. His novels *The Memory of Elephants*, *'Asylum'*, *U.S.A* and *'A Woman Madly in Love'* are re-enactment of his past experiences and in some way or the other deal with the Parsi community.

Subsequent to **Rushdie** many writers started using similar kind of themes and language in their works. **Shashi Tharoor** (b.1956) was one such writer to use the narrative and theme of the famous Indian epic *Mahabharata* in his famous work *The Great Indian Novel* and weaves a satirical story of Indian life drawing his ideas by going back and forth in time.

Allan Sealy's (b.1951) first novel *The Trotter-Nama* (1988) is the story of seven generations of an Anglo Indian Family 'The Trotters'. Sealy portrays the experiences of the Anglo Indian community of being outsiders both in India and Britain. His most recent novel *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998) brought him international acclaim and he was short listed for the Booker Prize in 1998. His second novel *Hero* was published in 1991.

Another fiction writer **Rohinton Mistry** (b.1952) was born in Bombay and immigrated to Canada in 1975 where he began his writing career. In his novels he writes about middle class Parsi households struggling to come to terms with the complex phenomenon of Indian modernity. His first novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) was set in Mumbai in 1971 during the time of India Pakistan war, when the city was engulfed by globalisation on one hand and illiteracy, unemployment, exploitation and homelessness on the other. In his other novels *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002) as well we

find a poignant picture of the Parsi community struggling in pursuit of identity for themselves.

Immensely popular for his novel *The Shadow Lines* **Amitav Ghosh** (b.1956) was born in Calcutta and spent his childhood in countries like Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. He won the *Sahitya Akademy Award* for his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). The novel skillfully weaves together personal lives and public events in three countries India, England and Bangladesh (between 1952 and 1979). The author focuses on story telling. As the story proceeds we see memories unfolding one after another. The other novels written by Ghosh are *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *Hungry Tide* (2004).

Upamanyu Chatterjee (b.1959) was born in Patna and studied in Delhi's St. Stephen's College. He became a civil servant of 1983 batch. *English August* (1988) is the story of a young civil servant Agastya known as August to his westernized friends is sent for a years training to Madna, a backwater town in central India. An urbanite living in metropolitan cities of Delhi and Calcutta is completely lost in this small town of Madna. He experiences isolation and alienation. There is a sense of loss and nostalgia especially when he receives letters from friends or when he sees passing trains. This novel takes up the continuing debate over the urban bias on civil services examination pattern and the approximate training rendered to the incumbents. A brilliant novel *English August* is entertaining, funny and has a touching story to tell. His other novels *The Last Burden* and *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* are also characterised by a wry sense of humour portraying the life of middle class Indians.

The author of *A Suitable boy* (1994) **Vikram Seth** (b.1952) was born in Calcutta and is proficient in writing prose, poetry and travelogues. His other novels include *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and *An Equal Music* (1999). His novel *A Suitable Boy* sold over one million copies worldwide bringing him into public spotlight. The novel is set in the newly independent India in the 1950s when India was struggling through a time of crisis like communal disharmony, corruption and perpetual fights between modernity with forces of tradition. Rupa Mehra is a widow whose mission throughout the novel is to look after her family and in particular search for a suitable Hindu husband for Lata who is of marriageable age. However Lata is torn between her mother's wishes and her own love for a Muslim boy Kabir. Seth has brilliantly woven together different themes of Indian history, hindu-muslim issues and love and marriage. The novel is well written, touching, humorous and widely panoramic. It truthfully portrays social and political events of the era.

Amit Chaudhuri (b.1962) another brilliant contemporary writer was born in Calcutta and brought up in Bombay. He has numerous publications apart from writing fiction, poetry and reviews. His novella *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) won the *Betty Trask Prize* and *Commonwealth Writers Prize* in 1991, *Guardian Fiction* (Eurasia Region, Best First Book). This was followed by the novel *Afternoon Raag* (1993) that won the *Southern Art Literature Prize* and the *Encore Award* for best second novel of the year. His novel *Freedom Song* (1998) won the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize* in the year 2000. His other novel is *A New World* (2000). Each of these novels examine Calcutta life using characters of different ages. *A Strange and Sublime Address* illuminates the life in Calcutta through the eyes of ten-year-old

Bombay bred boy Sandeep who is visiting his uncle's extended family during two summer vacations. The story is narrated in third person but Sandeep has a major role to play in the novel. The reader gets to see things from the child Sandeep's point of view. The novel is written in a simple style with a quiet and meditative tone. The other novels written by Chaudhuri are *Afternoon Raag* (1993) *A New World* (1998).

Exercise III

1. Name the writers of Post Independent India who have continued the tradition of social realism in their novels.
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2. Which novel of Khushwant Singh deals with partition?
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3. Where is the novel *A Train to Pakistan* set?
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4. Which awards were bagged by the novel *Midnight's Children*?
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5. Which novels of Boman Desai deal with the Parsi Community?
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6. Which novelist writes on the Anglo Indian Country in his novel - *The Trotter Nama*?
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34.5 WOMEN NOVELISTS

Post 1947 India saw a spurt of fiction writing by women. These women novelists projected women as the central figure and seemed to succeed in presenting them effectively. Some of the significant women writers were **Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hossain, Anita Desai and Ruth Pravar Jhabwala.** **Kamala Markandaya** (1924-2004) occupies special place among them.

Markandaya migrated to England at the age of twenty-five following her marriage to **Bertrand Taylor.** There she tried her hand in writing fiction.

Being away from her homeland and its problems and issues of its people she draws her experiences of India known to her. Her novels reveal her preoccupation with the changing socio-economic scene in Post 1947 India. Fame and success came to her with her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). The protagonist is a woman and the novel portrays through her, the plight of women at large and the incredible strength they had struggling with forces beyond their control in earlier times. It gives an account of the life of an Indian peasant woman Rukmani, her love for her husband Nathan and her struggle for survival. Conflicting western and eastern values is well portrayed in this novel. **Kamala Markandaya** deals with hunger and poverty, two major problems in India. Her other works include novels such as *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1963) *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffin Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honey Cows* (1977) and *The Pleasure City* (1984)

Shashi Deshpande (b.1938) has an important place among Indian women writers. Her writing career began with short stories which later developed into novel writing. The novels that go to her credit are *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) *Come up and be Dead* (1982) *If I Die Today* (1982), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Small Remedies* (2000).

Shashi Deshpande is the recipient of the prestigious *Sahitya Akademy Award* for her novel *That Long Silence*. This novel revolves around a middle aged educated woman caught between modern trends and traditional practices. This novel is a story of Jaya married to Mohan for seventeen years with two children. Misery strikes the day her husband is asked to leave his job while allegations of business malpractice against him are investigated. The future of the family is in jeopardy. All of **Shashi Deshpande's** novels deal with themes of inner conflict of the female psyche, search for identity, man-woman relationship and parent-child relationship. In her novels she projects the real dilemma of middle class educated women.

Another contemporary women novelist **Ruth Pravar Jhabwala** (b.1927) was born in Germany to Polish parents. She married **Cyrus Jhabwala** an Indian architect and came to stay in New Delhi, India. The picture she portrays of Indian social life in her novels has such inwardness that she is considered an insider than an outsider. She wrote eight novels, a collection of four short stories and a few screen-plays. In her novels *To Whom She Will* (1955) *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *The House Holder* (1961) and *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) she explores the urban middle class Indian life while *Esmond in India* (1958), *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1973) and *Heat and Dust* (1975) study the east-west encounter. *Heat and Dust* is the most well acclaimed work of **Jhabwala**. It is a simple and straightforward novel exploring the east west encounter through romance.

Set in two different eras, Colonial India of the nineteen twenties and independent India of the nineteen seventies, the novel tells the story of two women. One story is of Olivia, the wife of district officer of Satipur. The parallel between the two women's lives is beautifully portrayed in the novel. The novel concentrates on the emotions of women and their problems in two different eras in Indian history. It is also evocative of the rich Indian life on one hand and poverty and superstition on the other.

Nayantara Sahgal's (b.1927), family background familiarised her with the politics of India both before and after independence. This is clearly seen in the authenticity of the political situations presented in her novels. She began her literary career with her novels *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), *A Time to Be* (1958), *From Fear Set Free* (1962), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971). Nayantara Sehgal has also published two autobiographies and a number of articles. *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) a well-acclaimed novel has a political background with the State of Punjab divided into two separate states of Punjab and Haryana. The former is dominated by the Sikhs and the latter a Hindu dominated state. The novel presents both political bickering as well as the domestic turmoil simultaneously. All of **Nayantara Sahgal's** novels show mainly the social and cultural changes taking place in India. Her central preoccupation was the portrayal of oppressed women who had to struggle to be free from male bondage.

Another prominent woman writer belonging to the younger generation of writers is **Anita Desai**. (b.1937). Born in Mussoorie in India, **Anita Desai** was the daughter of an Indian businessman and a German mother. She began writing in English at a very young age and published her first story at the age of nine. She has received numerous awards including the 1978 *National Academy of Letters Award* for the Novel, *Fire on the Mountain* and the *Guardian Award* in 1983 for the children's fiction *The Village by the Sea*.

She tried her hand in novel writing in 1963 with the novel *Cry the Peacock* followed by *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye Bye, Blackbird* (1971), *The Peacock Garden* (1974), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *Village by the Sea* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1996), *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), *Diamond Dust* (2000) and *The Zigzag Way: A Novel* (2004)

Clear Light of Day is set in Delhi around the time of India's independence with the partition into statehood of India and Pakistan. Tara is married to Bakul a diplomat from Washington with whom she visits her home, Delhi every three years, to stay with Bim and Baba, her elder sister and younger brother. Tara recalls her childhood days when she was less confident while Bim was strong and attractive. Through Bim and Tara, **Anita Desai** explores into the psyche of sensitive women. The shift from present to the past and again to the present with the help of childhood memories makes the novel nostalgic.

A recent novelist **Manju Kapoor** teaches English literature in Delhi University. *Difficult Daughters* is her first novel. Set at the time of partition *Difficult Daughters* is the story of three generations of daughters beginning with the third generation daughter. The story is seen through the eyes of Ida who comes back to Punjab to reconstruct her mother Virmati's past. Virmati the eldest girl belonging to an austere family of Amritsar is torn between family duty, her desire to study to be independent and her illicit love for her next door neighbour a married professor. Virmati's conflict begins when her parents decide to marry her to a boy of their choice. Virmati struggles for freedom to live a life on her own terms. She refuses to marry the person her parents get her engaged. As a punishment she is sent to Lahore to study but here she is able to pursue her studies as well as be with the Professor without

any interference. Later she defies her family and society and marries the professor who already has a wife. Kasturi, Virmati, Shakuntala and Ida belonging to different generations have been difficult daughters for their parents. Each daughter experiences in her own way and points to the larger issues of women's oppression that even education and economic independence cannot bring to an end.

Another recent writer in India **Arundhati Roy** (b.1961) was born in Shillong, Meghalaya to a Keralite Syrian Christian mother and a Bengali Hindu father, by profession a tea planter. **Arundhati Roy** began writing her first novel, *The God of Small Things* in 1992 and completed it in 1996. **Arundhati Roy** became the first Indian citizen to win the prestigious *Booker Prize* in 1997 for this novel. Set in Aymanam, Kerala (India) during the late 1960s this novel is the story of the Indian boy-and-girl twins Estha and Rahel whose mother has left her violent husband to live with her blind mother and brother Chacko. The story takes a turn with the death of their nine year old half British Cousin Sophie Mol visiting them on a holiday. The novel gives a vivid description of the life of abject poverty and sadness in a small Indian town, the thoughts and feelings of two children and the complements and hypocrisies of the adult world. **Arundhati Roy** depicts nature seamlessly weaving the pristine and the humane around each other. She honestly presents the major cultural dilemmas of Postcolonial India.

Exercise IV

1. Name some of the significant women novelists in post Independent India.
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2. What are the major themes in the novels of Shashi Deshpande?
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3. Who is the central figure in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*?
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4. Where was the novel *The God of Small Things* set?
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34.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed early Indian English Novelists and their major works beginning with **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's** *Rajmohan's wife*, **Rabindranath Tagore**, **Toru Dutt**, **Sarat Chandra Chatterjee**, **Mulk Raj Anand** and his works *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, **R K Narayan's** *The guide* and **Raja Rao's** *Kanthapura*.

We then discussed **Khushwant Singh**, and his *A Train to Pakistan*, **Salman Rushdie's** *Midnight's children*, **Vikram Seth's** *A Suitable Boy*, **Amitav Ghosh** and his award winning novel *The Shadow Lines*, **Upamanyu Chatterjee's** *English August*. Coming to women novelists we have discussed the beginner **Toru Dutt** and her work *Bianca*. Other women novelists coming much later i.e. **Kamala Markandaya's** *Nectar in a Sieve*, followed by **Shashi Deshpande's** novel *That Long Silence*, **Nayantara Sahgal's** *Storm in Chandigarh* and **Anita Desai's** *Clear Light of Day*. From the more recent ones we have dealt with **Manju Kapoor's** *Difficult Daughters* and **Arundhati Roy** and her best seller *God of Small Things*.

33.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. The first novel written in English in India is *Rajmohan's wife* written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.
2. *Ghare Baire* was written in 1905. The title in its English version is *The Home and the World*.
3. Toru Dutt's novel *Bianca* is considered to have also contributed to the birth of the novel in India. The Protagonist of the novel is Bianca.
4. Romesh Chander Dutt was influenced by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee to write novels in Benglai. He translated two of his Bengali novels into English *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave girl of Agra* (1902).

Exercise II

1. The three significant novelists writing in the 1930s are Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao.
2. In his novels Mulk Raj Anand dealt with themes of political and social injustices.
3. Malgudi is a fictional town created by R K Narayan in his novels. It has features of a small town of southern India reflecting its superstitious and values.
4. The novel *Kanthapura* depicts some significant events of history in contemporary India like Gandhi's salt march, Gandhi's hunger strikes, his arrest and the brutal massacre of the people by the police participating in the Satya Graha.

Exercise III

1. The writers in Post Independent India to have continued with the tradition of social realism in their novels are Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, and Khushwant Singh.

2. *A Train to Pakistan* is a well known novel to deal with the theme of partition.
3. *A Train to Pakistan* is set in Mano Majra a fictional village in Punjab, in the border of Pakistan. Mano Majra represented the communal temper of the country during the days of partition.
4. *Midnight's Children* won the Booker Prize in 1991 followed by the Booker of Booker Prize in 1993.
5. Boman Desai's novels *The Memory of Elephants*, *Asylum*, *U.S.A.* and *A Woman Madly in Love* deal with the Parsi community.
6. Allan Sealy writes on the Anglo Indian community in his novel. *The Trotter-Nama*.

Exercise IV

1. The significant woman novelists in Post Independent India are Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hossain, Anita Desai and Ruth Pravar Jhabwala.
2. The major themes that Shashi Deshpande deals in her novels are the themes of inner conflict of the female psyche, search for identity, man-woman relationship and parent-child relationship.
3. Rukmani is the central figure in the novel *The Nector in a Sieve*.
4. The novel *The God of Small Things* was set in Aymanam, Kerala.

UNIT 35 THE NOVEL OF THE DIASPORA

Structure

- 35.0 Objectives
- 35.1 Introduction
- 35.2 Diasporic Communities: Circumstances and Reasons for their Formation
- 35.3 Diasporic Communities: Cultural Identity Versus Cultural Assimilation
- 35.4 Indian Diasporic Community: History and Evolution
- 35.5 Writing Diaspora as a Maker of Cultural Identity
- 35.6 Indian Diasporic Novel in Canada: The Beginnings
- 35.7 Indian Diasporic Novel in Canada: A Case Study
- 35.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 35.9 Answers to Self Check Exercises

35.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objectives in studying this unit are to study the meaning, usage and the original context of the term diaspora as well as the extended context and the contemporary usage of the term diaspora and its derivative terms and expressions. We shall also discuss other terms and expressions that are used in the same or similar context as the term 'diaspora' and the finer distinctions between them. We shall focus our attention on the societal circumstances/reasons for the formation of diaspora or diasporic communities that in turn involves the question of cultural assimilation and cultural identity. We shall examine Indian diasporic community in Canada as an example.

Next, we shall discuss diasporic writing as cultural identity marker and its distinguishing characteristics and look at Indian-Canadian Writing as a case study.

35.1 INTRODUCTION

Diaspora, by now, is a well known term that was applied originally to denote groups of people of Jewish origin who were ousted from and scattered beyond the bounds of their homeland. It, thus, came to be associated with relocation through force. However, after going through various variations, *avtars* and mutations, it now stands for relocation of groups of people or members of communities from one nation to another and not necessarily through the application of force. The other three more common terms that are used to denote a similar situation are 'expatriate', 'immigration' and 'exile'.

35.2 DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES: CIRCUMSTANCES AND REASONS FOR THEIR FORMATION

While Jews were allegedly forced to relocate or were subjected to a 'push', modern sociologists consider either 'pull' or 'push' factors or both to be responsible for the creation of diasporic situations, (that is circumstances

under which people relocate themselves). These ‘pull’ factors are generally economic in nature that is prospects of better paid jobs or more lucrative businesses, etc. However, groups of people and chunks of communities also move from one national location to another because of better living conditions including better socio-cultural life or more tolerant political systems. The ‘push’ factors include adverse economic circumstances, that is, lack of appropriate job opportunities or absence of favourable conditions for carrying out business activities. ‘Push’ factors also included hostile or unstable socio-political conditions in general or for specific groups of people or members of particular communities that may also mean violation of their human rights or even threats to their persons and property.

Reference to the Jewish community’s dispersal also shows the antiquity of the phenomenon of diaspora, that is, people travelling away from home and settling among people with widely different cultural profiles. In our own parts, the existence of the ancient Silk Route is one such evidence. However, the biggest diasporic situation in modern times—perhaps of all times—as also the most shameful situation was created when very large sections of population from different parts of Africa were removed forcibly to develop the Americas for their European colonial masters.

Exercise I

1. What does the term ‘diaspora’ mean? How is it related to terms like ‘immigration’ and ‘exile’?

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2. How do we define diasporic communities and distinguish them from national communities?

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35.3 DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES: CULTURAL IDENTITY VERSUS CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Identity formation, we know, is a very complex phenomenon. Some identity markers are given biologically, that is these are racial and ethnic in character: pigmentation, colour of eyes, texture of hair and shapes of noses. Thus, fair

skins, blue eyes, curly hair and small flat noses are connected with various races and ethnic groups. Running into individual members of ethnic groups through the operation of complex genetic processes, these are the most stable of identity markers and consequently most difficult to shed or change individually or communally, especially in diasporic situations. Also, these come to be stereotyped negatively. For instance, women with natural blonde hair have been associated with dumbness—most unfairly, of course. However, the most unjustified stereotyping with tragic consequences has been the case of associating dark pigmentation with ‘natural’ inferiority of mind and human values.

Some other identity markers are gifts of the environment to members of particular communities. Innuits, for instance, unlike their other fellow Canadians, can reportedly divide the phenomenon of snowing into at least six distinct categories primarily because snow is what they have all around them—all the time. Members of the Marwari community, originating in the desert of Rajasthan where adverse environmental conditions and lack of means of transportation made them more than optimal users of limited resources are known the world over—and they form diasporic communities in many parts of the world—for their penchant for building huge business empires out of very small beginnings.

It was these environmentally bestowed identity markers that, for instance, made the Canadian government encourage the Hungarian farming community to migrate to the mid-west when they were developing the Prairies into their granaries. Again, while developing the rail-road projects and the lumber industry on the Pacific coast in the west, the Canadian government encouraged migration from Punjab whose people were not only strongly built but were also known from their physical prowess to work hard under adverse conditions.

Most numerous—and most significant, perhaps—are the identity markers that are cultural in character. These involve language and religious beliefs, customs and rituals, forms of address and modes of inter-personal behaviour, dress codes and food habits, form and content of education, songs and stories, symbols and icons, myths and legends, practices for preserving history and tradition and many similar phenomena. Add to these, modes of production, economic, political and societal organisation, professional and philosophical preferences and we have the complete cultural identity map of communities and individuals. However, this category of identity markers is relatively unstable and it is the members from this category that come under various degrees and kinds of pressure for change in changing situations. As societies change and evolve, cultural tokens also change. However, such changes take place at different paces among various sections of a society and when such difference is perceptible in a significant way we also term it as the ‘generation gap’.

This fluidity in cultural situation is more significantly pronounced in diasporic situations where not just two phases of evolution of the same culture but two different cultures—if not more—are in contestation. The cultural space that emerges out of such a contest is a hybrid space wherein new patterns of socio-cultural behaviour emerge that are, at different times, pastiche, marginally

assimilated or significantly integrated, to name only a few. We shall speak about this space in more details in a later section of this Unit.

Exercise II

- 1. What are the identity markers of a community? How are these acquired by individuals?

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35.4 INDIAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES: HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

Many Indian myths and legends warn people against crossing the seas to travel abroad. Going beyond the ‘Kala Pani’—black waters—was considered sinful for the soul. And yet, Indians have been travelling and settling abroad in groups for long. However, in modern times, most of such settling abroad happened during the nineteenth century when the British colonial administration sent groups of Indians to work in other British colonies as indentured labour. This is how Indian diasporas came to be formed, for instance, in Mauritius, East Africa, South Africa, Malaysia and Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean region, Fiji in the Pacific Ocean region and Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica and Surinam in the Caribbean Sea region.

For various reasons ranging from economic to political, the British colonial administration did not want to employ local population either on the plantations or on development projects. Indian labour was one of the alternatives that the British employed. This could be construed as the ‘pull’ factor. Also, the British colonial rule in India had created what **R K Jain** calls, ‘severe economic and social disturbances’. This was the ‘push’ factor. Thus, development of the economies of the colonies created employment opportunities abroad for groups of people belonging to either a community or a region. This is how people from Punjab, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Western Bihar, Gujarat, Sindh and Tamil Nadu came to form diasporic communities in some of the countries named above.

Such emigration, however, was organised in various ways. Two main types are distinctly visible. One was the indentured labour system under which Emigration Agents, subagents and recruiters at different levels identified workers who under an agreement volunteered to work for a particular employer for, initially, a period of five years after which he could, if he so desired, switch to another employment. It was only after ten years of work in that particular colony that the person was eligible for partial return passage expenses. Those who went to East Africa, South Africa, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam were recruited under this system. Most of such people did not choose to return after the completion of their indenture contract and settled down in those colonies, finding alternate employment on their own initiative or setting up small business enterprises.

Groups of labourers who went to work on the tea and rubber plantations in Malaysia or Sri Lanka were recruited under a different system that came to be known as the '*Kangani*' system. Under this system, migrants were recruited by headmen who were also known as '*Kangani*'. Each *Kangani*, R K Jain tells us, recruited 'a score or more of men belonging mainly to his own caste and kin group. Sometimes, many such groups of recruited persons combined under a leader who was designated 'head *Kangani*'. It was *Kangani* who negotiated the deals, lent money for passage and other expenses to the recruited labourers and managed them. Since the workers under this system went to neighbouring Sri Lanka and Malaysia, they continued to be in touch with their families by returning home every couple of years. As a result, most of them could never be absorbed fully into the recipient societies.

Yet, another form of group migration was through what may be termed as 'free emigration', also known as 'passenger Indians'. These were generally skilled labourers or petty entrepreneurs who came to explore the possibilities thrown open by the development of these colonies. A number of Gujarati 'dukawallas' in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in East Africa, some groups of people in South Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century and more recent migrations since the beginning of the twentieth century to Canada, United States of America, the United Kingdom and still more recently migration to the Middle East came under this form of migration. It may be significant to observe here that, in the beginning invariably and in most cases even later, the workers were not allowed to either bring their families with them or send for them later. Thus, they lived in a family-less or women-less world, that alienated them to a very large extent from the surrounding socio-cultural environment.

Again, since most of the migrations under one form or another were never well-thought out and planned and were necessitated by either socio-economic disintegration back home or were prompted by the lure of the lucre, the groups of people did not try to make the necessary adjustments in their socio-cultural world view. As it is, most of them treated these locations abroad as purely temporary and time-bound. As a result, their continued practice of the cultural patterns and values brought by them from the donor society back home and reluctance to imbibe new ones from the recipient society, created conflictual situations alienating them further from the people of the host country. Most diasporic formations of Indians therefore became *janus-faced* from the very beginning, stranded as it were on a no-man's land between the two nation states, two societies.

Identity markers or cultural tokens, particularly those bestowed at birth and those acquired as culturally are the sites on which battles for new identity are fought in diasporic situations. Ethnic identity markers of immigrants cannot be got rid of and host societies accept them although with a lot of reservations and at times these are derided, ridiculed and even subjected to hostile behaviour, particularly verbals. The term 'Paki' in England for persons of not just Pakistan but of South Asian origin has its roots in such behaviour. Similarly, the expression 'Calcutta Coolies' for persons of Indian origin in British Columbia, Canada at the turn of the last century was also an example of such hostility towards ethnic identity tokens, although, interestingly, the immigrants were not from Calcutta. And they were no coolies either. The host or recipient societies however put pressure on diasporic communities to shed

as many as possible if not all cultural tokens of their past identities and acquire as quickly as possible the new tokens of cultural identity. Thus, there is pressure on groups of immigrants as also on individual members to shed their languages, customs and rituals, religious beliefs, health and hygiene, dress codes, food habits and forms of inter-personal behaviour. Some of these, the diasporic people give up voluntarily and easily – in visible public behaviour at least—in order to show their willingness to assimilate with the recipient society. For instance, immigrants are ready to accept and imitate not only the language of the hosts but also their peculiar accent. Indians trying to imitate American accent—what with a nasal twang—after relocating themselves there or the Indians in Australia trying to pronounce their diphthongs appropriately are instances of such voluntary attempts at linguistic assimilation. Similarly, Indian immigrant women give up wearing sarees or salwar-kameez and taking to western dresses and other forms of formal wear are attempts in the same direction of acquiring tokens of their newly acquired identities. Gujarati ‘dukawallas’ in East Africa welcoming their customers with ‘*Jambo*’ and ‘*Karibu Sana*’ are only flaunting their newly acquired cultural currency.

However, there are some tokens that the immigrants want to hold on to as long as possible and are unwilling to shed easily. The Sikhs not willing to give up wearing turbans, or the Hindus not willing to shed their inhibition of eating beef or the Jews their kosher are examples of such reluctance to assimilate fully. Again, immigrants from the sub-continent not permitting their girls to go on dates or to have physical relationships with their boy friends before marriage are forms of behaviour that they are unwilling to adopt primarily because these are not part of the socio-cultural code that they have brought with them from back home.

A situation, therefore, emerges in almost all diasporas – particularly in those with more pronounced cultural distance – wherein a serious contestation takes place on the sites of cultural identity and assimilation. And this situation of riding two cultures simultaneously leads to schism and bi-polarity of behaviour on the part of not only individuals but also groups and communities in the host society that in its extreme form, at times, causes societal instability and disorders.

Diasporic writing, we shall elaborate in another section below, draws its sustenance from this situation of cultural contestation and the process of assimilation.

Exercise III

1. What is cultural assimilation? How does it affect identity markers of individuals in diasporic communities?

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and belief, of philosophy and pragmatism, of memory and amnesia, of success and failures, of tears and smiles. In short, the lived experience —of not one but two communities.

As stated above, most of those who went out to form the first diasporas were members of the working class or the farming community. Most of them were illiterate. Thus, all the legends, myths and folk narratives they carried with them to their new lands were primary oral in nature. And it is to this repertoire that they added when they composed songs and poems, tales and stories, skits and plays while reflecting their new socio-cultural reality and sharing with one another. Some—very few though—could read and write and these acted as communicators between the members of the community and their families back home. In the letters they wrote on their own or their colleagues' behalf in which they 'narrated' the details of their new lives—the living and working conditions, the weather and climatic conditions, the flora and the fauna, the food and the drink, the dress and the dress code, the law and governance, the hosts and hostility, the other 'others' and the solidarity and a myriad other things. And while narrating all these, the 'writer' took care of the sentiments of the one on whose behalf he was communicating. May be the person did not want him to alarm his people back home by telling the truth about the working and service conditions which were generally harsh and adverse.

May be, he did not also want to talk about extreme climatic conditions that only added to their misery. May be they did not want to say anything about the discrimination and injustices meted out to them by their employers and the society at large. So he asked his 'amanuensis' to make necessary adjustments. Again, may be he wanted the 'writer' to embellish some of the description, particularly those involving his performance, etc. So, the communications sent home were essentially 'facts'—with something added here and something subtracted there. But then this is precisely what literature is all about—facts with a few pluses and minuses here and there. Thus, in these communication sent to their families by the diasporic persons lay the seeds of literature. Similarly, in the songs and poems they composed and sang, the stories they narrated of their various experiences, they exaggerated or underplayed 'facts'. This was literature in its nascent form. These were the beginnings of Indian diasporic writings in its infancy. This was so in East Africa, this was so in Mauritius, this was so in Fiji, this was so in Trinidad, Guyana and Jamaica and this was so in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The precise conditions and circumstances could vary, the linguistic and cultural expressions could vary but the manner in which Indian diasporic writings from various locations came to be was more or less the same.

Later, when subsequent groups of Indian immigrants arrived on these or other locations, particularly those with professional skills, they built on this tradition. Since they were not only literate but many of them highly educated, they wrote rather than narrating orally. They not only composed but also published. While some did it along with the pursuit of their professions, others made this—writing—their profession. In course of time, fairly stable body of such writings began to criss cross the global literary stage from various locations and some of these writers began to be noticed, read, evaluated and awarded. Soon, some of them became household names: **Salman Rushdie, V S Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, M G Vassanji, Bharati Mukherji, Farida Karodia, Anita Desai, K S Maniam and Jhumpa Lahiri** to name some.

Exercise IV

1. In what way is diasporic writing an identity marker for a community?
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35.6 INDIAN DIASPORIC NOVEL IN CANADA: THE BEGINNINGS

Indian diasporic writings in Canada began much in the same way as they began elsewhere. To understand its origin and evolution, therefore, we should first get some idea about the Indian immigrant community in Canada—when and how did it begin, who were its founding members, with what hopes and dreams did they arrive there and how they evolved to what they are today.

The Indian immigrants began to arrive on the Pacific coast of Canada towards the beginning of the twentieth century when Canada needed large scale human inputs for their lumber industry, railroad projects and jungle clearing operations as a part of their expansion to the west. Having disallowed—through various laws—the Chinese immigrants who were working on these projects earlier, the Canadian companies encouraged Indians—particularly strong, burly Sikhs from Punjab—to migrate and work in parts of British Columbia. Sensing this as an economic opportunity, Indian immigrants started arriving, from 1905 onwards, in batches—big and small—travelling first from Punjab to Calcutta by train, then from Calcutta to Hong Kong by small ships and finally from Hong Kong to Vancouver by CPR ships. Most of them found employment in saw mills, road building, wood cutting and land clearing. By 2006, their number had swelled to over 2000. It is at this point that they began to attract the attention of the local Canadians in the same manner in which the Chinese immigrants had begun to attract attention earlier. The Indian immigrants were now perceived to be taking away jobs from the Canadians and they were perceived to be ‘polluting’ their culture and society with their ‘filthy’ habits and practices. Thus, the sense of alienation that any group of people feel on moving away from home became manifold more because of harsher climatic conditions and hostile behaviour of the local people. They were intrigued by all this because they considered themselves to be ‘loyal royal subjects’ and expected to be treated well in all British territories. Their sense of intrigue turned to hostility when the Canadian government, under pressure from the Canadian people, created laws and regulations that discouraged Indians from migrating to Canada for employment. For instance, a condition of personal possession of two hundred dollars was imposed on each arriving passenger and, more importantly, the passenger had to undertake a ‘continuous passage’ from the port of embarkation to the port of final destination without any break en route. This was virtually impossible since there were no direct ships plying between India and Canada.

When the *Komagata Maru* incident happened in May 1914, when a ship with that name, carrying over 300 passengers fulfilling all conditions including that of 'continuous passage' was not allowed to dock and the passengers were not allowed to disembark—they were not allowed even food and water—despite the fact that there were women and children on board—the loyalty of the Indian immigrants 'slipped away with the slipping away of the ship from Canadian waters'. The immigrants realised that their maltreatment would end only if India were free. So, they began to support the National Freedom Struggle through the *Ghadr Movement* that was already very active across the border in the United States of America. They collected funds, organised meetings and above all brought out a number of publications to support the movement. *The Free Hindustan* started coming out in 1908 from Vancouver, edited by **Tarak Nath**. In 1909, *The Hindustan Association* was formed. In 1910, *Swadesh Sewak* began to be published in Gurumukhi. In 1911, the publication of *The Aryan* started. Movements were launched against the banning of Indian immigration and for allowing the families of the immigrants to be allowed to join them. This only aggravated the racial hostility against Indians who were dubbed as 'polygamous Hindus' and 'Calcutta Coolies'. The *Komagata Maru* incident ended in a tragedy with the death of a child passenger, the others returning, the killing of Inspector Hopkins by Mewa Singh who was subsequently captured and hanged. As World War I loomed large over the horizon, the Canadian government came down heavily on the supporters of the *Ghadr Movement* who were now scattered in various parts of North America. However, the struggle by the Indian immigrants continued after World War I and right through World War II. Particular focus was on the restoration of the franchise to vote that had been taken away from them in 1907. It was restored only in 1948 when Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru** intervened after India had become free.

After the war, many regulations that were considered discriminatory were repealed in deference to the UN Charter. Also, Canada needed huge inputs of human resources for its economic development that was put so succinctly by **John Diefenbaker**, the then Prime Minister in 1957—'Populate or Perish'. So under various criteria of 'employability', 'dependent relatives', etc., more Indian immigrants were allowed. Thus, the number of Indian diasporic people in Canada rose from 6774 in 1961 to 68000 in 1971 and 1,18,000 in 1976. Also, during this time people of Indian origin came to Canada not only from India directly but also from East and South Africa, the Caribbean Islands, Fiji in the Pacific and from South and East Asia. Thus, in the 1991 census in Canada, as many as 500,000 persons traced their origins to India. A large number of these were independent professionals whose profiles were very different from those founding fathers of the Indian diaspora in Canada, most of whom were illiterate and who came to work as unskilled labourers. It is around these latter group of Indian immigrants that the seeds of Indian Canadian writing were sown. Here below, we study briefly the development of Indian diasporic novel in Canada as a case study.

35.7 INDIAN DIASPORIC NOVEL IN CANADA: A CASE STUDY

As stated above, Indian immigration to Canada took place over a long period of time beginning with the first decade of twentieth century and these groups of immigrants came from various strata of the Indian society. While early

immigrants were uneducated, those who migrated between 1947 and 1970 and even later were not only well educated, they were also professional. Again, while many of them migrated directly from India to Canada, many others came from East and South Africa where they or their families had settled earlier migrating from different parts of India. Similarly, others came via the Caribbean Islands—Trinidad, Jamaica or Guyana where their parents or grandparents had been taken as indentured labour for developing the British colonies.

All these factors made the assimilation of Indian immigrant community into the Canadian mainstream a very complex affair. And if this were not enough, many of these victims had been victims of political vendetta elsewhere—the Kenyans, the Tanzanians, the Ugandans, the Trinidadians, the Jamaicans and the Guyanese, for instance—and hence, their motivations for immigration were quite different from others most of whom came in search of better economic prospects. Again, most of those named above as the victims of political upheavals had been displaced twice—once having migrated of their own volition and a second time having been forced out. As such, their mindsets and approach towards assimilation were quite different from those who had not been subjected to political prejudice as yet.

And then there was the question of their cultural baggage that have been described by **M G Vassanji** with that most appropriate metaphor—the gunny sack. Each group of migrants brought in his gunny sack a whole set of cultural artifacts that ranged from religious and community beliefs, customs and rituals, myths and legends, songs and dances, fables and folk tales, intra-family and inter-personal behaviour, food and dress codes. But above all these, the most unique feature of caste hierarchies.

All these complexities with their concomitant tensions—psychological, physical, financial—of adjustment and assimilation in an alien cultural environment that had racial discrimination writ large all over it, is captured very significantly by writers of the Indian diaspora in their poems and plays—and more importantly because of the discursive nature of the genre—in their stories and novels. **Moyez Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry, Reshard Gul, Cyril Dabydeen, Farida Karodiya, Lakshmi Gill, Uma Parameswaran**, and many more have all focused on—directly or indirectly—the new culture of adoption by the immigrants together with their fear of losing the cultural identity that they had brought with them. Thus, they all were—in their stories and novels—writing through their race. They invoked in their writings, their ethnicity, the myths and legends, customs and rituals, the interpersonal behaviour and idiosyncrasies of the country of their origin together with that of the nation of their first immigration.

With this kind of focus of their writings these first generation writers of the Indian-Canadian diaspora were exposing themselves to the charge of exclusionist ghettoisation and letting their work be pushed to the margins. However, through this, they were also redressing the imbalance of Canadian writing being primarily European and white in its content, form and worldview. By bringing in their own cultural identity, they were in a way questioning the underlying philosophy behind the official policy of multiculturalism which was in itself an attempt to compartmentalise the society. Thus, it may not be outrageous to observe that Indian immigrant

writing in Canada was, irrespective of the content and form, a political activity in the same way as women, aborigines, gays and lesbians around the globe and in our own case Dalits and tribals have been making political statements by their very acts of writing.

Indian immigrant writing in Canada did not actually make a beginning until 1950 and it was only in the 70s of the last century that it was identifiable although it was recognised as a part of a portmanteau category—South Asian literature in Canada. The label itself was politically motivated by lumping together writings by authors belonging to not only half a dozen nations of South Asia but also by extension of another dozen nations of Africa and the Caribbean islands from where some of these writers of South Asian origin had migrated to Canada.

Between 1962 and 1982 as many as 102 writers from this category had published 196 books. But most of these were one book writers. 1982 was a watershed year for Canadian writers tracing their origin to India. In that year, **M G Vassanji** started a journal—*Toronto South Asian Review*, *TSAR* in short—to publish the writings by authors of South Asian origin who were facing publication discrimination by so-called mainstream journals and magazines. It is interesting to note here that most of the better known Indian immigrant writers of Canada, including **Vassanji** and **Mistry** were first published in *TSAR*. Since then, not only has the number of publications more than trebled, the quality of writings has improved, forcing better recognition.

Rohinton Mistry is perhaps most visible among the Indian immigrant novelists of Canada. With books like *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, *Family Matters* and *Tales from Ferozsha Baag*, **Mistry** focusses his authorial gaze primarily on his own community, namely, the Parsis. **Mistry** has made Indian socio-political reality the basis of most of his books. His books also bring out the tragic dilemma of the Parsis, namely a very small community whose demographic profile is in a negative growth mode, acting extremely conservative when it comes to recognising marriages made outside their religious confines. This, **Mistry** shows to be in sharp contrast with their otherwise very modernist outlook.

M G Vassanji, is one of the most publicly acknowledged Canadian writer who belongs to the Indian immigrant community. With two *Giller awards*, he is amongst the most highly recognised writers of Canada. In fact, almost all his books—*The Gunny Sack*, *No New Land*, *Uhuru Street*, *The Book of Secrets*, *AMRiiKA* and *The In Between World of Vikram Lall*—have won one or another award.

Like **Mistry**—or any other diasporic writer—**Vassanji** also focuses on his own community—*Ismailis* who are portrayed as *Shamsis* in his books – that traces its origin to Gujarat on the Western Coast of India and a large section of which migrated to the East Coast of Africa in nineteenth century to form a substantial Indian diasporic community in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania from where they moved on to Europe and North America including Canada in the latter half of the twentieth century. **Vassanji** himself came to Canada from Tanzania via the United States of America in the seventies.

Another significant novelist—his numerical contribution however is confined to just two books, one a novel and another a collection of short stories—is **S S Dhami** who in his novel, *Maluka*, has very vividly and significantly portrayed

the formation of the Indian diasporic community in British Columbia in the beginning of the twentieth century. *Maluka* is perhaps the only novel that focuses in such great details on the travails and triumphs, the failures and the successes of the early immigrants—those burly Sikhs from Punjab – who with their tenacity and perseverance overcame stark racial prejudice and appalling working and service conditions.

Cyril Dabydeen came to Canada from Guyana in the Caribbean Islands where his ancestors had been moved as indentured labour by the British in nineteenth century from parts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. It is this experience of the Indians in Guyana that **Dabydeen** makes the subject of his novels and short story collections, which include *The Wizard Swami*, *Dark Swirl*, *Jogging in Havana* and *Elephants Make Good Stepladders*.

Other Indian immigrant novelists include **Ashis Gupta**, **Rewat Deonadan**, **Neil Bisoonath**, **Arnold Harichand Itwaru**, **Saros Kawosjee** and **B Rajan**.

Immigrant women novelists of Indian origin were late arrivers but have since contributed significantly to the Indian immigrant novel in Canada. Prominent among those are **Anita Rao Badami**, **Lakshmi Gill**, **Uma Parmeswaran**, **Hiro Boga**, **Ramabai Espinet** and **Nalini Warrior**. Besides them, those who have focused on the short story are **Himani Banerji**, **Arun Prabha Mukherjee** and **Surjeet Kalsey**.

Exercise V

1. Write an essay on the Indian diasporic novel in Canada.
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35.8 LET US SUM UP

Despite the myriad variations of religion, caste, language, region, educational and economic profiles as also the routes taken by members of Canadian Indian diasporic community, the writings about them by members of their own immigrant community portray them in the context of problematics of nation, home, homelessness, home beyond home, self, identity, integration and assimilation. In this too, the members of various groups show the same kind of variation as is visible in their socio-cultural profiles. It is this difference in their mindsets and responses that demarcate—at times—one novelist’s worldview from another. Again, while nostalgia, memory, amnesia and lived

experience are the sites on which some of these contestations are carried out, various writers show varied approaches here too.

Diasporic experience is basically about 'home' and 'world' where 'home' stands for the culture of one's origin and 'world' refers to the culture of adoption. Sometimes the concept of 'home' is equated with that of the nation one is born into and 'world' as the nation one immigrates into or exiles one into. Because of this sense of 'exile', an alternative term used for diasporic experience is 'homelessness', a term that was popularised by **Said** but that is also a favourite of a writer like **V S Naipaul**. **Homi Bhabha** would explain this experience in terms of what he calls 'gathering'—"gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures, gathering at frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres" as he would put it. **Rushdie**, on the other hand, would turn home into 'imaginary homelands' and liken them to broken mirrors some pieces of which are lost irretrievably. However, the picture that emerges out of the broken mirror—that is to say, the diasporic experience—may be different from the one reflected by a mirror that is whole but it is no less significant. It contains images of not only the donor culture but of the host society as well.

M G Vassanji would find a parallel for the diasporic experience in a jigsaw puzzle some of whose pieces are again lost like the pieces of **Rushdie's** mirror. For **Vassanji**, the creativity of a diasporic writer lies in supplying those missing pieces with the help of his imagination and the resultant history would be what he calls 'imagined history'. **Abdul Jan Mohammed** describes immigrant's experience to be that of a 'border intellectual'—either 'specular' or 'syncretic'—the first refers to an experience wherein an immigrant is not able to adjust both to 'home' and 'world' simultaneously whereas syncretic refers to an experience wherein an expatriate is able to reach out to both cultures—the donor and the recipient—simultaneously.

35.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read Section 35.1 carefully.
2. Read Section 35.2 and work out an answer.

Exercise II

Read Section 35.3 and work out your answer.

Exercise III

1. Read Sections 35.4 and then frame an answer
2. Read Section 35.6 and 35.7 and then frame an answer.

Exercise IV

Section 35.5 provides the answer – read it carefully and frame an answer.

Exercise V

1. Section 35.7 contains the answer. You need to read it and then work out a well planned answer.

UNIT 36 FUTURE OF THE NOVEL

Structure

- 36.0 Objectives
- 36.1 Introduction
- 36.2 The Novel in the Twentieth Century
- 36.3 The Novel in the Post Modern World
- 36.4 The Novel in the Present Age
- 36.5 The Postcolonial Novel
- 36.6 The Future of the Novel
- 36.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 36.8 Answers to Self Check Exercises

36.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we discuss the novel from its origins in the eighteenth century to the present times as well as the possible trends in the future. This unit will also look at the novel under various socio-political conditions such as postmodernism and the present context as well.

36.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel originated in the eighteenth century in Western Europe and soon became the most popular literary form. How soon? Well, in a span of a few decades, it started evolving in different directions, covering areas of life that had hitherto been left untouched in creative writing – poetry, drama, long or short comments and analyses in prose, for instance. One prominent stream of fiction writing took up contemporary manners and morals as its central concern and aimed to educate the vast majority of readers in what is now known as proper behaviour. This trend of fiction let the reader know all that was expected of him/ her in one's environment and how one was to circumvent obstacles if they emerged on one's path towards happiness, fulfillment, salvation, or what you like. Thus, the novel worked as a sort of class-room where the novelist assumed the role of a teacher and taught the reader through various methods – discussion, mimicry, representation of characters along lines of wrong and faulty conduct – and compelling her/ him to reconsider one's 'normal' (socially acceptable) approach to issues. Of course, the necessary precondition of this writing was that it had to be interesting or the readers would share the fate of audiences listening to a preacher from the pulpit. This could be called pleasure combined with purpose. Such an educative role made the novel extremely appealing to vast audiences hungry to know and learn about life. The best example of such fiction-writing was **Henry Fielding** in England.

Around the same time as **Fielding** wrote (in the eighteenth century) his morally educative novels, one sees a totally different kind of novel writing by **Richardson** who presented not the social life or the ethical tendencies of a time but went into the workings of the human mind. The psychological dimension in **Richardson's** writing is indeed fascinating. **Richardson's**

characters think and feel delicately, they remain uncertain at the edge of thought and do not know which direction to take to see their dreams fulfilled. **Richardson's** novels are about self-knowing as the character's mind is made to explore his/ her own motivations. How to relate with an unknown person? What could be the pitfalls in the growth of a relationship? What drives an individual to come out of oneself – one's sense of fear or a desire to fulfil oneself in spite of the dangers involved? **Richardson** dealt with these questions with great subtlety. A substantial part of the appeal in **Richardson's** writing lay in the characters he chose for depiction in his novels. They were women, young and curious, in which males of the day took keen interest and expressed a desire to relate with them. The apprehension of seduction always lurked behind the attempt that the males in question made. Also note that the new woman of the eighteenth century had to be treated differently from her counterpart in the earlier centuries. She was middle class with a sensitivity about her selfhood, about the role she would be playing under pressure from others or somewhat independently.

Isn't this to mean that both **Fielding** and **Richardson** catered to the cultural requirements of the day in their different ways – the former telling the curious reader what to adopt and what to shun and the latter letting the reader into the unknown recesses of the minds of the new men and women that had emerged in an altogether new England. This England, needless to say, was marked by the onward progressive march of the native merchants and traders. What is suggested is that the novel as a literary form at the time met the demands of the social environment and shaped the minds of the people even as it allowed those people to influence its working.

As the nineteenth century saw the novel in Europe strongly and courageously depicting scenes of socio-historical movements, it entered problematic areas of life such as the desirability of retaining or changing the existing power structures. This happened particularly in French and Russian fiction. The two gradually became highly realistic in their treatment of vital social themes. American fiction, too, documented changes taking place in the existing social environment amidst violence and wars. Both in Europe and America, the novel registered important happenings of the day. Names of **Walter Scott**, **Jane Austen**, **Charles Dickens**, the **Bronte sisters**, **George Eliot**, **Thackeray**, **Thomas Hardy**, etc. come to mind, who through their peculiar fictional strategies laid bare the clashes and antagonisms of the time. Issues and questions of helplessness, anguish, tragedy, defeat, moral self-questioning, heroic struggles of individual characters with the entrenched interests, etc. are scattered all over nineteenth century fiction. These denote the practice of novel writing by writers to engage with a real world that unfolded before them in its complexity and mystery. At the same time, we come across in the fiction of the nineteenth century a gradual occurrence of marginalisation of the literary endeavour. Particularly, as **Georg Lukacs** has argued in his significant discussion of the novel in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, the novel could be seen moving in the direction of a crisis and keeping its head above water with a great deal of difficulty. Thus, we see that in a little less than two hundred years the novel as a literary form had come to confront hurdles that had become increasingly difficult to cross. The question naturally arose: What would happen to the novel in the twentieth century, or to be more precise, what was the future of the novel in the next (twentieth) century? Interestingly, we meet this question today in more or less the same form as then. Let us take a brief note of what happened to the novel in the twentieth century.

Exercise I

1. Write a brief account of the developments in the novel as a genre from the 18th to the 19th century.

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36.2 THE NOVEL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The twentieth century has been witness to the emergence of varied perspectives in the field of learning. There are new views, responses and attitudes formulated by different states, combinations of countries big and small, and within them by groups, classes and individuals. The latter have been active in their intellectual or other pursuits to block or augment the march of sections that they support or oppose. The twentieth century world has been a truly divided house – the more so as it has become united along politics and ideologies. Since 1917, there have been two blocs, the capitalist-imperialist bloc on one side and the socialist bloc on the other. Even as late as the 1990s, the ‘unipolar’ world we live in has contending interests of the small socialist countries ranged against the mighty imperialist political formation. The tumultuous period we belong to has small Russian states moving gradually back to the socialist ideology and a rising public outcry all over the world against the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. This has a connection with literature in general and the novel in particular. Historical conditions shape literary trends and forms and are in turn shaped by them in a significant manner. That is how we relate literature to life.

What are these historical conditions that we refer to in our discussion about the present topic? Firstly, the twentieth century has seen two world wars; secondly, there has been intensive socio-economic exploitation of nations in the form of colonisation; thirdly, the age has also witnessed de-colonisation and the independence of colonies long buried under the weight of oppression; fourthly, there has been a cut-throat competition and clash of ideologies which are evident in the Cold War period of the nineteen fifties, sixties, seventies and eighties; and finally the world emerges as a unipolar world with the dominance of America.

36.3 THE NOVEL IN THE POST MODERN WORLD

Broadly, this historical development constitutes the life of the twentieth century and forms a backdrop to the formulation of multiple opinions. In which area of life does such a making of multiple opinions happen? Obviously, the political-ideological area where forces, developments, formations of all kinds manifest themselves, asserting as they do, weakly or

strongly, their ways of life, identities and attitudes. Mark that ‘multiplicity’ is the watchword in this ‘postcolonial-postmodern’ world of ours. We hear in this world that all established forms of life, nay, all established ways of thought and feeling as well as aspirations have become redundant and that humankind cannot go any further from here. According to this new and quite powerful argument, things are going to become worse and worse from here since nonhuman aspects of technology and commerce have decisively overtaken existence. There have been prophets of doom such as the American theorist **Fukoyama** who boldly predict the end of history. The argument is interesting since inherent in it is the belief that ‘history’ is a relatively new phenomenon, call it five or at the most ten thousand years old, before which humankind lived irrationally, anarchically, savage-like. The technological developments of today are thus, going to reduce humans to the level of non-thinking, non-feeling automata – the humans from now on would lose conscious control over their lives and only follow commands from a superior, all-powerful agency that is unapproachable to the faculty of human reason.

On the other side of this complex phenomenon of predictions, claims and counterclaims, I have in mind the serious disagreements of those who think that technology is bound to obey human commands of reason since technology is an extension of human power and also that governments, associations and such other formations of collectivity only reflect the power of human beings to improve the scope of freedom, happiness and fulfillment. Thus, there are claims and counterclaims. At the end of the twentieth century and now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, what could be the role of literature in general and the novel in particular? More, what could be the future of the novel, and more assertively, does it indeed have a future?

Exercise II

1. What were the developments in the novel in the last century? Give a summarised answer.

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36.4 THE NOVEL IN THE PRESENT AGE

The answer to these questions is inherent in the above discussion and all important aspects of this query have been broadly touched. There is an examples galore in the twentieth century which has witnessed large scale experimentation in the novel. Its range was widened in the twentieth century to include the psychological, symbolical, impressionistic and such other representations of life within the body of the novel. In the nineteen forties and fifties, for instance, a writer like **Samuel Beckett** confronted drama and fiction writing with the question of meaning in social and human existence. He called literary writing (drama in particular) the writing of the absurd. Thus, it is that we write only to tell ourselves or find that meaning does not reside in

the social sphere. This is how the argument goes with the literary representation of the post-World War II period. The nineteen fifties and sixties were without doubt the years of disillusionment and despair. In the novels of **Beckett** that were written a few years earlier but became subjects of discussion in the post-World War II period brought out this inefficacy of novel writing in the twentieth century.

Think also of the writer **Vladimir Nabokov** for whom the novel form served the purpose of negating the established parameters of novel writing and made the novel form in this context a vehicle of expressing anarchic human tendencies. The nineteen fifties and sixties were a background to this phenomenon. **Nabokov's** highly controversial novel *Lolita* challenged everything existing in the contemporary ideological sphere, the writer lashing out at the oppressive moral structures of the family and parentage. For **Nabokov**, these structures had an important psychological dimension where a different kind of human being, raw and undifferentiated, lived. Conversely, however, *Lolita* became a highly moralist comment on the way things were unfolding in the twentieth century world. **Nabokov** also devised a new method of creating blank spaces within a crowd of descriptions where nothing related to anything and the representation only became a challenge to the meaning-seeking reader.

Of course, things didn't stop here. The nineteen seventies and eighties saw a totally different kind of fiction writing, from a centre that had hitherto remained only a point of margin, away from where the determining forces of the day operated. What I mean by the centre here is the position of the discerning author who situates herself/ himself away from the dominant power. To be still more explicit, the fiction writing of these decades ceased to be Europe-centric because of which a clear rupture occurred in novel writing with the entire tradition of the European-American fiction. Generally speaking, this phenomenon is associated with postcolonial and postmodern writing.

Since, we see the novel as essentially preoccupied with subtler aspects of feelings and emotions, we realise that a view of certain life-processes prevalent today would be highly useful. There emerges, in the midst of poverty and squalor, for instance, a peculiar kind of resistance with the victims of the dominant order gaining awareness of their situation gradually. What is suggested is that no social situation is simplistic and unidimensional where oppression is taken to be an unchanging fatefulness. In things that promote others and those that block certain ones runs a thread. It may be weak at places but contains in it the possibility of becoming strong. The certainty of an ongoing development in society preserves humans in hostile surroundings. Indeed, these life-processes are what are reflected in literature. In literature, we find the representation of the current system at work and the various approaches to life from various positions intertwine to finally become one with the evolving structures. It is not only the English or the French writings that constitute literature in the twentieth century, but there has been a substantial contribution in the field of literature by writers from all over the world. There has been extensive works written by the ex-colonised. Let's take this up in some detail.

36.5 THE POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

In this sense, what we get in the twentieth century is something new and extremely significant in the history of literature. The age is witness to the democratisation of literature. This is precisely why the twentieth century becomes such a significant moment in the development of literary sensibility. The tyranny of the few (nations/ men), as it were, is undone in the latter half of the twentieth century by the assertion of the many (Nations/ Men) in the area of expression. Writing has become a world-wide possession after the independence of the colonised nations. There are writings from Latin America, Africa, South Africa, India and so on, expressing their pains and sufferings as well as points of view and their 'reality'.

Ours is a world of great upheavals and disturbances. Here is, where we find views and thoughts being shaped. Latin America and Africa are the crucibles in which new ways of literary response are big forged. These countries and places have either already become independent or are moving towards that end. Writing has become, with Independence, more accessible and open to the whole world. Freedom in expression is one of the biggest achievements of the age. There are a whole range of interpretations of thought-processes in the twentieth century. This in a way makes the world much more democratic in approach. The people of this new world would either be treated as equals or they would perish.

However, there may be some problems and difficulties specific to the field of literary writing. It would indeed be useful to have a look at them and consider the 'necessities,' call them compulsions if you like, they create for the writer. This is more so in the case of the contemporary writer/ novelist surrounded as s/he is by innumerable factors of living. I have indicated this in the previous parts of this discussion.

It should be stressed that a longer span of time in which a literary tendency can be placed should be carefully observed in critical discussion. What I have in mind at this point is that the first decade of the twentieth century had a 'past' that could hardly point towards the modernist trend in fiction writing. But the trend definitely came, as all of us know. Not only did the emphases change in literature but the related perspectives and attitudes shifted decisively towards mystery, uncertainty, unknowability, etc. There seemed to be no future at the time for the kind of writing **Dickens** or **George Eliot** had pursued in the period immediately preceding years. But a sort of flowering of new creativity did occur in fiction. And yet, there remains a vital link of a writing trend with its immediate past. Here, we have followed this general process of understanding the phenomenon. Thus, the early twentieth century novel contained in it a great deal of the practice under the genre in question. From **Fielding** and **Richardson** through **Austen**, the **Bronte sisters**, **Dickens**, **George Eliot** and **Hardy** the novel form manifested numerous experiments, changes in strategies, etc. One particular change for us to consider was that around nineteen hundred this literary form began showing signs of separation, if not isolation, from the life in the midst of which it got shaped. This trend has continued ever since then till the nineteen seventies and eighties and may still carry on for reasons that are specifically historical and political. Also to be kept in mind is the fact that these reasons have not deterred the novel from performing its literary-cultural function. This point becomes relevant to our present discussion involving the future of the novel. Shall we not call this a success of the genre, its enduring importance and gritty nature. We get a clue

to the overall issue of this Unit from the fact that challenges and difficulties posed by ideological-cultural circumstances only make the fiction of the period more valuable with respect to the grasping of contemporary reality.

36.5 THE FUTURE OF THE NOVEL

Do we visualise in the case of the novel the same kind of decisive break with its past at the dawn of the twenty-first century as seen in the beginning of the twentieth century? We observe that a deep current moves today against the novel. It is sought to be replaced by 'popular fiction' on the one side and journalistic writing on the other. Both exploit the sense of suspense and curiosity around ordinary questions of interest. Still further, the sociological aspect of the novel – it was called a documentary form since it adhered to the common details of existence and sought to capture the warp and weft of life in their immediate surroundings. The sociological novel in our context has been made redundant by long descriptions of cultural and social life in historical writings.

In the very first decade of the twenty-first century, however, what has been witnessed is an anti-novel current. This means that the twenty-first century seems in some ways to be departing from the literary traditions followed in the last three centuries. The new opinion gives weight to direct statement and a first person analysis of trends. According to this opinion, the thinker/philosopher/ writer should express only that which one perceives in the given environment since that makes more sense than an 'artistic' visualisation of a phenomenon. A number of arguments can be marshaled in support of this view that we can consider in brief here. For instance, the form of the novel is seen as a passive form of expression by the writers of the new age – the expression says and does not say anything. The author may not take responsibility for what one has written under the pretext of offering an imagined, not an actual reality.

V S Naipaul, the famous novelist of the post World War II era, has said recently that the new millennium calls for a kind of writing that deals with things head on, without softening their edges. Facts are what **Naipaul** has come to pin his hopes on in the changed scenario marked by experiment, innovations and descriptive shufflings. As we observe the phenomenon, we also notice that 'the common reader' (**Virginia Woolf's** term, a novelist herself) is more interested today in pop fiction that helps one to kill time and take care of boredom. Pop fiction leaves no trace of the 'effect' of the work after another novel has been read. It is possible that in a cumulative way, pop fiction bolsters biases and prejudices, racial or national, but the individual work of pop fiction does little in terms of helping the reader re-look and examine one's stock responses. Contrast this with the fact that the so-called serious novel is a subject for serious consideration by a specialist reader and interpreter who engages with the task of decoding the hidden meaning or message, if any, in the work of fiction.

Deconstruction, the reigning doctrine of the contemporary period, has blurred distinctions between fiction and nonfiction as well as between the said and not-said. Compare this with 'novel proper' with its eighteenth or nineteenth century counterpart that brought about changes in people's responses and attitudes. There seems no scope today for a **Fielding, Balzac, Tolstoy** or

Hawthorne novel to hold a mirror up to the reality of our times. Thus, it is believed that the form of the novel has become seriously deficient in the twenty-first century. Under such general apprehensions and misgivings, **Naipaul** has recently announced the “death of fiction.”

Do we agree with all this and stop assigning importance to the novel? Do we accept the argument that the novel form has outlived its utility and is thus, to be replaced by a straightforward expression of thoughts, feelings and emotions as happens, for instance, in a travelogue, biography/ autobiography, long/ short essay, a series of first hand accounts of happenings, etc? To state in another way, is responsible journalism the answer to novel writing?

We notice here that the argument about novel writing has shifted from offering a narrative to the reader to telling her/ him directly what the author wishes to convey about one's world. In this, there seems to be an over-emphasis on performing a socio-political role on the individual author's part – there seems to be an unseemly haste to leave a mark on the community of readers that are ready to be convinced by the author's offering of opinion or advice. For such a role, literature already has the essay form. In fact, the essay form and the novel form emerged almost simultaneously in nineteenth century Europe, particularly England. Still more, the novel initially combined the essay and the narrative in such a manner that it became a virtual ‘class room’ for the reader, a literary institution to make available to the audience fresh views, norms and responses juxtaposed with one another as well as with the entrenched ones in the minds of the audience. It is only later that novels were seen as drifting away from views, pronouncements and analyses and focusing exclusively on the experiential aspects of life. Indeed, the novel form has gone through a host of phases and stages to finally reach the situation we confront today.

But what we see as ‘the situation’ is only half the story. If, the crisis of the novel form is so acutely visible in the literature of western Europe and America, the same is not the case with the rest of the world. It would be interesting to compare the modernist crisis in the European novel to the emergence of the novel form in the languages of the many colonies at the time when they resisted the imperialist political pressures through nationalist struggles. **Tagore** (*Bangla*) and **Premchand** (*Hindi*) in India could hardly be accused of writing crisis novels in which the humans stood marginalised and indifferent in a capitalist world, victims of a fate over which they had no control. **Lu Hsun** used fiction and nonfiction equally well to promote the interests of social change in China in the first half of the twentieth century. The Russian novelist **Mikhail Sholokhov** truly underscored the dynamic nature of human behaviour, the gritty character of Russia's men and women against all odds in the wake of World War II. The Latin American novel seems perhaps the strongest answer to the charge of the novel form having outlived its utility. In the last three decades, the so called postcolonial novel (**Rushdie**, **Coetzee**, **Mistry**, **Amitav Ghosh**) has made its mark as an uncompromising intervention in a complex world of conflicting discourses and identities. These and other novels may not answer questions to the satisfaction of readers, but they do confront us with difficult issues. Examples abound.

Precisely, it is this tension in our world caused by clash of interests that brings along a space for analysis and self-reflexivity – we as sensitive citizens wish to see the factors that work behind the tension in question and exert our mind to that end; at the same time we turn towards our own role in the larger

happenings of the day. After all, it is our collective opinions and attitudes that finally decide the fate of our social environment. Isn't it interesting that the already existing centres of power know the potentialities of such collective opinions and spare no efforts themselves to execute what **Noam Chomsky**, one of the greatest libertarians in our midst today has called the "manufacture of consent?" Our tension-ridden world presents before the writer of the novel as for the ordinary citizen the challenge of seeing through this game of "manufacture of consent" being played in crude and subtle ways. What we have noted as the endeavour of postcolonial fiction writing is one example of this challenge. **Rushdie, Coetzee** and others constantly remind us that the modern reader and observer has remained under attack since World War II which (the attack) has its roots in the interests of the *status quo* – let things remain as they are or the perilously balanced world will fall like the proverbial nine pins. I am not suggesting that the postcolonial writer shows clear commitment to shaking up the present scenario and letting the reader know things as they actually stand. Far from it. What I say is that this writing trend in the novel form reflects the crisis of the modern ideological-political arrangement and makes a space for the justice-seeking egalitarian interests to comprehend and be active in. The novel of today can perform this fascinating talk. Whether it does more good to the state of affairs or not is a separate question and should be addressed at another level. The important aspect is that this clash of perspectives gives an opportunity to the observer for retrospection and enquiry into the present literary form.

Indeed, this way of thinking is a break from the traditional literary form. As always, the novel form has to resort to experimentation and innovation in a big way so as to meet the requirements of the audience to whose vital interests it has remained committed since its origin. It may provide in future a different way of approaching and interpreting life. At an abstract level, it can be said that a form may gradually weaken and disappear if the spirit that keeps it alive remains no more active to sustain it. In this sense, a rejection of one form or genre includes a building up of a different set of preferences and conditions for a new form in writing. This in a way provides freedom to those who wish to explore unknown territories in writing. In this way, the theoretical attempt to reject the novel in the twenty-first century may be seen as an act of approaching literature and life in a different fashion. Nevertheless, these are questions that cannot be answered straight away (which the century itself will answer in due course of time) but they are significant questions which must be raised even before this new genre is adopted and fiction is rejected.

Exercise III

- I. Does the novel have a future at all in the present century?

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36.7 LET US SUM UP

At the end, let us quickly go over a few related things. Firstly, facts, straightforward views and responses in themselves may not be adequate enough to present the true face of life and conditions surrounding us. If we look back in time, fiction performed the role of taking into account not merely incidents and events but also situations that project life in its complexity. Thus, the idea of realism central to fiction could also be interrogated keeping in view the demands of the twenty-first century world.

Secondly, conditions and situations in their stark form could take us away from what we call an objective view. The traditional novel form may take us so close to the happenings of life, this has happened in the naturalist novel of the nineteenth century, that we are unable to grasp the forces at work beneath the surface. For us to make sense of the problems confronting us, the novel form has to effect 'alienation' from our surroundings that we consider developments with wakefulness and detachment. This forces us to examine our own approach to the novel under which we expect it to 'tell' us about ourselves. It may also turn out that more important than the act of 'telling' in the novel is to 'de-stabilise' our complacent selves. The novel in the present form doesn't appear to be sufficiently equipped to do it for us. Hence, the outcry against the novel form.

Thirdly, fiction in the twentieth century has been multi-cultural and multi-lingual, particularly in the postcolonial period. This was a major shift in the paradigm. Fiction writing is no more a privilege of the western world. We have with us a major body of third world writing in the second half of the twentieth century. It is important to understand these two kinds of fiction to make an intelligent guess with regard to the future of the novel.

Within twentieth century writing, a major concern has been nationalism. The idea of nationhood emerged strongly in the middle of the century. Such nationalist struggles have brought in their wake social identities of a different kind – rather restricted and narrow as compared with the broad human identity. In the formation of such identities, religious faiths, cults, rituals, whole cultural notions of peculiar celebratory activities have been emphasised to demarcate one community from other. Whereas there is a demand to modernise minds and attitudes, there is the counter-demand to preserve ethnicities and specific ways of life. All this gets subsumed under what we call nationalism with every country or nation voicing its concerns independently of other countries. Since the concept of nationalism has worked effectively against the forces of colonisation and liberated communities and nations in a number of cases, we call a stop at the present time to the use of terms such as the colonising or the 'colonised' nations – that is what the word 'postcolonial' has come to clearly suggest.

With the advent of new theories in the last few decades of the twentieth century, there has been a strong tide of instability in the realm of fiction. This instability has come mainly with theories of post-structuralism and deconstruction. This seems to have shaken the strong political ideologies such as those of national assertion and anti-imperialist bias, newly found by the ex-colonies. The writers confronting this phenomenon seem baffled by a number of conflicting ideas submerged in their texts which were earlier considered to be under their conscious control. The large number of theories existing, about fiction, has resulted in a sort of anarchy where one can get away with anything one wished to say about a literary work. Since everything can be questioned in

this historical phase of ours, even ideas of freedom and independence are presented as suspect, questioned as they are by the new crop of theorists. In this scenario, not just words or phrases but gaps, pauses and silences are interpreted for their roles in projecting or hiding a supposed 'truth.' This is accompanied by the newly emerged view that the author is dead and the text is everything. Many a time, the conclusion is reached that every reader constructs one's own text, suggesting in this way that perhaps even the text is dead. How far it is from the bleak future of the novel is a point we are compelled to consider.

Finally, fiction of late seems to have had a definite role to play with respect to focusing upon women's issues – whether it is the question of ills and evils of patriarchy or the cultural-ideological pressures that the modern social set-ups bring to bear on women. In many a case, such an attack on women's freedom and dignity has been captured as cutting across geographical, racial and political boundaries. Theoretically speaking, the concept of 'racial' boundary could be considered dubious and untenable, but in the case of women's suppression, it has existed since times immemorial and is therefore 'real'. It is recognised on a large scale that women are persecuted simply because they are women and not that they are wrong, unjust or violate social norms. There is an in-built feeling of inadequacy in women for reasons of long term suppression in history. Not only does the morale of women remain low, their very responses, social and even linguistic, show signs of self-created guilt and inferiority. It is heartening to see that in a greater part of the second half of the twentieth century, women's writing, particularly their fiction and semi-autobiographical prose pieces, has infused a new sense of purpose and urgency into the literature of our time. Thus, whereas the novel as an overall genre and form has entered new problematic areas defying comprehension, the women's part of fiction writing has unraveled hitherto, unknown aspects of the suppressed self. Add to this the tendency among a host of women novelists of the contemporary period to those significant political issues have been chosen for depiction as a rare case of committed literary intervention. Important examples of this are the writings of **Maria Campbell, Nadine Gordimer, Margaret Atwood**, etc. who in their different ways have underlined the need to oppose audacious male behaviour vis-à-vis women. Nor have these women writers fought shy of naming ideological and political centres of power. Their engagement sometimes goes deep enough to assert the importance of people's mobilisation against oppressive state structures. This is a far cry from the highly vague and uncertain fictional representations of most European writers, invariably white males.

36.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Read Section 36.1 carefully before writing your answer.

Exercise II

1. Read Section 36.3 and then frame an answer.

Exercise III

1. Read Sections 36.5 and 36.6 before writing out your answer.

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