

M.A. (English)

SECOND YEAR

MAE-501

INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IDE
Rajiv Gandhi University

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

MA [English]

Second Year

MAE 501

RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY
Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

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About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

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UNIT III John Dryden: An Essay on Dramatic Poesy S T Coleride: Biographia Literaria. Chapter IV	**Unit 3:** John Dryden and Samuel Taylor Coleridge **(Pages 71-112)**
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INTRODUCTION

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Literary Criticism and Theory is a book which has been designed for students who are pursuing their postgraduate degree in English Literature. This book covers the breadth of criticism from Aristotle to Derrida. In a strict sense, literary criticism and theory is the systematic study of the nature of literature, its analytical methods and repercussions. Of late, this spectrum has been expanded to include history, moral philosophy, social prophecy and other interdisciplinary themes which are and continue to remain relevant to the ways in which meaning is generated. This is a practice that goes as far back to ancient Greece. Gaining new perspectives through the eighteenth century, theory and criticism of literature are closely tied to the history of literature. The modern sense of literary theory, however, dates only to approximately the 1950s, when Structuralist Linguistics developed by Ferdinand de Saussure began strongly influencing the English language. The New Critics and various European-influenced formalists had described some of their more abstract efforts as 'theoretical' as well. But it was not until the broad impact of structuralism that began to be felt in the English-speaking academic world, that literary theory was thought of as a unified domain.

The book has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with an Introduction followed by the Unit Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary, Key Terms and Activity further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

This book is divided into five units:

Unit 1: prepares an outline of literary criticism from Aristotle to Derrida

Unit 2: explains the important aspects of Aristotle's *Poetics*

Unit 3: summarizes the key areas of Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*

Unit 4: identifies chief features of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and T.S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

Unit 5: critically examines structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction

UNIT 1 ARISTOTLE TO DERRIDA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will trace the history of the literatures of the world in which criticism will emerge as a vast panorama of debates and discussions. In England, this literary genre was revived during the Renaissance when the writers and poets looked back to the revival of old classics and came to imbibe their style as well as emancipated the world by their learning and translations of the Greek and Roman classics. Every age and century paved the way for improvisations and gave birth to new ideas. Aristotle remained the sole controller of the golden age, which still continues to impress the modern theorists. There is a long trail of great voices till we reach the period of the post-modernist literary theorists where we conclude that criticism is more of a science than literature.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the importance of literary criticism
- Critically analyse the theories form Aristotle to Derrida

1.2 CRITICS FROM ARISTOTLE TO DERRIDA

In this section, you will be introduced to the history of criticism starting from Aristotle to Derrida.

1.2.1 Aristotle

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a great Greek philosopher. Born at Stagira, he received his education under the tutelage of the greatest logician Plato at Athens. He stayed with his master until his solemn demise in 347 BC and then travelled to Asia Minor where he joined a school founded by a group of followers of his master. For two years, he studied marine biology; taught Alexander of Macedon in 342 BC; and then founded his own academy, Peripatetic school. Here, he remained until 323 BC delivering discourses on various subjects. This eminent philosopher and preceptor died in 322 BC.

Aristotle was an eminent with rhetorician a wide range of knowledge of subjects like physics, poetry, logic, music, drama, metaphysics, politics, governance, biology, zoology, linguistics, ethics and many more. His contribution to the realm of philosophy has been enormous like his teacher Plato, thereby creating a platform for subjects like politics, literature, aesthetics, science, ethics and logic to flourish. He was a mainstay in the orbit of western philosophy whose learned and accurate ideas shaped most of the critical theories of art and aesthetics, which enlightened forthcoming generations of critics. He had a rather quiet political milieu compared to that of his master Plato which helped him in analyzing and finding out solutions to the questions that his master had raised. Aristotle's analysis of literature was sincere and scientific. He speaks against those who lay down precepts in writing. This prodigious philosopher was considered a great master in the days of Greek and Roman civilization. It was during the Renaissance that his true genius as a literary critic and a law-giver in the realm of poetry was explored by the modern thinkers.

Plato was an undefeated master, nevertheless, his pupil Aristotle was the first man to defend all the doubts that his master had raised against poetry. In *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses his views on poetry and drama, based on the concepts of Greek art; wherein he analyses subjects such as 'the spirit of literature, poetic truth, difference between art and morality, and the study of the end of art.' However, his approach in his masterpiece was as though he was trying to defend and logify what his master Plato had said against poets and poetry; his work has come out as an outstanding source of critical theory in the modern light of thoughts as it enlightened his age. In *Poetics*, Aristotle presents art as an imitation and posited this as a means for all art forms such as poetry, music, dance, painting and sculpture. He distinguishes between the objects and the manner of imitation, according to their mediums. Also, he had a gravity to differentiate between the types of arts; he judged tragedy as a higher form of art rather than comedy. In his view, poetry could have extensive forms ranging from epic to pure drama.

In *Poetics*, he studies the origin and development of poetry, that of imitation, 'harmony' and rhythm. According to ancient Greek poetry, two divergent trends came down to be known as tragedy and comedy. He has given a short account of comedy, defining ludicrous as its essential element; thereafter, he makes a comparison between epic poetry and tragedy. Then he focuses on tragedy where he defines what tragedy is, its functions, the role of a tragic hero, the guidelines and precepts, a poet writing tragedy should follow, and the sublimity or intellectual parts in a tragedy. He not only discusses its essence and soul, but also analyses the practical ways of its structure or form. Thus, he pays equal attention, delineating the components of form like diction and language. Aristotle believed that poetry with elevated language and lucidity may affix grandeur to its theme and soul. At the end, he describes the nature and elements of epic poetry; also, he differentiates between epic poetry and tragedy. He reminds poets to keep three things in mind in the art of versification 'the length of the poem, the metre, and the art of imparting a plausible air to incredible fiction.'

Unlike Plato, he stressed on aesthetic beauty in art rather than its moral value. According to his Metaphysics, 'At first he who invented any art that went beyond the common perceptions of man was naturally admired by man; not only because there was something useful in the inventions, but because he was thought wise and superior to the rest. But as more arts were invented and some were directed to the necessities of life, others to its recreation, the inventors of the latter were naturally always regarded as wiser than the inventors of the former, because their branches of knowledge did not aim at utility.' He strongly believed that all art imitate nature: 'it is the creative force, the productive principle of the universe.'

His theory of mimesis has a wide range of perspectives like an image of life which is a creative act capturing— 'its mental processes, its spiritual movements, its outward acts issuing from deeper sources; in a word all that constitutes the inward and essential activity of the soul.' The agents, such as the external world play the role of 'a background of human action, and enters as an emotional element into man's life and heightens the human interest.' He considers poetry as the most elevated and highest form of creative art which is superior to history; it gives vent to human imagination rather than fastening man to facts; and it has the capacity to encounter facts to surpass them: 'It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen, — what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a specic of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen.' One subjects itself to the particular whereas the other to what is universal. A great poet may make the unreal real by his artistic imagination. For him, drama is a high form of art which depicts life and human actions, it might portray human actions to the extent of delineating even weaknesses or infirmities of human character, but it should not be an inferior action.

He believed that art should not seek the purpose of utility or him, the true end of art, therefore, was to produce 'certain pleasurable impression produced upon the mind of the hearer or the spectator.' His views about poetry and poets thus differ from those of Plato and Homer. He held poetry as 'an emotional delight, its end is to give pleasure.' In *Poetics*, Aristotle studied the 'origin, development and the impact of poetry.' Tragedy, he believed, 'is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude . . . .' By 'language embellished,' he means language into which rhythm, harmony, and song enter. By 'the several kinds in several parts,' Aristotle

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implies that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.'

Furthermore, as tragic imitation implies persons acting, it necessarily implies that in the first place, the spectacular equipment will be a part of tragedy. Next in line was song and diction, for these are the mediums of imitation. By diction, Aristotle meant the mere metrical arrangement of the words: as for song, it is a term whose sense, everyone understands. Again, tragedy is an imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these are: thought and character. These form the two natural causes from which actions spring, and the success and failure depends on actions. Hence, the plot is the imitation of the action. The meaning of plot can be understood as an arrangement of incidents. By character, a sense of a virtue of certain qualities is implied. Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or it may be a general truth enunciated. Every tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which determine its quality namely: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song. These elements have been employed, we may say, by the poets to a man; in fact, every play contains a spectacular element as well as character, plot, diction, song, and thought. For Aristotle the dramatic plot must have a beginning, middle and an end; it should have a flow of communication between the incidents from one corner to the other where, the hero must possess virtues as well as sordidness. He does not immortalize a tragic hero as God, and therefore, his fall must arouse pity and fear into the spectators: he would be 'a man of noble nature, like ourselves in elemental feelings and emotions; idealized , indeed, but with so large a share of our common humanity as to enlist our eager interest and sympathy. He falls from a position of lofty eminence; and the disaster that wrecks his life may be traced not to deliberate wickedness, but to some great error or frailty.' This tragic flaw, which he calls *hamartia*, the Aristotelian hero must incapacitate some characteristic fault which finally leads to his fall. He gave the theory of *Katharsis* which boldly repudiates the doubts raised against the poets and poetry by Plato stating that it is the 'purification of passions.' The suffering of the hero should arouse pity and fear and we must sympathize with him. He also stresses on the three dramatic unities: place, time and action where the first two might have a secondary importance, but the action should maintain a basic unity with a logical sequence of happenings related to it.

He felt, epic poetry is longer than a tragedy. In his view, comedy is lighter in its treatment of the subject as it traces human follies and weakness. It does not impact us as greatly as tragedy even though they have certain similarities. Although epic and tragedy have certain points that overlap, Aristotle finds that tragedy is a superior form of art as compared to an epic.

1.2.2 Longinus

Cassius Longinus (213-273 AD) is chiefly known for his philosophical treatise *On the Sublime*. Neither the authorship of this critical text nor the details of the life of Longinus is broadly available. Yet, the manuscript of *On the Sublime* was first published in the 10th century AD by Francis Robertello with the name Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cassius Longinus on it. It was later that Boileau translated this work when it attained recognition. Cassius Longinus came from Palmyra and he was supposedly the counsellor of the famous queen Zenobia. Longinus has tried to deal with problems raised from the time of Homer to Caecilius. The most recent translation of this essay was attributed to Hall in 1652 followed by Pulteney in 1680. W. Rhys Roberts translated it in 1899 and that is considered as a landmark in the history of criticism.

On the Sublime is a valuable literary piece of rhetorical criticism which is highly important because of its ideas of art. Also, it is an important source as it imparts great information about the Greek and the Roman rhetoricians to the modern age. The work is often viewed as a beautiful combination of classicism and romanticism where the word sublime embodies the authenticity of unfathomable depth: 'it is well to keep it (sublime) with a very careful preliminary explanation that the Longinian sublime is not sublimity in its narrower sense, but all that deserves the highest critical encomium (standard) either in prose or poetry.' This critical text not only incorporates a fresh and wide-ranging approach to literature, but also propounds novel mediums of appreciation. Longinus mentions that Caecilius 'seeks to show the nature of the sublime by countless instances, but the consideration of the means whereby we may succeed in raising our own capacities to a certain pitch of elevation he has, strangely enough, omitted as unnecessary.' By rhetoric and poetry he means: 'the effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport.' The first six chapters of the treatise explain what we may call false sublimity. Citing extracts from Aeschylus, Longinus says that this might be a great work of art but it does not contain the intensity of expression that a literary piece should radiate. Later he gives five main sources of the Sublime: 'grandeur of thought, vehement and inspired passion, figures of speech, noble phrasing of diction and elevation in the arrangement of the words.' This essay emphasizes figures of speech, selection of diction and word-order. Besides Longinus stresses on the fact that literature must connect naturally to feelings and emotions; it should inspire and be imaginative, although there is a limitation to freedom in imagination; yet it should bring in the feeling of ecstasy. The classical precepts and novel approach to the appreciation of literature in the concept of Sublime that Longinus gave, made him a milestone in the history of criticism and a never-fading inspiration for the modern classicists.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What was the basic premise of Aristotle's *Poetics*?
2. What was Aristotle's view on comedy?
3. What was Longinus' view on the sublime?

1.2.3 Horace, Dante Aligheri and Julius Caesar

The absence of Aristotle came to witness a great depression in the field of criticism whereafter his death, mostly, critics were concerned with technicality, grammar and rhetoric. It was a phase of decadence in Greece. It was in this period that learning passed on from Greece to Rome when the text of the great Aristotle moved from Athens to Rome through General Marius in 85 BC. Quintus Horatius Flacus (65-8 BC), educated in Rome and Athens, came to be known as an acclaimed poet and critic. His importance chiefly lay in the fact that he emphasized the historical perspective of criticism and evaluated the art of many renowned poets and critics . His important

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text *Ars Poetica* or the *Epistle to Pisos* deals with subject-matter that is Poesis; technical aspects of poetry that is Poema; and in the last part, he speaks how a poet should be educated as well as what are his responsibilities, including discussions on creed and spiritual inclinations. However, the critical approach of Horace has been subjected to scrutiny both by the ancients and the moderns. A staunch classicist, Horace, believed sharply in the fact that poetry is meant to instruct and delight. He stresses on common sense and history censuring young flamboyant poets who believed in unrestricted flights of imagination. His great contribution lies therein.

Dante Alighieri

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321AD) was a known Florentine poet and law-giver in literature whose chief contributions to literature are *Vita Nuova* (autobiography), *Convivio*, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, and *Commedia* among other works. The period between Longinus and Dante is called the Dark Age: the age of Christian ascendancy when the art of poetry was looked down upon. Therefore, this age also lags behind in the advancement of literary criticism. The chief critics of the Dark Age were Horace and Quintilian who believed that literature was meant for the educated class; thus, segregating the common people from the educated elite. Dante serves an irrefutable link between the Dark Age and the Renaissance combining 'the pastness of past and the presentness of present.' He breathed Renaissance prior to its commencement and by the great faculty of verse and criticism, he rescued literature from the dearth of oblivion. Dante wrote his *Commedia* in Florentine idiom because he wished his verse to reach the ordinary mass and this he did, against the will of prevalent scholastic and religious hierarchy.

Championing the cause of the vernacular, Dante proposed a new horizon not only to those who were native speakers, but also to the popularity of poets in common and this trend was followed by almost all writers after him. Besides his contribution in the field of language where he felt that language is 'an instrument of expression' he pleads that language should be proper, illustrious and elevated. Suitable and expressive language, proper subject-matter and appropriate chain of thoughts are required for poetry. For tragedy, the grand and the powerful pertains to its style, but not for the comedy so is needed: 'Words, expression and construction must be stately, lofty and excellent in tragedy.

In comedy 'middle and lowly vernacular' is to be used, whereas in elegy only the lowly vernacular is to be made use of.' In his second *Tractate of Convivia*, Dante explained the meaning of allegory. According to him, we should appreciate the work of art in four meanings 'literal, allegorical, moral and analogic': to quote him, 'I say that, as is affirmed in the first chapter, it is neat for this exposition to the both literal and allegorical. And to make this intelligible, it should be known that writings can be understood and ought to be expounded chiefly in four senses. The first is literal, and this is that sense which does not go beyond the strict limits of the letter; the second is called allegorical and this is distinguished under the cloak of such story, and is a truth hidden under a beautiful fiction...the third sense is called moral; and this sense is that for which teacher ought as they go through writings intently to watch for their own profit and that of their hearers...the fourth sense is called analogic, that is above the sense, and this occurs when a writing is spiritually expounded which even in the literal sense, by the things signify likewise gives intimation of higher matter belonging to the eternal glory.'

Julius Caesar Scaliger

Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) is a major figure in the Renaissance literary criticism and a promoter of the neo-classical critical trend. His work *Poetics* libri septum (1561) was published three years after his demise, to establish him permanently as one of the great, scholars and pioneer critics of all times. The text reflects on 'language its origin, uses, end and cultivation.' He studies the importance of human speech. Speech services, 'the arts are cultivated and the claims of wisdom intercede with men for men.' According to Scaliger's views, the foundation of poetry is imitation, but 'the end is the giving of instruction in pleasurable form, for poetry teaches, and does not simply amuse.' Tragedy, he distinguished as a form different from comedy 'in the rank of characters, in the nature of the action, and in the outcome.' Also there is a sharp difference between the style and treatment of both the genres of drama. His disciple Horace; stressed on the dramatic unities; and mentioned that poetry 'must have four qualities or attributes Prudentia, Varietas, Efficasia and Suavitas or insight, variety, vividness and winsomeness.' In his *Poetics*, Scaliger maintains that style is a very important aspect of poetry which is of three kinds, respectively 'the grand, the humble and the moderate.' But Scaliger's speculations in the realm of literary criticism verges on making poetry a dogma.

Check Your Progress

4. For what reason is the Horatian period considered an important phase in literary criticism?
5. What is the period between Longinus and Dante called? And why?
6. Identify the primary concern of Julius Caesar Scaliger in the sphere of literary criticism.

1.2.4 Sir Philip Sidney

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), an eminent critic of the Renaissance, was a great friend of Edmund Spenser to whom he dedicated his *Shepherd's Calendar*. A known humanitarian, he had a very short but active life. Owing to his goodness of character, he had the popularity of receiving over two hundred elegies after his sad and abrupt demise. Sidney wrote *Apology for Poetry* in defence of Stephan Gosson's anti-Renaissance proclamation *The Abuse of Poetry*. His *Defence of Poesy* (1595) is the most characteristic representative of Renaissance critical writing. Sidney's modern approach to criticism, his stress on style and his humanitarian outlook have placed him with critics like Jonson, Dryden, Wordsworth, Shelley, Arnold and Eliot. Sidney mentions that England has proved to be 'a hard-step-mother to poets' where poetry is looked down upon as 'the laughing stock of children.' The *Apology* is written in a classical style having seven parts: 'the exordium introduction — the winning hearer attention to what follows; the narration — in which Sidney offers the historical survey of the role of poetry; the proposition — in which Sidney offers his own definition of poetry, drawn largely from the ancient Greek critics; the portitio — in which Sidney divides his arguments into different parts and tries to reply to the charges brought against poetry; the confirmation — in which Sydney finally proves his case; the refutation

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— in which Sidney censures his opponents; and, the peroration conclusion — final summing up.' Defending the cause of poetry, he maintained that poetry has been an educator to of mankind, historically. Poetry as a form of art has proved its universality and effect in course of succeeding generations.

Defending poetry, he said: 'Poetry is an imitation of nature but it is not mere imitation but something more. Poets with their faculty of imagination rival the position of gods, and create something beautiful and noble out of this reality. Poetry is not the mother of lies.' Liberally, Sidney encompasses all genres of literature into the arena of poetry and to him even Plato's dialogues come under the periphery of poetry. Sidney's theory is in line with Aristotle for he believes that poetry is an art of imitation. Besides, he also agrees with what Horace believed: poetry should instruct and delight. However, he implies improvisations to all these oft-quoted ideas by his predecessors: for the art of imitation, he mentions— 'lifted up by the vigour of his invention, he doth grow in effect into another nature in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as were neighbours in nature.' Man cannot create things as natural as God, but poets do take us into the world of ecstasy where the pleasure that we derive from their piece of art might make them parallel to God, this is what Sidney explains in his treatise. Sidney declares that poetry is superior to philosophy and history: 'nature never set forth the earth in rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither the pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever may make the too much loved earth more lovely. His world is brazen, the poets only deliver the golden.' Therefore, poetry, he means is more pleasing than reality; and the poets are creators of these pleasurable beauties.

As for functions and effects of poetry are concerned, Sidney believes that the poet should be a moralizer and a teacher: 'the end of all earthly learning is virtuous action.' And every artist, to whichever literary genre he chooses, must stick to morality: would he be a satirist, 'sportingly never liveth until he make a man laugh at folly, and at length ashamed to laugh at himself.' Similarly, he would say that 'comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our lives, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.' His views about tragedy are that— 'it openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the Ulcers that are covered with Tissues, that maketh Kings fear to be Tyrants and Tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that with stirring the effects of admiration and *commiseration* teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations golden roofs are builded.'

Here, Sidney has defended the onslaught on poetry by Plato and Gosson; he also remarks on the objections raised by 'contemporary Philistines.' Sidney does not assign a special place to metrical forms as far as the importance of poetical art is concerned. He believes that poetry has been there since the beginning of human speech; it teaches men compassionate actions and virtuosity; and it is never a lie. Imagination in poetry is used to represent truth that appears real. Poetry can never provoke 'pestilent desires' and whether it is science or art, its misuse might invite disharmony. In his essay, Sidney describes the origin and growth of poetry, the duties of a poet and replies to all who have censured and abused poetry simultaneously re-establishing its significance. His work is a harmonious whole of classical, neo-classical theories 'dealing

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with imagination and psychological processes of the mind' and having satisfied all the negative remarks of his contemporary as well as predecessors he establishes poetry 'above theology, rhetoric, logic, history and philosophy.'

1.2.5 Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson (1573-1637) was one of the most prolific playwrights and critics of the Elizabethan age of English letters. Three different critical trends emerged at that time amongst them, the idealistic trend being the first was represented by Sir Philip Sidney, the second trend evaluating poetry technically encompassed critics like Webbe, Puttenham and Daniel, and the third type of critics were those who capacitated the Renaissance element of humanism. They were realists and classicists with an open mind. Jonson belonged to this group. Much of Jonson's works were burnt in the fire of 1620. The remaining few which inspire his ideas about criticism are *Timber or Discoveries* (*Timber or Discoveries*; made upon men and matter; as they have flowed out of his daily reading; or had their reflux to his particular notion of the times.) and *Conversations with Drummond*. *Timber* focuses on excerpts, translations and summarizing the works of the ancients like Quintilian, Hoarce, Seneca, Vives to name a few. In it, his impressions gain precedence. Jonson has proved himself a classicist but he warns authors not to 'take all upon trust from them.' He believed strongly in studying and imbibing the ancients, but disagreed to follow them blindly. For a write, common sense must be the guide and must pave the way for generations to make their own judgements: 'nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator as the schools have done Aristotle… for too many things a man should owe but a temporary belief and the suspension of his own judgement, not an absolute resignation of himself or a perpetual captivity. Let Aristotle and others have their dues; but if we can make further discoveries of truth and fitness than they, why are we envied?' He believed that 'No art is at one stroke discovered or perfected.' Thus, it is the practice of many generations of artists, that an art might gain its identity.

His *Discoveries* might be seen in three parts where, in the first part, he gives his estimates of the art of expression, the study of poetry and drama. He castigates those who imbue their verses into excesses of romantic hues and praises the appeal of neat and clear expression. He pleads for natural beauty and expression, rather than the 'powdered or painted.' He maintained that language is the style of a man's inner soul and it should exhibit naturalness and realism. Diction, he said, should be appropriate to the thought and situation. It should suit the subject-matter: 'in style it is necessary to consider what ought to be written, and after what manner. The writer must first think and excogitate his matter.' Jonson does not simply direct to strip art off all ornamentation: 'some writing need sunshine.' He, therefore, pleads for effective style and good writing incorporating 'order, suitability, perspicuity, liveliness and discretion.' Tracing the beginning and sources of poetry, Jonson states what qualities a good poet must possess. He believed that poetry was the finest of all arts: 'the pen is more noble than the pencil. Like Aristotle, he follows the theory of imitation, but also blends the beauty of imagination into it, which makes poetry the most beautiful of all art forms.

Jonson laid great stress on the classical concepts of poetry or poems including epic, dramatic poetry, lyric, elegy and epigrammatic verse. For him, poetry is the 'queen of arts' which has 'ravishing delight and incredible sweetness.' But he

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emphasizes the quality of a poet where he believes that a poet must have native genius; he should be intellectually alert and broad-minded. His poetry, which is the outcome of his extensive labour, deserves to be remembered beyond the period in which it was written. Therefore, a poet ought to inculcate conscious industry. He should imitate the worthy ancients and learn art from their examples. This does not mean a poet should blindly follow the writers of the golden age, but read them carefully to chisel and polish his art. The poet should be of a receptive mind and an industrious scholar. He ought to consider Aristotle and Horace as his teachers: 'whatsoever nature . . . dictated to the most happy or long exercise to the most laborious, that the wisdom of Aristotle had brought into an art because he understood the causes of things. And what other men did by chance or custom, he doth by reason; and not only found out the way not to err, but the short way we should take not to err.' The genius of Aristotle was 'the first accurate critic and truest judge; nay the greatest philosopher the world ever had....he taught us two offices....how we ought to judge rightly of others, and what we ought to imitate specially in ourselves.' But he also acknowledges: 'nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator, as the schools have done Aristotle....for too many things a man should owe but a temporary belief and a suspension of his own judgement, not in absolute resignation of himself or a perpetual captivity. Let Aristotle have their dues; but if we can make further discoveries of truth and fitness than they, why are we envied.'

Turning to drama, Jonson, the creator of the comedy of humours and an eminent classical playwright, says comedy is a 'social machinery— expressing life in all its variations.' It is a genre founded on satire and not laughter. He laid stress on the plot construction of a comedy, close to the structure of an elegy or tragedy, with specific stay on the unities of time and action. All incidents should pass onto a unified whole. The relevance of Ben Jonson as a modern and rational critic lies in the fact that 'he is never forgetful of the contemporary scene and is endowed with a great practical sense.' Unlike his predecessors or contemporaries in England, he seldom stopped to theorize. Rather, he would choose to abide by common sense and practicality. He would say— 'the office of a true critic or censor was to judge sincerely of an author and his matter.' He would consider that 'to judge of poets is only the faculty of poets, and not of all poets but the best.' He tried to bring this fact to light that the genius of his age was not recognized as they ought to be. He sincerely disliked his contemporaries who wrote verses for pomp and showed disregard for the subject matter. Next are plagiarists who face criticism from him. And finally, the last category is made up of 'romantic fools' who only believe in spontaneity. In this manner, Jonson segregates the worthy from the unworthy.

Jonson regarded the excellence of Shakespeare with all his sagacity bringing to light his slippages in art and style. He does not admire Spenser either on the basis of his stanza form, subject-matter, obscurity and diction. He considers Donne and Bacon to be fine poets by virtue of his opinion on metaphysical conceits. To sum up, Ben Jonson may be ranked as a true neo-classical critic who set the standards of criticism for the succeeding generations. He created a strong platform for English critics such as Dryden, Johnson, Pope, Arnold and Eliot. This prolific critic is known for his clear-sightedness, realism, approach to the practical side of the problems, his awareness of the past and the present, judiciousness and his unprejudiced classical scholarship.

1.2.6 John Dryden

John Dryden (1631-1700) established the neo-classical trend of English criticism and remained a pioneer critic, translator, playwright, poet and satirist for the entire Restoration period. He wheeled forward Italian concepts and French neo-classical ideas propounded by Corneille, Racine and Boileau: however, the difference between the Italian and French group of critics lies in the fact where the former sided with liberty and broad outlook, the latter stuck to narrowness and rigidity. The Italian critics valued the ancients very much but did not succumb to mere imitation and remained open to innovations; however, the French chose to be the obedient disciples of the ancients in their outlook. Jonson followed the Italian trend and after his death, it was Dryden who rescued this literary trend from the hands of rigid rule-makers; 'Dryden, a real neo-classicist, never allowed himself to be tried down by the rules set by the ancients. He had a peculiar common sense, a great love for national literature and an understanding of the eternal value of literature.' He avoids undertaking the task of studying the basics of literature and often it appears that his defence of the heroic couplet or the rhymed metre is but insignificant in the modern context. He may be regarded as the first practical critic whose ideas radiate 'the principles of perspective, perspicuity and delight in literature.' He is the first critic in English letters who fought for the cause of his native language.

His fame rests chiefly on his critical writings — *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1667), *Defence of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), *Essay of Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age* (1672), *Apology for Heroic Poetry* (1677), *Preface to Troilus and Cressida* (1679), *Preface to Albium and Albanios* (1685), Discourse Concerning the Origin and *Progress of Satire* (1693), *Preface to Aeneid* (1697) and *Preface to the Fables* (1700). In the former essay, which is regarded as a landmark text of the restoration criticism, he fights for the cause of native speakers against the dominating French critical trends. Dryden took it as his duty to establish his native language as the most important vehicle in the art of versification. He appreciated the native talents such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson and Fletcher. His critical expressions find a better reflection in his *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1667), *Defence of Dramatic* Poesy (1668) and *Preface to the Fables* (1700).

The *Essay* is a dramatic dialogue among four gentlemen who are sitting in a boat in the river Thames having performed their duty in a war where Crites who represents Sir Robert Howard, the brother-in-law of Dryden himself, speaks for the classicists; Eugenius, represented by Lord Buckhurst, favours the moderns; Lisideius, represented by Sir Charles Sidley, a mouthpiece of Charles II, expresses that the French are superior to the English in dramatic art; and the last is Neander, Dryden himself, who fights for the native cause. The *Essay* is an argument among these four. The Essay observes classical foundations, as Dryden was a true classicist. Drama, they believe, is 'A just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.' Dryden is of the view that the dramatic personae should be a lifelike image; the plot should exhibit clearly the three dramatic unities; and drama should reflect a complete effect. Dryden is liberal enough to take the side of Shakespeare who did not observe the three classical unities of plot in his plays. Later, we see that Dryden uses blank verse following Shakespeare in his heroic play *All for love*: hence, he made the use of rhymed or unrhymed metres according to the need of his dramatic theme.

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The attributes of Dryden as a critic lies in the fact that he upholds the cause of practical commonsense, 'proportion, perspicuity and perspective'; he heads way for comparative criticism by comparing Homer with Virgil and Ovid with Chaucer as he has described in his *Preface to the Fables*. And he devotes his attention to the study of Chaucer in his Preface later: 'in the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer and Romans Virgil. He is perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences; and therefore speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; a continence which is practised by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients excepting Virgil and Horace.' He makes abundant use of history and criticism when he talks of Chaucer. As a neo-classicist, Dryden shows faith in delight and instruction; thus his importance might be recapitulated as — 'He is a neo-classicist but he is not fastened by any dogma. The flexibility of his outlook is to be noted in all his practical criticism. Together with Ben Jonson, he helps in the institutions of commonsense in English criticism and lastly he is the first nationalistic critic, who tries to uphold and unfurl the laurels of Shakespeare in an age when the continental theatre-goer who was charmed by the French neo-classic dramas of Corneille.'

1.2.7 Alexander Pope

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), a great poet and literary theorist of Britain, is chiefly known for his *The Essay on Criticism* (1711) which is an outstanding specimen of neo-classical theory of criticism. A staunch disciple of the ancient masters, Pope, on the footsteps of Quintilian and Horace, gives estimates 'of nature, wit and his ideas of a good critic.' We might say that Pope was inspired by Vida, Boileau, Rapin, La Bossu, Lord Mulgrave, Lord Roscommon and Dryden. His *Essay* has three parts where in the first, he discusses how he represents nature; the second one deals with his meaning of wit; at last, he talks of the qualities of a good critic. Here, he also mentions how a critic can be endowed with general qualities, what can be particular laws for him and what might be an ideal state for a critic.

For Pope, nature represented humanity and said that one must submit to the forces of nature: 'to subordinate yourself to the commands of the one thing which was the same in all men— the reason . . . nature had, too, its social implications.' For Pope nature and the classics were the same essentially. Perhaps, he felt and expressed that the ancient masters of literature were true to nature. To describe wit, he would say— 'what oft was thought, but never so well-expressed.' Both Dryden and Pope considered wit to be the 'propriety of thoughts and words'; in other terms, thoughts and words that were elegantly adapted to the subject became good indicators of wit. Pope argues that a critic must know his faults, should understand nature, imbibe the classical essence with clear-sightedness and should be humane, humble in his approach like a student. A critic may hold a work of art as a complete unit and try to seek what the author might have tried to produce. He censures those who are pedants, dishonest and untrue to their objectives, who do not appreciate the writer or the followers of classical precepts; also, the critics who would seek to identify 'the beauty of images, similes and metaphors, that is the picture drawn in the poem;' and those who pay ultimate attention to diction. He would suggest the critics to inculcate tolerance, discipline and objectivity. To him, a critic should be embellished with 'integrity, modesty, tolerance, tactfulness and courage.' Pope has remained true to his own limitations and has added to the repertoire of criticism by adding – 'Dryden's criticism had licensed outlets for the Romantic temperament; Pope fixed an inescapable limit to it, and one which, though battered, was not effectively done away during the remainder of his century.' Like his predecessors, Pope too, invoked appreciation for Shakespeare— 'if ever any author deserved the name of an original, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from fountains of nature . . . his characters are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of nature.'

Any writer should be assessed by the measures of the old masters and Shakespeare. If a comparison had to be made between the old masters and Shakespeare, it can be said with due consideration that it resembles a neat modern building – one that is elegant and responds to the requirements of the age. As opposed to this, the works of old masters can be compared to structures resembling Gothic architecture which is sturdy, solemn and has endured the test of time. It must be understood that each work (or structure vis-à-vis the comparison) contains enough thought to become several independent works of art. Having said this, it must be remembered that Pope does not agree to the unlicensed free play of imaginative forces and believed that the imagination is the ultimate source and birthplace of any creative endeavour.

Check Your Progress

7. What is the significance of Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*?
8. Identify the similarity between Ben Jonson's and Aristotle's concept of poetry.
9. What trend did John Dryden establish?
10. What was Pope's view on nature?

1.2.8 Addison and Lessing

Joseph Addison (1672-1719) reigned over the first half of the eighteenth century both as a neo-classical critic and an essayist: the person who was amongst the first to discuss modern psychological criticism. Inspired by Hobbes and Locke, his interpretation of imagination psychologically, paved the way for Hazlitt. Addison, a critic, does not offer his take on poets alone but gives his estimate of a true wit as an adjunct. His approach to criticism is modern. In his morning lectures of Spectator papers, he explains his ideas on literature; but his fame as a critic chiefly rests on 'the pleasures of the imaginations' (411-421) where we find his discussion on the psychology of art which made him the harbinger of the romantic criticism and psychological criticism. Addison says that the pleasure that we derive from sight is conveyed to us through 'image and visible objects': where the primary pleasure arises from our looking at the object directly; the secondary pleasure is caused by memories 'brought into the mind by our image.' He inspires us to study imagination, mind and memories in the following ways:

- Greatness or sublimity —'which frees the mind from the restraint and lifts it to a state of transport.'
- The new or uncommon — 'in which surprise or novelty increases interest.'

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- Beauty— 'or the harmonious adaptation of parts to the whole.' Addison's study of imagination' incorporates both: the sublime and novelty besides suggesting 'association of ideas' and revival of 'memories in the minds of the readers.'

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1766), in his critical work *Laocoon*, censures that 'humanistic and romantic attitude of equating all forms of arts' is a wrong notion. Furthermore, 'a gaping cavity is a formal defect in a sculpture and because of the moment of the half-opened mouth, short of the climax is a highly significant and fruitful moment. Visual arts have their own limitations. A man shouting with his face wide open would have been an ugly spectacle in sculpture. The visual arts are limited in what they can convey. Some of what poetry can describe or suggest becomes merely ugly when it is portrayed in painting and sculpture.' Regarding the difference between poetry and painting, he says— 'difference between poetry and painting is a basic difference between a medium of time and medium of space. A medium of space can present the action of such bodies only indirectly and through images of the bodies themselves. Conversely, a medium of time can present action directly and vividly, but can present bodies only indirectly and through actions.' According to him, 'Poetry must try to raise its arbitrary signs to natural signs: that is how it differs from prose and becomes poetry. The means by which this is accomplished are the tone of words, the position of words, measure, figures and tropes and similes. All these make arbitrary signs, more like the natural thing but they do not actually change them into natural signs; consequently all genres of art which use such means must be looked upon as less impressive forms of poetry and the highest kind of poetry will be that which transforms the arbitrary signs completely into natural signs. That is dramatic poetry.' In his work *Hanburg Dramaturgy* he gives his ideas about play and theatre that most important function of a play would be to stick to the truthfulness and natural rendering of human nature or passions: 'the mimetic use for language or the speech of dramatic persons is more poetically important than the poet's management of language, his rhythms and his figurative imagination.' It is often said that Lessing's views and humanistic approach, being a German, were similar to that of Dr. Johnson in England.

1.2.9 Samuel Johnson

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is the most prominent of the literary theorists of the eighteenth century England and the greatest neo-classical critic of all times. He was liberal, gifted with appropriate wit and common sense, humanist, realist, classicist, calculative, moralist, scholarly genius, logical and authoritative in his tone. He was strictly against the excesses of romantic exuberance. His approach is natural; his prose logical and lucid. He would castigate those whom he would think fit to deserve censure. Johnson believed that literature should depict 'general nature': a poet should essentially 'divest himself of the prejudices of his agent country.' He invokes praises for 'general nature' in his *Preface to Shakespeare* 'Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representation of general nature. Particular manner can be known to few, and therefore, only a few can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which common satiety of life sense us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.' He would again say that 'The business of a poet is to examine not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip or describe the difference

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shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portrait of nature such prominent and striking features as recalled by the original to every mind, and must neglect the small discriminations. . . .' It is not only nature that can create a great poet, for he would argue: 'But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of the poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all modes of life. His character requires him to estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude . . . He must write as the interpreter of nature and legislator of mankind; and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as being superior to time and place.' For Johnson, truth and reality are the most important factors that a poet must have: thus Shakespeare's characters are—faithful mirrors of manners and of life.' Shakespeare does not let his characters be ruled 'by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world.' So, his characters 'are the genuine progeny of common humanity such as the world will always supply'. He would not speak in favour of pastoral poetry as it is artificial— 'an intelligent reader acquainted with the scenes of life sickens at the mention of the crook, the pipe, the sheep and the kids.' And so, in his opinion, pastoral poetry can be relished by 'barbarians in the dawn of literature and children in the dawn of life.'

Regarding the three classical unities observed in the structure of drama, Johnson, with his liberal attitude, being a neo-classicist, remains a propagator of Dryden's ideas. He says that a dramatist ought to create a universe of his theme through a play and the strict adherence to the three classical unities of; time, place and action might prove to be stumbling blocks in the effect that it should produce. He would plead for 'a more open minded and flexible conception of decorum, based directly on nature itself.' He also advocates for tragi-comedies as they are the mixture of all the elements of life. He was deeply concerned with the end of a literature; that is why he supports the cause of tragi-comedies because they give instruction with pleasure. Shakespeare, he found, met the requirements of a good author in this regard: 'Shakespeare's plays are not in the vigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time the reveller is hastening to his wine and the mourner burying his friend, in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and many benefit are done and hindered without design.'

In his much acclaimed biographical criticism called *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81), Johnson speaks against the liberty that the metaphysical poets enjoyed, not to forget that it was he who gave them that name. While he did not approve of the free reign that was given to them, he was not opposed to their poetry and defended them on several occasions. Owing to the practical criticism of Johnson, it is observed that he speaks about 'nature, function and value of poetry.' He criticized Milton's *Lycidas* as it compromised 'real passion' for remote allusions and obscure opinions. He frequently used historical, biographical and comparative methods of criticism while

evaluating either an author or his composition. In his *Essay on Dryden*, he expresses what he thinks should be the end of a work of art, 'It is not comparing line with line that the merit of great works is to be estimated but by their general effects and ultimate results which is easy to note a weak line and write one more vigorous in his plays, to find a happiness of expression in the original and transplant it by force into the version, but what is given to the parts may be subducted from the whole, and the reader may be weary though the critic may commend. Works of imagination excel by their allurement and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention. That move is good in vain which the reader throws away. He only is the master who keeps the mind in pleasing captivity; whose pages perused with eagerness and in hope of new pleasure are perused again; and whose conclusion is perceived with an eye of sorrow, such as a traveller casts upon the departing day.' Johnson never forgets the historical past and ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them.' Samuel Johnson's methods of application in literary criticism met with further development during the nineteenth century. He was a master of comparative and biographical methods of criticism; propagator of humanism as a literary theorist and a perfect combination of classicism and practical commonsense.

1.2.10 William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was the leading voice among the elder Romantics and a literary theorist of excellence. As a critic he laid stress on imagination, poetic diction and the origin of poetry. His book *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1800 onwards) bears the impacts of Romantic criticism which is sharply distinguished from earlier dominant neo-classical traits. It 'raised a wall between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it dated a new era as it served to make forever intelligible the dividing line between two regions in criticism that might otherwise have seemed to flow into one another. We do not often have such dividing walls.' Ever since Spenser or Chaucer, the English poetic diction has been a subject of debate and many words came to be accepted or rejected as per the need of the hour, or the choice of the mind which has been utilizing it.

There was a sharp difference between the classical diction and the romantic use of words, as we hear through Thomas Gray in his letter to Richard West— 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where the thought and image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself, to which almost everyone that has written has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivations: nay, sometimes words of their composition or invention. Shakespeare and Milton have been great creators this way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions from the former.' Classical poetic-diction makes use of soft-spoken words and idioms together with scholarly vocabulary; it would be different than the language used by the common mass or conventions; and the romantic poetic-diction would seek for spontaneity, natural expressions, direct words which evoke out human passions.

Wordsworth became the first poet who withstood slavery to neo-classical vogue of diction calling them—'adulterated', 'distorted', 'vicious' and 'glossy'. He praised the simple and realistic language of Cowper and Burns. To him, their poetic-diction—'the gaudiness and inane phraseology' was far away from the expression or breath of

the common people and thus not acceptable. 'There neither is nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition' in other words, poetry should be free from constraints as it must flow at its own pace. It should be an emblem of nature — 'I have all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject; consequently, I hope that there is in these poems little falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance.' Thus, Wordsworth's subject-matter and diction were close to what originality can be. He would produce something that could be 'humble and rustic.' He objects to neo-classical poetic-diction which incorporates 'neo-classic stylistic devices, against personification, periphrases, Latinisms, inversions, antithesis and grammatical licenses.' Wordsworth felt that the ancient masters used figurative and metaphorical language which made their poetry powerful and natural. Figurative and metaphorical essence in language, therefore, is original. He gives the definition of poet in his *Preface*; he says 'He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.'

To him, the poet is most importantly a man communicating to his fellowmen, and poetry 'is the image of man and nature.' He believes that poetry commences with pleasure and destines at wisdom: 'A great poet ought to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feelings, to render their feelings more sane, pure and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things.' The craft of poetry is to instill sympathy in the readers. It should work as a true correspondence of the feelings that the poet has conveyed to his readers. In Wordsworth's definition, the process of creation is scientific and poetry 'is the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility 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.' The tranquility gradually disappears and emotion, related to that which was before the subject of contemplation is gradually produced. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment. He believes in controlling one's emotions and suggests that a poet ought to revise his compositions which must exhibit his 'observation, sensibility, imagination, fancy and reflection.' He once said, 'my first expression I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are best.' Wordsworth said that poetry is a difficult art, the success of which depends on the poet's efforts and capability .... and composition of verse is infinitely more of an art than men are prepared to believe; and absolute success in it depends upon innumerable minutiae.' His definition for imagination varies: on the one hand it is a 'faculty of arbitrary recall and willful combination of images;' on the other, it becomes as prolific as nature which 'moulds, endues, abstracts,

combines.' Wordsworth differs from Coleridge when he speaks about imagination and fancy. In his *Preface* of 1815, he has given the psychological explanation of both the terms. Fancy is a faculty which deals with 'fixities and definites,' and imagination, with 'plastic, the pliant and the indefinite.'

Coleridge, however, differs from Wordsworth regarding his theory of poetic-diction and its three aspects: first, he objects that the language of prose and metrical compositions cannot be the same; second, he asserts that a particular image can be used either in good or bad manner by many poets; and third, he says that education supports to create a poet because the language of poetry cannot be a rustic's language.

1.2.11 Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is considered as one of the most eminent poets and literary theorists of the Romantic Age. He is held to be as high as Aristotle or Longinus in his significance. He has been seen as the forerunner of the modern science of semantics. I. A. Richards in his book *Coleridge on Imagination* mentions 'With Coleridge we step across the threshold of a general theoretical study of language capable of opening to us new powers over our minds comparable to those that systematic physical inquiries are giving us over our environment. The step across was of the same type as that which took Galileo into the modern world. It requires the shift from a pre-occupation with the What, 'When and How' of language. The problems of poetry became for Coleridge, sometimes, interesting as problems with a structure of their own. They ceased to be mere voids waiting to be filled. The interest shifted from the answers to the questions and with that a new era of criticism began. Beyond the old tasks of reaffirming ancient conclusions and defending them from foolish interpretations, an illimitable field of work has become accessible.' Coleridge is often held as a brilliant critic dealing with existentialism, German transcendentalism and modern psychological criticism later theorized by Freud. Inspired by the German critics, he studied the forces of imagination and psychology in English literature. His discussions were structured to represent a unique systematic unity. His major critical texts are *Biographia Literaria* (1817), *Lectures on Shakespeare*, *Anima Poetae*, *Table-Talk* and *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. Coleridge's main interest lies in the process of creation which springs from human nature, which is why he studied psychology. He has investigated the origin of poetry and says that a poet 'brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity.'

In *Biographia Literaria*, he theorizes poetry and imagination as significant and complex processes. The first part of the book deals with his metaphysical and philosophical concepts. He gives his views about beauty and in the second part, i.e. the thirteenth and the fourteenth chapters are his major theoretical outpourings. While the thirteenth chapter deals with his ideas about imagination and fancy; the fourteenth chapter comprises of his views on poetry.

Discussing poetry, Coleridge says, 'The office of philosophical disquisition consists in just distinction; while it is the privilege of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware, that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is

the technical process of philosophy. But having done so, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist; and this is the result of philosophy. A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference therefore must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object being proposed. It is possible, that the object may be merely to facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observations by artificial arrangement; and the composition will be a poem, merely because it is distinguished from prose by metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly.

So much for the superficial form, the immediate purpose may be the communication of truths; either of truth absolute and demonstrable, as in the works of science; or of facts experienced and recorded, as in history. Pleasure, and that of the highest and most permanent kind, may result from the attainment of the end; but it is not itself the immediate end. In other works the communication of pleasure may be the immediate purpose; and though truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end, yet this will distinguish the character of the author, not the class to which the work belongs. Blessed indeed is the state of society in which the immediate purpose would be baffled by the perversion of the proper ultimate end; in which no charm of diction or imagery could exempt the Bathyllus, even of an Anacreon, or the Alexis of Virgil, from disgust and aversion!

.....The final definition then, so deduced, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species— (having *this* object in common with it) — it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.

.....The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgement of all countries, in equally denying praises of a just poem, on the one hand, to a series of striking lines or distichs, each of which, absorbing the whole attention of the reader to itself, becomes disjoined from its context, and forms a separate whole, instead of a harmonizing part; and on the other hand, to an unsustained composition, from which the reader collects rapidly the general result unattracted by the component parts. The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself . . . But if this should be admitted as a satisfactory character of a poem, we have still to seek for a definition of poetry. The writings of Plato, and Bishop Taylor, and Burnet's Theory of the Earth, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem . . . Yet if a harmonious whole is to be produced, the remaining parts must be preserved in keeping with poetry; and this cannot be otherwise effected than by such a studied selection and artificial arrangement, as will partake of one, though not a peculiar property of poetry. And this again can be no other than the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written.

My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in some of the remarks on the fancy and imagination in the early part of this work. What is poetry? — is so nearly the same question with,

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what is a poet? That the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and the emotions of the poet's own mind.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He fuses one into the other by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of imagination.' Coleridge's quest is aimed towards the nature of poetry; he discusses about the difference between the language of poetry and prose, form and content; also, he talks about the organic unity and its ultimate end. He does not appreciate a poem which is composed of a few prominent lines but fails to impress as a unified whole. A poem is equated with a journey, and the reader should have the effect— 'by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of journey itself.' Coleridge's definition of poetry is a little confusing: 'a poem of any length neither can be nor ought to be, all poetry.' The creative process by a poet brings out the whole soul into action in order to produce a poem. He believes that imagination which is 'secondary' and it reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities as it integrates and synthesizes. The 'esemplastic power' of the imagination produces poetry— it has that unifying, reconciliating and synthesizing power ' which enables all the faculties to be brought into play simultaneously, each playing its proper part, to produce a complex synthesis of comprehension.'

Coleridge's aesthetic and literary theory of primary and secondary imagination is his most valuable contribution to the realm of criticism. In his *Biographia Literaria* he says he talks of 'repeated meditations' the led him to suspect 'that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.' According to him, Milton had a highly imaginative mind while Cowley's was fanciful. He believed if he could establish the existence of the two faculties, it would be easy to determine the nomenclature. imagination, it seems, is a quality of the soul; thus, he contents himself with the philosophical basis of Imagination. He says 'I am convinced that a true system of philosophy— the science of life— is *best* taught in poetry.' He quotes Kant's philosophic effusions. In chapter XII, Coleridge mentions ten thesis which are related to consciousness which are— 'i. Truth presupposes a knower and a known; ii. Many truths are derived from others; iii. There must be an ultimate ground, 'self grounded, unconditional, and known by its own light;' iv. It is unique; v. it is neither objective nor subjective, it is a fusion of both; vi. A fusion Coleridge calls the Self or I am; vii. It has a will to act; viii. This is neither finite nor infinite; ix. It occurs in the reconciling and recurring actions of life and at this juncture philosophy merges into religion. x. 'a theism based on the certainty that individual must be a modification of the higher consciousness.' Ultimately, all submerge into one: 'The beautiful, contemplated in its essentials, that is in *kind* and not in degree, is that in which the *many*, still seems as many, becomes one. Take a familiar instance, one of a thousand. The frost on a window pane has by accident crystallized into a striking resemblance of a tree or as a weed. With what pleasure we trace the parts, and their relation to each other, and to the whole!' The artist is supposed to feel for the parts and the whole equally: 'The sense

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of beauty subsists in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole; exciting an immediate and absolute complacency, without the intervention of any interest, sensual or intellectual.' He says, 'the imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception . . . Fancy, on the contrary, has no counters to play with, but fixities and definites. . . Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space from the law of association.' For Coleridge, fancy has a lower potency or capability than imagination. His works *Table Talk*, *Miscellanies*, *Aesthetic and Literary*, *The Anima Poetae* and *The Letters* bear his impact of practical criticism.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

11. State any two ways in which Addison urges us to study the imagination, mind and memories.
12. What was Samuel Johnson's style of writing?
13. Identify the three areas that were important for William Wordsworth.
14. What was the unique quality of Coleridge's concept of poetry?

1.2.12 Shelley, Lamb and Hazlitt

Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792-1822) critical text *Defence of Poetry* (1821) displays the romantic values in the virtues of poetic creation; he speaks against the neo-classical trend in this treatise which was written in reply to Sir Thomas Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820). Peacock said that poetry was on its decline. Shelley defended by saying 'I dispatch . . . I have taken a more general view of what is poetry than, and will perhaps agree with several of my positions, without considering your own touched.' He says that poetry is 'the expression of the imagination' which is always linked with the gratification of pleasure: 'a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. He discourages the idea of any similarity between metrical and prose compositions. Shelley sees poetry in relation with society and drama as a mirror of social life. To him, poets are 'the inventors of the arts of life' whereas poetry is 'at once the centre and circumference of knowledge.' Poetry represents the finest art of human civilization and 'poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts on the present, the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'

Charles Lamb's (1775-1830) *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1808) takes us back to the appraisal of Shakespearian drama and uplifts the image of poetry by justifying its beauty and essence. He gave his estimates of both tragedy and comedy, besides paying attention to his contemporary. William Hazlitt (1778-1830) is considered to be a great critic of impressionism, interested in human psyche, 'moral theory and its relationship with human psychology and society.'. He developed the term 'gusto' and said that the goal of art is to contain 'a heightened and perceptive grasp of objective

reality.' In his work *Thoughts on Taste*, he states that 'Genius is the power of producing excellence; taste is the power of perceiving the excellence thus produced in its several sorts and degrees, with all their force, refinement, distinctions, and connections.....impulses of imagination, not antipathy, not indifference to them.' He believed that poetry 'is strictly the language of imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power.' He asserts that the emotional life of the artist has a great say. His major contributions in the field of criticism were *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), *The English Poets* (1818), *The English Comic Writers* (1819), *The Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820), *Table-Talk* (1821-22), *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) and *The Plain Speaker* (1826).

1.2.13 Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) dominated the Victorian age as the most influential mind in theorizing different aspects of literature after Dr Johnson. Arnold was clear-sighted and strong in his opinion when it comes to literary criticism. He laid emphasis on deriving goodness from the classical theorists of literature of ancient Greece and Rome. *Preface* (1853) was Arnold's first attempt in literary prose writing and it is considered a little immature. George Watson described the *preface*, written by the thirty-one-year-old Arnold, as 'oddly stiff and graceless when we think of the elegance of his later prose.' Arnold was a great critic, as observed on the basis of his future works in prose. Stefan Collini in 1988 stated, 'for reasons to do with our own cultural preoccupations as much as with the merits of his writing, the best of his prose has a claim on us today that cannot be matched by his poetry.' George Saintsbury divided Arnold's prose in three periods and puts his *Preface* as 'early literary criticism that begins with his preface to the 1853 edition of his poems and ends with the first series of *Essays in Criticism* (1865).' However, Arnold has been regarded as the first modern critic of substance. Furthermore, S. N. Radhika Laksmi observes 'Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the Victorian poet and critic, was the first modern critic, and could be called the critic's critic, being a champion not only of great poetry, but of literary criticism itself. The purpose of literary criticism, in his view, was 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas,' he has influenced a whole school of critics including new critics such as T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Allen Tate. He was the founder of the sociological school of criticism, and through his touchstone method, introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as two primary tools of criticism. His chief critical texts are *On Translating Homer* (1861), *Essays in Criticism* (1865), *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), *The Function of Criticism* (1865) and *The Study of Poetry* (1880). To him, culture comprises sweetness and light and disinterestedness.

For Arnold, culture was a reflection of a single-minded love for perfection, its desire to reason and manifest God's will. Even while culture insists that it is a machinery of sorts it tries to maintain its distance from getting overpowered by it.

He segregates the people of England into three categories—Barbarians, Philistines and the Populace. Like all great critics, Arnold too feels that poetry 'is the highest and

best fruit of human culture. Poetry is superior to everything; it is superior to science, philosophy and history.' Poetry is greater than religion as well. Arnold's poetry is the 'criticism of life' and that is the end of 'all literature'. According to him the purpose of a poet is to illuminate and inspire. As a realist he has faith in 'truth and high-seriousness.' He appears to be 'practical and descriptive' especially in his later works like *The Function of Criticism* and *Study of Poetry*. He lays stress on following classical literature and theories because they comprise the grand style. The grand style appears in poetry when a noble nature poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject. He suggests the touchstone method for the evaluation of great works of art. It is done by comparing a piece of art of some value with others having good value. He looks back to the past for his support and feels that his age requires more learning and spirit to produce better literature. Above all, he advocates absolute sincerity to his fellow poets.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

15. What was the primary concern of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*?
16. What was Matthew Arnold's focus while creating his ideas of poetry?

1.2.14 Walter Pater

Walter Pater (1839-1894) was the leader of the group who believed in 'art for art's sake.' He was a renowned literary critic, novelist and artist of the nineteenth century—the age which carried deep values for humanity, democracy, intellectualism and the rapid advance of science all of which influenced art and literature. They were worshippers of beauty in a manner articulated by Baudelaire which said 'whether thou comest from Satan or from God, what does it matter?' In this regard art for art's sake was more than a saying – it was a philosophy according to which art was separated from any moral, utilitarian or didactic function.

The group consisted of French masters like Gustave Flaubert, Theophile Gautier, Edmund and Jules de Goncourt, Baudelaire, and Swinburne. Their English propagators were Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and James Whistler. Pater's *Appreciations* (1889) contains *Essay on Style*, *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), *Plato and Platonism* (1893), *Greek Studies* (1895), *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895). His focus was on 'the innate qualities of works of art, in contrast to the prevailing tendency to evaluate them on the basis of their moral and educational value.' Wilde expressed that 'the only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure it is outside the proper sphere of art. To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent.' Pater believed that 'Art should be fresh, new, spontaneous, decorous but not hampered by decorum; gaining sobriety and richness from recognized methods and due authority; but in the truest sense a development, neither a new departure nor a servile imitation.'

1.2.15 Marxist Criticism

The followers of Karl Marx (1818-1883) believed in the historical past in order to shape the present. The disciples of Marx and Frederick Engels, the radical economists,

were called Marxists 'who sought to prove that the mode of production of material life determined the social, political and intellectual processes of life.' Marxist philosophy came to be a pervasive wave on every aspect of art and life by the turn of the century and ushered a new era. Marxism accepts that society and human behaviour are controlled by the economic forces operating at a certain moment of social development i.e. by the modes of production. The principal texts influencing such ideologies were *Critique of Political Economy*, *Communist Manifesto* to name only two of the most influential books. It is often said that the Marxists were propagandists and to them a writer is a 'prey of abstract economic forces.' In this philosophy, man becomes central figure whose emancipation is the most important task. They portray man as a whole with possible perspectives of his life. The chief exponents of Marxist as well as sociological critics were George Lukacs, Christopher Caudwell, Ralph Fox, V. F. Calverton, Vernon Parrington, Michael Gold and Grandville Hicks. The Marxist philosophy aimed to show the relation between common people and a work of art. They emphasized the value, significance and richness of content. They did not believe in mere ideologies and formalistic art.

I. A. Richards

Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893-1979) was the pioneer of psychological criticism in English literature which was scientific in nature. He speaks of analyzing poetry scientifically and speculating over the precise meaning of language, words, images and metaphor. His major critical contributions are *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (1921, with Ogden and Wood), *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923, with Ogden), *Principles of Criticism* (1924), *Science and Poetry* (1925), *Practical Criticism* (1929) and *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936). The modern critics explored the creative process and the psychological journey that a reader undergoes when he goes through a work of art. Man creates literature; and in literature, men voice their experiences. Richards interprets literature with the help of psychology and science. He speaks of two uses of language—scientific and emotive, where the former is used for *reference* and the latter, for emotional expressions: 'A statement may be used for the sake of the *reference*, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude . . . This is known as the *emotive* use of language.' To him, words are significant which create pictures when we read a poem. According to him, a misunderstanding and underestimation of poetry is mainly due to the overestimation of thought. By the same logic, he reflects on the poet's specific choice of words. To quote him, 'we can see still more clearly why does the poet use these words and no others? Not because they stand for a series of thoughts which in themselves are what he is concerned to communicate. He uses these words because the interests which the situation calls into play combine to bring them, just in this form, into his consciousness *as a means of ordering, controlling* and *consolidating* the whole experience, a similar situation leading to the same response.' Therefore, the reason is unknown as to why a poet uses a certain set of words at a certain moment. He says 'genuine poetry will give to the reader who approaches it in the proper manner a response which is as passionate, noble and serene as the experience of the poet, the master of speech because he is the master of experience itself.'

Richards looked for what is valuable in poetry. Moral authorities are not as well backed by beliefs as they were.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

17. What was Walter Pater's concept of art?
18. What was the underlying principle of Marxist criticism?
19. What was unique about I.A. Richard's concept of analysing poetry?

1.2.16 Thomas Stearns Eliot (T.S. Eliot)

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) is the most important man of letters of the modern age. He is an equally celebrated critic as I.A. Richards in the history of English literature. He is known to be the liberator of modern literature, celebrated as the international cultural hero and eulogized as the greatest poet and critic of the twentieth century. 'T.S. Eliot and I. A. Richards' ideas influenced many schools of poetry as well as criticism among which New Criticism is of foremost importance. Eliot's texts under the name of criticism are of three types: the first is *Theoretical Criticism* which is about the principles of literature, poetry, drama and criticism, the second is *Descriptive and Practical Criticism* dealing with the works of individual writers and evaluating their achievements and the third is *Theological Essays*. The important works in the first group are *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1919), *Rhetoric and Dramatic Poetry* (1919), *The Function of Criticism* (1923), *Education and the Classics* (1932), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *After Strange Gods* (1934), *Religion and Literature* (1935), *The Music of Poetry* (1942), *The Classics and the Man of Letters* (1942), *What is Minor Poetry?* (1944), *What is a Classic*? (1944), *The Social Function of Poetry* (1945), *Poetry and Drama* (1951), *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1953) and *The Frontiers of Criticism* (1956). Eliot gave the theories on tradition, objectivity in poetry and impersonality in art. In the second category, he evaluates many poets and schools of poetry amongst which his essays on *The Metaphysical Poets*, *Andrew Marvell*, *Homage to John Dryden*, *Dante*, *Yeats*, *Kipling* and *Ezra Pound* are very important. In the third category, his main essays are *Lancelot Andrews* (1926), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949).

Eliot reminds us of the historical past and says 'tradition is not solely, or primarily the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition. What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rites or our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place.' To him, 'tradition is a matter of a wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour.' It is that makes a writer conscious of his place in contemporary history. It is in this manner that Eliot asserts his historical sense and awareness. Like all classicists, Eliot pleads for disciplining the self. According to him, the progress of an artist is a continuous process involving self-sacrifice to a feeling or thought which is more valuable. He does not allow the creator to vent to his own emotions. Art is an impersonal activity. He believes that 'It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition, to see the best work of our time and the best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with

the same eyes.' It is the sense of tradition or the historical past which will enable the individual to be a perfect critic, as a great critic is 'armed with a powerful glass.' A critic must see literature as a whole and his job is to bring the past back to life.

Eliot kept revising his own ideas and what he said in the early decades of the twentieth century. He stressed on the need of education and a critic should have 'a very highly developed sense of fact.' He asserts that impressionistic criticism may be valuable, but 'If poetry is a form of communication, yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it.' He believes that anyone who aspires to be a poet must be able to experience both beauty and ugliness. In other words, this individual should be able to see beyond beauty, comfort and luxury; to know boredom and encounter the mundane. Eliot believed in the virtues of reality but ascribed to art – the ultimate function of imposing order and credibility.

He believed in reality, but it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us as Virgil left Dante, 'to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no further.'

1.2.17 Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was a French philosopher and was chiefly known for his contributions as a literary theorist who gave the analysis called Deconstruction. He was a post-structuralist associated with the theory of post-modernism. His ideas influenced various subjects such as ontology, epistemology (especially concerning social sciences), ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics and the philosophy of language. He influenced American critics such as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, Barbara Johnson and Harold Bloom. Derrida however denies 'that deconstruction is not a theory unified by any set of consistent rules or procedures, it has been variously regarded as a way of reading, a mode of writing, and, above all, a way of challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, the external world, and of language and meaning.'

The subject of his first three books was the science of writing. The titles were:

(i) *La Voix et le phenomène* (Speech and Phenomena) dealt with Edmund Husserl's theory of signs

(ii) *De la grammatologie* (Of Grammatology) dealt with the science of writing

(iii) *L'Écriture et la différence* (Writing and Difference), comprised essays on Hegel, Freud, and Michel Foucault.

Later on, he wrote *La Dissemination* (Dissemination) (1972) and *Marges de la philosophie* (Margins of Philosophy) (1982). While the former also comprised a long piece on Plato's opinions about writing and sophistry, the latter contained essays on Hegel's semiology and the use of metaphor in philosophy.

His work titled *Positions* (1972), consisted of three interviews with Derrida, which revealed his stand on Marxism, Hegel, and other topics. In 1991, he wrote *Circumfessions*, which was an autobiography highlighting Augustine's Confessions. In 1994, he came up with yet another work called *Spectres de Marx* (Specters of Marx) (1994), where he discusses Marxian legacies. *Deconstruction* is about the functioning of 'logocentrism' in a text wherein the term 'logo' is word that conveys a meaning. According to him, the term in Hebrew, which corresponds to 'logos', means 'to speak'. The Hebrew term he said was used to refer to God's self-revelation.

In addition, as per Hebrew culture, once the word was uttered, it was believed to have a real and meaningful existence. The term 'logos' and concept thereof may have partly originated from the Greek thinker Heraclitus and the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. Simply put, it could stand for a statement, science, saying or discourse.

LOGOS

Language Reality

Signifier 1 -*a*- Signified 1 ———*b*——— Object 1

Signifier 2 – Signified 2 ——————— Object 2

Signifier 3 – Signified 3 ——————— Object 3

Signifier 4 – Signified 4 ——————— Object 4

Ad Infinitum

Disturbance of any kind in this arrangement or system may result in it being disorganized. In case the order does disintegrate, the process will take several centuries. According to Derrida, when one signifier is substituted for another, it is called 'metaphor'. Therefore, Derrida believed that language has metaphorical power. The corresponding equivalent in modern Western society may be concepts like freedom and democracy. According to Derrida, these terms or concepts have complete authority, and can therefore not be questioned or examined. Deconstruction attempts to show how logocentrism operates, in all its forms. It tries to retrieve them within the arena of language and text, within the area where they can relate to other concepts.

Therefore, the main function of deconstruction is to restore language within the links of the different terms, which have traditionally ruled Western thought, that is, the links between thought and reality, self and world, subject and object. In part, this thought is affected by Ferdinand de Saussure, critic from Switzerland. According to Derrida, 'il n'y a pas de horstexte,' or 'there is nothing outside the text,' means that the characteristics of language mentioned above, which form 'textuality' are all encompassing. Textuality determines all interpretative operations.'

Derrida's assertion is that resistance between say sense and intellect, or body and soul, or master and slave, male and female, inside and outside, centre and margin, 'oppositions, such as those between intellect and sense, soul and body, master and slave, male and female, inside and outside, or even centre and margin are in no way representative of a state of equivalence between the concerned two terms. In fact, such resistance is a 'violent hierarchy' where one term has been traditionally thought to be lower or inferior, in gestures encompassing a host of religious, social, and political valencies.

As per Derrida's practice, if a text is read deconstructively, it will be termed a many-sided and complex project. Generally speaking, it would try to show logocentric

operations in the text by concentrating on a detailed and close reading of the language of the text; the employment of presuppositions or transcendental signifies; whether the text relies on binary oppositions; whether it contradicts itself; bottlenecks, if any; the manner in which it offers resistance to free play and brings about closure. In this way, deconstruction, as its name (derived from the term 'Destruktion' by Heidegger) suggests, examines the characteristics that play a significant role in the construction of the text and analyse them to their roots or very bases.

Check Your Progress

20. Name the three works of criticism developed by T.S. Eliot.
21. What is the significance of the metaphor as per Derrida?

ACTIVITY

Browse the internet and conduct a detailed search on the main aspect of literary criticism as given by each of the mentioned critics.

Did You Know?

Literary critic has often overlooked contributions from women authors. Feminist literary criticism challenges language itself and re-evaluates the ways in which literature is read. Prominent feminist literary critics include Isobel Armstrong, Nancy Armstrong, Barbara Bowen, Jennifer DeVere Brody, Laura Brown, Margaret Anne Doody, Eva Figes, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Anotgnette Kolodny, Anne McClintock, Anne K. Mellor, Nancy K. Miller, Toril Moi, Felicity Nussbaum, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Hortense Spillers, Gayatri Spivak, Irene Tayler and Marina Warner.

1.3 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Literary criticism is a vast panorama of debates and discussions.
- In England, the genre of literary criticism was revived during the Renaissance when the writers and poets looked back to the revival of old classics and came to imbibe their style and emancipated the world by their learning and translations of the Greek and Roman classics.
- Every age and century paved way for improvisations and gave birth to new ideas.
- Aristotle remained a sole controller of the golden age which still continues to impress the modern theorists.
- There is a long trail of great voices till we reach the post-modernist literary theorists where we mark that criticism is more of a science than literature.
- Aristotle was an eminent ancient Greek philosopher and rhetorician having a wide range of knowledge of subjects like physics, poetry, logic, music, drama, metaphysics, politics, governance, biology, zoology, linguistics, ethics and many more.
- Aristotle was a disciple of Plato and the teacher of Alexander the Great.
- Aristotle's contribution to the realm of philosophy has been enormous, like his teacher Plato, thereby creating a platform for subjects like politics, literature, aesthetics, science, ethics and logic to flourish.
- Aristotle was a major pillar in the field of Western philosophy whose learned and accurate ideas shaped most of the critical theories of art and aesthetics which enlightened forthcoming generations of critics.
- Aristotle had a rather quiet political milieu compared to that of his master Plato which helped him in analyzing and finding out solutions to the questions that his master had raised.
- Aristotle's analysis of literature was sincere and scientific. He speaks against those who lay down precepts in writing.
- Aristotle was considered a great master in the days of Greek and Roman civilization. It was during the Renaissance that his true genius as a literary critic and a law-giver in the realm of poetry was explored by the modern thinkers.
- Cassius Longinus (213-273 AD) is chiefly known for his philosophical treatise *On the Sublime*.
- *On the Sublime* is a valuable literary piece of rhetorical criticism which is highly important because of its ideas of art.
- *On the Sublime* is an important source as it imparts great information about the Greek and the Roman rhetoricians to the modern age.
- *On the Sublime* is often viewed as a beautiful combination of classicism and romanticism where the word sublime embodies the authenticity of unfathomable depth: 'it is well to keep it (sublime) with a very careful preliminary explanation that the Longinian sublime is not sublimity in its narrower sense, but all that deserves the highest critical encomium (standard) either in prose or poetry.'
- *On the Sublime* not only incorporates a fresh and wide-ranging approach to literature but also propounds novel mediums of appreciation.
- The period of Longinus was a phase of decadence in Greece. It was in this period that learning passed on from Greece to Rome when the text of the great Aristotle moved from Athens to Rome through General Marius in 85 BC.
- Quintus Horatius Flacus (65-8 BC), educated in Rome and Athens, came to be known as an acclaimed poet and critic.
- Horatius' important text *Ars Poetica* or the *Epistle to Pisos* deals with subject-matter that is Poesis; technical aspects of poetry that is Poema; and in the last part, he speaks how a poet should be educated as well as what are his responsibilities including discussions on creed and spiritual inclinations.
- Dante Alighieri (1265-1321AD) was a known Florentine poet and law-giver in literature whose chief contributions to literature are *Vita Nuova* (autobiography), *Convivio*, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, and *Commedia* among other works.
- The period between Longinus and Dante is called the Dark Age: the age of Christian ascendancy when the art of poetry was looked down upon. Therefore this age also lags behind in the advancement of literary criticism.

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- The chief critics of the Dark Age were Horace and Quintilian who believed that literature was meant for the educated class; thus, segregating the common people from the educated elites.
- Dante serves an irrefutable link between the Dark Age and the Renaissance combining 'the pastness of past and the presentness of present.'
- Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) is a major figure in the Renaissance literary criticism and a promoter of the neo-classical critical trend.
- Scaliger's work *Poetics* (1561) was published three years after his demise to establish him permanently as one of the greatest scholars and pioneer critics of all times. The text reflects on 'language its origin, uses, end and cultivation.'
- Scaliger studied the importance of human speech. Speech services 'the arts are cultivated and the claims of wisdom intercede with men for men.'
- According to Scaliger's views, the foundation of poetry is imitation, but 'the end is the giving of instruction in pleasurable form, for poetry teaches, and does not simply amuse.'
- Scaliger distinguished tragedy as a form different from comedy 'in the rank of characters, in the nature of the action, and in the outcome.'
- Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), an eminent critic of the Renaissance, was a great friend of Edmund Spenser to whom he dedicated his *Shepherd's Calendar.*
- A known humanitarian, Sidney had a very short but active life. Owing to his goodness of character, he had the popularity of receiving over two hundred elegies after his sad and abrupt demise.
- Sidney wrote *Apology for Poetry* in defence of Stephan Gosson's anti-Renaissance proclamation *The Abuse of Poetry*.
- Ben Jonson (1573-1637) was one of the most prolific playwrights and critics of the Elizabethan age of English letters. Three different critical trends emerged at that time: amongst them, the idealistic trend being the first was represented by Sir Philip Sidney, the second trend evaluating poetry technically encompassed critics like Webbe, Puttenham and Daniel, and the third type of critics were those who capacitated the Renaissance element of humanism. They were realists and classicists with an open mind. Jonson belonged to this group.
- William Wordsworth was the leading voice among the elder Romantics and a literary theorist of excellence.
- As a critic Wordsworth laid stress on imagination, poetic diction and the origin of poetry.
- Wordsworth's book *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1800 onwards) bears the impacts of Romantic criticism which is sharply distinguished from earlier dominant neo-classical traits.
- *Lyrical Ballads* raised a wall between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it dated a new era as it served to make forever intelligible the dividing line between two regions in criticism that might otherwise have seemed to flow into one another.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is considered to be one of the most eminent poets and literary theorists of the Romantic Age.

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- Coleridge is held to be as high as Aristotle or Longinus in his significance.
- Coleridge has been seen as the forerunner of the modern science of semantics.
- In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge theorizes poetry and imagination as significant and complex processes. The first part of the book deals with his metaphysical and philosophical concepts.
- Coleridge gives his views about beauty and in the second part, i.e. the thirteenth and the fourteenth chapters are his major theoretical outpourings.
- While the thirteenth chapter deals with his ideas on imagination and fancy; the fourteenth chapter comprises his views on poetry.
- Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792-1822) critical text *Defence of Poetry* (1821) displays the romantic values in the virtues of poetic creation; he speaks against the neo-classical trend in this treatise which was written in reply to Sir Thomas Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820).
- Peacock said that poetry was on its decline.
- Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) dominated the Victorian age as the most influential mind in theorizing different aspects of literature after Dr Johnson.
- Arnold was clear-sighted and strong in his opinion when it comes to literary criticism.
- Arnold laid emphasis on deriving goodness from the classical theorists of literature of ancient Greece and Rome.
- *Preface* (1853) was Arnold's first attempt in literary prose.
- Walter Pater (1839-1894) was the leader of the group who believed in 'art for art's sake.'
- Pater was a renowned literary critic, novelist and artist of the nineteenth century—the age which carried deep values for humanity, democracy, intellectualism and the rapid advance of science all of which influenced art and literature.
- The followers of Karl Marx (1818-1883) believed in the historical past in order to shape the present.
- The disciples of Marx and Frederick Engels, the radical economists, were called Marxists 'who sought to prove that the mode of production of material life determined the social, political and intellectual processes of life.'
- Marxist philosophy came to be a pervasive wave on every aspect of art and life by the turn of the century and ushered a new era.
- Marxism accepts that society and human behaviour are controlled by the economic forces operating at a certain moment of social development i.e. by the modes of production.
- I. A. Richards (1893-1979) was the pioneer of psychological criticism in English literature which was scientific in nature.
- Richards speaks of analyzing poetry scientifically and speculating over the precise meaning of language, words, images and metaphor.
- T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) is the most important man of letters in the modern age.
- Eliot is an equally celebrated critic as I.A. Richards in the history of English literature.

- Eliot is known to be the liberator of modern literature, celebrated as the international cultural hero and eulogized as the greatest poet and critic of the twentieth century who himself is 'the unity of his work.'
- T.S. Eliot and I. A. Richards' ideas influenced many schools of poetry as well as criticism among which New Criticism is of foremost importance.
- Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was a French philosopher and was chiefly known for his contributions as a literary theorist who gave the analysis called Deconstruction.
- Derrida was a post-structuralist associated with the theory of post-modernism.
- Derrida's ideas influenced various subjects such as ontology, epistemology (especially concerning social sciences), ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics and the philosophy of language.
- Derrida influenced American critics such as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, Barbara Johnson and Harold Bloom. Derrida however denies 'that deconstruction is not a theory unified by any set of consistent rules or procedures, it has been variously regarded as a way of reading, a mode of writing, and, above all, a way of challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, the external world, and of language and meaning.'

1.4 KEY TERMS

- **Criticism:** Analysis of a work of art
- **Emancipate:** Free from social, political, or legal restraints
- **Imitation:** Copy of an original; imitating
- **Imbue:** Fill or inspire with (ideals or principles)
- **Imbibe:** Absorb
- **Contemporaneous:** Happening at the same time
- **Ludicrous:** Ridiculous
- **Mimesis:** To imitate
- **Incapacitate:** To injure
- **Sublime:** Uplifting/awe-inspiring
- **Repertoire:** Range

1.5 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses his views on poetry and drama, based on the concepts of Greek art; wherein he analyses subjects such as 'the spirit of literature, poetic truth, difference between art and morality, and the study of the end of art.'
2. In Aristotle's view, comedy is lighter in its treatment of the subject as it traces human follies and weakness.
3. *On the Sublime* is a valuable literary piece of rhetorical criticism which is highly important because of its ideas of art. The work is often viewed as a beautiful combination of classicism and romanticism where the word sublime embodies the authenticity of unfathomable depth: 'it is well to keep it (sublime) with a very careful preliminary explanation that the Longinian sublime is not sublimity in its narrower sense, but all that deserves the highest critical encomium (standard) either in prose or poetry.'
4. The absence of Aristotle came to witness a great depression in the field of criticism where after his death, mostly, critics were concerned with technicality, grammar and rhetoric. It was a phase of decadence in Greece. It was in this period that learning passed on from Greece to Rome when the text of the great Aristotle moved from Athens to Rome through General Marius in 85 BC. He believed that poetry is meant to instruct and delight and stressed on common sense.
5. The period between Longinus and Dante is called the Dark Age: the age of Christian ascendancy when the art of poetry was looked down upon.
6. Julius Caesar Scaliger's primary concern in the sphere of literary criticism was the importance of human speech.
7. Sidney wrote *Apology for Poetry* in defence of Stephan Gosson's anti-Renaissance proclamation *The Abuse of Poetry*. His *Defence of Poesy* (1595) is the most characteristic representative of Renaissance critical writing.
8. Ben Jonson believed poetry is the finest of all arts: 'the pen is more noble than the pencil. Like Aristotle, he follows the theory of imitation, but also blends the beauty of imagination into it which together makes poetry the most beautiful of all art forms.
9. John Dryden (1631-1700) established the neo-classical trend of English criticism and remained a pioneer critic, translator, playwright, poet and satirist for the entire restoration period.
10. For Pope, nature represented humanity and said that one must submit to the forces of nature.
11. Addison inspires us to study imagination, mind and memories in the following ways:
    - Greatness or sublimity, 'Which frees the mind from the restraint and lifts it to a state of transport.'
    - The new or uncommon, 'in which surprise or novelty increases interest.'
12. Dr Samuel Johnson was strictly against the excesses of romantic exuberance. His approach is natural; his prose logical and lucid. He would castigate those whom he would think fit to deserve censure. Johnson believed that literature should depict 'general nature': a poet should essentially 'divest himself of the prejudices of his agent country.'
13. The three areas which were important for William Wordsworth as a critic were imagination, poetic diction and the origin of poetry.
14. The problems of poetry became for Coleridge, sometimes, interesting as problems with a structure of their own. They ceased to be mere voids waiting to be filled. The interest shifted from the answers to the questions and with that a new era of criticism began.

15. Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792-1822) critical text *Defence of Poetry* (1821) displays the romantic values in the virtues of poetic creation; he speaks against the neo-classical trend in this treatise which was written in reply to Sir Thomas Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820).
16. In his poetry, Matthew Arnold laid emphasis on deriving goodness from the classical theorists of literature of ancient Greece and Rome.
17. Walter Pater believed in 'art for art's sake'. This according to him was the appreciation of 'the innate qualities of works of art, in contrast to the prevailing tendency to evaluate them on the basis of their moral and educational value.'
18. The underlying principle of Marxist criticism was that the mode of production of material life determined the social, political and intellectual processes of life.
19. I.A. Richards (1893-1979) was the pioneer of psychological criticism in English literature which was scientific in nature. He speaks of analyzing poetry scientifically and speculating over the precise meaning of language, words, images and metaphor.
20. T.S. Eliot's three works of croticism were *Theoretical Criticism Descriptive and Practical Criticism* and *Theological Essays*.
21. As per Derrida, the substitution of one signifier for the other is called a 'metaphor'. According to him, language possesses metaphorical capacities.

1.6 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Which figure served as the link between the Dark Age and the Renaissance?
2. Comment on Dante's trend of using the native vernacular as the language of poetry and criticism.
3. Identify the style in which the *Apology of Poetry* was written.
4. Write a short note on the contribution of Coleridge to the discussion of poetry.
5. Comment on Arnold as the first modern critic of substance.
6. Explain 'art for art's sake'.
7. Recapitulate the essence of Marxist philosophy.
8. Give a brief argument on the relevance of history in T.S. Eliot's concept of poetry.
9. Explain the theory of deconstruction.
10. Explain the importance of the metaphor in Derrida's conceptualization of language.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the importance of rhetoric in Aristotle critical views.
2. Comment on the intervention of Horace post the Aristotelian era.
3. Write a short note on John Dryden as a literary critic.

4. What is the essence of Pope's theory of literary criticism?
5. Discuss Eliot as the most important critic of the modernist trends during the modern age.

1.7 FURTHER READING

Blamires, H., *A History of Literary Criticism*, Macmillan, London, 1991.

Hall, Vermon, *A Short History of Literary Criticism*, The Merlin Press Ltd., London, 1963.

UNIT 2 ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

NOTES

Structure

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 Classical Literature
2.3 Plato: A Brief Biographical Sketch
2.4 Aristotle: A Brief Biographical Sketch
2.5 Aristotle's Theory of Imitation
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2.8 The Six Elements of Tragedy
  2.8.1 Plot (Myth)
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2.9 Catharsis or Pleasure Proper to Tragedy
2.10 Aristotelian View of Mimesis
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2.12 A Review of Aristotle's Poetics
2.13 Summary
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2.15 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.16 Questions and Exercises
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2.0 INTRODUCTION

The difference between modern and ancient literature lies in the fact that the ancients could not store their work of art due to which they had to perform and respond at the same time. Due to these limitations, the ancients emphasized closeness between the reader and the writer. The imaginative creation of the ancient Greeks display some concepts which are different from their modern counterparts. An individual artist, poet or playwright could not do away with the traditions laid down by their predecessors. In this way, novelty or individual style had little scope. Given that new ideas had to become part of the tradition already existing, highly individualistic views and ideas were not welcome in ancient society. The credit of originality of ideas and inspiration was assigned to the muses. The artist was merely an imitator of the muses who followed their lead and produced only that which was good. As such, there was no room for innovation and experimentation. The advocates of 'art for art's sake' would have been shocked in those times. The creative artist, then, was supposed to please by emotional arousal.

Aristotle was considered to be the first person who formulated the study of 'logic' and his teachings had a profound influence on many disciplines such as rhetoric, physics, politics, ethics and notably on the physiological studies and linguistics. Aristotle

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was the first scientific literary critic and his literary criticism was made available to us in *Poetics*. It is a short treatise of twenty-six chapters and forty-five pages. It is not very coherent and its structure is not clear. It provides Aristotle's views on epic poetry and tragic drama. It provides a lot of information about Greek literature. The *Poetics* is chiefly concerned with tragedy, which is regarded as the highest poetic form. In it, Aristotle has formulated the basic principles of dramatic art, which cannot be overlooked.

In this unit, you will learn about this period of English literature which was represented by a more traditional and rigid outlook towards art. This was a period where new ideas and individualism were not encouraged and artists were seen more as an extension of their muses.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand classical criticism with special reference to Plato and Aristotle, their lives, works and ideas
- Analyse Plato's views towards artistic representation and his theories of imitation and mimesis
- Analyse Aristotle's reason for departing from Plato's basic notion with regard to artistic representation and mimesis
- Appreciate Aristotle's view on tragedy and analyse the six elements of tragedy
- Critically appreciate the way music was used in ancient Greece and study the concept of catharsis

2.2 CLASSICAL LITERATURE

A general perception prevails, that anything which is in accordance with the ancient Greek and Roman literature is classical. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'classical' as relating to or influenced by the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome1. Classics are works of literature which has stood the test of time. In the field of literary criticism, the work of Plato and Aristotle in Greece, and Horace and Longinus in Rome formed the basis of classical criticism. Now the question arises as to what is criticism. Common man's perception is that criticism is a kind of judgement. R.A Scot James has written that every artistic creation – whether a poem or a painting – involves the artist's criticism of life. Literary criticism, however, is different from the artist's criticism of life because the poet creates whereas the critic examines and appreciates what has been created.

2.3 PLATO: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Plato expresses his views on art and poetry in Book X of the *The Republic*. His main concern is with constructing an ideal state and the ideal citizen. He was a firm believer in the reality created by God. For him, the true reality was that of abstraction. He is against imitation because the poet and the painter imitate the appearance of the 'Idea' and not the 'idea' itself. In this endeavour, they cannot help in the realization of truth, which according to Plato, is the ultimate aim of the ideal citizen. The poet or the painter tried to imitate the appearance of the 'abstract' or the 'idea' and was, therefore, thrice removed from reality. For him, the 'idea' alone is real and painters are simply images of that 'idea'.

The following lines are taken from *The Republic*, Book X, 605.

> Then we can fairly take the poet and set him beside the painter. He resembles him both because his works have a low degree of truth and because he appeals to a low element in the mind. We are therefore quite right to refuse to admit to a properly run state because he stirs up and encourages and strengthens the lower element in the mind . . . .

An analysis of Plato's argument enables us to understand that he regarded poetry inferior because it was a hindrance in the making of an ideal State. Further, it was simply an imitation of an imitation.

> Poetry has the same effect on us when it represents sex and anger, and the other desires and feelings of pleasure and pain, which normally accompany our actions. It feeds them when they ought to be starved and makes them control us when we ought, in the interest of our own welfare and happiness, to control them. (Republic, Book X, 606).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is classical literature?
2. What is literary criticism?
3. Analyse Plato's views on poetry.

2.4 ARISTOTLE: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Aristotle practised the dissociation of art from morality, the first in ancient Greece. He examined the nature of *poiesis* and established that poetry was not a hindrance in the making of an ideal citizen. He formulated aesthetic principles to which poetry must conform and proved that poetry was a true and serious work of art.

Although Aristotle was Plato's pupil, he differed from his master in many ways. His approach was more scientific than Plato's. In his pursuit of an objective analysis of things, he regarded 'mimesis' as a healthy exercise and not as something which was a mere copying of the truth. Instead of assigning an inferior status to poetry, Aristotle suggested that poetry is concerned with a higher truth. Poetry is an imitation of life, and not a mindless replication of day to day activities. The poet tries to present life with its universal significance. As a result, the poet describes life not as it is but as it should be. Next, the function of the poet is not to enumerate the events that have taken place but to describe what might happen or what is probable. He also distinguishes between poetry and history and assigns greater importance to poetry which deals with the universal truths than history which is concerned with particular facts. Poetry,

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therefore, is more philosophical and of greater importance than history. Since poetry deals with the universal; it deals with what is probable. The poet lends a charm and universality even to historical facts and personages. In a theatrical performance, the characters need to be true copies of their historical counterparts. The poet can either give some more attributes or remove some according to the need of the plot. But in this endeavour, he definitely imparts universality to his characters. According to Aristotle, the psychological peculiarities of some characters might not be appropriate for presentation on stage or drama. He believes that the poetry should reveal psychological generalities and not peculiarities. Poetry deals with the universal and not the accidental. To serve this purpose the poet must choose only those aspects of life which are representative of life. The ability to see what is of universal relevance is a prerequisite for being a poet. Anything which is arbitrary or peculiar is not fit for poetic treatment as it loses the element of universality. This is Aristotle's answer to Plato's argument that all imitation is futile as it is thrice removed from reality and poetry is of low..... as it also imitates.

Aristotle also propounded that 'probable impossibilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities' and that 'a convincing impossibility is preferable to a non-convincing possibility'.

[*Poetics* chap.IX, p 68, chap.25, p 73, trans. T S Dorsch].

Yet another contribution of Aristotle was the unities of time, place and action which were proposed in accordance with the limitations of the audience. Later on, during the neo-classical era, these unities became famous as the three unities. His view on 'Catharsis in tragedy' requires a distinctive emotional response (arousal of fear and pity) in the audience which led to the proper purgation of human emotions.

Aristotle maintains that each genre of poetry has its own characteristics whether it is epic or tragedy and comedy. His attempt is democratic in doing so, although, he ends up considering tragedy superior to epic. In a tragedy, the tragic hero is of immense importance as he is a man of status and his actions should be able to produce the desired emotional effect, i.e. arouse fear and pity in the spectators. His fall is the cause of some error. The desirable hero is a man remarkable for neither virtue nor vice, for neither justice nor depravity, but a man whose fall is due to some error or weakness, some hamartia (Ibid, chap.13).

Now we know that the two great masters of classicism, Plato and Aristotle: the teacher and the pupil – have propounded contrasting views about the poet and poetry. While Plato's strong reservation against poetry is rooted in his bias for a metaphysical and utopian society, Aristotle has left no stone unturned in establishing the dignity and relevance of poetry and tragedy. Moreover, Aristotle's ideas on these topics constitute the beginning of literary criticism in the classical era and he becomes the father of literary criticism.

Aristotle's Poetics

Aristotle bestrode antiquity like an intellectual colossus. According to J. S. Barnes, 'No man before him had contributed as much to learning. No man after him could hope to rival his achievement.' The Homeric poems written by him reveal a society grappling with interpretative problems, and pious Greeks (Socrates, the best among them as seen in Plato's *Apology*), who blindly believed that oracles did not lie. The Sophists of the fifth century further complicated things by probing into epistemological questions. In brief, in the second half of the fifth century, a crisis had been created in the study of philosophy and the public life of Greeks. This state was equally disturbing for literary criticism, in the manner that the traditionally accepted terms of reference—especially moral or evaluative terms—could be extended to cover almost any kind of self-interested behaviour. In this state of dry despair, it was Socrates who made a new beginning with his consistent demand for definition—Plato joined the Socratic circle around the age of twenty. Later, Aristotle, at the age of seventeen joined Plato's Academy and enriched the Greek philosophical and literary critical tradition with his incisive critique of Plato.

In the Academy, Aristotle learnt that '...knowledge must be systematic and unified. Its structure is given by logic, and its unity rests at the bottom of the study that is related to the nature of being and existence. It is essentially explanatory. It pours into deep philosophical problems'. He divided knowledge into three major categories, which are as follows:

1. Productive knowledge, which is concerned with making things such as rhetoric and poetics
2. Practical knowledge/Science, which is focussed on action, such as politics and ethics
3. Theoretical science whose function is to explore truths like philosophy or theology, mathematics and physics

Aristotle's *Poetics* deals primarily with the productive knowledge, as well as that of the theoretical besides dealing with epistemological questions. From the point of view of dramatic theory, it consists of many distinct elements, some of which are mentioned below:

- Mimesis
- Different genres
  - o Epic
  - o Tragedy
    - – Plot
    - – Character
    - – Thought
    - – Diction
    - – Melody
    - – Spectacle
  - o Comedy
- *Catharsis*

The main themes in Aristotle's *Poetics* are:

- Art in general as imitation and how different forms of art differ in means of imitation
- Difference in object of imitation
- Difference in manner of imitation

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- Lyrical poetry and tragedy
- Comedy and epic poetry
- Tragedy and its parts
- Plot
  - o Beginning, middle and end
  - o Magnitude
  - o Organic wholeness of plot
- Unity of subject
- Poetry is imitation of what ought to be
- Simple and complex plots
- Elements of complex plot
  - o Peripeteia
  - o Discovery
  - o Suffering
- Divisions of tragedy
- Protagonist or the tragic hero
  - o Misfortune
  - o Change of fortune
- Effects of tragedy
- Character requirement
- Discovery
- Construction of plot and diction
- Complication and denouement
- Diction and thought
  - o Rhetoric
- Diction
  - o Parts of speech
- Diction
  - o Metaphor
- Qualities of diction
  - o Clarity
  - o Distinction
- Epic
- Nature of 'Representation of Reality' and 'Evaluation of the Poetic Art'
- Comparison of epic and tragedy

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. What were the contrasting views of poetry given by Aristotle and Plato?
5. What are the three famous unities propagated by Aristotle?

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2.5 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF IMITATION

> Epic poetry and tragedy, comedy also and dithyrambic poetry and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation. They differ, however, from one another in three respects – the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct.
>
> (*Poetics* by Aristotle –http://www.thefreedictionary.com/lyre)

With the acute power of analysis and reasoning, Aristotle has tried to redefine art and poetry and assigned the highest place to tragedy, among all the genres. Earlier Aristotle's epic poetry was regarded as the most sublime genre. However, Aristotle has given very strong reasons to support the cause of tragedy as superior to epic: 'And superior it is, because it has all the epic elements – it may use the epic meter – with music and spectacular effects as important accessories and they produce the most vivid pleasures.' (*Poetics*: XXVI).

Aristotle begins his *Poetics* with detailed discussions on imitation. He argues that all genres of literature or dithyrambic poetry are 'modes of imitation'. All these forms of literature are distinct from each other because mimesis is achieved differently. In each case either the 'medium' or 'object' or the 'manner or mode' of imitation is different.

Aristotle then goes on to define that in arts imitation is made possible by rhythm, language and harmony. The painter uses colour and form to produce imitation whereas voice is used by the musician for this very purpose.

As we have already seen the concept of mimesis has been mentioned by Plato in *Republic*. But the contempt which he shows for poets undergoes transformation in the hands of his pupil. According to Aristotle the meaning of mimesis is imitation or copying but with a difference. In place of ever elusiveness of Plato's idea or permanent reality, Aristotle argues that the artist's creation incorporates certain universal elements and imparts learning and pleasure. In *Poetics* Aristotle says:

> Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of the living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. (*Poetics*: IV).

Learning according to Aristotle, has always given a lot of pleasure to men in general. '*Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring……*'

(*Poetics*: IV).

He thus establishes that imitation is a natural action of human beings and in doing so the artist explores the Truth. Herein we find points of differences between Plato's and Aristotle's views on mimesis. Imitation was a transcendental reality for the former whereas for the latter it was a natural phenomenon. Rather, Aristotle goes beyond this and maintains that Art helps Nature in the attainment of perfection in Art and the artist strives to 'imitate things as they ought to be.' (*Poetics* XXXV). The

phrase 'ought to be' is very significant as it distinguishes between what is and what *ought to be*. Many critics feel that Aristotle's creative artist imitates nature with great care. He picks the permanent and the essential features and discards the near essentials and transitory features. Over the centuries, Aristotle's view of the art and imitating nature has been analyzed and interpreted variously. The Renaissance, the Restoration and the nineteenth century critics have sought inspiration from this theory.

2.6 THE MEDIA OF MIMESIS

Aristotle begins his discussion of mimesis with the fact that epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, flute or lyres are all products of imitation. The difference lies in the mode, manner and object of imitation that results in different forms of poetry. And the three medias which are used in isolation or in varied combinations are rhythm, harmony and language.

> For as there are persons, who by conscious art or mere habit, imitate and represent various objects through the medium of colour and form, or again by the voice, so in the art above mentioned, taken as a whole, the imitation is produced by rhythm, language or 'harmony' either singly or combined.
>
> (*Poetics*: I).

After discussing the three mediums through which the imitation is possible, Aristotle talks about the different combinations used by the artists in different art forms:

> Thus in the music of the flute and of the lyre, 'harmony' and the 'rhythm' are employed; also in other arts, such as that of the shepherd's pipe, which are essentially similar to these. In dancing the rhythm alone is used without harmony for event dancing imitates character, emotions, and action by rhythmical movement.
>
> (*Poetics*: I).

The painter of the sculptor uses colour and other forms but in the performing arts such as dance, music and theatre rhythm, harmony and language are used. Rhythm and notes are used in flute and lyre whereas only rhythm is used in dance.

Just as music and dance employ harmony and rhythm (either alone or together); the literary artist imitates character, emotion and action through language:

> There is another art which imitates by means of language alone and that either in prose or verse – which verse again, either combine different meters or consists of but one kind – but this has hitherto been without a name.
>
> (*Poetics*: I).

Both prose and verse imitation takes place through language only. In verse, the poet is free to combine different meters or use any one. However, all the three means, i.e., rhythm, language and harmony are employed in dithyrambic and elegiac poetry and tragedy and comedy. The only difference between in dithyrambic and nomic poetry is that all the three elements are used in combination whereas in tragedy and comedy, they are used simultaneously. There are again, some arts which employ all the above mentioned means namely rhythm, tune and meter. These are dithyrambic, and nomic poetry as well as tragedy and comedy. The difference between the two is

while dithyrambic poetry uses all available combinations, tragedy and comedy uses only one at a time. The rules formulated for tragedy and comedy can easily be applied to all other forms of drama. The way in which the three elements work in drama does not find mention in *Poetics*.

We can gather some information about the use of language from this discussion of language as one of the six elements of tragedy. We will discuss this at large while discussing Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Here it would suffice to say that lexis or language in theatre can be categorized into two parts: the spoken word and the sung word. Since the spoken word was not commonly used in ancient theatre, lexis meant a studied variation in pitch which could range from intoned speech to a beautiful song. The two aspects of language are: dramatic discourse and its linguistic and phonological aspects. Aristotle was least concerned about the former and talked about the latter at great length. Harmony (melopoiia) and rhythm are hardly touched upon in *Poetics*.

To sum up we can say that Aristotle gave a noble idea of mimesis to artistic creation although he thought that it was false imitation of the real world. Aristotle improvised it by saying that it is the most natural way of learning and creating a better world for ourselves.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

6. What is the meaning of dithyrambic poetry?
7. As per Aristotle, what are the two aspects of language in theatre?

2.7 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY

Unlike modern theatre, Greek theatre was not secular. In essence, Greek theatre has always been rooted in the fundamental processes of life. Plays were usually performed during festivals to remember gods and ancestors. Theatrical performances and presentation techniques were such that it would suit the spirit of revelry and delight. Greek drama has always treated dance and music as an integral part of theatrical performances. No drama representations could be possible without them and the arousal of the strong aesthetic of emotion was later on realized as Kath-arsis (catharsis). Since modern theatres were not available, theatrical performances took place in temples like Asklepios at Epidauros.

As we know western aesthetics and criticism has always drawn inspiration and started debates from Aristotle. It is therefore essential to locate the focal points of Aristotle's theories. *Poetics* opens with an introduction to mimesis. Imitation is an instinct which enables artistic creation and results in aesthetic pleasure. Secondly Aristotle suggests that how the various genres of poetry are different from each other. Next, he throws light on the six elements of the tragedy of which plot and character are the most touched upon. The other four elements of tragedy are: thought, language, music and spectacle. Last but not the least is catharsis or proper purgation of human emotions which form the basis of western critical tradition.

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Let us begin with Aristotle's definition of tragedy: 'tragedy then is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude. In language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions.'

To understand his views on tragedy, we can divide it as a) the imitation of action, b) which is serious, carries magnitude and is complete in itself, c) its language has all the artistic accessories to make it beautiful, however, these ornaments are used alternatively, one at a time, d) the genre is drama and not a narrative, e) the purpose of incidents is to arouse fear and pity, whereby to provide an outlet for these emotions. He tries to explain that 'language embellished' means it should have rhythm, harmony and song. The phrase 'several kinds in separate parts' suggests that verse should be used in some parts and in others songs can be used to produce the desired effect. This definition incorporates the nature of tragedy and the function of it. The first four points throw light on the nature of tragedy – it is an invitation, an action must be serious, language should be an artistic accomplishment and it should not be in narrative form - whereas the last point indicates arousal of pity or fear, i.e., the function of tragedy. Aristotle accepts the imitative theory of art not in the philosophical sense of the term. He maintains that the artist imitates both the outer reality and an idea and ideal in his mind. The essence of Aristotle's tragedy is 'the artificial reproduction of things in real life – recreation by re-creation' (Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's *Poetics* by F L Lucas, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1957). By imitation is meant 'men in action'. The nature of action has to be 'serious'. By 'serious' he means something which does not include comic elements. The mixture of the tragic and comic was known in ancient Greece. A play could either be a tragedy or a comedy. It could not use both the elements.

There comes the phrase 'certain magnitude' which hints at the size and proportion of the tragedy. Any object has to be in the right size and shape to be called beautiful. Beauty is lost if it is too small or too big. In the absence of modern facilities, plays had to be of such size and effects that they could be seen and understood at once. However, Aristotle does not ascribe any fixed size for the plot. (We will have the detailed discussion of plot while discussing the six elements of tragedy).

By 'complete' Aristotle refers to the proper building of the story, i.e., a suitable beginning; its development with a proper middle and then a gradual completion (end). The beginning should be such that it has something after it, and the end should be such that which has a lot before it but nothing after it. A tragedy has to be dramatic in form. Aristotle feels that it should be distinct from narrative, although today a novel or a story or even an epic is dramatically presented on stage. But when Aristotle says that a tragedy has to be different from a narrative, he means that tragedy has to be in dialogue form as it is to be enacted. The tragic sentiments are pity and fear and function of tragedy is to rouse them. The tragic hero is neither utterly deprived nor pre-eminently virtuous. The tragic hero is basically good and his misfortune is not because of any moral flaw but due to an error of judgement. The feeling of pity and fear are aroused among the audience because his misfortune is undeserved. Then there is a universal appeal in the character of the tragic hero. In other words, the audience should be able to identify with the tragic hero while pitying him for his fate.

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2.8 THE SIX ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY

Six elements mentioned earlier in the previous sections work together in the formation of an organic whole – the tragedy. They are intertwined in such a manner that they cannot be separated from each other. The beauty of this lies in their unity. If one of its aspects is missing, the charm and appeal is gone. Again, it is for the sake of convenience that Aristotle defines them as internal or external. Plot, character and thoughts are considered to be internal because they are not as obvious as the other aspects – music, spectacle and diction – of a tragedy. A perfect harmony between the so-called internal and external aspects can only lead to the making of a perfect tragedy. None of these elements are more important and indispensable than the other. At this point, one can think as to why Aristotle regards myth as 'the soul of tragedy' if every other aspect is equally important. Myth is the only binding force which holds every other element intact. The complete performance of the play can get nullified in the absence of myth. The play as a whole is a very complicated structure where speaking, moving, dancing, gesturing and music have to go one by one in different combinations according to the requirement of the theatrical performance. Even then Aristotle regards story or the plot as the basic foundation of a tragedy upon which many complex structures are raised.

Check Your Progress

8. State Aristotle's notion of tragedy as a 'complete' story.
9. What does internal and external components mean Aristotle's *Poetics*?
10. What was Aristotle's understanding of myth?

2.8.1 Plot (Myth)

Plot or myth, in Greek tragedy simply meant a story, (an informal English translation would be plot) and was described by Aristotle as 'the soul of tragedy' (though Aristotle points out that the other elements are not less essential). The myth is the most significant element of the text as it binds together other elements of the tragedy.

The aim of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to present the journey of the protagonist from one state of being to another through a series of episodes focussing on an action. Plot should be an organic whole, having magnitude.

> Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, middle and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. Middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.

Thus, without a proper beginning, middle and an end, tragedy would not achieve the desired effect on the audience. Moreover, tragedy should imitate action that has a certain magnitude as it is the magnitude of the action that provides beauty to the artistic

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rendition of the action—'a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude and order.'

Action having magnitude, if presented with wholeness (in the sense of completeness having a beginning, middle and an end) would provide 'Unity of action' to the plot, which according to Aristotle, is a must for a tragedy. Therefore, he thought that a dramatist has the liberty to make changes in the chronology of events as he is not merely chronicling history; neither is he a maker of verses, but a constructor of plot or myth. According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of plots:

- Simple (*aploi*)
- Complex (*peplegmenoi*)

A simple plot is without *peripetia* (reversal of fortune) and *anagnorisis* (recognition of the past act or identity or person) whereas the complex plot would have both *peripetia* and *anagnorisis*.

The structure of the plot must have definite shape or a magnitude like an animal's body:

> Again, a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude an order. Hence a very small animal organism cannot be beautiful; for the view of it is confused, the object being seen in an almost imperceptible moment of time. Nor, again, can one of vast size be beautiful; for as the eye cannot take it all in at once, the unity and sense of the whole is lost for the spectator; as for instance if there were one a thousand miles long.
>
> (*Poetics*: VII).

Such should be the length of the plot that it can be held by the memory at a stretch: it should neither be too long nor too short:

> As, therefore, in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in one view, so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by the memory
>
> (*Poetics*: VII).

Besides, the length of separate play has to be different according to the nature of the drama:

> The limit of length in relation to dramatic competition and sensuous presentation is no part of artistic theory. For had it been the rule for a hundred tragedies to compete together, the performance would have been regulated by the water - clock - as indeed we are told was formerly done. But the limit as fixed by the nature of the drama itself if this: the greater the length, the more beautiful will the piece by reason of its size, provided that the whole be perspicuous.
>
> (*Poetics*: VII).

> Plots are either simple or complex, for the actions in real life, of which the plots are an initiation, obviously show a similar distinction. An action which is one and continuous in the sense above defined, I call simple, when the change of fortune takes place without Reversal of the situation and without Recognition.
>
> (*Poetics*: X).

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Thus, according to Aristotle, the essential elements of a tragic plot are as follows:

- **Completeness:** An action should have a proper beginning, middle and an end. An ideal beginning is that which does not follow anything but leads to something that comes after it. Middle is the casual outcome of the beginning and the potential cause of the end. The end, in turn, should be one that rounds up the whole action and gives the impression of completeness. It ties all the threads of action.
- **Magnitude:** Magnitude refers to 'proper size, proportion and symmetry'. The length should be in accordance with the inner demands of the plot.
- **Unity of action:** Unity of action denotes an imitation of a single unified action.
- **Necessity and probability:** Necessity means a strict causal relationship between the incidents of a plot. Probability means that events must have a connection that makes their sequence likely. No tragic writer can sacrifice probability.
- ***Peripeteia* (reversal of fortune):** Reversal is a change in the course of the action from one state to the opposite, involving the fortunes of the protagonist, from happiness to misery, or from adversity to prosperity.
- ***Anagnorsis* (discovery or recognition):** It means a character's sudden realization of another's true identity, a knowledge that brings about a reversal in the entire situation.

The importance of plot is unquestionable as it initiates action and life; happiness and misery which again take the form of action. The actors do not perform with the aim of portraying character; rather characters are introduced for the sake of action. Naturally, action is at the end of tragedy.

Now what does Aristotle mean by plot? In ancient types, mythos or myth simply meant story. It is the modern understanding of the term that associates it with plot. However, the term myth is a better choice because it brings to our mind the collective memory of culture and traditions which created and nurtured it. Plot can be viewed as the modern variation of story which can always generate suspense and surprise. Nowadays the plot can range from events of everyday life to the stories of famous personalities or heroes in different fields of life. Therefore, Aristotle calls myth 'the soul of tragedy' in a dramatic action (praxis). Myth or plot is seen as an organic whole by Aristotle.

According to Aristotle, magnitude is the outer structure of a tragedy which seeks support from the unity of action. The union of the different parts of tragedy is such that the organic whole becomes a disturbed and disjointed structure, if any one of it is removed. Obviously in ancient Greece the stories were mostly those of well known figures in history and cultural tradition but the literary artist enjoyed the freedom to change the sequence of events for the sake of universality and wholeness. The poet can build upon historical facts with required changes in the events. Changes can also be made in traditional legends. We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to the received legends, which are the usual subjects of tragedy. Indeed, it would be absurd to attempt it, for even subjects that are known, are known only to a few, and yet give pleasure to all. It clearly, follows that the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than

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of verses, since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions. And even if the chances to take a historical subject, he is nonetheless a poet; for there is no reason why some events that have actually happened should not conform to the law of the probable and possible, and in virtue of that quality in them he is their poet or maker (*Poetics*: IX).

Aristotle talks of the unity of action or it provides magnitude and wholeness to the plot. This unity of action is as important for comedy as it is for tragedy. But he is never found discussing the other two unities of place and time which are commonly known as the three unities.

A complex plot contains both the Reversal of the situation and Recognition:

> A complex action is one in which the change is accompanied by such Reversal, or by Recognition, or by both. These last should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action. It makes all the difference whether any given event is a case of propter hoc or post hoc.
>
> (*Poetics*: X).

It is to be noticed at this point that Reversal of fortune and Recognition of it are applicable not only to tragedy but also to comedy. However, Reversal of fortune is best used when the action takes an opposite cause according to the law of probability and necessity:

> Reversal of the situation is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity.
>
> (*Poetics*: XI).

Recognition (anagnorisis) has been defined by Aristotle in these terms:

> Recognition, as the name indicates is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the situation, as in the Oedipus. There are indeed other forms. Even in animate things of the most trivial kind may in a sense be objects of recognition. Again we may recognize or discover whether a person has done a thing or not. But the recognition which is most intimately connected with the plot and action is .....The recognition of persons. This recognized, combined with Reversal, will produce either pity or fear; and actions producing these effects are those which .... Tragedy represents. Moreover, it is upon such situations that the issues of good or bad fortune will depend. Recognition, then, being between persons, it may happen that one person only is recognized by the other – when the latter is already known – or it may be necessary that the recognition should be on both sides.
>
> (*Poetics*: XI).

It is important to note that Aristotle was strictly against 'episodic' plots. Such plots cannot have universal appeal as they are made by pressing events one after the other without adhering to the law of probability or necessity:

> Of all plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot 'episodic' in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence. Bad poets compose such pieces by their own fault, good poets, to please the players; for, as they write show pieces for competition, they stretch the plot beyond its capacity, and are often forced to break the natural continuity.
>
> (*Poetics*: IX).

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According to Aristotle the best slot is that which follows the rule of cause and effect with an element of surprise. Such plots evoke fear and pity naturally in the spectators:

> Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear and pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design. We may instance the statue of Mitys at Argos, which fell upon his murderer while he was a spectator at a festival, and veiled him. Such events seem not to be due to mere chance. Plots, therefore, constructs, on these principles are necessarily the best.
>
> (*Poetics*: IX).

Reversal of the situation and Recognition of it in a plot turn upon surprises. However, Aristotle also adds a thirds element to it – the scene of suffering '*which is a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like.*'

(*Poetics*: XI).

Aristotle has not said much about the element of suffering in a plot. However, it is evident that scenes of suffering are required only in those tragedies where the fortune changes from good to bad. Aristotle's views were against the contemporary notion that the final destruction should be averted in a good tragedy. For Aristotle such tragedies are of second rate:

> The best tragedies are founded on the story of a few houses on the Fortunes of Alcmacon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thystes, Telephus and those others who have done or suffered something terrible. A tragedy, then, to be perfect according to the rules of art should be of this construction. Hence they are in error who ensure Euripides just because he follows this principle in his plays, many of which end unhappily. It is .... the right ending. The best proof is that on the stage in dramatic competition, such plays, if well worked out are the most tragic in effect.....
>
> (*Poetics*: XIII).

It is, however, important to notice at this point that unity of action; wholeness and magnitude were the features of tragedy to arouse fear and pity. These technicalities are to be implemented in the production of a comic plot as well. In a nutshell, Aristotle suggests that wholeness and magnitude and unity of action are integral parts of all kinds of plot.

Check Your Progress

11. What was the importance of myth in a play?
12. What are the two types of plots according to Aristotle?

2.8.2 Character (Ethos)

According to Aristotle, tragedy is meant to imitate people above the level of our world and comedy below it. Tragedy presents action of men having magnitude or greatness,

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whereas comedy and satire deals with 'mean persons'. To understand the nature of the character or protagonist of a good tragedy, Aristotle, in *Poetics*, mentions the following characteristics of the tragic protagonist or the tragic hero:

- **Goodness:** He is a person who is better than average, but not perfectly virtuous. He could be just one who should be transported in the course of the plot from a state of happiness to that of adversity through his own *Hamartia* or tragic error.
- **Life-like**: The tragic hero should be 'recognizably human' and should not change traits with a character from a myth or legend.
- **Appropriateness:** Appropriateness means truthfulness to or representation of the class or profession to which a character belongs. Characters should be universal rather than individual. This is in the sense that a king should be kingly, a woman womanly, a scholar scholarly so on and so forth.
- **Consistency**: The traits of a character should not be changed within the same play without any rhyme or reason. If a character is shown to be inconsistent, then he should be always shown so.
- **Heroic:** Characters should appear true to life and yet be better than what they are.

Aristotle's perception of character is different from ours. The art of characterization incorporates all that reveals a man's personal and inner self – his intellectual powers being as important as his emotions and feelings. However, Aristotle's idea of a character is not so comprehensive. He ascribes secondary place to character as tragedy imitates action and life instead of men:

> But most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not of quality. Now character determines men's qualifies, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the action.
>
> (*Poetics*: VI).

Aristotle goes to the extent of saying 'without action there cannot be a tragedy: there may be without character.' (*Poetics*: VI). Let us now focus on the features of a character as laid down by Aristotle: It must be good, true to life, consistent with an air of propriety:

> In respect of character there are four things to be aimed at. First, and most important, it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character: the character will be good if the purpose is good. This rule is relative to each class. Even a woman may be good, and also a slave, though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless. The second thing to aim at is propriety. There is a type of manly valour: but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness is inappropriate. Thirdly, character must be true to life for this is a distinct thing from goodness and propriety, as here described. The fourth point is consistency: for though the subject of imitation, who suggested the type be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent.
>
> (*Poetics*: XV).

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Besides, the poet should make a likeness which is true to life and yet be more beautiful. His attempt should be to preserve the type and also ennoble it. Of all the features of a character, the one that is of prime importance is ethos or the moral purpose. The choices and rejections made by the character should help in fulfilling the moral purpose of the tragedy. The protagonist should show no hesitation in making a moral choice in the course of action. If we take the whole analysis of the tragic hero we see that he should be good but not exceptionally good. By 'good' Aristotle suggests that type of goodness with which the spectators can identify. Since he is supposed to be a king or a prince of a royal figure he should display valour. The protagonist should give reasons for his choice and take quick decisions. The Greek culture did not foster individualism. It believed in sharing with family, friends, and community, as per the circumstances. Therefore, *dianoia* or the art of sharing is of great importance. This sharing helps the spectator's view how a protagonist behaves in a particular situation and how heroic he is. He can be a hero only if he is brave and quick at making decisions. Hence, we can see a contrast between Aristotle's and Shakespeare's approach in creating tragic heroes. The 'to be or not to be' type would hardly fit Aristotle's theory of a hero.

Adherence to the probable or the necessary is very important as it gives creative art a likeness with reality:

> As in the structure of the plot, so too in the portraiture of character, the poet should always aim either at the necessary or the probable. Thus a person of a given character should speak or act in a given way, by the rule either or necessity or probability; just as this event should follow that by necessary or probable sequence.
>
> (*Poetics*: XV).

Let us now look at how the Aristotelian tragic hero meets his downfall. The fall of a man of high moral reputation (though not a paragon of virtue) from prosperity into misfortune is affected not through any nice or villainy but through an error or tragic flaw or Hamartia. It is this error of the tragic hero which cooperates with the malignity of fate. Consequently, the tragic hero does not deserve such a downfall, but his own mistake reinforces the disaster tragic. Such generalizations about tragic heroes are based on Aristotle's understanding of Greek tragedies like Sophocles's *Oedipus* Trilogy. He regards Oedipus as an example of the kind and perfect tragic hero.

It is good to remember that Aristotle did not belong to an individualistic society unlike the Renaissance, which is more secular and individualistic. This was the disagreement in the relative importance of the tragic hero in the Aristotelian and the post Renaissance period. In Greek tragedy the tragic hero chiefly suffered under the impact of an external fate. As a result, the plot was of prime importance and character was secondary to it. Besides the suffering of the tragic hero should be capable of arousing the twin sentiments of fear and pity.

The serious objections, which modern critics level against Aristotle's theory is based upon the changing trends of tragedies and tragic characters in the modern world. In the post Renaissance era, character occupies the central place in a tragedy whereas plot becomes a subsidiary. It is again debatable whether modern tragedies evoke only the emotions of fear and pity or something more. A close reading of Shakespeare's *Tempest* does not follow Aristotle's doctrine of Hamartia or tragic flaw.

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We need to see if fear and pity are the only emotions produced by Shakespearean tragedies. Subordination of plot to character is another area where Shakespearean tragedies do not adhere to Aristotle's theory of tragedy. In the tragedies of Shakespeare we do not come across the operation of an inevitable fate. The inner psychological motivations of an individual bring about the catastrophic end in Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and King Lear.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

13. What was the importance of character in Aristotle's view?
14. What is the objection levelled against Aristotle's theory of character?

2.8.3 Thought (Dianoia)

As we know Aristotle expected the tragic hero to be able to make quick decisions. Even then the inner questioning continues in the mind of the protagonist. This is defined as *Dianoia* as Aristotle puts it:

> Third in order is Thought – that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstance. In case of oratory, this is the function of the political art and of the art of rhetoric; and so indeed the older poets make their characters speak the language of civic life; the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which does not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid anything whatever, are not expressive of character. Thought, on the other hand, is found where something is provided to be or not to be, or a general maxim in enunciated. If the moral courage to make a decision is called ethos, the thought process, 'to be' or 'not to be' situation, which precedes any choice is known as *dianoia*. The thought process of the mind of the protagonist is unravelled to the audience through his dialogues – here he can tell about the nature of things, his plight and his final choice i.e. the tragic action. The genesis of tragic action his in the thought process of the tragic hero hence its importance. Dianoia also includes debates which has a moral perspective. However, it excludes anything like scheming, plotting, intriguing etc.

According to Aristotle:

> Under thought is included every effect which has to be produced by speech, the subdivisions being: proof and refutation; the excitation of the feelings such as pity, fear, anger, and the like; the suggestion of importance or its opposite. Now, it is evident that the dramatic incidents must be treated from the same points of view as the dramatic speeches, when the object is to evoke the sense of pity, fear, importance or probability. The only difference is that the incidents should speak for themselves without verbal exposition; while affects aimed at is should be produced by the speaker and as a result of the speech.
>
> (*Poetics*: XIX).

The inner questioning that goes on in the mind of a character and makes him choose one way or the other is called *Dianoia*. The ability to choose the moral fiber or the courage to choose is ethos, but the ferment of thoughts that leads to the point of choice is known as *Dianoia*. This thought process often becomes a part of the dialogue when a character bewails his or her plight and speculates on the nature of things. For this reason, Aristotle insists that *Dianoia* should be regarded as an essential element of tragedy.

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Tragic Error or *Hamartia*

Aristotle in *Poetics* uses the word *Hamartia* to mean an 'error' or 'false step'. S.H. Butcher translates the word as 'frailty' while Michael Bywater calls it 'an error of judgment', which the tragic protagonist commits without any evil intention. According to Aristotle, the tragic protagonist must have nobility. He must be better than us, but at the same time he must also have a defect '...the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity, but by some error of judgment ...'. It should be noted that *Hamartia* cannot be a moral flaw. Sir Philip Sidney, the first critic of England, says that tragedy 'openeth the greatest wounds, and showed forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue, that maketh kings fear to be tyrants and the tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours ....'

2.8.4 Diction (Lexis)

Language or lexis in theatre is one of the most significant elements in drama, though in *Poetics*, Aristotle does not give a detailed description of this element as it is too obvious. Lexis can be divided into two parts:

1. The spoken word in the form of natural conversational speech
2. The sung word or an elaborate song

Since diction takes relatively less space in *Poetics* one can feel that Aristotle attached very little importance to it. However, the truth is otherwise. It was such an obvious and well known feature of a work of art in Greek tradition that Aristotle seems to have thought that it needed less attention.

Lexis or language can be divided into two parts – the spoken word and the sung word. It is to be noticed that was no gap between the spoken word and the sung word in ancient times. This gap between the spoken and the sung word was developed later. In the ancient times, the distinction between the linguistic content of the word and its musical content was more important. Language and music were the two ways in which sound produced meaning. The use of language in a theatrical performance was made possible through pitch variation, song and intonation. Aristotle's views of Lexis are as follows:

> One branch of the inquiry treats of the Modes of Utterance. But this province of knowledge belongs to the art of Delivery and to the masks of that science. It includes, for instance – what a command, a prayer, a statement, a threat, a question, an answer, and so forth. To know or not to know these things involves no serious censure upon the poet's art ..... We may, therefore, pass this over as an inquiry that belongs to another art, not to poetry.
>
> (*Poetics*: XIX).

Now the question is why Aristotle does exclude modes of utterance from inquiry. This was perhaps because he looked upon diction not as a combination of elocution but also as phonology, grammar and figures of speech. Aristotle recommends the poet to strike a balance between clarity and loftiness. He maintains:

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> The perfection of style is to be clear without being mean. The clearest style is that which uses only current or proper words, ... That diction, on the other hand is lofty and raised above the common place which employs unusual words. By unusual I mean strange (or rare) words, metaphorical, lengthened – anything, in short, that differs from the normal idiom. Yet a style composed of such words is either a riddle or a jargon; if it consists of strange (or rare) words. For the essence of a riddle is to express true facts under impossible combinations. Now this cannot be done by any arrangement of ordinary words, but by the use of metaphor it can ..... A certain infusion, therefore, of these elements is necessary to style; for the strange (or rate) word, the metaphorical, the ornamental, and the other kinds above mentioned, will raise it above the common place and mean, while the use of proper words will make it perspicuous. But nothing contributes more to produce a cleanness of diction that is remote from commonness than the lengthening contraction, and alteration of words, for by deviating in exceptional cases from the normal idiom, the language will gain distinction: while, at the same time, the partial conformity with usage will give perspicuity.
>
> (*Poetics*: XXII).

There are two kinds of nouns: (a) simple, made by insignificant parts like the word 'earth' or (b) double. It is possible also to have triple, quadruple and even larger compounds. Every noun, regardless of its structure, is either (a) the ordinary word for a thing (b) a strange word (c) a metaphor (d) an ornamental word (e) a winged word (f) a word expanded or (g) curtailed or (h) altered in form. The art of giving a thing a name, that belongs to something else is called metaphor. The transference can be from genus to species or species to genus or species to species or on grounds of analogy. When the poet gives a word which is quite unknown among people, it is said to be a coined word. When a word has a short vowel which is made long or an extra syllable is inserted, it is said to be lengthened out. There are rules for masculine and feminine nouns as well. Nouns ending in N, R, or S, or in the two compounds of this last PS and KS are considered to be the masculine form of nouns. Whereas words ending in long vowels like E, O and A are considered to be feminine form of noun.

The strange word, the metaphor and the ornamental word prevent the language from becoming dull and prosaic whereas the usage of ordinary words give it an element of clarity. But the use of lengthened and curtailed words provide language clarity and prevents it from meanness. However, compounds are best suited to dithyrambic poetry. Strange words and metaphors are supposed to be used in iambic poetry. However, all of them are used in heroic poetry.

2.8.5 Melody (Melopoeia)

The Greek chorus and actors were free to use all the prevalent musical forms in drama. This was the ritual even during the early stage when it was performed as part of religious festival. Aristotle argued that the 'chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor.' Choral odes should not be 'mere interludes', but should contribute to the unity of the plot.

In all ancient civilizations of the world, variations in musical tones have been associated with different emotional states and seasons. In India, we have a variety of musical notes for different seasons, festivals, rituals, occasions and emotional states. Similarly, in ancient Greece music had an important role to play in different walks of life. Obviously, this association of a particular musical tone with a particular occasion has been a matter of training. The ancient Greek playwrights were not only great writers; they also knew music and dance very well. It is a well known saying about Phrenikos that he knows 'as many dance steps as the waves of the sea'. Sophocles is also believed to have introduced the Phrygian scale into tragedy.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

15. State the importance of thought in a play.
16. What are the two kinds of noun?
17. State the rules for masculine and feminine forms of nouns.
18. What was the significance of music and dance in a Greek play?

2.8.6 Spectacle (*OPSIS)*

The visual element or spectacle or *Opsis* has a lot of importance in the Aristotelian scheme of tragedy. Though Aristotle recognized the emotional attractiveness of a spectacle, he insisted that poets relied on the mythos or the plot of the play. They depend on the plot instead of *Opsis* or the spectacle, to generate sympathy or fear; the dramatists who rely heavily on spectacle 'create a sense, not of the terrible, but only of the monstrous'.

In Aristotle's *Poetics* the least discussed subject is *Opsis*. The term *Opsis* is meant to denote all that is visual in theatre – gestures, movements, dance, chorus, hand signs and body language. The importance of spectacle in a Greek stage cannot be undermined just because Aristotle does not pay much attention to it. Perhaps Aristotle thought it was too well-known an aspect to be discussed in detail. However, in Greek tradition we come across authors like Athenaens and Lucian who have talked at length about dance and other aspects. The spectacular elements which lend charm and meaning to a play are termed as 'quantitative parts' by Aristotle. The various parts into which a tragedy can be divided are prologue, episode, exode and choric song. The choric song can further be subdivided into a Parode and *Stasimon*. These features are common in all theatrical performances. However, in some plays the playwright can add the songs of actors for the stage and the *Commoi*.

The prologue is spoken by a single actor or at times by two. After this the chorus enters the stage from the right side. All the information that the chorus gives to the spectators about the plot or characters or destiny of the hero is done by singing and dancing. There were five files (xuga) and three ranks (Stoikhoi) of the tragic chorus. The comic chorus consisted of six files and four ranks. The flute player came with the chorus. The chorus sang and danced till the completion of the parodos. This was followed by episode in which the actors spoke or sang to each other. In the end, the actors would go and the chorus sang the choric ode which was made of strople, antistrophe and the epode. The chorus presented a dramatic response in continuation of the dramatic action. Again the actors entered and the same cycle was repeated.

After the final episode came *Exodus* which consisted of an ode, that was dialogue and a brief song. The actors recited, sang and spoke but mostly the chorus sang.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

19. Define opsis.
20. What is a prologue?

2.9 *CATHARSIS* OR PLEASURE PROPER TO TRAGEDY

In the famous definition of tragedy by Aristotle, catharsis is regarded as the prime objective of a tragic play. Aristotle defines tragedy in the following manner:

> Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.

In *Poetics*, apart from talking about catharsis, Aristotle also talks about the pleasure that is derived from tragedy. Pleasure, appropriate to tragedy can be derived from the play for three reasons. These three reasons are as follows:

1. Tragedy should derive pleasure that is appropriate to tragedy, as it is a kind of pleasure that cannot be derived from any other form of drama.
2. The pleasure is derived from the completeness and organic wholeness of the action of the plot.
3. Pleasure may also be derived, as a result of the musical and spectacular elements of the play.

Catharsis is a term borrowed by Aristotle from the medical terminology that means the removal or purgation of the afflictions or emotional excesses. Though the term is borrowed from the medical terminology, Aristotle does not use the term in exactly the same fashion as it is used in the field of medicine, as Butcher points out, 'But the word, as taken up by Aristotle into the terminology of art, has probably a further meaning. It expresses not only a fact of psychology or of pathology, but a principle of art.'

Catharsis may therefore mean the emotional satisfaction that the audience experience when they watch a tragedy. The play achieves this by evoking the feelings of 'pity' and 'fear' as pointed out by Aristotle. These two emotions of pity and fear are evoked while watching a tragedy as the spectators or the audience perceives the tragic protagonist's change of fortune. Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of James Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* defines pity and fear as 'pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the secret cause'.

At some places in *Poetics*, Aristotle talks about pleasure which is proper to tragedy. At times he talks of *hedone*. However, *hedone* (pleasure) and catharsis are

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produced by the simultaneous arousal of fear and pity. Many critics take *hedone* (pleasure) and catharsis as one and the same, whereas some critics regard the two as different. Here, we need to refer to the doctrine of imbalance of elements which was later called humours.

Besides this medicinal doctrine, we also come across musical catharsis. According to Butcher music was used as a remedy for curing patients of madness. Patients were made to listen to music and come back to normalcy. However, Aristotle unites fear and pity as one psychological emotion in *Poetics* so that the same purgation can be applied with equal effect to inhomogeneous parts. Aristotle's predecessors seem to have accepted fear and pity as chief emotions. Hence, Aristotle has tried to harmonize them in dramatic art.

Modern criticism views Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis with an element of suspicion. The medicinal or curative function of tragedy is to be examined further. Critics believe that medicines and vaccines may cure but they don't provide 'pleasure'– something which is the essence of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. C.E. Monpague in *A Write on his Trade* feels that tragedy is more sedative or tonic since it enlarges the experience of spectators. In his book *Tragedy* D.M. Dixon observes:

> Aristotle would have this medicine restore us to the normal, to health, but surely it is an elixir, not a remedy, and the function of tragic drama is to exalt, not to cure it.

Even Butcher feels so:

> But the word, as taken up by Aristotle into his terminology of art, has probably a further meaning. It expresses not only a fact of psychology or pathology, but a principle of art.

He felt that the element of pity and fear 'in real life contains a morbid and disturbing element.... As the tragic action progresses the lowest forms of emotions are formed to have been transmuted into more refined forms' (254). Catharsis is also equated with aesthetic pleasure; 'But whatever may have been the indirect effect of the repeated operation of Catharsis, we may confidently say that Aristotle in his definition of tragedy is thinking not only of any remote result, but of the immediate end of the art, of the aesthetic function it fulfils'. (Butcher 269).

Gerald Else lays emphasis on the spiritual significance of catharsis. Remorse enables the viewers to pity the hero. In this way Catharsis proves his purity:

> The filthiness inheres in a conscious intention to kill a person who is a close kin. An unconscious intention to do so, i.e. in intention to do so without being aware of the kinship as Oedipus did not know that he killed his father would therefore be 'pure'. Catharsis. But purity must be proving that the act was pure in that sense. How is such a thing provided? According to Nicomachean Ethics, by the remorse of the doer, which shows that, if he had known the facts, he would not have done the deed. In Oedipus the thing which establishes this to our satisfaction is Oedipus's self-blinding. It, then effects a purification of the tragic deed and so makes Oedipus eligible to our pity (Else 98).

Else in a way suggests that catharsis does not benefit the audience and their emotions; rather it purges the tragic deed.

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Check Your Progress

21. Define Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis.
22. What is the modern critique of catharsis?

2.10 ARISTOTELIAN VIEW OF MIMESIS

Aristotle's *Poetics* opens with his views on mimesis (imitation), where he differs to a great extent from his teacher, Plato. Plato regarded art to be 'thrice removed from reality', which could be in no way a valid means to attain knowledge. For Plato, art merely nurtured the emotional self. He thought that poets should be banished from society, as they write under the influence of 'divine madness'. They do not know what they are talking about in their creative output. While Plato thought that poets were of no use for societal good, Aristotle regarded them to be supreme. Aristotle was of the view that poets in their imitation of reality are not denigrating reality, but are trying to incorporate the universal aspect. Poetry from the Aristotelian point of view is not about 'what was' or 'what is', but about 'what ought to be'. In that sense, for Aristotle, poetry or art aspires to capture that aspect of nature in its imitation, which is idealistic, a better version of what actually exists in this world. Imitation or mimesis is not demeaning, as it is only through imitation that human beings learn. Moreover, human beings love to imitate—as Aristotle states in *Poetics*,

> Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature.' First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one key difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of all the living creatures. It is through imitation that he learns his earliest lessons, and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. Thus, the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is that in contemplating it, they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he. For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the colouring or some such other cause. Imitation, then, is one instinct of our nature.

Therefore, if imitation is an innate fact of nature, then poets are not liars. Moreover, poets labour in order to attain truth. In other words, Aristotle upheld art and celebrated it (as against Plato) by pointing out that 'art imitates nature' and at the same time presents the ideal.

2.11 DIFFERENT GENRES: EPIC, TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Aristotle begins his *Poetics* with mimesis, by directly stating that different art forms are only different modes of imitation and they differ from each other in three parameters:

1. Means (language for literature)
2. Objects (actions with agents)
3. Manner (dramatic or narrative)

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It is often thought that Aristotle's *Poetics*, as a text is not complete. There may be chapters on comedy and satire, which are missing. Assuming the kind of thoroughness that Aristotle has in his writing, it is impossible to think that he discussed only tragedy in *Poetics* and left the other genres of drama untouched. Drawing a comparison between tragedy and comedy, Aristotle says that tragedy is inclined to imitate people above the level of our world while comedy imitates people below our level.

He further compares tragedy with epic and sees tragedy to be a much better form of art than epic. While tragedy is for the common audience, epic poetry is addressed to an educated and enlightened audience. The epic, says Aristotle, 'addresses a cultivated audience, which does not need the accompaniment of gesture'. Yet Aristotle points out that tragedy is superior to epic for the following reasons:

- Aristotle says that performance does not censure the tragic poet. If a tragedy can be spoiled in a performance, an epic can also be spoiled in its recitation. Tragedy, like epic, does not depend on performance for its full effect.
- Tragedy has all the elements of an epic. Furthermore, it has two more elements—a greater economy and concentration of effect. The tragic poet requires less space for the attainment of its end.

Check Your Progress

23. Define poetry from the Aristotelian point of view.
24. Different art forms are only different modes of imitation and they differ from each other in three parameters. Identify these three parameters.

2.12 A REVIEW OF ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

Gilbert Murray in the Introduction of Ingram Bywater's translation of Aristotle titled *On the Art of Poetry* writes, 'In the tenth book of the Republic ... Plato has completed his final burning denunciation of poetry ... Aristotle certainly knew the passage, and it looks as if his treatise on poetry was an answer to Plato's challenge.'

Plato and Aristotle are the two founding fathers of western metaphysics. If Plato is transcendental and abstract, Aristotle is biological and concrete. Though these two classical philosophers may differ in their views, yet it is the Plato–Aristotelian framework that dominated the western mode of thinking till about the twentieth century.

Aristotle is also significant for his interpretation of art and literature; primarily the genre of tragedy. Based on the practitioners of classical Greek tragedy, Aristotle developed his theory of tragedy in which he not only describes what tragedy should be but also provides a detailed recommendation on what would make a great tragedy. According to him, tragedy is the greatest form of art, even better than the epic. Therefore, Aristotle discusses the various elements of tragedy in detail, which would lead to the purgation of pity and fear (*catharsis*). However, what remains at the base of his analysis is that the audience identifies with the tragic protagonist in his change of fortune as he is essentially good albeit answerable to a specific tragic flaw. In the

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tragic protagonist's rise and fall the spectator recognizes himself as the hero and consequently in his fall, the spectator experiences an emotional turmoil.

Marxist critics think that this identification with the hero and the consequent emotional experience makes readers or the audiences go through an entire experience. This experience, however, is not going to help them see reality in its proper perspective. The Marxists think that Aristotelian norms are *bourgeoisie*, in terms of literature or art being an escape from reality. Therefore, in the twentieth century, dramatists like Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and others wrote plays that were anti-Aristotelian. This was because, for them, the objective of art was not merely to give readers an experience, which will merely provide them with pleasure, but the desired objective was to make them think and act. From that perspective, Aristotle has been critiqued by Marxists scholars. This is because they are of the opinion that the role of literature as a bearer of ideology is not merely to provide consent for the ruling class or to critique the way the ruling class tries to represent reality. It is also to provide a perspective to readers that will help them understand social formations.

Check Your Progress

25. State the Marxist view of Aristotelian philosophy.
26. Why has Aristotle been critiqued by Marxist scholars?

ACTIVITY

Organize a debate session where your friend is Plato and you play Aristotle. Now debate on the relevance of poetry, you can may refer to articles given on the Internet.

Did you Know?

Aristotle was a student of Plato in the Academy. He founded his own school known as the Lyceum. He was a teacher to Cassander and Ptolemy, who would both eventually be crowned kings. Cassander became king of Macedonia and Ptolemy became king of Egypt.

2.13 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Aristotle was the disciple of Plato. He is responsible for enriching the Greek philosophical and literary critical tradition with his incisive critique of Plato.
- Aristotle paved the way for all critics from his age till today to create their own theories of literary criticism.
- Aristotle has given a systematic theory of tragedy as a theatrical experience.
- Aristotle has described the six elements of tragedy.

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- As per Aristotle, plot is crucial to this conception and is described as the most important part of theatre. Character and thought are ascribed second position and the third place; has been devoted to the discussion of lexis, melopoeia and opsis.
- Lastly Aristotle states that pleasure proper to tragedy was derived from fear and pity through mimesis.
- Aristotle maintains that tragedy creates catharsis.
- The sequence in Aristotle's scheme of artistic creation is as follows: Mimesis was the prime theory which resulted in the arousal of powerful emotion which provided both: hedone (pleasure) and catharsis (relief).
- Aristotle divided knowledge into three major categories: Productive knowledge, practical knowledge/science, and theoretical science.
- Aristotle's *Poetics* deals primarily with productive knowledge, as well as that of the theoretical besides dealing with epistemological questions.
- Aristotle's *Poetics* opens with Aristotle's views on Mimesis (imitation), where he differs to a great extent from his teacher, Plato. While Plato thought that poets were of no use to society, Aristotle regarded them highly.
- Aristotle upheld art and celebrated it (as opposed to Plato) by pointing out that 'art imitates nature' and at the same time presents the ideal.
- Aristotle asserts that different art forms are only different modes of imitation, and they differ from each other in almost three parameters: means, objects, and manner.
- Drawing a comparison between tragedy and comedy, Aristotle says that tragedy is inclined to imitate people above the level of our world while comedy imitates people below our level.
- Aristotle says that though tragedy is for the common audience who feel restless for gross desires/dull wits, epic poetry is addressed to an educated and enlightened audience. He claims that tragedy has all the elements of an epic. Furthermore, it has two more elements—a greater economy and concentration of effect. He adds that tragedy, like epic, does not depend on performance for its full effect.
- According to Aristotle, the six elements of tragedy are plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle.
- Aristotle asserted that myth or plot or the myth is the most significant part of a work as it binds together the other elements of the tragedy. Plot simply means a story. Plot should be an organic whole, having magnitude.
- According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of plots: simple (*aploi*) and complex (*peplegmenoi*). A simple plot is without *peripetia* (reversal of fortune) and *agagnorisis* (recognition of the past act or identity or person), whereas the complex plot would have both *peripetia* and *agagnorisis*.
- The essential elements of a tragic plot are completeness, magnitude, unity of action, necessity and probability, *peripeteia* and *anagnorsis*.
- Aristotle, in *Poetics*, mentions the following characteristics of the tragic protagonist or the tragic hero: goodness, lifelike, appropriateness, consistency, and heroism.

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- The hero should be a better than an average person whose reversal of fortune has been brought by *Hamartia* or tragic error. The characterization should be truthful to the class or profession he belongs to. The traits of a character should not be changed within the same play without any rhyme or reason.
- According to Aristotle, the tragic protagonist must have nobility. He must be better than us, but at the same time he must also have a defect.
- The inner questioning that goes on in the mind of a character and makes him choose one way or another is called *Dianoia*. This thought process often becomes a part of the dialogue when a character bewails his or her plight and speculates on the nature of things.
- Aristotle argued that the chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor. Choral odes should not be 'mere interludes', but should contribute to the unity of the plot.
- The visual element or spectacle or *Opsis* has the least importance in Aristotelian scheme of tragedy.
- Although Aristotle recognizes the emotional attraction of spectacle, he is of the view that superior poets rely on the mythos or the plot of the play.
- Aristotle regards *Catharsis* as the prime objective of a tragic play. Aristotle states that pleasure can be derived from tragedy.
- *Catharsis* is defined as the emotional satisfaction that the audience experiences when he/ she watches a tragedy.
- According to Aristotle, a play achieves catharsis by evoking the feelings of 'pity' and 'fear'.
- Aristotle says that a tragedy involves the double vision of the human sufferer (the tragic protagonist who suffers because of his tragic flaw of character or *Hamartia*) and the secret cause (the fate).
- Plato and Aristotle are the two founding fathers of western metaphysics.
- In Western philosophy if Plato is transcendental and abstract, Aristotle is biological and concrete.
- Marxists think that Aristotelian norms are *bourgeoisie*, in terms of literature or art being an escape from reality.
- In the twentieth century, dramatists like Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and others wrote plays that were anti-Aristotelian in nature.

2.14 KEY TERMS

- **Abstraction:** The act of considering something as a general quality or characteristic, apart from concrete realities, specific objects or actual instances is known as abstraction.
- **Catharsis:** Purging of the emotions or relieving of emotional tensions, especially through certain kinds of art, as tragedy or music is known as catharsis.
- **Curtail:** To shorten; reduce

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- **Conform:** To act in accordance; comply
- **Elegiac:** Expressing sorrow or lament
- **Hindrance:** Stopping or preventing something from happening
- **Inevitable:** Unable to be avoided, evaded, or escaped; mimesis – to imitate
- **Purgation:** The act of cleaning the undesirable propriety – conform to proper behaviour
- **Epic:** An extended narrative poem written in dignified language, which celebrates the character of a legendary or traditional hero
- **Tragedy:** A literary work in which the main character suffers extreme sorrow, especially as a consequence of a tragic flaw, moral weakness, or inability to cope with unfavorable circumstances
- **Mimesis:** The imitation or representation of aspects of the sensible world, especially human actions, in literature and art
- **Plot:** The pattern of events or main story in a narrative or drama
- **Catharsis:** A purifying or figurative cleansing of emotions, especially pity and fear, described by Aristotle as an effect of tragic drama on its audience
- **Rhetoric:** The study of the technique of using language effectively
- **Denouement:** The final resolution or clarification of a dramatic or narrative plot
- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison
- **Hamartia:** The flaw in character which leads to the downfall of the protagonist in a tragedy

2.15 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Classical literature is generally perceived as anything which is in accordance with ancient Greek and Roman literature. It is seen as a work of art which has stood the test of time.
2. Literary criticism in common paradigm is seen as a kind of judgement where the critic examines and appreciates what has been created.
3. Plato regarded poetry as inferior because it was seen as a hindrance in the making of an ideal state. It was further seen as an imitation of an imitation and not as an idea.
4. Plato and Aristotle have propounded contrasting views on poetry. While Plato's strong reservation against poetry was rooted in his bias for a metaphysical and utopian society, Aristotle left no stone unturned in establishing the dignity and relevance of poetry and tragedy.
5. The three famous unities propagated by Aristotle are the: unities of time, place and action.
6. Dithyrambic poetry means inflated speech sung in praise of Dionysius.

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7. As per Aristotle, the two aspects of language in theatre are: dramatic discourse and its linguistic and phonological aspects.
8. Aristotle's notion of tragedy as a 'complete' story refers to the proper building of the story, i.e., a suitable beginning, its development with a proper middle and then a gradual completion (end).
9. In Aristotle's *Poetics,* plot, character and thoughts are considered to be internal while music, spectacle and diction are considered to be external components of a play.
10. Aristotle regarded myth as 'the soul of tragedy' where every aspect is important. Moreover, it was also regarded as the only binding force which holds the other elements together.
11. In a play myth is seen as an organic whole and comprises a series of episodes that show a passage of a protagonist's earlier state of being to his persona in the later stages.
12. The two types of plots according to Aristotle are: the simple (a ploi) and the complex (*peplegmenoi*).
13. The importance of character in Aristotle's view can be understood as a unique element which reveals a man's personal and inner self – his intellectual powers being as important as his emotions and feelings.
14. The objection that was levelled against Aristotle's theory of character was that it was based upon the changing trends of tragedies and tragic characters in the modern world.
15. The importance of thought in a play is that it represents the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in a given circumstance– that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in a given circumstance. The thought process of the mind of the protagonist is unravelled to the audience through his dialogues.
16. There are two kinds of nouns: (a) simple, made by insignificants parts like the word 'earth' or (b) double.
17. The rules for masculine and feminine nouns are: Nouns ending in N, R, or S, or in the two compounds of this last PS and KS are considered to be the masculine form of nouns. Whereas, words ending in long vowels like E, O and A are considered to be feminine form of nouns.
18. The significance of music and dance in a greek play was of utmost importance and was used to convey a particular occasion .
19. The term *opsis* signifies the spectacular element in theatre such as: gestures, movements, dance, chorus, hand signs and body language.
20. A prologue or the beginning is spoken by a single actor or at times by two which is a brief introduction to the play.
21. Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis is defined as emotion which unites fear and pity as one psychological emotion.
22. The modern critics of catharsis believes that medicines and vaccines may cure but they don't provide 'pleasure ' – something which is the essence of Aristotle's theory of tragedy.
23. Poetry from the Aristotelian point of view is not about 'what was' or 'what is', but about 'what ought to be'. In that sense, for Aristotle, poetry or art aspires to capture that aspect of nature in its imitation, which is idealistic, a better version of what actually exists in this world.
24. Different art forms are only different modes of imitation and they differ from each other in three parameters. These are:
    (i) Means (language for literature)
    (ii) Objects (actions with agents)
    (iii) Manner (dramatic or narrative)
25. The Marxists think that Aristotelian norms are *bourgeoisie*, in terms of literature or art being an escape from reality.
26. Aristotle has been critiqued by Marxists scholars because they are of the opinion that the role of literature as a bearer of ideology is not merely to provide consent for the ruling class or to critique the way the ruling class tries to represent reality. Literature should also provide a perspective to readers that will help them understand social formations.

2.16 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Define Plato's concept of 'idea'?
2. What is the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's views on mimesis?
3. Explain Aristotle's notion of completeness.
4. How is 'thought' used in a play?
5. In a play, what is the relevance of variation in musical notes?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically examine Aristotle's concept of *catharsis*.
2. Discuss the various kinds of plots according to Aristotle. Which of them is most suitable for tragedy? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Aristotle's theory of plot is no longer relevant. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Discuss in your own words Aristotle's definition of tragedy as an imitation of action, serious, complete and of a certain magnitude.
5. As per Aristotle what are the characteristics of a tragic protagonist?
6. How are Aristotle's views on Mimesis different from Plato's notion of imitation?

2.17 FURTHER READING

Ross, W.D., *Work of Aristotle*, Oxford University Pres, London, 1928.

Stanford, W.B., *Greek Tragedy and Emotions: An Introductory Study*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.

Endnote

1 Hornby, A S: Oxford English Learner's Dictionary of Current English; Fifth Edition, Oxford University Press.

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UNIT 3 JOHN DRYDEN AND SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

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3.12 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.13 Questions and Exercises
3.14 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will give you a brief commentary on the poet-critic John Dryden's treatise, *An Essay* on *Dramatic Poesy*. Author, poet, essayist, editor and lexicographer, Samuel Johnson, called Dryden the 'father of English criticism'. Dryden's treatise is an important landmark in the history of literary criticism in England. It was published in 1668. Dryden states that his aim in writing this essay was 'to vindicate the honour of (our) English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them'. The treatise does more than that. It provides its readers a benchmark on how to judge a play. It provides a balanced answer to the debate over who is better—the ancients or the moderns. In this essay, Dryden also offers the comparative merits and demerits of blank verse and rhyme for dramatic purposes. The setting of the tract is 'dramatic' as the 'essay' is in the form of a dialogue that takes place between four speakers, who have very different opinions in matters of poetry and drama. Dryden never claims that he knows the truth; his treatise is only an attempt to get closer to the truth. Let us read more about it.

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3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Recall important biographical aspects of John Dryden and Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Discuss Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*
- Explain Coleridge's notion of the role of Imagination in romantic poesy
- Paraphrase chapter IV of *Biographia Literaria*
- Describe the role of fancy and imagination as per Coleridge

3.2 JOHN DRYDEN: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* was published in 1668. It is believed to have been written during the plague year of 1666. The essay is considered to be his masterpiece in critical writing. It was written in the form of dialogue between Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius and Neander when the four friends undertook a journey by boat on the river Thames. It is here that they take turns to express their divergent views on different aspects of literature. They express their views so that the readers get different perspectives of looking at literature and poetic creativity and evaluate for themselves which is better.

John Dryden was a poet who was considered to be the best representative of the Restoration Age (1660–1700). It was an age that marked the end of the Puritan regime in England as Prince Charles II was restored to the English throne. Charles II, during his exile from England from 1442 to 1660, had been in France. Therefore, when he ascended the throne, he and his courtiers, who were in love with French manners and fashion, influenced the literary production and criticism of the age by fashioning it in French ways. The French critical parameter was influenced by the neo-classical thought, which was derived from Italy in the sixteenth century. However, unlike the Italians, the French were very rigid and systematic in their critical outlook.

It is generally assumed that John Dryden was neoclassical in his outlook, though he was not as rigid as the French. For the neoclassical, one of the fundamental principles was that the poets, writers and critics should follow the ancient masters, primarily Aristotle. Aristotle's *Poetics* was *the Bible* for them. Though Dryden admired and respected Aristotle, and made an elaborate analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics*, he did not agree to everything that Aristotle propounded. Dryden himself being an excellent poet and dramatist had an excellent understanding of the nature of poetic and dramatic creativity in the Restoration. Consequently his *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* became a significant piece of critical work that promoted the understanding of the essence and parameter of neo-classical age.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What was the basic premise of Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*.
2. What was the extent of Aristotle's influence on Dryden?

3.3 DIFFERENT VIEWS ON DRAMATIC POESY

This tract is a dialogue between four speakers, who are also contemporaries of Dryden. They make the critical work dialectic and provide freshness to the discussion on different aspects of drama (both theoretical and practical). Dryden, in keeping with the British Neo-classical tradition, handles five critical questions in his treatise, *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy.*

Table 3.1 states the names of the speakers and the topics of their discussion.

***Table 3.1** Four Friends and their Topics*

Crites	Sir Robert Howard	Arguing on behalf of the superiority of the Ancients
Eugenius	Dorset	Celebrating the Moderns
Lisideius	Sir Chrales Sedley	In favour of the seventeenth century French neo-classical theatre
Neander	Dryden	Defending the English theatre and the Elizabethans

The questions asked are as follows:

1. What are the relative merits of classical and modern poets?
2. Is the existing French theatre superior or inferior to the English theatre?
3. Are Elizabethan dramatists superior to the eighteenth century dramatists?
4. Do the plays become more perfect when they follow the classical rules?
5. Is rhyme in serious plays desirable or not?

The viewpoints of each speaker will now be discussed in detail.

3.3.1 Crites' Viewpoint

Crites begins by asserting the superiority of the ancient poets of classical antiquity. For him, the classical poets and dramatists had shown their mastery in the representation of human nature. The Moderns, according to Crites, had built their foundation on the ancient masters. Crites says, 'Those Ancients have been faithful imitators and wise observers of that nature, which is so torn and ill represented in our plays; they have handed down to us a perfect resemblance of her; which we, like ill copiers, neglecting to look on, have rendered monstrous and disfigured'. All good modern plays are fashioned according to the Aristotelian norms. For him, the plays are not good if they do not follow the ancient rules of writing. Thus, Crites takes up a rigid Neo-classical position in the debate among the four speakers. The rigidity of the Neo-classical norms, for Crites, makes a piece of dramatic work better as by following the rules, the work of art can prove to be faithful and just.

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3.3.2 Eugenius' Viewpoint

Listening to the tirades against the Moderns, Eugenius tries to defend the modern dramatists. He states that he had deep respect for the Ancients, but that does not take away the credibility of the modern writers. He says,

> If your quarrel to those who now write, be grounded only upon your reverence to the antiquity, there is no man more ready to adore those great Greeks and Romans than I am: but on the other side, I cannot think so contemptibly of the age I live in, or so dishonourably of my own country, as not to judge we equal the Ancients in most kinds of Poesy, and in some surpass them; neither know I any reason why I may not be as zealous for the reputation of our age, as we find the Ancients themselves in reference to those who lived before them.

The Moderns have profited from the Ancients as any artist builds on the achievements of his predecessors. However, according to Eugenius, the Moderns excelled more than the poets of antiquity. Eugenius criticizes the Ancients for not following the dramatic unities strictly and for the use of the stock characters. Modern dramatists follow the classical norms more closely than the Ancients and that is how Eugenius concluded that the Moderns were better than the ancient poets. Eugenius being a Neo-classical himself also gave importance to the classical norms of drama and tried to analyze the Moderns from that perspective. Eugenius pointed out the narrow range and the lack of innovation of the Greek theatre. He stated that 'their appetites were cloyed with the same dish, and the novelty being gone, the pleasure vanished'. He also emphasized on the limitations of the conventional plot of the Roman comedy by stating that '... in how straight a compass so ever they have bounded their plots and characters ....' As against the classical masters, the Moderns are not dull imitators and are innovative '... natural causes more known ... because more studied, it follows that poetry and other arts may ... arrive till nearer to perfection....'

Eugenius also remarked that the Ancients also had problems in the instructive apart and had shown a 'prosperous wickedness and an unhappy piety'. In terms of their representation of passions, Eugenius felt that there is nothing in the ancient drama that can be compared with the Moderns. He goes on to state that:

> ... in their tragedies to the excellent scenes of passion in Shakespeare, or in Fletcher for love scenes, you will find few among them; their tragic poets dealt not with that soft passion, but with lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition and those bloody actions they produced, which were more capable of raising horror than compassion in an audience: leaving love untouched, whose gentleness would have tempered them, which is the most frequent of all the passions, and which being the private concernment of every person, is soothed by viewing its own image in a public entertainment.

Crites disagrees with this view by saying that 'in their love scenes ... the ancients were more hearty ....'

3.3.3 Lisideius' Viewpoint

Lisideius on the other hand defends the dramatists of the seventeenth century France, for following the Neo-classical outlook very scrupulously. According to Lisideius, French theatre is better than the English because of four reasons, which are as follows:

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1. Observance of classical dramatic rules
2. Simplicity of plot
3. Decorum of the stage
4. Beauty of the rhyme

Further, he condemns the English tragi-comedy by stating that 'There is no theatre in the world has anything so absurd as the English tragi-comedy; ' It is a drama of our own invention, and the fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so; here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion, and a third of honour and a duel: thus, in two hours and a half, we run through all the fits of Bedlam.' The classical dramatic practitioners never mixed or mingled tragedy and comedy in a single work of art. For them, the two were distinct genres and needed to be dealt with separately. However, in the Elizabethan age, from the time of Shakespeare, tragedy and comedy were mingled together by the dramatists, which many critics could not digest. This innovation of the mingling of tragedy and comedy is perceived by the Neo-classical scholars as absurd, since 'classical theory of drama' does not approve of it.

Then, he draws a comparison between the classical and the seventeenth century French dramatists. He says that the French have followed the classical rules better than the classical poets themselves. He praises the French for their single and unified plots, for their well-contended development of action, for the just relation between exposition and action. Moreover, he praises the French dramatists for being grounded in history, 'so interweaves truth with pleasing fiction'. The French were mainly preoccupied with the emotional struggles of powerful characters trapped in a web of circumstances, which makes their plays great. In comparison to all these, according to Lisideius, the English theatre lacks the dramatic unity in their plays.

3.3.4 Neander's Viewpoint

Neander (Dryden himself) vindicates the English drama over others by saying that, 'neither our faults nor their virtues are considerable enough to place them above us'. He reminds Lisideius of the definition of the play: 'a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind'. He further states that the French plays have the beauty of the statue, but they are not lively. He states, 'For the lively imitation of nature being in the definition of a play, those which best fulfill that law ought to be esteemed superior to the others.' It is true, those beauties of the French poesies are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not: they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man, because not animated with the soul of Poesie, which is imitation of humour and passions.' Excessive formality in observing the classical rules have destroyed their liveliness. In their effort to follow the classical norms of drama, the French have proved to be faithful to the rules, but that has taken away the creativity from their works of dramatic art. For Neander, the purpose of literature is first to delight and the French are far behind than the British dramatists in providing pleasure to the audience in following the classical norms.

Neander then defends tragi-comedy on English stage, saying that pleasure can be derived from interspersing tragic scenes with the comic. 'A scene of mirth mixed

with tragedy has the same effect upon us that our music has betwixt the acts ... must therefore have stronger arguments ere I am convinced, that compassion and mirth in the same subject destroy each other; and in the meantime cannot but conclude, to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage than was ever known to the Ancients or Moderns of any nation, which is –tragi-comedy'. Neander convincingly tries to defend the irregularities of the English stage as against the coldness of the French drama by saying that the English theatre is much livelier because of its innovations. In English theatre, the sub-plots do not mar the main plot and its unity of action; rather they uphold the main plot and contribute to the overall signification of the play. Similarly, a variety of characters also provide certain beauty to the play when the plot of the play has unity of action, as against the French theatre, which may follow all the Neo-classical norms, but suffers from the 'dearth of plot' and 'narrowness of imagination'.

Neander goes on to defend the Elizabethan dramatists for their brilliant rendition of the theatrical activity. He takes up the Elizabethan dramatists—William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher and makes a comparative study of the four dramatists where he concludes that Jonson is the most learned and judicious; Beaumont and Fletcher, most cultivated and Shakespeare as having the greatest natural gifts. Neander says, 'Shakespeare was the Homer, or the father of dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil of the pattern of elaborate writing. I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.' Moreover, about Shakespeare, Neander says, '(Shakespeare) was the man of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accused him to have wanted learning gave him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned.' Dryden's such appreciation of Shakespeare has been praised by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who calls him a model of eulogistical (praiseworthy) criticism.

Neander praises Ben Jonson for his technical achievement, as he comments, 'Jonson was the most learned and judicious writer that any theatre ever had ... if I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit'. If one tries to judge a play merely from the point of view of the rules observed, then Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* or *The Silent Woman* points out the successful integration of action, observance of dramatic unities, and successful illustration of varieties of human nature. Beaumont and Fletcher, for Neander, present their 'great natural gifts' in their dramatic creations. Beaumont and Fletcher 'understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartees, no poet can ever paint as they have done'. He praises them for the gaiety in their comedies and pathos in the serious plays.

Dryden then, through Neander, defends rhyme in serious plays saying that it is neither artificial nor unnatural as 'tragedy is indeed the representation of nature, but ... nature wrought up in high pitch'. Rhyme may seem unnatural in comedy where greater realism is demanded, but fits well in tragedy as 'the plot, the character, the wit, the passions, the descriptions are all exalted above the level of common converse as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them with proportion of verisimility'.

Thus, Dryden defends the Elizabethan dramatists and shows how they epitomize the virtues in English theatre. Dryden shows great sophistication in showing the virtues and faults of the dramatists of different ages and different nations, which is the mark of a great critic.

3.3.5 Review

Dryden, addressing the readers, comments that the objective of his essay was chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English writers. At a time when the classical rules and French theatre influenced British culture, the British Neo-classicists—John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson and others—emphasized two important aspects of British Neo-classicism. These are as follows:

1. They did not blindly follow the classical norms.
2. They opposed the French practices and models.

It is thought that Dryden's primary contribution to the English criticism is that he set the tone, style and mode of British critical discourse—as pointed out by Wimsatt and Brooks: 'the conversational prose, the gentlemanly tone, the cool and judicial posture'. Dryden is the first critic in the history of English literary criticism to reasonably defend the British dramatists. But more than that, as T.S. Eliot pointed out in *Uses of Poetry*, 'The Great work of Dryden in criticism is that at the right moment he became conscious of the necessity of affirming the native element in literature.'

Dr Johnson sums up Dryden's contribution: 'Dryden may be properly considered as the father of English criticism, as the writer who first taught us to determine upon principles the merits of composition'. Moreover, he adds that 'the criticism of Dryden is the criticism of a poet; not a dull collection of theorems ... with imagery, so brightened with illustration'. Thus Dryden's 'An Essay on Dramatic Poesy' is considered to be a significant piece of critical work, which for the first time makes the English nation aware of its own greatness in literature in comparison to its European counterparts. At a time when Milton was writing *Paradise Lost* to celebrate the English nation and language, Dryden's *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* gained importance as it established the English dramatic canon. Moreover, the treatise is significant as it is the first piece of critical work that tries to define drama.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

3. State the questions that were asked by the four friends in the 'Essay'.
4. What was the significance of the moderns as per the viewpoint of Eugenius.

3.4 SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Coleridge was a great Romantic poet, and a great critic. *Biographia Literaria* is a kind of an autobiographical sketch of Coleridge's life, published in 1817. It illustrates Coleridge's literary aesthetics and theory. An important theme of the book of the role that philosophy

plays in literature, which is all pervading. Coleridge's digressions on the matters of poetry and literary theories make it an important piece of literary criticism. The book is an odd mix and contains components of a biography, philosophy and literary theory. Coleridge discusses the role of critics, the power of poetry to reveal the character of a man, issues of perception and how the mind processes information as well as the characteristics of poetic power. In Chapters XIV–XXII of the book, Coleridge analyses Wordsworth's theory of poetry. He did not support Wordsworth's views on poetic diction and his choice of rustic themes. In Chapter XIII of the book, Coleridge explains what the terms, 'fancy' and 'imagination' mean to him. He asserts that the purpose of poetry is to give pleasure to its readers and to the poet. His theory of 'imagination' is his most significant contribution to the subject of literary criticism. Let us read about Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* in brief.

3.4.1 Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*

The Romantic Age began with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the year 1798. The literary historians are of the view that the publication of this collection of poems along with its Preface, heralded a new era in the history of English literature. Every age is either a reaction to the immediate earlier age or a continuation of the earlier age with subtle changes. The Romantic Age is a complete reversal of the Age of Reason (eighteenth century). The term Romantic not only means a poetic creed in English literature; it also connects a highly complicated set of attitudes and beliefs as well.

Romanticism was largely a reaction against the prevailing Neo-classical school of writing, which laid great stress on form, structure and conventions of poetic diction. Thus, opposed to classicism and its sophisticated culture, the Romantics brought with them the 'Renaissance of wonder' where the natural world is revealed and vividly portrayed for the first time. This led to the idea of nature as an inspiring force, as felt by William Wordsworth and Percy B. Shelley.

The governing word of the eighteenth century was 'reason' and the dominating word of literature in this century (also termed Neo-classical age) was 'diction'. The Romantics tried to oppose both these notions and thus reason was replaced by imagination/emotion. The diction of the eighteenth century poetry was replaced by the language of the common man, as Wordsworth talks about it in the 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads'. Thus, a stark contrast can be perceived between the eighteenth century poems and the poems of the Romantics.

However, this change that you perceive did not happen suddenly; it was gradual. The Pre-Romantics (Thomson, Gray and others; some literary scholars even include William Blake in the list of the Pre-Romantics) had their contribution in achieving this change in the history of the English literature. However, Wordsworth in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' emphasized the aims and objectives of the new poetry. According to him, the subject of the new poetry should be taken from the ordinary and commonplace life and coloured with imagination to make it poetic and to express in common man's language. Though Coleridge published poetry with Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), these two eminent poets of the Romantic Age differed in their outlook in many ways. Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* not only professed his

ideas about poetry and creative processes, but also expressed his intellectual difference from Wordsworth, though he had deep veneration for him. In chapters fourteen and seventeen of *Biographia Literaria,* you learn about the admiration Coleridge had for Wordsworth. However, that does not deter him from pointing out the lapses in Wordsworth's notion of poetry as propounded in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads'.

Biographia Literaria is an autobiographical sketch by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, published in 1817. It is a discourse that is contemplative, and lays heavily on philosophy. It elaborates the philosophies propounded by Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling.

3.4.2 Role of Imagination in Romantic Poetry

Wordsworth in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' has talked about how imagination should be the means through which one should colour the commonplace incidents of one's life. He spoke of poetry as a 'work of imagination and sentiment'. Keats wrote in a letter in 1819—'I describe what I imagine'. Thus, all the Romantics are preoccupied with imagination, though it was Samuel Taylor Coleridge who tried to theoretically and critically talk about imagination in his book of criticism named *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817. Coleridge made a distinction between 'fancy' and 'imagination'. Coleridge in chapter thirteen of *Biographia Literaria* writes the following:

> The imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the Infinite I am. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet as identical with the primary in its kind of agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space ....

Primary imagination, according to Coleridge, is the only means through which the poet can transcend the worries, tensions and pains of this reality so as to communicate with the 'infinite' or the 'divine' and get some access to the ideal world. Coleridge asserts that the only poetic means through which a poet can surpass the 'fixities and definites' of the world of fancy is through primary imagination. He also distinguishes between the the fanciful and the imaginative poet when he compares John Milton and Abraham Cowley, and says 'Milton is an imaginative poet, whereas Cowley, a fanciful one'.

However, the poet's work is not only that of a seer, as he does it while getting into the mode of perceiving the supreme reality with primary imagination. His next role is that of a prophet, where his duty is to talk about the things that he has perceived in his primary imagination. Thus, the poet now tries to make the perception of the primary imagination concrete, through the secondary one. However, as Coleridge says it is not altogether possible to recreate the things of the primary imagination, as the secondary imagination 'dissolves, diffuses and dissipates, in order to re-create'. Therefore, it is never possible for any imaginative poet to be completely satisfied with his creative

output as the essence of what he had perceived through his primary imagination is lost if not fully, at least partially. T. S. Eliot, later on, in a different context altogether in the poem *The Hollow Men* writes the following:

'Between the conception and the creation

Falls the shadow'

This shadow disappointed the Romantic poets. It is termed by literary scholars as 'Romantic Agony'.

Coleridge's famous poem *Kubla Khan* represents the concept of imagination that Coleridge tried to theoretically talk about in *Biographia Literaria*. The poem is about poetic creativity and about how primary and secondary imagination work. Coleridge like *Kubla Khan* fails to create a dome, though he as a 'poet' is able to make it. This is because the poet as a seer can use his primary imagination to transcend from the world of the real to reach the ideal world. However, after experiencing the ideal world, his next role is to substantiate it for the readers. Coleridge like Kubla Khan is the poet in his secondary imagination where he fails to substantiate the ideal that he has come to know when he heard the song of the 'Abyssinian Maid' talking about the hidden knowledge of existence. The knowledge of the ideal is clear to the poet's mind—he knows that if opposites are juxtaposed in proper order, the ideal can be reached. He probably got this idea from Renaissance alchemy (alchemical practices during the Renaissance that used trial and error methods to discover the nature of substances) or from John Donne, 'whatever dies is not mixed equally'. So, the poet wanted to create a dome, which has the opposites existing in it, 'that sunny dome! those caves of ice'!

Check Your Progress

5. What was the chief characteristic of the Romantic age?
6. State Coleridge's formulation of Primary imagination.

3.5 BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA: CHAPTER IV

In Chapter IV, Coleridge returns to the initial formation of his poetic doctrine and to the third (and most significant) impact upon it — Wordsworth's poetry. Although crucial opening insights were provided by Boyer and Bowles, Wordsworth's works revealed something radical to Coleridge. Coleridge had gone through Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches*, while he was at Cambridge. He was convinced that Wordsworth was the original poetic genius. Wordsworth's skills were fully revealed later in 1795, when Colerdige got a chance to hear Wordsworth reciting *Guilt and Sorrow*, his manuscript poem, when they first met. Coleridge was deeply and instantly affected by this reading. What impacted him was the unusual manner in which the depth of feeling had united with intense thought. This had a deep effect on Coleridge's judgement too. There was this extraordinary balance between what was truly observed and what was imagined in the way the observed objects were modified.

Wordsworth had managed to spread the tone, atmosphere, depth and height of the idyllic world around, with its scenarios, events and forms, which had otherwise lost

their sparkle to custom. Coleridge was impressed by this decisive and influential insight, whose nature he could not easily and accurately define.

The manner in which Wordsworth's poetry brought about a unification of thought and feeling, had never been done in English literature after Milton. He had a way of realizing and idealizing the commonplace. He had the knack to make the readers see man and nature as if they were laying their eyes on them for the very first time. Where did Wordsworth obtain this fresh sensation? What distinguished his poetry from the works of eighteenth-century writers? According to Coleridge, repeated meditations and the ability to anticipate and also prepare for the inevitable arguments and illustrations that would follow, had led him to initially suspect that 'fancy' and 'imagination' were two separate and different faculties. They were not two terms with the same meaning as was popularly believed. They were not a smaller or greater degree of the same power either.

At the centre of *Biographia Literaria* lies the desynonymisation of fancy and imagination. In the true sense of the word, it is the raison d'être. Coleridge's aim was to find out the principle that determines imagination and in the process be able to state his own poetic doctrine. He did not wish to express these principles as his own opinions, but as the result of derivations from existing principles. The terminus a quo of this study/ research was primarily Wordsworth, whose *Guilt and Sorrow* initially drew Coleridge's attention to poetry and related imagination. The terminus ad quem, that follows the philosophic deduction of the imagination, maturely assesses all that has been achieved by Wordsworth's poetically.

3.5.1 *Biographia Literaria*: Chapter XIV

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge met in 1795. They immediately recognized each other's talent and what bloomed from their friendship is *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems published by the duo in 1798, which changed the course of poetry in England. They often met each other and discussed different aspects of poetry, as Coleridge himself claims in the beginning of chapter fourteen of *Biographia Literaria.* Coleridge states, 'During the first year that Mr Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination'.

The discussions on divergent topics related to art and poetry—on the notion of art being true to reality and the factor of imagination being true to the creative process—paved the path for a fresh outlook in poetry. Moreover, Wordsworth and Coleridge decided to delve into two different aspects of Romanticism and write poetry on those aspects, as Coleridge himself mentions, 'that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts'.

'In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interest of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they

present themselves'. Coleridge thought of directing his endeavours 'to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic' in the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel* (the poems of Coleridge in the collection *Lyrical Ballads*).

Wordsworth tried 'to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday'. Thus, Wordsworth and Coleridge decided to champion two different, but significant aspects of poetry in the Romantic Age. They did this in order to set an example of a collection of poetry, which would provide freshness to the readers who were cramped with too much of poetic diction and elitism of the eighteenth century poetry.

Coleridge then goes on to praise the efforts of Wordsworth, 'for rejecting the usual ornaments an extra-colloquial style of (his) poems' (poetic diction) in *Lyrical Ballads*. He points out that the assailants of Wordsworth are dubious in presenting their 'acrimonius passion' against Wordsworth and his notion of poetry as presented in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' and in practice in his poems. For Coleridge, Wordsworth is an institution in himself and it is proved by the sale and popularity of *Lyrical Ballads*. If Wordsworth's works would have been 'silly' or of no importance as far as poetic process is concerned then his poetry would have been disregarded or forgotten. However, the popularity of *Lyrical Ballads* only goes on to prove the prominence of Wordsworth, 'Had Mr. Wordsworth's poems been the silly, the childish things, which they were for a long time described as being had they been really distinguished from the compositions of other poets merely by meanness of language and inanity of thought; had they indeed contained nothing more than what is found in the parodies and pretended imitations of them; they must have sunk at once, a dead weight, into the slough of oblivion, and have dragged the preface along with them. But year after year increased the number of Mr. Wordsworth's admirers.'

In any case, if Wordsworth is great in his poetic creed, it does not make Coleridge uncritically admiring towards Wordsworth, as he too has his own critical mind. Coleridge's mind differs from Wordsworth and he asserts it vehemently in chapter fourteen of *Biographia Literaria*. He says, 'I think it expedient to declare once for all, in what points I coincide with the opinions supported in that preface, and in what points I altogether differ.' When Coleridge asserts his difference from Wordsworth, he is not trying to cast his aspersions on Wordsworth as the other assailants of the age did, but is trying to justify his own stand in terms of the creed set up by Wordsworth in the 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads', which Wordsworth added to the later publications of *Lyrical Ballads*.

3.5.2 Coleridge's Notions of Poetry and the figure of the Poet

Coleridge's conceptions of poetry and the poet arose from his notion of imagination, which according to him was the defining characteristic of Romantic poetry in particular and poetry in general. Coleridge began by distinguishing between poetry and poem. Poetry, for Coleridge, was of wider connotation as he used the word poetry to cover almost all forms of imaginative writing and art whose immediate intention was to impart pleasure.

In poetry, Coleridge included unrhymed imaginative writing, as he said, 'The writing of Plato and Bishop Taylor, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry if the highest kind exist without meter ... The first chapter of Isaiah (indeed a very large portion of the whole book) is poetry in the most emphatic sense.' If that is the case, how can one distinguish a poem from poetry? Coleridge was of the opinion that a poem combined the same elements, as were found in imaginative prose compositions, but rendered in a different manner because it aimed at a different object. Sometimes, the intention may be communication of truth and such communication may give pleasure, but this pleasure was not the immediate end. It was indirectly obtained, whereas pleasure was the immediate objective of poetry.

Coleridge defined poem as—'A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth and from all other species—(having this object in common with it)—it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.' He added, 'a poem contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference therefore must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of different object being proposed'. For Coleridge, poems do not differ much from prose, except in terms of them being metrical and rhythmical. These distinguishing elements in poetry make it distinct and 'pleasurable' to the readers.

3.5.3 Superaddition of Rhyme to Poetry

Coleridge discusses that whether the superaddition of rhyme would make a literary work, a poem. If meter is superadded in composition, then all other parts should be at par with it. According to Coleridge, a legitimate poem is that 'the parts of which mutually support and explain each other'. This originates from a corresponding organic process whose source is the poet. 'The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of imagination.' Here it must be stressed that pleasure and truth which Coleridge seems to separate are derived both from poetry as well as science. Coleridge's separation of the two seems arbitrary and can be explained by the fact that Coleridge, like other nineteenth century thinkers in general, was not able to shed the dichotomies of the current philosophy.

As a poet, Coleridge thought that Wordsworth's greatness lay in 'the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed and above all the original fight of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations'.

3.6 BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA: CHAPTER XVII

In chapter seventeen of *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge deals with William Wordsworth's faith in low and rustic life as especially favourable to the formation of poetic diction. To Coleridge, William Wordsworth was the greatest poet of his age. In a letter, Coleridge mentioned Wordsworth's esteem by saying 'I feel myself a little man by his side.'

Wordsworth's championing of the language of the rustics and Coleridge's disagreement

Coleridge starts the chapter by stating the theory of language as is being propagated by Wordsworth in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' and how it affected the age and its writings. 'Mr. Wordsworth is fully justified in believing his efforts to have been by no means ineffectual. Not only in the verses of those who have professed their admiration of his genius, but even of those who have distinguished themselves by hostility to his theory, and depreciation of his writings, are the impressions of his principles plainly visible.' Coleridge feels that Wordsworth was justified in pointing out the artificiality of a poetic diction of the eighteenth century, as it was stagnant and to a greater extent hindered the manifestation of the poet's experience. However, at the same time, Coleridge disagrees with Wordsworth's view that the language of poetry should be 'the language of natural conversation of men under the influence of natural feelings'. However, his disagreement with Wordsworth cannot be compared with the remonstrations of other people of the age. According to Coleridge, the people who challenged Wordsworth did so without any real basis as they did not try to interpret Wordsworth's 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' in a just manner. Though Coleridge speaks in favour of Wordsworth and the effect of his critical and creative writing still it does not mean that Coleridge's thoughts are no different from that of Wordsworth. Chapter seventeen especially focuses on those aspects where Coleridge points out the grounds on which he differs from Wordsworth's doctrine on poetic diction, by presenting his strong objections to Wordsworth's praising of the language of the rustics. Coleridge states that poetry cannot be of everyday language because poetry needs certain elements in order to provide pleasure to the reader like the naturalness of a thing described, way of representation and the feelings it generates in the reader.

Wordsworth thought that 'because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity, they convey their feelings, and notions in simple and unelaborated expression. Moreover, Wordsworth thinks that the language of the rustics needs to be purified from all defects for it to be the medium of poetic expression. Coleridge feels that one should object to this purification of rustics' language for the purpose of poetry. He thinks that if rustics' language is purified from its defects, then it is no different from the language of any common man.

3.6.1 Coleridge's Views on Meter

Coleridge makes a close reading of 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' and also points out Wordsworth's contradictions of ideas. On the one hand, Wordsworth advocated poetic use of the language of men; while on the other, he insisted on the principle of selection. Wordsworth denied the essential differences between the language of poetry and that of prose. At the same time, he was against the use of meter in poetry. Coleridge is of the opinion that though poetry and prose make use of the same vocabulary, yet in poetry the way the words are ordered is what makes it poetry. Coleridge writes,

> the true question must be, whether there are not modes of expression, a construction and an order of sentences, which are in their fit and natural place in a serious prose composition, but would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry; and vice versa, whether in the language of a serious poem there may not be an arrangement both of words and sentences and a use and selection of (what are called) figures of speech, both as to their kind, their frequency and their occasions, which on a subject of equal weight would be vicious and alien in correct/ and manly prose. I contend, that in both cases this unfitness of each for the place of the other frequently will and ought to exist.

Therefore, for Coleridge, the primary difference between the language of prose and poetry is meter. Meter determines the use of a particular language in poetry, which has to be different from that of prose. Coleridge says, 'I write in meter, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose.'

Coleridge then points out how some parts of Wordsworth's theory of diction are contradictory to his own practice. He points out how Wordsworth's poetry is even composed in a poetic diction which is 'impassioned, lofty and sustained'. Coleridge does this to point out that Wordsworth has discarded his own theory in practice. Therefore, it is difficult to reconcile Wordsworth's theory of diction and its practice, as he says, 'to me it will always remain a singular and noticeable fact; that a theory which will establish this lingua communis is not only as the best, but as the only commendable style, should have proceeded from a poet, whose diction, next to that of Shakespeare and Milton, appears to me of all others the most individualized and characteristic'.

3.6.2 Review

The simplicity and primitivity of Wordsworth's poems, and even more of his theoretical views, provoked a considerable volume of immediate protests from his reading public. However, the critic who spoke with the shrewdest authority was Coleridge, after a lapse of seventeen years in his reminiscential *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge's argument about poetic diction may be summarized in three main parts, which are as follows:

1. He said that if Wordsworth, in arguing that the language of 'metrical composition' is essentially the same as that of prose, meant only that poetry and prose have the same vocabulary, or dictionary, on which to draw, he was uttering a truism. Coleridge concluded that Wordsworth really meant that the poetic manner of combining words was no different from that of prose and this, he retorted, was patently false. It is perhaps worth observing that Wordsworth may not in fact have made it quite clear whether he excluded either of the meanings defined by Coleridge; and that it is not necessary, either for justice to Wordsworth or for purposes of literary history, to suppose that he had brought himself to the point of facing a sharp distinction.
2. Coleridge argued that if a given image or figure (for instance, the 'image' of Phoebus as the sun) is used badly by a given poet (for instance, Gray in a sonnet criticized by Wordsworth), the reason for the bad quality is not the figure; it is a repetition of what other poems have done, but that it is in some way a violation of 'grammar, logic, psychology', 'good sense', or 'taste'—the 'rules of imagination'.
3. Coleridge argued that education, and not the lack of it, tends to make a poet. Uneducated men are disorderly in their writing; they lack purview. If the peasantry of Wordsworth's Westmoreland and Cumberland spoke a pure and

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vigorous language, this did not come from an uninstructed communion with nature, but from a spirit of independence and from a solid religious education and acquaintance with the Bible and hymn book.

One kind of speech (socially defined) could not be more real than another. However, in a given instance it might be either more or less poetic. In his appreciation of Wordsworth's own poetic performance, Coleridge noted that Wordsworth suffered the difficulties of a ventriloquist in his undue liking for the dramatic form. Either a rustic speaker was invested with Wordsworth's authority of utterance, or an opposite fault appeared, matter-of-factness, circumstantiality, and a downright prosaism, 'I've measured it from side to side; 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.' It is not possible for a poet, urged Coleridge, especially not for a lyric poet, 'to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity'.

Check Your Progress

7. What was the basic premise of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* Chapter IV.
8. Give a brief description of Coleridge's notions of poetry and the figure of the poet.

3.7 SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: A CRITIC AND PHILOSOPHER

The true blending of literary criticism with philosophy begins with Coleridge. However, one need not be misled by this statement and feel that Coleridge was a philosopher first and then a man of literature or a literary critic. Coleridge turned literary criticism into a philosophical discipline. He was primarily a poet and a literary who attempted to base literary criticism in philosophy. However, to understand Coleridge as a literary artist and a philosopher, we need to study Coleridge's own philosophical development. Coleridge believed that poetry cannot be separated from philosophy and philosophy could be best understood if it was studied in poetry. In a letter which he wrote to one of his friends in 1816, Coleridge states:

> I am convinced that a true system of philosophy – the science of life – is best taught in poetry.

The greatness of philosophy lies in the fact that it is the study of life. The main strength of Coleridge's criticism is its philosophical basis. The development of Coleridge as a philosophical critic can be seen in two stages. In the first phase, the development of Coleridge's critical faculty began with *associationist* philosophy, where he was greatly influenced by Hartley. The second stage of Coleridge's development, as a critic stands in sharp contrast to the first stage. In the beginning, he was the follower of Hume and Hartley and his associationist philosophy was a product of the classical developments in eighteenth century; in the later stage, he repudiated both Hume and Hartley. In other words, the early period of Coleridge's criticism bears a mark of Associationist philosophy. To understand Coleridge's views in the two stages as a literacy critic, we need to understand the meaning of Associationism. The emergence of

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Romanticism lies in its reaction of the mechanistic and materialistic classical theories of the eighteenth century. An introduction to the theories of Associationism and Necessitarianism will enable us to understand the psychology and moral philosophy of the pre-Romantic era. Romantic criticism rejects these eighteenth century classical ideas and Coleridge was a fanatic opponent of the neo-classical theories based on Associationism and Necessitarianism.

Associationism began with David Hume and David Hartley. A study of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738) proves that Hume was a skeptic as far as the *power of reason* was concerned. The eighteenth century was also known as the '*age of prose or age of reason.*' However, both Hume and Hartley rejected the superiority of reason. In the eighteenth century, reason was considered the primary force in the study of nature.

Hartley tried to establish the supremacy of instinct over reason. He wanted people to examine the moral issues with reason. He was looking for moral and psychological parallel of reason. Newton's theory of gravitation became the basis of a number of concepts in Physics and helped in unifying the physical world. Similarly, Hartley was also looking for some theory – some fundamental doctrine which could be seen as the unifying force in the physical world. In this sense, Hartley's Associationist philosophy can be seen as moral Newtonism.

Even Hume was on lookout for some basic force which could unite the physical world. For this purpose, he had already propounded the theory of the *'association of ideas'* as the unifying agent in the world of human experience. According to Hartley, the human mind works in a mechanical way through the association of ideas. He has elaborated this theory in *Observations on Man* (1749). Hume also believes in the association of ideas. But he gives a more scientific explanation of this theory as stated in *Treatise of Human Nature*:

> The qualities from which this association arises, and by which the mind is after this manner conveyed from the idea to another, are three, viz. resemblance, continuity of time and place, and cause and effect.

Hume was interested in establishing a standard of taste on a rational foundation. The proper judgment about an object should be made according to the features inherent in it. An object is found beautiful by a person because the mind contemplates it to be so. This is purely a subjective method of looking at things. However, as Hume believes, subjectivity alone cannot account for the beauty of an object. One has to discover the rules of art in our experience and in the observation of human life. Hume feels that the universal appeal of Homer depends on his adherence to the rules of art. However, the judgment about a work of art should be studied and comprehended from various points of view. Besides, an acquaintance, with the great works of art in the past is also necessary for a proper evaluation of a work of art. The proper evaluation of a work of art should be done without subduing reason. He observes, "If reason be not an essential part of taste, it is at best a requisite to the operation of this latter faculty". Reason enables us to grasp the design of a work of art and judge whether its function is well realized. A good critic possesses "strong sense, united to delicate feeling, improved by practice, perfected by comparison and cleared of all prejudice". The judgment given by such a critic is "the true standard of taste and beauty".

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All human experiences have been divided into two categories by Hume. The first is *impressions* which consist of our emotions, feeling, ideas and sensations. The first appearance in the soul of a human being is made by impressions. These very images are reflected in thinking and reasoning. The function of memory is to hold these ideas and memories in the mind. It is left to the imagination to unite these simple ideas into complex ones. Thus, the *principle of association* functions on the basis of resemblance, closeness in time and place and cause and effect: In the *Treatise of Human Nature*, it is observed:

> There are therefore the principles of union or cohesion among our simple ideas and in the imagination supply the place of that in separable action by which they are united in memory. Here is a kind of attraction.

Many complex ideas are derived from this principle of association. These ideas comprise of "relations, modes and substances". For example, what do we know about "substance"? It is nothing but a collection of specific features. The idea of a substance, like iron, is the idea of its properties. The idea of a mode of being like the idea of duty is all the notions that we have about duty. In this way, the idea of a substance is a collection of simple idea. These ideas are united by the *principles of association*. The theory of association, initiated by Hartley, studies this fundamental principle of the association of substances. This philosophy has played a major role in moulding Coleridge's career as a literary critic in 1798.

Hume and Hartley's contribution to the theory of '*association of ideas*' has been summarized by A.G. George:

> Hartley is chiefly remembered for the development of the moral principle of association of ideas. He carries the application of Hume's theory further. Hume had explained the laws of cohesion on the principle of ideas. Hartley goes further and uses the principle of association not only for explaining the mechanism of mental process but also for the evolution of our moral characters from childhood to manhood. The development of the moral sense is itself out of simple sensations. Hartley's theory explains the formation of human character by circumstances through the universal principle of association. As a corollary to this, Hartley hold's that it is possible to improve man's moral and intellectual conditions by education. The moral sense is not congenital. It is acquired through the principle of association.

If we talk of pleasure and the association of ideas, pleasure can be easily associated with notions of right and wrong. However, the role of instinct becomes important here. Naturally, the human mind associates pleasure with the right kind of objects. The mind does not find pleasure in the wrong objects. It seems that there is some unseen power which shapes our characters and controls or checks us with discipline. The unseen power monitors our development from childhood to youth and then to old age i.e. the age of wisdom, experience and maturity. In other words, we are not actively involved in our gradual development. We are passive out lookers, carried forward by providence to the right path. In the initial stage, we feel the pleasurable sensations, then we associate these pleasures with sublime objects and finally realise the presence of God everywhere.

The theory of association of ideas cannot be understood at length without knowing about Necessitarianism. Necessitarianism believes that the external world is arranged by the providence. The laws of human nature are framed on the basis of association of

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ideas. The moral order of the world and the capability of associating pleasure with correct objects are inherent in human nature. The principle of association of ideas is always operational in the world. It operates by itself. That is why there is moral order and perfection in the world. If human beings want the order of perfection to continue, they need not interfere with this associative principle. Rather its inherent functioning should be allowed to continue. In other words, the human mind has no active role to perform, in maintaining moral order in the world. Thus, both Associationism and Necessitarianism suggest that there is an unseen power which imposes its will in the world; hence its conception is mechanistic. Associationism and Necessitarianism also lead to a materialist psychology.

The early phase of Coleridge as a critic manifests a deep influence of Associationism and Necessitarianism which were the products of the eighteenth century and hence materialistic and mechanistic philosophies. However, these ideas could not remain the source of inspiration for long in front of the daunting personality of Coleridge. There were two incidents which are significant in the birth of Coleridge as a literary critic. He visited Germany and was greatly inspired by the Romantic ideologies of Kant and Schlegel brothers. His acquaintance with William Wordsworth also played a significant role in moulding his personality into what he is famous for. He underwent a transformation and repudiated the materialistic and mechanistic twin doctrines of Associationism and Necessitarianism, of which he was an ardent follower some time before.

The second phase of Coleridge is remarkable for its allegiance to the *transcendental philosophy* of Immanuel Kant. According to this theory, the human mind is an active agent. Thus, we see the difference between two streams of thought. The human mind, which incorporated *imagination* and *fancy,* were passive in Hartleyan principle of association of ideas where the human mind (imagination) becomes the centre of all activities and is an active performer, according to the transcendental notion. The new influence was so powerful on the mind of Coleridge that he talks of having thrown the Hartleyan influence forever. As written to Thomas Poole by Coleridge in 1801:

> If I do not delude myself I have not only completely extricated myself from the opinions of time and place, but have overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley ... Especially the doctrine of necessity.

Moving to Coleridge's eminence as a literary critic and an analysis of his major critical work *Biographia Literaria*. It began as a literary autobiography by Coleridge. Later on, it developed into philosophical discussions about Kant and Schelling. It was published in 1817. However, originally it was conceived as a brief critical preface to Sibylline Leaves. Rapidly, it grew into a causerie on his literary life and opinions, in two volumes. As a conventional autobiography, it is lacks in the aesthetic and recapitulatory 'finish' because of its being unsystematic, inexhaustibly communicative and not belonging to a single literary register. Its subject matter is not one but many. Whether it is his youthful admiration for the sonnets of William Bowles, his early friendship and intimacy with William Wordsworth, or talks about the associationist philosophy from Aristotle to Hartley and how it faces challenge in the hands of Kant and other German Romantic successors, Coleridge begins invariably and frequently ends his literary work in *medias res*. A curious student has to look for important theoretical matters behind long passages

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of advice to would-be writers and the detailed analyses of the practical difficulties of publishing and editing journals. His method is excitingly inspirational in Table Talk. The reader comes across sudden insight and wonderful incandescence.

However, the underlying concern of *Biographia Literaria* is the process of human creativity. The literary and philosophical thought of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was empirical. The daunting task left to Coleridge was to 'view culture and creativity as simple givens rather than as the products of a specifically constituted intelligence'. His exploration of the pioneering works of Kant, Schilling and the Schelegel brothers results in the famous definition of the creative intelligence or the "Imagination'. In chapters IX, XII and XIII Coleridge analyses the relations between subjectivity and objectivity, self and the world, rational understanding and speculative reason. Coleridge is often accused of borrowing the ideas of the German, although he himself arrived at most of the ideas. He himself created the system into which these ideas were fitted. It is his theory of Imagination around which his whole aesthetic – definition of poetry, and idea of the poet and poetical criticism – revolves. Chapters XIII and XIV are of great importance from this point of view. His theory of imagination is preceded by a prolix. Coleridge's abstruse philosophical discourse comprises of certain or propositions relating to Nature and Self. Nature is objective, passive and unconscious. Self or Intelligence is subjective, vital and conscious. The coalescence of the subject and the object produces all knowledge which leads to the act of creation, 'I AM'. In this state the 'subject and the object, being and knowledge' become identical. At this stage one can experience and affirm the reality of "the one life in us and abroad". The cosmos is produced out of chaos. Coleridge suggests that this is possible when the self or the spirit views itself in all the objects which are dead and finite. The finite become infinite, the dead come alive because of the functioning of the creative imagination. Kant and Schelling also believed in the independence of the subject and the object as complementary objects of a single reality. Herein lays the affinity in the views of Coleridge and the German philosophers. Another point of similarity is the notion of the self-conceived as a Totality. Thoughts and feelings are no more abstractions; rather they are viewed in their original identity. However, Coleridge firmly believed that Imagination is not the monopoly of a particular group or a specific practice, although he knew that it found its best manifestation in poets and highest form of expression in poetry and aesthetic culture.

Having reached the central part of his theoretical meditations, Coleridge abruptly drops it. Volume II of the book is largely a critique of Wordsworth's theory of poetry and poetic diction. This main theme is interspersed with essays of Shakespeare. The difference between poetry and prose along with a detailed discussion of metre – its origin and elements – also form the body of the book. Here, he turns from the theory to the psychology of the creative process. He also discusses the inner preconditions and workings of authentic imagination. *Biographia Literaria* is the most carefully articulated piece of literature of the Romantic era in response to the multiple contradictions of the early industrial society, before Shelley's unpublished work Philosophical View of Reform. It influences on, upon later nineteenth and twentieth century literary theory has been immense. The students of poetry and literature are still most readily familiar with its model of the creative process. It has, therefore, justifiably been described by critics like Arthur Symons as "the greatest book of English criticism".

3.8 THE GERMAN ANGLE AND THE THEORY OF FANCY AND IMAGINATION

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In the eighteenth century the imitative – rationalist theory was mechanical and mechanistic. There were certain rules laid down for artistic creation. The creative artist was supposed to master the rules for artistic craftsmanship. Thus, poetry was good if the poet's understanding of the rules was sound. Ways to seek standards of lasting validity in arts were laid down by critics like Racine and Boolean. According to them, the act of creative writing was nothing more than producing a mechanical device like a clock or an engine. Let us look at the prescribed way for making a tragedy:

> Let the poet first choose a moral precept which he wants to impress on his audience by means of the senses. Then he invents a general story to illustrate the truth for famous people to whom something similar has happened and from them he borrows names for the characters in his story in order to give it a semblance of reality. After this he things up all the attendant circumstances necessary to make the main story really probable, and these are called the sub-plots and episodes. He then divides his material into five pieces, all of approximately equal length, and arranges them so that each section follows from the preceding section, but he does not bother further whether everything corresponds to the historical happenings, nor whether the subsidiary characters bore these or other names.

Such is the recipe given by Gottsched for the making of a tragedy. Obviously, creative writing was an invention and not imagination. Not that there was no concept of imagination in the eighteenth century. Here we find no scope for creative imagination, in the sense it was, later on, used by the Romantics. In the mind's eye, images come across one after the other. The difference between memory and imagination lies not in their functions, but in how they occur. If the images recur as in original experience, it is memory. If the recurrence is in a different order and if they combine to produce a new whole, it is imagination.

Imagination is something far and beyond reason according to the Romantic point of view. It is a mysterious creative faculty. It is divine. Its procedure is synthetic and not analytical. Intuition helps us to grasp the truth all at once. Imagination does not follow the route of reason or circumlocutions. It is active and productive. It does not only reproduce external data. It is not determined by some other faculty, rather it is determinative. In Kantian philosophy, the power that determines sense is prior in respect of its form or imagination. Its main function is to bridge the gap between thought and sensation. The world which is given to us by sensations is chaotic whereas the world of thought has an order and a system. The task of the creative artist is to bridge the gap between the two extremes – thought and sensation. This can be done by none other than the 'shaping spirit of imagination'. William Blake goes to the extent of declaring that there is nothing other than imagination which makes artistic creation possible. Imagination, in Blake's views, is divinity incarnate. It is the image of God which operates in the human mind. Plato's theory of knowledge as recollection and art as imitation has been thoroughly rejected by him. Just as memory was the ultimate power for Plato, imagination is the highest creative power for Blake. Even Wordsworth has assigned a very important place to imagination in his 'Preface' of 1815. The mechanical approach of the neoclassicists is refuted yet again in his hands:

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> Imagination in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following poems, has no reference to images that a merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but in a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.

The importance of imagination is yet again confirmed by P.B. Shelley and Keats. In *A Defence of Poetry,* Shelley made a distinction between reason and imagination. Reason is the analytic process where imagination is the synthetic process. Reason enumerates known qualities. The task of imagination is to perceive and determine their value. In the typical Romantic spirit, Keats has expressed his views on imagination in letters which are regarded as the storehouse of his critical thoughts. Imagination comprehends truth in the form of beauty. It, therefore, is a surer guide to truth than reason. One of his letters written to Benjamin Bailey contains his ideas on imagination:

> I am certain of nothing but the holiness of heart's affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth ... The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth.

However, the theory of imagination finds its best and most comprehensive expression in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. Besides Table Talk, his letters also contain valuable information about his theory of imagination. He rejected the eighteenth century idea of viewing imagination as the 'despotism of the eye'. Let us move to the *Table Talk* of May 1 1833, where he observes that 'the genius of the highest kind implies an unusual intensity of the modifying power, which detached from the discriminative power, might conjure a platted straw into a royal diadem'. He also believed that 'the activity of thought and vivacity of the accumulative memory are essential'. He also speaks of the imagination as 'the modifying power' which is opposed 'to fancy, or the aggregating power in that sense in which it is a dim analogue of creation, not all that we can believe, but all that we can conceive of creation'. Imagination modifies or transforms the material on which it operates. Fancy is contrary to imagination because it can group the materials mechanically. Fancy depends upon the succession of events in time and its combines them associatively in such a way that the event retains its original character. Imagination, as it's opposite, introduces harmony and transforms the given into a whole. Coleridge was greatly influenced by Kant's philosophical ideology which was expressed in *Critique of Judgement*. Kant's reproductive imagination is similar to fancy. There are many forms of imagination. So it is possible that fancy and imagination may co-exist in one and the same activity. The higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower kind. Fancy regulates the mental activity, but imagination is constituent of this activity. Fancy regulates the figures and other external ornaments, the form of the creative art. It is a power associating the figures, images and diction with the thought or feeling. Hobbes has treated fancy as imagination. In 1795, Coleridge borrowed Bishop Burnet's *History of My Own Times* from the Bristol library, which spoke of the struggle launched by the Cambridge Platonists against the teaching of Hobbes. One of Cadworth's work 'True Intellectual System' states that the mind has a creative function even in the knowledge situation. It can form concepts. The creative activity is said to be necessary for an apprehension of the ideas.

However, in propounding his theory of imagination, Coleridge was greatly influenced by Wordsworth, Schelling and Kant. Coleridge's association with Wordsworth has been a fruitful one. Only after this he realized that the mechanistic theory of mind was not sound. It would not explain the active function of the mind. After meeting Wordsworth, he realized his potential as a human being who could think and imagine. He came to know that he was not a commodity or an object that could only receive external impressions. There was something peculiar in the human mind which enabled it to perceive, to feel the inner moorings and to create something new. This knowledge prompted Coleridge to examine the existing theories of artistic creation of the neo-classical age. Consequently, all mental activity of the human mind is divided under two heads: (a) imagination and (b) fancy. Coleridge's visit to Germany was also instrumental in shaping his vision. Gradually, he had a conviction that into truth was essentially dependent upon the soul and the emotions. The human will is affected by the mind and in return the mind cannot function without the effect of the human will. Coleridge experienced the emotion of love and based his philosophy on it. Once he wrote to Thomas Wedgewood about how his power of imagination was born out of his craving for love:

> Love is limitless sensation, I...think ideas never recall ideas no more than leaves in a forest created each other's motion-the breeze it is that runs through them – it is the soul, the state of feeling.

Nature and human soul are inherently related to each other. There is an element of the infinite in every object. This 'infinite' can be arrived at by insight and not reason. This infinite is the fundamental of all nature. Those human beings who have this insight are specially gifted and as a result few. In other words, this insight is none other than their imaginative faculty. The major characteristic of insight is that it reveals the infinite in all finite things. Coleridge's theory of imagination examines this very nature of the insight. He also regards human soul as superior to nature. The appreciation of the nature by the human mind is not only superficial. It is deep and philosophical. It goes and unravels those aspects of nature which are not visible to the naked eye. Human mind appreciates the mystery and beauty of the inner life along with its external functions. The manifestation of the mysteries of nature is found in the sensual world. Our spiritual experiences get reflected in the sensual world. Coleridge was a firm believer in the fact that ideal and symbolic meanings were inherent in nature. The special faculty which enables a man to understand these deep rooted symbolic meanings of nature is none other than imagination. This special faculty is not possessed by an ordinary man. Here, we are reminded of Wordsworth who believes that a poet is a man different from ordinary human beings because of his sensitivity and ability to probe those aspects of finite objects which are beyond the perception of lesser mortals. The ordinary man, Coleridge maintains, lives in the real world – the world of 'fever and fret', physical torments and the tyranny of the senses. It is the faculty of imagination which can break through the world of actuality. These views find a beautiful expression in 'Dejection: An Ode' by Coleridge:

"Late, late yestreen I saw the new moon,

With the old Moon in her arms;

And I fear, I fear, my master dear!

We shall have a deadly storm.

Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence

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Well, if the bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mold you cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,
Which better far we mute.
For lo! The New Moon winter – bright!
And overspread with phantom light,
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! That even now the gust were swelling,
And the slant night shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
And sent my soul abroad
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it more and live!

2

A grief without a pang, void, dark and clean,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear –
O Lady in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle wooed,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the Western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze – and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;

Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
You crescent moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

3

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off any breast!
It were a vain endeavor,
Though I should gaze forever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

4

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature Live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would be aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed,
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! From the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth –
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sound the life and element!

5

O pure of heart! Thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein in doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.

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Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life and Life's effluence, cloud at once at shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower,
A new Earth and New Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud-
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud –
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

6

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Now care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! Each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth
My shaping spirit of Imagination
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And happy by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man –
This was my sole resource, my only plan;
Till that which suits a part inflects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.
Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality's a dark dream
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,

Which long have raved unnoticed.
What a scream of agony by fortune lengthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou wind, that rav'st without,
Bare crag, or mountain tairn, or blasted tree,
Or pine grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st devils Yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
Thou actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
Thou mighty poet, e'en to frenzy bold'
What tell'st thou now about?
'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds -
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!
But hush! There is a pause of deepest silence!
And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shuddering – all is over –
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less affright
And tempered with delight.
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay –
'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home but she hath lost her way:
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear

8

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle sleep! With wings of healing,
And may this storm be but a mountain birth,

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May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,

Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!

With light heart may she rise,

Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,

Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice,

To her may all things live from pole to pole,

This life the eddying of her living soul!

O simple spirit, guided from above,

Dear Lady! Friend devoutest of my choice,

Thus, mayst thou ever, evermore rejoice.

In this Ode written to Sara Hutchinson in 1802 as a 'verse letter', Coleridge explains the Romantic idea of imagination. About this time Coleridge's health had begun to deteriorate. He suffered from pain and was becoming a slave to opium. This poem is an account of his periodical fits of acute depression on the gradual loss of the poet's imaginative powers – the shaping spirit of imagination which is responsible for bringing about a harmonious relationship between external nature and the inner moorings of the poet's imagination. This creative faculty produces joy when one is at peace with one's own self and with the universe. With the slow departure his imaginative faculty, the poet is not able to perceive any beauty and charm in nature.

Imagination presupposes a sense of harmony and spirit. The outward form of nature displays harmony and spirit. There is a sort of hidden consciousness in the imagination which leads to creation and the transformation of the finite into the infinite. Coleridge's theory of imagination, as discussed in the *Biographia Literaria*, bears a lot of resemblance with the theory of the idealist philosopher, Schelling, of Germany. As we know, according to Schelling, artistic creation and the discovery of philosophical truth is possible because of imagination. The power of imagination lies in bringing about reconciliation between the opposites and producing harmony. *Thus,* both poetry and philosophy incorporate imagination as a reconciling principle. The philosophy of Schelling was transcendentalist. Hence, he believes that the unity of life is possible only through the nature of imagination. The imaginative is bestowed differently upon individuals. This faculty among ordinary human beings enables them to differentiate between the self and the world. In the case of philosopher, the imaginative faculty firstly enables him to draw a distinction between the self and the nature and then to mediate on this ground of distinction. A step ahead goes the mind of a poet. His imagination reconciles the opposites and provides an outward and objective expression to them. Hence, Schelling ascribes the highest place to art and poetry than all other forms of knowledge. He also believed that the subject and the object are inherently interdependent because of the power of imagination. This quality of unifying the opposites is named as an 'esemplastic power' by Coleridge. The unification of the human consciousness is possible through imagination. The gap between thought and emotion, reason and intuition is bridged by imagination. Thus, the philosophical basis of Coleridge's theory of imagination lies in Schelling's view that the whole self of man is involved in the apprehensions of reality.

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However, Schelling is not the only influence on Coleridge in the shaping of his theory of imagination. The German stream of thought has been adopted by him in an electric way i.e. that the inspiration is drawn from various sources and then homogeneously mixed together to make a single whole. Coleridge's idea that all experiences are not made up of merely general notions but as forms of mental image is a typical German influence. The other view that in a common spiritual life both symbol and the mind participate equally, is also German. This participation results in the experience of the beautiful.

Coleridge was prompted by his close friend William Wordsworth to study and reform the theory of imagination. However, Wordsworth has accepted the theory of imagination as propounded by Coleridge with some minor modifications. *Excursion* is Wordsworth's attempt to give a poetic exposition to his theory of imagination. Coleridge has drawn distinctions between primary imagination, secondary imagination and fancy. Wordsworth and Coleridge have differed about the nature of fancy. However, we will see these differences after an analysis of Coleridge's theory of imagination. Before Coleridge, the terms fancy and imagination were more or less indistinguishable. The same idea was expressed generally by both the terms. We come across a significant distinction of fancy and imagination for the first time in Chapter IV of *Biographia Literaria* where he considers the greatness of Wordsworth's mind as a poet.

> Repeated meditations led me first suspect (and a more intimate analysis of human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions and effects matured my conjectured into full conviction) that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.

Then he goes on to describe, how the two faculties were possessed differently by Milton and Cowley: 'Milton had a highly imaginative, Cowley a very fanciful mind. If therefore I should succeed in establishing the actual existence of two faculties generally different, the nomenclature would be at once determined. To the faculty by which I had characterized Milton, we should confine the term "imagination, while the other would be contradistinguished as fancy"'.

Coleridge assigns the same role to fancy which was ascribed to imagination in the eighteenth century. Fancy, viewed in this light, is mechanical. It functions according to the law of association. In Chapter XIII, Coleridge describes fancy in these terms:

> Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the fancy must receive all its materials readymade from the law of association.

Although Coleridge assigns minor role to fancy, it is a pejorative term. Fancy is lawless and arbitrary. No higher powers of judgement or selection control it. Its purpose is not very serious. In contrast to fancy, imagination is creative. Imagination is further subdivided into Primary and Secondary imagination. All men are imaginative whether it is a scientist or a poet, a farmer or a labourer. This is possible because of the presence of the primary imagination. It is the basis of all human perception. It enables us to identify, to discriminate, to synthesize and thus to produce order out of disorder:

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> The Imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination, I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Kant's 'Imagination' corresponds to Coleridge's 'primary imagination'. Imagination, Kant believes, is a universal faculty. It has the ability to reconstruct experience. The external data is received through our senses. Imagination is functional in arranging the data in various forms and designs. Imagination, thus, is a common faculty with which all of us are born. It has no special powers. Kant gives it no poetic status. It is a common cognitive faculty with which everybody is endowed. Coleridge does not agree with this. Imagination is a poetic faculty in its most advanced form. In Kant's opinion imagination is only a synthesizing power with hardly any creative ability. It cannot make the creation of poetry possible. On the contrary, imagination is a 'dim analogue of creation' in Coleridge's opinion. The secondary imagination makes artistic creation possible. It coexists with the conscious will. It differs from the primary imagination only in the degree and mode of operation. There is no difference in the kind of operation. All objects in the world are fixed and dead. Secondary imagination vitalizes them. It is active because it can give life to objects. It gives such attributes to the objects that they become responsive and hospitable to man. Secondly, it idealizes and unifies. It dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate. The secondary imagination or the creative imagination creates a chaos through the process of dissolution, diffusion and dissipation. Out of the chaos it creates a universe. It is an esemplastic power which can reconcile opposites, unify disparate elements and synthesize dialectically opposed forces. It idealizes and reshapes the data of experience to create a new reality out of them. This reality is endowed with the attribute of organic unity in it. The secondary imagination is the poetic faculty. It dissolves the work of the primary imagination and recreates it; it transforms the sense impressions which are already modified by the primary imagination. Thus, the charge that Coleridge has borrowed his materials from the Germans bears no significance. He has worked upon the material and given it his own interpretations. The imagination of the creative artist is secondary. The utilitarian world of the primary is one of value. The secondary imagination explains how the world of experience is to be grasped in a fuller unity so that we can have a significant experience of reality.

The will also operate in the primary imagination. The secondary imagination breaks up the original perception and constructs a new one. Both the primary and the secondary imagination are constructive, but it is the latter which is also destructive. The process of unification in the absorption of the experiences into a whole. The poet feels the need to create a coherent whole, and he embodies the experience in an all-inclusive pattern. In this process it destroys the isolation of objects. The creative imagination brings forth a 'charm of novelty'. Such a picture is not possible to the primary imagination in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude'.

Imagination 'informs and animates other existences' and hence becomes essentially vital. In normal life the objects are means, utilities and counters. With the

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focus of conscious imagination, they become ends in themselves. They are *vital* because they are integrated to the consciousness of the artist. Under the influence of the primary imagination we do not apprehend the living principle in the world of objects. The living principle is apprehended by the secondary imagination. As a result the objects appear more complex and significant. At the level of primary imagination, the objects are in the epistemological situation. They have an anthological status at the level of secondary imagination. Primary imagination is purely intellectual because it gives the sense of data. The secondary imagination reveals the agreement of the external with the internal, by revealing the organic unity of the world with the consciousness of the individual and of the creativity of Nature with that of the human mind. Secondary imagination results in poetic passion and aesthetic pleasure. It unifies the data and breathes into it a new life of its own.

Imagination is a creative activity of the mind, fancy is its mechanical activity because it only assembles past experiences. Fancy collects its materials from the law of association. The objects do not enter as and when they come. Each item is fixed. Each bears its original character. It is the unconscious will which create a few events or facts from the original experience. Then the objects are randomly grouped. How this grouping or association is done depends on the feeling present at the onset. "Association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of feeling than on trains of ideas... Ideas never recall ideas any more than the leaves in a forest create each other's motion. Feelings are associated with one another by fancy. Each feeling branches off into another and corresponding to this there is a recollection of the images. However, no attempt is made by fancy to harmonize the feelings. Fancy enters the domain of poetic creation first because of the collected feelings. The governing principle of fancy is associationism. Fancy and imagination are two distinct faculties. Fancy is not concerned with feelings. Imagination is concerned with ideas. Reason leads to truths or ideas through the imaginative process which is directly concerned with ideas. *Thus,* the imaginative activity also becomes the spiritual activity of human life due to the involvement of factors like reason, intuition, truths and ideas.

The associationistic philosophy based on mechanical or mechanistic approach 'mistakes clear images for distinct conceptions' and it 'demands conceptions where intuitions alone are possible or adequate to the majesty of the truth'. The contemplation evoked by this is directed to 'external casualty in which the train of thought may be considered as the result of outward impressions, of accidental combinations of fancy or the associations of the memory.' Another type of thinking contemplates 'internal casuality' in which we have the operation of 'the energy of the will on the mind itself". In this way 'thought is active or passive and the same faculties may in a popular sense be expressed as perception or observation, fancy or imagination, memory or recollection'. Fancy is passive. Hence, it can be compared with dreams or day-dreaming. We neither believe nor disbelieve the dreams while dreaming. And the strong feelings that are connected with these forms are 'bodily sensations which are causes or occasions of the images, not their effects. Fancy presents everything as independent of the rest. While combining it does not establish any relation between the feelings or between the images. The principles that govern its combining activity are derived from the activity of the imagination. We need imagination even to associate. By giving imagination 'the charm of novelty to things of every day' imagination awakens the minds attention to

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the lethargy of custom, and directs it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us.' Imagination transforms the given into the beautiful by virtue of the feelings and intuitions. Both fancy and imagination are necessary for the creative process. Imagination is superior to fancy only because of its capacity to unite.

Imagination is 'an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.' In his *Diary* for November 15, 1810, Crabb Robinson noted 'Coleridge made an elaborate distinction between fancy and imagination. The excess of fancy is delirium, of imagination mania. Fancy is the arbitrary bringing together of things that lie remote, and forming them into a unity. The materials lie ready for the fancy, which acts by a sort of juxtaposition. On the other hand, the imagination under excitement generates and produces a form of its own.'

The creative artist has an 'intuition of absolute existence' which makes him realize within himself 'a something ineffably greater than his own individual nature'. Imagination is concerned with existence and quality. Imagination is also necessary to make any perceptual experience possible. It is the point on which the activities of reason and understanding converge. Understanding is the science of phenomena. It is 'discursive', analytical and directed to the external world. Reason, on the other hand, is 'the immediate and inward beholding of the spiritual as sense is of the material'. Understanding enables us to apprehend the concepts of objects. The only object of understanding is 'the material world in relation to our worldly interests'. 'In reason there are no means, nor ends, reason itself being one with the ultimate end, of which it is the manifestation'. Reason can be conveyed only through symbols. Reason is close to ordinary experience, and normal understanding aids imagination.

3.9 WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE: AN EXPOSITION ON FANCY AND IMAGINATION

Wordsworth and Coleridge were friends, collaborators of the *Lyrical Ballads* and literary theorists. They have collaborated with each other in creative as well as critical writing. As a result it is not possible for a student of literature to discuss the achievements of one without any reference to the other. The mutual understanding and trust which they shared has allowed both of them to flourish as great critical and creative artists. The general practice is to discuss their theories and poems separately. But when taken together their works (both creative and critical) constitute a complete picture of the Romantic Movement in England. It is better to focus on them as critical writers for the time being. We have already discussed Coleridge's views on imagination so let us concentrate on Wordsworth's stand on it. He has also refuted the mechanical view of imagination which was popular during the eighteenth century:

> Imagination in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.

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Wordsworth discusses 'the conferring, the abstracting and modifying powers of the imagination.' The word 'hang' is used by Virgil, Shakespeare and Milton. Wordsworth uses this term to illustrate the operation of imagination:

> ... the imagination also shapes and creates... by innumerable process; and in none does it more delight that in that of consolidating numbers into unity and dissolving and separating unity into number,... alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers.

The differences between Wordsworth's theory of imagination and Coleridge's are only superficial. There is no serious difference of opinion regarding the theory of imagination. There are some differences even in their views on fancy. To understand what Wordsworth has to say about fancy, one needs to read the following lines by him:

> To the mode in which Fancy has already been characterized as the power of evoking and combining, or as my friend Mr. Coleridge has styled it, "the aggregative and associative power" my objection is only that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the... imagination as to the fancy, but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose. Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough, for her purpose... under which the processes of fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender or pathetic, as the objects happen to be oppositely produced or fortunately combined. Fancy depends upon the rapidity and profusion with which scatters her thoughts and images, trusting that their number, and the felicity with which they are linked together, will make amends for the want of individual value; or she prides herself upon the curious subtlety and the successful elaboration with which she can detect their lurking affinities.

Wordsworth also tries to separate fancy from spiritual truth. 'Fancy is given to quicken and beguile the temporal part of our nature, imagination to incite and to support the eternal.'

This view of Wordsworth has been objected to by Coleridge in the twelfth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*:

> If by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny that it belongs to all to the imagination; and I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of fancy and imagination for the operation of the latter singly.

Wordsworth has talked about fancy and imagination as two categories with fancy as the inferior and imagination as the superior faculty of the mind. Fancy is an arbitrary way of imaging according to Wordsworth whereas imagination is the creative faculty. Coleridge has added one more category in his study of fancy and imagination – (a) fancy (b) primary imagination and (c) secondary imagination. Fancy, in his views, is again arbitrary. It is the fixed memory in the human mind. It receives its materials from the law of association. The primary imagination is common to all human beings. It is universal the source of all human perception. Artistic creation is possible by a poet due

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to the secondary imagination. It is not a common phenomenon with all human beings. The underlying unity in man and nature is revealed through the artistic imagination.

Coleridge's views on poetry and the poet cannot be separated from his views on imagination. He makes a distinction between the terms 'poetry' and 'poem'. The term 'poetry' is used to cover all the forms of imaginative literature. Its connotation is wider. The medium of imparting pleasure in poetry is beauty. As stated by Coleridge in the essay 'On the Principles of Genial Criticism' in *Biographia Literaria* –

> All the fine arts are different species of poetry... They admit, therefore, of a natural division into poetry of language (poetry in the emphatic sense, because less subject to the accident and limitation of time and space); poetry of the ear, or music; and poetry of the eye, which is again divided into plastic poetry of the eye, which is again divided into plastic poetry or statuary and a graphic poetry, or painting. The common essence of all consists in the excitement of emotion for the immediate purpose of pleasure through the medium of beauty; herein contradistinguishing poetry from science, the immediate object and primary purpose of which is truth and possible utility.

Since *Lyrical Ballads* was composed in collaboration between the two friends. They had together decided the subjects for their poems. Wordsworth was supposed to take up subjects which dealt with nature and Coleridge had to write on the supernatural subject:

> During the first year that Mr Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself... that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural, and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any anytime believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.
>
> In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least Romantic; yet so as to transfer 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 poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity, and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

Coleridge suggests that metre or rhyme alone cannot make a piece of composition, a poem. If it were so, anything would deserve to be called poem on the basis of rhyme or meter:

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> A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference, therefore, must consist in a different combination of them; in consequence of a different object being proposed. According to the difference of the object will be the difference of the combination. It is possible, that the object may be merely to facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observation by artificial arrangement; and the composition will be a poem, merely because it is distinguished from prose by meter, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly. In this, the lowest sense, a man might attribute the name of a poem to the well-known enumeration of the days in the several months:
>
> Thirty days hath September,
>
> April, June and November.

However, communication of pleasure can be possible not only by a work of art metrically composed. Other genres can also give pleasure. Novels and romances also impart pleasure but they can't be called poems. All the parts of a work of art must be in harmony with each other:

> ... nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it. They must be such as to justify the perpetual and distinct attention to each part, which an exact correspondent recurrence of sound and accent are calculated to excite. The final definition, then so deduced, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth, and from all other species it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.

Coleridge believes that metre alone cannot make poetry, and poetry can be of the highest kind even without metre. 'The writings of Plato, and Jeremy Taylor, and Burnets' Theory of the Earth, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem. The first chapter of Isaiah is poetry in the most emphatic sense'. The question is how to distinguish the poem proper from this poetry, which too has language as its medium like the writings of Plato and the Book of Isaiah. The poem proper and the imaginative prose compositions combine the same elements. The difference lies in the manner in which these elements are combined because it aims at a different object. Similarly, by adding metre also, we cannot name a work of art poem. The immediate object of a poem is pleasure not truth. Besides if one understands what poetry is, it is easier to understand what makes a poet. 'What is poetry? Is so nearly the same question as what is a poet? The answer to one is involved in the solution of the other. For, it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts and emotions of the poet's own mind.' If the parts of a poem mutually support and explain each other, it becomes a legitimate poem. This organicism originates from a corresponding organic process whose source lies in the poet:

> The poet described in ideal perfection brings the whole soul of man into activity with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power. To which would exclusively appropriate the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control, *Laxis efferteen habenis*, reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness with difference; of

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> the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more that usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound and vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the actual and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

Coleridge, in his views on Poetry and the poet seems to separate truth and pleasure. However, truth and pleasure are derived both by science and poetry. It seems that, like other thinkers of the nineteenth century, Coleridge was not able to shed the dichotomies of the current philosophy. Obviously this separation seems arbitrary.

Coleridge defines poetry in terms of the function of a poet. It is the poet who composes poetry and imagination is a creative faculty which works in the poet. The idea of the poet, the poetic, and imagination is exemplified with a reference to Sir John Davies:

> Doubtless, as Sir John Davies observes of the soul (and his words may with slight alteration be applied, and even more appropriately to the poetic imagination). Doubtless this could not be, but that she turn Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange, As fix converts to fire the things it burns, As we our food into our nature change. From their gross matter she abstracts their forms, and draws a kind of quintessence from things which to her proper nature she transforms, to bear them light on her celestial works. *Thus,* does she, when from individual states. She doth abstract the universal kinds; which then reclothed in divers names and fakes steal access through the senses to our mind.

The concept of poetry is wider and larger than that of the poem. The poet is exactly what his poetry is:

> Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life and imagination the soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

The whole soul of man is brought into activity by poetry. He believes that the immediate object of a poem is pleasure not truth. But the immediate object of poetry is truth. Thus, poetry is different from poem due to the distinction in their objects. While critically analyzing Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis' and *Rape of Lucrece*, Coleridge elucidates the specific symptoms of poetic power. A true creative artist should first of all have music in his soul. Secondly, as for the choice of subjects, Coleridge maintains that the poet should choose subjects very remote from his private interests. Thirdly, images should be modified by a predominant passion. Lastly, the poet should have depth and energy of thought. Regarding the first characteristic of poetic genius, Coleridge says:

> In the Venus and Adonis, the first and most obvious excellence is the perfect sweetness of the versification; its adaptation to the subject; and the power displayed in varying the march of the words without passing into a loftier and more majestic rhythm than was demanded by the thoughts, or permitted by the propriety of preserving a sense of melody predominant... The man that hath not music in his soul can indeed never be a genuine poet.

Regarding the second characteristic he says, 'A second promise of genius is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. At least I have found that where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences, the excellence of a poem is but an

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equivocal mark, and after a fallacious pledge, of genuine poetic power'. Then the raw material is to be coloured by the imaginative power of the poet: 'It has been observed that images, however beautiful, though faithfully copies from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity or succession to an instinct; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit'.

The last feature he talks about is depth, 'The last character I shall mention ... is depth, and energy of thought. No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrance of all human knowledge, Human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language. In Shakespeare's poems the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a warlike embrace'.

Coleridge's views on the nature of poetry, art and poet remind us of Schelling. He believes that art is not a blind imitation; it is rather the recreation of what is around. The poet does not copy nature blindly. The poet 'must master the essence ..... which presupposed the bond between nature and the highest sense and the soul of man. There is an analogy between the process of nature and intelligence which is the business of the poet.' He states that 'the mystery of genius in the fine arts' is 'to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought and thought nature'.

The creative artist does not copy external nature. Rather the spirit of nature is communicated to us through symbols. Here, Coleridge's seems to be influenced by Schelling's view of creative imitation, as reflected in his book *The System of Transcendental Idealism*. Schelling maintains that philosophy cannot give what poetry can. Poetry can present the unconscious in action and creation. Nature appears to be an idle world with many limitations to the philosopher as well as the poet. Herein lays the difference between Schelling and Coleridge. Schelling's philosophy can be easily termed as pantheistic whereas Coleridge's philosophy is theistic. It is also important to realize that Coleridge has not provided a fully developed aesthetic theory on the nature of poetry. It is fragmentary and incomplete. The student of Coleridge has to gather information in tits and bits from here and there and join the loose ends together.

However, the greatness of Coleridge as a philosopher and poet lies in his attempt to discover the relationship between form and content, manner and matter in his aesthetic theory. As is clear by now, the neoclassicists were interested in analyzing the form of a, work of art. The content was hardly an important issue for them. Their discussions on form were related to the metre in a creative work. Coleridge has tried to handle both the issues of form and content in *Biographia Literaria*. In this process he becomes not only a literary critic but also a serious philosopher. He goes on to distinguish between a poem and poetry. The former pursues pleasure whereas the latter pursues truth. In this endeavour poetry becomes an imaginative synthesis. According to A.G George 'The ideal poet not only produces poems but composes poetry. Thus, poetry is an imaginative synthesis or a special insight. Related to this idea is the notion of the aesthetic unity of the form. A poem is in organic unity. We derive pleasure from poems because we are appreciating the element of organic unity in it. This conception of organic unity is advanced

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by Coleridge as the essential distinction between the poetic verbal structure and the non-poetic verbal structure'.

Check Your Progress

9. State the underlying concern of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.
10. Why does Coleridge's view on nature of poetry remind us of schelling?

ACTIVITY 1

Read Dryden's Essay on Satire and prepare a synopsis.

ACTIVITY 2

Browse the Internet and find out the meaning of Romantic Agony. Write a brief essay on it. You may also draw comparisons between Wordsworth and Coleridge's notion of romantic poetry.

Did you Know?

John Dryden studied at the University of Cambridge.

3.10 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- John Dryden was a poet who was considered to be the best representative of the Restoration Age (1660–1700).
- The Restoration was the age that marked the end of the Puritan regime in England as Prince Charles II was restored to the English throne.
- Dryden wrote an essay called *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. This essay is in the form of a dialogue between four speakers: Neander, Crites, Eugenius, and Lisidieus, with Neander representing Dryden himself.
- Crites begins by asserting the superiority of the ancient poets of classical antiquity.
- For Crites, the classical poets and dramatists had shown their mastery in the representation of human nature.
- The Moderns, according to Crites, had built their foundation on the ancient masters.
- Crites takes up a rigid neo-classical position in the debate among the four speakers. The rigidity of the neo-classical norms, for Crites, makes a piece of dramatic work better as by following the rules, the work of art can prove to be faithful and just.
- Listening to the tirades against the Moderns, Eugenius tries to defend the modern dramatists.
- Eugenius says that he has deep respect for the Ancients, but that does not take away the credibility of the modern writers.

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- According to Eugenius, the modern poets have excelled more than the poets of antiquity.
- Eugenius is critical of the Ancients for not following the dramatic unities strictly and for the use of the stock characters.
- Eugenius feels that modern dramatists follow the classical norms more closely than the Ancients and that is how the moderns are better than the ancient poets.
- Lisideius on the other hand defends the dramatists of the seventeenth century France for following the neo-classical outlook very scrupulously. According to Lisideius, French theatre is better than the English because English theatre lacks dramatic unity in their plays.
- For Neander, the purpose of literature is first to delight and the French are far behind than the British dramatists in providing pleasure to the audience in following the classical norms.
- Neander convincingly tries to defend the irregularities of the English stage as against the coldness of the French drama by saying that the English theatre is much livelier because of its innovations.
- Neander defends tragi-comedy on English stage by saying that pleasure can be derived from interspersing tragic scenes with the comic.
- Neander goes on to defend the Elizabethan dramatists for their brilliant rendition of the theatrical activity.
- Dryden defends the Elizabethan dramatists and shows how they epitomize the virtues in English theatre.
- The Romantic Age began with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the year 1798.
- *Biographia Literaria* is an autobiography in discourse by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, published in 1817. The work is lengthy and appears to be loosely structured.
- Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* not only professes his ideas about poetry and creative processes, but also ponders his intellectual difference from Wordsworth, though he held him in high esteem.
- *Biographia Literaria* is not a straightforward or linear autobiography. Instead, it is meditative, with a number of essays on philosophy.
- Though all the Romantics are preoccupied with the imagination it was Samuel Taylor Coleridge who tried to theoretically and critically talk about imagination in his book of criticism named *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817.
- According to Coleridge, primary imagination is the only means through which the poet can transcend the worries, tensions and pains of this reality so as to communicate with the 'infinite' or the 'divine' and get some access to the ideal world of His.
- Coleridge's conceptions of poetry and the poet arose from his notion of imagination, which according to him was the defining characteristic of Romantic poetry in particular and poetry in general.
- Coleridge defines poetry as all forms of imaginative writing and art whose immediate intention was to impart pleasure.

- Coleridge was of the opinion that poem combined the same elements, as were found in imaginative prose compositions, but rendered in a different manner because it aimed at a different object.
- For Coleridge, poems do not differ much from prose, except in terms of them being metrical and rhythmical.
- In chapter seventeen of *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge deals with William Wordsworth's faith in low and rustic life as especially favourable to the formation of poetic diction. To Coleridge, William Wordsworth was the greatest poet of his age.
- Coleridge feels that Wordsworth was justified in pointing out the artificiality of a poetic diction of the eighteenth century, as it was stagnant and to a greater extent hindered the manifestation of the poet's experience.
- Coleridge also presents his strong objection to Wordsworth's eulogization of the language of the rustics. He thinks that if rustic's language is purified from its defects then it is no different from the language of any common man.
- Coleridge is of the opinion that though poetry and prose make use of the same vocabulary, yet in poetry the way the words are ordered is what makes it poetry. For Coleridge, the primary difference between the language of prose and poetry is meter.
- Coleridge also points out that in practice; Wordsworth has discarded his own theory of diction.

3.11 KEY TERMS

- **Neo-classicism:** A revival in literature in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, characterized by a regard for the classical ideals of reason, form, and restraint
- **Tragi-comedy:** A kind of drama representing some action in which serious and comic scenes are combined; a composition partaking of the nature both of tragedy and comedy
- **Ancients:** The ancient Greek and Roman authors
- **Autobiography:** An account of a person's life written or otherwise recorded by that person
- **Rhyme:** Correspondence in the sounds of two or more lines (especially final sounds)
- **Meter:** The measured arrangement of words in poetry, as by accentual rhythm, syllabic quantity, or the number of syllables in a line

3.12 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. John Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, published in 1668 and considered to be his masterpiece in critical writing. It was written, in the form of dialogue between Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius and Neander when the four friends undertook a journey by boat on the river Thames. It is here that they took turns to express their divergent views on different aspects of literature.
2. Though Dryden admired and respected Aristotle, and made an elaborate analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics*, he did not agree to everything that Aristotle propounded. Dryden himself being an excellent poet and dramatist had an excellent understanding of the nature of poetic and dramatic creativity in the Restoration.
3. The questions asked by the four friends in the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* are:
   - What are the relative merits of classical and modern poets?
   - Is the existing French theatre superior or inferior to the English theatre?
   - Are Elizabethan dramatists superior to the eighteenth century dramatists?
   - Do the plays become more perfect when they follow the classical rules?
   - Is rhyme in serious plays desirable or not?
4. Listening to the tirades against the Moderns, Eugenius tries to defend the modern dramatists. He states that he had deep respect for the Ancients, but that does not take away the credibility of the modern writers.
5. The Romantic Age is a complete reversal of the Age of Reason (eighteenth century). The term Romantic not only means a poetic creed in English literature; it also connects a highly complicated set of attitudes and beliefs as well.
6. Primary imagination, according to Coleridge, is the only means through which the poet can transcend the worries, tensions and pains of this reality so as to communicate with the 'infinite' or the 'divine' and get some access to the ideal world.
7. The basic premise of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* Chapter IV is 'to investigate the seminal principle' of imagination and, in so doing, 'to present an intelligible statement of my poetic creed; not as my *opinions*, which weigh for nothing, but as deductions from established premises'.
8. Coleridge's view of poetry and the figure of the poet cannot be separated from his views on imagination. He makes a distinction between the terms 'poetry' and 'poem'. The term 'poetry' is used to cover all the forms of imaginative literature. Its connotation is wider.
9. The underlying concern of *Biographia Literaria* is the process of human creativity.
10. Coleridge's views on the nature of poetry, art and poet remind us of Schelling. He believes that art is not a blind imitation; it is rather the recreation of what is around. The poet does not copy nature blindly.

3.13 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Neander's (Dryden's) dialogue expressing his views on dramatic poesy.
2. What were the important aspects of British neo-classicism emphasized by Dryden, Pope, Addison and Johnson.
3. Give a brief overview of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria.*

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4. What was Coleridge's notion of imagination in romantic poetry?
5. Comment on Coleridge as a philosopher.
6. Write a synopsis of Wordsworth and Coleridge's exposition on fancy and imagination.

Long-Answer Questions

1. What were the reasons that led to Dryden's 'Essay' becoming a significant contribution to literary criticism?
2. Discuss *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* as a major work of a poet-critic rather than of a professional critic alone.
3. Would you regard Dryden as a conformist or a rebel in relation to neo-classicism?
4. Who are the main interlocutors and what do they represent in *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*? Discuss briefly.
5. A study of Dryden's *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* seems to give the impression that classical norms may be desirable but are not essential for the playwright to observe. Comment.
6. Write a critical note on the salient features of Dryden's *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*.
7. Describe the difference between fancy and imagination as explicated by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*.
8. As per Coleridge how does primary and secondary imagination help in the process of poetic creation?
9. Describe Coleridge's notions of poetry and the poet.
10. What was the objective of Wordsworth and Coleridge in creating the *Lyrical Ballads*? Were they successful in carrying out their intentions?
11. Analyse Coleridge's disagreement on Wordsworth's use of the language of the rustics in his poetry. Write a short note on Coleridge's reasoning in arguing against it.
12. Write a short note on Coleridge's views on meter and rhyme in poetry.

3.14 FURTHER READING

Gilbert, Allan H.; *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1963.

Pechter, Edward.; *Dryden's Classical Theory of Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975.

Latt, David J. & Monk, Samuel Holt; *John Dryden: A Survey and Bibliography of Critical Studies, 1895-1974*, University of Minnesota press, Minnesota.

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UNIT 4 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND T.S. ELIOT

Structure

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4.19 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.20 Questions and Exercises
4.21 Further Reading

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Romanticism was a movement that emerged in the 1790s in Germany and Britain and is also known as the Romantic Movement or romantic revival. But with the advent of Romanticism, new critical problems crept up. The changes were evident in comparison to the previous ages. One could make out how the function of criticism had changed and that critical emphasis had shifted. As the scope of literary criticism widened, aesthetics and social criticism also became philosophical with Coleridge. It was for the first time after the Renaissance that criticism challenged the old order – the classical and the neo-classical criticism. First of all, the Romantics refuted the concept of social conditioning of literary process in the neo-classical era. The impact of society on literature was supposed to be of great importance during the eighteenth century. As a result, we see that writers like Pope and Johnson were deeply interested in social factors. In a way, this age started a debate on the relative merits of the ancients and the moderns. An

individual writer was free to express himself. Interest in the individual psychology of the creative artist became the notion of the genius. In the Augustan age, the focus was on ordered rationality which was mechanical, artificial and impersonal. These characteristic features of eighteenth century were replaced by sincerity, spontaneity and originality. The neo-classicists like Dryden, Johnson and Pope favoured the imitation of classical models. However, Romantic poets like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelly saw the artist as a kind of genius whose works were an expression of his inspiration, emotion and imagination. The romantics stressed on freedom from the rules of composition and organic form. Consequently, they were preoccupied with the biography and psychology of the poet. Literature and criticism of this age reflected the changes in attitudes to life and values. Hence, Lessing's views are of great significance. Credit goes to Coleridge for composing standard biological and critical study of Lessing. The critical terminology that entered England from Germany was due to Coleridge. Lessing's *Laokoon* is a landmark work as it recognizes the difference between poetry and painting and between the medium of time and space.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Elaborate Romanticism and its effect on society
- Discuss the life of William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot
- Critically analyze Wordsworth's theory of Poetry in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*
- Explain Wordsworth's views on poetic diction
- Recognize the importance of Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

4.2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Wordsworth was a world-acclaimed English poet who was born on the 7 April 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland, in North-west England. Second of the five children to John Wordsworth and Ann Cookson, poetry was infused in him right from the beginning by his father. His mother taught him to read while he attended various local schools. He was also introduced to Milton, Shakespeare and Spencer through his father's library quite early in his life. Noted poet and diarist, Dorothy Wordsworth was his sister, younger to him by only a year.

In 1778, after the death of his mother, his father sent him to Hawkshead Grammar School in Lancashire. In 1787, he began attending the St. John's College in Cambridge from where he received his B.A. degree in 1791. By then, he had already started writing. His first publication was a sonnet in *The European Magazine* back in 1787.

Wordsworth toured the scenic locales of Europe and its influence can be seen in his works. Of all his works, his magnum opus is considered to be *The Prelude* which is a semiautobiographical poem. But his work *Lyrical Ballads* in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge heralded the Romantic Age in English Literature. Britain honoured him with 'Poet Laureate' in 1843. He died of Pleurisy on 23rd April 1850.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How did Wordsworth contribute to Romanticism in England?
2. How was Wordsworth influenced by his father?
3. How was William Wordsworth related to poet Dorothy Wordsworth?

4.3 UNDERSTANDING ROMANTICISM

A particular type of critical writing with a particular historical background and certain general features can be defined as Romantic criticism. However, the definition of the term Romanticism has been controversial and elusive. As a result, we come across various interpretations and definitions of the term. Some people go to the extent of saying that there cannot be one precise definition of Romanticism as it is subject to individual interpretation of the subjective mind. In other words, there are as many definitions of Romanticism as there are individual dimensions that are taken into account. A. O. Lovejoy, in his essay *On the Discrimination of Romanticisms* expresses similar views.

According to Reeve Wellek, Romanticism takes into account various types of imaginations and different attitudes to nature and individual styles of writing. Romanticism salutes the individual voice and the individual genius like never before. Its emphasis on the individual genius associates it with the common man. His attributes:

Historically, the advent of Romanticism is associated with the early nineteenth century in Europe. However, this statement should not imply that the romantic spirit was altogether a new entity. It has always coexisted with the classical spirit. Western literary tradition was influenced by the Greek and Roman classicists upto the eighteenth century. The romantic impulse was overshadowed due to the predominance of the external reality and scientific materialism. The neo-classicists held classical masters like Aristotle, Horace and Quintilian in high esteem and drew inspiration from them. The critics in this age tried to reinterpret Aristotelian concept of imitation to include the idea of original creation. However, a deeper scrutiny of the maxims of Aristotle showed that imitation serves the purpose of artistic delight. It was not just a copy of the real. It aimed at something more than what actually existed. This means that the romantic impulse was very much present. Even Horace's dictum, that the purpose of a work of art is to instruct and delight, hints at the subdued romantic element. However, the end of the 18th century marks the beginning of a new dawn. This brought about a new orientation of attitudes and values which questioned the basis of the rationalist aesthetics. The movements of enlightenment and sentimentalism strengthened this tendency.

The Romantic Movement in general was pioneered by men like Goethe, Schiller and Herder in Germany. They began the movement called Strum Und Drang (storm and stress) by stressing on the independence of the individual. Kant and Fichte demanded to establish the subjective order instead of the objective order. Poets like Heine and Uhland and the Schlegel Brothers – A.W. Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel also made significant contributions to the inauguration of the Romantic Movement in Germany. To

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understand the scope of romanticism in England, we need to study the historical development of literature and criticism. In England, literary criticism started with the humanists whose chief preoccupation was with language style and rhetoric. In its infancy, this was a welcome trend for the growth of English language. But in the neoclassical age, it could do no good to creative writing. The bias of language, style and rhetoric got converted into the theory of poetic diction. During the neo-classical age, the basic questions concerning the:

- nature of poetic creation,
- nature of poetry, and
- nature of the pleasure derived were secondary. Discussion about the rules and principles of composition were of prime importance.

However, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the signs of unmistakable change became discernible. More and more people advocated democratic liberalism in thought, philosophic rationalism and individualism. The tendency of spiritualism prompted critical inquiry of the ancient rules and practices with a skeptical frame of mind. The new spirit did not believe in strict adherence to ancient literary forms. Instead, new interest in human psychology became evident. Poets and philosophers were trying to probe the vast expanse of human mind and psychology. This included the psychology of knowledge and aesthetic experience, the psychology of moral action and poetic creation. A new theory of aesthetic thought was propounded in England by Edmund Burke. Lessing, Goethe and Baumgartner laid the foundation of a new science of aestheticism in Germany.

As we know, Aristotle emphasized that poetry must present objects in action. According to Lessing, poetry should be a vocal moving picture with the emphasis on the narrative kind of description. According to him, some natural signs are required in poetry. These signs depend on the tone and position of words and on the measure and figures. The directness of drama and its mimetic use completely transforms the arbitrary sign into a natural sign. Lessing was a great supporter of Aristotle's theory of poetry. Like Aristotle, he too strongly felt that drama is the highest form of poetry and the object of poetry is action.

Besides, Lessing had defended Romantic drama on the basis of Aristotelian theory. In this way, he also pioneered a new type of criticism. Aristotle's theory was viewed favourably by Lessing due to his preference for the ideal forms of sculpture. Hence, the object became of prime importance and the neoclassical ideal of being true to life was also modified. The impact of Lessing is reflected in the modified humanistic *Critical Theories* of Mathew Arnold.

The mimetic and expressive nature of poetry is emphasized by Herder also. His argument is that poetry has been natural expression of feelings since primitive ages. In this way, we see a shift from the organic view of nature of art criticism. Poetry responds to the social, political, religious, economic and psychological conditions and assimilates and integrates them. This organic theory of Herder is very close to aesthetic relativism. The rules laid down by Aristotle may suit Greek drama but not necessarily Shakespearean work. This is because they have emerged from a different soil, culture and environment. The notion of aesthetic relativism can be traced back to Dryden. Gradually, it was assuming a new dimension. Critics and poets were rejecting the rules

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and the rule makers. Obviously, the emphasis was not on the autonomy of the literary artists. As a result, we see that the creative writers are full of insight and imagination. Such autonomy excludes considerations of pleasure, interest and didacticism. It involves an element of the unity of mind and ruse. Each work of art bears the impression of the author- follows its own laws, takes new flights of fancy. Hence, the tendency of criticism becomes biographical. But Herder saves criticism from this by saying that a great poem is a work of the soul. He wanted to capture the spiritual life of the author. Herder also believed that the primitive language was made of mythology, metaphor, system and allegory. This arouses a kind of aesthetic primitivism which finds prominence in the works of Wordsworth and Shelley.

It goes to the credit of Immanuel Kant to liberate aesthetic enquiry from its traditional moorings. He classified the arts into:

- speech – poetry and rhetoric
- shaping – architecture, sculpture and painting
- sensory form – music and colour design

According to Kant, a work of art reveals purposiveness without any purpose. A work of art is not a means to an end. It is a work of nature. He believed in the unconscious element in the artistic process. For Kant, the inspirational element in the process of artistic creation is the unconscious or the inward process. Although artistic genius is not independent of training, yet it is a natural gift. It cannot be acquired by practice or learning. It is not like understanding Newton's laws of science. One can easily understand science, but it is not possible to compose a poem unless one is naturally gifted.

Kant's views on the productive and reproductive forms of imagination suggest Coleridge's understanding of the Primary Imagination and Fancy. It was Coleridge who brought Kant's ideas to England.

Schiller disagreed with Kant's ideas on subjectivity and abstraction. He believed in a balance between freedom and necessity, the particular and the universal, sensuous and the rational. He created a unity between matter and form; between receptivity and activity. For him, beauty was both subjective and objective. It is an object because we become aware of it when we reflect. It is subjective because we realize/feel it only through feeling. According to him, naïve and sentimental are the two forms of poetry. The classical spirit is termed as 'naïve' and the romantic as 'sentimental'. This is because the former is realistic and impersonal whereas the latter is personal. Both these impulses find manifestation in a man's personality. Human beings have a natural ability for the synthesis of these opposed impulses. This is known as 'play impulse' which is the source of all artistic creation.

Goethe also had great influence on English poets. He believed that a work of art follows its own rules, standards and values. However, the truth of art and nature are different from each other. Each follows its own laws and standards. Still, a good work resembles a natural one because it presents the human spirit. According to him, 'The artist, grateful to the nature which produced him, gives back to her a second nature, but one which has been felt, thought out and humanly perfected.' This second nature is responsible for the creation of the higher reality which the fine art tries to

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express and realize. Hence, the artistic reality is truer and more valuable than the actual world in which we live.

Schelling starts with the anti-thesis of:

- subject and object
- nature and intelligence
- freedom and necessity
- Conscious and unconscious

Both nature and art are necessary for the creation of a work of art. The creative process is the result of the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious act is voluntary whereas the unconscious is involuntary. Novalis believed that poetry is a representation of the spirit of the inner world. Jean Paul Richter also admits that the operation of the conscious and the unconscious is genius. Friedrich Schlegel spoke of poetry as 'spiritual music'. Hegel made 'reason' or 'thought' central to his philosophy. But Schopenhauer made 'will' the basis of all artistic creation. William Blake views 'vision' as basic to artistic creation. He claimed to have written poem by 'immediate dictation' without any element of premeditation or will. He said that imagination is the real world. This world is a faint shadow of the real and eternal world of imagination. According to him, nature is not real and science cannot understand reality. Only imagination can do this.

Theories of Schelling, Kant and the Schlegel brothers deeply influenced romantic criticism in England. The critical writings of Coleridge bear the mark of their influences. The Romantics showed interest in the mind of the man and his consciousness. This resulted in a new sociology and anthropology which reflected in the works of Rousseau of France. His social theory maintained that all men are born free with equal original features. It is the process of civilization which suppresses originality. Hence, the urge of the romantic critic was to reinterpret and judge according to his own criteria. This resulted in re-evaluation and reinterpretation of ancient masters and their theories. The neo-classical masters like Dryden, Pope and Dr Johnson were also studied and interpreted in the new light. Post-Renaissance creative artists like Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton were also reinterpreted according to the new classical theories.

Different critics have tried to understand and interpret the works of Shakespeare in their own ways. Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare focuses on the study of his characters. Wordsworth found profound imagination in Shakespeare. Keats was interested in the 'negative capability' of Shakespeare. Most romantic poets were under the romantic spell of Milton's poetry. According to A. G. George, 'both in theory and practical application, romantic criticism is widely diverged from the Renaissance and the neo-classical schools of criticism. (P 78).[1]

Check Your Progress

4. How many classes did Kant classify the arts into?
5. Recapitulate William Blake's views on artistic creation.
6. What is the meaning of Paly Impulse?

4.4 ROMANTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

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Romantic theory is quite distinct from its classical counterpart. Romantic criticism focused on the active involvement of the human mind; the prime importance of the individual and distrust of reason. The role of human mind becomes secondary in the mimetic view. Plato's analogy of a mirror depends on the significance of external reality. Even Aristotle did not suggest the inner reality of the mind in his Poetics. Locke and Hartley also tried to explain the working of the human mind in mechanical terms. In the mimetic view, value was attached to what was general and not to the particular. What Dr. Johnson has to say about the role of the poet is indicative of the rationalist neo-classicist spirit:

> The business of poet is to examine, not the individual but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances..... (He) must neglect the minute discrimination, which one may have remarked and another neglected.

These lines from the History of Rasselas: Prince of Abyssinia enables us to grasp the neo-classical spirit. The same spirit is reflected in the following lines where Dr Johnson praises Shakespeare in his Preface to Shakespeare:

> Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature..... Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life.

According to Dr. Johnson, the artist should present the passions of men which are uniform. They should avoid presenting their customs which are particular. Shakespeare has successfully been able to achieve this goal hence, he is praised:

> This, therefore, in the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life, that he who mazes his imagination ..... May here be cured of his delirious ecstasies by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and confess or predict the progress of the passions .... His scenes are occupied by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion..... The dialogue of this author .... (seems) to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation and common occurrences. According to him literature represents 'things really existing and actions really performed'.

All that the classicists and the neo-classicists rejected was of great importance for the Romantics. As Blake puts it:

'To generalize is to be an idiot. To particularize is the lone distinction of merit.' He feels that the individual is a mysterious reservoir of boundless potential. The distinction between the neo-classical and the romantic can further be elaborated by the understanding and handling of similar subject – man – by Pope and Wordsworth. When Pope talks of man, he talks of a species in 'Essay on Man'. But when Wordsworth takes up the same subject, he ends up by composing an autobiographical poem- *The Prelude.*

Reason, as the Romantics believed, has a limited role to play in the creation of art. However, they have never tried to discard it just as the classicists never rejected the romantic spirit thoroughly. The Romantics have accommodated reason with emotion despite their reservations against it.

The romantic theory of art, thus, lays emphasis on expression, on the inner self. The definitions of poetry and art may differ from one romantic to the other but the basic focus remains the same. Wordsworth defines poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. Coleridge states that poetry reveals the inner world of man in *On Poetry or Art*. According to Shelley, poetry is an 'expression of imagination'. But Byron maintains that poetry is 'the lava of imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake'. Although it is difficult to describe romanticism in a few words, yet we are trying to categorize the romantic features broadly. The basic ideas of romanticism are:

- imagination
- inspiration
- organicism
- emotion

Imagination, according to the romantics, is a wonderful creative faculty which is superior to reason. Inspiration for them is one of the most central concepts required for poetic art. The idea of organicism also plays an important role in the creation of a work of art. A work of art achieves form and unity because of the element of organicism. The process of poetic creation is described by Wordsworth as the natural growth of a forest tree; Shelley relates it with the natural growth of a child in the womb; Coleridge is reminded of the growth of a plant for this purpose.

Check Your Progress

7. Whom does Dr Johnson praise and why?
8. Explain how Wordsworth is different from Pope.
9. What are the basic ideas of Romanticism and how have they been described?

4.5 FORMS OF POETRY IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

All the features of romantic poetry are bound together by strong passion or emotion. Coleridge described the function of emotion or feeling in a poem, in a letter to Southey. For him, it is like the gentle and soothing movement of the breeze. All art forms are determined by the aesthetics that underlie them. The aesthetics of a particular age are determined by its social, political, cultural, economic and psychological background. Since gods were regarded as the supreme power and men were mere puppets in their hands in ancient Greece, tragedy proved to be the most suitable art form. The post-Renaissance period saw the rise of different art forms with modifications. This was primarily because of the spirit of adventure and discovery. The eighteenth century is known as the 'age of prose and satire'. The reason behind it is its pragmatic and mechanical outlook. Didactic verses, essays, prose, satires, comedy of manners, comic epic in prose were best written in this period. In the age of individualism, inspiration and subjectivity of the art forms underwent a great transformation. Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* can be regarded as the manifesto of the new aesthetics. Lyrical poetry became the poetic norm as it is the purest expression of the feelings of the self, i.e., the author. Hence, a great emphasis was given on:

- intensity
- sincerity
- spontaneity
- feeling
- emotion
- free expression
- self-expression
- individualism

Hence the lyric forms –

- ode,
- sonnet,
- song
- elegy

found new freedom, flexibility and intensity in the hands of the Romantics. This new trend also led to the failure of the narrative forms of poetry and drama. This happened because of the interference of the elements of subjectivity and lyricism where objectivity and narrative technique were required. Barring Shelley's play, *The Cenci,* all other dramatic works like Wordsworth's *The Borderers*, Coleridge's *The Remorse* and Keats's *Otho the Great* lack a real dramatic tension and conflict.

Check Your Progress

10. Why is the eighteenth century called 'the age of prose and satire'?
11. What are the accepted forms of lyric poetry?
12. What was the poetic norm in the eighteenth century and why?

4.6 WORDSWORTH'S *PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS*

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) met Coleridge sometime in 1795 and moved to 'Alfoxton House', Somerset in 1797 in order to be close to Coleridge. Together, they issued the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. It is a volume of poems which deals with common subjects in an imaginative way.

The two friends had discussions on the theory of poetry which can be summarized as:

(i) The power of exiting the sympathy of the reader by a 'faithful adherence to the truth of nature'

(ii) By the compelling nature of the imagination

While discussing these two problems, the friends were also encountered with a third problem: the synthesis of the first two problems.

Wordsworth has dealt with the first problem and to a certain extent with the second one. This is evident when he talks of 'the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us'. But he has not touched upon the third one.

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According to the initial plan Coleridge was supposed to write the preface. However, it was Wordsworth who finally wrote it according to the conversations which took place between him and Coleridge.

As Coleridge states: 'To the second edition, he added a preface of considerable length in which, notwithstanding some passages of apparently a contrary report, he (Wordsworth) was understood to contend for the extension of this style to poetry of all kinds.'

Here, while talking of lyric poetry, Wordsworth included all forms of poetry. He made lyric poetry the symbol of all poetry. Coleridge would never have allowed this, had he written the preface.

In a letter to Southey, July 1802 Coleridge writes: 'I will surprise you of one thing, that although Wordsworth's preface is half a child of my own brain, and arose out of conversations so frequently that, with few exceptions, we could scarcely either of us, perhaps, positively say which first started any particular thought, yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth.'

In yet another letter written to Southey, Coleridge says, 'It is most certain that the heads of our mutual conversations, etc., and the passages were indeed partly taken from notes of mine; for it was first intended that the preface should be written by me.'

The first volume of 1798 was published with a short 'foreword'. Many new poems were added in the second edition published in 1800. It also had a much longer and detailed preface. In 1802, it was further revised and expanded. Many additions were made regarding the definition of the poet and the value of poetry and its universality. His literary criticism is also available in:

- *Note to the Thorn*, 1800,
- Appendix to *Lyrical Ballads*,
- *Preface to Poems*, 1815,
- The 'Essay' supplementary to the preface 1815

The *preface* is a revolutionary critical statement of a poet who wants to take poetry nearer to life. He wants to take it as it is actually lived, make it a sincere expression of feelings and emotions. In other words, he wanted to free poetry from the hackneyed and artificial style of writing which was the order of the eighteenth century. Credit goes to Wordsworth for heralding and inaugurating a new era in English poetry and criticism. The subjects with which Wordsworth seems to be mainly concerned fall into four categories:

(a) What is poetry
(b) Characteristics of a poet
(c) The value of poetry
(d) What is poetic diction

In the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth argues that poetry should be written in language that comes naturally to a poet and understood easily. Too lofty words, which are regarded as 'poetic', should be avoided. Words should be used to convey the emotions in the memory and poetry is a passage. According to Wordsworth, poetry should give pleasure through a rhythmic and beautiful expression of feeling—for all human sympathy, he claims, is based on a subtle pleasure principle that is 'the naked and native dignity of man.' *Lyrical Ballads* became both the symbol and instrument of that revolution.

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Let us begin with the nature of poetry. As opposed to the classical norms, Romantic poetry is an expression of feelings and emotions.

In the words of Wordsworth: '... all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but 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, had also thought long and deeply.

Poetry is a continuous expression of feelings and emotions, but the role of thought and reason is not to be undermined. Feelings are always emerging like a gush of stream but they are to be controlled and directed by thoughts. Our feelings are made by past experiences. According to Eliot, 'We must be capable of thinking our feelings and feeling our thoughts. If this is done by practice, we can very well be quite imaginative and at the same time thoughtful.'

According to Rene Wellek, Wordsworth faces the problem of justifying poetic pleasure. For this, he unites the concept of poetic pleasure and that of truth.

The purpose of poetry is to provide pleasure. As Wordsworth acknowledges:

> .... When the style is manly, and the subject is of some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who is sensible of the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure. Now, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order. But if the words by which this excitement is produced are in themselves powerful or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed when in an unexcited or a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and retaining the passion by an intercourse of ordinary feeling. This may be illustrated by appealing to the reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the re-perusal of the distressful parts of Clarissa Harlowe or the Gamester. While Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us as pathetic beyond the bounds of pleasure – an effect which is in a great degree to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement. On the other hand (what it must be allowed will much more frequently happen) if the poet's words should be commensurate with passion, and inadequate to raise the reader to a height of desirable excitement, then, (unless the poet's choice of his metre has been grossly injudicious) in the feelings of pleasure which the reader has been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling whether cheerful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words, and to effect the complex end which the poet proposes to himself.

Poetry is not the product of mere imitation, external realities and superb craftsmanship. Something goes on in the depth of the human mind and then it originates with an element of sincerity. As stated by Wordsworth in his 'Essay Supplementary to the Preface' poetry is 'the reflection of the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the imagination.' Having rejected the artistic poetic diction of the neo-classical age, Wordsworth found solace and genuine inspiration for the poet in the simple and sane life of the common man – the peasant and the farmer. Wordsworth states:

> Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local but general and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which given competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature.

The purpose of poetry is to provide pleasure; poetry is regarded superior to science. Poetry will not cease even if science brings about a major change in our environment. It will be 'carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself.' Whatever discovery is made by science, it will provide material for poetry. Science deals with reason and intellect. It is 'the false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions'. The 'dull eye, dull and inanimate' of science is put 'a prop to our infirmity.' Referring to Aristotle, Wordsworth says:

> Aristotle, I have been told, has said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local but general and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which given competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature.

Wordsworth further said, 'There are obstacles, which stand in the way of the fidelity of the biographer and historian, and of their consequent utility. They are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who comprehends the dignity of his art. The poet writes under one restriction only: the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being, possessing that information. This may be expected of him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between them, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.'

Poetry is also superior to history. The subject matter of history is individual and local; it talks about a particular place and time. It narrates the events related to a certain king or prince. But the truth of poetry is universal. It is of all time and all place. It is not the truth of a person, place or thing. It is the truth of human life. It is truth which is 'carried alive into the heart by passion.' The historian has to be true to dates and years and the actual place where the event took place. There is no such binding for poetry. Its purpose is to provide pleasure.

The poem has to be true to human nature. The poet experiences the unity and truth of humanity. He finds an organic relationship between man and nature because it is superior to science and history. The only restriction which the poet follows is that of giving immediate pleasure to a human being. Poetry deals with the personal and the intimate whereas science is preoccupied with the impersonal and the objective.

'To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which, without any other discipline than that of our daily life, we are fitted to take delight, the poet principally directs his attention. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. And thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole cause of his studies converses with general nature, with affections akin to those, which through labour and

length of time, the Man of Science has raised up in himself, by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies. The knowledge of both the poet and the Man of Science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings.

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. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of knowledge, it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. Emphatically may it be said of the poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, 'that he looks before and after'. He is the rock of defense for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.

The objects of the poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet we will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of Science, not only in those general indirect, but he will be at his side carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to man, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.'

Here again, it is nice to know that Wordsworth does not feel that science is the enemy of poetry. He sees science as complementary to it. Besides, the importance of poetry will increase with the growth of science. He negates that industrialization and modernity will do any harm to the health of poetry.

Poetry is also better than philosophy because it gives rise to rational enjoyment. In the words of Wordsworth:

> The appropriate business of poetry (which, nevertheless, if genuine is as permanent as pure science) her appropriate employment, her privilege and her duty, is to treat things not as they are, but as they appear; not as they exist in themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses and to the passions. What a world of delusion does this acknowledged principle prepare for the inexperienced! What temptations to go astray are here held forth for them whose thoughts have been little disciplined by the understanding and whose feelings revolt from the sway of reasons! When a juvenile reader is in the height of his rapture with some vicious passage, should experience throw in doubts, or common sense suggest suspicions, a lurking consciousness that the realities of the muse are but

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shows, and that her liveliest excitements are raised by transient shocks of conflicting feeling and successive assemblages of contradictory thoughts – is ever at hand to justify extravagance, and to sanction absurdity. (Essay supplementary to the Preface, 1815).

He talks of higher poetry in the following words:

> In the higher poetry, an enlightened critic chiefly looks for a reflection of the wisdom of the heart and grandeur of the imagination. Wherever these appear, simplicity accompanies them. Magnificence herself, when legitimate, depending upon simplicity of her own, to regulate her comments. But it is a well known property of human nature that our estimates are ever governed by comparisons, of which we are conscious with various degrees of distinctness. It is not, then, inevitable (confining these observations to the effects of style merely) that an eye, accustomed to the glaring hues of diction by which such readers are caught and excited, will for the most part be rather repelled then attracted by an original work, the colouring of which is disposed according to a pure and refined scheme of harmony? It is in the fine arts as in the affairs of life, no man can serve (i.e., obey with zeal and fidelity) two masters."(Essay Supplementary to the Preface, 1815)

Talking about the similarities between religion and poetry, he says that poetry which deals with religion as its subject gets distorted:

> The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols. The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. In all, this may be perceived as the affinities between religion and poetry – between religion – making up the deficiencies of reason by faith and poetry – passionate for the instruction of reason; between religion – whose element is infinitude, and whose ultimate trust is the supreme of things, submitting herself to circumscription and reconciled to substitutions; and poetry – ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation. In this community of nature may be perceived also the lurking incitements of kindred error – so that we shall find that no poetry has been more subject to distortion then that species the argument and scope of which is religious; and no lovers of the art have gone further astray than the pious and the devout.

Wordsworth speaks of poetry as passion – not the original passion of the first experience but the purified and carefully selected one. The passion, as Wordsworth feels, is rendered impersonal. In the process of poetic contemplation, the passion spiritualizes itself. Wordsworth says in his *Note on the Thorn* (1800:

> .....poetry is passion: it is the history of science of feelings: now every man must know that an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language. During such efforts, there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character. There are also various other reasons why repletion and apparent tautology are frequently beauties of the highest kind. Among the chief of those reasons is the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion. And further, from a spirit of fondness, exultation, and gratitude, the mind luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear to successfully communicate feelings.

The truth of these remarks might be shown by innumerable passages from the Bible and from the impassioned poetry of every nation.

> Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: Arise Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

'At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed there he fell down dead.' 'Why is his Chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his Chariot?' – Julges, chap V, verses 12, 27 and part of 28. (See also the whole of that tumultuous and wonderful poem.)

The 'vital union' of thoughts and feelings leads to the creation of genuine poetry. In his essay on epitaphs, Wordsworth argues:

> If words be not an incarnation of the thought, but only clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift." He firmly believes that "by the act of writing in verse an author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known laws of association". The associationist doctrine, which was the product of the 18th century, seems to have a deep-rooted influence on Wordsworth's mind also. He also says that the moment someone engages himself in writing in verse, he "makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known laws of association". There is no denying the fact that he refers to metre and a certain form of expression. He further elaborates that he is keenly interested in rustic life, "chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement". There is an association between ideas and passion. As told to Gillies on 22nd December 1814, "My first expression I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words, as of second thoughts, that they are best". The information which he shared with Haywood in 1828 is sufficient to understand the pain he took in the composition and revision of his poems: "Composition of verse is infinitely more of an art than men are prepared to believe: and absolute success in it depends upon innumerable minutiae". In this way, we see that the criteria of spontaneity undergo a serious thought process. It is a manipulation of feelings for the purpose of man's edification. The greatness of poetry lies in its emotional effect. It should be of affecting right kind of sensibility, feelings and awareness. The poetry of the highest kind can humble and humanize men; it can exalt and purify them. Sincere poetry works towards the unification of sensibility.

Wordsworth brought a completely new approach to the writing of English poetry. The well- known characteristics of his revolutionary artistic achievements are his objections to an over-stylized poetic diction, his attitude to nature, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects for his poetry. Poetry for him was primarily a record of a certain kind of state of mind, and the value of poetry for him lay in the value of the state of mind which the poem recorded.

4.6.1 Four Principles of Poetry

Wordsworth in the very beginning of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* points out four essential principles of poetry that are included in it. Those four principles are as follows:

1. Themes from ordinary life
2. Expressed in the day to day language of ordinary men
3. Coloured by imagination
4. Through them and in them the universal and primary laws of human nature be brought out

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He also propagates the reason for such poems. In Wordsworth's language, the principal object of the poems in The *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is 'to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature …'.

Thus, '*The Preface*' is an epoch-making critical writing as it marks a definite break from the earlier poetry of the eighteenth century. In *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, the poet – critic Wordsworth discusses several issues related to poetry, which can be categorized under the following heads:

- Definition of poetry
- Defining the poet
- Value of poetry
- The nature of poetic diction

4.6.2 Wordsworth's Definition of Poetry

One of the key issues Wordsworth deals with in *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is the notion of poetry. For Wordsworth, '… all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and 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, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified'.

Wordsworth considers poetry 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'; at the same time, the expression of the feelings is not as spontaneous. This is proved by Wordsworth's comment that the poet has to think 'long and deeply' before he gives expression to his feelings. Later in *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth adds, 'I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. It takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. The emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility 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. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on …'. Thus, for Wordsworth, unlike the eighteenth century poets whose emphasis is on the imitative rationalist aesthetic, poetry finds its origin from the emotions of the poet though it should have universal appeal, as that is the only way the poet can ensure that his creation is understood by his readers.

Thus, going along with the beliefs of the Romantics, Wordsworth emphasized that the tendency of art or aesthetic object should be from the individual to the universal.

'Poetry being the image of man and nature' makes Wordsworth transcend the personal feelings in the process of creative expression to make it have a universal appeal.

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4.6.3 Defining the Poet

While identifying the key issues of good poetry, Wordsworth shifts his attention to what the poet should be. It is here that he identifies three key features of a poet, which are as follows:

1. The poet should be exceptionally sensitive 'endued with more than lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness … a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind'. This exceptional sensitivity of the poet makes him a perceiver who not only does feel his emotions strongly, but feels for everything around him—man and nature. Thus, for Wordsworth, the poet is an extraordinary creature having the power of feeling more comprehensively than any other common human being.
2. The poet is 'a man speaking to men'. The poet's role does not stop at the power to feel enthusiastically and sensitively, but the other greater role is to express those strongly felt emotions to his readers. In other words, the poet is not merely a self-indulgent creature seeking pleasure in deep feelings, but has a social responsibility. A great poet is a man of integrity who gives his readers the chance to rectify their feelings by his poetry. Therefore, Wordsworth adds, 'every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered a teacher or as nothing'.
3. Wordsworth also endows the poet with a strong imaginative power, that is, he has the power to perceive 'absent things as if they are present'. The Romantics believe that it is through imagination that they can transcend the pains of this world and aspire for the ideal. Wordsworth, thinking along the similar line, asks the poets to be imaginative as it is this quality that distinguishes them from the commoners and makes them a poet. Percy B. Shelley significantly says 'the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. They are legislators as they provide the world with better or the idealistic version through their imagination; even though they live in the same world of flux, fever and fret.

4.6.4 The Value of Poetry

Wordsworth attaches much importance to the language of poetry as it is the medium through which the poet communicates with his readers. He says '… the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts down these to his purpose'. Wordsworth thought, similar to others, that language is the most significant aspect of poetry as 'language and the human mind acts and react on each other'. Moreover, he thinks that with the growth of science, poetry has become more crucial as 'If the labours of the man of science should ever create a material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet

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will sleep than no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of objects of science itself'.

While comparing science with poetry, Wordsworth says 'The knowledge both of the poet and the man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. 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, rejoice in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. It is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. Emphatically may it be said of the poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, "that he looks before and after". He is the rock of defense of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'.

4.6.5 Poetic Diction

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, as put forward in The *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* invited a lot of controversy in the Romantic Age and afterwards. It is true that his views of poetic diction were not so much criticized as his practical application of the theory in his own poems. Wordsworth was against his predecessors, the eighteenth century poets for their use of stylistic devices and figures of speech in particular and the poetic diction in general. He thought that neither did it suit their creative output nor the period in which they were writing.

Wordsworth is of the view that there can be no general poetic style that all the poets can follow, as every poet's mode of experience is peculiar to him. That experience should find expression in the language, which is best suited to put forward that experience to the readers. The classical poets naturally wrote in a figurative language as it suited their themes and the age in which they were writing. The eighteenth century poets, according to Wordsworth, consciously imitated the classical model of writing and consequently there was artificiality in their diction. Therefore, Wordsworth rejected the stereotypical, artificial and stagnant poetic diction of his predecessors. Moreover, he asserted that his poetry will have in the language of men, the language of the rustic as their language, which is similar to their way of living, not artificial and most natural. It is the language of the rustics, which needs to be purified for the sake of poetic use.

Wordsworth says, 'Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, 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 condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily

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comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.'

Moreover, Wordsworth felt that the language of poetry does not differ much from good prose as he says 'the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the meter, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written... the language of prose may yet be well adapted to poetry; and I have previously asserted that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good prose. I will go further. I do not doubt that it may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition'. As the aim of poetry is to produce excitement with pleasure and the regularity provided by a particular rhythm, functions to tamper the feelings generated. Similarly, meter can also function to mitigate the more pathetic situations and sentiments Thus, Wordsworth expresses his reservations about the artificiality of meter and, particularly, of rhyme. They, however, tamper and restrain 'the passions' and contribute to regularity of effect.

4.6.6 Review

1650 to 1770 was the period of the neo-classicist dominance in English Literature. The change began in 1770 and in 1798, with the publication of Wordsworth's.*The Preface to Lyrical Ballads* the form and content of poetry changed altogether. *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads* also marked the beginning of Romantic criticism. It was an end of the creed of authority as the canonical treatise on poetry dealt with the questions like, what is poetry, nature of poetry, creative process, etc. in a new way, a way that marked a definite break from the neo-classicist thought process.

Romantic theory of poetry, primarily that of Wordsworth, attaches value to subjective experience, to personal feelings, emotions and passions. Reacting against the artificiality of the eighteenth century poetry, Wordsworth promotes simplicity both in the theme and form of poetry. Wordsworth is of the opinion that the subject of poetry should be taken from the humble and rustic life and presented to the readers in the language of common man. Thus, the common man of humble and rustic origin is the chief concern of Wordsworth in his poems. *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is not merely a statement of the theme and nature of poetry but Wordsworth in *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

makes a declaration of the Romantic creed where 'spontaneity' is the key word. When Wordsworth defines poetry as 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings ... recollected in tranquility'; he is saying that poetry should not be pre-meditated, and in poetry emotions should be privileged over rationality.

For Wordsworth poetry is 'the most philosophic of writing' as in it the general truth and essential laws of the universe and human existence find their expression. Juxtaposing poetry against science, Wordsworth says that as against the practicality of science, poetry is an instrument of truth that does not need external validity, as it is its 'own testimony'. Wordsworth says, 'Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing. It is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony ... Poetry is the image of man and nature. ... The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information, which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand'. Thus, a poet for Wordsworth is a specially gifted individual, out of the ordinary in his perception and in his ability to feel '... affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present ... and a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels...'. Thus, for Wordsworth, the poet is a genius, an extraordinary individual who has the capability in him to perceive the ideal, which the common people do not have. It is this characteristic of the poet that makes him see extraordinary things in the ordinary and present it to the readers for their pleasure. T. S. Eliot vehemently criticizes the Wordsworthian theory of poetry and poet in his critical essay *Tradition and Individual Talent*.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

13. What were the circumstances that led to the creation of the *Lyrical Ballads*.
14. What were the initial problems encountered by Wordsworth and Coleridge while scripting *Lyrical Ballads*?
15. What were the circumstances under which Wordsworth wrote *The Daffodils*?

4.7 CHARACTERISTICS OF A POET

Wordsworth explored a wide range of ideas related to a poet. According to him, the poet is a man who has more sensibility that ordinary human beings. He is a man who speaks to men and his imaginative and creative faculty is superior to the lesser mortals. The difference between the poet and an ordinary man lies not in the kind but in the degree of his qualities. A good poet is naturally endowed with the capability of blending thought and feeling. His mind process allows him to think long and deeply and his feelings are the outcome of his superior organic sensibility. In the Preface to Poems in 1815, he states the qualities of a poet:

> The powers requisite for the production of poet are, first, those of observation and description, i.e., the ability to observe with accuracy, things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer: whether the things depicted are actually present to the senses, or have a place only in the memory. This power, though indispensable to a poet, is one which he employs only in submission to necessity, and never for a continuance of time; as its exercise supposes all its higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects, much in the same way as translator or engraver ought to be to his original. Secondly, sensibility – which, the more exquisite it is, the wider will be the range of poet's perception; and the more will he be incited to observe objects, both as they exist in themselves and as re-acted upon by his own mind. (The distinction between poetic and human sensibility has been marked in the character of the poet delineated in the original preface). Thirdly, reflection which makes the poet acquainted with the value of actions, images, thoughts and feelings, and assists the sensibility in perceiving their connection with each other. Fourthly, imagination and fancy – to modify, to create and to associate. Fifthly, invention – by which characters are composed out of materials supplied by observation; whether of the poet's own heart and mind, or of external life and nature, and such incidents and situations produced as are most impressive to the imagination, and most fitted to do justice to the characters, sentiments, and passions, which the poet undertake to illustrate. And, lastly, judgment – to decide how and where, and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be exerted; so that the less shall not be sacrificed to the greater; nor the greater, slighting the less, arrogate, to its own injury, more than its due. By judgment, also is determined what are the laws and appropriate graces of every species of composition.

In the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth answers queries like:

- What is meant by word?
- What is a poet?
- To whom does he address himself? And
- What language is to be expected from him?

What makes a man a poet is something that Wordsworth talks about in these lines:

> He is a man speaking to men: and man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him, delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passion produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves: - whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.

The poet is a person different from the ordinary human beings because of his capability of observing things differently. This observation is accurate and the poet

uses this with honesty in composition of a poem. Any passion or feeling is best suited for artistic creation when it is in its original form. There should be no interference of wit and intellect in it. The second quality which is required to be a poet is 'sensibility'. He should be soft and tender at heart. An element of magnanimity is also essential for a poet. A large-hearted man should always know that human nature is very peculiar and erratic. Moreover, he should be full of life and enthusiasm. He has to be a true lover of life and its ways. He should be able to find liveliness even where it is lacking. It is not only the concrete and material things which should exert their influence on the poet; he should also feel and sense what is absent and invisible; abstract and unseen. He must be able to conjure those thoughts and feelings which do not find a direct and clear stimulus in the external world. He is gifted to express those thoughts and feelings better than an ordinary man, which are not the immediate response of external environment. The third point is 'reflection'. The thoughts, feelings, emotions ideas, images and action are the raw materials for the creation of poetry. But these cannot lead to a good artistic creation unless they are perceived in association with each other. Imagination and fancy occupy the fourth place in the realm of artistic creation. Their function is to modify the first impression, create a new body of ideas and then to associate them. The fifth step in this process is to invent – the poet- observes and forms ideas. These ideas can be formed by events in the outside world or they may be the creation of the author's own mind and heart i.e. his imagination. The final step in the process of artistic creation is 'judgment'. The poet's power of judgment enables him to choose and reject from the outward and the inward material available to him.

Despite possessing these characteristics the poet succumbs to be mechanical:

> However, exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a poet, it is obvious, that while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, may, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with their; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. Here, then, he will apply the principle of selection which has been already insisted upon. He will depend upon this for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion, he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature; and the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.

Check Your Progress

16. What are the qualities of a poet, as listed by Wordsworth?
17. According to Wordsworth how is a poet different from a common man ?
18. As per the Wordsworthian perspective, is the work of a poet mechanical?

4.8 VALUE OF POETRY

The medium used by the poet for the expression of his thoughts and feeling is language. Poetry is the product of the interaction between the language and the poet's mind.

Both of these influence each other. The ancient critical tradition provided more importance to language and less to the poet's mind. In the new critical tradition initiated by Wordsworth, we come across a more balanced view. Now, he attaches equal importance to language and human mind. However, it is important to know that the poet performs his role by indirectly manipulating language:

> ..... the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts down these to his purpose.

The role of language in poetry is to sensitize the readers. The relevance of poetry has increased in the modern industrial and mechanical age:

> For a multitude of causes, known to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.

Wordsworth has always emphasized the necessity of freeing language from the clichéd shopworn expression of the eighteenth century.

Check Your Progress

19. What is the medium used by Wordsworth to express himself and how does he use it?
20. According to Wordsworth, what is the role of language in poetry?

4.9 POETIC DICTION

Of all his critical / prose writings the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* puts forward his most celebrated and most criticized theory of poetic diction. Ever since it was first elaborated, it has invited a lot of controversy. It is noteworthy that his theory of language criticizes his own theory of poetic diction. The basic idea being that there is no difference between the language of poetry and day to day communication. As Wordsworth states:

> Is there then, it will be added, no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition? I answer that there neither is nor can be any essential difference. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between poetry and painting, and accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify the affinity between Metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep, but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichors that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.'

Wordsworth's observation is restricted to lyrical poetry only. Wordsworth's theory is an appeal for the passionate and primitive, for the real and the naturally spoken word. It is a protest against pedantry and affectation. Figurative language is un-poetic and artificial. Wordsworth's poetry is the outcome of his concept of what poetry is. In it, he advocates the most natural subjects treated in the most natural way. As he says:

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> The principal object than which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: Chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passion 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; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are those easily comprehended, and are more durable: and lastly because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language too of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expressing in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation.

His theory of language is self-contradictory. However, he believes that the poet is a man who speaks to men. His language should conform to this principle and be the language of men. In *Essay on Epitaphs*, Wordsworth expresses that language is the incarnation of thought; it is not its dress. This theory supports the fundamental Romantic view that language is organic and not prescriptive. It is also significant to note that Wordsworth's basic view – the language of poetry should be natural - is not questioned. What is criticized is his justification of his theory and the gap between the doctrine propounded by him and its real application in his own poems. According to his theory, rustic speech of farmers and peasants is passionate in its innate simplicity; it is charged with high emotion. There is also an element of universality in this naturalness and peculiarity. The mode of experience of every poet is peculiar to him. The poet expresses his experiences in a style which is appropriate for it. As a result no two subjects can be treated in the same style and no two poets can follow the same language. A poet is different from other in his choice of subject and its treatment. No general style can be prescribed for all poets. This element of peculiarity makes poetry unique. Here, Wordsworth seems to be revolutionizing the ideas and theories propounded by his predecessors in the eighteenth century who prescribed a general poetic diction with known stylistic devices and figures of speech for all poets and forms of poetry. The language of the common, if selected carefully and variegated with metaphors, can give that pleasure which is peculiar to poetry. The poetic devices were quite naturally and powerfully used by the first poets. However, during the neo-classical age style was imitated quite artificially and as an infallible model. As we know Dryden felt that the language used by the royal people – the king and his courtiers – was best suited for poetry. Gray, in a similar fashion, knew that the language used in his age was not the language of poetry. Wordsworth has rejected the distorted, artificial, unfeeling and glossy poetic diction of the eighteenth century, with all spirit, both in theory and practice. In a reaction to the neo-classical poetic diction stereotyped, he advocated the use of the real language of man – the language of the rustics – whose language was very natural and genuine.

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> The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events: they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring and figurative. In succeeding times, poets and men ambitious of the fame of poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect, without having the same animating passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of those figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and ideas with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation.

However, several charges are levelled against Wordsworth's theory.

In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* Wordsworth is first charged for being driven by a democratic impulse in rejecting the language of the Kings and the aristocrats.

Next, when Wordsworth talks of using the language of the rustics he does not take into account the fact that, howsoever natural it might be, it is to be used by the poet for the sake of artistic creation.

Thirdly, when he talks of selecting the language used by men, he does not realize that the term 'selection' itself means that it is done deliberately and not naturally the rustic speech. This selected language throws away all the baseness of the ordinarily spoken words. It is like the natural speech of ordinary men, but actually it is not. It embodies all the qualities of figurative language.

Wordsworth tried to point towards that art, which conceals itself. Wordsworth was a strong proponent of the belief that art lies in concealing art. That is why when he advocates the cause of naturalness and simplicity, he does not rule out the importance of figurative language. In this way he was asserting his faith in the organic view of style. He was not against metaphors and figures of speech. However, they were not appropriately used if they were added to a poem like ornaments from without. These rhetorical devices should be organic to a poem. As he has said:

> If the poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures.

As we have stated earlier that Wordsworth could not follow his own critical theories in his poems. He has opposed the artificial poetic diction and advocated simplicity. He, however, failed to perceive his own poems which have employed all the figurative devices which his theory didn't approve of. In the process of refuting the hackneyed poetic diction of his age, he made some self-contradictory arguments. In the most emotional moments we use figurative language. Also, the language used by the primitive man is rhetorical, figurative and passionate. The earliest poets wrote naturally and felt powerful when they used figurative language. Wordsworth has tried to associate true rhetoric with spontaneous expression but at the same time challenged the artificial rhetoric of his time.

'But the first poets, as I have said, spoke a language which, though unusual, was still the language of men. This circumstance, however, was disregarded by their successors; they found that they could please by easier means: they become proud of a language which they themselves had invented, and which was uttered only by themselves as their own. With passage of time, it became a symbol of promise of this unusual language, and whoever took upon him to write in metre, accordingly as he possessed more or less of true genius, introduces less of more of this adulterated phraseology into his compositions; and the true and the false became so inseparably interwoven that the taste of men was gradually perverted; and this language was received as a natural language.'

He goes on to explain that the language of the earliest poets differed from that of the ordinary men. This was because it was created out of some extraordinary heroic occasion. The language of the ordinary was not the product of such heroic occasion. This explains the difference between the two. As an example he refers to the language of Homer. A.G. George in his books *Critics and Criticism* terms it as Wordsworth's inclination towards 'poetic primitivism'. According to George, 'Wordsworth's theory of language recommends the poetry of strong passion and heroic occasions written in an elevated metaphorical language which the primitive bard was supposed to have used'.

It seems that while delineating the theories of poetical composition, poetic diction and metre, Wordsworth was inspired by psychological considerations. Metre is used by the poets to produce excitement with an over balance of pleasure. It is also used to check the excitement produced by poetry. The metrical alternation of sound enables the poet to discover similitude in dissimilitude and dissimilitude in similitude and thus, enhances the pleasure in poetry.

Connected with his theory of poetry language or diction is the theory of sincerity. It is to be followed to attain poetic excellence. The greatness of a poem lies in the greatness of its experience. In the best poetry, there is a correspondence between the poet's convictions and the subject of the poem. The better the correspondence, the higher is the level of the poem. According to A.G. George, Wordsworth's theory again shifts to psychology and biography of the author. However, we should not conclude that poetry is the mirror of the poet's life. Wordsworth also suggests that there are two types of poetry subjective and objective. The poetry of Burns bears the marks of the personality, hence it is subjective. On the other hand the poetry of Homer and Shakespeare is objective because the life and ideas of the poet do not influence their poetry. Thus, it is clear that when Wordsworth talked of sincerity, he did not want the poet to succumb to biography. He finds the objective poetry of Homer and Shakespeare more sincere than of many others who created subjective poetry. Sincerity in the composition of poet can be achieved by:

- a sensible observation,
- reflection,
- imagination,
- fancy and
- Judgment.

Carelessness in artistic creation cannot be regarded as poetic sincerity. Wordsworth himself has thoroughly revised the second edition of *The Prelude*. He, therefore, cannot undermine the importance of revision and technique in poetic excellence. He has been

an ardent supporter of discipline in artistic creation. In a nutshell, the doctrine of sincerity does not deal with the initial process; it gives poetry its refinement. It deals with the aim and end of poetry.

In the end, we can say that Wordsworth has followed his creative impulse in his poetic creation. His poetic triumphs, as Coleridge observes, could be achieved as he followed his instinct as a poet. Even his unbalanced critical remarks should be judged sympathetically and with an understanding of the contemporary age. Phrases such as 'real language of men', 'selection' and 'a colouring of imagination' contradict each other. And a balanced understanding of these arguments will enable the reader to understand Wordsworth, the critic and poet, in a better way.

Besides Wordsworth's theory of poetic language, sincerity cannot be complete without an evolution of his doctrines by his friend Coleridge. Coleridge was very much aware of the lapses in Wordsworth's theory; however, he also knew that their age will be known by Wordsworth in the days to come. He places him in importance only after Shakespeare and Milton. Here, it is also interesting to notice that another great romantic poet Keats regarded Wordsworth as next to Shakespeare. Coleridge has all praise for Wordsworth as a poet, but at the same time he does not miss to notice the essential drawbacks in his theory of poetic diction. He finds himself very small in comparison with Wordsworth's poetic excellence. The man 'to whom at all time and in all modes of excellence I feel myself inferior' was no other that Wordsworth. 'I feel myself a little man by his side' says Coleridge in one of his letters. Coleridge feels, the greatness of Wordsworth, lies in his ability to unite profound thought with deep feeling, observation with imagination. However, Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction has been vehemently criticized by Coleridge.

Check Your Progress

21. What language does Wordsworth recommend in his theory of language?
22. What are the shortcomings that are attributed to Wordsworth's theory of poetry?
23. What, according to Wordsworth, are the two kinds of poetry?

4.10 WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION AND FANCY

In the book *Wordsworth's Imagery,* Florence Marsh has explained the theory of Imagination in these words:

> Imagination, as Wordsworth defined it, becomes the name for the mental power that transforms the literal to the figurative. It has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but it is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and process, of creation or of compositions, by certain fixed laws. It is the power of the mind to do more than associate mechanically. The mind can confer on objects, properties not inherent in them, it can abstract from them some of the properties that they actually posses and it can modify an image by another. In every case, the mind alters the object creatively. Wordsworth takes the example of

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Milton's use of the word "hangs" (*in Paradise Lost Book II*) to illustrate this modifying power of imagination. Above all, it is through the power of imagination operates upon the raw material of sensation to illustrate the evidence of eternal truth. Fancy merely relates to temporal or worldly enjoyments.

Wordsworth's views on imagination and fancy are fully set forth in the *'Preface to Poems'*, 1815. He makes a distinction between fancy and imagination. For him mind is the creative faculty in human body. Unlike his predecessors, Wordsworth believes in the active participation of mind in the creative process. It does not reflect the world around it passively. The mind is an active agent; its imaginative faculty enables it to create. Here, Wordsworth challenges the early associationist psychology, developed in the eighteenth century, especially by David Hartley, which ascribes a passive role to the human mind – it only reflects the external world, like a mirror. The term 'associationist' has been ascribed to this notion of psychology because cognition is the result of accidental psychology. According to Wordsworth, imagination is creative and active whereas fancy is passive. In the words of Wordsworth:

> I come now to the consideration of the words fancy and imagination, as employed in the classification of the following poems. "A man", says an intelligent author, "has imagination in proportion as he can distinctly copy in idea the impressions of sense: it is the faculty with images within the mind the phenomena of sensation. A man has fancy in proportion as he can call up, connect, or associate, at pleasure, those internal images..... so as to complete ideal representations of absent objects. The imagination is formed by patient observation; the fancy by a voluntary activity in shifting the scenery of the mind. The more accurate the imagination the more safely may a painter, or a poet, undertake a delineating, or a description, without the presence of the objects to be characterized. The more versatile the fancy, the more original and striking will be the decorations produced" – British Synonyms discriminated, by W. Taylor.

Wordsworth was against the eighteenth century perception of imagination which crippled it of its creative ability. In the following, Wordsworth tries to distinguish between the two perceptions of imagination – the neo-classical and the romantic.

'Is not this as if a man should undertake to supply an account of a building, and be so intent upon what he has discovered of the foundation as to conclude his task without once looking up at the superstructure? Here, as in other instances, throughout the volume, the judicious authors mind is enthralled by etymology; he takes up the original word as his guide, his conductor, his escort, and too often does not perceive how soon he becomes its prisoner, without liberty to tread in any path but that to which it confines him. It is not easy to find out how imagination, thus explained, differs from distinct remembrance of images; or fancy from quick and vivid recollection of them: each in nothing more than a mode of memory. If the two words bear the above meaning, and no other, what term is left to designate that faculty of which the poet is "all compact", he whose eye glances from earth to heaven, whose spiritual attributes body forth what his pen is prompt in turning to shape; or what is left to characterize fancy, as insinuating herself into the heart of objects with creative activity? Imagination, in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but in a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind open those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.'

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Wordsworth cites many examples to explain his ideas about imagination. Let us look at one of the example used by Wordsworth and his explanation of it according to imagination:

Shall I call thee, Bird,

Or but a wandering voice?

This concise interrogation characterizes the seeming ubiquity of the voice of the cuckoo, and dispossesses the creature almost of a corporeal existence; the imagination being tempted to this exertion of her power by a consciousness in the memory that the cuckoo is almost perpetually heard throughout the season of spring, but seldom becomes an object of sight.

Further elaboration on the faculty of imagination suggests how imagination confers additional features upon an object, or abstracts the other from its natural properties:

> The far of images independent of each other, and immediately endowed by the mind with properties that do not inhere in them, upon an incitement from properties and qualities the existence of which is inherent and obvious. These processes of imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses and thus enabling to react upon the mind which had performed the process, like new existence.

Besides being an endowing and modifying power, imagination also helps in shaping and creating. Wordsworth explains how it is done:

> By immediate process; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number alterations proceeding from and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own might and almost divine powers.

Wordsworth also talks about the great masters of the post Renaissance period whose imagination have enriched literature. He prefers their genius to that of the ancient Greek and Roman poets. In Wordsworth's view:

> ..... I shall spare myself and the reader the trouble of considering the imagination as it deals with thoughts and sentiments, as it regulates the composition of characters, and determines the course of actions: I will not consider it .... As that power which, in the language of one of my most esteemed friends, "draws all things to one, which makes things animate or inanimate, being with their attributes, subjects with their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect". The grand storehouse of enthusiastic and meditative imagination, of poetical, as contradistinguished from human and dramatic imagination, is the prophetic and lyrical parts of the holy scriptures, and the works of Milton, to which I cannot forbear to add those of Spenser. I select these writers in preference to those of ancient Greece and Rome because the anthropomorphism of the pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries to the bondage of definite form; from which the Hebrews were preserved by their abhorrence of idolatry. This abhorrence was almost as strong in our great epic poet, both from circumstances of his life, and from the constitution of his mind. However, imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul; and all things tended in him towards the sublime: Spenser, of a gentler nature, maintained his freedom by aid of his allegorical spirit, at one time inciting him to create persons out of abstractions; and at another, by a superior effort of genius, to give the universality and permanence of abstractions to his human beings, by

means of attributes and emblems that belong to the highest moral truths and the purest sensations – of which his character of Una is a glorious example. Of the human and dramatic imagination the works of Shakespeare are an in exhaustible source.

'I tax not you, yet elements, with unkindness, I never gave you kingdoms, called you daughters.'

Imagination can bring about vital changes in an object but fancy can't:

> Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch, and where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose of it be slight, limited and evanescent. Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the imagination..... The law under which the processes of fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender or pathetic, as the objects happen to be appositely produced or fortunately combined. Fancy depends upon the rapidity and profusion with which she scatters her thoughts and images, trusting that their number, and the felicity with which they are linked together, will make amends for the want of individual value :... Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, imagination to incite and to support the eternal.

Fancy is not related to our cognition; it merely reflects the world around us. Fancy gives us impressions whereas imagination creates the patterns of perceptions. Imagination is the power of creation; it gives a new look and significance to first impressions.

However, an intellectualist approach to truth is rejected by Wordsworth. Intellect is the main guiding principle of science and artistic creation, hence Wordsworth rejects it. He recognizes intellect as a false secondary power. However, the true knowledge of things is obtained through insight or imagination only. The sensuous incarnation of philosophy is poetry. In this way Wordsworth unites truth, nature, philosophy and poetry through the theory of imagination.

Check Your Progress

24. What are Wordsworth's views on imagination?
25. How does Wordsworth differentiate between imagination and fancy?
26. What are Wordsworth's views on intellect?

4.11 THE *LYRICAL BALLADS* AND WORDSWORTH'S CRITICISM

Wordsworth's purpose was to arouse pleasure, excitement and enjoyment through poetry. His concept of pleasure has sometimes been misunderstood. Pleasure was supposed to appeal only to the senses. However, when he talked about pleasure proper to poetry, he meant neither intellectual nor spiritual pleasure only. Again it was neither bodiless nor metaphysical. Pleasure, in Wordsworth's poetry, lies in stimulating imagination to perceive beauty and newness in day to day commonplace activities. The poems in the Lyrical Ballads aimed at providing this pleasure. Wordsworth was a firm believer in the individuality of human beings. It is this which made them different from each other. The peculiarities of a man; his reactions and responses make a man what he is. He celebrates this idea in the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*. 'Lines composed above the Tentern Abbey' exemplify the notion of dissociation of sensibility along with the doctrine of pleasure. 'The Thorn', the most criticized poem in this collection, deals with the story of Martha Ray who was cruelly treated by her lover and fiancé, Stephen Hill. She also had a child who died / or was killed. Wordsworth describes the mental agony, the psychological turmoil of Martha Ray. The poem provides pleasure by exciting imagination. Barring a few poems like 'Michael' and 'The Idiot Boy', most of the poems published in the *Lyrical Ballads* adhere to the theory of poetry and poetry pleasure delineated in the Preface.

Check Your Progress

27. What does Wordsworth say about pleasure?
28. Which is Wordsworth most criticized poem and why?

4.12 WORDSWORTH'S LITERARY CRITICISM: ITS CULTURAL CONCERNS

One of the main concerns of Wordsworth's literary criticism is to strengthen a culture, which is humane and sensitive. Here, the first thing is to see what is meant by culture. The most common meaning of the term is improvement and refined attained by training and education. Besides this denotative meaning, the term enjoys many connotations. Figurative applications of the word 'culture' are developed by many thinkers with a strong culture concern. With the advent of industrialization and urbanization, many people felt the necessity of saving culture for the welfare of human society. As a result, cultural critics like Arnold, Carlyle and Ruskin have tried to fill the vacuum created in life by science and modernity by humanizing and sensitizing people.

According to Coleridge, culture is 'the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity.' Matthew Arnold views culture as 'the best that has been thought and known in the world' in *Culture and Anarchy*. The cultural critics felt an urgent need for culture since life was becoming mechanical and external. The inner values were losing their importance and man was lined by the rosy and comfortable prospects of science. This lineage of thought has been developed in literature with a peculiar orientation of its own. These cultural critics may differ in their views and ways of looking at life. But one thing is common: they are shattered to see how people getting away from their roots to create a de-humanized and lifeless world for themselves. The culture critics felt that literature was best suited for this purpose: to orient people and fill the world with sweetness, life, vitality and light.

This breed of cultural critics belongs to the later age: the Victorian era. However, Wordsworth had anticipated the necessity for culture much before them. His writings have pioneered the cause of culture by using the phrase 'the people' in contradiction

to 'the public'. A clear distinction between the two has been brought about by Wordsworth in the essay 'supplementary to the Preface (1815)':

> Still more lamentable is his error who can believe that there is anything of divine infallibility, in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever grounded by factious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE. Towards the PUBLIC, the writer hopes that he feels as much difference as it is entitled to: but to the PEOPLE, philosophically characterized, and to the embodied spirit of their knowledge, so far as it exists and moves, at the present faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future, his devout respect is due". Wordsworth felt that he was responsible to the 'PEOPLE' as a poet. Hence he says that "every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered a teacher or as nothing.

Wordsworth could foresee the cultural deterioration in the society. He acknowledges the responsibility for bringing refinement and culture in the society through his poetry. In the 'Preface' Wordsworth states that a mentally and spiritually healthy reader of poetry would really feel exalted and enlightened. Poetry, in this way, becomes the image of man and nature; the most refined form of human knowledge and the upholder and preserver of relationship and love, mutual understanding and trust.

Wordsworth sees the relevance of poetry in the modern world of fever and fret. It has provided solace in the ancient times; it can safeguard and promote cultural values in the era of science and technology. Poetry, from this angle, becomes the most refined form of man and nature. It provides defense for human nature. Mass society and mass culture are the two most important causes of such cultural crisis. Thus, Wordsworth becomes the prophet of culture before the arrival of Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, Leavis and Eliot on the centre stage.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

29. According to Wordsworth what are the issues faced by today's culture?
30. How does Wordsworth address the cause of culture?
31. How, according to Wordsworth, does poetry find relevance in today's world?

4.13 T.S. ELIOT: AN INTRODUCTION

Thomas Stearns Eliot was an American writer of great talent. Eliot was an important contributor to the modern literary criticism. In this section you will be introduced to Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* as an important work in the oeuvre of literary criticism.

Despite being a poet of great repute, with a Nobel Prize in Literature, Eliot's body of work was quite small. Eliot was aware of this shortcoming and had admitted to a friend and a Harvard Professor on his career that:

> My reputation in London is built upon one small volume of verse, and is kept up by printing two or three more poems in a year. The only thing that matters is that these should be perfect in their kind, so that each should be an event.

Eliot had a style of his own in the publication of his poems. He would first publish the poems individually in magazines or periodicals. This would be followed by publication in books. His first collection was *Prufrock and Other Observations* which was published in 1917. Eliot published more poems in London and New York than anywhere else. Both the editions had the same poems except that *Ode* in the British edition was replaced with *Hysteria* in the American edition. Later, in the year 1925, he published another collection which also included *The Waste Land*, with these poems.

The other collections included *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, which was a collection of light verse published in 1939. There was a collection of poems, published posthumously in 1967, which consisted of poems written much earlier in the period 1907–1910 and 1909–1917.

Eliot was influenced by his birth place and his nationality to which he had quipped later:

> [M]y poetry has obviously more in common with my distinguished contemporaries in America than with anything written in my generation in England ... It wouldn't be what it is, and I imagine it wouldn't be so good ... if I'd been born in England, and it wouldn't be what it is if I'd stayed in America. It's a combination of things. But in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America.

His first major work *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was written when he was just twenty two years old, but his character, Prufrock, was a middle aged person lamenting a wasted life with missed opportunities. In this work, Prufrock, the character, described his physical and intellectual shortcomings in a manner distinct from the poetry of the earlier Romantic poets. The description of unattained physical love was considered to be offensive for that period. In a way, he was one of the first to adhere to the modernist expressions, deviating from the Romantic poets of yore.

Critics are divided in their opinion as to whether the narrator left his residence in the course of the narration. From the poet's perspective, the locations described can be interpreted from many angles. These include actual physical experiences, mental recollections, or possibly symbolic images. Eliot in this writing was heavily influenced by Dante of Italy, whose greatest work was *The Divine Comedy*. The poem found a very frigid reception as observed by the following review which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* on June 21, 1917:

> The fact that these things occurred to the mind of Mr Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to anyone, even to himself. They certainly have no relation to poetry...

Ezra Pound was an American expatriate poet and critic. He was a major figure in the early modernist movement in poetry. He was known for his role in developing *Imagism*. *Imagism* was a reactionary movement against the Victorian and Georgian poets. It favoured tight language with unadorned imagery. It relied on a strong relation between the verbal and musical qualities of verse and mood. His best-known works include *Ripostes* published in 1912, and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* published in 1920. There was an unfinished work called the *Cantos* which had 120 sections. The Cantos was published between 1917 and 1969.

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Ezra Pound played an important role in shaping T.S. Eliot's thoughts and writings. Pound was in fact greatly disturbed by the extensive loss of life and destruction caused by World War I as was Eliot. The disillusionment is also due to his failing marriage.

While working in London, Pound helped to discover and shape the work of authors such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Robert Frost and Ernest Hemingway. This was a period when he was working as a foreign editor for many American Magazines. In a manner, Pound helped the publication of Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in 1915 and for the serialization of Joyce's *Ulysses* from 1918. *The Waste Land* was another significant publication in the year 1922. In its dedication, he appreciates the significant support of Ezra Pound in helping shape and publish this work. Elements of influence from Indian philosophy are evinced by the ending lines which have 'Shanti Shanti Shanti'. The poem is not about individual failure but the failure of a chaotic society itself.

Eliot was to later on write about this poem in the following words:

> As for *The Waste Land*, that is a thing of the past so far as I am concerned and I am now feeling toward a new form and style.

The poem was known for its obscurity and the frequent slippage between satire and prophecy. There was an abruptness of various facets in the poem, including speaker, location, and time. This poem is the poetic counterpart of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which was also influenced by Ezra Pound. The similarities between the two, in form, mark the beginning of modern literature.

Later, other poems were to appear which had strong elements of despair, as evinced in *The Waste Land*. They were influenced by the general pessimism of the times after World War I and a shortage of hope as evinced by these lines from his poem *The Hollow Men*:

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper.

Eliot's conflict with religion also shaped his writing. Eliot converted to the Anglican Church in 1927 and *Ash Wednesday* his first long poem was published in 1930. This was greatly influenced by matters of faith and the hope for salvation. The poem marked the beginning of a more contemplative period of writing of a casual and melodic phase. Although the critics were enthusiastic about this poem, the interplay with orthodox Christianity caused discomfort to the more secular people.

The Four Quartets was considered a masterpiece by Eliot. It consisted of four long poems, each initially published separately. The first was *Burnt Norton* published in 1936 followed by *East Coker* in 1940, the *The Dry Salvages* in 1941 and finally *Little Gidding* in 1942. The poems followed a standard structure with five sections each. Each poem is associated with one of the four classical elements: air, earth, water, and fire. This work was also greatly influenced by Christianity. Christian thoughts and traditions have been heavily drawn on by Eliot. These include art and symbolism. There is a commonality with the language of figures such as Dante, St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich. The deeper communion sought in *East Coker*, the 'hints and whispers of children, the sickness that must grow worse in order to find healing', and the exploration which inevitably leads us home – all point to the pilgrim's path along the road of sanctification. For this work, T.S. Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Over a period of time, Eliot's focus shifted from the gloomy to the more lyrical and from poetry to writing plays, with components of comedy and a redemptive end. Some of his famous plays were *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Rock*, *The Family Reunion* and *The Elder Statesman*.

While giving a lecture in 1933, he said: 'Every poet would like, I fancy, being able to think that he had some direct social utility .... He would like to be something of a popular entertainer, and be able to think his own thoughts behind a tragic or a comic mask. He would like to convey the pleasures of poetry, not only to a larger audience, but to larger groups of people collectively; and the theatre is the best place in which to do it.'

Check Your Progress

32. In which medium did Eliot first publish his poems?
33. In which year was his first collection *Prufrock and Other Observations* published?
34. What was Eliot's age when his first major work *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was written ?
35. Name the American expatriate poet and critic who helped to discover and shape the work of T.S. Eliot.
36. Which significant publication of Eliot was published in the year 1922?
37. Name the work that is considered to be his masterpiece.

4.14 T.S. ELIOT: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

T.S. Eliot was a well-known playwright and literary critic. He was one of the most important English poets of the twentieth century. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on 26 September 1888. He moved to England while he was only twenty five years of age. He became a British citizen at the age of thirty nine, in 1927. He achieved fame with the poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. This was published in Chicago in 1915. It is regarded as a masterpiece of the modernist movement which reflected the far-reaching changes and attitudes which were coming over western society in the early stages of the twentieth century. The other works which have gained equal fame include *Gerontion* published in 1920, *The Waste Land* published in 1922, *The Hollow Men* published in 1925 and *Ash Wednesday* published in 1930. Besides writing such well known poems, he has seven plays to his credit, of which *Murder in the Cathedral* published in 1935 is the most famous. T.S. Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in

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Literature in 1948 and was also declared a member of the OM or The Order of Merit the same year.

Eliot was born into a very wealthy family. The family was originally from New England. This could explain the future shift to England. The family had moved to St. Louis, a major town and port on the banks of the Mississippi river in the state of Missouri in America. His father, Henry Ware Eliot, was a successful businessman. He was the president and treasurer of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St. Louis. Eliot gives credit to the broad Mississippi river for seeding his literary vision:

> It is self-evident that St. Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has ever done. I feel that there is something in having passed one's childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those people who have not. I consider myself fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London.

His mother, Charlotte Champe Stearns, also influenced Eliot, as she was a poet. She also influenced Eliot towards the modernist movement by being a practising social worker. Social work, as a profession, was just appearing at that time. Eliot was the last of six surviving children. Eliot's family was large. He was called Tom. Eliot studied at the local Smith Academy till 1905, where he studied Latin, Ancient Greek, French, and German. Eliot was influenced by the work *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam and the translation by Edward Fitzgerald. He started writing poetry at the age of fourteen. He did not like what he wrote initially and destroyed his early works. The first poem published by him in 1905 appeared in the school magazine and was titled *A Fable for Feasters*. This was also published in the Harvard Student Magazine, a University he was to study, in later. The other short stories published that year included *The Man Who Was King*.

After spending a year at Milton Academy, Eliot joined Harvard in 1906, where he studied philosophy and received his degree. At Harvard, he was introduced to various literary works which had a profound influence on him in the coming years. Some of these works included Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and Tristan Corbière's *Les amours Jaunes*. At Harvard, a number of his poems were published and he slowly developed a circle of novelists and writers who were to become his lifelong friends.

After graduating, from Harvard, Eliot briefly worked as an assistant in the period 1909-1910, but moved to Paris, where he continued his studies at the famous French University, The Sorbonne, where he studied for a year. His acquaintances increased at Sorbonne. In 1911, he returned to Harvard for three years, where he studied Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit. From there, he moved to Merton College, Oxford, on a scholarship. Eliot moved from Merton after a year, having grown tired of University towns, writing to a friend:

> I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books and hideous pictures on the walls ... Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead.

In 1915, Eliot married Vivienne Haigh-Wood. She was a Cambridge governess. Eliot took up a couple of teaching jobs in London. His marriage was not a happy one as he has written in a private paper:

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> I came to persuade myself that I was in love with Vivienne simply because I wanted to burn my boats and commit myself to staying in England. And she persuaded herself (also under the influence of [Ezra] Pound) that she would save the poet by keeping him in England. To her, the marriage brought no happiness. To me, it brought the state of mind out of which came *The Waste Land*.

While working on various teaching assignments, he also wrote reviews on books and lectured in evening classes. He then worked in the Lloyds bank for a couple of years, during which he frequently travelled outside England. Finally in 1925, Eliot quit his job at the Lloyds bank and joined the publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer. Two years later, he converted to the Anglican faith and finally became a British citizen. Since his marriage was not a happy one, he was on the lookout for opportunities to leave. This was presented in 1932, when an opportunity to work for a year at Harvard arose. He left his wife behind and then filed for a divorce. She was ultimately admitted to a mental hospital. She remained in England till her death in 1947.

Eliot returned to London within a year of filing for separation from his wife. Eliot moved around a bit and shared a flat with a friend of his called John Davy Hayward. Hayword retained a lot of Eliot's papers when they separated, which he later donated to Cambridge.

In 1957, Eliot married Esmé Valerie Fletcher. She was his secretary at Faber and Gwyer. He had known her since August 1949. Their marriage was a secret and there were no children. After Eliot's death in 1965, she dedicated her life to preserving his works.

Eliot's major works (Collection of poems, plays and non-fiction) are as follows:

Poetry

- *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917)
- *Poems* (1920)
- *The Waste Land* (1922)
- *The Hollow Men* (1925)
- *Ariel Poems* (1927–1954)
- *Ash Wednesday* (1930)
- *Coriolan* (1931)
- *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939)
- *The Marching Song of the Pollicle Dogs and Billy M'Caw: The Remarkable Parrot* (1939) *in The Queen's Book of the Red Cross*
- *Four Quartets* (1945)

Plays

- *Sweeney Agonistes* (published in 1926, first performed in 1934)
- *The Rock* (1934)
- *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935)

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- *The Family Reunion* (1939)
- *The Cocktail Party* (1949)
- *The Confidential Clerk* (1953)
- *The Elder Statesman* (first performed in 1958, published in 1959)

Non-fiction

- *The Second-Order Mind* (1920)
- *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1920)
- *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1921)
- *Hamlet and His Problems* (1919)
- *Homage to John Dryden* (1924)
- *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (1928)
- *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928)
- *Dante* (1929)
- *Selected Essays,* 1917–1932 (1932)
- *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933)
- *After Strange Gods* (1934)
- *Elizabethan Essays* (1934)
- *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936)
- *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939)
- *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948)
- *Poetry and Drama* (1951)
- *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1954)
- *The Frontiers of Criticism* (1956)
- *On Poetry and Poets* (1957)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

38. When and where was T.S. Eliot born?
39. Name the movement that came to define and represent Eliot's poetry.

4.15 *TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT:* A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Tradition and Individual Talent was an essay written in 1919. Originally, it was published in two parts *The Egoist*, in 1919 and later on it was published in Eliot's first books of criticism, *The Sacred Wood*, in 1920 - a pattern similar to that of his publication of poems.

Though Eliot's fame lies in his works of poetry, he contributed extensively to the field of literary theory. *Tradition and Individual Talent* is one of the most well-

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known works that Eliot produced in his critic capacity. In this work, Eliot has formulated his thought on the relationship between the poet and the literary tradition which precedes him. He presents the conception of tradition and the definition of the poet and poetry in relation to it and says:

> In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence.

He further proceeds to the position that,

> English tradition generally upholds the belief that art progresses through change - a separation from tradition, literary advancements are instead recognized only when they conform to the tradition.

Eliot believed that tradition in its actual usage represented a historical timelessness. It meant the fusion of the past and present. He felt that a poet did not acquire greatness by departing with the past, rather traditional works had an awareness of the past and their relationships. However, this respect for tradition in no way was to interfere with the requirements for novelty in writing. Eliot had a dynamic and progressive understanding of the poetic process. He felt that novelty was possible by realizing the importance of tradition.

The importance of tradition was also important as creativity did not happen in a 'vacuum'. It happened in an ideal order based on past traditions. Eliot felt that new work did not alter the order but only caused a re-adjustment of the older order. In his words,

> What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it.

Eliot has compared a poet to a catalyst in a chemical reaction, 'in which the reactants are feelings and emotions that are synthesized to create an artistic image that captures and relays these same feelings and emotions.' He reflects that though the mind of the poet is necessary for the production, it is not affected by the process of creation of his work. The artist stores feelings and emotions and properly unites them into a specific combination, which is the artistic product. Hence, what imparts greatness to a work of art is not the feelings and emotions themselves, but the nature of the artistic process by which they are synthesized. In his view, the artist is responsible for creating 'the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place'. Further, it is Eliot's view that it is the intensity of fusion that renders art great.

Great works do not express the personal emotion of the poet. The poet does not reveal his own unique and novel emotions, but rather, by drawing on ordinary ones and channelling them through the intensity of poetry, he expresses feelings that surpass altogether experienced emotion. This is what Eliot intends when he discusses poetry as an "escape from emotion". Since successful poetry is impersonal and, therefore, exists independent of its poet, it outlives the poet and can incorporate into the timeless 'ideal order' of the 'living' literary tradition.

Eliot asserts that it is absolutely necessary for the poet to study, to have an understanding of the poets before him, and to be well versed enough that he can understand and incorporate the 'mind of Europe' into his poetry. But the poet's study is unique – it is knowledge which 'does not encroach', and which does not 'deaden or pervert poetic sensibility'. It is, to put it most simply, a poetic knowledge – knowledge observed

through a poetic lens. This ideal implies that knowledge gleaned by a poet is not the knowledge of facts, but knowledge which leads to a greater understanding of the 'mind of Europe'. As Eliot explains, 'Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum.'

It is ironic that Eliot inspired the movement of New Criticism, when he was to later on criticize it for the detailed analysis of texts. The similarity with the critics is on the same focus as on the aesthetic and stylistic qualities of poetry, away from the ideological content. The new critics resemble Eliot in their close analysis of particular passages and poems.

There has been much criticism of Eliot's theory of literary for his limited definition of what constitutes the canon of that tradition. An example of the criticism is by Harold Bloom, who disagrees with Eliot's condescension of Romantic poetry by criticizing its 'dissociation of sensibility'.

Also, many criticize him for being Euro-centric by his detailing of literary tradition as the 'mind of Europe'. This is contradictory as Eliot was influenced by eastern thought and Indian philosophy, including the use of Sanskrit.

The other arguments criticize him on account of the divergence with feminist, post-colonial and minority theories. Kenyan author, James Ngugi wa Thiong'o, attacked him on the basis of his lack of commitment to native works and relating to one's own culture, while talking of literary excellence. Therefore, he singles out Eliot's subjective criterion for attack in the manner of choosing an elite body of literary works. Post-colonial critic, Chinua Achebe, is another critic of Eliot. He argues against deferring to those writers, who are deemed great, while they only represent a specific cultural perspective.

The other point of view is reflected by critic William Empson who said, 'I do not know for certain how much of my own mind [Eliot] invented, let alone how much of it is a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He is a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike the east wind.'

Another important construct was the linking of the words of the text and events along with the state of mind of the poet and his experiences. Eliot's essays played a major role in reviving the interest of the works of the metaphysical poets. Eliot praised the metaphysical poets' ability to show experience as both psychological and sensual, while at the same time infusing this portrayal with—in Eliot's view—wit and uniqueness. Eliot's essay *The Metaphysical Poets*, gave significance and attention to metaphysical poetry. It also played a role in introducing the concept of a unified sensibility. This is considered by some, to mean the same thing as the term metaphysical.

Many have viewed his poem *The Waste Land* from the prism of his work as a critic. This work is a critique reflective of his personal despair about World War I.

Unsuspectingly, Eliot encouraged the New Criticism movement. This is ironic as he in his later life criticized it over detailed analysis of texts. Eliot did share with the New Critics the same emphasis on the aesthetic and stylistic qualities of poetry. This was more important than the ideological content of the work. The New Critics are similar to Eliot in their resemblance of the study of particular passages and poems.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

40. When was the essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* written?
41. According to Eliot, in the absence of creativity what is the next important point of reference?
42. What has Eliot compared a poet to?

4.16 *FUNCTION OF CRITICISM:* A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Function of Criticism, an essay written in 1923, was born from a conflict. Eliot's essay *'Tradition and the Individual Talent'* was published about four years earlier, in 1919. Middleton Murry deals with the Eliot's views in his essay, *Romanticism and the Tradition.* The present essay is how Eliot replied to Murry. Part one briefly presents Eliot's views as expressed in the essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent.* The second part provides the views of Middleton Murry. Part three sees Murry's views being temporarily dismissed. In the final part, which is part four, the poet takes a look at the various facets of criticism, including its nature and function.

Eliot's essay begins with a reference to constructive views, which he had talked about in his earlier work, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, as he believes they have great significance in the current essay. In the earlier work, he had drawn attention to the close connection that exists between the past and the present, when it comes to literature.

In *Tradition and Individual Talent* , he had said that the existing monuments together comprise a perfect order, which is altered when a new or modern work of art is introduced. Even before the arrival of the new work, the existing order is actually complete. However, if it is to survive after the introduction of something novel, the existing order has to undergo some alteration. This leads to a readjustment of the relations, proportions and values of each work of art in the context of the whole. This is what is known as conformity between the past and the present or the old and the new. Those who agree to this concept of order of form in literature, European or English, will also not oppose the idea of altering or modifying the present. They will also agree that the present is surely directed by the past. The poet who has knowledge of this will also be aware of how difficult the task is and the degree of responsibility it entails.

European literature, from time of Homer to the present day is part of a single literary tradition, from which different individual writers and individual works of art are implied. Clearly this is because, the past does not die but continues to live on in the present. A transformation of the past takes place by the present in the same way that the past directs the present. The past literary works figure a perfect or idyllic order. However, if this ideal order is ever disturbed to a certain degree, this disturbance leads to the emergence of a new work of art. Values get readjusted, traditional values emerge somewhere in the middle of the old and the new. Literary tradition keeps undergoing change and keeps growing different from age to age. The artist of the present must be committed to external ability or the literary or legendary tradition. He has to keep

surrendering and sacrificing himself to gain meaning and significance. True artists, irrespective of the time they belong to, are part of an idyllic community, and the artist of the present should attain a sense of his community. He should be aware a common inheritance or common grounds unite all artists, irrespective of the time they belong to. If an artist considers his individuality as an assets, just because his is different, then he is a second rate artist because true artists do not take pride in being different; they try to stick to tradition. True artists believe in collaborating, exchanging and contributing.

Part two of Eliot's essay diverges into thinking about Middleton Murry's perspective of Classicism and Romanticism. Some critics believe that Classicism and Romanticism are one and the same. However, Murry clearly distinguishes the two saying nobody can be a classic and a romantic simultaneously. In doing so, Murry wins Eliot's admiration. But Eliot does not really agree with him when he choses to make the issue a national one or a racial question. He disapproves when Murry states that the French are true followers of Classicism while the English are Romantics. Murry goes on to relate Catholicism with Classicism in literature, as he was of the opinion that both Catholics and followers of Classicism believed in adhering to traditions. They were disciplinarians and submitted to an objective authority beyond the individual. On the other hand, the Romantics and Protestants, and the social liberalists were linked together, as they had full faith in their 'inner voice'; they believed in the individual, and did not follow the instructions of any external power or influence. They did not follow any regulations and traditions. Eliot, however, differed. According to him, the difference between the Classicists and Romanticists translated into the dissimilarity between the whole and the incomplete. It was reflective of the difference between the adult and the immature, the organized and the disorganized. He felt that by listening to the inner voice, one is actually doing what one likes, which is actually a form of indiscipline, vanity, fear and lust. He does not agree that the English, in general, are romantics, humorous or non-conformists. He does not agree that the French are 'naturally' classical either.

The third section of Eliot's essay, dismisses Murry's views. Here, Eliot seems to be mocking the 'inner voice' because he feels that those who follow the 'inner voice' do not value criticism aimed at making art perfect by discovering certain common principles. Those who trust the 'inner voice' have no desire for principles as they do not bother to achieve perfection in art. Perfection can only come from obeying the laws of art and tradition, which are actual representatives of the amassed wisdom and experience of ages.

Eliot's opinions on criticism are derived from his perspective of art and tradition. According to him, criticism is an account or exhibition of works of art using the written words. He feels that criticism is always about something. Art, according to critics, such as Matthew Arnold , may have other goals, like moral, religious, cultural. But it is not necessary for art to be conscious or have knowledge of these ends. In fact, the performance of art is much better when it is unaware of these ends and indifferent to them. However, criticism will always have one certain end—, explaining and illuminating works of art and correcting taste. He goes on to say that criticism is aimed at promoting an understanding of literature so that it can be enjoyed.

As criticism has a well-defined and clear end, it is easy to assess whether a critic has done his job properly or not. However, matters become complex only when critics express their views strongly and in their individual capacity instead of consulting with fellow critics and attempting to arrive at a common and true judgement. They choose to express their personal intolerances and whims independently. This is mainly because their livelihood comes depends on their individuality and dissimilarity.

The outcome is that, criticism has ended up being a competition amongst orators to gather as many spectators as possible. Such a breed of critics do not have any value or importance. But Eliot also talks of another breed of significant critics on the bases of whose works, Eliot himself comes up with various objectives and methods of criticism to be adopted by all.

In the last part, Eliot discusses the problem of criticism and all its facets. At the outset, he comments on the terms 'critical' and 'creative'. He makes fun of the rather simple and uncomplicated way in which Matthew Arnold has made a distinction between the two terms. He fails to realize that criticism is extremely important when it comes to conception.

Eliot goes on to say that a writer's criticism of his own work is essential and is the best criticism of all. Eliot refers to this criticism as 'workshop criticism', as it does not last for long.

According to him, any work of art or any creation is autotelic. Since criticism is not about itself, there is no way creation and criticism can be joined or connected. When any critical activity unites with creation on the efforts by the artist, the activity attains true fulfillment.

The value and worth of workshop criticism cannot be deprived. A poet who is aware of how mysterious the process of imagination is, will be able to write about it in a better way than those who have no idea or have had no such personal experiences. Eliot proceeds to say that certain creative writers are far better than the others merely because they possess the power to criticize. He makes fun of those who whine about the critical work of the artist and feel that the artist who is unaware is the better or superior artist. According to him, such concepts are 'wiggery' and people who follow them are being ridiculous. He felt that those who adhered to traditions instead of following their 'inner voice' will end up creating work that is as perfect as possible.

Subsequently, Eliot goes ahead to take into account the level to which an opponent is qualified. The main quality of a perfect critic is that he should possess a very highly developed sense of fact, which is an extraordinary quality. Not only is it not very commonly seen, it is not easy to develop it quickly either.

When a person criticizes his own work, or 'workshop criticism' as it is referred to by Eliot, is valuable as it pertains to fact which he is familiar, and therefore, he can make us understand them too. Eliot's own criticism is also of the same type, that is, workshop criticism. Eliot admires such critics and approves of their criticism. A major share of criticism is aimed at interpreting the work of an author. However, most of this is not really an explanation. It is more of fiction. The critic expresses his opinions and views of the work. He talks of the way the work has made an impression on him. These views tend to be false and mislead. He does not approve of such unclear criticism as it does not provide us any insight into the work being studied.

His belief is that true explanation is not really an explanation. It only puts the reader in charge of the facts, which he could have otherwise overlooked or missed out on.

The true critic on his own is aware of the facts regarding a work of art, its conditions, its settings, and its origins. A true critic presents these facts to the readers in an uncomplicated way. Therefore, clearly, Eliot refers to the different scientific facets of a work of art as 'facts'.

A critic compares and analyses. He uses his comparisons and analyses cautiously and intelligently. He cannot compare or analyse without having any idea about the works that should be analysed and compared. He should be aware of the facts regarding the work of art, for example, the technical features including structure, content and theme. He should not unnecessarily waste time trying to look for trivial facts. But, conventionally, the technique used to compare and analyse, even when it is done in an irrational manner, is preferred over 'interpretation'.

Warning against Fact-hunting

Eliot is of the opinion that even facts of the lowest order, are not capable of diluting or corrupting taste, whereas criticism capable of making an impression, such as that of Coleridge and Goethe, always tends to mislead. The objective of criticism is to educate taste or, to promote the appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of literature. Not matter how insignificant facts are, they cannot influence taste. Facts are only capable of satisfying taste. Critics, such as Goethe or Coleridge, are the actual corruptors as they provide opinions. Finally, Eliot warns us from becoming subservient to facts. He cautions us against insignificant things like the laundry bills of Shakespeare. Looking for such facts does not qualify as criticism. In the same way, he cautions us against the horrible preference for reading about works of art rather than the works themselves.

'Lemon-squeezer' and Impressionistic Criticism: Eliot's Condemnation

Eliot emphasizes facts making it clear that his critical stand is with the New Critics, such as F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards. While he favours written criticism, he goes against the 'lemon-squeezer' school of critics. The name is derived from the fact that they attempt to squeeze every single drop of meaning out of words. A critic must focus on the text, comparing and analyzing it, instead of giving in insignificant or empty hair-splitting. The aim of an ideal critic is to base his judgment on facts. Tradition provides him the necessary guidance, along with the wisdom and knowledge he has gathered over the years. It is not his 'inner voice' that guides him. He does not merely express his opinion or fancy. Eliot disapproves of impressionistic criticism, but he does not state any rules or principles nor does he elaborate on any theories or their values.

It is not possible to predict impressionistic criticism. But then, a critic's freedom is curtailed if he sticks to rigid theories.

Eliot's Originality: Objective, Scientific Attitude

Eliot's aim was to guide critics by facts alone. According to Eliot, a critic should carry forward a work of art with a free mind, which is devoid of rigid notions or theories. Otherwise, it will not be possible for him to be completely objective and impersonal. In this aspect, criticism can be called a science. It becomes a co-operative activity, where the critic of one era seeks truth in cooperation with the critics of the previous ages. Truths of this type are not permanent as truths of one era tend to get modified or adapted and rectified by truths disclosed by future ages. This unique and innovative objective-scientific attitude sets Eliot apart from all English critics of the past. He resembled a scientist with an open mind working in co-operation with others, for the awareness and knowledge of truth, the certainty of which only he is aware of.

Check Your Progress

43. What views are expressed in the beginning of Eliot's essay, *Function of Criticism*?
44. Define external ability.
45. With reference to contemplation of Middleton Murry's outlook, identify the area that gains precedence for Eliot.
46. What are the views with which Eliot disagrees?
47. What are the chief tools of a critic?
48. What does Eliot caution us against?
49. Name the school with which Eliot disagrees.
50. What according to Eliot should be the critics exclusive guide ?

4.17 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The critical canon of Wordsworth comprises many Prefaces and essays.
- He wishes to create an atmosphere conducive to the healthy growth of the poetry of a higher kind.
- The 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' is to be earnestly checked and censured so that the poet can recollect ideas in 'tranquility'.
- Poetry originating out of ideas recollected in tranquility provides pleasure by stimulating the imagination.
- The language of poetry should be the language of the common man.
- The process of selecting a language allows the poet to free it from absurdity.
- Coleridge has appreciated Wordsworth as a poet but criticized him as a critic.
- There is a cultural dimension to Coleridge's theory of poetry.
- Romanticism was a movement that emerged in the 1790's in Germany and Britain.
- Wordsworth (1770-1850) contributed to the Romantic movement through his *Lyrical Ballads*.
- During the neo-classical age, the basic questions concerning the nature of poetic creation, nature of poetry and nature of the pleasure derived were secondary.
- Discussions about the rules and principles of composition were of prime importance.
- The Romantics showed interest in the mind of the man and his consciousness.

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- According to Wordsworth, a good poet is naturally endowed with the capability of blending thought and feeling. The role of language in poetry is to sensitize the readers.
- As per Wordsworth, the relevance of poetry has increased in the modern industrial and mechanical age.
- We see the prominent literary features in the expansion of literary criticism.
- One is able to understand the socio cultural, political and literary factors which laid the precedents for this development and the improvement of the modernist movement.
- We critically appreciated the works of T.S. Eliot, a prominent poet, writer and playwright.
- Literary criticism has become more urbanized through the fundamentals laid by this great writer and his contribution to English Literature.
- T.S. Eliot was an American writer of great talent and an important contributor to the field of literary criticism.
- In *The Function of Criticism*, Eliot looks at the scope and limitations of literary criticism.
- The value of a practitioner's criticism—say that of a poet on his own art, 'workshop criticism' as Eliot elsewhere calls it—lies in the fact that he is dealing with facts which he understands, and so can also help us to understand them.
- Eliot's objective is that critic should be guided by facts and facts alone.
- The past is transformed by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.
- Literature in the past figures in an ideal order, but this ideal order is disturbed if ever so, to some extent, when a really new work of art appears.
- *Tradition and Individual Talent* significantly expresses T.S. Eliot's views and concepts about poetry in general.
- *Tradition and Individual Talent* emphasizes the importance of tradition in poetry and in the creative process, in particular.
- Eliot's poetry, critical writing and poetic drama, in some ways, present the essential dilemmas of the modern day existence.
- His early essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent* emphasizes two aspects that he thinks are very important for poetic creation.
- The importance of tradition in poetry and the Theory of Impersonality are the two aspects that are of utmost importance to Eliot.

4.18 KEY TERMS

- **Augustan Age:** The age of Augustus (31 BC–AD 14), during which art and literature flourished
- **Advocacy:** The act of pleading or arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support
- **Assimilate:** To incorporate and absorb into the mind; to make similar; cause to resemble
- **Didacticism:** The practice of valuing literature, etc., primarily for its instructional content
- **Metaphor:** One thing conceived as representing another; a symbol
- **Allegory:** A symbolic representation
- **Mooring:** Elements providing stability or security
- **Anthropology:** The scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans
- **Epistemology:** The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity
- **Metre:** The rhythmic arrangement of syllables in verse, usually according to the number and kind of feet in a line.
- **Satire:** A literary work in which human vice or folly is attacked through irony, derision, or wit.
- **Elegy:** A poem or song composed especially as a lament for a deceased person.
- **Kindred:** A group of related persons, as a clan or tribe
- **Efficacy:** The quality of being successful in producing an intended result; effectiveness.
- **Cleave:** To adhere, cling, or stick fast.
- **Abinoam:** The father of *Barak* who defeated *Jabin*'s army, led by *Sisera*, from *Kedesh*-naphtali
- **Magnanimity:** Liberality in bestowing gifts; extremely liberal and generous of spirit
- **Pedantry:** The habit or an instance of being a pedant, esp. in the display of useless knowledge or minute observance of petty rules or details
- **Ubiquity:** Existence or apparent existence everywhere at the same time; omnipresence
- **Anthropomorphism:** Attribution of human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena
- **Frigid:** Here, without warmth or feeling
- **Metaphysical:** Here, concerned with abstract thought or subjects, as existence, causality, or truth.

4.19 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The first publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, was written in collaboration with S.T. Coleridge, a contemporary poet in Wordsworth's period, who helped set the stage for Romanticism in England.
2. Wordsworth was influenced by his father as it was he who introduced the great poets like Milton, Shakespeare and Spencer to young William.

3. Dorothy Wordsworth was William Wordsworth's younger sister, younger to him by only a year.
4. Kant classified the arts into three classes:
   (a) Speech: which includes poetry and rhetoric
   (b) Shaping: which includes architecture, sculpture and painting and
   (c) The sensory form: which includes music and colour design.
5. According to William Blake, vision is the basis of any artistic creation.
6. The play impulse is the capacity of human beings to have a natural ability to synthesize opposed impulses.
7. Dr Johnson is all praises for Shakespeare and pays a tribute to him in his book Preface to Shakespeare. In his book, Dr Johnson calls Shakespeare 'the Poet of Nature'. He also places him above all modern writers.
8. Pope and Wordsworth are different in their treatment of 'man' in their works. When Pope talks about 'man', he talks about the species 'man'. But when Wordsworth deals with the same subject, he gives it his 'Romantic' touch. Wordsworth's treatment is evident in his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*.
9. The basic ideas of Romanticism are:
   (a) Imagination
   (b) Inspiration
   (c) Organicism
   (d) Emotion.

   Imagination is the creative faculty of artistic creation while inspiration is the central concept for the same. A work of art achieves form and unity because of the element of organicism. Emotion is something which Shelley relates to as 'natural growth of a child in the womb' whereas Coleridge refers to the 'growth of a plant' for this purpose.
10. The eighteenth century was called the age of prose and satire because in this period, writers had a pragmatic and mechanical outlook.
11. The accepted forms of lyric poetry are:
   (a) Ode
   (b) Sonnet
   (c) Song
   (d) Elegy
12. Lyric Poetry was the poetic norm of the eighteenth century as it was accepted to be the purest expression of the feelings of the author.
13. William Wordsworth met Coleridge in 1795 and the two became good friends. Two years later, Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy moved to the 'Alfoxton House' near Coleridge's house. There, they produced *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 with fruitful insights from Dorothy.
14. During the initial phase of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge had detailed discussions on the 'power of exciting the sympathy of the readers by faithful adherence to the truth of nature' and on the nature of imagination. They also faced the problem of synthesizing the first two problems. While the first two problems were sorted out, the third problem was left unresolved.
15. Wordsworth wrote *The Daffodils* as he was mesmerized by the beauty of the Daffodils growing by the river. The poem was composed late after he had recollected the memories of his visit and synthesized his thoughts.
16. The qualities of a poet as listed by Wordsworth are:
   (a) Power of observation and description
   (b) Sensibility
   (c) Reflection
   (d) Imagination and fancy
   (e) Invention
   (f) Judgment
17. According to Wordsworth, a poet is different from the common man because of his ability to observe things differently. The poet's observation should be true and accurate and he should use it with honesty in the composition of the poem.
18. As per the Wordsworthian perspective, a poet's work must also be mechanical.
19. The medium used by Wordsworth is language and he intended to use it creatively by subjecting it to manipulation.
20. According to Wordsworth, the role of language is to influence its readers. The language of the poem should be such that it should touch the hearts of its readers.
21. In his *Theory of Language* Wordsworth reccommends a natural use of language. Wordsworth advocates a simplicity of language which he feels has a universal appeal.
22. The shortcomings attributed to Wordsworth's theory of poetry are as follows:
   (a) Driven by democratic impulse.
   (b) Inconsiderate. Does not take into account the fact that the language is to be used for artistic creation.
   (c) Contradictory to its own statements. Wordsworth talks about 'selecting' the language, which contradicts the very meaning of being natural.
23. According to Wordsworth, there are two kinds of poetry, objective and subjective.
24. Imagination, as Wordsworth defined it, becomes the name for the mental power that transforms the literal to the figurative. It has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but it is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and process, of creation or of compositions, by certain fixed laws.
25. Wordsworth's views on imagination and fancy are fully set forth in the *Preface To Poems*, 1815. He makes a distinction between fancy and imagination as per which Imagination operates upon the raw material of sensation to illustrate the evidence of eternal truth. While Fancy merely relates to temporal or worldly enjoyments.

26. Wordsworth's views on the intellect are as follows: (i) An intellectualist approach to truth is rejected by Wordsworth. He recognizes intellect as a false secondary power; (ii) Intellect is the main guiding principle of science and artistic creation, hence Wordsworth rejects it.
27. Pleasure, in Wordsworth's poetry, lies in stimulating imagination to perceive beauty and newness in day to day commonplace activities.
28. *The Thorn* is the most criticized poem of Wordsworth.
29. According to Wordsworth, the issues that are faced by culture are: a mechanized mode of existence as well as the loss on inner values.
30. Wordsworth's writings address the cause of culture by using the phrase 'the people' in contradiction to 'the public' in the essay *Supplementary to the Preface* (1815).
31. Wordsworth sees the relevance of poetry in the modern world of fever and fret. It has provided solace in the ancient times and can safeguard and promote cultural values in the era of science and technology. Poetry, from this angle, becomes the most refined form of man and nature.
32. Eliot first published his poems individually in magazines or periodicals.
33. 1917 was the year in which his first collection, *Prufrock and Other Observations* ws first published.
34. Eliot was twenty-two when his first major was published.
35. Ezra Pound was the American expatriate poet and critic who helped to discover and shape the work of T.S. Eliot.
36. *The Waste Land* was first published in 1922.
37. *The Four Quartets* is considered to be Eliot's masterpeice.
38. T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri on September 26, 1888.
39. The Modernist Movement came to define and represent Eliot's poetry.
40. 1919 was the year when *Tradition and Individual Talent* was first written.
41. Tradition is the next important point of reference in the absence of creativity.
42. Eliot has compared a poet to a catalyst in a chemical reaction.
43. Constructive views are expressed in the beginning of Eliot's essay *The Function of Criticism*.
44. External ability is the artist's commitment to the present.
45. With refernce to Middleton Murray's outlook, Classicism and Romanticism, for Eliot are areas that gain precedence.
46. Eliot disagrees with the view that the English as a nation is romantic and so 'humorous' and 'non-conformists', while the French are 'naturally' classical.
47. The chief tools of a critic are comparison and analysis.
48. Eliot cautions us against not becoming slaves to facts and bother about insignificant details.
49. Eliot disagrees with the Lemon squeezer school of thought.

50. As per Eliot a critic's exclusive guide should be facts and facts alone. A critic should advance the work of art with a free mind, unbiased by any theories or fixed notions.

4.20 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer questions

1. How was Romanticism different from the neoclassicism of the preceding age?
2. Discuss Wordsworth's theory of poetry.
3. Who wrote the preface to the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*? Who was supposed to write it according to the initial plans?
4. What was Eliot's style of writing poetry?
5. What was Eliot's word of caution regarding facts?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Was Coleridge critical of Wordsworth or was he in support of his theories. Give reasons for your answer.
2. Who did Coleridge write letters to during the scripting of *Lyrical Ballads* and what did he write in them?
3. What relationship does Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* influence?
4. What are Eliot's view regarding Middleton Murry's outlook on Classicism and Romanticism?
5. What are Eliot's views on criticism?

4.21 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M.H.; *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1953.

Eliot, T.S.; *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, London, Faber and Faber, 1933.

Endnote

[1] Critics and criticism, A.G. George, Asia Publishing House, 1971

UNIT 5 STRUCTURALISM, POST-STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

Structure

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 Structuralism
5.3 Post-Structuralism
5.4 Deconstruction
5.5 Summary
5.6 Key Terms
5.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.8 Questions and Exercises
5.9 Further Reading

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The word structure has been used in different contexts in various disciplines of ccience and humanities. It is used in physics (the structure of an atom) or in chemistry (the structure of a compound). All the social sciences resort to it abundantly. It is widely used in anthropology and linguistics. We can speak of the structure of a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter, a book, and so forth. The formal structure of a play consists of its acts and scenes and their interdependent balance. The non-formal structure comprises the events and actions which take place. One may think that the structure of a poem is its central statement or arguments (its logical structure) while everything else (the words, their sounds, rhyme and imagery) is texture. This is the common notion of structure but this is not what has now been called structuralism in literature. The word structure is used in literature in its specialized sense. In fact, literary criticism has borrowed the specialized sense of structure from linguistics.

In the 1960s, structuralism, which had dominated the French intellectual life since the mid-1950s, began to be replaced by another more antinomian movement that first came to be known as post-structuralism and then post-modernism. If structuralism emphasizes order, structure and rules, post-structuralism argues that language is subject to contingency, indeterminacy, and the generation of multiple meanings. Rather than being an instrument of understanding, the meanings render themselves open to reasoning. In other words, these are instruments of mastery, discipline and social control. All the values, ideals, and norms of western philosophy and western social life — from truth conceived as a clear idea to the conscious mind to the individual conceived as a free agent who determines his or her own destiny — deny the materiality and contingency of existence, which is characterized by movement, change, and multiplicity, rather than logic, regularity and identity.

The most influential of all post-modern and post-structural theories is the theory of deconstruction given by Jacques Derrida. He is the most influential intellectual author in current philosophy and Anglo-American literary theory.

5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain structuralism
- Discuss the causes that led to post-structuralism
- Paraphrase the important aspects of deconstruction

5.2 STRUCTURALISM

To begin with, structure implies a system. A system is a whole, a totality. A structure has elements. Elements can be arranged or rearranged. Arrangements or rearrangements will modify the structure, but will not change the structure. Dorothy Baisch Seiz writes: 'Structure is a set of terms in relationship constantly defined, whatever the transformations.' Piaget has defined it as a 'system of transformation.' Roland Barthes has offered an entirely different definition of structure: 'Structure is, therefore, actually a simulacrum of the object.' In the words of Richard Harland, 'The structuralists in general are concerned to know the (human) world—to uncover it through detailed observational analysis and to map it under extended explicatory grids. Their stance is still the traditional stance of objectivity, their goal the traditional goal of truth.'

Lacan, a French psychologist while defining the human consciousness, has given us a significant structuralist notation that has influenced the structuralist activity of our time. The human unconscious is structured like a language and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure conceived of language as a sign system that communicates in relationships or interdependence. A sign gives meaning only in relation to the totality of other signs. A sign consists of a signifier (sound image) and signified. According to Saussure, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. For an understanding of structuralism, an understanding of its linguistic foundation is essential because structuralism in other disciplines is nothing but a metaphor or a model taken from linguistic foundation. Structuralism is based on the idea of the sign as a union of signifier and the signified and the starting point of this system is found in Saussure's course in General Linguistics (1915), as Saussure writes: 'The linguistic sign writes not a thing and a name but a concept and a sound image.' The theory of structuralism is the result of a product of a system of code or signification. The signification is rendered by the way the elements of the code are related. Codes are random, and in their absence reality cannot be caught. When it comes to literature and literary criticism, structuralism questions the belief that any literary work or text is a reflection of reality, and a literary text comprises other conventions and texts.

Structuralism opposes mimetic criticism, that is, the view that literature mainly imitates. It does not favour expressive criticism (the view that literature primarily expresses the feeling or temperament or creative imagination of its author). It is also opposed to any form of the view that literature is a means of communication between the author and the readers. In general, it tries to develop a science of literature, and in doing so, structuralism deviates from the traditional concepts humanistic criticism that rule. Let us look at some examples:

(i) As per the 'structuralist view', what was once known as a 'literary work' comes to be a simple 'text', that is, a means of writing by playing with the elements as per particular literary conventions, rules and codes. These factors may lead to an illusion of reality but may be far from the truth. They may not have any reference to a reality that exists beyond the literary system itself.

(ii) Each author, as an individual (subject) does not have the permission to be referred to as the 'origin' or the producer of a work in terms of its design, initiation or expressions. Rather, the conscious 'self' is declared as a construct, which itself is the outcome of the linguistic system's working. The author's mind is called an assigned space wherein the 'impersonal' and existing systems of literary language, codes, conventions and rules are accelerated to take the form of a specific text. In the words of Roland Barthes, the declaration that the author is dead, is the subversion of the humanistic view.

(iii) The author is replaced by the reader in structuralism. The reader becomes the main agency in criticism. However, the traditional reader, as an aware individual with a purpose, ends up as an impersonal reader. Therefore, the text read is not a text full of with meanings. Structuralist criticism concentrates on the impersonal process of reading, which renders literary sense to the words, their sequence, the phrases and the sentences that comprise the text. This is done by using the relevant rules, codes, conventions, and expectations.

The 'term' structuralism pertains to the theories of French authors, Claude Levi- Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and their counterparts in other parts of the world. The most prominent name in the study of structuralism, however, is Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist, whose Cours de Linguistique led a structuralist enterprise in different disciplines including literature. The concept of the 'signifier' and 'signified' is based on the way Saussure described language, its elements as well as the terminology employed to describe language.

As per his analysis, 'sign' was divided into two components parts:

(i) A sound or acoustic component (signifier)

(ii) A mental or conceptual component (signified)

He introduced two pairs of terms, which were contrasting, and essential to the understanding of structuralism. He also made a distinction between 'langue' and 'parole' or 'language' and 'speech' while studying language.

Language refers to the theoretical system or structure of a language, the corpus of linguistic rules which speakers of that language must obey if they are to communicate; speech is the actual day-to-day use made of that system by individual speakers. Saussure brings out a distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic axes of investigation. Saussure himself advocated the synchronic study of language under structuralism as a whole is necessarily synchronic. It is pertains to the study and examination of a specific system or structure under artificial and historical conditions, which ignore the systems or structures from which they have been derived in the hope that their existing functioning can be explained.

Saussure outlines another distinction: syntagmatic and paradigmatic. According to him, words establish relations on the basis of the linear nature of language, in

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discourse. This is due to the fact that they are linked together. All the elements occur in a sequence as part of a chain when spoken. Combination with the support of linearity forms a syntagm. In a syntagm, a term gets its value merely because it opposes everything preceding or following it or both.

When it comes to a chain or sequence of words, signs suggest or express meaning mainly due to the place they occupy in the sentence.

There were many significant original contributions made by Saussure:

(a) Language as a system of signs or a structure with individual parts understandable only in relation to each other and to the system, as a whole instead of as an external 'reality'.

(b) Langue vs parole: While langue represents a language as a whole, such as French, English and German, parole represents utterance, or a specific use of individual units of langue

(c) Diachronic vs synchronic: 'Diachronic' indicates the historical study of the development of a language (growth through philology) while 'synchronic' denotes the study of a language as a system at a given moment of its life (Saussure emphasizes synchronic study)

(d) Disturbance between the signifier and the signified.

Claude Levi-Strauss came up with a structural theory, which considered myth, ritual and kinship, in his work *Antropologie Structurale* (1958), and *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949). He considered social structure as a type of model and attempted to show that the behavioural patterns of kinship and the existence of institutions relied on communication techniques characteristic of the manner in which the human mind works. He examined the methods of thought as well as action, instead of how they originated or what caused them. His theories related to myths considerably impacted the development of the theory of narratology, another aspect of structuralism. The structuralist theories of Roland Barthes (1915–80), stated in *Mythologies* (1957) and *Systemede* la mode (1967), disclose a general interpretation of the term 'language' as a social practice. Barthes, initially, was a follower of Marxism and held a very different view of myth and kinship, which was like middle-class ideology.

His attempt was to find a type of 'grammar' and 'syntax' of such means of communication. His interpretation of social practices involved food and clothes as a system of signs, functioning on the same model as language. He explained the idea of a 'garment system', which functioned like a language. Generally speaking, 'garments' refers to the system which Saussure ultimately referred to as 'langue' and Chomsky called 'competence'. A specific set of garments corresponds to a 'sentence'(which Saussure called 'parole' and Chomsky called 'performance').

The same difference exists in food. Food stuff genereally comprises a system just like a specific menu comprising a meal represents a 'sentence.' After 1968, following his famous discourses in S /Z (1970) and *The Death of the Author* (1968), Barthes was linked with post-structuralism. Noam Chomsky contributed yet again to structuralist theory, which is significant to linguistics and deserved mention here. He distinguished between 'surface structures' and 'deep structures.' The former comprises the collection of words and sounds articulated and heard in a sentence while the latter

refers to the abstract and underlying structure of language. A single sentence may have several different surface forms and features and yet mean the same. The underlying/ deep structure is responsible for regulating the meaning. These are the focal theoretical distinctions made in generative grammar. David Crystal summarizes the primary current theory by saying that grammar functions by creating a seet of abstract deep structures within its phrase-structure rules, ultimately transforming these underlying representations into surface structures. This conversion is effected by the application of a certain transformational rules. David Crystal draws attention to the fact that this two-level conception of grammatical structure has been challenged. Jonathan Culler develops a theory of structuralist poeticsin his work *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975). He further builds on the idea that the real object of poetics 'is not the work itself but its intelligibility'. He focused on the important of trying to elaborate on how works can be understood. He said that it was important to understand the unspoken or implied knowledge, and the conventions that allow readers to make sense of them should be formulated. Jonathan Culler concentrates on the reader instead of the text, which implies that while the rules governing the interpretation of text can be determined, it is impossible to establish the rules governing the composition of texts. Therefore, the structure dwells within the system underlying the reader's interpretation or 'literary competence' instead of in the text. The concept of 'literary competence' can be challenged. However, Culler does not try to identify a predictable rules of reading them; It is internalized in the form of an articulation of a theory of codes and conventions. The work of Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), especially his two essays *Linguistics and Poetics* (1960) and *Two Aspects of Language* (1956), give other forms of structuralist theory. His theory was built on the concept of binary opposition in the language structure. He was especially bothered about the metaphor or metonymy opposition and what it implied when it came to analyzing realism and symbolism. In *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977) David Lodge applies the theory to modern literature and in his comic novel, *Nice Work* (1988) he plays with the concept making use of wit.

Since the structuralist's intention is to define the conditions that permit the very creation of a poem, a novel, or a play, he is concerned with the system of beliefs and notions that makes the possibility of these literary productions. Just as a grammarian's concern is the grammatical system that enables the production of meaningful sentences, a structuralist's concern is the literary system. The structuralist operates upon a piece of literature to discover the principle that allowed the arrangement of words and phrases into a piece of literature. His assumption is that literature can make meaning, like the kicking of a ball can make meaning, because of a system of beliefs and notions called conventions. The desire for a system in a structuralist's pursuit is a desire to look behind the literary productions so that what enables that production can be understood. In this connection Jonathan Culler observes, 'Structuralism is thus based in the first instance, on the realization that if human actions and productions have a meaning there must be an underlying system of distinctions and conventions which makes meaning possible.' At the heart of structuralism lies the idea of a system. Every literary unit from individual sentence to the order of words can be seen in relation to the concept of a system.

The desire to discover a system is not without implications in literary criticism. First and foremost, this desire reflects the hope to introduce a kind of scientific rationality

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in criticism. The scientific urge to go beyond natural phenomena in order to discover how these phenomena take shape is active, in the structuralist pursuit in literature. There is something mystic and undefinable in literature. That something has to be discovered. This urge is scientific. By discovering that tantalizing mystic element in literature, structuralist criticism entertains aspiration to make literary criticism a scientific discipline. Leo Bersani in his article *Is There a Science of Literature?* states: 'The ideal of a literary science is at the heart of the structuralist adventure.' Robert Scholes also says, 'Structuralism has tried—and is trying—to establish for literary studies a basic that is as scientific as possible.' The structuralist hopes that literary criticism will become an objective and scientific discipline if the literary structures are discovered and the literary system shaped.

The mode of operation in structuralist criticism will not be an analysis of a particular work with an intention to discover its meaning. On the contrary, the structuralist will dissect a work to discover the structure. Unlike grammatical analysis where a sentence can be related to a particular structure in the grammatical system, structuralist criticism cannot relate a work to a structure in the literary system because there is no structure or system which is clearly defined. What exactly is the structure of literature has not been discovered or understood.

This can be called the structuralist dilemma. That is why structuralist criticism has a duel function to perform: i) it analyzes a work of art, and ii) it discovers or defines the underlying structure. So the criticism begins as a confrontation with a particular work and progresses by isolating the deep structures and ends with defining the principles that make the structures. These principles are to be applicable to at least a few more works in literature. We may call this process 'dissection and articulation.'

This process can be very mechanical and monotonous and indeed it has been quite mechanical and monotonous in the hands of critics who believed that by applying the linguistic model, the model described by Saussure, literary criticism could be made into a coherent and scientific discipline. In fact, the very beginning of the structuralist enterprise in literature is deeply indebted to structural linguistics. Leo Bersani rightly observes, 'The structuralist approach—not only to literature, but also to primitive myths, to mass media, to the world of fashion—is easily recognizable by the highly technical instruments of analysis it borrows from linguistics.' The relation between linguistics and structural literary criticism is deep-rooted that any meaningful discussion of literary structuralism has to take notice of its linguistic foundation.

The structuralist examines a work to discover how meaning is shaped or how meaning is made possible and thereby discovers the basic structures of literature. Its value as a mode of thought that reorients the mind of the critic and urges him to understand the very possibility of understanding is unquestionable. Structuralism gives valuable insight into the basic process of understanding.

A direct application of the linguistic model on any piece of literature will make structuralist literary criticism a very mechanical process. If the linguistic model is directly applied to a piece of literature, that application would resemble a working out of a problem in Mathematics or Physics. In that event, structuralist literary criticism would be monotonous. In fact, the intention of structuralist criticism is not to apply the linguistic mode on any literary work and discover its meaning. The structuralist examines a work

to discover how meaning is shaped or how meaning is made possible and thereby discovers the basic structures of literature. The discovery of the structures of literature will lead to the structuring of the human mind. What are those human hopes and fears that made man attribute meaning to events? How is it that the withering of a flower is the fading of beauty, a fall into the oblivion of death, or losing of youth in literature? Man has imposed meaning on natural events and has concealed meaning in cultural events; and, thus, he has woven a complex system called literature. The system is as complex as the human mind itself. Psychology is exploring and exposing the complexities of the human mind whereas philosophy has been concealing that complexity. Is the linguistic model closer to psychology or philosophy? Or, is the linguistic model a pure model as the linguists claim? A post-structuralist theory, investigates the structuralists' claim to the purity or the scientific basis of the linguistic model.

The structure of language that Saussure has described encourages the literary critic to make a revolutionary innovation in the study of literature. But, innovation is not imitation. The literary structuralist has a challenging task to perform. Linguistics can be of use only be a centre of inspiration. Linguistics has demonstrated that language, which appears to be natural, is in fact, not natural. Familiarity often makes us simplistic and naive. A critical examination needs a distance between the examiner and the examined. A model can often serve as a de-familiarizing device. But, what model is useful for that purpose in literature? As there is no such model other than the traditional models of philosophy or morality structuralists in literature build models. Every model becomes insufficient in explaining the literary system and a structuralist is in eternal discontent. However, its value as a mode of thought that reorients the mind of the critic and that urges him to understand the very possibility of understanding is unquestionable. Structuralism gives tremendous insight into the basis and process of understanding. However, in confronting literature, it fails to provide convincing answers. Confronting literature is confronting the complex human mind and the failure is understandable.

Structuralism as the word suggests, is concerned with structures, and particularly with examining the laws by which they work. Structuralism also tends to reduce individual phenomena to mere illustration of such laws. Nevertheless, it constitutes a distinctive doctrine which is not to be found in Northrope Frye.

It has to be borne in mind in this regard that structuralism, in its course, has encompassed important areas of linguistics such as semiotics or semiology, modern communication theory, narratology and many others. The doctrine of structuralism is grounded in the belief that the individual units of any system have meaning only by virtue of their relationships with one another. But, you can examine a poem as a structure while still treating each of the items in a more or less meaningful manner. Yet, a real authoritative structuralist is one who claims that the meaning of each image is wholly a matter of its relation to the other. The images do not have a 'substantial' meaning but, only a 'relational' one. Suppose a poem contains one image about the sun and another about the moon. And you are interested in seeing how these two images fit together to form a structure. As said just before, a real strucluralist will not think that way. For him, the images will not have a 'substantial' meaning but only a 'relational' one. Accordingly, hard-core structuralism insists on the meaning in the poem being inseparably related to each other.

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Eagleton takes an example: He analyses a story in which a boy leaves home after quarrelling with his father, the son sets out on a walk through the forest in the heat of the day and falls down in a deep pit. The father comes out in search of his son, peers down the pit but is unable to see him because of the darkness. At that moment the sun has risen to a point directly over his head and illuminates the depths of the pit with its rays and helps the father to rescue his child. After a joyous reconciliation they return together. As per Eagleton, this story can be interpreted in many different ways but the structuralist will 'schematise' the story in a diagramatic form. The first unit of signification will be the boy's quarrel with the father. This might be re-written as – low rebels against high. The boy walking through the forest is a movement along a horizontal axis in contrast to vertical axis – high and low -- and could be indexed as middle. The fall into the pit may signify low again. Sunlight, at this point, can be interpreted as shining below its surface, i.e., in a sense it has stooped low thereby inverting the narrative where 'low' is 'struck' against 'high'. Moreover, the reconciliation between the father and the son restores equilibrium between father and son; between high and low, and they walk back together. The point of returning together may signify the middle which marks this achievement of a suitable intermediate state. In this way, the structuralist can re-arrange the narrative.

Structuralism ignores the cultural value of the content and apparently makes no distinction between a great poem and a mediocre one. Moreover, it refuses the obvious meaning and seeks to discover underlaying in deep significance. It examines various relations that exist within and creates its own structure of sense.

This literary structuralism flourished during the 1960s and received a great deal from the efforts of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* which appeared in 1916. Giving rise to modern Structural Linguistics which attributes importance to the signs, that is the black marks: c-a-t rather than the object called Cat.

Structuralism in general is an attempt to apply this linguistic theory to objects and activities other than language itself. A Structuralist will busy himself with isolating the underlying sets of laws by which these signs are combined into meanings. He will largely ignore what the sign actually says and concentrate instead on their internal relations to each other.

Russian Formalism, although not identical with structuralism, was yet sought to be connected with it by the linguist, Roman Jakobson, who was the leader of the Mascow Linguistic Circle, founded in 1915. Jakobson maintained poetics to be a part of the field of linguistics and believed that language was placed in a kind of self-conscious relationship to itself. The poetic functioning of language, according to him, promotes the 'palpability of signs' (making them denote the objects clearly) In other words, it encourages us to recognize their 'material qualities'. Eagleton remarks that in structuralism, the Poetics dislocates (detaches) the sign from its object, disturbing the usual relation between the sign and the referent (the object of reference or discussion), which invests the sign with 'a certain independence as an object of value in itself.'

According to Jakobson, all communications include six elements: an addresser, an addressee, a message passed between them, a shared code which makes the message intelligible (code system of words, letters, which represent sentences to ensure economy in transmission of the message), contact or physical medium of communication and a

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context to which the message refers. Any one of these elements, Jakobson states, may dominate in a particular communicative act. Language, seen from the addresser's viewpoint, is emotive or expressive of a state of mind: from the addressee's standpoint it is conative or trying for an effect; if the communication concerns the context, it is referential and if it is oriented to the code itself, it is metalinguistic (as when two individuals discuss whether they are understanding each other): and communication, angled towards the contact itself, is phatic – for example – Well here we are chatting away at last. Phatic is the using speech for social reasons to communicate feelings rather than ideas.

The poetic function is dominant when the communication focuses on the message itself rather than what is said by whom and for what purpose in what situation.

Jakobson also makes much of a distinction, implicit in Saussure: between the metaphorical and the metonymic. In metaphor, one sign (word) is substituted for another because it is somehow similar to it and so passion becomes flame, love and so on. In a metaphor we select sign from a possible range of equivalences. In metonymy one sign is associated with another: for example, wing is associated with aircraft because it is a part of it. In poetry, we pay attention to equivalences in the process of combining words together as well as in selecting them. Jakobson states in a famous definition, that 'The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination'. Another way of saying it is that in poetry, 'similarity is super-induced upon contiguity:' words are not just strung together for the sake of the thoughts they convey as in ordinary speech, but with an eye to the patterns of similarity, opposition, parallelism and so on, created by their sound, meaning, rhythm and connotations. Some literary form for example, realist prose tend to be metonymic, linking signs (words) by their associations with each other; other forms like romantic or symbolist poetry are highly metaphorical.

The Prague School of linguistics comprising Jakobson, Felix Vodica and others represents a kind of transition from formalism to modern structuralism. They elaborated the ideas of formalism and systematized them within the framework of Saussurean linguistics. Poems were to be viewed as 'functional structures' in which 'signifiers' and the 'signified' are governed by a single complex set of relations. These signs (words) must be studied in their own right, not as reflections of an external reality. Nonetheless, the literary work was related still (in Formalism) to the world by the concept of defamiliarization: as art estranges and undermines the conventional sign-system and compels our attention to the material process of language itself and renews our perceptions.

Structuralism has been applied to linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, folklore, mythology and Biblical studies. In fact, this has been applied to all social and cultural phenomena. Its attractions are considerable: structuralism is, at least seemingly, scientific and objective. It identifies structures, systems of relationships, which endow signs (e.g., words) or items (e.g., clothes, cars, table manners, rituals) with identities and meanings, and directs us to the ways in which we think.

But, we note at the outset that the extent to which structuralism and its derivatives ran function as an approach to interpreting a literary work is limited. It has even been said that post-structuralism cannot be applied to literary texts.

Structuralism claims intellectual linkage to the prestigious line of French rationalists stretching from Voltaire to Jean-Paul Sartre. Structuralists emphasize that the description of any phenomenon or artifact without placement in the broader systems which generate it is misleading if not impossible. Accordingly, they have developed analytical, systematic approaches to literary texts that avoid traditional categories like plot, character, setting, theme and tone. Even more significantly, however, structuralists tend to deny the text any inherent privilege, meaning, or authority; to them the text is only a system that poses the question of how such a construct of language can contain meaning for us.

Such a view denies any claim of privilege for any author, any school, any period, and any correct explication. The structuralists have encouraged us to reread, rethink, and restudy all literary works and to equate them with all other cultural and social phenomena.

Structuralism emerged from the structural linguistics: developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, mainly in his lectures at the University, of Geneva between 1906 and 1911. Not available in English until 1959, Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in French (1916) attracted thinkers far beyond Switzerland, linguistics, and universities. It became the model for Russian formalism, semiology or semiotics, French structuralism, and deconstruction, each of which we will treat briefly below. Saussure's model is acceptable as an analogy for the study of many systems other than language.

Saussure's theory of language systems distinguishes between langue (language, the system possessed and used by all members of a particular language community – English, French, Urdu and such like) and parole (word; by extension, speech-event or any specific application of langue in speech or writing). Parole is impossible without the support, the structural validity and generation of meaning-conferred on it by langue, the source of grammar, phonetics, morphology syntax and semantics. As Saussure explained, paroles appear as phonetic and semantic signs (phonemes and semes). A linguistic sign joins a signifier (a conventional sound construction) to a signification (semantic value, meaning). Such a sign does not join a thing and its name, but an allowable concept to a 'sound image'. The sign has meaning only within its system – a langue or some other context – only within its originating system. Further, Saussure stressed the importance of considering each item in relationship to all other items within the system.

The approach to analyzing sentences is syntagmatic; word by word in the horizontal sequence of the parts or syntagms or the sentence. Saussure's structural linguistics furnishes a functional explanation of language according to its structural hierarchy, that is, structures within structures. He suggested that his system for studying language had profound implications for other disciplines. In the study of a literary work, Saussure's syntagmatic approach explains our usual, instinctive approach. We read a poem from its start to its finish, we see the narrative work in terms of the sequence of events or the scenes of the play and we understand the details from the first to the last. This approach emphasizes the surface structures of the work, as it does for the sentence in Saussure's scheme, as opposed to the deep structures, those not on the surface – the understood but unexpressed signs. Saussurean linguistics applies, moreover, to synchronic features (i.e., language as it exists at a particular time) rather than to diachronic features (details of language considered in their historical process of development).

What is known as structuralism and structuralist literary theory is an intellectual movement that embraces a number of different approaches that have some basic ideas in common. The fundamental insights of structuralism are derived from or influenced by several streams of thought.

The linguistic circles of Prague (among whose leaders were N. S. Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson) and Copenhagen (where the outstanding figure was Louis Hjelmslev, the originator of a linguistic theory known as 'glossematics'), Ferdinand de Saussure's seminal ideas on structural linguistics, the French cultural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss' study of systems that underlie different cultures, the American school which derived originally from the ideas of Leonard Bloomfield and later from Noam Chomsky, the Firthian and neo-Firthian schools in England, other concepts of sign and system, the assumption that poetics is the 'science of literature'—all such ideas contributed to the growth and development of structuralism.

Although structuralism started as a mode of approach in linguistic and anthropological studies, it has influenced other areas such as sociology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, history, economic theory, political theory, semiotics, myth studies and literary criticism.

Saussure (1857-1913) began by defining the scope and limits of his study; he proposed a number of distinctions such as:

(a) La langue and la paraole

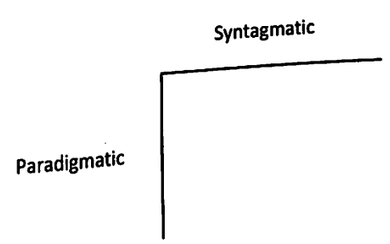
(b) Synchronic and diachronic analyses

(c) Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships

(d) Signifier and signified

La Langue is the system, the institution called language which is a set of impersonal rules and conventions: langue is trans individual and abstract. Parole is the actual manifestation of language in speaking, which is taken as primary; parole is individual / concrete. If the study deals with the description of a language at a given point of time, it is called synchronic and if it deals with changes that occur in the course of time, it is called diachronic (i.e. the history and development over a period of time). Though Saussure did not reject the value of the diachronic studies, he asserted that the diachronic perspective deals with phenomena that are unrelated to systems although they do condition them.

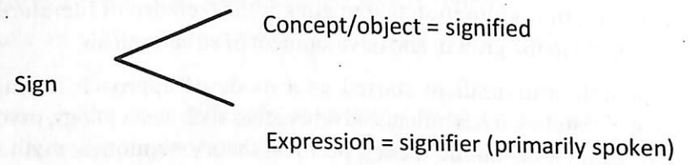
Syntagmatic is the linear arrangement of units as in a chain; the units maybe sounds, letters, words, sentences etc. 'Paradigmatic' is the vertical arrangement of units as in a ladder; the units may be sounds, letters, words, sentences, etc. Some scholars feel that all behavioural patterns show these two types of relationships. For example, a menu card in a five-star hotel shows different kinds of soup, which gives a paradigmatic choice. The way we eat–first the soup, then the first course, then the second courseshows the linear syntagmatic choice.



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It is also maintained that all linguistic relationships (maybe all relationships and discriminations) are binary (i.e. always in twos).

Language, Saussure said, is a system of signs and the linguistic sign is a two-sided psychological entity composed of a concept and a sound-image, 'I propose to retain the word sign to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified and signifier'. The relationship between the signifier and the signified was arbitrary with respect to nature/object but not with respect to culture. For example, the word tree' in English refers to an object which is identified and accepted by English speaking people. But it is arbitrary since there is no inherent connection between sounds and their referents.



Not just the form but the sound image, but the connection between the signified and the signifier, is arbitrary.

Language, according to Saussure, is a system of interrelated units and the value of the units is determined by their places in the system at a given time and in a given state. The stress laid on the synchronic study and analysis of language as systematic structures in terms of binary contrasts of signifiers laid the foundations of modern structural linguistics.

One can find similar sets of assumptions in the structuralist poetics of Roman Jakobson, in the cultural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, in the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, in the sociology of Durkheim, in Bloomfieldian and Chomskyan linguistics, in New Criticism and Practical Criticism, in Firthian and Neo-Firthian functional linguistics-all of which are essentially structural.

As Jonathan Culler points out in the preface to his *Structuralism Poetics* (1975), three characteristics of structuralism and literary theory clearly stands out. First, it is not primarily interpretive; it does not offer a method which, when applied literary works, produces meanings. Secondly, structuralism does not focus on individual works, but attempts to understand the conventions which make literature possible. The langue of literature, in the words of Jakobson, are the universal underlying structure in Chomsky. Thirdly, it would 'attempt to specify how we go about making sense of texts, warfare the interpretative operations on which literature is based. This, in a way, is similar to the 'close reading' of the text in practical/new criticism. In other words, structuralism tries to describe 'the system of conventions which enable poems to have the meaning or the range of meanings they do'.

Structuralism constructed an elaborate metasystem or a way of thinking on the basis that literature is like language, or language becomes 'literature's being'. Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction to Poetics* (1981) speaks of the grammar of literature. In structuralism, any individual work (like parole) can only reveal a part of a system (like langue); in other words, it is the interest in the system or the grammar of literature rather than the meaning of the individual work that became the forte of structuralism,

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and, paradoxically, the source of its decline. Todorov declared: 'The particular text will only be an instance that allows us to describe the properties of literature (in general)'.

The basic or 'bottom-line' proposition in structuralism, that no unit can be understood in isolation and that units are to be understood only in the context of larger networks or structures, had its widespread influence upto the 1980s. As Peter Barry says in his *Beginning Theory* (1995), 'The arrival of structuralism in Britain and the USA in the 1970s caused a great deal of controversy, precisely because literary studies in these countries had very little interest in large abstract issues of the kind that structuralisms wanted to raise. The so-called 'Cambridge revolution in English studies in the 1920s had promulgated the opposite to all of this; it enjoined close study of the text in isolation from all wider structure it was relentlessly text based' and tended to exclude wider questions, abstract issues and ideas. Structuralism in that sense turned English studies on its head, and devalued all that it had held dear for around half-a-century, asking long-repressed question such as? 'What do we mean by 'literary'? How do narratives work? What is a poetic structure. This in a way provides the line of continuity between the preoccupation of Russian formalism and its concern with literariness and the concepts in structuralism, especially in its early phase.

Some of the best contributions of structuralism critics are in the area of prose narratives, pointing out a network of inter-textual connections or an underlying universal narrative structure. Todorov's study of Boccaccio's *Decameron* concentrates on the grammar of the narrative. In *Grammaire du Decameron* (1969) he analyzes the narrative syntax whose basic unit is the clause (on the analogy of syntactic patterns in linguistics), which consists of a subject and a predicate.

Roland Barthes in his Introduction *to the Structural Analysis of Narratives'* (1966) emphasizes the need for a hierarchical typology of units and proposes three levels of narrative structure.

(a) Functions (as in Prop)

(b) Actions (by which he refers to characters)

(c) Narration (equivalent to discourse)

Barthes in his *S/Z* (1970,1974 in English) through a study of Balzac's *Sarassine* presents the codes underlying both the production of texts and their reading and proposes certain codes for analyzing all stories. Silverman exemplifies the model of Barthes in a lucid manner in her the subject of semiotics (1983).

> The Semic code: functions to define persons, objects and places; it is useful for grouping a number of signifiers around a proper name or another signifier (as though it is a proper name) and the signifiers, grouped functions like a collective signified to the proper name or its surrogate. For example in Hardy's *Tess* of D'Urbervilles, there is a character called Durbeyfield who is described 'On an evening in the later part of May, a middle-aged man was walking homeward from Shaston to the village of Marlott, in the adjoining Vale of Blakemore or Blackmoor. The pair of legs that carried him were rickety, and there was a bias in his gait which inclined him somewhat to the left of the straight line. He occasionally gave a smart nod, as if in confirmation of some opinion, though he was not thinking of anything in particular. An empty egg-basket was slung upon his arm, the nap of his hat was ruffled, a patch being quite worn away at its brim where his thumb came in taking it off. Before the proper name is supplied, middle-aged, empty egg-basket, rickety-legs, shabby hat, bias in his gait are given to create a collective signified.

The hermeneutic code: This is entrusted with the responsibility of articulating and resolving the enigma (something that is mysterious and difficult to understand) formulation of the enigma, request, for an answer, snare, equivocation, jamming, suspended answer, partial answer and disclosure. These elements can be combined in assorted ways.

For example, in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, we have the following description of Mr Utterson (who has something to utter/tell):

'Mr Utterson, the lawyer, was a man of rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile: cold, scanty, and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary, and somehow loveable. At friendly meetings, and when the wine was to his taste, something eminently human beaconed from his eye; something which indeed never found its way into his talk, but which spoke not only in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face, but more often and loudly in the acts of his life. He was austere with himself, drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years.'

The theme for the enigma is created in the description of Mr Utterson; the conflict self-indulgence and self-denial is created; later Mr Utterson says, 'If he is Mr Hyde, I'll be Mr Seek.'

Similarly, in the description of Mr Hyde's house, we find the enigma. Even on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighborhood, like a tire in a forest . . . showed no windows, nothing but a door on the lower story; and a blind forehead of discolored wall on the upper . . . .'

The mystery is exaggerated. A trap (snare) is created when Utterson asks Poole, the servant about Hyde: 'O, dear no, Sir. He never dines here . . . Indeed we see very little of him on this side of the house; he mostly comes and goes by the laboratory.'

Equivocation contains a snare and a truth. When the body of Hyde is discovered, Utterson remarks: 'Hyde is gone to his account; and it only remains for us to find the body of your master.' Utterson is already in the presence of that body and has no need to search for it. Jamming can take place in the form of, for instance, the death of a key witness or something missing. A suspended answer or a partial answer may be given. Disclosure is the closure and end of signification.

The Proairetic code: This is the code of actions, the sequence of events within a story; it is the 'glue' which binds the events together.

The symbolic code: This represents polarities and antitheses that cannot be reconciled, for example, the sexual difference that goes beyond the biological difference.

The cultural code: This may be represented in the form of good and evil, humanity and bestiality, day and night, body and soul. These are fragments of ideology whose effect is felt in all the other codes. In Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde, we have: 'Man is not truly one, but two', which shows that man is a house divided against itself; it may represent the Christian fall. Jekyll was slowly losing hold of his original and better self and becoming slowly incorporated with his second and worse. The cultural codes provide the means whereby information contained in the authoritative text like the Bible or the Gita finds its way into the novels and poems, which perpetuate that order.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The word structure has been used in different contexts in various disciplines. Name any two.
2. Saussure made a number of contributions to the field of linguistics, name any two.
3. Define language as defined by Saussure.
4. Define structuralism.

5.3 POST-STRUCTURALISM

The ramifications of intellectual change during the period of structuralism were profound. The structuralists wanted to describe the invariant structures of literature that gave way to the post-structuralist emphasis on those dimensions of language, psychology and social life which undermine precisely those stable orders of meaning, identity, and truth that structuralism seeks to establish. Post-structuralist critics would be more concerned with the contingencies of identity, the lack of fixity of meaning and the indeterminacy of the world.

Inseparable from the radical politics of 1968, the year students and workers rose in protest against the French state and almost overthrew the government; post-structuralism itself represents a radical dismantling of some of the most important assumptions underlying western culture and philosophy. Paramount among those assumptions is the belief that reason provides access to a realm of pure ideation which transcends matter and language. In this way reasoning proceeds without assistance from signification, which is derived and secondary in relation to thought. Such a model of ideation provides an authoritative standard for truth conceived as the presence of the idea or concept in the mind, a standard that sustains and is sustained by traditional western value oppositions as the soul and the body, culture and nature and spirit and matter. Truth and ideation thus conceived allow reason and rationality to be categorically opposed from madness, nonsense, falseness, representation, metaphor, imitation and artifice by an apparently clean cut design that separates logic from rhetoric or speculative philosophy from mere grammar. A related assumption of such metaphysics is that the natural and social sciences describe a world of objective facts; they are not discourses that construct schematic orders of power/knowledge out of a flux of experience.

The post-structuralists connect these philosophic and scientific assumptions to the way society and the self have been conceived in the West. Western social life is supposedly rational and civilized, but the post-structuralists argue it is disciplinary. The ordering power of reason merely allows a moralistic segregation of well-disciplined and functionally useful 'good citizens' from dissident troublemakers. Similarly, the individual self or subject, the basis for the western political ideal of liberty and the capitalist ideal of freedom, is defined by his supposed conscious awareness and his ability to control his own destiny. Post-structuralists argue that there is an effect of unconscious psychological processes, society-wide systems of symbolic construction, and cultural discourses that are beyond our control. Moreover, in Western thought, the

dominant system of Oedipalized hetero-sexual family relations charged with engendering sexed subjects is conceived as being a normalizing institution, rather than a machine for constraining and compressing a potential multiplicity of desires, possible identities, sexual object choices, and libidinal energies into easily manageable, compartmentalized and limited forms of identity.

Further, the post-structuralists argue that Western assumptions about what is good, true and normal are essentially (rather than accidentally) related to the system of patriarchy, heterosexism and capitalism. Moral good does not reside in what is authentic, original and is subtracted from imitation and artifice. The true and the good are the effects of processes of differentiation and replication that confound all moral identities and all simple ontologies of substance that might serve as grounds for moral systems which privilege authenticity and virtue over contingency and artifice. Finally, according to the post-structuralists, what we take to be real does not exist prior to simulation; rather, it is simulated into being and lent a semblance of ontological reality by virtue of acts of representation, masquerade, and posturing that are themselves fundamental and generative of the real. Reality is the successful repression of these processes.

Everything which we consider to be true is at stake. What we think and what we question are all subject to criticism. We must assume if we are to continue within lending Western rationalist culture our assent and voluntary participation - our institutions for producing good citizens, our habits of thinking we are above matter or nature, our values based on the easy segregation of truth from artifice. Literature is a small part of all of this, but in as much as literature draws attention to such things as the construction of realities through signification and explores the undersides of social life that normality banishes from view (one may recall the scenes of extreme tension and irrationality in Shakespeare's *King Lear*). Literature can be an important site for exploring the processes that post-structuralism claims are at work in Western thinking, society, and culture, processes that must be otherwise violently suppressed if the dominant concepts of normality and of reality are to be sustained.

One common root of post-structuralist theory and practice is the work of the nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche took issue with the dominant assumptions of Western philosophy and Christian idealist culture: the idea that there is a coherent human subject, the belief that reality is a stable field of objects capable of being known by a neutral instrument called reason, the belief that knowledge is a recording device rather than a machine for constructing order and identity where there is none, the idea that moral good consists of the suppression of our material natures and the belief that truth is a spiritual quality that rises above language are open to criticism. According to Nietzsche, these concepts of truth are incapable of grasping the flux of matter and sensation in which the human subject is immersed. They ignore the way reason produces knowledge by ascribing identity to processes that are used to differentiate rather than unify. Nietzsche discredits the moral ideals of western society, which train people to be ashamed of their bodies and of the world of matter in general. He argues that material life should be celebrated and not denied. He sees all the ideals of western bourgeois society, from aesthetic beauty to legal justice, as projections of power, a will to dominate by imposing models that out things into schemes and fixities when in reality, these models of truth are in a state of constant flux. The universal in Nietzsche`s view is merely the dominant.

He argues that we should not ascribe meaning to the world and, thereby, impress upon it our desire to be unique, to stand above matter, to feel our lives made significant by a spurious notion of spiritual meaning or non-material ideation. Rather, we should conceive of the world as a material process that includes human reason, as an ongoing repetition of the same – of life replicating itself over and over again without teleology or finality or goal. This view of life has no particular in the spiritual afterlife; as matter without meaning.

Nietzsche's critique of Western moral idealism continues in the twentieth century in the work of Georges Bataille, a French thinker whose work spans the era from the mid1950s to the early 1960s and who also was a major influence on post-structuralism. Bataille argues that Western society and culture represses materiality and heterogeneity in favour of a homogeneous stasis based on rational utility and human servility. Human beings project closed systems of thought and morality on the world and seek to expel everything that discloses the human link to materiality, such as sexuality, excrement and death. Capitalism organizes life around usefulness and appropriation, while ignoring what is most rich about life – expenditure without reserve, the pure enjoyment of pleasurable excitation without any conception of its utility. The sacred is one experience that is a metaphor for our attempt to reconnect with the material totality of nature; another more direct route is eroticism. Bataille was influenced by anthropology, especially the work on gift-giving in primitive societies by Marcel Mauss which allowed Bataille to formulate an alternative to the utilitarian exchange system of modern capitalism, an alternative in which giving away, unreserved spending without expectation of return, would replace utility.

Several ideas from Bataille re-emerge in post-structuralist work. The imagery of madness is populated by animals because humans are still animals 'in nature.' Another theme is the heterogeneity, expenditure and waste that accompanies and undermines all human rational systems that seek to be homogeneous. This excess in life must be restrained if a culture of repression and an economy of limited utility are to operate successfully. This notion applies to language as well. An excess of possible meanings must be repressed if logic and reason are to use it successfully to establish meaning and truth. Another theme is the fascination with evil, criminality and marginality. Those branded as 'perverts' by so-called normal society (writers like the Marquis de Sade) are frequently, according to Bataille, explorers of the limits between nature and culture, the appropriative and the excremental, the homogeneous and the heterogeneous. They undermine the moral values and ideals upon which repressively normative culture is founded and draw attention to the violence inherent in those ideals of normality (de Sade`s corrupt priests and ministers are exemplary of this).

The earliest work characteristic of structuralism was seen in Michel Foucault`s examination of the history of madness in the early 1960s. Reason, according to Foucault, is positioned as the centerpiece of Western philosophy in the seventeenth century and that positioning requires the banishment of alternate modes of thought, which are deemed mad or unreasonable. Foucault was the first to argue, following Nietzsche, that reason is not the transparent instrument of knowledge as philosophers and scientists have claimed it is, nor is it a touchstone for determining value (what is good is what is rational, for example, which is to say, good is what behaves in a certain logical and orderly way). Reason, rather, represents a certain political choice regarding what shall be counted as reasonable.

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In his later works, Foucault argues that knowledge in society consists of discourses that posit and create objects to be known as record pre-existing realities. The way knowledge is organized in the discourses of western society is allied with the organization of power in society. Power seeps into the pores of society rather than occupying a single-state site; over time, power becomes part of the habitual everyday procedures and operations of social institutions such as the school, hospital, prison, and the workplace. Citizens learn to absorb and perform disciplinary actions themselves. Morality, all the ways in which one is instructed to be 'good,' becomes inseparable from voluntary compliance. One no longer needs to be told what to do because one does it oneself automatically.

In the mid 1960s, the writers and critics of the journal *Tel Quel*, many of whom, like Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, would become important post-structuralist thinkers, began to link the study of signification to radical political critiques of Western capitalist society, especially to the disordering and subversion of the reigning modes for constructing subjectivity and reality through language. They focused on the way the signifying potential of language exceeded the semantic orders (the way the meaning or truth of being, of the self, of the good is established) that was formed on the basis of western capitalist culture. Influenced by recent translations of the Russian formalists and the Prague Linguists (a group with connections through Roman Jakobson to the Formalists), who emphasized the autonomy of the operations of language from meaning as well as the role of such structuring principles as binary opposition in the formation of semantic content, the *Tel Quel* writers explored the way the signifying potential of language, its ability to generate multiple meaning effects in a proliferation of possible references, posed a rich and creative counterpoint. The objective was to pin down meaning into singular terms, to annul the play of language by arresting it and elevating language into a vertical structure that placed meaning over language, truth above signification. As per the *Tel Quel* writers truth and meaning are effects of signification, not the other way around.

Jacques Derrida's three books of 1967 – *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomenon* – provide the crucial analytic devices and concepts for much of the later post-structuralist critiques carried out by thinkers as Jean Baudrillard, Luce Irigaray, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Derrida, whose work is largely associated with deconstruction, argues that western philosophy claims to speak for reason, truth, and knowledge, however it consists of violent acts of opposition and hierarchy, value judgments that unjustifiably subordinate one set of terms and privilege another. The valued terms are truth (defined as the presence of ideas or of objects in the mind), reason, rationality, meaning, logic, authenticity, originality, speech, immediacy, the living, identity and many more. The devalued terms are broadly categorized as difference, signification, non-identity, repetition, substitution, writing, imitation, representation, artifice, metaphor and many more. All of the first terms allow western philosophy to organize itself as a project of knowledge that seeks to determine truth in an authoritative manner by dispelling falseness. Truth must itself be untouched by falseness, by all of the devalued terms listed above, from repetition and difference to imitation and signification. To determine truth as an authoritative self-identical, proper, unique, present, vivid, and original; as something untainted by substitution, repetition, difference, must rely on the theory of differentiation. In other words, differentiation can be understood as that

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which distin-guishes an inside (of truth) from an outside (of substitution, difference, representation, and the rest). Language as representation must be understood as rational thought. The inside-outside opposition must already be in place in order to establish truth as that which is identical with itself, living, and authentic. Similarly, it must also establish repetition and substitution as examples of false speech or untruths.

This initial decision to differentiate inside from outside, truth from representation, and identity from difference is never accounted for in western philosophy; it is always simply assumed. As a result, that philosophy declares difference as secondary, as a derivative and external; when in fact it is necessary to the constitution of philosophy in the first place, in as much as that must begin by assuming an identity. If difference were not already at work, allowing an inside to be distinguished from an outside, no philosophical opposition between truth and its others could be established. Yet, according to Derrida, the process of differentiation cannot itself be turned into a philosophical category, one that can be identified or grasped by the mind as a clear and knowable presence, an identity from which all differences had been purged.

Derrida also notes that Western rationalist philosophy assumes an opposition between the intelligible and the sensible, between ideas and the material world, between meaning and signification. These oppositions are parallel to and work in conjunction with the oppositions between inside and outside and between truth and its variations which ultimately derive from the opposition of soul and body, spirit and matter and between the ideal and the physical. Truth is always determined as the presence of ideas to the mind, an internal presence that is almost spiritual in nature in that it is supposedly a pure intelligibility uncontaminated by external signs, which pertain to the realm of the body and the physical. In the western tradition, speech (the voice of the mind talking to itself) is consistently identified with this ideal of truth as an intelligible presence in the mind. Writing on the other hand, is considered to be a substitute body, a repetition rather than an original presence, a sign of a sign (speech) rather than the thing itself in its living presence.

Derrida argues that these oppositions depend for their existence on what they seek to exclude as additional, supplemental and external. Everything that is placed beyond the boundaries of truth (traits such as substitution, repetition, mediation and differentiation) must be the result of the workings of an ideal. True ideas are usually thought to be universal and eternal; they must be capable of infinitely repeating themselves. What this means, is that they must repeatedly take their own place and substitute for earlier versions of themselves. The very qualities of signification that placed it outside truth - that it is a mere substitute or repetition of something more original are therefore necessary for the truth to exist. The plenitude of truth known as a living idea in the voice of the mind has breaks within it. To be what it is, it must double itself. It must signify itself by repeating itself. As Derrida puts it, there is a supplement at the origin; repetition inhabits presence originally and constitutively what seems as singular and unique is originally doubled.

Derrida's arguments are quite difficult at times. For our purposes, it is enough to say that he argues that meaning and truth are inseparable from signification, that western ideals of identity are founded on a ruse that obscures the way identity is produced by non-identity and difference, that meaning and truth are effects of the same processes of repetition, substitution and differentiation that characterize the modes

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of signification such as writing that are supposedly external to truth, that originality and authenticity are two values linked to truth and do not precede and produce imitation. Rather they too are derived from a process of repetition and substitution that is the same as the one at work in imitation, that texts that participate in the western tradition's value system will privilege values such as virtue or truthfulness that are founded on violent acts of differentiation, hierarchy and subordination. That which is rejected as truth is rejected precisely because they represent a rich multiplicity of semantic possibilities that undermine the paternalist and spiritualist authority of the western ideal of truth. That what counts as true and good is a ruse of domination and an effect of epistemic violence; a violence that can never be taken into account by philosophy if the ruse is to operate successfully.

Other post-structuralists like Julia Kristeva find a revolutionary tool in language for undoing the false identities of meaning and subjectivity upon which western humanist and capitalist culture is based. Avant-garde writers such as Kafka , Joyce, Kristeva and others find a kind of writing that evokes semiotic processes that are subversive of subjective identity and of the barriers that keep the unconscious desire constrained for capitalist ends. The western concepts of identity, ontology and truth efface, marginalize and subordinate the processes of linguistic generativity that make them possible. The orders of truth and reason must suppress the productivity of signification in favor of models of homogeneous ontology and cognitive certainty. But the generative power of signification, its ability to create effects unbeholden to the regimes of conceptual truth, always threatens what it makes possible and one sees this at work especially in avant-garde writing.

Post-structuralism developed further in the mid1970s work of Deleuze and Guattari on psychoanalysis and materialism and it attains its full articulation in the work of Jean Baudrillard, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Jean-Francois Lyotard in the 1970s and 1980s. Deleuze and Guattari are psychoanalytic materialists who describe the immersion of culture, society, and human psychology in material nature. There is no distinction between the representations of culture and the realities of nature; they intermesh and culture is simply a momentary arrangement or form of materiality. Matter has two major tendencies, one toward homogeneous organization or stasis, which they refer to as segmentation and territorialization the other towards disaggregation, de-territorialization and flight. Deleuze and Guattari advocate an undoing of all the identities and congealed masses that constitute capitalist society and culture in favour of nomadic flows of energy that cannot be pinned down to a system of identity or power.

Cixous and Irigaray apply the lessons of post-structuralism to feminism and to the question of gender identity. They argue that the oppositions at the foundation of Western culture have associated men with truth, reason, and the mastery of matter, while women have been linked to falseness, irrationality and unbounded matter. Irigaray is concerned with locating an identity for women that might escape these categorical traps, while Cixous is interested in developing modes of writing, what she calls 'feminine writing,' that transcend the oppositions altogether.

Lyotard's early work focuses on the tension between figural representation, the palpable design of any work of art and the semantic content it supposedly transports or communicates. Any work on changing the semantic contents privileged in western culture must transform the figures that bear them. In his later works, Lyotard will argue that all thought and all meaning is discursive and open to a narrative form. When we

enter into social debates over the shape of the world, we merely trade stories and offer contending narratives. Any change in turn would merely be the success of one narrative over another. Lyotard calls the current dominant narrative – post-modernity, which consists of a rejection of the grand narratives that envisioned society as a project for liberating humanity or the working class or the free humanist individual. In today's world of theories, micro-narratives dominate, and society is organized in terms of cybernetic performativity. This is a theory which explains how people and things function in order to assure the successful operation of a social system in which information is power and in which powerful corporations increasingly dictate the future course of social research. In other words, this theory tries to determine all that can be determined and understood as real. Lyotard examines the pragmatic nature of contemporary knowledge, the way it is constructed as an expanding series of language games or linked phrases that can never achieve complete description of reality or of truth.

For Jean Baudrillard, capitalist, political and economic life has given way to a domination defined in semiotic terms. The modern world is one in which the distinction between the artificial and the real, the simulated and the actual, has disappeared. Now, everything is a simulation. The rapid disintegration of indexicality has added to the notion of the vanishing original. The modern media especially, are powerful agents that have contributed to the genesis of this theory. The media creates a sense of *hyperreality* in which the real seems to be on display in an unmediated manner, but in fact, this hyperreality is a simulation. Disneyland is the perfect metaphor for a world in which representations replace the real. Disneyland makes it seem as if the real is elsewhere, outside the fantasy, but this is simply a lure of power that leads us to believe that simulations are real. The old philosophic idea of a truth that seductively evades interpretation has given way to a barrage of interpretations in the modern world. Everything now consists of signs without referents. We are dominated by a code that assigns identities, regulates knowledge, and defuses desire in a pervasive manner that attempts to absorb even resistance and revolt. The result is that none of the traditional oppositions hold any longer. The good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the left and the right – all become interchangeable and usable as signs which determine lives more powerfully than any economic instance or political form.

In the late 1960s, structuralism was criticized for its thoughts and modes of thought. Post-structuralism involved looking for possibilities, implications and drawbacks of structuralism and its basis in Saussurean linguistics itself. In a way it was complemetary to structuralism as it offered alternative techniques of inquiry, explanation and interpretation. Post-structuralism was uncertain about whether structuralism was adequate and whether the meaning of any text, in literature, was stable.

Saussure fundamentally distinguished between the signifier and signified, which were at the centre of the instability. Unconsciously, while distinguishing, Saussure, did not reveal any coherence between signs. In fact, he revealed a natural incoherence. Post-structuralism went on to chase Saussure's perception that in any language there merely existed differences without any positive terms showing that the signifier and the signified were not nust oppositional but multiple forces dragging each other in opposite directions, and in the process, ending up with the meaning getting deferred.

Simply put, the process of creation of meaning results in an unlimited series of patterns and sequences, which criss-cross each other.

It is essential to believe in the disproportionate qualities of language (a form of inadequacy) when it comes to a post-structuralist thinking. Therefore, the idea of indeterminacy is a significant element of a deconstructive practice in Jacques Derrida's theory of difference. As per the post-structuralist theory, meaning has a natural instability while a structuralist would believe that it is possible to explain and understand provided there is an analysis of the conventions and codes of any literary or cultural text or message. Roland Barthes is very significant in post-structuralist theory, because he brings together the structuralist and the post-structuralist movements. In his work *Elements of Semiology* (1967) he says that structuralism possesses the ability to explain any sign system from any culture (i.e. all systems of signification). However, according to his perception, such an explanation makes it necessary to come up with a theory of meaning and explanation. This results in the idea of metalanguage. In other words, something beyond language or belonging to the 'second-order of language'. This order typically describes, explains and interprets the first order of language.

The presumption here is that one order of metalanguage is like to provoke other orders to come into play.

Each order of language naturally depends on a metalanguage, which explains it. In this way, ironically, deconstruction is put in a delicate position where it becomes (against its principles and design) a metalanguage itself. Therefore, are many discourses in regression and all discourses stand a chance to be interrogated. This is one feature of Barthes's post-structuralist thinking and is essentially, deconstructive.

After 1968, the theories of Barthes made him question other stipulations: (a) that the Author (or the concept of the Author) is dead, an idea elaborated in his essay *The Death of the Author* (1968); (b) that there are two primary experiences derived from reading: (i) plaisir and (ii) puissance (c) that texts could be lisible or scriptible (i.e. 'readerly' or 'writerly.'); and (d) that considering the application of certain codes, a text may be called 'readerly' or 'writerly' (or both).

Julia Kristeva came up with some significant psychoanalytic contributions to post-structuralist theory in the French tradition. Her approach, though complex, was fascinating. In La Revolution du Language Poetique (1974), she discussed how the orderly and the rational were related. She also talked about the relation between the heterogeneous or the irrational and between the conscious and the unconscious. Her work examines the link between the 'normal' and the 'poetic'. According to her, semiotic material is irrational and illogical, and while reason is responsible for creating logic, syntax and coherence it results in the 'symbolic' element. Antimonies like feelings and thoughts are implied and there are also antimonies, such as brain and heart as well as the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. In essence, Kristeva conceives the 'semiotic' element (associated with the concept of an infant—a word meaning 'speechless'—in the pre-Oedipal phase) as going against the 'symbolic'. She considers it as a way of undermining the symbolic order, thus creating confusion, because of its fluid and plural nature. This makes it even more baffling to create any fixed meaning. Just like water, the semiotic elements go against anything that is static or not moving. They are also opposed to any binary opposition, such as the masculine – feminine. However, there is more to a fluid-fixed state than a simple binary opposition. In one way, 'semiotic' writing is bisexual (the pre-Oedipal phase is genderless). In English literature, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are examples of 'semiotic' writers who use language freely

and disseminate meaning in a 'writerly' way and style. In other words, these are examples where they have deviated from the rigid, realistic or conventional. Julia Kristeva goes to the extent of relating sound in poetry to a primary sexual impulse suggesting that a blend of consonantal sounds, could be either feminine or masculine. It is suggested that 'semistic' material may be equated with a feminine tendency, and the symbolic with the masculine. This raises the possibility for feminine theory of the idea of feminine writing.

It indicates writing, which is feminine not just in style but also language, tone and feeling and is totally different from a language and discourse, which is completely masculine. Deconstruction is the main aspect of the post-structuralist theory, which is used in literary practice. Jacques Derrida was mainly responsible for this. His essay *Structure, Sign and Play* (1966) is the first critique of structuralism. He was responsible for initiating the methods of close reading.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. What is the central argument of the post-structuralist theorists?
6. How is Nietzsche a post-structuralist?
7. What was the importance of the journal Tel Quel and who were its contributors?
8. What was Julia Kristeva's approach to post-structural philosophy?

5.4 DECONSTRUCTION

Derrida was born in 1930 in the suburbs of Algiers in a petit bourgeois Jewish family. His Jewishness, the sense of belonging to a marginal, dispossessed culture had formative influences on the development of his theory. He went to France as a nineteen year old student; he studied and taught there, later dividing his time between France and the United States. Rebellion is a spontaneous activity in French society and French intellectual tradition must mock the order, state and authority. In France he experienced a degree of rigidity and conservatism in French Universities where, in spite of revolutions, the educational system remained unchanged. The curriculum remained distant to most theories and had not opened itself to Saussure's theory of language. The approach of the Academy with a single authoritative opinion on literature or philosophy was accepted without any questions. The student revolt of 1960 was an indication of the restlessness in French Universities; it could be a matter of a strange coincidence that the student revolution followed the publication of Derrida's most influential work (first published in French) *Of Grammatology* in 1967. An excerpt has been given below:

> Deconstruction simply problematizes all habits of thought in any 'discipline' (the word 'discipline' itself shows how our thinking itself is disciplined) by demonstrating how impossible it is to draw a clear-cut line between reality and representation; this, in turn, will involve a sustained and rigorous attention to the ways in which certain notions of 'language' or 'text' have been taken for granted. Though the focus of study in Deconstruction is 'language/text', ultimately, Deconstruction is a rigorous attempt to (re) think the limits of that principle of reason which has shaped the emergence of Western philosophy, science and technology at large and its search for an answer to the question: Is the reason for reason rational?

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who translated Derrida's *Of Grammatology* into English (published in 1976), says: 'A certain view of the world, of consciousness and of language has been accepted as the correct one and if the minute particulars of that view are examined, a different picture emerges.'

For example, Derrida examines Rousseau's *Confessions*. Rousseau says, writing is a 'dangerous supplement', an addition to the natural resources of speech . . . a necessary evil. Derrida points out that Rousseau uses writing to debunk writing and denounces the very means by which his own ideas are set down for others to read; writing is exactly the mechanism which allows Rousseau to practise the art of concealment to express the opposite of what he feels. A supplement is one that adds and makes the original more complete; this means that there is a lack or absence of something in the original; the inadequacy or deficiency in speech can be supplemented only by writing and in that case, it is not dangerous; it is not a 'necessary evil' as Rousseau says. Incidentally even in the Bible it is written: God said 'Let there be light . . . ' but the command is written. Often we too use the expression, 'Derrida says' but it is expressed in writing.

Similarly, Derrida minutely examines Saussure's ideas on language and points out that Saussure is not so sure of what he says. For instance Saussure says:

'Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both written and spoken forms of words; the spoken form alone constitutes the object. But the spoken word is so intimately connected to the written image that the latter manages to usurp the main role. People attach more importance to the sign itself (*Course in General Linguistics:* 1916, pp. 23-24).'

Derrida argues that Saussure, like Aristotle, Plato and Rousseau considers speech to be a privilege because of its self-presence; he says that it is not just speech alone that is privileged but its presence is privileged over absence. Derrida says: 'Voice becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity . . . writing, on the contrary, destroys the ideal of a pure self-presence.' Rousseau glorifies speech to such an extent affirming it as pure, spontaneous, authentic, original and natural that writing becomes secondary and lifeless. Privileging speech over writing is called phonocentrism; through privileging the spoken word, meaning and truth, reason and logic, the phonocentric tradition becomes essentially logocentric. In other words what is actually privileged through phonocentricism is logocentricism (the Greek word 'logos' means reason and truth). The phonocentric and logocentric tradition spans from Plato and Aristotle to Heidegger, Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Structuralism. As portrayed by Derrida, the logocentric system always assigns the origin of truth to logos or to the spoken word, to the voice, reason and the Word of God. Derrida does not deny that the use of speech comes before the use of writing in the history of language or in the learning of a language by human beings. What he argues is that the original or true form is not necessarily the purest form. There is a distinction between the earlier and conceptual notion of priority. For example, in mathematics, historically, counting was done with sticks or stones or beads but they have now been discarded for more abstract forms and formulae. We do not bring in historical priority to decide conceptual importance.

Moreover, we cannot take only the Roman system of writing (from left to right) as the representative of all writing systems; there are other systems where writing proceeds from right to left (as in Arabic) or from top to bottom (as in Chinese). So we cannot assume that the marks on the paper (i.e. the letters) stand for the sound of the spoken language; even in the Roman system there was no one-to-one correspondence between speech and writing. Moreover, writing systems like Chinese or the Egyptian Hieroglyphic or ideogrammatic writing systems where the scripts precede the development of the phonetic or alphabetic scripts. Writing, as we know, started with pictures and ideas and developed as picto-ideo-phono-graphic. Some believe that writing existed before human beings were created. In Islam, Allah himself gave writing to man but not to the angels. In Hinduism, Chitragupt (chitra—pictorial; gupt—secret) is supposed to be the chief accountant. Linear writing is only one form of writing. Moreover the word writing itself has several other meanings; writing cannot be used only in the conventional sense of inscriptions on a page.

Derrida uses writing in its narrow sense as well as in its broader sense to indicate all systems that shows traces of thinking or interior speech or anything that precedes exterior or actual speech. In its broader sense, arche-writing 'supplements perception before perception even appears to itself.' In the Derridean concept of Deconstruction, writing, in the sense of traces, always exists prior to perception and its presence alone is what we understand as speech. Trace is writing in general and it serves as the foundation of speech. Thus, Derrida reverses the speech- writing hierarchy and privileges writing.

After pointing out that the concept of writing cannot be reduced to a graphic or inscriptional sense, Derrida proceeds to deconstruct another important Saussurean statement that stresses that: In language there are only differences without positive (i.e. fixed) terms. Saussurean differences operate at two levels—signifiers (form/expression) as well as signifieds (concepts). Signifiers are sound images, expressions, audible sounds in speech and visible marks in writing; signifieds are concepts. Both signifiers and signifieds are purely differential.

According to Saussure, 'Language is a system whose parts can and must all be considered in their synchronic solidarity'.

Derrida is not against the term signified; he puts it under erasure (a device used to show that it exists but needs close/ critical examination). Since the word is put under scrutiny it is crossed out; since it exists it remains legible but crossed. Derrida argues that 'difference' will mean presence; both entities are present. But not everything is present in the language system; secondly, what is present is elusive. There are no entities or relations of absences. For example, look up the dictionary for the meaning of the word 'meaning'. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* tries to define the word in the following circular manner:

Meaning	:	What is meant; significance
Meant	:	What it means
Mean	:	Signify, have in mind, intend
Significance	:	Being significant; meaning, import
Significant	:	Having or conveying a meaning

In an attempt to capture the signified (i.e. the concept or the meaning of the word), we keep moving from one signifier (word or form) to another signifier; we never get to the signified. The signified gets lost in the search and we keep going round and round. One can mark the circularity of 'signifiers' and how the 'signified' or meaning slips

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beneath the circularity of signifiers. One may try defining (i.e. capturing the signified) even simple words like 'a city'; it can never be defined in absolute terms, using population, area, civic amenities and various other checks. We can only say it is a larger town. But, again the word 'town' has to be specified; we cannot say it is a large village. This clearly shows that a sign is a sign of another sign with no fixed meaning or signified; there is no final transcendental signified. 'The meaning of meaning is infinite in its implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signified . . . .' Derrida points out that in everything (word, text and context) opposite is always already there as a trace. He refers to the Greek word Pharmakon which means both, 'remedy' and 'poison'. We can cite several examples like 'model' which means a copy of the original as well as the original; a model in a fashion show is the original from which the others are expected to copy.

The elements or entities are never fully present because language is a state of dissemination. Dissemination is the state of perpetually unfulfilled meaning. So, Derrida has no use for differences inscribed once and for all in a closed system or a static structure. He coins the term differance to express not only difference but also the endless deferment or postponement. According to Derrida,

'Language is structured as an endless deferral of meaning and any search for the essential, absolute stable meaning must therefore be considered metaphysical; there is no fixed element, no fundamental unit, no transcendental signified that is meaningful in itself and escapes the ceaseless interplay of linguistic deferral and difference. The free play of signifiers will never yield a final, unified meaning that in turn, might ground and explain all others' (Norris, 1982).

This unstable condition entails endless weaving and unweaving of language or text. If there is no signified or entity or thing which is present, what we left with are the postprints, impressions or traces of what is absent. No sign is complete in itself; it depends on another sign and that sign in turn depends on another. In other words, each sign is only a trace of an other/another and, without the one that supplements it, no sign is complete. For every sign, a half of it is 'not that' and the other half 'not there'. This means that there are no clear-cut forms and no entities; there are only formations, indications, impressions, imprints, traces where each sign supplements the 'other'.

The notions circularity, plurality, indeterminacy, free-play, differance and supplementary are crucial to the understanding of deconstruction. A summary has been given below:

Trace	Difference	Supplement
No fixed or finished entities only indications, impressions, imprints, footprints of the object. The trace is a word that is absent and can only give formations and not forms. (Something like *samskara*).	To differ and not to differ only to transcend while no transcendental sources of the signifieds are given; only movement that indicates an endless deferral from the signifier to the signified and eventually to a state of dissemination. (Something like *leela*)	This is a state of one getting defined through the other. To supplement is to add what is missing; to supply a necessary lack in the other; to Substitute perpetual dependency on that which is required to complete some existing lack. Nothing is complete in itself. (Something like the concept of the *ardhanareeshwar* – the half and half principle)

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These are the important features of writing before speech and conventional writing; it is implied here that any system that exhibits the three features mentioned above is 'writing' in the Derridean sense.

If a sign is a sign of another sign, a text must be a text of another text. No single element – a word/sentence/discourse-may be present in and of itself referring only to itself without referring to another element, which is not present, whether in a spoken or written discourse. The notions of trace, difference and supplement are applicable to texts as well. A text is henceforth no longer a finished body of writing. Some content is enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.

This textual combination of different tests is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. There are differences everywhere as there are signs of traces. There is no original trace as there will be transcendental signifieds if there could be one. Only the linkage among texts (the intertextuality which is produced through the transformation of one text into another) is the 'text'.

Derrida argues: 'The essence of a rose is its non-essence; it is its odour as it evaporates - the effluvium that is thrown out (a belch, the excrements, its dissipation). The text is thus a gas.' (Derrida in Glas pp. 69-70). Etymologically the text is a cloth and 'textus' is the form from which 'text' is derived and it means 'woven'. According to Lacan a 'text' is like a dream; you can never say what it means.

Roland Barthes, a French structuralist who turned deconstructionist, followed Derrida and made useful distinctions between 'work' and 'text':

'The work is concrete, occupying a portion of book-space (in a library, for example); the text, on the other hand, is a methodological field . . . The work can be seen in book stores, card catalogues and on course lists, while the text reveals itself, articulates itself according to or against certain rules. While the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language; it exists only as a discourse . . . the text is experienced only in an activity, a production. The text practises the infinite deferral of the signified . . . it cannot be apprehended as part of a hierarchy or even a single classification of genres . . . the text is dilatory . . . the text is plural.' (*From Work to Text*).

If a sign is a sign of another sign and if a text is a text of another text, then a context is a context of another context. This implies that even contextual meaning is not fixed and there is no limit to what may be called 'contextual meaning'. The same endless deferral with supplementarity and traces is found in contextual meaning. Context is boundless in two senses: a) any given context is open to further description and b) there is no limit to what might be included in a given context. In other words, any context can be grafted into the context it tries to describe, yielding a new context. Context is not just physical; in any context, there is always already a mental/emotional/spiritual/imaginative 'Other' within the text that 'supplements' the given context.

Derrida points to a suggestion by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein remarks that one cannot say 'bububu' and mean – 'If it does not rain, I shall go out for a walk'. Ironically, Wittgenstein himself has made it possible [for us] to do that. If you are carrying a white umbrella and someone says 'I have never seen a white umbrella; you can say – he has seen one. For example, an expression such as – Not now darling, could have been

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said by a mother to her child in front of an ice-cream parlour; the contextual meaning 'decomposes' because it can be grafted onto another context. The mother could be thinking of another context in which the same expression could have been used on her by her husband. This in turn, can be grafted onto another fictional context by saying that this entire episode happened in a short story which could be based on one of the experiences of the writer ad infinitum ad nauseam. In this manner there is endless deferral in contextual meaning

If you get into the spirit of deconstruction you are thinking of the unthought. Derridean deconstruction urges you to think beyond what is given as absolute knowledge into the area of the unheard or unthought thoughts. To deconstruct is to do and undo ceaselessly; to undo is not the same as to destroy but rather it is akin to decenter, to constantly destabilize what has been done and to rigorously demystify what is received in the name of knowledge. To deconstruct is to examine minutely in order to dismantle conventional hierarchies in the given system to arrive at an exactly opposite position. The deconstructive enterprise involves extensive vigilant skepticism, a labour of thought; it is not an open-ended, unlimited textual 'free-play' and a farewell to rigorous reading, as some people think it is. Some American deconstructionists think that Deconstruction is a kind of hermeneutic free-for-all, a joyous release from all the rules and constraints of critical reading and understanding. In fact, it needs the highest standards of argumentative rigour because it is a disciplined identification and dismantling of the potentialities of textual power. The 'text' is shown to be read against itself through the exposure of what might be called the 'textual subconscious', where meanings are directly contrary to the surface meaning; the text is shown as multiple, disunited, with shifts and breaks, contradictions, silences, 'aporias' (blind spots) and 'fault-lines' (much like the cracks in rock formations) that reveal previous activity and movement.

Though Barthes ideas on literature and literary criticism have taken several turns, he is one of the most entertaining and witty French theorists of the sixties and seventies. He was a structuralist and his belief that only Structuralism could explain all the sign-systems of human culture is explained in *Elements of Semiology* (1967). But under the influence of Derrida he abandoned structuralism and turned into a post-structuralist. His short essay *The Death of the Author* (1968) gives an extended meaning to the notion inherent in New Criticism according to which the unity of the text is in the text itself and not in the author's 'intention'. Barthes in his post-structuralist writings *S/Z* (1970), *Mythologies* (1972), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) celebrates pluralism, heterogeneity and the productive capacity of the text. He declares that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author'. Barthes makes an interesting distinction between readerly texts and writerly texts. A readerly text (or a readerly approach to a text) allows the reader to be a passive consumer of a fixed, given meaning; a writerly text (or a writerly approach to a text) turns the reader into a producer. All along, according to Barthes, we have had the privileged consumption of over production, in the reading of classical texts, in our literary interpretation, in the teaching of literature and in the classrooms. The 'proper or correct' consumption of literature called interpretation and production is regarded as something beyond the capacity of the reader. Barthes says that the author is always supposed to go from signified to signifier, from content to form . . . 'This is how the readerly approach (i.e. an archeological dig) takes place at the site of the text and the text 'itself promotes an infinite play of signification where there is no fixed or transcendental signified or 'closure' of the text.' The endless deferral makes the text expand to several times its original

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size. For example, Blake's *Tyger* has been treated as a readerly text by many, but it can become 'writerly' in the hands of competent critics. One can say that able critics have always treated texts as 'writerly' but it can be added that Deconstruction has opened it further.

Barthes, in his inimitable style, argues that re-reading is an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have 'thrown away' the story once it had been consumed, ('devoured'), so we are then able to proceed onto another story. Rereading is tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers – children, old people and professors. His book *S/Z* marks his transition from structuralism to post-structuralism; it is a reading of Balzac's short novella *Sarrasine*. The reading is divided into five reading units or narrative codes: hermeneutic (questions and suspense), semic (connotative), symbolic (binary distinctions in the theme), proairetic (indication of actions) and cultural. This division is structural and sometimes not clearly demarcated; but his analysis denies the text a classical status as a realistic story and demonstrates an anti-reading and dismantles the masculine-feminine difference.

Post-structuralism and deconstruction are virtually synonymous. Deconstruction arises out of the structuralism of Roland Barthes as a reaction against the certainties of structuralism. Like structuralism, deconstruction identifies textual features but, unlike structuralism, deconstruction theory concentrates on the rhetorical rather than the grammatical aspect of the text.

Deconstruction accepts the analogy of text as syntax as presented by Ferdinand de Saussure and adapted by the structuralists. But whereas structuralism finds order and meaning in the text (in the construction of a sentence), deconstruction finds disorder and a constant tendency of the language to refute its apparent sense. Hence the name of the approach: texts are found to deconstruct themselves rather than to provide a stable identifiable meaning.

Deconstruction views texts as open to various subversive readings as it denies any final explication or statement of meaning. It questions the presence of any objective structure or content in a text. Instead of alarm or dismay at their discoveries, the practitioners of deconstruction theory celebrate the text's self-destruction, that inevitable seed of its own internal contradiction, as a never-ending free play of language. Instead of discovering one ultimate meaning for the text, as formalism seems to promise, deconstruction describes the text as in a perpetual state of change, furnishing only provisional meanings. All texts are thus open-ended constructs and sign and signification are only arbitrary relationships. Meaning can only point to an indefinite number of other meanings.

Deconstruction involves taking apart any meaning to reveal contradictory structures hidden within. Neither meaning nor the text that, seeks to express has any privilege over the other and this extends to critical statements about the text.

The break with structuralism is profound. Structuralism claims kinship between systems of meaning in a text and a structuralist theory itself. Both would reveal the way human intelligence works. When deconstruction denies the connection of mind, textual meaning and methodological approach, it represents a kind of nihilism and anarchy for structuralists.

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Further, deconstruction opposes logocentrism, the notion that written language contains a self-evident meaning that points to an unchanging meaning authenticated by the western tradition. It would demythologize literature and thus remove the privilege it has enjoyed in academia. In deconstruction, knowledge is viewed as embedded in texts, not authenticated within some intellectual disciplines. Since meaning in language shifts and remains indeterminate, deconstructionists argue that all forms of institutional authority shift in a similar manner. Since there is no possibility of an absolute truth, deconstructionists seek to undermine all pretensions to authority, or power systems in language.

The most important figure in deconstruction has been the French philosopher – Jacques Derrida, whose philosophical skepticism became widely adopted when his work was translated in the early 1970s. Because of the academic location of many other deconstructionists at the time, deconstruction came to be known by some as the Yale school of criticism.

Derrida claimed that the Western tradition of thought repressed meaning by repressing the limitless vitality of language and by moving some thoughts to the margin. While Derrida argued to subvert the dominant Western mindset, he also recognized that there is no privileged position outside the instabilities of language from which to attack. Thus, deconstruction deconstructs itself; in a self-contradictory effort, it manages to leave things the way they were, the only difference being our expanded consciousness of the inherent play of language as thought.

The major attacks on deconstruction have responded to its seeming lack of seriousness about reading literature and more seriously, to its refusal to privilege such reading as an act at all. Its opponents feel that it threatens the stability of the literary academy, that it promotes philosophical and professional nihilism, that it is dogmatic, that it is deliberately obscure and that it is mostly responsible for the heavy emphasis on theory over practical criticism in recent years. Various critiques of deconstruction have pointed out that deconstructive readings all sound oddly similar, that it does not seem to matter if the author under study is Nietzsche or Wordsworth. Furthermore, deconstructive readings always seem to start with a set conclusions thereby lacking any sense of suspense about the outcome of the reading.

Despite its alleged shortcomings, the value of deconstruction may be as a corrective, as some of its cautions are absorbed into other interpretive approaches.

Deconstruction, or deconstructive or post-structural criticism, can almost be characterized as the opposite of everything for which formalist criticism stands. Deconstruction philosophy begins with the assumption that the world is unknowable and that language is unstable, elusive, and unfaithful. Language is all of these things because meaning is largely generated by opposition: hot means something in opposition to cold, but a hot day may be 90 degrees whereas a hot oven is at least 400 degrees. Deconstructionists seek to show that a literary work (usually called 'a text' or ' discourse') is inevitably self-contradictory. Unlike formalist critics, who believe that a competent author constructs a coherent work with a stable meaning and that competent readers can perceive this meaning, deconstructionsists (e.g., Barbara Johnson, in *The Critical Difference* [1980] says that a work has no coherent meaning at the center. Jonathan Culler, in *On Deconstruction* [1982], says that 'to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts'. Johnson and Culler provide accessible introductions, but the major document is Jacques Derrida's seminal work *Of Grammatology* [1967, trans, 1976]). According to this the text is only marks on paper and therefore as a reader goes the author of a text is not the writer but the reader. Texts are 'indeterminate,' 'open' and 'unstable.'

NOTES

Despite the emphasis on indeterminacy, one sometimes detects, in deconstructionist interpretations, a view associated with Marxism. This is the idea that authors are 'socially constructed' from the 'discourses of power' or 'signifying practices' that surround them. Thus, although authors may think they are individuals with independent minds, their works usually reveal—unknown to authors—the society's economic base. Deconstructionists 'interrogate' a text, and they reveal what the authors were unaware of or had thought they had kept safely out of sight. That is, deconstructionists often find a rather specific meaning—though this meaning is one that might surprise the author.

Deconstruction is valuable so far as new criticism is concerned, it encourages close, rigorous attention to the text. Furthermore, in its rejection of the claim that a work has a single stable meaning, deconstruction has had a positive influence on the study of literature. The problem with deconstruction, however, is that too often it is reductive, telling the same story about every text. Again and again, we see how a text is incoherent and heterogeneous.

Some authors seem overtly aware that the emphasis in deconstruction theory is on instability and incoherence and therefore aim to entertain instead of adding to the ongoing debate. They probably would claim that they do not deconstruct meaning in the sense of destroying it; rather, they might say, they exuberantly multiply meanings and to this end they may use such devices as puns, irony, and allusions, somewhat as a poet might, and just as though (one often feels) they think they are as creative as the writers they are commenting on. Indeed, for many deconstructionists, the traditional conception of literature is merely an elitist construct. In this regard, all 'texts' or 'discourses' are unstable systems of decoding. If literature (in the usual sense) occupies a special place in deconstruction theory it is because literature delights in its playfulness, its fictiveness, whereas other discourses nominally reject playfulness and fictiveness.

Check Your Progress

9. Quote Derrida's explanation of deconstruction.
10. What is the notion of the 'unthought' with regard to the theory of deconstruction?
11. What is the central argument embedded in the theory of deconstruction?
12. What has been the impact of deconstruction on new criticism?

ACTIVITY

Read Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, *Can the Subalterns Speak?*

DID YOU KNOW?

Neitzsche came up with the quote, 'God is dead'.

5.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The word structure has been used in different contexts in various disciplines of Science and Humanities.
- Structuralism as the word suggests, is concerned with structures, and particularly with examining the laws by which they work.
- All the social sciences resort to Structuralism abundantly.
- Structuralism is widely used in anthropology and linguistics.
- In the 1960s, Structuralism, which had dominated French intellectual life since the mid-1950s, began to be replaced by another more antinomian movement that first came to be known as post-structuralism and then post-modernism.
- If Structuralism emphasizes order, structure and rules, post-structuralism argues that language is subject to contingency, indeterminacy and the generation of multiple meanings.
- Rather than being an instrument of understanding, the meanings render themselves open to reasoning.
- Meanings are instruments of mastery, discipline and social control.
- The most influential of all postmodern and post-structural theories is the theory of deconstruction given by Jacques Derrida.
- Derrida is the single most influential intellectual author in current philosophy and Anglo-American literary theory.
- As far as literature and literary criticism are concerned, structuralism challenges the long-standing belief that a work of literature (or any kind of literary text) reflects a given reality; a literary text is, rather, constituted of other conventions and texts.
- Structuralism is in explicit opposition to mimetic criticism (the view that literature is primarily an imitation of reality), to expressive criticism (the view that literature primarily expresses the feeling or temperament or creative imagination of its author) and to any form of the view that literature is a mode of communication between author and readers.
- More generally, in its attempt to develop a science of literature and in many of its salient concepts, structuralism departs radically from the assumptions and ruling ideas of traditional humanistic criticism.
- The post-structuralists argue that western assumptions about what is good, true and normal are essentially (rather than accidentally) related to the system of patriarchy, heterosexism and capitalism.
- Moral good does not reside in what is authentic, original and is subtracted from imitation and artifice.
- The true and the good are the effects of processes of differentiation and replication that confound all moral identities and all simple ontologies of substance that might serve as grounds for moral systems which privilege authenticity and virtue over contingency and artifice.
- According to the post-structuralists, what we take to be real does not exist prior to simulation; rather, it is simulated into being and lends semblance of ontological reality by virtue of acts of representation, masquerade, and posturing that are themselves fundamental and generative of the real.
- Deconstruction accepts the analogy of text as syntax as presented by Ferdinand de Saussure and adapted by the structuralists.
- Whereas structuralism finds order and meaning in the text (in the construction of a sentence), deconstruction finds disorder and a constant tendency of the language to refute its apparent sense.

5.6 KEY TERMS

- **Structuralism:** It is a school of thought developed by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, in which cultures, viewed as systems, are analyzed in terms of the structural relations among their elements.
- **Russian formalism:** Also known as formalism, is an innovative 20th-century Russian school of literary criticism.
- **Proairetic code**: This is the code of actions, the sequence of events within a story; it is the 'glue' which binds the events together.
- **Deconstruction:** It is a form of philosophical and literary analysis, derived mainly from work begun in the 1960s by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or 'oppositions', in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts.

5.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The two disciplines in which the word structure has been used are: Science and Humanities.
2. Saussure made a number of important original contributions: (a) the concept of language as a sign system or structure whose individual components can be understood only in relation to each other and to the system as a whole rather than to an external 'reality;' (b) a distinction between langue and parole: langue representing a language as a whole (e.g. French, English, German), and parole representing utterance, a particular use of individual units of langue.

NOTES

3. Saussure defined language as a system of signs and the linguistic sign is a two-sided psychological entity composed of a concept and a sound-image.
4. Structuralism as the word suggests, is concerned with structures, and particularly with examining the laws by which they work. Structuralism also tends to reduce individual phenomena to mere illustration of such laws. Nevertheless, it constitutes a distinctive doctrine which is not to be found in Frye.
5. The central argument of the post-structuralist theory is that there is an effect of unconscious psychological processes, society-wide systems of symbolic construction, and cultural discourses that are beyond our control.
6. Nietzsche is a post-structuralist as he discredits the moral ideals of Western society, which train people to be ashamed of their bodies and of the world of matter in general. He argues that material life should be celebrated and not denied.
7. The imporatnce of the *Tel Quel* was that many of its contributing writers such as, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, became important post-structuralist thinkers. They were the initiators of the study of Signification and created radical political critiques of western capitalist society.
8. Julia Kristeva approaches post-structuralist philosophy by discussing the relationship between the orderly and the rational, the heterogeneous or the irrational, between the conscious and the unconscious and between the 'normal' and the 'poetic'.
9. As per Derrida, Deconstruction problematizes all habits of thought in any 'discipline' (the word 'discipline' itself shows how our thinking itself is disciplined) by demonstrating how impossible it is to draw a clear-cut line between reality and representation.
10. The notion of the 'unthought' is the Derridean notion of deconstruction that urges one to think beyond what is given as absolute knowledge into the area of the unheard or unthought thoughts. To deconstruct is to do and undo ceaselessly.
11. Deconstruction philosophy begins with the assumption that the world is unknowable and that language is unstable, elusive, and unfaithful.
12. Deconstruction is valuable so far as New Criticism is concerned, it encourages close, rigorous attention to the text.

5.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State the relationship between a sign and a signifier.
2. Comment on the significance of the text vis-à-vis a structuralist perspective.
3. Highlight the importance of the contribution of Roland Barthes in structuralism.
4. Outline the contributions made by Saussure in the field of structural linguistics.
5. Define language according to Saussure.
6. Give a brief description of post-structuralism.
7. Critically analyse Nietzsche's view of moral idealism in the twentieth century.
8. What was Julia Kristeva's contribution to semiotic writing?

9. Define the theory of deconstruction.
10. Comment on Spivak's translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

NOTES

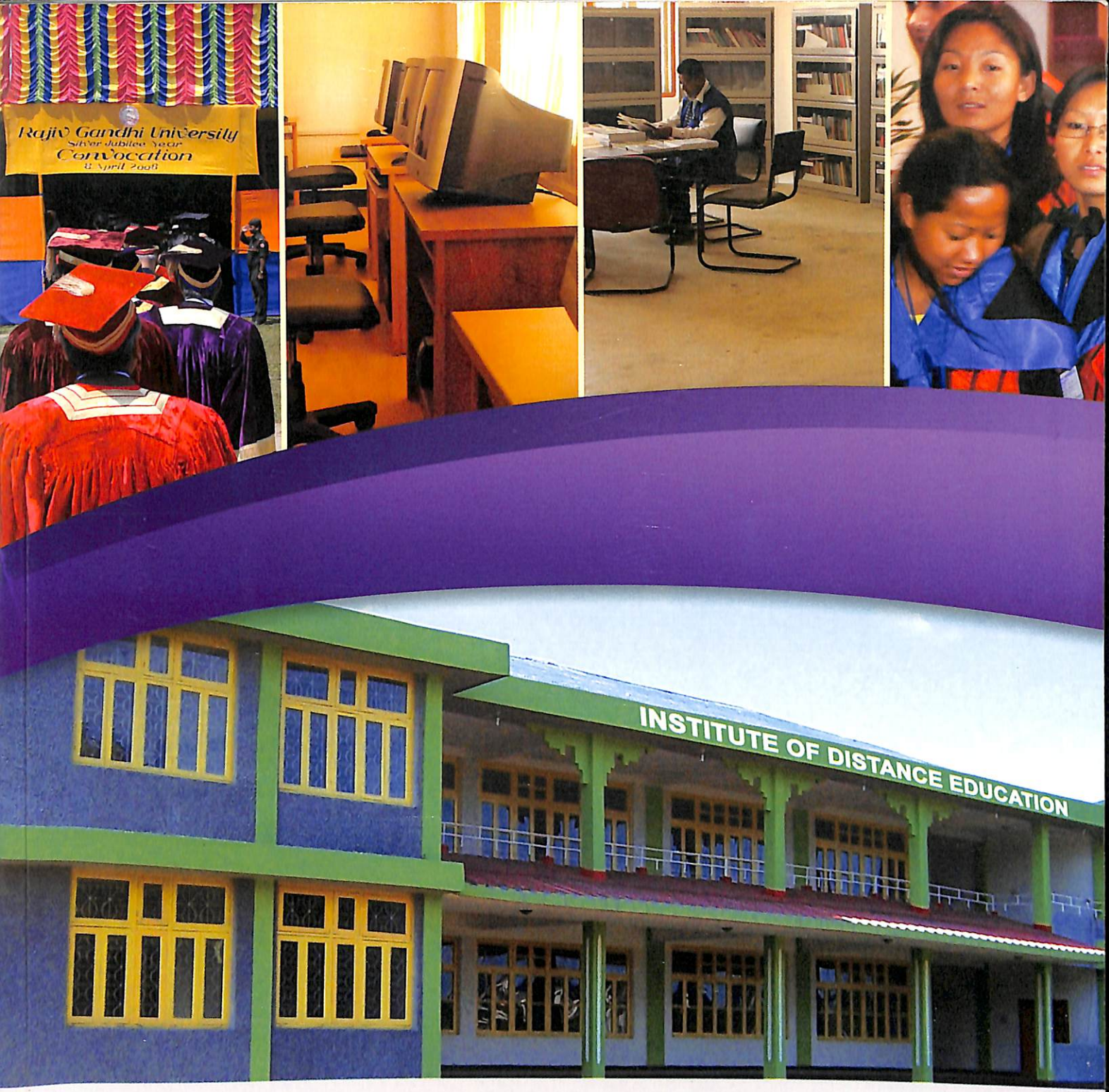
Long-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief overview of structuralism which had dominated the French intellectual life since the mid 1950s.
2. Recapitulate Lacan's views of language and sign.
3. Describe the semic code and the hermeneutic code.
4. Critically analyse the proceedings in literary criticism that gave rise to post-structuralism.
5. Explain Derrida's contribution to the theory of deconstruction.

5.9 FURTHER READING

Blamires, H., *A History of Literary Criticism*, London: Macmillan, 1991.

Hall, Vermon, *A Short History of Literary Criticism*, The Merlin Press Ltd., London, 1963.



M.A. (English)

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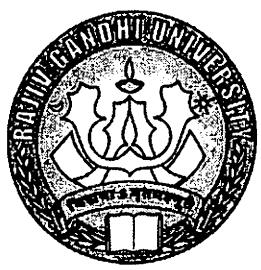
INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Indian English Literature

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
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UNIT II **Nissim Ezekiel** Night of the Scorpion Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. **A K Ramanujam** A River Obituary	**Unit 2:** A. K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel **(Pages 23-66)**
UNIT III **Jayanta Mahapatra** Hunger The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street	**Unit 3:** Jayanta Mahapatra **(Pages 67-86)**
UNIT IV **R K Narayan** The Guide **Mulk Raj Anand** Coolie	**Unit 4:** R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand **(Pages 87-120)**
UNIT V **Anita Desai** Voices in the City **Amita Ghosh** The Shadow Lines	**Unit 5:** Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh **(Pages 121-145)**

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INTRODUCTION

NOTES

Indian English Literature is a book which has been designed to give students an insight into various aspects of Indian writing in English and what it means in the context of a modern world. 'Indian english literature' is a term used to refer to the body of works in India, which uses English as the medium in which prose and poetry is written. Indian writing in English is also associated with the works of the members of the Indian diaspora whose native language could be any of the numerous regional languages and is frequently referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. This comes under the broader realm of post-colonial literature – work that has emerged from previously colonized countries such as India.

The purpose of *Indian English Literature* is to acquaint students with writers who have established Indian writing in English as it included prose and poetry. Apart from the matter, students are expected to understand the aesthetic drive of the writers who have been mentioned in this book. It is a fact well established that a quintessential Indianness is what constitutes the craft and the imaginative sensibility of the practitioners of Indian writing in English.

This book – *Indian English Literature* – has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the **Introduction** followed by the **Unit Objectives** for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with **Check Your Progress** questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of **Questions and Exercises** is also provided at the end of each unit. The **Summary**, **Key Terms** and **Activity** further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

This book is divided into five units:

Unit 1: Discusses the elements of Indian English prose and poetry

Unit 2: Explains the selected poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and A. K. Ramanujan

Unit 3: Critically analyzes the problem of poverty and prostitution in the selected poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

Unit 4: Summarizes and explains the novels *The Guide* by R. K. Narayan and *Coolie* by Mulk Raj Anand

Unit 5: Discusses the predicament of the Partition and a growing modern-urban sensibility in Anita Desai' *Voices in the City* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

NOTES

Structure

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Unit Objectives
1.2 British East India Company: English Language and India
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1.11 Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is almost impossible to do justice to a body of literature that expands for more than two hundred years while discussing about it within such a limited space. This unit is meant to provide a bird's eye view on a topic that is commonly identified as Indian English. To put it simply, Indian English refers to works written by Indians in English language. Indian English literature is an umbrella term used to identify literature composed by Indian writers who chose to write in English instead of their native or co-native language are spoken. Indian English literature also extends to the compositions that are penned by members belonging to the community addressed as the Indian diaspora. This gamut of Indian literature, many a times, is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. Sometimes it is associated with post-colonial literature (literature produced by those countries that were colonized by the European powers). At the outset, it might appear a bit odd to read about the background of Indian English literature; after all our day-to-day life is replete with English language—newspapers, magazines, books, everyday conversation, hoardings/billboards and advertisements on TV to name only a few. In other words, it may appear strange to understand the history of Indian writing in English where mundane life, even in remote places, seems interspersed with English words. Without realizing the facts of its foreign origin, many of us use words such as bus, cycle, biscuit, train, station , chalk, telegram, film in our everyday life. English language in India has a wide currency and is used as a medium to produce an exclusive body of literature which is vibrant, massive and potent.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Recall the events that led to the establishment of the British East India Company
- Discuss elements of Indian English prose and poetry

- Critically analyze the rise of Indian English novels and drama
- Critique the contemporary period

1.2 BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND INDIA

Before we proceed to investigate the literary aspect, we must first understand the socio-political scenario that led to the inception of the English language in India. In the introduction of his edited work, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra takes the year 1800 as the 'starting point' for 'the literature written largely by Indians in English'. This year is not relevant for any specific literary contribution, but holds more substance as a historically important juncture. By this period, the British had managed to annihilate every kind of political opposition that could have posed a challenge to their authority in the Indian continent. Before the English came to India many other European powers had made their mark felt. After Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama arrived in India (Calicut, 17 May 1498) through the sea, the Portuguese established trade relationships here. Within a few years, Dutch East India Company (1602) was formed and obtained the powers to wage wars, sign treaties and acquire territories. The Dutch soon set up factories all over India and managed to dethrone the Portuguese as the sole European representative in India. But after a while the Dutch had to retreat and abandon their mission to expand their empire as the English defeated them in the Battle of Bedera (1759). But before the East India Company made a formal presence in India, English merchant John Mildenhall made his way to India in the year 1599 with the sole purpose of trading. In the same year (1599) the English East India Company was established by an assembly of merchants who functioned under the banner *Merchant Adventurers*.

By the year 1608, the East India Company undertook a resolution to build a factory at Surat. As a result, Captain Hawkins arrived in India (Mughal emperor Jahangir's court) in the year 1609, to request for permission for the same. By 1613, Jahangir issued a *farman* allowing the English to set up their factory. After the first permission was granted, Sir Thomas Roe arrived in the court of Jahangir as a representative of James I to seek authority for building factories in other parts of the country as well. The other foreign power that made a brief appearance in Indian history after the emergence of the English in India was the Danes. The Danes East India Company landed in India in the year 1616. Without much ado, they established their settlements in Tamil Nadu (1620) and Bengal (1676). However, they could not exercise much of their influence; by 1854 they were compelled to sell off all their administrative power in India to the British. The other influential foreign power that had its commercial interests in India was France. The state of France played an influential role in forming the French East India Company (1668). This was an individual initiative (unlike the English East India Company) undertaken by Colbert. The first French factory was set up by Francois Caron at Surat (1668). On the political front, things seemed to be moving smoothly until the arrival of Dupleix as the French governor of India (1792). His governance trigged an Anglo-French conflict which resulted in a series of wars between the English and the French (also known as Carnatic Wars); ultimately overpowering the French power in India and thus, establishing the English as the superior foreign power in India. The British dominion not only overpowered any competition from the foreign shores, but also vanquished all the local powers that posed a threat to their authority. Some of the prominent wars included

the Battle of Plassey (1757) and Battle of Buxar (1764) (both battles were fought by the East India Company against Nawabs of Bengal), the Anglo Mysore Wars (finally concluding with the Fourth Anglo Mysore War, 1799, with the death of Tipu Sultan) and Anglo Maratha Wars (ending with the Third War that was waged all through 1817-1888, ended with the defeat of the Marathas).

With the consolidation of political power the British Empire slowly but firmly made its way into other aspects of Indian—social, cultural and economic. Ranjit Guha in his seminal work *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (1997) points out an interesting outcome that came about. According to him, this incident 'brought together in one single instance all the three fundamental aspects of colonialism in our subcontinent, namely, its origin in an act of force, its exploitation of the primary produce of the land as the very basis of a colonial economy and its need to give force and exploitation, the appearance of legality.' The most significant of all their contributions can be seen in the ways in which English language became a part of the Indian language system.

As we delve deep into the subject, we have to keep in mind that Indian writings in English are a byproduct of the historical interaction between two influential cultures—Indian and Western; an association that lingered for about almost two hundred years. It is not to imply that Indians were not exposed to foreign culture or foreign rule prior to the advent of the English in the Indian coasts (as has already been discussed) but what made the English rule more influential was the introduction of the new economic system. After Renaissance, Europe was brimming with the welcoming changes that the Industrial Revolution had brought with it. The economic sphere benefited greatly as advanced technology integrated with everyday life. This phenomenon was termed as Capitalism by Marx. Before the British established their authority in India, India by and large followed a feudal system of economy. India was, in many ways, a closed world that thrived within its multifarious caste system and religious beliefs. In fact, the much needed change to the Indian political scenario emerged with the advent of the English in a backdrop of weakening and disintegrating Mughal power. Credit goes to British rule for managing to penetrate this closed society. Once in full control of the power structure they brought about the most significant cultural change with the establishment of four universities with which the Western system of education was formally introduced in India. English language paved the way for Indians to be introduced to Western culture as well as Western system of knowledge. Being acclimatized with English education many writers chose to apply the newly acquired Western aesthetics into writing, even though they wrote in their native language. Yet there was another group which decided to go ahead and express themselves in English language instead of their local Indian language. As a result, there was an interesting mixture of expression: Indian ideas and English tongue. This interesting confluence is termed as Indo-Anglican literature.

By the late seventeenth century, the printing press had made its way into the Indian terrain. But its utility was limited to bringing out fresh editions of the Bible or government orders. These mundane publications succeeded the advent of newspaper culture in India. The year 1779 holds a special significance in the Indian social scenario. It was the year when the first English newspaper, *Hickey's Bengal Gazette* came out. The very same year James Rennel came out with his *Bengal Atlas*. Lord Clive had appointed Rennel as the first Surveyor-General of Bengal, who had spent years extensively studying the coastal belt of southern India. With cartography being an indispensable aspect to empire building, Rennel's efforts were imitated by many of

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his fellow counterparts, which resulted in the English consolidating and exploring new avenues. Apart from map building, the English intellectuals started exploring other cultural and noetic knowledge of the conquered territories through philosophy and translation. As A.K. Mehrotra identifies Sir Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, Sir William Jones, John Gilchrist and Henry Colebrooke as 'orientalists' for their contribution to Oriental learning. The Western world's interest in Indian culture and more specifically, in Indian languages, was nurtured by the desire to handle the administration effectively. Without this particular access, things would have been difficult for them. In fact, the English system of education (that generated an entire class of native bourgeoisie), was introduced with the need to create a group of locales who would aid the English in their administrative purpose. The colonial rulers were not keen on imparting formal English education in India for 'educating' the masses; rather their intention was to acquaint the local populace in their mother tongue. It were the efforts of people such as Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833) and his fellow compatriots who made British rulers introduce the English language to primary education so that it could be taught along with the rest of the Indian subjects. However, not every scholar was truly interested to learn the Indian traditional system of knowledge. There were some scholars who were genuine pursuers of knowledge, Sir William Jones being the most remarkable scholar. Sir Jones had established his reputation as a scholar of Oriental studies long before he arrived in India. After his arrival in India as a supreme court judge, he established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784.

The formal link between India and the English language can be traced back to the introduction of the English language as a means of communication in India and the casual treatment of English literature as a subject of study in various Indian universities. Macaulay's Minute presented in 1833 made way for the inclusion of English language as a medium of teaching with the proclamation that 'the English tongue would be the most useful for our native subjects'. As he was introducing his famous minute, Macaulay, without any hesitation admitted that he was not acquainted with any of the works written in Sanskrit or Arabic and yet he did not mind shying away from making a biased announcement:

> ...A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. ...All the historical information, which has been collected in the Sanskrit language, is less than what may be found in the paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools of England...

With this statement, we realize that India had become another ground of testing for which reason, the rulers decided to launch English literature in classrooms and test its efficiency, especially at a time when European universities were still engrossed with the literatures of the antiquity—Latin and Greek. English was, as a result, introduced in educational organizations, legal structures (such as courts) and other offices as a means of communication and documentation in India. This shift in communication came as a blow to the traditional language of India—Arabic and Sanskrit—which were the official languages prior to the introduction of English. In the year 1835, Lord William Bentinck had declared that the ruling powers would 'favour English language' and would make subsequent arrangements to create 'knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of English language.' The Wood Dispatch of 1854 proclaimed that the Universities at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta would be set, thus making English language accessible to learners, teachers

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and also the official staff appointed at government offices. As expected, the introduction of English at every level of life had some interesting effects. The term '*Babu English*' was coined during this era to mark the encounter between the language of the colonizers (English) and the natives. This was also the time for literary studies in India to flourish.

1.3 INDIAN ENGLISH PROSE AND POETRY

The year 1794 is a benchmark for Indian literature in English. Dean Mahomet (1759-1851) acquired the distinction of being the first Indian author who published and composed his work in English. The book titled *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) documents his travel experiences, that is non-fictional in nature and has the overtone of a travelogue. But a more coherent body of work composed in English by Indians can be traced back to the era of Raja Rammohan Roy. To go back to Raja Rammohan Roy and his contributions to the Indian English literary scenario, we realize that he was a pioneering figure in the field of Indian English literature. His exposure to the language was honed by his experience of working with British officials. Through his knowledge and exposure, he tried to infuse new thoughts and removed old and redundant rituals through his organization the Brahmo Samaj. Through Brahmo Samaj, Roy educated the masses for social uplift that was in favour of women and other marginalized sections of the society. He advocated that *Sati* practices ought to be done away with. He also worked for the freedom of press. With his diligence and effort he managed to create a niche for this kind of writing and laid the foundation for future Indo-Anglian literature. His successors included luminaries such as, Henry Derozio, Kashiproshad Ghose, the Cavally Brothers, Hasan Ali, P. Rajagopual, Mohanlal and Michel Madhusudan Dutt.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838 –1894) are two other prolific writers of the time who deserve a mention for their contribution to Indian English writings. Dutt composed epic verses in English and Chatterjee wrote a novel (*Rajmohan's Wife*) in English language of the colonizers. *Rajmohan's Wife* was first published in a serialized form in a magazine. But it finally came out as a book in the year 1935. This novel was set in the rural belt of Bengal. Though the story was of a simple domestic setting, it brought into focus the central issue: the significance of renunciation over one's own well-being. Creative writings such as these, produced after the initial encounter, created a sense of unease that has trickled down over the decades. Salman Rushdie referring to such discomfort, considers this first novel composed by an Indian in English of mediocre quality.

Michael Madusudan Dutta had an interesting and colourful personality. Moreover, his not so conventional yet tragic life has magnified his power and charm that is associated with his name. He was known as man who was generous with his friends, often romantic and charming. His creativity was paramount in changing the Bengali literary scene. Credit goes to Michael for first introducing blank verse in the year 1860, in the play titled *Padmavati*, that was based on a Greek myth. Though initially criticized for the use of blank verse, his later work puts an end to his share of criticism, thereby firmly establishing the style of blank verse in literature.

Madhusudan's *Meghnad-Badh*, an epic poem, is supposed to be his greatest work till date. The epic is composed in blank verse. The work is based on the epic, Ramayana, but is highly influenced by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In Madhusudan's composition, the evil Ravana is transformed into a hero figure. This vast heroic-tragic

Check Your Progress

1. Why is the year 1800 considered to be the starting point of Indian Writing in English?
2. State the categories of publication that emerged in the late 17th century.
3. Comment on the early introduction of the English language.

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epic is in nine cantos. The use of such a style is extremely unique in the world of Bengali literature. As has been pointed out by many critics, *Meghnad-Badh* is the first original epic found in Bengali literature and that is why Madhusudan earned the status of an epic poet. This man was a genius who indulged in experiments in forms and types of literature which gave a new dimension to Bengali literature.

Irrespective of their significant contribution, neither of these writers ever thought of writing anything in English thereafter. This occurred despite their contribution as prominent writers of Bengali literature.

A young lady who was writing in English around this time was Toru Dutt (1856 –1877). She penned poems and wrote novels in both French and English. In her short span of life, twenty-two years, she had many published and unpublished works to her credit. Her two unpublished novels were *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* and *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*. The former is considered to be the first novel in French written by an Indian author, whereas the latter is identified as the first novel in English composed by an Indian woman. That apart, she also penned *Ancient Ballads* and *Legends of Hindustan*, two unfinished volumes of poems in English.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) is considered to be the first Indian English poet. He had written verses composed in English in India. He joined as a teacher at the Hindu College (Calcutta) in English literature. Derozio's poetry has influences of Keats in his dealing of nature. He seemed to be extremely influenced by the English Romantics: Byron, Shelley, Keats, Scott and Moore. Derozio's life was untimely cut short by the debilitating effects of cholera in 1831.

The mid-nineteenth century saw many social reformations taking place in India. During this time, thinkers and reformers such as Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Kesub Chunder Sen and Swami Dayanand Saraswati — the founder of the Arya Samaj — contributed a great deal in the field of social justice, educational reforms and religious practices which brought about a kind of renaissance in India.

It was a time when Hindu society in Bengal was facing considerable disturbance. In the year 1828, Raja Rammohan Roy established his reformational organization Brahmo Samaj, which appreciated Hindu ideals but did not approve of idol worship. Such a stance led to negative repercussions within orthodox Hindu society. With this social backdrop, Derozio joined Hindu College as a lecturer where he instilled notions for a social change that had already been laying its foundation. His lectures were based on his extensive readings that always put forward reasonable arguments. Being a man of reason, he encouraged his students to focus on authors such as Thomas Paine (*Rights of Man*) and other liberal rationalists. Derozio, despite being a Christian became an atheist. He insisted other likeminded people to question the orthodox Hindu norms and conventions and their validity in society. He motivated his students to understand and appreciate the value of freedom of expression and the quest for knowledge and a zeal to live a life that was worthy while simultaneously questioning certain irrational cultural exercises. Derozio's unexpected enthusiasm for teaching and his ability to introduce new ideas made him a great success among students and a popular figure at Hindu College. In fact, his students were called Derozians. He coordinated debates where motley aspects of society were discussed without any hesitation. In the year 1828, Derozio stimulated his students to form a literary as well as a debating club that was called the Academic Association. In the 1830s, the club successfully came up with a magazine, titled *Parthenon*. These students not only

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brought out articles criticizing dogmatic practices of Hindu religion, but also advocated for the emancipation of women and censured many facets of the British rule. With the help of Derozio, students took up journalism through which they could put their ideas and communicate with their society freely. The idea was to bring about radical changes in the society and work towards freeing minds from oppressive dogma. Derozio found immense pleasure in interacting with his students and composing sonnets for them: 'Expanding like petals of young flowers, I watch the gentle opening of your minds....'

Another author who deserves mention here is Kashiprosad Ghose (1809-1837), a major contributor to the Indo-Anglian literature. Ghose's contribution to Indian English literature can be equated with Henry Derozio in its extensiveness. Ghose's *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830) is remarkable for many reasons. Researchers point out that he was the first Indian who had published a regular series of English verse. *The Hindu Intelligence* was an English weekly that was edited by Ghose. His verse collections are considered to be original yet conventional in description.

Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) was Toru Dutt's cousin. Romesh Dutt had cleared his Indian civil service examination in the year 1869 and had worked in various parts of India. He played a significant role in bringing out literary creations in both Bengali and English. Dutt translated some of his works into English, such as, *The Lack of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). He also dealt with history in his works, which included works such as, *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, *The Economic History of British India*, *India in the Victorian Age* and *A brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal*. But his *magnum opus* was his translation of verses and passages from *Rig Veda*, Buddhist literature, the *Upanishads*, Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* and Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniya* into English.

Manmohan Ghose (1869-1924) is another author whose mention is important to our present discussion. Manmohan was the brother of Sri Aurobindo. He had studied at Manchester and Oxford. The first poetry collection that he brought out was *Primavera* (1890). The book was well received by literary scholars and his fellow batchmates at Oxford. Just like Derizio, Manmohan Ghose chose to become a teacher of English at Presidency College (Calcutta). In the year 1898, he brought out another collection of poems titled *Love Songs and Elegies*. Around this time he composed a five act play named *Perseus the Deliverer*. His ability to use the precise English words and infuse a sense of rhythm, made him very popular among other literary craftsmen as well as those English scholars who worked in England. His poetry earned the reputation of being thoughtful and the rhythm was considered remarkable. Manmohan Ghose's verses in many ways stood out distinctly from the rest of the Orientalist poetry. His works reflected his desire to return to England, a place where he had spent a substantial time (twenty-two years) of his life. It might seem a bit odd that while his fellows in India, as well as his brother Aurobindo Ghose, were busy composing elements on nationalistic themes and were relying on ancient Indian culture for their inspiration, Manmohan Ghose time and again looked at England for inspiration.

By now Indian literature in English had acquired a distinct identity. But it was not until the time of Rabindranath Tagore that took the whole experience to a different level and won the Noble Prize for literature. Indo-Anglican literature now had a global presence. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was not just a gifted author but a true nationalist as well. Even today he is addressed as *rishi* and *gurudev* among many other titles conferred on him. Being a man of immense talent he left behind his mark as a poet, producer, musician, dramatist, actor, painter, educationist, reformer,

philosopher, novelist, story writer and a critic of literature. Tagore in his initial days wrote mostly in Bengali and eventually translated his verses and plays into English. Even before he attained the age of eighteen, he had managed to write poetry of more than 7000 lines. It was *Gitanjali* (1912) which won him the Noble Prize for literature and made him a renowned poet. Soon after his Noble achievement, his works, including *Gitanjali*, were translated by critics and scholars into several foreign languages. Tagore is credited with many poems, songs, critical pieces and plays, both in Bengali and English.

To this purpose the contributions of Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) is of critical importance. He is one of those figures whose contributions to Indian literature is invaluable. Aurobindo's long stretch of poetic journey earned him the stature of a literary master who commanded the Indo-Anglican literary league. Ghose was not just inclined literarily, he showed remarkable interest in teaching, poetry and politics as well. Ghose's *Songs to Myrtilla* and a longer piece composed in the early period-*Urvasie* came out in published form in the year 1895 and 1896, respectively. He was influenced by the classics and used the diction of Milton. This classical influence can be traced in *Love and Death*, a poem of 1100 lines composed in blank verse. The central theme of this poem is love which lays its foundation on the ancient Hindu legend that had an unlikely resemblance to the Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. Apart from his volumes of verse and plays, Aurobindo is famous for his work *The Life and Divine*. It is a work of prose which is artistic and is hailed as one of the greatest philosophical books ever composed.

But the one work that surpasses his reputation as an Indo-Anglian writer is *Savitri*. The book is published in three parts. It is divided in to twelve books or forty nine cantos that has a total of 23, 813 lines. It was an ambitious task and the author is said to have spent no less than fifty years of his life composing it. M.K.Naik writes in his *A History of Indian English Literature:*

> *Savitri* was continuously revised by the poet almost till the end of his days and shaped into an epic of humanity and divinity, of death and life divine. It is a kind of poetic philosophy of the spirit and of life, and an experiment in mystic poetry cast in heavy symbolism.

It might seem that the Indo-Anglian literature in its initial days was exclusive to male authors. Not many women writers were writing in English at that time, though one can trace the presence of a number of female writers in regional languages. Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) probably appears to be an exception because she was the only female contributor of this era who worked relentlessly towards the cause of Indo-Anglian literature. Her education at London and Cambridge developed her style of lyrical art. She was a woman of multiple talents. She was not just a writer but an able administrator as well. She was in charge of some of the most prestigious official positions in India. Her first anthology of poetry, *The Golden Threshold*, was published in 1905. It was followed by *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). The compositions consolidated her position as a poetess of great repute. In terms of style, her lyrics were well structured that had remarkable quality.

In her works, Naidu displays great depth in handling various meters and stanza forms. She earned herself the sobriquet of the Nightingale of India. In addition to this, she was an influential political figure in India and had taken position as the president of the Indian National Congress. Her skills in oratory had earned her fame as a national leader. Naidu was a rare combination of creative genius and political mind. When she was writing, the nationalistic movement in India had taken a revolutionary term.

Unrest had preceded peace in the political and social scenario. Waves of change could be felt across the nation. Moreover, the world wars had set new horizons for India and the demand for freedom could be heard more vehemently from every corner of the country. Among the political leaders, Mahatma Gandhi singularly changed the political front of India with his perseverance and determination ushering an era of change. It is interesting to note how Gandhi's contribution to Indo-Anglian literature made way for a new generation of literature that later came to be known as Gandhian literature. We must remember that Gandhi himself was not author or a writer, nor did he ever extend his genius to the sphere of writing, but he remained influential in producing a body of work that had great impact not only at a national level but also globally. He has left a mark on all aspects of humanity—economical, educational, political, social and religious apart from influencing language and literature.

Father of the nation, Gandhi, was a revolutionary who laid the foundation of positive change in India. He raised his voice for women rights, abolition of untouchability, religious reformation, uplift of the depressed classes (or *Harijans*) and many other evils within the Indian society. These issues later the influenced various Indian authors who wrote in Indian languages as well as in English. Mahatma Gandhi achieved the heights of greatness through his life experiences. His autobiography titled *My Experiments with Truth* (1925) documents his extraordinary life with amazing honesty. Till date this remains as one of the best autobiographies to have been ever composed. The work synthesizes socio-political, ethical, cultural and spiritual issues. For our convenience of understanding, we can divide Gandhi's writing period into three phases:

London period (1888-1891): In this phase he wrote a fifty-five page long essay recounting his personal experiences in London.

The South African period (1893-1915): This was intellectually a highly productive phase for Gandhi. He wrote many pamphlets such as *The Indian Franchise* (1895), *An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa* (1896), *Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa* (1896) to name a few. *Indian Opinion*, a journal launched by him also came out in this period and his first major work *Hind Swaraj* (1909) was published in this journal.

The Indian period (1915-1948): During this period he launched two other journals, *India* (1919-1932) and *Harijan* (1933-1948). Most of Gandhi's later writings appeared in these journals.

The next writer of significance who helped expand the scope and horizon of Indo-Anglian literature was Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). Like Gandhi, his contribution largely swayed towards non-fiction. Nehru, hailed from one of the politically acclaimed families of India (his father was Motilal Nehru) and was greatly influenced by Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore and later on went to lead India from the political helm in post-Independence period. He was a prolific orator and a great writer and discharged the role of Prime Minister of India for seventeen years. Being educated at Harrow and Cambridge and exposed to the ideas of Karl Marx and Lenin, Nehru proved to be a visionary and had the capacity to think ahead of his times. *Soviet Russia* was his first published book. It came out in 1928. The book contains certain specific views about Russia and considers it to be a friend to India. In the

Indo-Anglican body of literature Nehru's letters hold a special significance. His *Letters from a Father to His Daughter* (1930) is a collection of thirty-one letters which were addressed to his daughter Indira Gandhi. His other collection of letters, *Glimpses of World History* (1934), was composed while he was in prison and contains 196 letters. It analyzes the history of the world from earlier days to the mid-nineteenth century. But his autobiography, *An Autobiography* (1936), consolidates his position as a literary writer. He chronicles his life with sincerity and shows his leniency towards a scientific approach, Marxism and nationalism. The book is an authentic historical record of the era it represents. Nehru's passion for India can be seen through his work *The Discovery of India* (1946). This analytical survey of India, starting from the Indus Valley Civilization and ending with the mid-nineteenth century, remains a milestone composition assimilating the literary, political and historical perspective.

1.4 INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

Up till this juncture, the Indo-Anglian literature grew and made itself available at the world level. But it must be mentioned that though prose and poetry written in Indian English flourished remarkably in India, novels and novelists were yet to make their way into the global literary scenario. The Indian literary history is inked with creativity that covers genres such as epics, fables, poetry, drama and short stories. But the novel established itself much later. As many critics and researchers would like to point out, the first known English novel written by an Indian was *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), unlike in Europe where novel as an independent genre evolved in the eighteenth century. During the initial days, the theme of novels revolved around the harsh realities of life that one came across in India. The second half of the nineteenth century India saw production of random novels and many of these novels had an overtly social and historical tone and seemed to be inspired by contemporary as well as leading British fiction writers, such as, Defoe, Fielding and Scott to name a few. Given these facts, one notable aspect is the unexpected appearance of a number of great women novelists.

Novels in India found a new voice after the First World War. Some novelists were attracted to the ideas and thoughts that questioned the very existence of capitalism and colonialism, like the ideas expressed by Marx. Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is a prominent Indian English novelist whose works such as, *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Black Waters* looks at the lives of social sufferers who have been relegated to the margins of Indian society. Anand's plots revolve around the hasher realities of life and analyses the repercussions of social evils such as caste, class and religion that legitimizes economic exploitation.

After Anand, the other novelist that demands attention is Raja Rao (1908-2006) who played a commendable role in experimenting with narrative techniques. He combined the narrative elements of Indian epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata and a Western style reflected in Eliot and Joyce. His *Kanthapura* still remains one of the most coveted texts ever composed. Raja Rao, unlike his predecessor Anand, was keen on exploring the spiritual legacy that India treasures, but he never dealt with social issues that crippled the nation at the time. His style was to mix elements of the past with contemporary issues. In this way he was able to create a unique syntax of writing through which he bridged the gap between the past and the future. Myths and legends were recurring motifs in his writings. Titles of his novels reflected his choice of mixing myths and legends with present time. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) are

Check Your Progress

4. What was the underlying idea in the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj?
5. Who was Toru Dutt?
6. What was Sarojini Naidu's contribution to Indian writing in English?

some of the examples. Rao's contribution to the literary sphere not only earn him literary recognition (he was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi award in 1964) but also fetched him many other prestigious awards at various national and international levels (Padma Bhushan, 1969; Neustadt International Prize for Literature, 1988; Padma Vibhushan, 2007).

The next novelist of great prominence who elevated the genre of novel in Indian English to a different milieu was R. K. Narayan (1906-2001). In sharp contrast to Mulk Raj Anand's fascination for social reality laced with humanism, Narayan presents us a world immersed in humor and irony, sympathy and fantasy yet, not undetached from realism. Narayan's writings display his inclinations towards philosophy as they reflected in his novels, such as, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Dark Room* and many more. Most critics unanimously agree that Narayan's Malgudi is similar to Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Malgudi, like Wessex, is an imaginary town where Narayan's novels are set. Malgudi is a self-engrossed town that is detached from the outside world, yet external disturbances find a way to encroach upon the simulated harmony that exists there. For instance, the changing political scenario had an immense impact on the ostensibly detached world of Malgudi. Narayan's endearing appeal also lies in his simplicity. The way the child protagonist Swaminathan, from rural India, sees the world around him makes the stories of *Swami and Friends* an engaging read.

Novels written in Indian English that were published within the period 1935-1960, more often than not, recount the experiences under the colonial regime along with the problems and disillusionment post-Independence, its harsh yet irrefutable reality. The writers, whose creativity flourished during the decades of thirties and forties such as K. Nagarjan, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and K.S. Venkataramani along with novelists who dominated the fifties such as Humayun Kabir, Ahmed Ali, K.A. Abbas and Kamala Markandiya, Nayantara Sahgal and Khushwant Singh have highlighted the crisis of colonial as well as post-colonial India. While the Indo-Anglican literary scenario was gaining rapid success, globally, India was undergoing a violent political phase, which resulted in the Partition. This division of administrative jurisdiction led to strife and trauma of such intensity that it still remains one of the most traumatic events of Indian history.

Various reasons, ranging from catharsis to the urge to chronicle, have been offered as motives for the Partition as one of the recurring themes in Indian writing and fiction. These accounts and narratives echo the barbarity of Partition and the plight of people. Khushwant Singh, a prominent novelist, wrote *A Train to Pakistan* which narrates the pain of separation and bloodbath that migration and Partition brought for people of India and Pakistan. Singh's next attempt, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* narrates the ironic picture of a Sikh family which has a joint family structure and throws light on various Indian reactions to the freedom struggle that was taking place in the forties. The Partition came as a crisis in India and overpowered the narrative structure of novels written in English. Works of fiction such as these presented a dystopic point of view that anticipated the nuances and predicament of post-colonial theory and criticism.

1.5 INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Indian English drama owes its origin to Krishna Mohan Banerji and his play *The Persecuted* written in 1837. Though, the real journey of Indian English Drama was

Check Your Progress

7. Which is regarded as the first known English novel written by an Indian?
8. How did novel writing change of the World War I?

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launched by the efforts of Michael Madhusudan Dutt through his play, *Is This Called Civilization* published in 1871. To this, one may add the contributions of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. While Bengali remained Tagore's choice of language, his works are also available in English (most of which have been translated by Tagore himself). His corpus of writing is essentially rooted in the Indian tradition.

Sri Aurobindo wrote five blank verse plays that were complete. That apart, he also composed six incomplete plays. Some of his complete plays are *Radoguna*, *Vasavadutta*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Eric* and *The Viziers of Bassora*. Each of these complete works adheres to a five act structure. His incomplete plays include: *The Witch of Ilni*, *The Maid and the Mill*, *The House of Brut*, *The Birth of Sin and Prince of Edur* and *Achab and Esarhaddon*. Being incomplete, these plays range from one scene to three acts.

One of the most notable features of Sri Aurobindo's plays is that they narrate lives of people from various parts of the globe that echo a multitude of experience, moods and emotions. *Perseus the Deliverer* is based on the myth of Persues (from the ancient Greek source); *Vasavadutta* has been influenced from the romantic tale of ancient India. The romance, *Rodoguna*, owes its origin to Syria; *The Viziers of Bassora*, which is a romantic comedy, is set during the times when the great Haroun al Rashid lived. The romance of *Eric* is set within the boundaries of Scandinavia and narrates the tale of love and war that takes place between the offsprings of Odin and Thor. Aurobindo was an artist par excellence who dealt with all the major genres — comedy, tragedy, romance, heroic play and farce. On analyzing the texts we realize that Aurobindo is highly influenced by Elizabethan drama in terms of plot construction and characterization. In his works, Aurobindo employs the English blank verse to perfection.

Playwright Harindranath Chattopadhay is an important figure in Indian English drama. He made his debut as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918). He published seven verse plays under the title *Poems and Plays* (1927). Interestingly all the seven plays revolve around the lives of Indian saints. The collection, *Five Plays* (1929) are composed in prose. While *The Window and The Parrot* narrates lives of the deprived, *The Sentry's Lantern* is a symbolic work that talks about the harbinger of a new era for the people who are deprived. And *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* is a dramatization of Buddha's life.

The other name that deserves mention is A.S.P. Ayyar who composed six plays. *The Clutch of The Devil*, published in 1926, was his first play while *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* was his last. The literary world remembers him for his unusual verse in the play *The Flute of Krishna*.

The other notable playwright is T.P. Kailasam. He composed both in English and Kannada languages. Kailasam is called the father of modern Kannada drama. His plays in English include *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Keechaka* (1949) and *Karna* (1964).

During the colonial era, many women writers emerged as significant playwrights. A prominent name is Bharati Sarabhai. She had written two plays titled *The Well of the People* (a symbolic and poetic text echoing Gandhian social ideology) and *Two Women* (a realistic play prying into the private world of individuals).

Another pre-Independence Indian English dramatist who deserves mention is J.M. Lobo Prabhu. He had composed more than a dozen plays of which two plays

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have become iconic. These are, *Mother of New India*, a play of Indian village in three acts (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945). These were published before Independence. Lobo Prabhu's *Collected Play* came out in 1956. Prabhu's strength was in his dialogues and situation. His characters, however, were devoid of lifelike conviction.

In post-Independence era, as far as drama composition in Indian English language was concerned, there was a silence of sorts. Though pre-Independence Indian English drama was rich in creativity, it failed to establish subsequent stage productions.

In post-Independence era, Indian English drama witnessed growing interest among people outside India. A decent number of plays composed by Indian playwrights such as Pratap Sharma, Asif Currimbhoy and Gurucharan Das were staged in England and the USA with unexpected success. But unfortunately India was unable to set up a regular platform to stage Indian English drama. One chief reason for this was that the Indian theatre was monopolized by regional language theatre productions, which had more popularity and demand. In other words, Indian English drama was yet to become a theatre of the masses.

Though plays in the post-Independence period were mostly written in prose, poetic plays were also plentiful. Writers such as G.V. Desani, Lakhan Dev, Manjeri Isvaran, and Pritish Nandy made their contributions to theatre but with own specific style and deliberate deviations. Manjeri Isvaran's *Yama and Yami* (1948) narrates the incestuous love Yami nurtures for her brother. The play is composed in dialogue form, written in poetic prose that contains a prologue and an epilogue. G.V.Desani's *Hali* (1950) is immersed in symbolism and imagery that talks about transcending human love; Lakhan Dev's *Tiger Claw* (1976) is a three act historical play centered around the controversial murder of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. His *Vivekananda (1972)* and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting (1976)* display an effortless use of blank verse. Other authors, who composed verse plays during this period include M.Krishnamurti (*The Cloth of Gold*, 1951), P.A.Krishnaswami (*The Flute of Krishna*, 1950), S. Raman (*Karme*, 1979), Satya Dev Jaggi (*The Point of Light*, 1967), S.D.Rawoot (*Immortal Song*; *Karm and the Killers*, 1959), Pritish Nandy (*Rites for a Plebian Salute*, 1969), P.S. Vasudev (*The Sunflower*, 1972) and Sree Devi Singh (*The Purple Braided People*, 1970).

The most celebrated playwright of the post colonial era is Asif Currimbhoy. He is credited for having composed and published more than thirty plays. Some of his popular tiltles include *The Tourist Meeca* (1959), *The Doldrumness* (1960), *The Restaurant* (1960), *The Captives* (1963), *Goa* (1964), *Monsoon* (1965), *An Experiment With Truth* (1969) and *Sonar Bangla* (1972) among many others. Despite being comprehensive, Currimbhoy's plays have been critiqued for lacking in plot coherence, obscure language and imperfect characterization.

Currimbhoy was succeeded by Pratap Sharma. He wrote two prose plays: *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has A War Cry* (1970). Sharma's plays were staged successfully in foreign shores though they failed to be staged in India.

Discussing about Indian drama, Nissim Ezekiel deserves a special mention. He was a prolific poet and playwright. Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) (*Nalini: A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy* and *The Sleep Walkers: An Indo-American farce*) were creative excellence in Indian English drama. *Songs of Deprivation* (1969), composed by Ezekiel is a short play. Ezekiel is known for his coherent settings, irony,

Check Your Progress

9. Mention one feature in Aurobindo's plays.
10. Name any woman playwright of the colonial era.

minute observation of human life and behavior and yet somewhere the poet always took over the dramatist.

1.6 CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

In the present times, Indian drama, shedding its classical and European inspiration, is experimental and innovative from the thematic and technical point of view. It is not derived from any specific tradition and has emerged as a distinctive tradition within the history of world drama by reintroducing and recreating myth, religion, history, legend and folklore that are based on contemporary socio-political issues. A theatrical tradition that was given shape by names such as Badal Sirkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar paved the way for contemporary Indian English theatre.

Girish Karnad, in his versatile role as writer, director and actor, enthusiastically contributed to the world of Indian English theatre. Karnad's dramatic sensibilities, were shaped by the influential touring undertaken by '*natak*' companies and, especially Yakshagana, that was not considered as classical art till recently. Karnad's famous plays include *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1962), *Hayvadana* (1970) and *Nagmandala* (1972). His plots came from mythology, history and old legends laced with symbolism. Credit goes to Karnad for trying to reintroduce their relevance in the contemporary socio-political milieu. The play *Yayati* retells an ancient story from the Mahabharata with a modern sensibility. The narrative of the play *Hayvadana* comes from *Katha Saritsagar* (ancient collection of stories composed in Sanskrit). *Tughlaq* is a historical play where he blurs facts with fiction through the presentation of the complex personality of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. Through his play *Tale Dande*, he unravels the significant relationship between the contemporary world and literature. His play *Nagmandala* deals with the conflict existing in the patriarchal and matriarchal order of society. Though critics suggest that Karnad's dramatic works are devoid of stability his success unfolds through the technical innovation sowed within traditional dramatic form.

Another notable name that Indian English theatre can boast of is Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar began his professional career as a journalist but he was always interested in theatre. His very first play was *Grihasth* (1955) and last one was *Safar* (1992). His plays provided Indian theatre with a fresh perspective on arts. He was one of the leading figures of the Vanguard (the avant-garde Marathi Theatre). Tendulkar's plays represented new awareness as they voiced the sufferings, pains and agonies of middle class society. His plays, more often than not, highlighted the theme of isolation of the individual and the individual's effort to combat hostile forces of nature. Tendulkar did not consider recurring violence within humans as something to be ashamed of because it was part of human nature. The representation of violence on stage never translated into anything grand, they were always natural. His plays *Chimanicha Ghor Hote Menache* (1960), *Kalojanchi Shalai* (1968) and *Ek Holti Mugli* (1967) display his concern with the idea of exploitation and authoritarian powers. The theme of oppression takes over the plays such as *Silence! The Court Is In Session* (1968) and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). *Sakharam Binder* (1972) narrates the gory tale of human violence. *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadaan* (1982) look into the complexity of the domestic space to understand the predicaments of marriage and exploitation. Tendulkar was associated with the New Theatrical Movement (Maharashtra) for a long time.

Badal Sircar is another name that vibrates throughout contemporary theatre. He was associated with the New Theatrical Movement in India. He created 'people's theatre' (a theatre that was run with the support of the people and was created by the people). His initial plays, *Evan Inderjit* (1962), *That Other History* (1964) and *There Is No End* (1971) showcase his concern with social, psychological, political and existential problems. *Evan Inderjit* depicts the tale of a playwright who tries hard to script a play. His play *Procession* tries to decipher the meaning of a 'real home' within the context of new society based on equality. *Bhoma* is again a fictional dramatization of oppressed peasants who survived in India. Sircar's association with Grotowski's Poor Theatre worked as an impetus for him to create his Third Theatre.

Indian English drama would be incomplete without the mention of Mohan Rakesh. He originally wrote in Hindi but his plays were translated into English and other regional languages for their exceptional qualities. His first prominent play *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* was published in 1958. After that *Leharon Ke Rajhansa* appeared in 1963. His famous play *Adhe Adhure* was first staged in 1969 and the play *Pair Tale Ki Zamin* was completed by Kamleshwar and published posthumously in 1974. In his plays, Mohan Rakesh highlighted the crisis of contemporary society. He considered drama as a complex system of production involving actors, light, special effects, sound and stage direction. He was well known for his extensive experiments in his plays.

Apart from male play writers, women dramatists also contributed a great deal to Indian English drama. They brought to Indian theater the inner feminine psyche which was missing in earlier productions. Women's theatre movement stared off with Street Theatre movement. It was a kind of Theatre Of Protest where women writers voiced their disagreement over politics of exploitation that was based on gender discrimination. They also reworked on myths of *Sita* and *Savitri* and interpreted stories from the woman's point of view. The plays of Usha Ganguli and Mahasweta Devi fall under this category. Mahasweta Devi's feminist and social protest texts include *Mother of 1084*, *Aajer Urvashi O' Johny, Byen* and *Water.*

Mahesh Dattani indeed is one of the best playwrights of the contemporary times. Born on 7 August 1958 Banglore, Dattani expressed himself in the English language to voice the ideas and dilemmas of the Indian sentiment and sensibility in the context of globalization. Some of his plays are *Where There is a Will*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance like a Man* and *Tara*.

Indian novelists of contemporary times who are writing in English include names, such as, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Deshpande, K. Nagrajan, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Bharti Kirchner, Amit Chaudhuri, Vikas Swarup, Rohinton Mistry, C R.Krishnan, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamla Markandya, Vikaram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhathi Roy to name a few. Among these most of the writers are settled in the West. Through their plays these writes are trying to portray a hybrid identity. Their novels echo a post-colonial world which is haunted by neo-colonial troubles such as social evils, economic catastrophes, governmental corruption and other forms of oppression. Their experience relating to cultural migration provides new perspectives as well as creative avenues that form the aesthetic impulse of new Indian writing in English. Mostly set in the urbanized West these authors show a tendency to stage contemporary social issues and cultural troubles in their own geography and put an effort to redefine it through the postcolonial context. In their

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fiction they add the past, the present and the future along with the imperial and colonial experiences, thereby, blurring the distinction of time and introducing a new scope and purpose.

As far as the poetical scenario is concerned, today Indian English poetry holds a place of its own in the milieu of world poetry. Though years ago when poets, such as, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawalla, Jayanta Mahapatra and Dilip Chitre, who ruled the writing world during fifties, sixties and seventies, found themselves struggling to get published. To combat this, they domain jointly started a small press and produced magazines. Subsequent poets include names such as Sarang, R Parathsarathy, Pritish Nandy, K Ayyappa Paniker, Kamala Das and others who experimented with theme and structure and provided a new lease of life to Indian poetry in English.

Activity

Read R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* and comment on the ways in which language has been used.

Did You Know

Representation of women writers, pre-Independence, has given rise to many arguments regarding the possibility of accurately re-presenting the marginalized. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak's essay, *Can the Subalterns Speak?* is one of the most influential essays that discusses the visibility of the marginalized (and the silenced).

1.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Indian English literature is an umbrella term used to identify literature composed by Indian writers residing in India who chose to write in English instead of their native or co-native language.
- Indian English literature also extends to those compositions that are penned by the members belonging to the community addressed as the Indian diaspora.
- This gamut of literature, many a times, is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. This category of literature many a times is associated with post-colonial literature.
- The formal link between India and the English language can be traced back to the introduction of the English language as a means of communication in India and the casual treatment of English literature as a subject of study in various Indian universities.
- The year 1794 is the real benchmark year for Indian literature in English. Dean Mahomet (1759-1851) acquired the distinction of being the first Indian author who published and composed his work in English.
- Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894) are two prolific writers of the time for their contribution to Indian English writings. Dutt composed epic verses in English and Chatterjee wrote the novel, *Rajmohan's Wife*.
- A young lady who was writing in English around this time was Toru Dutt (1856 –1877). She penned poems and novels in both French and English.
- Manmohan Ghose (1869-1924) is another author whose mention is important. His first poetry collection was *Primavera* (1890).
- Though Indian literature in English had acquired a distinct identity of its own, it was not until the time of Rabindranath Tagore that took the whole experience to a different level and won the Noble Prize for literature.
- It might seem that the Indo-Anglian literature in its initial days was exclusive to male authors only. Not many women writers were writing in English at that time, though one can trace the presence of a number of female writers in the regional languages.
- London and Cambridge educated Sarojini Naidu had made immense contribution towards literature in the pre-colonial period. Her poetry *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 followed by *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917).
- Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* (1925), remains as one of the best autobiographies to have been ever composed.
- Novels in India found a new voice after the end of the First World War. Some novelists were attracted by ideas and thoughts that questioned the very existence of capitalism and colonialism, like the ideas expressed by Marx.
- A novelist of great prominence who elevated the genre of the novel in Indian English to a different milieu was R. K. Narayan (1906-2001).
- Indian English drama owes its origin to Krishna Mohan Banerji and his play *The Persecuted* written in 1837.
- Playwright, Harindranath Chattopadhay is an important figure in Indian english drama. He made his debut as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918).
- During the colonial era, many women writers emerged as significant playwrights. Prominent among them is Bharati Sarabhai who wrote two plays titled *The Well of the People* (a symbolic and poetic text echoing Gandhian social ideology) and *Two Women* (a realistic play prying into the private world of individuals).
- A theatrical tradition that was given shape by names such as Badal Sirkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar paved the way for contemporary Indian english theatre.
- Badal Sircar is another name that vibrates throughout contemporary theatre. He was associated with the New Theatrical Movement in India.
- As far as the poetical scenario is concerned, today Indian English poetry holds a place of its own in the milieu of world poetry.

1.8 KEY TERMS

- **Babu English:** It was a term coined during the colonial era to mark the encounter between the language of the colonizers (English) and the natives.

Check Your Progress

11. What was unique about R.K.Narayan's writing?
12. Who were the important playwrights of the post-Independence era?
13. Name any two contemporary playwrights.
14. Name any three Indian novelists writing in English.

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- ***Blank verse:*** *It* is poetry written in regular metrical but unrhymed lines, almost always iambic pentameters.
- **Indian English:** It refers to works written by Indians in English language.

1.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The year 1800 has been considered the 'starting point' for 'the literature written largely by Indians in English' by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. This year is not relevant for any specific literary contribution, but holds more substance as a historically important juncture. By this period, the British had managed to annihilate every kind of political opposition that could have posed a challenge to their authority in the Indian continent.
2. Initially there were three categories of writing that were being published widely. These were: newspapers, atlas as well as maps of different regions.
3. The formal link between India and the English language can be traced back to the introduction of the English language as a means of communication in India and the casual treatment of English literature as a subject of study in various Indian universities. Macaulay's Minute presented in 1833 made way for the inclusion of English language as a medium of teaching with the proclamation that 'the English tongue would be the most useful for our native subjects.'
4. The basic idea behind the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj was to remove old and redundant rituals and give way to new ideas. It also worked to improve the position of women in the society.
5. Toru Dutt was a poet and novelist who wrote in both French and English.
6. Sarojini Naidu contributed immensely towards the cause of Indo-Anglian literature. Her first anthology of poetry *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 followed by *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917).
7. *Raj Mohan's Wife*, written in 1864 by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay is regarded as the first known English novel written by an Indian.
8. After the First World War, some of the novelists were attracted by ideas and thoughts that questioned the existence of capitalism and colonialism, like the ideas expressed by Marx. One of the prominent writers of this period was Mulk Raj Anand.
9. A notable feature of Aurobindo's plays was that they narrated lives of people from various parts of the globe that echoed a multitude of experience, moods and emotions.
10. A prominent name among women playwright that emerged in the colonial era was that of Bharati Sarabhai's.
11. Narayan presented a world immersed in humor and irony, sympathy and fantasy yet not undetached from realism. Narayan's writings displayed his inclinations towards philosophy. Narayan's endearing appeal also lay in his simplicity.
12. Some of the eminent Indian English playwrights of post-Independence era were Pratap Sharma, Asif Currimbhoy and Gurucharan Das. People like G.V. Desani, Lakhan Dev, Manjeri Isvaran, and Pritish Nandy also contributed to theater but with own specific style and deliberate deviations.
13. Girish Karnad and Badal Sirkar was among the famous playwrights of contemporary India.
14. Indian novelists of contemporary times who are writing in English include names, such as, Shashi Deshpande, K. Nagrajan, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Bharti Kirchner, Amit Chaudhuri, Vikas Swarup, Rohinton Mistry, C R.Krishnan, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghose, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamla Markandya, Vikaram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhathi Roy to name a few.

1.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How did the printing press in the late seventeenth century affect the Indian literary scenario?
2. Write a short note on *Babu English* as the midpoint between the language of the colonizers and the natives.
3. Write a brief note on the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore to Indian English.
4. Write a short note on Indian English novel with special emphasis on any one writer.
5. In theatre, what were the thematic preoccupations of the post-Independence era?
6. How was the British East India Company instrumental in bringing the English language to India?
7. What was Gandhi's contribution towards Indian English literature?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Trace the growth of Indian English prose and poetry?
2. Who were the pioneers of Indian English novels? You may refer to Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* for its unique style in theme and writing.
3. Indian English drama registered a marked change in its aesthetics post-Independence. Explain.
4. Give a critical overview of the theatre of the contemporary period.
5. The casual treatment of English was instrumental in the rise of Indian writing in English. Discuss.
6. In its initial days, Indo-Anglian literature was dominated by male authority only. Comment.
7. What are the reasons to consider Gandhi's South African period (1893-1915) as intellectually productive?

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1.11 FURTHER READING

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Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Twice Born Fiction*, Arnold Heinemann, Delhi, 1971.

UNIT 2 A. K. RAMANUJAN AND NISSIM EZEKIEL

Structure

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 A. K. Ramanujan: A Brief Sketch
2.3 Ramanujan's *A River*: Text and Summary
  2.3.1 Important Passages for Explanation
  2.3.2 Irony in *A River*
  2.3.3 Theme of *A River*
  2.3.4 Structure of *A River*
2.4 Ramanujan's *Obituary*: Text and Summary
  2.4.1 Historical Context of the Poem
  2.4.2 Important Passages for Explanation
  2.4.3 Irony in *Obituary*
  2.4.4 Theme of *Obituary*
  2.4.5 Structure of *Obituary*
2.5 Nissim Ezekiel: A Brief Sketch
  2.5.1 Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*: Text and Summary
2.6 *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*: Text and Summary
  2.6.1 Elements of 'Indianness' in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*
  2.6.2 The Use of Language in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*
  2.6.3 The Speaker in Poem
  2.6.4 Poetic Devices Used in a *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*
  2.6.5 Modern Life in Ezekiel's Poems
  2.6.6 Pursuit of the Self in Nissim Ezekiel's Poems
2.7 Summary
2.8 Key Terms
2.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.10 Questions and Exercises
2.11 Further Reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The poetry of A. K. Ramanujan is one of the finest contributions to the genre of Indo-Anglian poetry. We can assume that Indo-Anglian poetry began in the 1960s and the poets who have developed it to its status of 'serious' poetry include figures, such as, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N. Daruwalla. The characteristic feature of Indo-Anglian poets is that they choose their themes from a wide range of Indian legends and Indian folklore that reflect the poet's views on Indian contemporary scenario. For instance, Ramanujan's poetry reveals his awareness of his Hindu heritage, successfully blending with modernity. Ramanujan is certainly one of the greatest poets of english language among the Indo-Anglian poets.

Nissim Ezekiel (14 December 1924 – 9 January 2004), on the other hand, was a renowned Indian poet of Jewish origin. He was also a prolific playwright, broadcaster, social commentator and art-critic. He had the distinction of being an editor of repute. Ezekiel was one of the prominent figures writing in English. He had made several contributions towards post-colonial literature of India as well as literary history.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss important aspects of A. K. Ramanujan and Ezekiel's biography
- Explain passages from Ramanujan and Ezekiel's poetry

2.2 A. K. RAMANUJAN: A BRIEF SKETCH

Born in Mysore on 16 March 1929, Attipate Krishnaswamy Ramanujan was one of the finest Indo-American writers who wrote poems not only in English but also in Tamil and Kannada. He was a professor of Dravidian studies and Linguistics at the University of Chicago.

Ramanujan's poetry reflects his Indian experiences, recognizes his Hindu beliefs and ridicules Hindu superstitions. In 1969, he was awarded the gold medal of the Tamil Writer's Association for *The Interior Landscape'*. In 1976, he was awarded the Padma Shree.

A. K. Ramanujan's major works of poetry include *Of Mother's Among Other Things*, *A River* , *Looking For A Cousin On A Swing* and *Obituary*. He died on 13 July 1993 in Chicago.

Ramanujan's poetry is deeply rooted in India and his poems represent him both as a propagator of Hinduism and a poet of Indian identity. His poem, *A River*, brings out the cultural and literary stagnation of the old and new poets in a ponderous and sedate manner. *A River* begins with a reference of Madurai, a historic city, famous for its temples and literary culture. One of the oldest inhabited cities of the world, Madurai, is located on the banks of the river Vaigai, which has a religious significance for Tamils. Ramanujan's deft use of irony in the poem successfully exposes poets who are not aware of their social responsibilities.

2.3 RAMANUJAN'S *A RIVER:* TEXT AND SUMMARY

A River

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

He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.

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

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

Check Your Progress

1. What is Madurai known for? To which river does the poet refer to?
2. Who was Ramanujan?

SUMMARY

Madurai is a holy city famous for its cultural and spiritual heritage as well as a traditional centre of learning. The poet says that the river Vaigai, which has been sung about and celebrated by many old and new poets, is reduced to a thin stream of water in the summers. It is all dried up and has little force. It seems, that the summer has made the

river arid and lifeless due to which its ribs are exposed. As the river becomes almost dry, the otherwise hidden sand is now revealed and it looks like the ribs of an emaciated being. The pieces of straw and women's hair, which the river carries with it, are also revealed when the water dries up. These things not only make the river dirty but also lead to blockage at the gates of the dam. The iron bars of the gates have become rusty and the bridges seem to have 'patches of repair' on them, suggesting that the dam has previously suffered damages as well. The river carries with it wet as well as dry stones. The wet stones lying still in the river bed look like crocodiles. It appears that the crocodiles are floating in the water with only their back visible from outside. However, the dry stones look like water buffaloes lounging comfortably in the sun. The buffaloes' skin looks dry from the outside even if it has enjoyed the water for long. Similarly, the stones which were earlier submerged in the river bed, now partially visible, look like the dry back of buffalo skin.

In the second stanza, the poet looks at Vaigai through a different lense and in a different season. The poet has observed that the other poets, new as well as old, have only written poetry describing the river during floods in the monsoon. Every year, when it rains, the river gets flooded, which gives an opportunity to poets to visualize the vitality and vigour of the flooded river. The poet says that 'he' (probably Ramanujan himself) , visits Madurai for a day when the river Vaigai is flooding. He is taken aback by the apathy of the poets to human suffering and loss. He observes people talking in mathematical terms, measuring the rise in the level of water as per inches and the precision with which they are documenting the rise and fall. This demonstrates a kind of hostility towards human loss. Equally indifferent to the suffering and sorrow, people casually talk about how the river destroyed the 'three village houses', drowned 'one pregnant woman' and 'a couple of cows', 'as usual'. The poet highlights that people are used to the annual floods now. They are callous towards human suffering and loss but very particular about statistical data and the accuracy of reporting loss. They know the exact number of how many inches the water level raised, how many houses and people drowned, even the death record of the livestock is accurately maintained. However, the irony is heightened by the fact that the cows are named Gopi and Brinda, but the pregnant woman who drowned is completely unknown. These lines represent a sense of being jaded with the overall devastation that has come about as a result of the deluge.

The poet says that both the old as well as new poets wrote verses about floods in the river Vaigai. The poet is shocked and shaken because of the insensitivity of these poets, who appear unconcerned with the destruction that has been caused by the floods. The new poets only follow the footsteps of the old and carry forward the tradition of composing verse. But ironically, no one bothers to ponder over the condition of those who have succumbed to the destruction. The pregnant lady, may have been expecting twins and perhaps two more lives have been claimed by the floods. Perhaps, those unborn twins were kicking her belly when she drowned making it all the more painful for her to die. While the poets are busy singing about the creative force of the river during floods, they are completely oblivious to the pregnant woman who drowned with the twins who could have lived.

According to Ramanujan, poets, both old as well as new, consider the river during floods to be a source of inspiration. The destruction that became synonymous with the flood appeared to have become an annual occurrence making the people indifferent towards the pain that was felt by the victims. It is acknowledged 'as usual' that the flooded river always washes away three village houses, a couple of cows

(Gopi and Brinda) and an anonymous pregnant lady. It is true that the events are not always repeated in exactly the same manner, but people have become so accustomed to the repeated destruction by the annual floods that they consider it all the same every year. The pregnant woman may have been expecting the 'identical' twins. This assumption emphasizes the identical and repetitive nature of the crisis caused each year. Everything appears so much alike that even the twins could not have been identified unless they would be wearing diapers of different colours.

2.3.1 Important Passages for Explanation

1. '*Every summer . . . in the sand.*'

Reference to Context

These lines have been taken from the poem *A River*, written by A. K. Ramanujan. In these lines, the poet brings to our attention the river Vaigai which dries up in the heat of the summer and therefore fails to attract the attention of poets.

Explanation

In these lines, the poet says that every year in the summer season, a river gets dried up due to the excessive heat. This is the same river which holds a special place in the lives and culture of Tamil people as the holy city Madurai stands on the bank of the river Vaikai. However, the river is reduced to a thin and narrow stream of water due to the excessive heat of the summer and flows very slowly in the sand.

2. '*Baring the sand ribs . . . all over them.*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the poet brings to our attention the dirt hidden beneath the water bed. Now when the summer heat has reduced the river to a trickle, all the dirt lying underneath gets exposed which shows how the river has been neglected and misused by the people of nearby villages. It also describes the ways in which the river acts as a signifier of nature and its dwindling beauty in the face of destruction.

Explanation

In these lines the poet says that when the river is reduced to a narrow stream trickling without any force, it exposes the otherwise hidden elements of human dispose underneath the water bed. It slowly moves through the mounds of sand which look like the ribs of an emaciated being. It immediately draws a picture of a sick river in the same manner as it draws the imagery of death and starvation through exposed ribs. The water gates get clogged due to the bits of straw and women's hair. The poet succeeds in drawing a picture of morbid humour for the reader, despite the seriousness of the theme. For instance, the reader may laugh at the thought of a choked watergate. The rusty bars of the gates and the bridge over the river reveal the patch work of having been repaired. It is evident that the river is not looked after and maintained properly.

3. '*The wet stones . . . lounging in the sun.*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the poet presents two striking similies which enhance the tableau-like effect created by the images.

Explanation

River Vaigai dries up in summer and is reduced to a dry trickle, yet there is some beauty is left in it. The poet makes use of the vivid similes to describe the beauty that is usually ignored by poets. The poet goes on to say that the wet stones lying in the river bed look like sleeping crocodiles. The wet stones shine and resemble crocodiles lying in the water, with only their back showing out of water. Another image is that of water buffaloes resting in the sun. Whereas the wet stones resemble crocodiles, the dry stones appear to be buffaloes. Though the buffaloes lie in water for a long time, their skin remains dry, in this manner the dry stones resemble water buffaloes lying in the sun.

4. '*The poets sang only . . . had the floods.*'

Reference to Context

Here the poet brings to our attention the cold and callous attitude of old as well as new poets. The poet satirizes those who sing 'only' about the river in the flood and show indifference to the loss and suffering caused by it.

Explanation

The poet says 'only' floods invoke poetry in old as well as new poets. The irony is highlighted by writing an isolated line in order to emphasize that the poets write 'only' about floods. When the river has almost dried up, no one bothers to notice and write a poem, but the same river inspires poetry during monsoon. The tone here is clearly sarcastic and ironic.

5. '*People everywhere talked . . . the bathing places.*'

Reference to Context

The poet comments upon the people who are insensitive to the loss and suffering of their fellow human beings. Such people are only concerned with figures and data.

Explanation

The poet says that when there are floods, people get an interesting topic to talk about. Everywhere people discuss the rise in the level of water. These people are very particular about the exact inches by which the water level rises. This kind of excessive attention to detail serves the purpose of conveying a rather jaded sense of loss. They even remember how the stone steps of the bathing place are submerged one by one.

6. '*And the way it carried . . . Gopi and Brinda, as usual.*'

Reference to Context

Here the poet draws a picture of destruction caused by the river during flood. Through these lines the poet presents the irony of the situation.

Explanation

In these lines the poet says that the people observe the river during the monsoon and discuss the rising levels of water. These people have also seen how three village houses were destroyed and carried away by the force of the flood. They report of seeing a pregnant woman drowning. They have also witnessed livestock, two cows named Gopi and Brinda, being carried away by the overflowing river. The poet laments

the accuracy and precision with which people discuss unnecessary details of the devastation: 'three' village houses, 'one' pregnant 'woman and 'two' cows. However, these tragedies do not come as a shock for people because as this has become an expected annual statistic for them. The poet brings out the irony of the situation by calling it 'as usual'.

7. '*The new poets still . . . even before birth.*'

Reference to Context

Here the poet laments the callous and cold attitude of the new as well as old poets who remain indifferent towards the suffering of human beings.

Explanation

Ramanujan says the new poets have little to originality to offer as they have merely replicated the style and strategies of their predecessor. In other words, they have only quoted what has been said before. Both generations of poets sang about the floods caused by the overflowing river Vaigai in their poems. They have equally been insensitive towards the tragedy caused by the floods. Little time and creative energy has been spent lamenting and understating the loss of the unnamed pregnant woman who could perhaps have been carrying twins. For Ramanujan, the hypothetical death of three, is a highly sensitive topic that demands it own unique pattern of grief. The poet imagines that the twins in her belly could still be alive as she herself was succumbing to death, kicking desperately while struggling to live. Perhaps they were kicking the 'blank wall', the womb of their mother who was already dead. This tragedy has been completely ignored and overlooked by the old as well as the new poets.

8. '*He said: The river has . . . only once a year.*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the poet satirizes the poets who are inspired to write poetry only once a year when the river is flooding.

Explanation

In these lines the poet says that when the river is flooding, the poets get inspiration to write poetry describing the fullness and vitality of the river. But it happens only once a year during the rainy season, As a result, old and new poets come out with their poetic sensibilities only once a year. Ramanujan is being sarcastic towards the old and new poets whose poetry depends upon the rise and fall in the level of water of the river.

9. '*And then it carries . . . named Gopi and Brinda.*'

Reference to Context

The poet has emphasized the destruction caused by the floods. These lines are a mere repetition of the second stanza, but powerful due to the satire. It is the indifference that the poet tries to capture.

Explanation

In these lines the poet says that every year during the monsoon, there are floods. However, people have become so used to the devastation that they are already in a position to anticipate the destruction: three village houses, two cows and one pregnant

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woman. It is ironic that the cows have names, Gopi and Brinda, whereas the pregnant woman has no identify.

10. *'And one pregnant woman . . . to tell them apart.'*

Reference to Context

The poet comes to a conclusion that every year the river gets flooded and people have now become desensitized to these calamities. They are no longer disturbed by the sorrow of loss. Instead, they appear to be consumed by the unnecessary excess of recording the rise and fall in the water level and other trifles.

Explanation

The poet concludes by saying that though both the old as well as new poets have described floods in their poetry, attitude towards the victims of the devastation is what sets the tone of poetry apart from rest. In an elaborate attempt to record unnecessary details, the real subject of the devastation has been neglected. The pregnant woman goes unnamed and whereas livestock that has also been lost merits an accurate mention. This inversion of thematic preoccupation causes the poet to reflect on the nature of loss and the attitude that one observes in a case where loss can be anticipated, even chronicled. By giving examples of nebulous recordings that people appear to be discussing in detail, Ramanujan explores a peculiar reaction to loss. . Perhaps, the pregnant woman was expecting twins who had no different identification marks on their bodies that would differentiate one from the other. By lingering on the hypothetical life and death of the twins, the poet brings out the pathos of the victims. The unspeakable tragedy of the drowned woman and the subsequent and rather vivid death of the imagined twins in her womb resonates the sense of loss.

2.3.2 Irony in *A River*

A River describes two different images of the river Vaigai – one in summer and the other in during monsoon. Whereas in summer the river is reduced to a dry trickle, in the rainy season, the river tends to flood. But the irony of the situation is that 'the poets sang only of flood'. Another example of irony is found in the poem when the poet becomes a mere observer and maintains an attitude of complete detachment in order to arouse the pity in readers. He simply describes the situation that though many poets, old and new, have written poetry about the flooding river, they never referred to the aftermath of the destruction. New poets only quote the old and keep themselves at a distance from chronicling the details and effects of destruction. There is more irony in the lines 'the river has enough water to be poetic about only once a year….'. It satirizes the poets who get inspiration to write poetry only once a year when the river floods. It also highlights the fact that only a casual treatment has been given to the damage caused by the flood.

2.3.3 Theme of *A River*

The theme of the poem *A River* is to bring out the indifferent and the cold attitude of the old as well as new poets towards the loss and suffering of human beings. The poem unfolds many layers of meanings and comments on the different generations of poets who completely ignore the misery around them and romanticize the river during the monsoon. The poem also reveals a dual picture of the river – one in summer and the other in the rainy season. In summer it dries up because of the excessive heat and resembles a thin narrow stream which doesn't attract any poetic flourishes. . However,

in monsoon, the river exhibits its vigour and vitality and becomes a source of inspiration for all the poets – old as well as new. As the poet ironically says:

'the river has water enough
to be poetic about only once a year...'

Though the poets sing about the river in flood, their cold and insensitive attitude towards the destruction and the resultant tragedy is a matter of concern. It is certainly very disappointing that 'they sang only of the floods', when they should have displayed sensitivity towards the sorrow and suffering of the people. The poem rightfully raises the question of the social role and responsibility of a poet towards society.

2.3.4 Structure of *A River*

The poem displays the characteristic feature of Indo-Anglian poetry in creating lines that have been written in an inconsistent and irregular manner. The structure of the poem is not coherent in the sense that there are four paragraphs of uneven length. The initial paragraph is even shorter than the rest of the arrangements. However, two isolated lines stand apart in the poem but they play a significant role in consolidating the entire poem. Another feature that can be discussed under structure is that the poem has no rhyme scheme at all.

The first paragraph, which is very short, introduces the reader to the concept that would be elaborated gradually in subsequent paragraphs. It talks about Madurai as the city of temples and poets, further emphasizing what we will be discussing in the rest of the poem – the poets who sing of cities and temples.

The second paragraph describes how the much celebrated river is reduced to a thin stream of water during summers. However, the single line brings to focus that the old as well as new poets 'only' sing about the flooded river.

The next paragraph brings to our attention the destruction caused by the annual floods. This picture of destruction and sadness is re-emphasized in the last paragraph with its repetition. The poem ends with another single line which becomes the part of the explanation of the whole poem. Perhaps, the pregnant woman was expecting identical twins who had no marks of identification on their bodies. The mother would have made them wear the diapers of different colours in order to be able to distinguish one from the other. But the grim reality of all three lives perishing makes the irony even more hard-hitting.

2.4 RAMANUJAN'S *OBITUARY*: TEXT AND SUMMARY

Obituary

Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table of papers,
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him,

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Check Your Progress

3. What is the significance of reporting the names of the lost livestock?
4. Why is the closing passage so tragic?
5. How does the poet describe the attitude of other poets?
6. List the similies in the poem.
7. What is the irony in the statement 'the poets only sang of the floods'.
8. What is the relevance of 'as usual' in the poem under discussion?

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a house that leaned
slowly through our growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard.
Being the burning type,
he burned properly
at the cremation

as before, easily
and at both ends,
left his eye coins
in the ashes that didn't
look one bit different,
several spinal discs, rough,
some burned to coal, for sons

to pick gingerly
and throw as the priest
said, facing east
where three rivers met
near the railway station;
no longstanding headstone
with his full name and two dates

to holdin their parentheses
everything he didn't quite
manage to do himself,
like his caesarian birth
in a brahmin ghetto
and his death by heart-
failure in the fruit market.

But someone told me
he got two lines
in an inside column
of a Madras newspaper
sold by the kilo
exactly four weeks later
to streethawkers

who sell it in turn
to the small groceries
where I buy salt,
coriander,
and jaggery
in newspaper cones
that I usually read

for fun, and lately
in the hope of finding
these obituary lines.
And he left us
a changed mother
and more than
one annual ritual.

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SUMMARY

As the title of the poem suggests, *Obituary* is written as a creative response to the tragic event of the death of his father. The narrator says that when his father died, he left behind him a dusty table full of papers, some unpaid debts and daughters to be married. We do not perceive any great affection on the part of the narrator for his father. It appears that the narrator is not as much aggrieved by his father's death as he feels burdened with the liabilities his father has left him. The narrator then mentions a bed wetting grandson that reveals that there is an infant in the house. The infant was named after his grandfather (as is the custom in many places in India). It shows that the naming of the grandson was just a formality, and the name was decided by the toss of a coin. The introductory paragraph is informative with regard to the narrator's relation to his father and his financial condition. Though there is no clear contextual demarcation within the poem, the spaces denote the structural division of the poem into separate paragraphs.

The second paragraph continues further information about their house, to give which appears to be slowly and gradually leaning over an old coconut tree in their yard. He says that all of them have witnessed this gradual inclination of the house through their growing years as they have always lived in that house. The coconut tree itself seems to be bending in the yard and not growing straight upwards. It may be recognized as their general household condition which is decaying gradually and now with the death of the father, the responsibility of household directly shifts to the son(s).

After describing the house as a metaphor for their deteriorating quality of life, the poet brings our attention to his father, but he does that in an ironic manner. He says that the father was the 'burning type'. It could be suggestive of the father's fiery temper or a reference to the father's physicality of being dried and parched that he burnt well in the cremation. He concludes the lines by saying that his father's cremation took place in accordance with the Hindu customs as the father disappeared effortlessly from this world. In order to gain strength and accept the tragedy of his father's death, the poet finds respite in irony, through which, he tries to detach himself from his father. He goes on to say that the cremation of his father took place as per the Hindu tradition and he 'burned properly' 'as before easily at both ends', signifying that he had lived a fulfilling life and died a contended death. When his father got cremated, there was another ceremony according to Hindu customs according to which, the sons of the deceased pick the ashes and bones and immerse them in the holy river. Thus, the narrator says that he picked his father's ashes and found the 'eye coins' 'that didn't look one bit different'. The image describes the nature of his father, probably when he was alive; there was the 'same' cold look in his eyes. He also observed that there were several bits of spinal discs, some of those were half-burnt and had become rough and some had turned to coal having completely burnt. The narrator struggles hard to convey the pain that a son feels while performing the last rites of his father.

The narrator ironically comments on the various rituals and ceremonies associated with the dead. The priest who performed the last rites of the narrator's father directs the sons to carefully pick the ashes and bones and immerse them into the holy water at the meeting point of three rivers near the railway station. The reference to the three rivers brings out the analogy of the three sacred rivers—the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati that meet at Triveni Sangam in Allahabad. As per Hindu mythology, it is believed that the deceased attains salvation if the sons perform the last rites by the banks of this holy confluence. The priest also directs the sons to do the needful while facing towards the east. The narrator further tells us that he did not erect any monument in the memory of his father. 'No longstanding headstone' was intended to commemorate the name of the father as well as the two important dates within the brackets, i.e., the day when he was born, and the day he died.

The narrator says he was unable to parenthesize the two important events of his father's life – the day he was born and the day he died as he himself did not exercise any control over these events. The father could not manage to be born naturally, as a caesarian operation was performed to bring him to this world. The narrator discloses the fact that the father was brought to the world with the intervention of doctors. This was to emphasize that the father could exercise no control over the events of his life from the time that he was born. Similarly his death was also a sudden event over which father had no control. He died due to heart failure in a local fruit market.

The narrator comes to know that his father's obituary appeared in some local newspaper. He was told by someone that his father had got an obituary notice published to inform people about his death. He looks for scraps of the newspaper so that he may come across those 'two lines in an inside column' that his father got published for himself. He expects to find that obituary notice after four weeks as the newspaper would first be 'sold by the kilo' to the street vendors, who would then sell it to small grocery shopkeepers, where the newspaper would be folded in cones in order to wrap up salt, coriander and jaggery. If, by chance, the narrator would come across that particular newspaper cone in which his father's obituary appeared, he would be able to read it. He says usually he reads the newspaper wrappers just to have fun, but this time it would be for a different reason. He hopes to find his father's obituary notice in one such newspaper wrapper.

The narrator, however, goes back to the point where he started. The concluding lines are very tragic and painful as they convey the sadness and pain of the family of the deceased. The narrator continues to describe what his father has left for him. As in the opening lines he had listed the liabilities in the form of 'debts and daughters', now he informs us that the father has also left behind him their mother. The mother has completely changed after his father's death. These lines reveal the intensity of pain that the mother has suffered as a result of her husband's death. For the narrator, now she is a 'changed mother', a mother who has undergone trauma and has transformed as a result of it. However, this is not all. There is much more to what the father has left behind. The legacy also includes 'more than one annual ritual'. It refers to the various rituals that the sons and the other family members would be required to perform in the memory of the father. This is a reference to another Hindu custom of having some rituals performed every year for the salvation of the soul of the deceased person.

2.4.1 Historical Context of the Poem

Ramanujan's poetry is deeply rooted in India and his poems richly present him 'both as a propagator of Hinduism and a poet of Indian identity.' (Nayak, Bhagat 'The Axis of Hindu Consciousness in A. K. Ramanujan's poetry). His poem *Obituary* deals with the memory of the father who recently passed away. In dealing with the rituals and ceremonies associated with the dead, Ramanujan displays his awareness of Hindu tradition. The reference to a point 'where three rivers meet ' and 'more than one annual ritual' reveals that his Indian upbringing and exposure to Hindu customs is well blended with his awareness and recognition of the flaws and faults of ancient orthodox Hinduism. It is a typical feature of Ramanujan's poetry that he constantly looks to the past, recalling the behaviour, actions and temperaments of his relatives.

In *Obituary*, Ramanujan's deft use of irony brings out his creative tension in dealing with his father's death. 'Ramanujan's poetry derives its complexity from western modernity and oriental orthodoxy' (Sivaramkrishna).

2.4.2 Important Passages for Explanation

1. '*Father when he passed . . . a coin after him*'

Reference to Context

These are the opening lines of A. K. Ramanujan's poem *Obituary*. In these lines the poet introduces us to the legacy that his father has left behind. As expected from the title of the poem, it is meant to be an obituary of the poet's father in which he should ideally be talking about the fond memories of his father and the pain that his death has caused to the family. However, the poet uses an ironical tone throughout the poem.

Explanation

The narrator says that his father has passed away and what he left behind for the family was a table full of papers on which dust had gathered. The father also left the family some unpaid debts and unmarried daughters. The alliteration in 'debts and daughters' highlight the daughters as liabilities because they are unmarried. In the absence of the father, the responsibility of their marriage falls onto the sons. The father has also left behind an infant grandson, who still wets the bed. The infant was named after his grandfather. The above lines do not convey the father's death as an event of sorrow. Rather the narrator reveals that he was burdened with the unpaid debts and other liabilities, which his father could not carry out in his lifetime.

2. '*A house that leaned . . . tree in the yard*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the poet points out the impoverished condition of the family. He brings to focus the general household condition which has deteriorated over time.

Explanation

The narrator says that the father has not just left behind 'debts and daughters' but also a house. The irony is that the house is in a state of gradual decay. The tone of the narrator is somewhat cynical in listing the liabilities left behind as legacy by his father. He says that he has grown up in the same house and has observed the slow and gradual inclination of the house on a coconut tree in their yard. The house becomes

Check Your Progress

9. How has Ramanujan dealt with Hindu tradition in Obituary?
10. What is the legacy that the father has left behind?
11. Why does the poet call his father 'the burning type'?
12. Why does the poet refer to her mother as a 'changed mother'?

the metaphor for the deteriorating quality of their life. The coconut tree against which the house is leaning is itself bent and this suggests a mutual state of dilapidation, enhancing the irony of the father's legacy.

3. '*Being the burning type . . . and at both ends.*'

Reference to Context

Here, the narrator reveals his anxiety and regrets the death of his father. He tries to understand the life of his father, now when he is responsible for the father's unaccomplished tasks. However, he uses an ironical tone to detach himself so that he can prepare himself to fulfil the leftover responsibilities.

Explanation

The narrator says that the father was 'the burning type 'and therefore he 'burned properly 'at the cremation. Here, the narrator refers to his father who always struggled in his life in order to meet the family obligations. He was an ordinary man who was struggling (burning) throughout his life and finally succumbed to death. Therefore, the narrator says that he burnt throughout his life and finally burnt well at the cremation. The narrator feels concerned for the poor father's constant 'burning' when he was alive and finally, 'burning properly' at the cremation. These lines are beset with irony as the narrator chooses a tone of detachment in order to gain strength so that he can come to terms with the loss of his father. The metaphor of burning is used to bring out the morbid spillover of a life that was full of rage and anguish as it was subjected to endless strife, which even after death appears to consume the flesh in a rapid fury.

4. '*Left his eye coins . . . some burned to coal.*'

Reference to Context

The narrator brings to focus the last rites performed in accordance to the Hindu tradition. These last rituals are very painful for the family members of the deceased, especially the sons. According to the Hindu belief, the last rites performed by the sons lead to the salvation of the soul.

Explanation

The narrator does not break the continuity of the list of the things as per the legacy of his father. However, here the listing becomes very tragic as the narrator talks about the 'eye coins' that he found in his father's ashes. He stresses the fact that they looked very similar and the likeness could be linked to his eyes when he was alive. It is quite obvious that it would have been a very painful moment for the son when he went to the funeral pyre and saw his father reduced to ashes. There he found the 'eye coins' that further enhances the tragedy.

5. '*For sons to pick . . . near the railway station*'

Reference to Context

The narrator ironically comments on the rituals and ceremonies associated with the dead. The reference to the meeting point of the three rivers introduces the image of the sacred Hindu legacy of Triveni Sangam in Allahabad.

Explanation

The narrator says the priest performing the last rites of his dead father directs the sons to carefully pick the ashes and bones that are left of him to be immersed in the holy water of the three sacred rivers that meet at a particular point . According to the Hindu belief, the sons face eastward and immerse the ashes of the father in Triveni in Allahabad and this ritual is significant for the salvation of the soul. Incidentally, the three rivers happen to meet near the railway station. So they go to that place and perform the sacred ceremony.

6. '*No longstanding headstone . . . manage to do himself*'

Reference to Context

Here the narrator reveals his father's lack of control over his life. He brings to our attention the inability of the father to manage his life according to his will.

Explanation

The narrator says that he has not erected any monument in the memory of his father. Had he erected 'a longstanding headstone' dedicated to his father, it would require the name of his father to be inscribed on it along with the inscription of two important dates – the day his father was born and another significant day when he died. However, the narrator amuses us by saying that the father lacked any control over his life, so he doesn't want to put the two significant dates in brackets. He says that his father was not even born as a result of his own efforts.

7. '*like his caesarian birth . . . in the fruit market*'

Reference to Context

The narrator describes his father as an inefficient person, who died without completing his worldly duties and had no control over the events of his life.

Explanation

In these lines the narrator refers to his father's caesarian birth and says that he did not ever manage to get his own way in life and it was a regular feature with him ever since he was born. He was born after a caesarian operation, which was performed implying that he was born with a reluctant disposition. Even at the time of his birth, he did not manage to come and face the world on his own. Thus, his birth in a congested Brahmin neighbourhood was an insignificant matter as was his death. He died as a result of heart failure in a local fruit market.

8. '*But someone told me . . . of a Madras newspaper*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the narrator is told by someone about his father's obituary notice in a local newspaper, so he gets restless in finding out the last traces of his father in the scraps of newspaper.

Explanation

The narrator says that a person known to him told him that his father had managed somehow to get an obituary notice published in an inside coloumn of a Madras

newspaper. It shows that though the narrator is trying hard to develop detachment from his father, but in his heart he grieves for his father who is no more.

9. '*Sold by the kilos . . . coriander and jaggery*'

Reference to Context

Here the narrator longs to read the obituary notice of his father. In describing the long process of how that bit of information would reach him, he is shows his keenness in reading the obituary notice.

Explanation

The narrator says that the newspaper is sold in the kilos exactly four weeks after its publication. He knows that the newspaper will follow its own course in reaching him. First, the vendors will buy the newspaper in bulk. They will then sell it to the small grocery shopkeepers who will make newspaper cones in order to wrap the groceries like salt, jaggery and coriander. The narrator personalizes this process by including him in the process. He says that he also buys the groceries in the newspaper cones. So, he expects to come across the obituary notice in one of those newspaper wraps.

10. '*In newspaper cones . . . these obituary lines*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the narrator reveals his helplessness at the loss of his father and also shows that despite the estrangement that he shared with his father, he desperately searches for the last lines of obituary published by his father.

Explanation

The narrator says earlier he used to buy groceries in newspaper cones and would read the news for fun, but now his purpose is completely different. Now, he helplessly waits to read the obituary notice. He buys the groceries and hopes to find out the 'two lines', which have appeared in the newspaper in his father's memory.

11. '*And he left us . . . one annual ritual*'

Reference to Context

These are the concluding lines of Ramanujan's poem. Here the narrator conveys the intensity of the tragic event and recapitulates the sense of loss.

Explanation

The narrator goes back to the beginning where he started listing what his father has left behind. He counted the debts and analyzed the liabilities. But in the end, he brings out the tragic legacy where he mentions that his father has left behind a changed mother'. No words can express the grief of his mother who has completely changed after the death of her husband. He further says that the father has also left them with various ceremonies and rituals to be performed every year in his memory. Here, once again there's a reference to the Hindu ritual of performing various rites every year in the name of the deceased by his family members, especially sons.

2.4.3 Irony in *Obituary*

As the title of the poem suggests, obituary relates to a death and is written in a tone of grief. However, there is more irony and wit in the poem than grief. Ramanujan treats the death of his father in a light-hearted tone. For instance, when the narrator talks about the legacy that the father has left behind, the alliteration created by the juxtaposition of 'debts and daughters', is rather ironic in treatment and style. Therefore, the legacy is more of a liability. There are many more instances of irony, as the father is called 'the burning type' and he 'burned properly at the cremation'. The father's birth through a caesarian operation in a congested Brahmin neighbourhood is as ironic as the insignificance of his death due to heart failure in a local fruit market. Even the concluding lines of the poem have a touch of irony, when the narrator continues with the list of legacy, wherein he says the father also left them 'a changed mother'. We can call the poem as wholly ironical in its treatment of the subject as well as the tone.

A. K. Ramanujan
and Nissim Ezekiel

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2.4.4 Theme of *Obituary*

The theme of the poem is the death of the father and its effect on family members including the narrator and his mother. The poem is written as a remembrance of the father who succumbed to heart failure. Therefore, the title of the poem prepares us for a mournful poem with a tone of grief. However, the narrator has treated the serious theme in a light-hearted and ironical, yet amusing manner. The narrator has cynically described his relation to his father as a strenuous one. He does not invoke a feeling of tragedy in his father's death. Rather, he becomes ironical and comical at several points in the poem. However, we find two obituaries in the poem – one that appear in an inside coloumn of a local newspaper and the other, in the form of a creative response of a son on his father's death.

2.4.5 Structure of *Obituary*

The structure of the poem is quite irregular. However, if we look at the poem without reading it, it appears to have a coherent structure. Its outward appearance has a well defined structure with eight paragraphs of similar length: seven lines each. However, when we read the poem, we find it cannot be divided into different paragraphs. It is a regular and continuous piece of writing, which is thematically connected with the subsequent paragraphs. The paragraphs are linked to one another either with commas or in continuity of expression. However, each line within a paragraph is of a different length – ranging from seven words to one word. The narrator has used alliteration in order to emphasize his point of view, for instance, 'debts and daughters', 'being the burning type to point out two prominent instances.

The first paragraph begins with listing the legacy of the father and the rest of the poem is connected with the same theme throughout, differing here and there, in explaining more about father's nature and the varied rituals and ceremonies associated with the dead. Nevertheless, the concluding lines again connect with the opening lines and continue the listing further. Thus, we can say that despite its irregular structure, the poem is connected from beginning to end.

Activity 1

Read other poems by Ramanujan and write an essay describing his rendition of rural life. You may also comment on how it may have led to the creation of a specific type of Indo-Anglian poetry.

Check Your Progress

13. What does the priest direct the sons to do?
14. What does the caesarian birth of the father refer to?
15. How does the poet relate the small groceries to his father's obituary?
16. List the alliterations used in the poem.
17. Give an example of irony in the poem.
18. What is the theme of *Obituary*?

2.5 NISSIM EZEKIEL: A BRIEF SKETCH

Nissim Ezekiel is considered to be one of most well known names among Indian poets writing in English. His Jewish Parsi that background allowed him to emerge as a personality could not be subjected to simple analysis. His poetry reflects a kind of deep rumination of predicaments that are central to an Indian sensibility.

Ezekiel can be compared to the likes of Ramanujan and Parthasarathy. On a professional level he served as a Professor of English in Bombay University and proved himself to be a man of great intellect. He was a philosopher as well as a poet. Given his Jewish-Parsi upbringing and cultural roots, his affinity for writing in English as an Indian, was truly remarkable. His association with Indian beliefs and worldview paved the way for him to express his complex notion regarding the predicaments of those writing in a foreign language. Ezekiel had his initial schooling in Bombay and after that he joined Wilson College (Bombay). But after his college he flew to Birkbeck College (London) to pursue higher education. His sojourn to England was undertaken so that he could study philosophy under the guidance of C.E.M. Joad. But once there, Ezekiel displayed equal interest in other creative fields such as visual arts, theatre and poetry. While studying he had taken up the position of a clerk at the high commissioner's office in London. But his professional life had not marred his interest either for his intellectual pursuits or for his creative acumen.

Ezekiel being a man of versatile talent, held many significant positions besides being a professor in Bombay. Ezekiel was appointed as the editor of *Quest*, *Imprint* as well as the poetry section of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. He was also a visiting professor to several universities (in India as well as in the US and Australia). Ezekiel also worked as director of a theatre unit in Bombay. The synthesis of poetic aesthetics with philosophical inclinations can be seen clearly in Ezekiel's poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his work, *Latter-Day Psalms*. The book is a collection of his poetical works. His poetry compilation includes *Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Discovery of India* (1956), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Snakeskin and Other Poems* (translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant, 1974), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982) and *Collected Poems* 1952-88 (1989). His plays are collected in the book *The Three Plays* (1969). Some of Ezekiel's popular poems include *Night of the Scorpion*, *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*, *The Railway Clerk*, *Latter-day Psalms*, *In the Theatre*, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.*, and *The Professor*. His compositions concentrated on issues such as love, death, parting, sex, solitude and prayer to identify a few. These works highlight the fact that Ezekiel was constantly engrossed with the complexities of life.

The poems confirmed his belief in the religion of the 'self'. He highlights the efficacy of prayer and makes repeated attempts to connect with his own being. Parthasarathy comments on Ezekiel as a poet whose 'poetry is both the instrument and the outcome of his attempt as a man to come to terms with himself. One finds in his poems the imprint of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level, feelings of loss and deprivation'.

Short Bibliography

Poetry

1952: *Time to Change*
1953: *Sixty Poems*
1956: *The Discovery of India*
1959: *The Third*
1960: *The Unfinished Man*
1965: *The Exact Name*
1974: *Snakeskin and Other Poems, translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant*
1976: *Hymns in Darkness*
1982: *Latter-Day Psalms*
1989: *Collected Poems 1952-88*

Plays

1969: *The Three Plays*

Editor

1965: *An Emerson Reader*
1969: *A Joseph King Reader*
1990: *Another India, Anthology of Fiction and Poetry*

Poems

Night of the Scorpion
The Doctor
Case Study
Poster Prayers
The Traitor
Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher
Latter-day Psalms
The Railway Clerk
Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.
Enterprise
In India
In the Theatre
The Couple
A Time to Change
Island
For Elkana
The Professor
Urban

If we consider Nissim Ezekiel as a poet of the tradition of Indian English writing, we would realize he has made significant contribution to this body of work. One of the notable features of his poetry is the '*Indianness*'. The Indian flavour is reminiscent of Ezekiel's engagement with his country and its countrymen. He used fun and wit to bring about the fallacies of local folks; and sincerely expected to bring about improvement in the situation of the country and his fellow compatriots through his creativity. Ezekiel used his poetry as a vehicle to highlight the deplorable condition that people of India lived in. In the world literature, W. B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot are representatives of the Irish sensibility and the modernways of life. Ezekiel's poetry reflects his quintessentially Indian qualities. Ezekiel has beautifully used Indian experiences as expressions of what we call Indianness. Ezekiel hailed from an immigrant Jewish family though he himself was born and brought up in Mumbai. Besides undertaking trips to various foreign countries, he has lived, worked and earned his livelihood in Mumbai.

As a man of deep knowledge and a poet with gifted observational skills, Ezekiel understood the Indian way of life from close quarters. He has used his creativity to represent the long history of quintessential Indian identity through the socio-cultural representation expressed in a variety of ways.

In Indian writing in English, usually the term 'Indianness', refers to the collage of cultural patterns that reflect Indian society and other socio-political dimensions of Indian life. Ezekiel interweaves most of these elements of Indian life and culture into his poetical works. As a poet who preferred realism, Ezekiel displays an inclination towards seeing his country adopting better living conditions. His works reiterates his love for the nation that eventually became his home. Ezekiel's poems reflect various elements of Indian identity. The concept of Indianness occupies a vital place in Ezekiel's mind which is expressed through his symbolism and imagery. The theme of Indianness is of primary significance to Ezekiel and his poetry that is both: intense and personal. His thoughts and feelings surface through the ambience that is created in the poem and the characters who appear in the poems. The poems of Ezekiel undoubtedly are soaked in Indian flavour as they invariably follow the Indian way of life.

Some Major Works by Ezekiel

One of the most famous poems of Ezekiel is *Night of the Scorpion*. In this poem Ezekiel tells readers about an incident that took place in an Indian village where a woman was stung by a scorpion on a rainy night. The speaker of poem is the lady's son. Ezekiel, through his beautiful composition foregrounds the superstitions prevalent in the village and the love and sympathy that a mother nurtures for her child. Through that unnamed village of India, the poet sheds light on the gullible nature of the rural folk who say that:

May he sit still, they said
May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May the poison purify your flesh
of desire and your spirit of ambition.

But the most amazing response comes from the mother. She sighs with relief and says:

Thank God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children.

The lines highlight the quintessential Indian mother figure who is constantly worried about the welfare and safety of her children. The general folks of the village keep repeating the name of God so as to ward off the ill effects of the bite. Soaked in superstition they believe that recalling God was the only means to find a solution. The victim's husband is shown as a representative of the educated class who are enslaved by reason and skepticism. Ezekiel through this poem conveys the general mentality of the Indian rural population who are still untouched by modern learning.

Another mother figure who is engrossed with her family even in the worst moment of crisis appears in *The Truth about the Floods* . We see the speaker pleading:

I have not eaten for three days
My husband has been washed away
My parents have abandoned me
My son is dying
I cannot find my daughter.

The bonds of family and at large the bonds of humanity that find a voice in Ezekiel's works. He appears to be in charge of representing the woes of humanity in general.

Nissim Ezekiel dealt with the interiors of the home, i.e. the domestic space in order to explore different relationships and bonds. In an interesting poem revolving around the age old rivalry of the daughter-in-law and mother- in-law, *Edinburgh Interlude-lightly* Ezekiel depicts the perils of a newlywed bride. In a matter of fact way the mother-in-law tells her new daughter-in-law:

Don't worry, dear,
I need no help in the kitchen.
Leave it to me, please.

The daughter-in-law, not sensing anything harmful, innocently leaves the hearth and the kitchen to her mother-in-law. But soon afterwards the father-in-law tells the new bride in the family:

You must try to understand
your mother-in-law.
She's a very kind woman, you know.
There aren't many who do
all the work in the kitchen.

Much to the daughter-in-law's distress even her husband informs her,

If you quarrel with my mother,
you quarrel with me.

Ezekiel's alarming familiarity with the concerns of the domestic as well as the public sphere makes him a popular poet and a poet of the masses.

Despite being a land of plentitude, poverty was and to some extent remains synonymous with India. In *The Railway Clerk* Nissim Ezekiel focuses on urban India. He speaks about the poverty and ugliness that shrouds the big cities. As the title suggests *The Railway Clerk* is about a poor railway clerk. He struggles to survive in a wretched condition. Hailing from the middle class he says

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It isn't my fault
I do what I'm told
but still I am blamed.
This year, my leave application
was twice refused.

His being obedient does not earn him any laurels. In fact, he is criticized severely for trivial issues. But this is not his only complaint; he mentions how his leave application had already been rejected twice in the same the year. To make matters worse, he says

My wife is always asking for more money.
Money, Money where to get Money?

This tug of war between desire and dissatisfaction leads to corruption, which is one of the major troubles in India. The clerk reflects upon his state and laments his lack of a proper education which is why perhaps he is not getting any recognition.

I am living far off in Borivali,
My children are neglecting studies,
How long this can go on?

The railway clerk was seen an emblem of poverty and strife that continue to be two integral parts of Indian politics and its challenges. The clerk is the symbolic rendition of the disillusioned youth who has lost faith in life. The insistence of the clerk's wife on arranging extra money to meet basic household expenses is not unjustified but even the clerk finds himself at a loss trying to figure out how to arrange additional income. Moreover, he is presented as one who does not accept bribes. Ezekiel tidily incorporates the problem of corruption that haunts government offices in India. Ezekiel's poems are marked with an extraordinary sense of realism which indeed was different from the idealism and romanticism that his literary predecessors had.

Ezekiel's works reflect India in all its varied reflection. Having dealt with rural, urban, private and public lives; he next focused on linguistic peculiarities of India, especially the way English language is used. In his poem *A Very Indian Poem in Indian English*, Ezekiel incorporates the progressive tense, to reproduce a variety that is popular in Indian English:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct.
I should say even 200% correct.

There is a glaring difference between the content and the words. While the content without any doubt highlights the significance of Gandhian ethos in political consciousness and intellect, the language that is used to engage in this invokes humor and parody, especially if we take into account the English words and odd syntactical constructions that are typical of Indian English. Ezekiel was poet of India who portrayed India in its multifarious vivacity with zest, humour and concern.

2.5.1 Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion:* Text and Summary

NOTES

I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

Parting with his poison - flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room -
he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the mud-baked walls
they searched for him: he was not found.
They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.

May he sit still, they said
May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
May the sum of all evil
balanced in this unreal world

against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain.
May the poison purify your flesh

of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre,
the peace of understanding on each face.
More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
more insects, and the endless rain.
My mother twisted through and through,
groaning on a mat.
My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.

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I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation.
After twenty hours
it lost its sting.

My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.

SUMMARY

Ezekiel's best known poem, *Night of the Scorpion*, deals with an accident where a scorpion has stung a woman and the public gathered takes remedial measures to save the victim. The narrator in this monologue is the son of the woman.

The poem originates from the speaker's emotions, recollected at leisure in a tranquil state of mind. He recalls that unfortunate incident that took place one night. His mother was stung by a scorpion that had hidden beneath a sack of rice on a rainy night.

As the news of the scorpion bite spread, villagers started assembling in the speaker's house, chanting the name of God; their chanting sounded like the buzzing of bees. People searched for the scorpion in every corner of the house, but in vain. They believed that as the scorpion moved its poison spread in the woman's body. The villagers wished that the lady's sins of her former lives be burnt away by the poisonous venom. They believed she must have committed some sin in her previous life for which she had to pay in this life. The villagers also believed that the punishment will reduce the misfortune of her next life. (She will have to suffer less in her next birth as she had undergone some part of the punishment already.) They said that the poison of the scorpion sting would purify her flesh and diminish her desires and ambitions for material things. The implication is that joy and sorrow come to man as a consequences of the virtuous and evil deeds committed during this life or in former lives.

The peasants seated on the floor did not seem too worried or concerned. Each and every face there gave an impression that it was fully aware of the metaphysical facts. The speaker's mother cried, twisting and writhing in pain.

The speaker's father was known to be a skeptic and a rationalist. He did not believe in the villagers' words but he was trying every curse and blessing and every therapeutic measure he was aware of. He applied powder mixed with herbs. He even poured a little paraffin oil on the toe of his wife where the scorpion had stung and lit a match to it. A holy man was also summoned to rid the lady of the misery. She finally got relief in about twenty hours.

Despite the twenty-hour long ordeal, the victim was relieved that her children were safe and that the scorpion had chosen her and not them. This indicates that she would have suffered a lot more if any of her children had been the victim. It also signifies the lady's selfless nature and that she cared for the well-being of her children more than for her own.

The poet in this incident records four kinds of responses—the religious mystical response of the villagers; the rational response of the speaker's father; the ritualistic response of the holy man and; the self-sacrificial response of the mother.

NOTES

The buzz '*the name of God a hundred times/to paralyze the Evil One.*'

This approach is based on the metaphysics that there exist in the universe two kinds of forces—the force of goodness headed by God and the force of evil headed by Satan. In order to counter the forces of evil we need the help of God and His goodness. The peasants' wishing that the lady's sins of the previous life be burnt away, that her present suffering may decrease her suffering of the next life, that the sum of evil may be diminished by her pain, and the poison may purify her flesh of desire, signifies that according to them the lady had been punished for some misdeed in the present life or in some former life. The father trying various remedies signifies his faith in allopathy. The holy incantation and performance of rites is a ritualistic approach in which one resorts to praying to God to realize the desired end. The mother thanking God for the scorpion picking her and sparing her children is an instinctive self-sacrificial approach as for her it is the welfare of her children that is more important than her own welfare.

This episode proves that all actions, whether taken by religious minded people or by the rationalist father or by the holy man, were exercises in vain as it takes twenty hours for the pain to subside. Twenty hours is a long time for the body to counterbalance the poison injected into it by the scorpion. If any of the measures had been effective, the pain would not have taken such a long time to subside. The persona ridicules even the rationalists, as the father, who is a sceptic and a rationalist, as the poet describes him, tries 'every curse and blessing'. If he is a rationalist, he should not believe that blessings and curses can bring any relief to a patient stung by a scorpion.

He also laughs at the superstitious belief that the poison spreads in the victim's blood with every movement of the scorpion:

With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said.

The mocking tone in the poem has rightly been resented by T.V. Reddy who says in his article *Nissim Ezekiel: Dissociation of Sensibility*

> The situation is cleverly presented, but at the same time more intelligently the writer has levelled his pungent attack on the illiterate rural folk. The attack is all the more vicious because it is at once contemptuous and brutal without any remote suggestion of sympathy or empathy to the unlettered poor folk. The ignorant ideas and superstitious speculations of the villagers are cleverly but callously transformed into mathematical equations. While the sting of the scorpion loses its power after twenty hours, the sting of the poet's vitriolic pen gains its savage power.
>
> (T.R. Sharma (ed.), *Essays on Nissim Ezekiel,* Meerut: Shalabh, 1994, pp.143-44)

The poet does not find anything positive in any of the approaches as far as the problem of scorpion-sting is concerned. This may suggest that the poet rejects every alternative explored in the poem without giving his own preference.

The poem has been written in free verse and the lines do not rhyme. However, a large number of lines are octosyllabic interspersed with hexasyllabic lines. For instance, the lines, 'was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours . . .' and 'to crawl beneath a sack of rice' are octosyllabic, while the lines 'he risked the rain again. And 'may the sum of evil . . .' are hexasyllabic.

Check Your Progress

19. What are the four views that have been explored in the poem?
20. What is the significance of the poem's closing lines?

NOTES

2.6 *GOODBYE PARTY FOR MISS PUSHPA T. S.*: TEXT AND SUMMARY

Friends,
our dear sister
is departing for foreign
in two three days,
and
we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.

You are all knowing, friends,
what sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
I don't mean only external sweetness
but internal sweetness.
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
even for no reason
but simply because she is feeling.

Miss Pushpa is coming
from very high family.
Her father was renowned advocate
in Bulsar or Surat,
I am not remembering now which place.

Surat? Ah, yes,
Once only I stayed in Surat
with family members
of my uncle's very old friend,
his wife was cooking nicely...
that was long time ago.

Coming back to Miss Pushpa
she is most popular lady
with men also and ladies also.

Whenever I asked her to do anything,
she was saying, 'Just now only
I will do it.' That is showing
good spirit. I am always
appreciating the good spirit.

Pushpa Miss is never saying no.
Whatever I or anybody is asking
she is always saying yes,
and today she is going
to improve her prospect

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and we are wishing her bon voyage.
Now I ask other speakers to speak
and afterwards Miss Pushpa
will do summing up.

SUMMARY

The poem, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.* is collected in Nissim Ezekiel's sixth volume of poems titled *Hymns in Darkness*. In the poem, Ezekiel unleashed humour and ridicules the erroneous yet funny ways in which grammar, syntax and idioms are used by many Indians, while they make an attempt to speak or write in English. In the most amusing fashion he mimics the Indian style of English speaking.

At the outset of the poem we are told that it is a farewell speech. A get-together party has been arranged and a number of acquaintance and friends have been invited so that they may formally say 'goodbye' to Miss Pushpa who is on the verge of 'departing for foreign' in 'two or three days' to improve her prospects. The speaker conveys her to have a blissful voyage and extends words of eloquence in favour of her 'good qualities'. In an incoherent manner, after initiating the topic, the speaker moves on to elaborate on how Miss Pushpa has always been amicable. She is, according to the speaker, a lady of sweet disposition that reflects 'externally and internally'. The speaker points out that Miss Pushpa smiles perpetually even when there is no any particular reason to be happy. The speaker's memory deceives him and he cannot remember whether Miss Pushpa hails from Bulsar or Surat, yet he does remember that she comes from a respectable family.

I am not remembering now which place.

Surat? Ah, yes,
Once only I stayed in Surat
With family members
Of my uncle's very old friend
His wife is cooking nicely....
That was long time ago.

The intentional touch of drama is apparent when someone reminds the speaker that she hails from Surat, to which the speaker gets engrossed in his own memories of Surat while coming back to the topic of Miss Pushpa just in time so that he can recount the many virtues that Miss Pushpa has. The speaker seems to be a poor conveyer of words and definitely not a right person to address a goodbye speech as he gets carried away and refers to irrelevant facts, like the time when he once stayed at his uncle's very old friend's place where, as the speaker recounted, his 'wife was cooking nicely.'

The speaker tells that Miss Pushpa is extremely popular among both men and women. The speaker claims that whenever he had asked Miss Pushpa to help him out, she would promptly reply 'Just now only I will do it.' Definitely the speaker intends to highlight Miss Pushpa's willingness to help in any work but the unnecessary addition of 'just' and 'only' marks the speaker's Indianness and brings to light his ignorance of the usage of certain English words.

Moreover the speaker's repeated use of the present continuous tense instead of the simple present tense is demonstrated throughout the poem. While appreciating

Miss Pushpa for her good nature the speaker mentions that 'she is always saying yes' whenever he or anyone else 'is asking' for any help. The speaker brings a closure to his amusing speech by conveying that they all wish Miss Pushpa bon voyage. He even clarifies that Miss Pushpa 'will do the summing up', after the other speakers have concluded their talk. This indirectly implies that Miss Pushpa will enthusiastically and positively respond to the words of praise. Nissim Ezekiel, in this poem, composes the odd ways in which Indians use English especially while speaking.

Notes

Line 2: 'dear sister' – Addressing the guest of honour of a certain programme as 'dear' or 'beloved' followed by some relational term such as sister, brother and professor is a common practice in India.

Line 3: 'departing for foreign' – Here the word 'foreign' is used as a noun and the word departing is used in the sense of leaving or going.

Line 4: 'two three days' – Within a few days (word to word translation of a parallel regional expression).

Line 6: 'we are meeting today'– This is one of the numerous instances when the simple present tense is sacrificed in the poem.

Line 7: 'Bon voyage' – An expression of French origin used to convey good wishes to a traveler for his/her impending journey.

Line 10: 'External' – Anything to do with or connected with the exterior or outside or outer section.

Line 10-11: An interesting way to express that Pushpa is not just a woman with graceful exterior, but also possess many beautiful qualities of mind and heart.

Line 12-13: The lines convey that Pushpa is always smiling, which signifies that she is either extremely courteous or perhaps a little dim-witted or both.

Line 15-19: These lines are spoken to convey the social status of Miss Pushpa, yet they appear to be vague as the speaker has trouble providing specific information about the guest of honour (Miss Pushpa). One is not sure how Miss Pushpa herself reacted to such a scenario. In phrases, such as, 'very high family', 'renowned advocate' the use of indefinite article is missing.

Line 20: 'Surat? Ah yes' – The line implies that someone has helped the speaker remember that the place in context is Surat.

Line 22: 'family members' – Is a common Indian phrase to identify people of the same family.

Line 22-25: Earlier, in India people did not shy away from being a guest to someone else even if they were remotely acquainted!

Line 24-25: The words 'that was long time ago' instills in a sense of ambiguity as well as irony.

Line 27-28: 'Popular lady with men also, and ladies also' – an unexpected use of the words 'men and ladies', these terms are usually not put together, the correct usage is, men and women, ladies and gentlemen.

Line 30: 'Just now only I will do it' – This is another example of a typical Indian-English expression, which probably is a direct translation of an Indian phrase.

Line 34: 'Pushpa Miss': This distortion of the word order is not unusual. It is common in Indian way of speaking English.

Line 40-42: It means Miss Pushpa will generously reply to all words spoken in her favour.

2.6.1 Elements of 'Indianness' in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*

Nissim Ezekiel's association with Bombay (now Mumabi) is well established. Bombay for him was not just a geographic location which extended to him a home and an identity as well as a means for expressing dilemma and other imbalances. For Ezekiel, Bombay turns out to be a place that acts at numerous levels of understanding. On the one hand, it is representative of everyday aspects of life representing modern India in all its mundane vibrancy and on the other; it also tries to uphold the intellectual and philosophical existence. But the matter of mind and existence are not segregated into watertight compartments. Ezekiel through his poetry knits the mundane with the intellect in a most fascinating manner.

Goodbye party for Miss Pushpa T. S. is an Indian poem by all means. In this beautiful lyric, Ezekiel has managed to capture the real essence of Indian English. While reading this poem for the first time, one will probably end up laughing. The poem written in English sheds light on Indian qualities while making fun of Pidgin English that many Indians use.

Also termed as *Babu English*, such English is essentially parodied by the poet. This kind of English makes fun of the obsession for the 'foreign' language. This poem is one of those compositions of Nissim Ezekiel which demonstrates one of his seminal characteristics, which went on to become his hallmark feature as far as his poetic career is concerned.

Ezekiel through this poem has successfully managed to reproduce the way in which Indians make use of incorrect English and grammar. The laughter of the situation emerges from a peculiar problem; since English is a foreign language many people tend to first recall their thoughts in their own mother tongue and then translate it (in their mind, of course) word by word and phrase by phrase as they continue to speak or write. The result at times is as funny and is disastrous.

Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling' is an example of how a language such as English is highly nuanced. Further, the poem makes fun of fashionable girls of high society who lack intellectual prowess. It is a poem which takes on the mood of social satire where the poet has brought out ironical implications of using pretentious as well as improper English the Indian *sahibs* and *memsahibs* took recourse to. Moreover, it is common to the Indian scenario where people in general prefer to use the present continuous tense instead of simple present tense. This erroneous use of grammar has been made fun of in the entire poem (Ezekiel writes: 'we are meeting' instead of we have met; 'you are all knowing' instead of you all know; 'I am not remembering' instead of ' do not remember).

As you proceed with the poem you will come across some phrases which are specifically Indian. For example: 'departing to foreign', 'two three days', 'cooking nicely', 'not remembering now' and many others.

Another remarkable element is the fact that Pushpa is unfailingly addressed as 'Miss Pushpa' and as 'dear sister'. Yet, she is never addressed by her first name.

Interestingly Miss Pushpa's association with grace and manners (she is both 'internally' and 'externally' 'sweet'), has a direct correlation to her very 'high family' connection. After all her father happens to be a 'renowned advocate'; thus highlighting how family background and professional achievements is of utmost importance to an Indian sensibility. It is perhaps not a coincidence that these facts are recollected during her farewell party.

Well of course, Ezekiel must be credited for crafting such an amazing poem out of an ostensibly mundane situation such as a farewell party. Moreover, he not only successfully manages to hold our attention but also provide us with hearty laughter without compromising on the aesthetic or on the literary quality. Even if we analyze the poem from a post-colonial perspective, we realize his empathy with the native speakers for molding the foreign language to their convenience (which was far removed from the original standards).

Goodbye party for Miss Pushpa T. S. is often identified as a parody on Indian English. It must be kept in mind that each part of India demonstrates a specific style of speaking English in terms of the nuances, diction and usage. This humorous reconstruction of a specific use of English based on topography acts as a process of self-revelation (as far as the nature of the speaker is concerned). Language, after all, unleashes the unconscious traits of the speaker's mind. The language of Indian English speakers also reveals the socio-cultural context that is specific to their geographic condition. In fact, it is interesting to note that the words, 'goodbye party' has a striking resemblance to the term 'birthday party'.

2.6.2 The Use of Language in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*

The language of *Goodbye party for Miss Pushpa T.S.* is interesting. The poet takes readers to the party where along with other guests; readers also become part of the farewell party organized for Miss Pushpa T.S. The party hosted to bid farewell to a lady leaving for overseas underlines the fact that the incident takes place within a specific socio-cultural context as the idea itself, of organizing a gathering to celebrate someone's foreign tour is taken from the West. Thus, someone who has been mildly acquainted with English culture would hold such a gathering and the guests in all respect would identify with such an idea. Being in a party like this, one is expected to come across people of repute conversing with each other in English (as a mark of high standard). Ezekiel takes the readers on a tour to a party brimming with ides communicated in English. The poem brings out several fallacies that are associated with the notion of a 'goodbye party', the language in which people converse and its significance.

The poem starts off as a rollercoaster ride taking readers through all the aspects of Indian English language. From the very beginning, the poet remains focused on the language of Indians. Interestingly, Miss Pushpa is never addressed without the prefix –Miss. She is referred as 'dear sister'; addressing a lady who hails from a good family as calling someone 'sister' is a common practice in India and is considered to be a polite and civilized mode of addressing another. In the first stanza the speaker specifies the reason for the gathering by saying that Miss Pushpa will leave for foreign shores in 'two three days' (instead of the correct phrase – two or three days). In his attempt to reinforce Miss Pushpa as a woman who is kind and gentle, the speaker says she possess 'external sweetness' and 'internal sweetness'. This appears comical because it gives the impression that the speaker has directly translated the common

regional phrase to express the same in English. Again, Miss Pushpa is suggested to be 'smiling and smiling even for no reason'; given the assumption that this was intended as a compliment, the speaker probably wanted to say that Miss Pushpa was a lady of a pleasant temperament .

While introducing her family background to the audience. The speaker mentions that Miss Pushpa hails from a 'high family'. What he indented to say was that she came from a family which was well educated and affluent and well-respected. Once again the language used to identify the family background of the guest of honour, suggests the Indianness of the speaker. Ezekiel employs the language of fun and sarcasm to convey how the respectability factor of a lady in India rests not on her own achievement(s) but on her family. Moreover, the speaker's use of 'just now only I will do' probably meant to indicate that Miss Pushpa was more than ready to appear agreeable and willing.

Since it is an informal party the language used has a conversational tone. Such conversational language is a perfect backdrop for a party. Repetitive use of the present continues tense ('departing', 'meeting', 'knowing', 'smiling and smiling', 'cooking nicely', 'appreciating the good spirit') not only suggests the misuse of grammar and the Indianization of the Queen's language but also indicates the continuous progression of the party. One can recall another 'very Indian poem in Indian English' where a similar order of grammar is used:

> Other day I am reading in newspaper
> (Everyday I'm reading Times of India
> To improve my English language)
> How one goonda fellow
> Throw stone at Indirabehn.

Apart from the grammar, the tone employed in the poem is that of sarcasm. Through sarcasm, the poet tries to highlight a typically Indian obsession with the language of the British. Furthermore, it is implied that the poet's use of incorrect English is deliberate as it is meant to parody the notion of it being associated to progress and culture. Ezekiel, through the use of the language and setting, was pointing at the shallow imitation of English culture that lingered on in Indian society. Needless to say, through the language used in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.,* Ezekiel effectively communicates the hallmark features of the post-colonial world.

One significant aspect of Ezekiel's writing is the use of simple language and diction. The poet conveys the most intricate ideas through the simplest of language. His philosophically intense poems also reflect a similar concern. Being an author whose subject matter centered on India he adopted an idiom that reflected and resonated with India and a quintessential Indian consciousness. One just needs a basic functional knowledge of English language to read and understand the poem. Though probably, a deeper understanding of literature and maturity would be required to understand the way people are projected and through them a nation is constructed in the poem.

Ezekiel never fell prey to the archaic or grand vocabulary that would have acted as an obstacle in appreciating the essence of the poem. Yet, despite being home to the most simple language, his poetry is always laced with music and rhythm. Even when one reads this peom, one realizes that the flow is never once compromised. Moreover, the use of Indian english in the poem gives the poem a realistic appearance which makes the experience of reading all the more enjoyable.

Numerous poets from India have taken recourse to the English language as a medium of creativity. Yet, Ezekiel earns the distinction of representing the national aspirations and culture in the most authentic manner. Most critics unanimously agree to this achievement of his whereby he was able to successfully voice his nationalist concerns.

The syntactical uniqueness that *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.* reflects makes it clear (even if not in the first reading) that Ezekiel's sensibility was deeply rooted in Indian consciousness.

Being able to create a distinct Indian flavour, Ezekiel's contribution to the body of Indian writing in English is remarkable. Three of his poems *A Very Indian Poem in Indian English*, *A Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.* and *The Professor* all deal with the quintessential Indian attitude that is expressed in so-called *Babu English* or *Bazar English* or *Swadeshi Angrezi*. All the three poems rely on the syntactical oddities and lexical weirdness as well as word by word translation of phrases and idioms that denote Indianness.

2.6.3 The Speaker in Poem

The context of the poem *A Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.* is explained to the readers through the speaker who address the gathering. The speaker seems enthusiastic to express his good wishes to Miss Pushpa. Although the party was an informal one, they require some degree of formality. The speaker seems to be devoid of any. In fact, as the poem progresses, one wonders in earnest if the speaker had given any thought to this party before giving the speech. Before we delve further into the character of the speaker, we must bear in mind that Nissim Ezekiel has not made it clear whether the speaker is male or female. By keeping the identity of the speaker a mystery the poet withholds a gendered representation of the speaker and posits the possibility of making him/her just a voice representative of India.

The speech of the speaker meanders on its own pace. There is no scope for structure or logic. The speakers himself moulds his own speech into an unintentional parody. The speaker rambles

> Miss Pushpa is coming
> from very high family.
> Her father was renowned advocate
> in Bulsar or Surat,
> I am not remembering now which place.
>
> Surat? Ah, yes,
> once only I stayed in Surat
> with family members
> of my uncle's very old friend-
> his wife was cooking nicely . . .
> that was long time ago.

The ambiguity regarding the posting of Miss Pushpa's father highlights the superficial attempts made by the speaker to show his/her acquaintance with Miss Pushpa. The speaker might have a covert motive behind praising Miss Pushpa; given that she comes from a well connected family where the possibility of earning her grace may translate into future benefits for the speaker.

The speaker, in trying to be more generous with his compliments, ushers Miss Pushpa unintentionally with further nonsensical words of hilarity:

> You are all knowing, friends,
> What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
> I don't mean only external sweetness□
> but internal sweetness.
> Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
> even for no reason but simply because
> she is feeling.

The speaker is represented as a typical Indian who adheres to a grammatical structure that is Indian in tone. The shallowness that the speaker reflects in describing Miss Pushpa makes him/her a satirical representation of the people of India and underscores their odd behaviour and the ways in which they react under special circumstances. It might also seem probable that the other guests along with the speaker and Miss Pushpa might never be able to identify the gaps as they are not in a position to identify grammatical incoherency or fallacy of this speech. The simple, yet ignorant speaker is definitely unaware as to whether a genuine praise or insult had been delivered to Miss Pushpa. This is where the beauty of the poem lies and also highlights Ezekiel's originality.

2.6.4 Poetic Devices Used in *A Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*

A Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S. is a lyric poem which expresses the writer's feelings in organized stanzas.

One can identify the use of dramatic monologue in the poem. Dramatic monologue is 'a poem written in the voice of a character, set in a specific situation, and spoken to someone.' (as per the College English Glossary). This form of writing was used by Robert Browning in his poem: *My Last Duchess* (1842).

> Friends,
> our dear sister
> is departing for foreign
> . . .
> Now I ask other speakers to speak
> and afterwards Miss Pushpa
> will do summing up.

This poem by Ezekiel can be said to have elements of an ode. An ode is written in admiration of or celebration of a person, object or incident. Odes can be composed on any subject, ranging from battles to lofty emotions even pets or household objects. Some popular odes in English literature include Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* and *Ode to a Grecian Urn* by John Keats. In this poem one can see that the poem is addressed to Miss Pushpa T. S. and the speaker eulogizes before she embarks on her journey:

> What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
> I don't mean only external sweetness□
> but internal sweetness.
> Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling

even for no reason but simply because
she is feeling.

The other poetic device that one can see being used in the poem is eulogy. Eulogy can be described as a tribute as or praise for someone who has either accomplished a great feat or is dead. The speaker showers Miss Pushpa with the most gracious words and it seems in synchronization with her high birth and her progression to 'improve her prospect' along with her being the 'most popular lady with men also and ladies also' qualifies as the ground for her praise.

Friends,
our dear sister
is departing for foreign
in two three days,
and
we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.

The other poetic device that one can identify in the poem is the inclusion of a speaker/ persona. The speaker is the one who gives voice to the work of verse. It must be kept in mind that s/he is not the poet himself/herself. Even if a poem may sound biographical one should not forget that the poem is a fictional creation and hence the voice of the speaker:

Whenever I asked her to do anything,
she was saying, 'Just now only
I will do it.' That is showing
good spirit. I am always
appreciating the good spirit.

The use of 'I' in the stanza does not imply to Nissim Ezekiel, but the speaker who is at the helm of the farewell party organization.

While extending his farewell speech the speaker gets lost in his days at Surat. He recalls his past where he had enjoyed various homemade delicacies and met good people. . . . once only I stayed in Surat

with family members
of my uncle's very old friend-
his wife was cooking nicely…
that was long time ago.

The use of enjambement is apparent in the following lines:

Whatever I or anybody is asking
she is always saying yes,
and today she is going
to improve her prospect
and we are wishing her bon voyage.

Enjambement by definition is the use of a line that runs on to the next line, without a pause, to complete its grammatical sense (compare end stop).

2.6.5 Modern Life in Ezekiel's Poems

Modern man seems to be laced with unforeseen troubles and tribulations which test his very justification for survival. From the beginning Ezekiel showed great inclination towards the life of the common man and never got self-involved with the theoretical perception of living. His poet persona says:

Give me touch of men and give me smell of
Fornication, pregnancy and spices.
But spare me words as cold as print, insidious
Words, dressed in evening clothes for drawing rooms.

The modern existence struggles at times cannot come up with anything simple. The poet announces his dislike for 'devious routes' that one has to undertake to arrive at the destination. In the poem *The Worm*, the poet-persona is highly motivated by the way a tiny creature lives his life and ponders:

It moved so straight! Oh God! To think that I
By such absurd and devious routes should reach
My destination.

But somewhere in the middle of the need to survive in the complex settings of the modern world the poet has a difficult time identifying and following that path to the destination. He agonizes in the following way:

Then, in bitterness, I crushed the worm,
Sadly determined not to honor more
It's easy mocking victory. So now
It's dead. Pretty worm, where is your strength?
The god who made you to be wiser than
The cunning subtleties within my brain
Shall know by this the anger of man.
Only in anger can I emulate
The worm's directness. I've killed the worm

Ezekiel had a curious association with city life. Being born and brought up in a city and having exposed to the Western life, he experienced the kind of impact a city setting has on a common man. Author Shaila Mahan in her book *The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel* points out that in Ezekiel's work, 'The modern city has its dehumanizing effect. The place is not necessarily Bombay, but any place where man loses identity. The bleak picture of the city deprived of human sensitivity, seething with poverty, dirt, squalor and noise comes vividly before our eyes by the use of concrete imagery.' Mahan continues suggesting that , ' . . . the images –'slums', 'seasons', 'rains', 'hawkers', 'beggars', 'processions', 'drums', 'purgatorial lanes' are seen allied to the image of city. The use of 'purgatorial lanes' takes us to the great Italian poet Dante. The notions of suffering, doom, punishment signified by 'purgatorial' adds to the horror of the city.' City becomes synonymous with inferno and turns out to be a place where anyone who endures the city for survival is meant to suffer for the sake of existence.

According to Shirish Chindhade, author of *Five English Poetry*, in Ezekiel's poems one can see, '... that the mood is permanently one of self-absorption, inwardness, introspection: all roads lead to the city within, the city of the soul. There is a consistent

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attempt at self-search and self-definition. The holy grail of the search is hidden within the soul and poetry offers consolation in such a state of mind. It also helps 'to shape one's inner image silently.'

The narration of urban world is a common theme that frequently appears in the poetry of many poets who belonged to the modern era. Names such Eliot and Auden come up among many others. Ezekiel centers his works on people who live in the metropolis and undergo similar predicaments and agony. Like the urban dwellers, Ezekiel too represents the rootlessness that is characteristic of a typical urban world. Moreover, the pain and agonies that are experienced by the modern urban civilization are also similar to a large extent. But there is a marked difference in the way Ezekiel perceives the city than his Western counterparts. Ezekiel is more absorbed with the setting that is strictly Indian and is far removed from the continental space. The ambivalent relationship that Ezekiel shares with the city generates reactions that oscillates between love and hate and builds a sense of unease in his writing that is again vastly different from the other modern Indian English poets. Ezekiel, despite being popularly referred to as a 'Bombay poet', longs for an escape from the city. It is so because he feels the city, 'like a passion, burns':

The city like a passion burns.
He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand.
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamor close at hand.

Note, that the poet is troubled by the dilemma of survival. Furthermore, he cannot stop himself from wondering where his abode is and does he belong to the right place:

Do I belong, I wonder,
To the common plain? A bitter thought.
I know that I would rather
Suffer somewhere else
Than be at home
Among the accepted style.

Talking about his urban association Shaila Mahan suggests that, 'Ezekiel has endeavoured to explore the chasm between the city dwellers quest for the cherished ideal of an unfettered and oppression – less existence and his failure to achieve even a partial realization of it. In this poem the dilemma of the modern man who desperately tries to shun and run away from urban life is expressed forcefully and touchingly.' Further discussing about Ezekiel and his city observations critic John Thieme opines that, 'His passion is invariably that of an urban Bombayite, but it is a condition from which he frequently seeks release. In 'Urban' . . . the city becomes an interior landscape, invading his mind with its traffic, while he longs from a view from the hills and seeks respite from a location where 'The city like a passion burns.'

Despite his gruesome condition, the poet makes it amply clear that he is far removed from the world of artificiality:

That I must wait and train myself
To recognize the real thing

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And in the verse and friends I make
To have no truck with what is false.

In the poem *Theological* the poet says, 'Lord, I am tired of being wrong.' The poor narrator appears to be exhausted of pretense and how he wishes to be freed.

Even as myself, my very own
Incontrovertible, unexceptional
Self, I feel I am disguised.

The speaker continues with his dilemmas, and says:

I am tired
Of irony and paradox
Of the bird in the hand
And the two in the bush
Of poetry direct and oblique
Of statement plain or symbolic
Of doctrine and dogma

Chindhade observes that, 'Although the modes of traditions and beliefs of old have not been totally rejected by Ezekiel, he can identify himself with modern India with greater authenticity. Most of the poems in *Hymns in Darkness* bear out this observation. The journey is not down the memory lane, though the philosophical reflections of the earlier poetry are no doubt seen in some of the poems in *Hymns in Darkness*.'

The poem, *A Morning Walk* unfolds images of a barbaric city which the poet cannot get away from:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words in crumbs.

Bombay, in this poem, takes on the shape of a 'barbaric city sick with slums'. But surprisingly it still remains the inescapable center that dominates the poet's physical experience as well as his creative world. Mahan suggests that, 'As an urban poet, Ezekiel has delved into the heart of Bombay in this poem. 'The city like a passion burns', while the helpless citizen gets conditioned to its vulgar noises. Ezekiel creates a picture of the modern man who desperately tries to shun and run away from the city's turmoil but finds himself in a dilemma.' Mahan suggests that, '. . . the urban man yearns for a quiet habitation away from the turmoil and chaos of the wild city. But his desire to withdraw remains a daydream against the forceful pull of 'kindred clamor close at hand.' Urban reality therefore becomes a crucial part of Ezekiel's poetic consciousness.

2.6.6 Pursuit of the Self in Nissim Ezekiel's Poems

Nissim Ezekiel was a representative poet of the modern era. He spoke about the troubles and dilemmas associated with the existence of modern man. The source of

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his poetry could be found within the self-questioning soul. Ezekiel was a poet who lived by the thought that, 'A writer must make life difficult for himself.' He understood life 'as a journey where poetry is the source through which he could discover himself. The developing body of his poems expresses his personal quest for a satisfactory way of living in the modern world.'

The pursuit of the self that Nissim Ezekiel can be best exemplified by referring to his poem *Transparently*, where:

All I want now
Is the recognition
Of dilemma
And the quickest means
Of resolving it
Within my limits.

This verse segment is an acknowledgement of his dilemma as well as the confession of the means through which he is looking to solve it. Ezekiel's early tryst with the hunt for the real self reflected in his writings dating back to the 1950s when he wrote a letter from London to his sister Asha Bhende. Ezekiel wrote in his letter:

> There was no alternative if I am to live a creative life. There is no other life for me. In a sense, of course, I am beaten, since I cannot organize my life as a whole. Nevertheless, fidelity to the poetry of it is a great saving factor. I do not wish to make excuses nor draw attention to the lives of the poets and their characteristic shortcomings. I want to be practical too and to stand on my own feet.

Ezekiel in the poem *Subconscious* reflects about his divided self:

Consciously, I ask my sub-conscious
To supply me with a poem.
It sends up this harsh message:
You have not turned to me so long,
I shall not speak now.

Paris-base Indian scholar, Geetha Ganapathy-Dore, analyzes this poem and suggests the poet is analyzing the self thorough psychoanalysis. She says 'The self of which Ezekiel here refers to as a modernist is not the old unitary self of psychology but the divided self of psychoanalysis. Naturally he pokes fun at Freud by transposing the id and ego as a married couple living in a two-storied house.'

Especially, explored in the poem, *Family*, from *Songs for Nandu Bhende*:

Should we take to meditation,
Transcendental, any other?
Should we take to Zen?
We cannot find our roots here,
Don't know where to go, sir,
Don't know what to do, sir,
Need a Guru, need a God.
All of us are sick, sir.

As if the dilemmas of survival were not sufficient for a modern man, s/he seems to be haunted by the mechanical existence as expressed in the poem *Encounter*:

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The city pressed upon me; shops, cinemas and
Business houses
Spoke in unambiguous accents. Only the people said
Nothing.
They bought the evening papers, hurried to a tube
Station,
Ceasing to exist.

Ezekiel's intentions were simple. He did not intend to head for trans-human possibilities. He did not ponder or erode his energy over things that he could not achieve. Continuing this discussion, Indu Saraiya suggests that for Nissim Ezekiel , 'a "longing" to live life on many frontiers on his own terms with the courage of his own convictions rather than on received wisdom had surfaced quite early in . . . life.'

Though some of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry suggests a kind of desperation, the poet seems unable to hide it. Language, for him, is the best medium to convey a message yet at times the poet cannot but wonder if that is the right approach at all. If we consider his poem, *Speech and Silence*, we realize he is vexed by this conundrum:

Man is alone and can not tell
The simplest thing to any friend.
All speech is to himself, others
Overhear and miss the meaning.
And yet to speak is good, a man
Is purified through speech alone,
Asserting his identity
In all that people say and do.

The poet seeks freedom from the already set pattern of life that seems to be pre-determined by the mind and beliefs (which is conditioned by the society and its structures). He realizes that it is impossible for him to get out of its effects. Without trying to behave like a moralist, he confesses that he is indeed affected by (various forms of) corruption around him. And since there is no concept of surviving alone or in isolation he finds the whole process excruciating, a problem that he announces in the poem *Double Horror*:

I am corrupted by the world, continually
Reduced to something less than human by the crowd,
Newspapers, cinemas, radio features, speeches
Demanding peace by men with grim warlike faces,
Posters selling health and happiness in bottles,
Large returns for small investments, in football pools
Or self control, six easy lessons for a pound,
Holidays in Rome for writing praise for toothpastes.

As if the process of corruption was a chain reaction, the poet goes on to confess in the same poem:

Corrupted by the world I must infect the world
With my corruption. This double horror holds me
Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake, denounced

Only by myself, to others harmless, hero,
Sage, poet, conversationalist, connoisseur
Of coffee, guide to modern Indian Art
Or Greek antiquities.

Ezekiel's pursuit of the self involved a larger analysis of the self in all its varied forms. According to poet and writer Keki N. Daruwalla, 'The contribution of Ezekiel becomes all the more stark in comparison to the ruthless analysis of one's own motives and passions, the reflection on inner turbulence in poetry, doubt and self doubt and the questioning of the scriptures, all this was new.'

Activity 2

Read other poems by Nissim Ezekiel and write an essay critiquing the perpetual presence of the metropolis. You may refer to the example and arguments given in this unit.

Did You Know

Majeed Amjad (1914 – 1974) was one of the greatest of modern Urdu poets of the Indian subcontinent. Although, he is not well known or widely read as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Noon Meem Rashid, Nasir Kazmi or Meeraji but amongst critics he is widely regarded as a philosophical poet of great depth and sensitivity. His refined poetic mind was not widely recognized in his lifetime as he lived a life of bureaucratic obscurity in a small town in west Punjab.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The poetry of A. K. Ramanujan is one of the finest contributions to the genre of Indo-Anglian poetry.
- Nissim Ezekiel (14 December 1924 – 9 January 2004) was a renowned Indian poet of Jewish origin.
- Nissim Ezekiel received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his work, *Latter-Day Psalms*.
- Ramanujan's poetry reflects his Indian experiences, recognizes his Hindu beliefs and ridicules Hindu superstitions.
- In the poem *A River*, the poet brings our attention the river Vaigai which dries up in the heat of the summer and fails to attract the attention of poets.
- The poet talks about the dirt hidden beneath the water bed. Now when the summer heat has reduced the river to a trickle, all the dirt lying underneath gets exposed which shows how the river has been neglected and misused by villagers.
- The poet goes on to say that the wet stones lying in the river bed look like crocodiles which are sleeping and the dry stones appear to be buffaloes.
- Ramanujan satirizes the poets who sing 'only' about the river during indicating their indifference to the loss and suffering caused by the flooding river.
- Ramanujan writes the poem *Obituary* as a creative response to the death of his father.

Check Your Progress

21. What kind of language was used in the poem *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*?
22. What was the importance of the speaker in the poem under discussion?

- After describing the house as a metaphor for their deteriorating quality of life, the poet brings our attention to his father, but he does that in an ironic manner. He says that the father was the 'burning type'.
- The poet, who performs the last rites, comments on the various rituals and ceremonies associated with the dead in the poem.
- Ezekiel's best known poem, *Night of the Scorpion* deals with an accident where a scorpion has stung a woman and the public gathered takes remedial measures to decrease the pain caused by the bite.
- The poem has been written in free verse and the lines do not rhyme. However, a large number of lines are octosyllabic interspersed with hexasyllabic lines.
- The poem, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.* is collected in Nissim Ezekiel's sixth volume of poems titled *Hymns in Darkness*.
- Nissim Ezekiel unleashed humour and ridicules the erroneous yet funny ways in which grammar, syntax and idioms are used by many Indians while they make an attempt to speak or write in the English language.
- Though some of Ezekiel's poetry suggests a kind of desperation, the poet persona seems unable to hide it.

2.8 KEY TERMS

- **Irony**: Irony refers to a caustic remark or witty use of language in order to convey the opposite of what might be expected. It leads to incongruity by saying one thing and implying the opposite
- **Satire**: Satire refers to a medium through which the vices, shortcomings or follies are ridiculed using witty language
- **Alliteration:** Alliteration refers to a decorative device used by the poet in order to emphasize his point of view. It is the use of the same consonant at the beginning of each stressed syllable in a line of verse
- **Anglo-Indian poetry**: Anglo-Indian poetry refers to the body of work by the members of the Indian diaspora who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India

2.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Madurai is a historic city famous for its rich cultural and literary heritage. It is located on the banks of the river Vaigai and is known for its old temples, which also include the very famous Meenakshi temple. The poet refers to the river Vaigai in this poem. He reveals two different pictures of the river in two different seasons – a river reduced to a thin trickle in summer and a river in flood in the rainy season.
2. Attipate Krishnaswamy Ramanujan was one of the finest Indo-American writers who wrote poems in English, Tamil and Kannada. He was a professor of Dravidian studies and Linguistics at the University of Chicago.
3. The significance of the names given to a couple of cows is to enhance the tragic drowning of a pregnant woman. It is an ironic situation in which the cows have been named Gopi and Brinda, but the woman who drowned is only referred to

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as the 'pregnant woman'. Possibly there could be a religious significance to the names given to the cows as Hindus worship cows as symbolic of maternal qualities such as selflessness and sacrifice.

4. The closing passage is tragic in a sense that it emphasizes the tragic drowning of a pregnant woman. The last passage is a mere repetition of the second stanza which was a description of the destruction caused by the floods. The repetition of the destruction in the last stanza is meant to highlight the fact that people have become used to such tragedies as the river floods every year. It further enhances the tragedy of a pregnant woman who died with perhaps twins in her womb.
5. The poet uses irony to describe the attitude of other poets. He says that though the poets have written poetry about the flooded river, they never referred to the havoc which the annual floods create. There is more irony in the lines 'The river has water enough to be poetic about only once a year. . . .' It satirizes the poets who get inspiration to write the poetry only once a year when the river is in flood.
6. The poet makes use of striking similes to describe the beauty usually ignored by old and new poets. The poet says that the wet stones shine and resemble crocodiles lying in the water, with only with their back showing. Another image is that of water buffaloes resting in the sun. The dry stones look like water buffaloes lounging in the sun.
7. The irony is that the poets 'only' write about floods. When the river is almost empty, no one bothers to notice and write a poem; but in rainy season, the poets write about the vitality of the same river in flood and at the same time they ignore the sufferings of people caused by the floods.
8. The expression 'as usual' highlights the cold and callous attitude of the people to the suffering and sorrow caused by the floods. People casually talk about how the river in flood destroyed the 'three village houses', drowned 'one pregnant woman' and 'a couple of cows', 'as usual'. It shows that people are used to the annual floods now.
9. In dealing with the rituals and ceremonies associated with the dead, Ramanujan displays his awareness of Hindu tradition. The reference to a point 'where three rivers meet' and 'more than one annual ritual' reveals that his Indian upbringing and an exposure to Hindu customs is well blended with his awareness and recognition of the flaws and faults of the ancient religion.
10. The father has left behind a dusty table full of papers, some unpaid debts, daughters to be married, a house that is in a decaying condition, a changed mother and more than one annual ritual.
11. The poet refers to his father as someone who has always struggled in life to meet the family obligations. He was an ordinary man who was struggling (burning) throughout his life and finally succumbed to death. Therefore, the poet says that he burnt throughout his life and finally burnt well at the cremation.
12. According to the poet, the mother has changed due to pain and agony that the death of his father has caused.
13. The priest directs the sons to carefully pick the ashes and bones and facing eastwards immerse them at a point where the three rivers meet.

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14. The caesarian birth of the father is suggestive of the inability of the father to manage his worldly affairs. The poet implies that his father was not even born as a result of his own efforts in the sense that medical intervention was required.
15. The small groceries use the old newspaper cones to wrap salt, jaggery and coriander. The poet expects to find the two lines of obituary, published in a newspaper, which will soon reach a grocery shop.
16. The poet makes use of several alliterations, for instance, 'debts and daughters', 'being the burning type' and 'several spinal discs'.
17. When the poet talks about the legacy that the father has left behind, the list includes 'debts and daughters', which is rather ironic.
18. The theme of the poem is the death of the father and its effect on the family members including the poet and his mother. The poem is written memory of the father, who recently passed away.
19. The poet, in this incident, records four kinds of responses—the religious mystical response of the villagers; the rational response of the speaker's father; the ritualistic response of the holy man and; the self-sacrificial response of the mother.
20. The closing lines where the mother thanks God that the scorpion had picked her instead of her children stresses the innate Indianness of the poem where the mother is considered to be the central figure of selflessness and sacrifice. While the poem tries to establish multiple responses to the sting, it ends with a strong emotional resonance embedded in the mother's word of thanks to God. This intensifies the poem's complexity as it positions Ezekiel as a writer who is intimately familiar with Indian culture replete with superstition and prescribed feminine qualities of self-sacrifice and altruism.
21. The language of *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.* is interesting. Since it is an informal party the language used has a conversational tone. Such conversational language is a perfect backdrop for a party. Repetitive use of the present continues tense ('departing', 'meeting', 'knowing', 'smiling and smiling', 'cooking nicely', 'appreciating the good spirit') not only suggests the misuse of grammar and the Indianization of the Queen's language but also indicates the continuous progression of the party.
22. The speaker introduces the readers to the farewell party, the central character at the part, Miss Pushpa T. S. and the guests. The speaker tells the readers about Miss Pushpa, her family and her characteristics. The readers get to know that Miss Pushpa would be leaving the country soon for better career opportunity and that she lived in Surat, Gujarat.

2.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. In the poem *A River*, what similarities can be found between the old and new poets?
2. What is the theme of the poem *A River*?
3. Why did Ramanujan think that poets talked more about the river during floods?

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4. What were the incomplete tasks of the father in the poem *Obituary*?
5. Why was Ramanujan keen to look for the obituary in the newspapers?
6. Write a note on the works of Nissim Ezekiel.
7. Give a summary of the poem Night of the Scorpion.
8. What was the element of Indianess in the poem *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*?
9. Write about the structure of the poems by Ramanjuan.
10. What are the structural differences in Ezekiel's poems?
11. What was the significance of the coconut tree in the yard in the poem *Obituary*?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of A. K. Ramanujan's poem *A River* .
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UNIT 3 JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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3.2 JAYANTA MAHAPATRA: A BRIEF SKETCH

A physicist by training and a poet by compulsion, Jayanta Mahapatra was born on 22 October 1928 in Cuttack, Odisha, to a lower middle class family. He started his career in 1949 as a physics teacher in different colleges of Odisha. However, he started writing poetry at the age of 38 and his first collection of poems, '*Swayamvara and Other Poems*' was published in 1971.

Mahapatra is known for his originality and variety of themes. Poverty, hunger, starvation and sexuality constitute some of the dominant themes in his poetry. His style of writing, use of the English language as well as the choice and the treatment of various themes is remarkable. The depth and subtlety of Mahapatra's poetry has enriched the genre of Indo-Anglian poetry. His most famous works of poetry include *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*, *Hunger*, *The Exile*, *The Moon Moments*, *Dawn At Puri* and *Total Solar Eclipse*, to name a few.

Mahapatra became the first Indian English poet to win the Sahitya Akademy award in 1981. He was awarded the Padmashree degree in 2009. He was also awarded Litt. D. by Utkal University in 2006. On 2 May 2009, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Ravenshaw University.

3.3 *HUNGER*: TEXT AND SUMMARY

Hunger

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 only 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.

SUMMARY

The poem begins with an acceptance of an intense desire by the protagonist or the speaker, who narrates an incident. The speaker begins by admitting the urge to satisfy the pangs of sexual desire. Right at the onset of the poem, the poet introduces the two metaphors of hunger: one in the literal sense and the other as sexual urge. In the face of the metaphorical urge, the speaker finds a fisherman who can make an offer to satiate his sexual hunger. On finding this fisherman, the speaker is asked in a careless and casual manner if he would really want to have a girl? In asking him, the fisherman pretends to be indifferent to his answer as if his answer would make no difference to him. The intentional carelessness of the fisherman in asking the protagonist conveys a sense that perhaps this has become a routine feature for him, a daily struggle with poverty and hunger. 'Will you have her?, the question itself relegates the individual identity of the girl as if she were an insignificant commodity. However, the protagonist started walking behind the fisherman who was 'trailing his nets and his nerves'. The fisherman was dragging his nets behind him, which showed his anxiety in leading the protagonist towards the gratification of his hunger. Despite the fisherman's pretence of carelessness in asking the question, the protagonist could see him dragging and pulling together his nerves as well. The protagonist observed that his indifference in asking the question was an attempt to wipe out the guilt from his purpose. The fisherman seemed to be feigning ignorance so as to validate the purpose itself. The white bone seemed to 'thrash his eyes', as though his inner being was in conflict with his physical being and wanted to obliterate his vision.

The speaker or the protagonist says that he followed the fisherman across the extreme stretches of sand on the sea beach, which had spread far and wide. While following the fisherman, the protagonist felt the violent beating in his mind. His mind was experiencing turbulence as he wanted immediate gratification for his sexual hunger. Just as the sling supports a fractured arm, similarly his flesh or body was supporting his agitation in his mind. At the same time, the protagonist was feeling a sense of guilt in following the fisherman for his intense desire. He felt that the redemption of his sin would perhaps lay only in burning the very house that he lived in. The agitation in his mind sought a way to regain peace of mind through a gesture of repentance. Silence had completely gripped him and he felt as if his tongue has been paralyzed. It seemed to him that even his sleeves had been tightly seized by silence. He also observed that the nets that the fisherman was dragging behind him, had some foam upon them as a result of his casting the nets into the sea. However, the froth on the fisherman's net could also be suggestive of the fact that wrong doings always leave some traces behind.

The protagonist reached the fisherman's hut and it was already getting dark by that time. Against the flickering light, his lean body appeared like a wound. This particular imagery reveals the rough and uneven conditions of the shelter where the fisherman lived with his daughter. It was a lean to cabin that was a clear sign of their poverty. At this moment the protagonist felt that he was as free as the wind. The leaves of the palm tree scratched his skin revealing the scars of guilt. For him, all the hours were similar as they were confined in the same shack. Hours in the shack are presented as stacks bunched up to the walls against the flickering light of the oil lamp. The smoke coming from the oil lamp burning inside the shack seemed to be penetrating the blank mind of the protagonist. This feeling of being covered in 'soot' was also an outcome of his sense of guilt and shame, as the image of 'soot' is suggestive of sin

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the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

The speaker or the protagonist says that he followed the fisherman across the extreme stretches of sand on the sea beach, which had spread far and wide. While following the fisherman, the protagonist felt the violent beating in his mind. His mind was experiencing turbulence as he wanted immediate gratification for his sexual hunger. Just as the sling supports a fractured arm, similarly his flesh or body was supporting his agitation in his mind. At the same time, the protagonist was feeling a sense of guilt in following the fisherman for his intense desire. He felt that the redemption of his sin would perhaps lay only in burning the very house that he lived in. The agitation in his mind sought a way to regain peace of mind through a gesture of repentance. Silence had completely gripped him and he felt as if his tongue has been paralyzed. It seemed to him that even his sleeves had been tightly seized by silence. He also observed that the nets that the fisherman was dragging behind him, had some foam upon them as a result of his casting the nets into the sea. However, the froth on the fisherman's net could also be suggestive of the fact that wrong doings always leave some traces behind.

The protagonist reached the fisherman's hut and it was already getting dark by that time. Against the flickering light, his lean body appeared like a wound. This particular imagery reveals the rough and uneven conditions of the shelter where the fisherman lived with his daughter. It was a lean to cabin that was a clear sign of their poverty. At this moment the protagonist felt that he was as free as the wind. The leaves of the palm tree scratched his skin revealing the scars of guilt. For him, all the hours were similar as they were confined in the same shack. Hours in the shack are presented as stacks bunched up to the walls against the flickering light of the oil lamp. The smoke coming from the oil lamp burning inside the shack seemed to be penetrating the blank mind of the protagonist. This feeling of being covered in 'soot' was also an outcome of his sense of guilt and shame, as the image of 'soot' is suggestive of sin

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and dark deeds. Although the soot is covering the shack of the fisherman, yet it is the mind of the protagonist in which it is penetrating.

The fisherman tells the protagonist that his daughter has just turned fifteen. He asked the speaker to feel free to 'feel' his daughter and hurriedly leaves the shack saying that he would soon return. Before going out, the fisherman also reminded him that his bus would leave at nine, implying that till then he can gratify his hunger. The speaker felt as if the sky had fallen on him and he felt an inexpressible shock. Now he understood the tricks which the fisherman had been employing in order to fetch customers for her daughter so that he could make some money out of those deals. The protagonist felt that in doing so, the fisherman had already used up all sorts of tricks to different customers and his stock could well be exhausted. The fisherman's invitation seemed unabashed to him and he was stunned by it. He realized the fisherman saying that his daughter has just turned fifteen, could also be one of his tricks. However, the girl's years felt like cold rubber due to her impoverished upbringing. The fisherman's daughter was in front of him. She was tall and thin and knew the situation all too well. He uses the term 'wormy' for her legs as she opened them wide, suggesting her abject condition. The description of her legs indicates her impoverished status as a child. The girl's gesture made the protagonist realize that it was sheer poverty which had forced the father-daughter duo to resort to prostitution in order to make some money. For the first time the protagonist understood the meaning of 'hunger'. He realized that just as he was hungry, she too was hungry, but the nature of the two hungers was entirely different. While the protagonist's hunger is based on sexual urge, the girl's hunger is an outcome of poverty. Thus, the two hungers – sexual desire and poverty are brought together casually here. The protagonist understands that she is offering her body to him because she needs money to satisfy the hunger of her belly. He has found out the feeling of an empty stomach as though a fish turned inside. The girl was as helpless as the fish caught in the net. While the fish struggles to get rid of it, the girl can do nothing except being consumed.

3.3.1 *Hunger*: Historical Context

Mahapatra's, poetry is influenced by the history and culture of Odisha, which constitutes the main theme of his poetry in general. The thematic range of his poetry, is wide and he successfully deals with human relations and different social problems of varying intensity and horror. Mahapatra admits the impact of his unhappy childhood, his poetry. Of *Hunger*, he had said 'I was writing with experience'. He admitted to have had a traumatic childhood and always felt alone. However, *Hunger* is one of Mahapatra's famous poems, that shares its theme and concern with another poem: *The Whorehouse In A Calcutta Street*. In both these poems, the theme is sexuality. However, in *Hunger*, poverty and sexuality lead to a hunger of two different kinds.

Check Your Progress

1. Are there any autobiographical elements in the poem *Hunger*?
2. Why did the fisherman adopt a careless tone?
3. What did the fisherman tell the protagonist about his daughter?
4. How did the protagonist interpret the girl's hunger?

3.3.2 Important Passages for Explanation

1. '*It was hard to believe . . . Will you have her, carelessly,*'

Reference to Context

These are the opening lines of Jayanta Mahapatra's poem *Hunger*. The poet speaks through the expressions of the protagonist, who narrates his experience with a fisherman and his daughter. In these lines we find an acceptance of an intense desire felt by the protagonist.

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Explanation

The protagonist says that he was feeling an incredible urge for sexual gratification. It was so intense that he could not believe himself. However, he found out that a fisherman can help him in this regard and he approached the fisherman. The fisherman asked him very carelessly if he would have the girl. The fisherman's tone was casual in asking the question.

2. '*Trailing his nets and . . . Thrash his eyes.*'

Reference to Context

These lines have been taken from Jayanta Mahapatra's poem *Hunger*. In these lines the protagonist gives an account of his observation of the fisherman's behavior.

Explanation

The protagonist says that he was willing to go with the fisherman in order to gratify his hunger for sexual gratification. However, despite the causality of tone the fisherman was nervous as he was dragging his nets. The protagonist observed that in dragging the nets, it appeared that he was dragging his nerves as well. The fisherman's indifference in asking the protagonist whether he would have the girl aroused anxiety in the protagonist. It appeared to him as though the fisherman pretended to be indifferent to validate the very purpose of asking the question. However, despite his pretence, the protagonist could see his white bone thrashing in his vision, and by extension, his inner self was at conflict with his outward behaviour.

3. '*I followed him across . . . . the flesh's sling.*'

Reference to Context

In these lines the protagonist gives an account of the way through which the fisherman took him to his shack. Whereas the fisherman was pretending to hide his anxiety, the protagonist was also experiencing a similar anxiety.

Explanation

The protagonist says that he followed the fisherman across the extreme stretches of sand on the sea beach, which had spread far and wide. The use of alliteration in 'sprawling sand' enhances the stretch and further elaborates it. While following the fisherman, the protagonist felt the violent beating in his mind. His mind was experiencing turbulence as he wanted immediate gratification for his sexual hunger. Just as the sling supports a fractured arm, similarly his flesh or body was supporting his agitated mind.

4. '*Hope lay perhaps in . . . dragged up from the seas.*'

Reference to Context

Here the protagonist admits a sense of guilt while following the fisherman. He appears to be thinking the ways of atoning for the sins which is about to commit.

Explanation

The protagonist was feeling a sense of guilt in following the fisherman because of his apparent hunger for sexual gratification. He felt that the redemption of his sin would perhaps lay only in burning the very house that he lived in. The agitation in his mind

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and dark deeds. Although the soot is covering the shack of the fisherman, yet it is the mind of the protagonist in which it is penetrating.

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explains the nature and genesis of the two different kinds of hunger: one that is a result of poverty and the other that is a response to a bodily urge.

3.3.3 *Hunger*: A Comment on the Social Issue of Poverty

Jayanta Mahapatra is a poet of Indian sensibility who has always shown keen interest in taking up themes that range from nature and religion to sexuality and prostitution. His deftness in presenting the realities of women's lives has always been significant to the Indian scenario. The pathetic condition of women in Indian society has always been one of the main issues that have often been addressed by Mahapatra. Mahapatra's women range from being wives, village women, city women, seductresses, adolescent girls as well as prostitutes. Prostitution is an outcome of poverty, and thus, in addressing the issue of poverty, Mahapatra has also addressed the issue of prostitution.

In the poem, the poet has dealt with two images of hunger: Hunger related to flesh and hunger related to poverty. The poem is a critique on the girl's objectification by her own father as a result of poverty. As the girl mechanically opened her legs wide, the protagonist is made to understand the hunger of an empty stomach.

3.3.4 Theme of the Poem

The theme of the poem is poverty and sexuality. *Hunger*, is a poem that refers to a strong desire for physical gratification, as well as the physiological need for food and sustenance. In both the meanings of hunger, the end result has to be gratification. The poem describes the experience of the protagonist, with a fisherman and his daughter. Although, no details are given regarding the financial condition of the fisherman, the inference that he is at the fringes of society, can be deduced from his behaviour and the condition of the place where he lives. Thus, it is evident that his impoverished condition had compelled him to use his daughter as a commodity, in order to earn a livelihood. He employs many tricks in fetching customers for his daughter, who is aware of the situation, and surrenders to her father's will. Thus, the customer goes to the fisherman's daughter, in order to gratify his sexual hunger and in turn satisfies their hunger emanating from poverty.

3.3.5 Structure of the Poem

Hunger is a short poem with a compact and concise structure fit to be adapted into a full length story. However, Mahapatra's excellence in dealing with the structure of *Hunger* is evident from his capacity to condense his material and present it within a confined space that may reflect his technique and aesthetics. The way in which he has narrated the story in the form of a short poem is remarkable. The poem doesn't only tell a story, but also portrays three characters in a simple realistic manner. The whole account is presented to us in a coherent and concise manner. Mahapatra's choice of words and his skillful arrangement is not only praiseworthy but also a reflection of his craft. The sheer brilliance of originality lies in his sentence construction and the use of metaphors. For instance: 'The flesh was heavy on my back' conveys the intense desire of the protagonist. Similarly, 'My mind thumping in the flesh's sling' conveys the violent thumping of his mind, supported by the flesh.

The structure is coherent in its appearance, theme and literary meaning. The poet assumes the role of the speaker, who is also the protagonist and the narrator. Even though words are not given as reported speech, the poem follows the thoughts

Check Your Progress

5. What was the nature of the protagonist's imagined 'redemption'?
6. What thoughts occupied the mind of the protagonist as he entered the fisherman's shack?
7. How did the girl react on seeing the protagonist?

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of the protagonist as he finds his way to the fisherman's shack. Similarly, the girl does not utter a single word in the poem, but we know a lot about her. Likewise, the fisherman's speech is also negligible, however, we recognize him through the poet's description.

Hunger is a comment on the broad and vivid theme of poverty and sexuality written in a compact and terse structure, possible only in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry.

3.4 *THE WHOREHOUSE IN A CALCUTTA STREET*: TEXT AND SUMMARY

Walk right in. It is yours.
Where the house smiles wryly into the lighted street.
Think of the women
You wished to know and haven't.
The faces in the posters, the public hoardings.
And who are all there together,
Those who put the house there
For the startled eye to fall upon,
Where pasts join, and where they part.

The scared hollow courtyard
That harbours the promise of a great conspiracy.
Yet nothing you do
Makes a heresy of that house.
Are you ashamed to believe you're in this?
Then think of the secret moonlight of the women
Left behind, their false chatter,
Perhaps their reminding themselves of looked-after
children and home:
The shooting stars in the eager darkness of return.

Dream children, dark superfluous;
You miss them in the house's dark spaces,
How can't you?
even the women don't wear them -
Like jewels or precious stones at the throat;
The faint feeling deep at a woman's center
That brings back the discarded things:
The little turnings of blood
At the far edge of the rainbow.

You fall back against her in the dumb light,
Trying to learn something more about women
While she does what she thinks proper to please you,
The sweet, the little things, the imagined;
Until the statue of the man within

Check Your Progress

8. What are the two images of hunger?
9. Is it possible to say that the poem carries a full length narrative within its short structure?
10. What is the theme of the poem?

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You've believed in throughout the years
Comes back to you, a disobeying toy
And the walls you wanted to pull down,
Mirror only of things mortal, and passing by:
Like a girl holding on to your wide wildness,
As though it were real, as though the recurring voice
Tore the membrane of your half-woken mind
When, like a door, her words close behind:
'Hurry, will you? Let me go,'
and her lonely breath thrash against your kind.

SUMMARY

Mahapatra's poetry often deals with the theme of prostitution and what causes this evil in society, namely, economic disparity and social injustice. Unlike other poets who make extensive use of euphemisms, Mahapatra, never shies away from 'tickling our basic instinct, nor does he indulge in sentimental whispering, raving or blathering' (T.M. Bhaskar). In his poetry, women and their predicaments are treated with care and in a manner which is restrained, unsentimental, delicate and above all realistic. *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street* begins with an invitation to enter a whorehouse and ends with the prostitute asking the protagonist to leave. The ending is as sharp as the beginning as both come across as instructions. Like his other poems, this poem also sheds light on the deplorable condition of prostitutes and explores the mundane reality of their everyday struggle against poverty, corruption and other forms of exploitation.

The poem abruptly begins by inviting a customer into a whorehouse. The poet wants the customer to assume that he owns this place. It appears that the house is smiling ironically at the arrival of another customer. The poet asks the customer to give a thought to those women whom he wanted to have in his life but could never have and perhaps never will. The poet reminds the customer of all the attractive faces he has seen in advertisements, posters and public hoardings. All these faces and images depicted on bill boards, meant to allure men with their charm and beauty are conjured as paralled images of lust and rapacity. However, the customer has never had any chance of being close to such beautiful and attractive women whose faces are depicted on banners as spectacles of beauty. The poet informs the customer that in the whorehouse, he will be able to see some faces similar to those which he had seen in posters and had always fancied. Outside the whorehouse, the customer is being lured by the commercial world by designing such advertisements whose sole motive is to appeal to customers and compel them to use their products. Sometimes, the customer may have felt the desire to have an opportunity to really have access to the women appearing in such advertisements. The customer once again finds himself lured to finding similar faces, if not exactly the same ones, in the whorehouse.

The whorehouse is ironically referred to as the 'sacred' hollow courtyard in order to further tempt the customer to leave his inhibitions and be there with a free mind. A customer may feel hesitant or ashamed in having visited a whorehouse as it has certain taboos associated with it. Also the courtyard of this place is compared to a fake promise of commercial conspiracies. Thus, the poet further reveals to the customer that at a place like this, the customer himself is the target of great conspiracies.

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If the customer goes back without achieving what he had desired, the conspiracy fails. However, if the customer makes the payment of a certain amount and is satisfied with the services of the whorehouse and as he goes back with a promise to return, the conspiracy is said to have succeeded. This is the bitter truth of such a place. The poet further tells the customer that his good intentions or actions cannot alter the already widely accepted opinion of people about the whorehouse. When a house is called a whorehouse, no effort to contradict the opinion can ever be successful. If the customer still feels ashamed to have entered a whorehouse, he should think about those women whom he has left behind and come here. The poet is trying to create a parallel with those women who are childless even though they have always wished to have children. Yet they try to satisfy their longing to have children by the false imagination that they have got children.

There is a reference to dream children or imaginary children who do not exist in reality. The customer is asked to think of them and the conditions under which they are imagined. Even though the childless women who invent these dream children, do not keep thinking about them all the time. There is a vivid use of simile and metaphor in these lines. As a symbol, a woman is usually identified with the 'discarded things'. She is portrayed as sexually oppressed by the so-called patriarchal system and poverty. The image of the women is vividly presented in the poem by merging the similies and metaphors. The dream children are depicted as a matter of destroying the emotions of human kindness.

The customer may have visited the whorehouse with an intention of trying to learn something more about women. He may not have visited the whorehouse only for physical gratification, but his purpose may have been to get to know these women in a better way and understanding their psychology. However, the woman in the whorehouse does what is required of her and tries to please the customer with sweet little things. She may also make true what the customer fancied about her. She does what she thinks proper to make her customer happy. A customer would move back a little in a dimly lit room and would most likely collide with one of the other prostitutes who may have entered the room to be looked at and surveyed by the customer.

'Dumb light' also refers to a moment when no one speaks. Suddenly he feels that his inner self has to convey something to him. However, it appears like a disobeying toy. 'A disobeying toy' is a metaphorical phrase that refers to the customer when his inner self reveals itself to him. His inner self is compared to a toy, which somehow, does not obey his command and acts in the way he wants to according to his own free will. The customer may have visited the whorehouse with the intention of not just having physical pleasures but also emotional solace, which is torn to bits with a simple command by the prostitute mechanically engaged in her business. She deals with her customers in a professional manner as she sees herself as a commodity and the customers as buyers with limited access to her time. In this regard, to think of finding emotional comfort at such a place, is a foolish thought. When a slightly watchful and observant customer tries to study the psychology of the woman in the whorehouse, she hurriedly and mechanically gets busy in doing all sorts of things which are part of her profession and a matter of routine for her. Her only purpose is the sexual gratification of the customer. Thus, her initiative reveals to the customer his own inner being. At this point of time, he is able to discover his own identity, and he feels disabled to command his inner self because a conflict between his conscious mind and subconscious mind comes into play.

whorehouse which is presented in a rebuke-like phrase and reflects the poet's craft as he does not subordinate sentiment to craft. The terseness of the prostitute's tone and the command given to the customer to finish and leave so that she may move to her next appointment is the disturbing truth of the prostitute's life and by extension of the whorehouse itself.

3.4.1 Important Passages for Explanation

1. '*Walk right in . . . to know and haven't.*'

Reference to Context

These are the opening lines of Mahapatra's poem *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*. The poet becomes the speaker and talks to the customer who is inhibited to walk in the whorehouse. It may be possible that the poet wants us to imagine that the whorehouse is itself speaking these words or is to be imagined as having said these words to somebody who is about to enter.

Explanation

The poet assumes the role of a speaker who is asking people at random to be customers and to enter the whorehouse. He passes on the sense of belongingness to the customer as the whorehouse belongs to any visitor who may have it deliberately and intentionally in search of physical pleasures and sexual gratification. There is another image of the whorehouse smiling in the lighted street as the whorehouse is amused to find yet another customer. The speaker lures the visitor in thinking about the women he had always fancied. There must have been some women in the customer's life whom he desired but could not get. The speaker asks him to ponder over those women whom he always wished to know more closely but couldn't because of the circumstances.

2. '*The faces in the posters . . . the public hoardings.*'

Reference to Context

In these lines, the poet reminds the customer of all the attractive faces he had seen and desired in advertisements. These lines present an ironic comment on a society that portrays women as objects of desire.

Explanation

In these lines the poet asks the customer to think about all those beautiful and attractive faces that he sees in advertisements in the form of posters or public hoardings. The irony of the situation is that even if these advertisements are meant to popularize a product to be used by men, they have a sensual picture of a woman selling that product. So, the idea behind this façade is to arouse the men and attract them to buy the product. But in all this, it is the women on the posters who become the object of desire.

The poet says to customer that all the beautiful and attractive women whom he has desired in some point in his life are there in the whorehouse, not exactly the ones he desired, but similar faces are all there together. In these lines the poet mocks the male libido which only craves physical gratification devoid of emotional involvement. Moreover, in doing so he, perhaps unknowingly, makes a broad generalization that all women in advertisements and posters are the same. The element of objectification is unmistakable. The use of the word 'similar' is the clincher in this section as it reinforces the idea of a generic statement being made to women who are available for public consumption either through billboards or in whorehouses. The poet goes further to state that the whorehouse has been put up for men like him by women who appear 'similar' to the glamorous women he sees on display.

4. '*The sacred hollow courtyard . . . a heresy of that house.*'

Reference to Context

In these lines, the poet ironically refers to the whorehouse as sacred in order to further lure the customer to leave his inhibitions and get inside the whorehouse with a free mind.

Explanation

The speaker, whether it is the whorehouse itself or some spokesman on behalf of the whorehouse, asks the visitor to get ready to enjoy the pleasures that he is seeking. There is certainly a social stigma attached to a whorehouse and that may be the reason that the customer is being hesitant to go there without being guilty. However, the speaker compares the 'sacred hollow courtyard' to a false promise of commercial conspiracy. So, whether the customer goes there or not will not alter the already widely accepted opinion of people regarding the whorehouse. No action whatsoever can remove the stigma associated with the whorehouse. In other words, whether or not the customer enters or abstains on grounds of prudence or morality, the tarnished impression that the whorehouse carries will remain with it forever.

5. '*Are you ashamed to believe . . . eager darkness of return.*'

Reference to Context

Here the poet tries to convince the customer that it is not a shameful an act to have visited a brothel and in case he is feeling ashamed of his visit to the forbidden place, he should think about the women he has left behind.

Explanation

The poet asks the customer if it is such a shameful act to be in the brothel! He asks him if he feels embarrassed to admit that he has come to a whorehouse. He tells him to think about those women he left behind to be in the brothel. Perhaps they remind themselves of the 'looked after children' and a 'home' that they never had.

Check Your Progress

11. What are the main themes in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra?
12. Why does the speaker remind the customer of 'the faces in the posters'?
13. What does the promise of 'a great conspiracy' refer to?
14. What is meant by 'disobeying toy'?

Reference to Context

In these lines, the poet reminds the customer of all the attractive faces he had seen and desired in advertisements. These lines present an ironic comment on a society that portrays women as objects of desire.

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6. *'Dream children, dark, superfluous . . . edge of the rainbow.'*

Reference to Context

The poet talks about the imaginary children and refers to them as– dream children. However, the dream children are depicted as a matter of destroying the emotions of human kindness.

Explanation

The poet makes a brilliant use of metaphor in describing the imaginary children who do not exist in reality. In calling them 'dream children', the poet reminds us of a famous essay *Dream Children* by Charles Lamb , in which he imagines having a couple of children and expresses his thoughts and fancies about them. The customer is asked to think of the dream children, even though the childless women who invent them do not spend all their time thinking about them. The sense of guilt of a customer deepens when he thinks of the women whom he has left behind in order to go to a brothel, thereby, seeking new experiences of physical pleasures. There is a vivid use of simile and metaphor in these lines. As a symbol, a woman is usually identified with the 'discarded things'. She is portrayed as sexually oppressed by the so-called patriarchal system and poverty.

7. *'You fall back against her. . . little things, the imagined.'*

Reference to Context

In these lines the poet presents the whore as a mechanical tool who performs her task as a professional and shows no emotional attachments.

Explanation

The customer moves back a little bit and brushes against another prostitute who must have entered the room to display herself as variety for the customer's preference. These lines are also suggestive of the sexual encounter between the customer and the prostitute. While still engaged in their business, the customer tries to probe further into the psychology of the prostitute in an attempt to have a better understanding of the women whom he is with. However, as a thorough professional, she performs the task emotionlessly and gives the customer maximum satisfaction with the aim of securing his patronage. In doing so, she also pleases him with the sweet little things that the customer may have fancied.

8. *'Until the statue of the man . . . A disobeying toy.'*

Reference to Context

This refers to the customer's inner conflict when suddenly his innermost feeling reveals itself to him..

Explanation

The customer suddenly feels an urge to listen to his inner self. It seems to him as if his inner self has something to convey to him. However, it appears to him like a disobeying toy. 'A disobeying toy' is a metaphorical phrase that refers to the customer when his inner self reveals itself to him. His inner self is compared to a toy, which somehow, does not obey his command and appears to be guided by its own free will.

NOTES

9. *'And the walls you wanted . . . your half– woken mind.'*

Reference to Context

Here the poet struggles with his subconscious in the 'wild wilderness' of his 'half-woken mind'.

Explanation

The customer feels disabled to command his own inner self because a conflict between his conscious and subconscious mind comes into play. The customer finds that he has always disregarded such acts of physical pleasure, and sometimes he had even wished to dismantle these brothel houses. However, at the same time, he has also felt a suppressed desire of having such an experience. While the customer is lost in his inner conflicts, he is suddenly jolted back to his senses.

10. *'When, like a door . . . thrashed against your kind.'*

Reference to Context

These are the concluding lines of *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*. In these lines the poet experiences a sudden shock to hear the 'thrashing' words of the woman who was in a hurry to finish the business.

Explanation

The poet is stunned at the remark made by the whore. This rebuke comes at a time when he was thinking of ways to seek emotional solace in her company. This is when she suddenly asks him to hurry up and leave. Her words had a great force in them as she asks him to be quick, so that she can move on to her next appointment. He is shocked at her urgency to leave quickly in order to carry on business with a new customer for a payment. Her words appear to carry the intensity of a whip and he understands that the whorehouse is not a place for people like him who have mixed feelings and wish to seek emotional and psychological companionship.

3.4.2 *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street:* A Comment on the Social Issue of Prostitution

Mahapatra's deftness in presenting the realities of women's life has always been significant to the Indian scenario. The poor and pathetic condition of women has always been one of his main concerns. Mahapatra's women range from being wives, village women, city women, seductresses, adolescent girls as well as prostitutes.

Indian society has always ostracized prostitutes and prohibited them to be a part of cultured society. Mahapatra deals with the misery of the lives of prostitutes in *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*. He presents a meaningless and futile life of prostitutes struggling for their own identity and sustenance. They have nothing but darkness all around them and are condemned to survive amidst sorrow and difficulty. He represents their lives by showing a kind of emotional detachment that they seem to possess and the routine aspect gets reinforced by the monotonous and strenuous sexual encounters they experience. The matter of fact tone of the prostitute is suggestive of her superficial involvement as seductresses and highlights her emotional distance from any real bonding that some of her customers may want. In other words, the flesh and the mind are at odds with each other and no attempt has been made to reconcile the conflict.

Check Your Progress

15. What heresy is referred to in the second paragraph?
16. How does the customer struggle with his inner self?
17. Why is the customer shocked in the end?

NOTES

3.4.3 Theme of the Poem

Mahapatra's thematic concerns are many and he deals with a variety of themes, with deftness. Sexuality and prostitution are the theme of *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*. While the customer visits a whorehouse with an urge to indulge his fancies, he is finally rebuked by the prostitute to finish the business quickly, so that she can attend to her next customer. Though, there is an initial inhibition in the customer because he is ashamed in entering a house of ill repute, yet he is happy to think that he will soon be able to satisfy himself. He also has an urge to learn more about the women he is with. Therefore, the poem combines the psychological interest with an interest that such a theme inherently possesses.

Mahapatra's treatment of the theme of prostitution is remarkable as are his social implications. Prostitution is an outcome of poverty and in addressing the issue. Mahapatra has addressed the issue of poverty. He has also commented on the mechanical nature of a prostitute's job which leaves her least interested in her customers as individuals. This can be seen in the ending where she abruptly tells the customer to get dressed and leave without any further ado.

3.4.5 Structure of the Poem

The structure of the poem is irregular in the sense that there are four paragraphs, each of different length. The incoherent structure also implies the incoherent nature of prostitution. All the four paragraphs share a similar appearance but there is no rhyme scheme at all. Whereas the poem begins by asking the customer to walk right in the whorehouse, it ends with an indication to the customer to leave as quickly as the business is over. The theme is connected from beginning to end and has the sharpness of tone in revealing the initial inhibitions and intentions of the customer.

The first paragraph invites the customer to a whorehouse and lures him with a promise of fulfillment. However, the second paragraph labels that promise as a 'promise of great conspiracy' and his initial hesitation and shame in having visited a whorehouse diminishes. The third and the fourth paragraph involve him into a psychological analysis where his physical pleasures are taken care of. A sudden shock comes to the customer when he is asked to quickly finish his business and leave.

A comment on a broad and vivid theme of sexuality and prostitution presented in a compact and terse structure such as this is possible only in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry.

Activity

Read other poems by Jayanta Mahapatra and make a list of themes that keep coming up such as: poverty, prostitution and loneliness. You may compare your observations with your colleagues.

Did You Know

Mahapatra was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in 1981 for his poem *Relationship*. He is the first Indian English poet to receive the honour.

Check Your Progress

18. Which social issues are addressed in the poem?
19. What is the theme of the poem?
20. How does Mahapatra deal with the theme of prostitution?

NOTES

3.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra, is one of the finest contributions to the genre of Indo-Anglian poetry, which is undoubtedly a significant part of Indian literature. The sensibility, themes and ideas are Indian; only the medium to express them is English.
- We can assume that Indo-Anglian poetry began in the 1960s and the poets who have developed it include Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, A. K. Ramanujan and Keki N. Daruwalla , to name a few.
- The main characteristic feature of Indo-Anglian poets is that they choose their themes from a wide range of Indian legends and Indian folklore and express their views with reference to the contemporary situation in India.
- Poverty and hunger have been two staple themes, as well as challenges that continue to influence poetry and intellectual thought and these are the themes that dominate Mahapatra's poetry as well.
- *Hunger* is a poem, that refers to a strong desire for physical gratification as well as the physiological need for food and sustenance. In both the meanings of hunger, the end result has to be gratification. The poem describes the experience of the protagonist with a fisherman and his daughter. Although, no details are given regarding the financial condition of the fisherman, the inference that he is at the fringes of society can be deduced from his behaviour and the condition of the place where he lives.
- Mahapatra's poetry often deals with the theme of prostitution and what causes this evil in society. Unlike other poets, who make extensive use of euphemisms, Mahapatra, never subordinates the seriousness of the issue, at hand to maintain bourgeoisie prudence.
- In his poetry, women and their predicaments are treated with care and in a manner which is restrained, unsentimental, delicate and above all realistic.
- *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*, begins with an invitation to enter a whorehouse and ends with the prostitute asking the protagonist to leave. The ending is as sharp as the beginning, as both come across as instructions. Like his other poems, this poem also sheds light on the deplorable condition of prostitutes and explores the mundane reality of their everyday struggle against poverty, corruption and other forms of exploitation.

3.6 KEY TERMS

- **Metaphor**: A metaphor is a figure of speech in which, two unrelated things are compared in an implicit manner. Unlike simile, a metaphor does not make use of the words 'like' and 'as'. For instance: 'the flesh's sling', 'her wormy legs' compared in an implicit manner.
- **Alliteration**: Alliteration refers to a decorative device, used by the poet in order to emphasize his point of view. It is the use of the same consonant at the beginning of each stressed syllable in a line of verse. For instance: 'sticky soot crossed the space', 'his nets and his nerves', 'sprawling sand'

Mahapatra has addressed the issue of poverty. He has also commented on the mechanical nature of a prostitute's job which leaves her least interested in her customers as individuals. This can be seen in the ending where she abruptly tells the customer to get dressed and leave without any further ado.

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- **Simile**: Simile refers to a figure of speech, that establishes a similarity and resemblance between different kinds of things. The words 'like' and 'as', are used to bring out the similarity of the things of different kind

3.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Jayanta Mahapatra's poem *Hunger*, is based on his personal experience of growing up in a poor district of Odisha. He has witnessed his own grandfather almost perishing in the famine of 1866 in Odisha. He admitted that he had a troubled relation with his mother and an unhappy childhood. The experiences of his unhappy childhood can be seen in his poetic works.
2. The fisherman adopted a careless tone in order to hide his guilt. He was trying to be casual as if the protagonist's answer would not matter to him. But it was one of his tricks to secure a customer for his daughter in order to get some money. However, as a father, he was trying to hide his anxiety of selling off his own daughter.
3. The fisherman told the protagonist that his daughter had just turned fifteen, assuming that fifteen was the right age for a girl to lure a customer. He asked the protagonist to feel her till he comes back. He becomes a flesh-monger of sorts to escape succumbing to poverty.
4. The protagonist realizes that the girl was doing everything under the compulsion of poverty. Her gesture of spreading her 'wormy legs wide' at once made him understand that she too had experienced 'hunger' but of a different nature; her hunger was an outcome of poverty.
5. The protagonist felt a sense of guilt in following the fisherman to his shack. He was aware of his intense sexual hunger, but he wanted to seek redemption after committing the sin. He wished to burn the very house that he lived in.
6. The smoke coming from the oil lamp burning inside the shack seemed to penetrate the blank mind of the protagonist. Although the shock was covered with soot, yet it was the mind of the protagonist which it was penetrating. This feeling of being filled up with 'soot' was also an outcome of his sense of guilt and shame.
7. The girl was a victim of extreme poverty and was also aware of the situation. She did not speak anything, but 'opened her wormy legs wide'. She knew that she was just a commodity for the customer, similar to the fish caught by the fisherman in his nets. While the fish struggles hard to get out of the net, the girl silently allows herself to be consumed. It was not her urge like the protagonist, but real hunger and the possibility of starvation, that compels her to be ravished.
8. The poet has drawn out two images of hunger. Hunger related to flesh and hunger related to poverty. The former is experienced by the protagonist while the latter is experienced by the girl and the fisherman also her father and broker. In this poem, the juxtaposition allows for us to see how the gratification of one hunger will lead to the gratification of another hunger.
9. The poem *Hunger* has all the elements of a full length story. There is a sequence of events in a proper order, from the beginning when the protagonist admits to have an urge for sex, to the end, where he realizes that his urge is not the only hunger to be satisfied. Poverty emanates the worst kind of hunger. Like a story, the poem also has three different characters, even though two of them remain silent throughout.
10. The theme of the poem is poverty and sexuality. The poet has drawn two vivid pictures of hunger – one emanating from sexual urge and the other emanating from extreme poverty. A father sells his daughter to a person who himself is in the throes of carnal hunger. However, his gratification leads to the gratification of the father, as well as the daughter.
11. Mahapatra's thematic concerns are many and he deals with a variety of them like poverty, hunger, starvation, prostitution, sexuality, nature and religion.
12. The speaker reminds the customer of the 'faces in the posters' in order to lure him to visit the whorehouse where he says 'are all there together'. He tempts him with an assumption that he will find similar women in the whorehouse just like the ones he had longed for all his life.
13. The speaker compares the 'sacred hollow courtyard' to a false promise of commercial conspiracy. So, whether the customer goes there or not will not alter the already widely accepted opinion of people about the whorehouse.
14. 'A disobeying toy' is a metaphorical phrase that refers to the customer when his inner self reveals itself to him. His inner self is compared to a toy, which somehow, does not obey his command.
15. The speaker tells the customer that his good intentions or actions cannot alter the already widely accepted opinion of people about the whorehouse. When a house is called a whorehouse, no effort to contradict the opinion can ever be successful. Society has always ostracized prostitutes and prohibited them to be a part of its mainstream functions and culture, so whether the customer visits the brothel or not will not affect the profession of prostitution in any manner.
16. The customer feels disabled to command his own inner self because a conflict between his conscious mind and subconscious mind comes into play. The customer finds that he has always disregarded such acts of physical pleasure and sometimes he had even wished to dismantle these houses of ill repute. However, at the same time, he has also felt a desire of experiencing gratification in a brothel.
17. The customer is shocked, at the prostitute's urgency to leave quickly, in order to carry on with new business with a new customer, for a fresh payment. The words of the whore completely 'thrash 'him' when she asks him to hurry up and finish the business as soon as he can. He is shocked at her detached response.
18. Social issues such as prostitution, sexuality and poverty are addressed in the poem, *The Whorehouse In A Calcutta Street*.
19. Sexuality and prostitution are the themes of *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*.
20. Mahapatra's treatment of the theme is brilliant which also has social implications. Prostitution is an outcome of poverty and in addressing the issue of prostitution Mahapatra has also addressed the issue of poverty. He has also commented upon the mechanical nature of a prostitute's job who is least interested in entertaining customer's as individuals with emotional needs.

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3.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Why was the fisherman 'trailing his nets and his nerves'?
2. Bring out the similes and the metaphors in the poem 'Hunger'.
3. Write a note on the two kinds of hungers described in the poem 'Hunger'.
4. What is the significance of the women the speaker sees on billboards and advertisements in the poem, *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta street*.
5. What was the reaction of the protagonist on seeing the fisherman's daughter?
6. What does Mahapatra try to tell through his poems?
7. What does dream children refer to?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Comment on the figure of the fisherman, the protagonist and the girl.
2. Discuss *Hunger* as a comment on the social issue of poverty.
3. Write a critical appreciation of Jayanta Mahapatra's poem *The Whorehouse In A Calcutta Street*.
4. Discuss the theme of the poem *The Whorehouse in Calcutta*.
5. Comment on the 'false chatter' of the women left behind in the poem, *The Whorehouse in Calcutta*.
6. Write an essay highlighting the importance of the ending of the poem, *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*.

3.9 FURTHER READING

Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature,* Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1982.

Iyengar, K.R.S., *Indian Writing in English,* Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1962.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Twice Born Fiction*, Arnold Heinemann, Delhi, 1971.

UNIT 4 R. K. NARAYAN AND MULK RAJ ANAND

Structure

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Unit Objectives
4.2 R. K. Narayan: A Brief Sketch
4.3 *The Guide*: A Summary
4.4 Major Themes in the Novel
  4.4.1 Family Relationships
  4.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and Its Consequences
  4.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness
  4.4.4 Emancipation of Women
  4.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality
  4.4.6 Class Difference
4.5 Characters
  4.5.1 Raju
  4.5.2 Rosie
  4.5.3 Marco
4.6 R. K. Narayan's Technique of Writing
4.7 Mulk Raj Anand: A Brief Sketch
4.8 *Coolie*: A Critical Appreciation
4.9 Summary
4.10 Key Terms
4.11 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.12 Questions and Exercises
4.13 Further Reading

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to two famous novelist and short story writers who were the founders of the English-language Indian novels.

— R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand

Narayan is one of the most famous and widely read Indian authors of the twentieth century. He is credited with introducing Indian culture to the rest of the world. Though Narayan's work has been often criticized for being too simple in prose and diction, he has managed to gain international visibility based on his highly-localized novels that are usually set in the fictional Mysorean village of

Malgudi—the single most endearing 'character' created by Narayan.

In 1935, Narayan began his writing career with *Swami and Friends*. Not only has the Indian culture been described intricately in Narayan's writings, it also possesses a uniqueness of its own. He was a gifted author who immaculately described the simplicity of old days and how people tried to cope with the changing world.

Some of Narayan's famous works include *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *Malgudi Days* (1982), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993).

On the other hand, Mulk Raj Anand is known for his realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the poor. Born in Peshawar (now in Pakistan) on 12 December 1905, he went to University College, London, and Cambridge University after graduating from Khalsa College in Amritsar in 1924. He actively participated in India's independence while in Europe. At the same time, he wrote a series of books on South Asian Culture. These were *Persian Painting* (1930), *Curries and Other Indian Dishes* (1932), *The Hindu View of Art* (1933), *The Indian Theatre* (1950), and *Seven Little-Known Birds of the Inner Eye* (1978). As a novel writer he gained wide recognition with *Untouchables* in 1935 and Coolie the following year. Anand also wrote short-stories and edited numerous magazines and journals, including Marg, an art quarterly that he founded in 1946. He also intermittently worked on a projected seven-volume autobiographical novel entitled Seven Ages of Man, completing four volumes: *Seven Summers* (1951), *Morning Face* (1968), *Confession of a Lover* (1976), and *The Bubble* (1984).

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Recall important various aspects of R. K. Narayan's career
- Summarize the novel *The Guide* by Narayan
- Describe the major themes of *The Guide*
- Recall important aspects of Mulk Raj Anand's life
- Summarize the text of *Coolie*

4.2 R. K. NARAYAN: A BRIEF SKETCH

Among the Indian writers in English, R. K. Narayan has a special place in history. As a novelist, he maintained India's essence in all his works rather than adopting traditional Western style.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born on 10 October 1906 at Puraswalkam, Madras. It was a congested, noisy and dusty downtown locality. The large family of Iyers included many uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins. Narayan was the third of eighteen children of his parents. The household included grandmothers and grandfathers on both mother's and father's side besides grand uncles and aunts. This was because of the practice of intermarriage between the sister's and brother's children.

Narayan was looked after more by his maternal grandmother addressed as Ammani, rather than by his own mother. His grandmother had a great influence on his life. She affectionately called him Kunjappa, a name that he was called by among his family. She took on the responsibility of educating him, teaching him arithmetic, mythology, classical Indian music and Sanskrit. English was the language spoken in their house.

According to R. K. Laxman, Narayan's youngest brother, grammatical errors the siblings made were not looked upon too kindly. During his stay with his grandmother, Narayan attended many schools including the Lutheran Mission School in Purasawalkam, the C.R.C. High School, and the Christian College High School.

Reading was a passion for Narayan and as a young boy he read the works of Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy. At the age of twelve, Narayan took part in a pro-independence march. His act was frowned upon by his uncle. The family was not inclined towards politics as they regarded all governments as wicked.

Narayan's Education

Narayan studied at his father's school and disappointed his family's emerging middleclass aspirations as he failed his first attempt to qualify for the graduate course in Arts. When his father was transferred to the Maharajah's Collegiate High School, Mysore, Narayan shifted there to be with his family. Delighted by the well-stocked library at school as well as his father's collection, Narayan's reading habit intensified.

It was at this time that he started writing as well. After a failed attempt at the university entrance exam, he spent a year at home just reading and writing. He cleared the exam in 1926 and joined the Maharaja College of Mysore. A formal education did not seem to suit him as he took four years to complete his graduation, a year more than normal. He would have pursued an MA degree but was dissuaded by a friend who was convinced this would kill his interest in literature. Instead, he took to teaching in a school but walked out when he was asked by the headmaster to act as a stand-in for the physical training instructor.

With this experience came the realization that, for him, writing was the only career. He then made up his mind to stay at home and concentrate on writing novels. His first published work was a book review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England.* In the meantime, he never faltered in his resolve to write for a living; he also tried to make ends meet by freelance journalism and keeping odd jobs. He kept on writing and submitting stories for newspapers and magazines.

Narayan's Career

As Narayan was struggling with a writing career, he couldn't contribute financially to household expenses. The lot fell on his elder brother who literally had to burn the midnight oil to keep the family going. Narayan stayed at home, typing the script of a play on a noisy typewriter, while his father, along with others, were certain that he was wasting his time trying to make a living as a writer.

The completion of his first novel did not bear immediate fruition as, for Narayan, it was not easy to find either a publisher or a reading audience. In 1933, while on vacation at his sister's house, Narayan fell in love with a fifteen-year-old girl Rajam. Astrologically and financially they were mismatched but with great difficulty Narayan managed to obtain parental approval and married her. Subsequent to this, Narayan joined a paper called *The Justice* as a reporter. His strict rebellion against the caste-difference in India, especially that between a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin, was displayed in this newspaper which was dedicated to the rights of non–Brahmins. As part of his job, he was exposed to a variety of people and various causes.

Earlier, Narayan had sent the manuscript of a novel to a friend at Oxford, who showed it to Graham Greene. It was this first novel, *'Swami and Friends'*, which brought him in contact with Greene. The first novel of Narayanan was published again in 1935 under Greene's care in England. Greene also advised Narayan to shorten his name to enable it to be easier for the English-speaking readers. In his first novel, he attempted to be a realist and used his own experiences in the form of a story.

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- Recall important aspects of Mulk Raj Anand's life
- Summarize the text of *Coolie*

4.2 R. K. NARAYAN: A BRIEF SKETCH

Among the Indian writers in English, R. K. Narayan has a special place in history. As a novelist, he maintained India's essence in all his works rather than adopting traditional Western style.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born on 10 October 1906 at Puraswalkam, Madras. It was a congested, noisy and dusty downtown locality. The large family of Iyers included many uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins. Narayan was the third of eighteen children of his parents. The household included grandmothers and grandfathers on both mother's and father's side besides grand uncles and aunts. This was because of the practice of intermarriage between the sister's and brother's children.

Narayan was looked after more by his maternal grandmother addressed as Ammani, rather than by his own mother. His grandmother had a great influence on his life. She affectionately called him Kunjappa, a name that he was called by among his family. She took on the responsibility of educating him, teaching him arithmetic, mythology, classical Indian music and Sanskrit. English was the language spoken in their house.

According to R. K. Laxman, Narayan's youngest brother, grammatical errors the siblings made were not looked upon too kindly. During his stay with his grandmother, Narayan attended many schools including the Lutheran Mission School in Purasawalkam, the C.R.C. High School, and the Christian College High School.

Reading was a passion for Narayan and as a young boy he read the works of Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy. At the age of twelve, Narayan took part in a pro-independence march. His act was frowned upon by his uncle. The family was not inclined towards politics as they regarded all governments as wicked.

Narayan's Education

Narayan studied at his father's school and disappointed his family's emerging middleclass aspirations as he failed his first attempt to qualify for the graduate course in Arts. When his father was transferred to the Maharajah's Collegiate High School, Mysore, Narayan shifted there to be with his family. Delighted by the well-stocked library at school as well as his father's collection, Narayan's reading habit intensified.

It was at this time that he started writing as well. After a failed attempt at the university entrance exam, he spent a year at home just reading and writing. He cleared the exam in 1926 and joined the Maharaja College of Mysore. A formal education did not seem to suit him as he took four years to complete his graduation, a year more than normal. He would have pursued an MA degree but was dissuaded by a friend who was convinced this would kill his interest in literature. Instead, he took to teaching in a school but walked out when he was asked by the headmaster to act as a stand-in for the physical training instructor.

With this experience came the realization that, for him, writing was the only career. He then made up his mind to stay at home and concentrate on writing novels. His first published work was a book review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England.* In the meantime, he never faltered in his resolve to write for a living; he also tried to make ends meet by freelance journalism and keeping odd jobs. He kept on writing and submitting stories for newspapers and magazines.

Narayan's Career

As Narayan was struggling with a writing career, he couldn't contribute financially to household expenses. The lot fell on his elder brother who literally had to burn the midnight oil to keep the family going. Narayan stayed at home, typing the script of a play on a noisy typewriter, while his father, along with others, were certain that he was wasting his time trying to make a living as a writer.

The completion of his first novel did not bear immediate fruition as, for Narayan, it was not easy to find either a publisher or a reading audience. In 1933, while on vacation at his sister's house, Narayan fell in love with a fifteen-year-old girl Rajam. Astrologically and financially they were mismatched but with great difficulty Narayan managed to obtain parental approval and married her. Subsequent to this, Narayan joined a paper called *The Justice* as a reporter. His strict rebellion against the caste-difference in India, especially that between a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin, was displayed in this newspaper which was dedicated to the rights of non–Brahmins. As part of his job, he was exposed to a variety of people and various causes.

Earlier, Narayan had sent the manuscript of a novel to a friend at Oxford, who showed it to Graham Greene. It was this first novel, *'Swami and Friends'*, which brought him in contact with Greene. The first novel of Narayanan was published again in 1935 under Greene's care in England. Greene also advised Narayan to shorten his name to enable it to be easier for the English-speaking readers. In his first novel, he attempted to be a realist and used his own experiences in the form of a story.

Though it elicited favourable reviews, sales figures did not go up. The Indian publishing industry in the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s was not very well organized. There were not many readers of Indian fiction in English. This meant small or nonexistent means to support oneself as a writer.

In 1931, after trying to interest all available publishers in his short stories and after trying to find a job in the newspaper *The Hindu* as a trainee reporter, he had a book review and short story published in *The Indian Review*. In 1933, *Punch* published his short satirical article, 'How to Write an Indian Novel.' In 1934 and 1935, he worked as the Mysore reporter for *The Justice*, the official organ of the non-brahmin movement.

Towards the end of the 1930s, Narayan started to contribute regularly with short stories and other pieces to *The Hindu*. This paper published many of his short stories and essays. During the latter half of the 1980s, Narayan's work was published in the magazine, *Frontline*. These included some essays, short stories, and three novels in a serial form. During the middle of his literary graph, Narayan had a fruitful association with *The Illustrated Weekly* and *The Times of India*.

R. K. Laxman, India's greatest cartoonist and the writer's youngest brother, was also deeply associated with these periodicals.

His next novel was *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), which is a picture of his own college life and experiences. In this book, Narayan described how marriages in India are finalized based on horoscopes and how a wife bears all animosities of her husband in the social contract of marriage. A different publisher on Greene's recommendation published it. Soon, *'The Dark Room'* (1938) was published, which dealt with the theme of domestic disharmony. In his third book, he wrote about a dominating husband whose wife was a victim of his oppression. Narayan's first three books dealt with socially accepted practices. In 1937 after his father's death, he accepted a commission from the Government of Mysore, which was a proposal to write a book to promote tourism in the state.

Malgudi Days, his first collection of short stories, was published in November 1942. The fictional town of Malgudi is the setting for most of Narayan's stories. The people there are simple and humble, and represent the middle class. *The English Teacher* was published in 1945. In the interim period, due to the war, Narayan was cut off from England. During this time, he started his own publishing company and named it Indian Thought Publications.

R. K. Narayan: A Comparative Analysis

Narayan was one of the first Indians to have his work published outside India with the exception of Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie. Before we analyse and compare Narayan's work, it would be apt to describe the unique features of his writing style. His writings were considered to be simple and unpretentious with a dash of humour. Narayan mainly focussed on ordinary people and his writings usually reminded the reader of people who are a part of their daily life, such as the next-door neighbour, cousins, friends and postman. It was this focus on ordinary people that the readers are able to relate to the story as it unfolds. Narayan had a very different approach from his contemporaries and was able to give a detailed version of the Indian society without making changes in his characteristics or the simplicity of his subject. His writings seem to be devoid of the current trends in fiction writing and, therefore, are unique in their own sense. Narayan's work is said to have gentle Tamil overtones and he also

Check Your Progress

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
   (a) R. K. Narayan was born on _____.
   (b) Narayan's _____ was a great influence on his life.
   (c) Narayan took _____ years to complete his graduation.
   (d) His first published work was a _____of Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England.
   (e) When Narayan finished his first novel, he could find neither a_____ nor a reading public.
   (f) In the novel _____, Narayan recounts his own college life and experiences.

employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose. Critics who have evaluated Narayan's work consider it to be descriptive and less analytical. They point out that his objective style is rooted in a detached spirit which provides a more authentic and realistic narration. His experience of life coupled with his attitude provided a unique blend of characters and actions, creating a connection with the readers.

4.3 *THE GUIDE:* A SUMMARY

The Guide is the story of a selfish middle class hero named Railway Raju, who does not complete his schooling, but spends his life cheating himself and all those who surrounded him for reasons best known to him. in the end turns a demi-God. Ironically, the life of the protagonist ends in sacrificing himself for an illusory cause. Narayan traces the career of this man from obscurity and ordinariness to prosperity and eminence, and finally his downfall.

Through the life of Raju, Narayan beautifully brings out the lives of Rosie, Marco, Gaffur and Raju's mother.

The Guide is thoroughly Indian, not only in its characters but also in its theme, ideas, imagery and sensibility It depicts the ironies of life and is a blend of comedy and seriousness. While there is a certain amount of social satire, there is no didactic aim or intention in this story of adultery.

The Guide possesses perfect artistic unity. Characters, setting, story, symbol, and style, all of them are functionally related to each other to create an artistic unity. The characters grow according to their own laws, and not according to the novelist. He is only suggesting the nature of his characters and the meaning of their acts and perhaps his own attitude towards them in relation to his vision of life. Raju's death, viewed symbolically, means that, if the individual who loses his life for the sake of his fellowmen, his 'death by water' is no death but a means of purification and self-realization.

It is the triumph of the traditional mode of living through natural and manmade catastrophes.

The whole story in the novel goes in flashbacks. The author moves on two planes — the past and present.

The Story

Raju is the son of a vendor at the Malgudi railway station. His father had built the house long before the railways had arrived. The railways brought prosperity as it opened up Malgudi for tourists. Scores of people come to see the ancient caves in the Mempi forests which had antique paintings of great cultural importance.

Soon, Raju got involved in entertaining tourists and taking them around the place. His knew Tamil and had studied at the Board High School for some time Gradually Raju became Railway Raju, a famous guide whom visitors asked for. His friend Gaffur, who operated a taxi, was his biggest help.

A scholar of ancient culture, Marco, comes to visit Malgudi to study the paintings in the caves. Raju lodges him at the Anand Bhavan Hotel and takes him to show the caves in Gaffur's taxi. Soon, thereafter, Marco's wife Rosie comes too. She is a postgraduate, 'not very glamorous, but she did have a figure, slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white but dusky'. She

Check Your Progress

2. State whether the following are true or false:
   (a) Narayan was affectionately called Ammani by his family.
   (b) At the age of twenty, Narayan took part in a pro-independence march.
   (c) After a failed attempt at the university entrance exam, Narayan spent a year at home which he spent in reading and writing.
   (d) He walked out of a teaching job when he was asked by the headmaster to act as a stand-in for the classical music instructor.
   (e) Narayan's first novel was *Swami and Friends*.
   (f) Towards the end of the 1930s, Narayan started to contribute short stories and other pieces to *The Hindu* regularly.

belongs to a family of temple dancers. Marco married her after advertising for a bride with education and good looks. She is, however, not interested in Marco's passion for paintings and objects of art. Rising with good temperament but sleeping after a quarrel is their routine. In such a situation, betraying his relationship with his wife, Marco affords an opportunity to Raju to be closer to Rosie.

As a tourist guide, praising and flattering has become Raju's second nature and he succeeds marvelously with Rosie. Dancing is her weakness, which is detested by Marco as 'street acrobatics'. But Raju tries his trick by praising her talent for dance to the extent that he succeeds in establishing sexual relationship with her after whetting her dissatisfaction for Marco. All this comes to the notice of Marco very soon and he abandons Rosie at the Malgudi station before leaving for Madras. She comes to stay with Raju in his house and starts practising dance.

These developments become intolerable to his mother and she leaves with her brother for her village. Raju's shop at the platform is swindled by his assistant and he is indebted to Sait for eight thousand rupees. The shop is allotted to another contractor. The creditor, Sait, files a criminal case against Raju for assaulting him. But he does not abandon Rosie. After she has had enough practice, he secures a chance for her dance performance at the Albert Mission College students' function. It proves a breakeven incident and Rosie becomes a star dancer. Her name is changed to Nalini and invitations for her performance come from all the corners of south India. Huge amounts are paid in advance and she is always booked.

Raju, too, becomes a respectable person with judges, ministers, officers and mill-owners seeking his company. His household has several servants, a driver and a Gurkha guard. One day, Raju receives a book, *The Cultural History of South India*, sent by Marco's publishers. He does not show or talk about it with Rosie. After some time he finds an insured envelop addressed to Rosie from Marco's lawyers. It contains a document for the release of a jewellery box to be signed by Rosie. Fearing revival of feelings for Marco in Rosie's heart, Raju forges her signatures on the document and sends it back. Soon he is arrested on Marco's complaint. In spite of Rosie's best efforts, he is sentenced to two years' imprisonment. While in jail, he is a model prisoner and is referred to as a teacher. But, after his release, he comes to the village of Mangal and camps at an old desolated temple on the banks of river Sarayu.

The poor, ignorant but innocent villagers gather faith in him and start flocking round him for solutions to their personal problems. They come to believe that his mere look transforms a person. They bring him offerings of fruit, rice and milk and clothes on festivals. They start calling him the 'swami'. Many years pass by thus. Then there is a drought. Drought results in famine. Food brawls and murders start taking place. In his humility, Raju sends a message to a man named Velan and other villagers to stop quarrelling, otherwise he would not eat. The message is sent through an idiot who reports that the Swami informs that he would not eat until it rains. Villagers from far and near start thronging the place to have a glimpse of the holy man who is fasting for rains. Newspapers flash this news and several governmental agencies come to exploit the potential of the congregation there.

Raju tries his utmost to explain to Velan that he never intended to fast for rains and does not want to do it. He tells Velan of his past life of crime and lust. But the reverence for his holy appearance with long beard and hair is so stupefying that Velan does not react except with renewed submission. Raju has no option but to rise to the demands of the situation. He undertakes to fast and pray in the knee-deep waters for

the arrival of rains. On the eleventh day, he collapses while praying in the river bed with the prophecy that it has started raining in the hills. *The Guide* is, thus, a very powerful story. It has a strong mythological base.

Opening of the Novel

As the novel opens, we find Raju sitting alone and bored in a crossed-legged position on a granite slab on the banks of river Sarayu, waiting for someone's company. A gullible villager, Velan, comes and sits two steps below where Raju is sitting. When asked, the stranger tells Raju that he is from Mangala, 'not very far from here'. He is returning from a visit to his sister who lives nearby. Raju likes his 'rambling talk' and remembers how he met the loquacious barber just outside the prison gate soon after his release. Raju was not ready to talk about his conviction and sentence but the barber guessed that Raju had not committed any serious crime. After he had finished, he told Raju that he looked 'like a maharaja'.

The narrative then goes into the flashback. The incident of the villager who has come to consult with him happened long ago. The narrative then gets somewhat confusing as Narayan moves forward to tell the villager, named Velan, his life story. It is at this time that Rosie is introduced to the reader. There is another swing to the past where the narrator recounts his childhood before returning to Velan and his problems. The blank lines he has inserted in the narrative mark the points at which the settings change.

Raju mistaken for a *Sadhu*

Velan mistakes Raju for a holy man and entreats him to solve his domestic problem. His half-sister has run away from the house on the day of her marriage and was traced in a fair in a distant village three days later. The girl sulked in a room the whole day and Velan wondered whether she was possessed by an evil spirit. As is his wont, Raju makes light of the whole thing saying that such things are a part of life.

Then he remembers how his troubles started when Rosie came into his life. It was a strange name for a typical South Indian woman. She was not a foreigner and she could have had any other Indian name like Devi, Meena or Lalita. It was a memorable day when he saw the ill-matched couple at the Malgudi station. Raju knew that Marco was 'a lifelong customer' for him.

Raju was fated to become a tourist guide. He muses; 'I was a guide for the same reason that someone else is a signaller, porter or guard. It is fated thus'. He was influenced by the railways since very early in life. He felt at home on the railway platform and 'considered the railway master and porter the best company for man and their talk the most enlightened. I grew up in their midst.'

Raju's Childhood

Raju's father had built their house outside Malgudi town with papaya trees all around. Initially, he sold the papaya and later he built a small shop of 'planks and gunny sack' outside the house. Here, he sold peppermint fruit, tobacco, betel-leaf, parched gram and whatever else the wayfarers on the Trunk Road demanded. As a child, Raju was asked to help his father when he went home for his mid-day meals. They were woken up early in the morning with the crowing of the neighbourhood cock. They began their day with the ritual pooja before the pictures of gods. After his father had milked the cow, he tried to teach Raju the Tamil alphabet on the *pyol* of the house. But Raju

was not interested in studies. He was relieved when his father went to attend his shop. He would rush off to the shade of a tamarind tree across the road and play there all day. Sometimes his father took him to the town in a bullock cart for shopping. Raju liked these excursions: 'Men and vehicles, hogs and boys— the panorama of life enchanted me.'

As Raju is musing over his childhood and how he came to be a tourist guide, the stranger interrupts his trail of thoughts with his problem. He then suggests to the worried Velan to bring his sister to him. Raju ruminates: 'I wish I had asked him what the age of the girl was. Hope she is uninteresting. I have had enough trouble in life.' Raju starts feeling that he is 'attaining the stature of a saint'.

Velan and his Sister

The next morning, Velan brings his sister there. He also brings some food and other offerings for Raju. The girl has braided her hair and decorated herself with jewellery. Raju sits up rubbing his eyes: 'He was as yet unprepared to take charge of the world's affairs. His immediate need was privacy for his morning ablutions.' He asks them to go a certain distance away and wait for him. Raju starts telling them the story of Devaka which he cannot complete. Velan and his sister keep following him as he strides across the temple majestically; they also keep listening to him mutely. Velan is of the stuff disciples are made of: an unfinished story or an incomplete moral never bothers him; it is all 'in the scheme of life'.

As Raju fumbles with the story his mother had told him, he starts thinking of his childhood again. His father would keep chatting with the wayfarers outside his 'Hut-Shop' till late at night without bothering to have his meals despite several reminders from Raju's mother. While waiting for his father to come home after closing the shop, Raju would insist that his mother tell him a story. Raju tells Velan that he is not going to think of his problems right now; he will consider them and render his advice when 'the time is ripe for it'. Velan accepts this answer 'with resignation' and rises to leave. Raju then points to his sister and tells Velan: 'I know what your problem is, but l wish to give the matter some thought. We cannot force vital solutions. Every question must bide its time.... And to arrive at a proper understanding time is needed.' Raju is himself surprised at what he is saying.

Velan is relieved to hear that 'his master' is seized of the problem faced by him. He looks 'significantly' at his 'difficult sister' who bows her head in shame. Raju gazes at her and tells her 'What must happen must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change its course just as no one can change the course of this river.' Satisfied with these platitudes, Velan and his sister leave. As we shall see, Raju's words leave a great impact on Velan's sister; she goes from there a 'changed girl'.

Narayan starts the narrative in the middle of the story and he plunges straight into the story a couple of days, after Raju's release from prison. His chance meeting with an illiterate and gullible villager, Velan, gradually elevates the former tourist guide and jailbird to sainthood. By uttering a few platitudes, Raju is able to win Velan's confidence and Velan, as Narayan points out, is 'of the stuff that disciples are made of'. In course of time, he becomes Raju's follower, constant companion and confidant. Besides, he provides him with faith.

Narayan's narrative technique in *The Guide* is unusual. There is a constant shifting between the present and the past. For instance, as Velan relates his immediate problem to Raju, the latter dashes back to his past and the time when all his problems started. There are also dexterous touches, the typical Narayan tongue-in-cheek humour as in the description of Rosie's husband, Marco, the eternal tourist.

Check Your Progress

3. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
   (a) Raju is the son of a vendor at the _____of Malgudi.
   (b) A scholar of ancient culture named _____, comes to visit Malgudi to study the paintings in the caves.
   (c) Through the journey of _____, the lives of Rosie, Gaffur and Marco are unveiled.
   (d) Velan tells Raju that he is from _____, a nearby town.
   (e) Raju was fated to become a _____.
   (f) Raju has a great impact on Velan's _____.

Raju's Schooling

Raju thinks of the time when the railway line was being laid a little distance away from his house. It would take six to eight months for the tracks to be laid before trains could come to Malgudi. Work continued at a brisk pace, Raju lost part of his freedom under the tamarind tree because lorries were parked there now. He would climb onto them and play; nobody minded him but his clothes became dirty. He would often stand on top of red mud and view the distant Mempi hills. Gradually, he befriended the men working on the track listening to their talk and sharing their jokes. Raju's father was worried and he decided to admit him to school, which he 'loathed'. A great fuss was made every morning when Raju was sent to school. He was dressed in clean shirt and shorts, his hair was combed and a tiffin was packed for him. But it soon became a drudgery for Raju: 'l preferred to be neglected and stay at home than to be fussed over and sent to a school.' But he was helpless as his father was a stern disciplinarian who would take no nonsense from him.

The teacher, an old man, believed in 'getting the maximum noise out of his pupils'. Raju would have preferred to be sent to the fashionable Albert Mission School which was close by. 'I'd have felt proud to call myself an Albert Mission boy,' But his father didn't want him to have anything to do with a Christian school. The place where Raju was sent to study was hardly a school. The teacher was an abusive man, who habitually used to address his pupils as donkeys. Whenever the teacher went inside the house, which was very often, the students would peep in to see what was going on there. Once they saw the teacher cooking while his wife stood closely. From that day the teacher decreed that his students were not to cross the threshold of his house. From that day they never peeped in again but confined their attention to the drain that flowed beneath the *pyol*. The teacher's fee was one rupee a month per student and whatever else his students brought him. That was his only interest in his students who felt honoured to serve him. Despite the teacher's obvious disinterest in him and Raju's own indifference to studies, he proved 'good enough.'

Velan's Problem Solved

When Velan comes to see Raju the next day, the girl listens to Raju's advice and apologizes to her brother for the inconvenience and embarrassment caused. She also agrees to get married to the person chosen by Velan. This establishes Raju's claim as a holy man in Velan's village. He, however, does not attend the girl's marriage. He does not want to be seen in a crowd and he does not want to gather a crowd around him as a man who has worked a change in an obstinate girl. Velan brings the girl to him along with her hushand and a crowd of villagers and relatives. The incident attracts more followers. Raju is now looked upon as a holy man and people gather around him every evening. Raju cannot question them or ask them to go away as the river bank is a public place, where he himself is an intruder. People come and sit on the steps lower, to where Raju sits and keep looking at him. He doesn't have to say a word to anyone; he just keeps sitting there at the same place, and tries hard to think 'where he should go from there next and what to do.' People do not so much 'whisper a word for fear that it might disturb him'. Raju is 'beginning to feel uncomfortable on

(g) Velan, over time, elevates Raju, the former tourist guide and jailbird to _____
(h) Raju wanted to go to_____ School.
(i) The teacher's fee was _____a month per student.
(k) The coming of _____ brought prosperity to the small town of Malgudi.
(l) In *The Guide*, the author utilizes cinematic elements such as _____and jump cuts.

NOTES

these occasions' and wonders 'if he could devise some means of escape from their company'. Throughout the day he is practically left alone, but late in the evening after finishing their work, the villagers would come there; they felt blessed in his company.

Raju's Indecisiveness about being a Holy Man

One evening before the people arrive, Raju moves to the backyard of the temple and hides himself behind a huge hibiscus bush full of red flowers. He hears their voices on the steps of the river. Talking in low whispers, they go round the shrine and pass by the hibiscus bush where Raju is hiding. He holds his breath and waits. He thinks of an excuse of hiding there in case, he is discovered. He would tell them that he has found this an ideal place for meditation. But fortunately they do not look for him there and wonder where the swami could have gone. 'What a pity he is not here today!' They exchange views on how the swami has changed their lives ever since his arrival. They all miss him. They leave the food they have brought him in the temple and go home since it was getting dark. As Raju cautiously peeps out of his hiding plane, he hears their voices trailing off in the distance. Since he is hungry, he goes inside the shrine and devours the food they have brought wrapped in a banana leaf for him. He prays that Velan never discovers who he is in reality; he is grateful for the food Velan and his friends regularly bring for him. At the same time, he is amused at the qualities they attribute to him.

The next morning, Raju gets up early, washes his clothes at the river, makes himself coffee and feels 'completely at ease with the world'. He must decide on his future now. The choice is clear: he can either go back to the town of his birth (Malgudi) and face the taunts and barbs of the people or go somewhere else. Where else can he possibly go? He is not used to work hard. He is now getting food without asking for it. Anywhere else, no one is going to bother about providing him food, clothing and shelter without his working for these basic necessities of life:

> Where could he go now? Nowhere. He realizes that he had no alternative: he must play the role Velan had given him.

With his mind made up, Raju prepares to receive Velan and his friends in the evening. He sits as usual on the stone slab waiting for them with a blessed and calm look on his face. He prepares to act the part of the holy man assigned to him by Velan and the other villagers. The thing that really bothered him was that he might sound so brilliant in everything he says.

Raju shifts his seat to the inner hall of the temple and awaits Velan's arrival with some excitement. When no one turns up at the appointed time, he gets panicky. He is restless at night, wondering whether his followers have deserted him and whether they would return at all. He thinks of walking to the village and letting Velan and his friends know that he is back. However, he dismisses such a move as undignified and cheap. Suddenly, he sees a boy grazing his sheep on the opposite bank of the river. He calls the boy and offers him a banana. During his conversation with the boy, Raju discovers that he has been sent there by his uncle to ascertain whether the swami has returned to the temple. Raju sends him back with the message that he is back and that people should visit him in the evening.

Indianness in the novel

The novel is an essentially Western art form but Narayan has successfully used it to express Indian sensibilities. Narayan's works are a curious blend of Western method and Eastern material. Narayan's Indianness is seen in various ways. It is seen in his simple and traditional mode of narration, which is straightforward and chronological, even in *The Guide*, where part of the story is narrated by Raju and a part by the novelist. It is also seen in his exploitation of such Indian motifs as cobras, *devdasis*, Bharata natyam, gurus, sadhus and swamis. It is also seen in the setting of the novel. Malgudi is a typical Indian town gradually and steadily transforming from a semi-agricultural town to a big city. This transformation is a symbolic one; representing the change that was taking place in India as a whole. Malgudi has its own distinct individuality. It is but a small representative of the Indian social system, the Indian way of life and also of the Indian values cherished and followed through the ages. The residents of Malgudi, despite their local trappings - are essentially human. Therefore, they are related to humanity. In this sense, Malgudi is everywhere.

Malgudi is a territory Narayan was fond of. Nobody has succeeded in identifying or locating it yet. More than one critic has regarded Malgudi as one of the characters in Narayan's novels. It is essentially a lower middle-class town with its schools, temples, hotels, printing shops and the neighbouring Mempi Hills, with its usual beggars, conmen, confident tricksters, bogus sadhus and others. It is indeed, a microcosm of India, and not a regional town. English poet and critic William Walsh calls it, 'an image of India and a metaphor for everywhere else'.

In the words of author A. Hariprasanna: 'Narayan creates his fictional world of Malgudi as an essentially Indian society or town. The Indianness and Indian sensibility pervaded the whole place. Narayan's Malgudi is also a microcosm of India. It grows and develops and expands and changes, and is full of humanity, drawing its sustenance from the human drama and is enacted in it.'

Indianness is seen in Narayan's stress on the family which is assigned a place of central importance in each of the novels. As William Walsh points out, 'The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for able subtlety and conviction with which family-relationships are treated—that of son and parents and brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*, of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father and son in *The Financial Expert*, and of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The closeness of relationship between the adults and children, and the absence of watertight compartments between the worlds of the two, constitute the basis of these novels. But the action is developed through the conflict between the egocentricity of an individual member and the family's claim on him.

Indianness is seen in the way Rosie, despite being in an unhappy marriage, tries to make up for her momentary infidelity by owning up to her mistakes and asking for pardon. The importance given to marriage in India is brought out in Rosie's relationship with Marco. The Indianness is seen in the way Raju's mother depends on her brother to put some sense into Raju. She does not mind her brother coming and scolding her son because in the absence of her husband, she gives him the respect due to an elder male. The Indianness is seen in the way Velan is eager to take advice from an unknwon Swami because learned men or Swamis are respected in society. He laps up everything that Raju tells him ignoring the fact that he has served a sentence in prison. Indianness is seen in the fact that Marco is educated and progressive enough to marry Rosie who belongs to a family of Devadasis. However, his is still the true Indian male who cannot tolerate his wife pursuing dance or being unfaithful to him. He does not pardon his wife even though she confesses her mistake.

Check Your Progress

4. State whether the following are true or false:
   (a) After his release from prison, Raju comes to the village of Mangal and camps at an old desolated temple.
   (b) Raju undertakes to fast and pray in the knee-deep waters for the arrival of rains.
   (c) The characters in *The Guide* grow according to the laws of the novelist and not according to their own laws.
   (d) In *The Guide*, Narayan presents a very merciless, harsh and uncompromising picture of official and social cooperation existing in the society at that time just before the Independence.
   (e) Velan mistakes Raju for a holy man.
   (f) Raju first saw Rosie and Marco at the cinema in Madras.
   (g) Velan brings some books for Raju to read.
   (h) Narayan's narrative technique in *The Guide* constantly shifts between the present and the past.
   (i) The teacher was a gentleman and used to address his pupils politely.
   (j) Raju was a 'good enough' student at school.
   (k) Raju is grateful for the food Velan and his friends regularly bring for him.
   (l) Raju's work at the shop gave him an excuse to leave school.

NOTES

4.4 MAJOR THEMES IN THE NOVEL

When *The Guide* was published in 1958 by Methuen in London and by Viking Press in New York, Narayan was already a fairly well known writer in India, England and the United States. His previous novels, *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952) and *The Printer of Malgudi* (1957) had already gained him a faithful reading audience.

The Guide brings out the simplicity of rural folk, their supersititions stemming from illiteracy, the position they give to women in their society, the husband–wife relationship, the disdain with which infidelity is looked upon, the helplessness of widows and the manner in which money can corrupt. In this section, we will explore the major themes of *The Guide* including the repercussions of deviating from acceptable norms or conventions, marital disharmony, emancipation of women and class difference.

4.4.1 Family Relationships

Narayan's novels are studies in human relationships, particularly family relationships. Of relationships within the family, the father-son relationship is most frequently studied. In *The Guide*, Narayan has studied the relationship between Raju and his father. When Raju gets into bad company at the constructions site, his father is concerned and enrolls him in a school. On this issue, there is a clash of ideologies. Raju wants to study at the Albert Mission School. His father feels that in this school, Christianity is imposed on the students and they are forced to convert. So, against Raju's wishes, he decides to send Raju to the pyol School. The headmaster of that school is an abusive man and his language is no better than the labourers at the construction site. Soon Raju discontinues school and helps his father in running the stall at the Malgudi railway station. After his father's death, Raju is left to manage the stall alone. He now also has to look after his widowed mother.

All goes well until Raju's involvement with Rosie. When Rosie comes to live in his house, Raju's mother is against keeping a woman who has left her husband. Raju disregards his mother's feelings and ultimately she has to leave the house and goes to live with her brother. Here, it can be seen that Raju gives more importance to Rosie than his old, widowed mother.

He is even ready to go against his uncle to whom his mother turns for advice and help in the absence of a senior male member in the family. In traditional Indian households, the children never go against the word of the father or anybody old enough to take the place of the father. Raju decides to stand up against anyone who opposed his relationship with Rosie.

As his art matured, Narayan's study of human relationships became more complex and intricate. Such complex relationships which he explores, are those which centre around sex or money. These relationships are of particular importance in *The Financial Expert, The Guide, Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *The Sweet-Vendor.* In these novels money and sex appear in different guises, and are explored and studied from different angles. Excessive preoccupation with either money or sex is an aberration which results in discord and disharmony—in the disruption of normal family life, for instance—but peace and harmony ultimately return and normalcy is restored. This is so much so the case that the disruption of the accepted order and the ultimate restoration of normalcy may be said to be the central theme of the novels. In fact, Narayan is a penetrating analyst of human passions and human motives—the springs of human action—and this makes him a great critic of human conduct. Human relationships—relationships within the family circle, and relationships centering round sex and money—are his ever-recurring themes, and we can learn from them how to establish right-relationships. Life must be accepted and lived, despite its many shortcomings, follies and foibles. This may be said to be the Narayan message, but it has to be gleaned by each reader according to the light that is inside him.

Narayan's fictional characters have their mooring in Malgudi. This town of Malgudi is a traditional one visited by Lord Rama, Laxmana, Sita, Hanuman and Goddess Parvati – the mythical gods and goddesses to Buddha, Sankara and Gandhi – from the mythical to the real. According to P.S. Ramana, Narayan has studied a character first on the test of social order, i.e., in the context of his community, set up and social environment; secondly, he studies a character in relation to himself. An analysis of their life reiterates the claims of their foregrounding in Indian moral and social value system. Narayan's vision illuminates numerous significant themes, which are discussed in this unit as follows:

- The place of woman in a traditional society
- The moral limitations of a materialistic way of life
- The consequences of flouting accepted codes
- The psychological and ethical implications of some Hindu concepts as ascetic purification, *Yoga*, renunciation, non-attachment, *Maya* and the cyclic progressions of life and death
- The great Indian theory of *Karma* and the various paths of achieving *Moksha* or self-realization

4.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and Its Consequences

In *The Guide*, Narayan develops a theme touched in *The Bachelor of Arts*, that of a bogus *sanyasi*. Raju, a restless, attractive youngster, acts as a guide to the tourists who come to visit the Malgudi ruins. The corruption-by-outsiders theme is this time initiated by the tourists, Marco and his glamorous wife, the dancer Rosie. Raju's love for Rosie is delineated as a consuming obsessive passion, fundamentally destructive and terrible. We find that Raju comes into conflict with traditional morality as he seeks to realize his aspirations. The result is that the accepted order is disturbed, and there is chaos and disorder. He seduces Rosie and thus is guilty of immorality and corruption. When she comes to live with him, conventional morality is violated, and there is displeasure all around. The neighbours are annoyed, and his widowed mother is obliged to leave the home and stay with her brother. Raju does not attend to work, has to give up the railway stall and soon is in financial trouble. He is unable to pay his debts and has to face prosecution in the law courts. He is an egotist, an individualist, a self-seeker who exploits Rosie sexually and commercially. They earn fabulous amounts, but he wastes it all in drinking, gambling and extravagant living. He is too possessive and centred and forges Rosie's signatures to get a box of jewellery. It is a criminal act, and it soon lands him in jail. It is a violation of ordinary norms of conduct, and his example shows that crime does not pay. We must not act as Raju acts, we must not be over-possessive, self-centred, extravagant or jealous. Thus, the violation

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of conventional norms creates chaos and disorder in his own life and in the life of his social environment.

In R. K. Narayan's novels, there is a rebellion in the characters who violate the social norms but this rebellion is followed by a return, a renewal and a conformity to the social set-up. Violation of traditional norms leads to disruption, misery and unhappiness. In *The Guide*, Marco snaps his conjugal tie with Rosie when he comes to know of her intimacy with Raju. It is nothing short of infidelity. He says to her:

> But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics.

The traditional world of Malgudi has its own custom of arranged marriage which is settled by parents after negotiations and matching of horoscopes. In Indian society, marriage is looked upon as a sacrament and a spiritual union. It has been sanctified by society and sanctioned by tradition. Men and women living together as husband and wife outside wedlock are regarded as sinners and hence do not enjoy or receive any social acceptance or recognition. It is therefore sacrilegious to violate the sanctity of sex. Illicit relationship is considered to be a stigma on those who are engaged in this kind of relationship. In *The Guide*, Rosie, after separation from her husband, lives with Raju as his wife under the assumed name Nalini, without marrying him. Raju's mother who is an orthodox woman is dead against her son's way of life with Rosie. She says to Raju:

> Why can't she go to her husband and fall at his feet? You know, living with a husband is no joke, as these modern girls imagine.

She doesn't want the tainted woman to stay in her house. It is a moral as well as social sin. But Raju has no regards for his mother's sentiments. So she leaves the house forever. In course of time, Raju's love for Rosie is replaced by love for money which leads him to forge her signature resulting in his arrest. Their relationship is finally severed. Thus, their romantic love not only causes miseries and sufferings to them but also to their families.

4.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness

Raju's evolution from a tour guide to a spiritual guide forms the central theme of the novel. The title of the novel, *The Guide*, has two implications. It brings out the two roles played by Raju. One, as a tourist guide, where he is impulsive, undisciplined and given to self indulgence; and the other, after serving a sentence and converting to a holy man who thinks over life philosophically, is careful and self-disciplined. There are two stories in the novel. One is Raju's relationship with Rosie and the other is his relationship with the villagers. In the opening scene, Raju is sitting by the temple talking to Velan, one of the villagers who mistakes him to be a holy man. The novel then moves back and forth with accounts of Raju's life as a holy man told in third person, and Raju's account to Velan of his previous career as a tour guide and lover, which is told in the first-person. Raju plays a dual role, that of a saint and a sinner. But it should be noted that he is at no point in the story a complete sinner, nor a complete saint. Raju's character strikes a chord of sympathy in us. The title leads us to the question of who is the guide and how does he guide people. Raju is first a tour guide as he shows the interesting sights of Malgudi to people who come to visit the town. He also plays guide to Rosie as he is instrumental in helping her find a way to fulfill her dreams. We should not, however, mistake Raju as a political or moral guide who leads a community. All his actions are self-centred and while guiding people he keeps his interest in mind all the time.

It is now that spiritual regeneration takes place. Raju rises above his self. He recognizes the claims of humanity and learns to live and die for others. He may die, but his very death is his spiritual re-birth. Raju has matured, has achieved self-realization and self-fulfillment and has taken a new birth. His example shows that salvation and regeneration, the realization of one's highest aspirations, comes not through self-seeking but through self-negation and self-effacement. One must learn to live and die for others, before really noble and worthwhile achievement becomes possible.

The major theme of transmigration of the human soul from the clutches of 'maya' or ordinary desires to attain 'nirvana' or self-realization is amply demonstrated by the author in the novel. Raju embarks on life's journey as a man who is self centred and attracted only to material things. He is fascinated by the world of 'maya' and would do anything to achieve it. In the end, self-realization dawns upon him and he sacrifices his life.

4.4.4 Emancipation of Women

Rosie is a complex character and Narayan uses her to talk about women liberation.

Rosie feels suffocated in her marriage and tries her utmost to emerge in her own right as a woman who is talented and artistically inclined. She is married to Marco, an archeologist, whose only interest is the academic research he is pursuing. He has come to Malgudi to study some caves. He is busy in stone statues but does not value human relations. Rosie is not at all interested in the 'Cold, old stone walls' that excite her husband. Rosie meets Raju, a local tourist guide and it is in his company that she finds happiness and enjoys life. Rosie and Marco are incompatible. Marco has no interest in Rosie's love for classical dance. It is Raju, who later encourages her to emerge from her shell and bring forth her talent.

According to C. D. Narasimaiah, she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly, as the novel progresses. To quote his own words, 'It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts—and a married woman at that, and in the Hindu society too, and considering, above all, that Narayan is operating within the framework of traditional Hindu society whose code of conduct he largely endorses, it is curious that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment. In all fairness to Rosie though, Narayan tries to show how the instincts of a faithful wife were not dead in her. Quickly realizing her mistake, a represent Rosie tries to mend fences with Marco. 'I realized I had committed an enormous sin..... My mind was greatly troubled. I didn't want anything more in life than to make my peace with him. I did not want to dance. I felt lost...'

After studying Rosie's character, we can conclude that women have a fixed place in society. They have to be economically dependent on their husbands and tolerate the treatment meted out to them. This situation prevails in all levels of society in India. Such is the practice of gender inequality. As long as Rosie allowed herself to be confined within the walls of her husband's existence, she suffered silently. But when she emerged from its confines, she was able to prove her worth as a classical dancer. Though R. K. Narayan had to face controversy for dealing with an issue like extra marital relations, his attempt to portray emancipation and empowerment of women, through the character of Rosie, was indeed a brave effort.

Rosie is the one character in the novel who seems to offer a singular example of recovering from folly as the novel progresses. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and the very picture of ideal womanhood in spite of her loss of chastity—there is enough atonement for it and that is what matters. And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. This seems to be true of almost all the women characters created by Narayan. But especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint, Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the feminine principle–the primary process of a woman's life, as it incorporates the rules and values of natural law.

4.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality

Does Raju finally manage to transform himself into a true 'swami'? Perhaps this passage suggests an answer:

> The sky was clear. Having nothing else to do, he started counting the stars. He said to himself, 'I shall be rewarded for this profound service to humanity. People will say, "There is the man who knows the exact number of stars in the sky. If you have any trouble on that account consult him. He will be your night guide for the skies." He told himself, 'the thing to do is to start from a corner and go on patch by patch. Never work from the top to the horizon, but always the other way.' He was evolving a theory. He started the count from above a fringe of the Palmyra trees on his left-hand side up the course of the river, over to the other side. 'One.... two.... fifty-five....' He suddenly realized that if he looked deeper a new cluster of stars came into view; by the time he assimilated it into his reckoning, he realized he had lost sight of his starting point and found himself entangled in hopeless figures. He felt exhausted.

This passage is very important as we see how Raju progresses from a regular guide to someone who guides the progress of souls. The title of the story now assumes a far deeper meaning. The novel moves on from being the story of an ordinary guide known as 'Railway Raju', to the story of someone who has more significance. The above paragraph also shows Raju's transition from fantasy to actuality. In the act of counting the stars, or trying to assess what is intangible, Raju is trying to work out the vastness of life. For once in his life, Raju is thinking about something so deeply knowing that there will be no material gain from this. His life now goes beyond its personal limitations and encompasses a wider sphere.

4.4.6 Class Difference

Narayan presents social norms and class distinctions in *The Guide* mainly through the symbolism of Rosie's name. The non-traditional name is the marker of Rosie's social hybridity, through which the novelist gives a realistic and truthful representation of social norms and prejudices in India. In this respect, Rosie's failure to give the name of her father locates her social identity as belonging to a family of devadasis—'I belonged to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers…we are viewed as public women…we are not considered respectable, we are not considered civilized.' It may seem ironic that both Raju's mother and uncle seek to view Rosie in terms of social class:

> Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No….After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families.

They judge her according to their social norms, instead of her individual merits. It is shocking that in their prejudice they completely ignore Rosie's other identity as an educated woman with an M.A in economics. Rosie's westernised name and her association with the symbol of snake, mark her social exclusion; Marco's satiric name and appearances also symbolizes his detachment from reality; and various other personality traits also symbolize a move from the time-honoured orthodox Hindu belief to a modern urbanized society. The use of symbolism, when combined with realism of the novel, unfolds a wide spectrum of walks of life in a modern society of India through Narayan's meticulous attentions to details of characterization.

4.5 CHARACTERS

Narayan is the creator of a whole picture-gallery of some of the most memorable characters in literature. A number of life-like figures move in and out of his novels and once we have been acquainted with them, we can never forget them. In his novels, he focusses on the instincts of people from all classes and all walks of life. His characters indulge in various professions and lead their lives in simple and old-fashioned ways.

In this section, we will discuss the three remarkable characters of *The Guide*, Raju, Rosie and Marco. A host of other minor characters contribute to the tapestry of middle class life in Malgudi—Velan, Raju's parents, the driver Gaffur and Joseph. Only Marco and Rosie are educated in the literal sense. The rest are simple rural folk busy trying to earn their living.

4.5.1 Raju

In *The Guide*, Raju is the central figure—a rogue and fraud who plays different roles, till, finally, he comes to be regarded as a Mahatma, and falls a martyr to his own ingenuity. Raju's career from a railway guide to a Mahatma brings out the truth of the statement that, 'Raju never did anything; things always happened to him. His entire career illustrates the drill of a passive character from one role to another'.

Raju has apparently nothing heroic about him. In fact, he is an anti-hero, a common man with just a tinge of the uncommon in him. He is a simple, very ordinary and not extraordinarily smart character. A transformed, shapeless character who easily picks up the suggestions of others; his personality is, in fact, a product of other people's convictions. He is extremely susceptible to the suggestions of others, and this plasticity of response determines his career and ultimate destiny. Raju's character is a mixture of many traits, some of which are even contradictory.

From a stall-keeper, Raju turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent and observant, and he soon acquires little bit of knowledge by reading the old magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who come to his stall. He is a fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but he pretends to know everything. He never says 'no' to any customer. He freely changes and distorts facts to please the tourists. The result is that his fame spreads and he comes to be known as 'Railway Raju'. His confidence and nonchalance pay him rich dividends, and he never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruths he has told. He deceives, lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists.

Raju would have remained a successful tourist guide all his life, but for the arrival of Marco and Rosie in Malgudi. Raju is fascinated by 'the divine creature' that he perceives Rosie to be and wins her heart by his sympathy and consideration, as

Check Your Progress

5. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
   (a) Narayan minutely represents various paths of achieving _____ or self-realization in his novels.
   (b) Over time, Raju's love for Rosie is replaced by love for _____.
6. State whether the following are true or false:
   (a) The violation of conventional norms creates chaos and disorder in one's life and in the social environment.
   (b) Rosie, after separation from her husband, lives with Raju as his wife without marrying him.

Rosie is the one character in the novel who seems to offer a singular example of recovering from folly as the novel progresses. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and the very picture of ideal womanhood in spite of her loss of chastity—there is enough atonement for it and that is what matters. And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. This seems to be true of almost all the women characters created by Narayan. But especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint, Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the feminine principle–the primary process of a woman's life, as it incorporates the rules and values of natural law.

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In *The Guide*, Raju is the central figure—a rogue and fraud who plays different roles, till, finally, he comes to be regarded as a Mahatma, and falls a martyr to his own ingenuity. Raju's career from a railway guide to a Mahatma brings out the truth of the statement that, 'Raju never did anything; things always happened to him. His entire career illustrates the drill of a passive character from one role to another'.

Raju has apparently nothing heroic about him. In fact, he is an anti-hero, a common man with just a tinge of the uncommon in him. He is a simple, very ordinary and not extraordinarily smart character. A transformed, shapeless character who easily picks up the suggestions of others; his personality is, in fact, a product of other people's convictions. He is extremely susceptible to the suggestions of others, and this plasticity of response determines his career and ultimate destiny. Raju's character is a mixture of many traits, some of which are even contradictory.

From a stall-keeper, Raju turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent and observant, and he soon acquires little bit of knowledge by reading the old magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who come to his stall. He is a fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but he pretends to know everything. He never says 'no' to any customer. He freely changes and distorts facts to please the tourists. The result is that his fame spreads and he comes to be known as 'Railway Raju'. His confidence and nonchalance pay him rich dividends, and he never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruths he has told. He deceives, lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists.

Raju would have remained a successful tourist guide all his life, but for the arrival of Marco and Rosie in Malgudi. Raju is fascinated by 'the divine creature' that he perceives Rosie to be and wins her heart by his sympathy and consideration, as

Check Your Progress

5. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
   (a) Narayan minutely represents various paths of achieving _____ or self-realization in his novels.
   (b) Over time, Raju's love for Rosie is replaced by love for _____.
6. State whether the following are true or false:
   (a) The violation of conventional norms creates chaos and disorder in one's life and in the social environment.
   (b) Rosie, after separation from her husband, lives with Raju as his wife without marrying him.

well as showing keen interest in her art. Both of them are born romancers and the novel celebrates the coming together of two similar temperaments.

Raju is a typical confident man of Indian tales; he betrays those who confide in him. Like Marco who has great faith in him, is kind and generous to him, and leaves him to look after his wife as he pursues his archeological studies but Raju takes advantage and seduces Rosie. He does not hesitate to ruin the domestic life and happiness of a man who has confided in him, paid him handsomely and has treated him as a family member. It is his confidence, his nonchalance which enables him to win Rosie very easily.

Raju is so despicable that he appears almost to be the antagonist of the novel until its concluding pages. Raju is arbitrarily cruel, hypocritical, and manipulative from his earliest recounted youth. He manipulates his father into taking him into town; he abuses a local cattle–boy for entering his private play-area; he lies to and takes advantage of tourists; he steals Rosie from Marco; he makes Rosie miserable, chasing away her friends, and becoming pretentious (even forging her signature on a legal document, rather than let her have any contact with Marco); finally, he takes advantage of the villagers in order to get food. These are hardly traits one would ascribe to a 'hero'. He displays greed and materialism matched only by narcissism and hypocrisy, so that he loses even his closest friends; only money saves him, and he soon loses that as well.

Raju is thoroughly unprincipled and immoral. He is a self-seeker who tries to achieve his goal by hook or by crook. When Rosie comes to live with him in his house, he takes her in without caring for his mother's sentiments. He wastes his time and money on Rosie. The stall is neglected, and soon he has to give it up. His debts continue to mount, and ultimately the Sait comes to him to demand his money. Some Satan is within him and he treats the Sait insolently. He goes away in great anger and as a consequence, gets Raju involved in endless litigations. By his insolent arrogance, he even drives his mother out of the house.

In the third stage of his career, he becomes a convict, and even this role he performs with enthusiasm, becoming an ideal prisoner. This was an act that Raju did voluntarily and deliberately, it did not happen to him. But Raju was bewildered that such a trivial action should bring down such frightful consequences on his head. When out of jail, we find him playing the role of a Swami or Mahatma. He plays this role to perfection, for basically there is not much difference between the role of a railway guide and that of a spiritual guide. The same eloquence, the same ability to make grand, mystifying statements, the air of knowingness, enables him to play his new role with such success. Although he is a fraud and a rogue in reality, he appears to be a mahatma. He sits on slab of stone as if it was a throne. Raju felt he was attaining the stature of a saint and later he felt he was growing wings.

Not once does he deliberately try to pass himself off for a holy man, but when he finds that people want to believe in his spiritual power, he cannot disappoint them. It is the public reposition of faith that compels him to act and die as a holy man even though he had no inclination towards either option. Raju is both an Indian enigma and a key to the mystery and myth. Here a man has lesser claim to his privacy. He lives for others and is guided by external considerations and compulsions and is defined in spite of his disinclination and indifference.

It is not clear to the reader, whether it rains due to Raju's penance. Also, the change of heart that Raju undergoes has not been given much importance by Narayan.

He makes it seem as if that is the least he could do to atone for his sins. He doesn't give more than a few lines to mention this. It is a moment of great disturbing beauty, in which we know something larger and more affecting than the working out of an individual destiny in an inhospitable world.

Why, then, does Raju almost fail to be the hero of *The Guide*? It seems impossible for any character such as Raju to redeem himself and earn our respect. In order to do so, he must display a fundamental change of heart regarding the villagers, and must take dramatic steps to prove his devotion to this new philosophy. We finally see these changes only eight pages before the end of the book. It is not, in fact, until the last page of the book that Raju displays the characteristic that confirms his heroism and courage.

The Guide has an element of the picaresque, but it is not a picaresque novel in which there is no such transformation and spiritual rebirth. Raju is redeemed by becoming a martyr for the sake of others; there is no such redemption in the ease of the picaro in a picaresque novel. The most interesting character in the novel, Raju is a hero who is not heroic, except at the very end. He is a mixture of good and bad qualities, but he is not a villain except, perhaps, in one instance when he forges Rosie's signature on a legal document sent to her by Marco. Raju is potentially a tragic figure and, given his character, there is perfect inevitability in what happens to him.

4.5.2 Rosie

Rosie, in the novel, overshadows Raju whereas Raju remains the pivot for the whole part of the novel. Hers is a very complex character. As they say, women are the most difficult creatures to understand on this earth, it is very difficult to understand her. She is moody, impulsive and ambitious. These frail aspects of her character have been glossed over in the novel. It was because the character of Rosie was ahead of its times. To imagine a woman leave her uncaring and impotent husband and live with her lover in his house, was impossible in the sixties. Though she has been represented as a rebel, her rebellion has been justified in such a way that it finds consonance with the novel. To humanize her and get the sympathy of the viewers with her, Marco has been demonized. This is the reason why it is difficult to understand her in the novel but still easy to comprehend.

Rosie is one of those butterfly-type of woman who frequently appear in the novels of Narayan. She is the heroine of the novel. She has a charming and fascinating personality. Raju falls in love with her at first sight and says, 'she was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice' Her arrival at Malgudi, with her husband Marco, plays havoc with the life and career of Raju, the popular Railway guide.

Born in a family of dancing girls, she knew who her mother was but not her father. She is given a college education and is an M.A. in Economics. She is flattered that a man like Marco wished to marry her, and is devoted to him in spite of his impotence and priggishness. But her inherited feelings for dance cannot be suppressed, and when she gets a chance to perfect the art, she seizes it. Her giving way to Raju is understandable. She might have resisted her physical urge if her husband had been at least kind and considerate: but his inhuman coldness, Raju's evident admiration and the opportunity so conveniently provided by her husband, result in what seems a

foregone conclusion. When that husband throws her out and she has no other place to go to, she comes to Raju. More than the attraction of sex is the desire to perfect her and realize herself fully in her god-given gilt. She does not take long to achieve eminence. When Raju wants her to give performances she is not unwilling. But with fame come unceasing demands on her time and energy. She has to fall into a routine and go round and round like a bull yoked to an oil-crusher. Her weariness of it all is like that of any film star: She is being exploited but sticks it out.

It is through the character of Rosie in *The Guide*, that Narayan truly takes up and treats the concept of women emancipation. Rosie attempts to break free of the restrictions that her husband has imposed on her. Her husband, an archaeologist, is busy with his research and exploration and has no value for living beings. Rosie's encounter with the enthusiastic tourist guide Raju, at Malgudi railway station proves to be the turning point of her life. Rosie and her husband, Marco are two very different individuals and function on different planes. In the initial stage, he aggresively defies the wishes of his wife who desires to see a king-cobra. He snubs her. 'Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake-your interests are morbid.' On the other hand Rosie has a distaste for 'Cold, old stone walls'. Marco was not interested at all in Rosie's talent of classical dance which was encouraged by Raju.

In all fairness to Rosie though, R.K.Narayan tries to show how the instincts of a faithful wife were not dead in her. When she finds that her husband has produced a masterpiece, she cuts out his picture from the *Illustrated Weekly* and puts it on her dressing mirror.

She is surprised by Raju's behaviour in the matter of the book, and later by the forgery. But she does not walk out on him. To get him out of the mess into which he has got, she dances day and night and is willing to go round like a parrot in a cage, or a performing monkey.

Raju exploits Rosie for his own advantage and narrow, selfish ends. He says: 'I had monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her ..... She was my property.' And a little later... 'I did not like to see her enjoy other people's company. I liked to keep her in a citadel.' Raju takes all the credit for her success, and is of the view that she would not be able to do without him. But he is soon disillusioned. She rises to new heights of popularity and stardom without him. He is amazed at her extraordinary vitality. He realizes that neither he nor her husband matter at all to her.

The rift is cemented when Raju is arrested for forging Rosie's signature on a legal document sent by Marco's solicitors over the custody of a jewellery box. Rosie is hurt. She promises to pawn the last of her possessions to defend Raju in court, but tells him categorically that she won't have to do anything with him after that. Rosie proves to be true to her word. She engages the best lawyer from Madras to defend Raju and has to undertake numerous dance engagements to pay the star lawyer. When Raju is sentenced to two years' imprisonment, she closes down the establishment at Malgudi and moves over to Madras, where Marco lives. But she will have nothing to do with him also. Her career is on the upswing, as Raju learns from newspaper reports that he reads in jail. He wonders how she can manage without him. But Rosie is managing her career on her own admirably because she has found her métier at last.

Rosie's behaviour is always dignified and noble despite her nightlong bickerings behind the closed bedroom doors with Marco or altercations with Raju later when she cautions him not to discuss anything in the presence of servants. She does not react when Raju's boorish uncle shouts at her, calls her names and orders her to get out of

the house where she has come, and is staying, uninvited. There is enough atonement for her adulterous liaison with Raju, which is there primarily because he helps her realize her ambition of displaying her art in public. Rosie's delineation is in keeping with Narayan's delineation of female characters in general. Rosie may have succumbed to circumstances but she remains free from inward taint. That is why she makes such a complete and miraculous recovery, though the novelist, quite wisely, does not restore her to her earlier dubious marital status. Rosie is a strong-minded woman who is unwilling to sacrifice her happiness or ambition for the sake of keeping up appearances and staying with an appalling husband.

According to Narasimaiah, 'she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly as the novel progresses.' To quote his own words, 'It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts and a married Hindu woman at that, it is surprising that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment from the novelist. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and a true picture of ideal womanhood. Despite losing her chastity, she confesses to her husband and tries to seek pardon. This is highlighted as her biggest virtue. And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. He takes special care to protect the character of Rosie from being tainted internally. Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the tradition as the Feminine Principle in life.'

4.5.3 Marco

Marco is a complex and enigmatic character, who frequently appears in Narayan's novels and plays minor roles. They are odd, eccentric characters, like knots in wood, who keep away from the mainstream of human life. Marco comes to Malgudi with his wife Rosie, and with 'water diviner's' instinct, Raju at once realizes that he is his permanent customer: He is dressed like a spaceman. We don't know his real name. Raju calls him Marco, for he looks like an 'eternal tourist'. Marco and Rosie are not able to pull on together, for in his zeal for, and devotion to, his archeological studies, he takes no interest in his young fascinating wife. Raju thinks of Marco in relation to Rosie as 'a monkey's picking up a rose garland'. He is unable to understand Marco's obsessive interest in ancient relics, and says, 'Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs.'

He is bored with Marco's ruin collecting activities. Rosie, too doesn't like to see the 'cold, old stone walls'. She finds that her wealthy husband is more interested in books, papers, painting. When Marco decides to stay on to explore the cave painting more fully, Raju takes charge of Rosie and soon becomes her ardent lover. Analysing the causes of Marco's failure with Rosie, Raju says: 'Marco was just unpractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them .... Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone to care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong—this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one.'

Marco has nothing in common with an average tourist as he doesn't wish to visit the traditional tourist spots in and around Malgudi. He has come there with a purpose to study and decipher carvings in temples and to visit the ancient caves near Mempi Hills. And he is single minded in the pursuit of his goal. In the same manner

NOTES

as his wife, Rosie is devoted to dance. They are a mismatch as they fiercely hate each other's hobby and this leads to frequent arguments and quarrels between the two. There are a few ugly scenes in the hotel at Malgudi and the guesthouse on Mempi Hills.

Marco's satirical name and the descriptions of his appearance are also symbolic in *The Guide*. 'Marco' is a name that Raju invents because of the man's weird attire somehow, reminds him of Marco Polo. Certainly, the name resembles the potential strangeness in him, and his appearance reinforces this: 'He dressed like a man about to undertake an expedition, with his thick coloured glasses, thick jacket, and a thick helmet, over which was perpetually stretched a green, shinny, water proof cover, giving him the appearance of a space-traveller.' This idiosyncratic outfit, so inappropriate for the hot climate of Malgudi, symbolizes his lack of connection with the reality and the emotions of this world, which ultimately explains his failure to understand Rosie. The presentation of Marco's desire to control every aspect of his environment seems to stem from his distaste for the unpredictable vitality and willfulness of living things: 'dead and decaying things seemed to…fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs.' This obviously creates a symbolical contrast between him and Rosie—while Rosie is projected as a symbol of life, Marco is anti-life.

What takes Rosie away from Marco is his aversion to dance; he hates the very word, While Raju says, 'I could almost hear the ripple of water around it' when Rosie indicates the lotus with her fingers. Marco calls dance a monkey trick or street acrobatics. What interests Rosie irritates Marco and she confesses to Raju 'I could have preferred any kind of mother in law, if it has meant one real, live husband.'

According to C.D. Narasimaiah, 'Raju-Rosie relationship becomes credible and acceptable only because of the neglect Rosie suffers at the hands of her husband.'

Marco strikes us as uncommonly eccentric. For example, 'He would not part with an anna without a voucher, whereas if you gave him a slip of paper could probably get him to write off his entire fortune,'. Stern, self-centred and self-righteous, Marco thinks he has acquired his wife's body and soul, and he thinks that his rights over his 'property' are unlimited. Dancing to him, is another form of prostitution, especially when Rosie belongs to a Devadasi family of temple girls, who have no respect in society and are considered public property. One of the conditions of his marriage to Rosie was she would give up dancing, and now that she mentions it, he is furious; he accuses her of breaking the covenant of marriage. Her confession of infidelity stuns him and he stops talking to her. He fails to understand that a wife can be unfaithful to her husband even once and can still be in love with him. To Rosie's passionate appeal, 'I want to be with you. I want you to forget every thing, I want you to forgive me.' He replies, 'Yes, I'm trying to forget even the earlier fact that I ever took a wife. I want to go out from here too—but I want to complete my work; and I am here for that. You are free to go and do what you please.' When he leaves for Madras he buys only one railway ticket, leaving Rosie behind in Malgudi to fend for herself.

Marco leaves for Madras, but even though he is physically not there in Malgudi, he seems to be an ominous, overhanging presence. Rosie never forgets him, 'for after all he is my husband', she tells Raju. She sees his picture in the *Illustrated Weekly* cuts it and places it on her dressing table. She wants to see his book but Raju has hidden it in his liquor cabinet. Rosie is grateful to him for letting her go, any other man in his place would have throttled her when he learnt of her adulterous liaison with Raju. This induces a feeling of insecurity in Raju. Yet Marco is full of honesty and integrity in his own way. In spite of the fact that Raju has insulted him and seduced his wife, he acknowledges Raju's help in his book; 'This author is obliged to acknowledge his debt to Sri Raju of Malgudi Railway Station for his help.'

He is scrupulous towards Rosie also, as he tries to restore a box of jewellery to her. We have no reason to believe Raju (who forges Rosie's signature in the legal document and lands in jail on a forgery charge) that it is a plot to entrap Rosie and force her to return to him. Nor must we blame him for pressing his charge of forgery against Raju. It is not an instance of vindictiveness but a desire to let the man who has wronged him have his just deserts. Marco wishes to restore the box of jewellery to his wife and when he finds that her paramour is trying to grab it through fraud, he is perfectly justified in taking the measure that he takes. In this way, he has revenge on the man who has seduced his wife.

Check Your Progress

7. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
   (a) Raju forges Rosie's signature to get a _____lying with Marco.
   (b) Marco permits Raju to go and persuade Rosie to come with them to _____.
   (c) Rosie's behaviour is always _____ and _____despite her nightlong bickerings behind the closed bedroom doors with Marco.
   (d) Rosie puts a picture of her _____ from the *Illustrated Weekly* on her dressing mirror.

4.6 R. K. NARAYAN'S TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

R. K. Narayan is a storyteller in the Indian tradition of storytelling. The narration moves forward chronologically, each succeeding event being linked causally with the previous one. As Paul Verghese points out, 'Narayan's is the most simple form of prose fiction—the story which records a succession of events. There is no *hiatus* between character and plot; both are knit together. The qualities the novelist attributes to these characters determine the action, and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end. In other words, as a good story-teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a beginning, middle and an end. The end of his novel is a solution of the problem which sets the events moving; the end achieves that completeness towards which the action has been moving and beyond which the action cannot progress. This end very often consists either, in a balance of forces and counter-forces or in death or both.' However, *The Guide* is an exception in this respect. The narrative technique Narayan has followed in this novel is different from that of the other novels.

In the story *The Guide*, we see the narration moving back and forth, from the present to the past and again to the present. The story is told by two people; the narrator tells the story in its present context, and in the third person. Raju, the main character, tells his story in the first person. His narration takes the reader to the past. Cinematic elements like flashbacks and jump cuts have been extensively used.

Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself. This is certainly an improvement in Narayan's narrative technique; here however, it is necessitated by the nature of the story. The novel begins with the release of Raju from prison. Whatever happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator—the novelist; whereas whatever had happened to Raju before he was imprisoned is told in a series of flashbacks in Raju's own words, in the form of a confession to Velan who has come to think of him as a saint. Then Raju takes over the narrative chores and relates his progress from sweetmeat seller to jailbird to Velan. In between, the omniscient narrator punctuates Raju's narrative by showing him dealing with the villagers as a holy man.

The Guide divided into two parts, narrates Raju's childhood, love affair, imprisonment (first part) and growth into a swami (second part). Though the streams move simultaneously, the first part is set in Malgudi, Raju's past and the second part

(e) Marco's appearance made him look like a _____.
(f) Marco leaves Rosie and returns to _____.

8. State whether the following are true or false:
   (a) Raju, a rogue, a picaro, is transformed into a saviour.
   (b) Raju is a burden on the villagers.
   (c) Rosie has no money to engage a lawyer to defend Raju.
   (d) Rosie is a strong-minded woman.
   (e) Marco encourages Rosie to dance.
   (f) Marco takes revenge on the man who has seduced his wife.

is set in Mangla, Raju's present. While Raju's past in Malgudi is narrated by Raju himself, his presence in Mangla is narrated by the author. R. K. Narayan is a novelist of common people and common situations. His plot of *The Guide* is built of material and incidents that are neither extraordinary nor heroic. *The Guide* is a story of Raju's romance, his greed for money, his sin and repentance. It is also the story of everyman's growth from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the railway guide to the spiritual guide.

4.7 MULK RAJ ANAND: A BRIEF SKETCH

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the three pioneers of Indian novelists writing in English, the other two being R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao: Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are regarded as classics of Indian fiction composed in English. Anand wrote during what is called the 'pink decade', depicting not only the anxiety of the age following the Great Depression, but also the novelist's protest against the age of chaos and conundrum in morals.

His Popular Works

- *The Village*
- *Across the Black Waters*
- *The Sword and the Sickle*
- *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*
- *Untouchable*
- *Two Leaves and a Bud*
- *Coolie*

Check Your Progress

9. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
   (a) The narration of The Guide moves from the present to the _____.
   (b) The part of the story set in _____ talks of Raju's present.
10. State whether the following are true or false:
   (a) Raju, the main character, tells his story in the first person.
   (b) R.K. Narayan is a novelist of glamorous people and unusual situations.

A Humanist

His three novels *Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936)* and *Two Leaves and A Bud (1937)* have gathered much admiration. But his boldness and critique of the age also brought him notoriety and his novels were banned from being printed, sold or marketed. He was called a propagandist and a socialist. However, Anand never propagated the ideology of the Right or the Left. He was a humanist, a historical humanist. He once said,

> Just as I desire a total and truly human view of experience, a view of the whole man, in order that a completely new kind of revolutionary human may arise, so that I am inclined to stress the need for a truly humanist commensurate with the need of our time.

However, Anand's humanism is not merely the Hellenic idea of man being the measure of all things, independent of social context, particularly when it comes to measuring the development of the lowest of the low in society, especially Indian society– the outcasts and the downtrodden. They could even be the disregarded and denigrated erstwhile princes whose privileges were taken away after the Independence of India. In *Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saros Cowasjee*, Anand explained:

> My knowledge of Indian life at various levels had always convinced me that I should do a *comedic humaine*. In this, the poor, the lowly and the untouchable were the only kind of outcasts. *Untouchables* also included the middle sections and the nawabs and rajas. Unfortunately, there has not been time to show the poor – rich of our country, who deserve pity more than contempt.

Evidently, Anand's sympathies are not confined to the poor and the outcasts, as it is alleged. He is no political propagandist and resents being called one. Anand never liked to be called a realist, as initially he 'never viewed man as a compound of egoistic influences, but as years went by, his mastery over selfish instincts, which were stronger in the beginning than altruism and which must be held in check in order to make society possible.' According to Anand, the society did not come into being out of nothing; it developed as man grew more altruistic. The measure of development of society is in terms how many, who are not known or recognized as human at all, are admitted within society, such as all kinds of outcasts. And in this regard, Anand said in *Author to Critic*:

> I not only tried to reveal things which the middle classes do not accept but the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie – by going below the surface of various hells made by man for man with an occasional glimpse of heaven as a desire-image.

Anand puts great stress on the emotional and the practical-social; thus bringing the ethical ideal into bolder relief. Anand's humanism, thus is the way to humanitarianism. The great problem in the way to this ideal, as he found out, was to subordinate, so far as possible, the personality to sociability; everything must be related to humanity. Anand's central impulse is love of mankind, particularly love for the neglected sections of the human races – to live for others is absolute demand in Anand's fiction. For him, humanity is worthy being worshipped.

Anand deserves better appreciation. Though he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi in 1972, Indian academicians have only grudgingly and very slowly extended their welcome to him. This is because Anand's later novels are found to be weak variations on the same theme of social protest and have failed to win critical acclaim. It might be said that the first two novels—*Untouchable* and *Coolie*—are most dear to his heart and represent his religion of humanity, which he created by replacing the religion of God and that of metaphysics. *Untouchable* (1935) was Anand's first attempt to find this great religion of humanity by exposing the religion of God and metaphysics.

In *Coolie*, Anand exposes the religion of money. Every society passes through two stages – theological and metaphysical—before turning to the positive stage, the definitive stage of the religion of humanity. These three stages are clearly marked though they coexist in *Coolie* and that is the reason it is marked by chaos and confusion.

Anand thus traces the evolutionary stages of Indian society, particularly in respect of the *condition humaine* of the poor Munoo, and through him of the whole low caste people.

4.8 *COOLIE:* A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Coolie is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, though it was published after *Untouchable*, and is wider and more varied in scope than the latter. *Coolie* is not the story of a single day in the life of Munoo, the protagonist; nor is it simply the journey of the child. It is a picaresque novel, an epic of thousands of *Coolies* in India. Munoo, is thus an archetype of the downtrodden. Cowasjee writes:

> It (*Coolie*) is a study in destitution, or to use Peter Quennell's words: India seen third-class — a continent whose bleakness, vestiges and poverty are unshaded by a touch of the glamour, more or less fiction that so many English story-tellers, from Kipling to Major Yeats-Brown, have preferred to draw across the scene.

Check Your Progress

11. Name the three pioneers of Indian novel writing in English.
12. What according to Anand is the measure of development of society?
13. Why has Anand not been openly appreciated by Indian academicians?

Simply told, Munoo, a hill boy, leaves his none too idyllic surrounding in the Kangra hills, forced, of course, by his uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri, to earn, orphan as he was, with no inheritance left after the death of his parents. Arriving in the house of a bank clerk, he falls foul of a shrewish and vindictive housewife and flees from the household of Baboo Nathoo Ram. Munoo next arrives at a primitive pickle factory in Doulatpur, where a quarrel over money between the partners of the factory uproots him and sends him to Bombay to work as a *Coolie* in a cotton mill. But an impending strike in the mill followed by communal riots make him run for life and he is rescued by an Anglo-Indian woman, Mrs Mainwaring, and taken to Shimla to work for her as a servant. He dies of tuberculosis (which is aggravated by his having to pull the rickshaw for the mistress).

Chapter–1

This chapter traces Munoo's journey from the hills of Kangra to Shimla. Munoo was only fifteen when his uncle thought that Munoo was grown up and must fend for himself. So, his uncle got him a job in the house of a Babu of the bank, where Daya Ram worked as a peon in Sham Nagar. Munoo did not like the idea, for he still wanted to enjoy the company of his friends. Munoo wished to delay his journey to the wider world for no specific reason. He was confused. The village has taken away everything from him and the town has nothing to offer him. Munoo loved to luxuriate in the lavish beauty of nature, but he is equally attracted by the industrial world.

Chapter–2

Chapter 2 begins by showing Munoo being goaded by his uncle to the house where he was to be employed. Obviously, he found the journey tedious. He was bare feet and intermittently sat to nurse his feet, which were sore and weary after ten miles march. However, the sun shone with searing intensity, and he was perspiring under the thick cotton tunic. As his uncle shouted for Munoo to accelerate his pace, the boy cried: there were tears in his eyes as he gazed at his blistered feet and felt a quiver of self-pity go through him. His uncle only promised to buy him a pair of shoes out of his following month's pay. On nearing the town, he forgot the inconvenience of the journey. He was happy that he reached the end of the journey.

As he advances on his journey, his passion to know, the 'why' of things gets the better of other motives. Everything absorbed his fancy.

When Munoo was asked by his uncle to bow to Babu Nathoo Ram, he, thought the Babu to be a miracle: 'Long live the gods,' he said and wondered at the Babu's black boots. He further wondered whether the language that his would-be master spoke was the 'Angrezi' which the village school master said should be learnt by all those who wanted to be babus. Babu Nathoo Ram's bungalow filled Munoo with wonder, because the house was part of those buildings which lay shrouded, as Munoo sensed (a false scent) in an atmosphere of cool, shady trees among neatly trimmed hedges. He wondered who lived in these houses. Anything – riches, and status, English language and its speakers, bunglows, etc. filled Munoo's heart with wonder. Even the way the babu's wife draped her sari filled him with awe. However, as she resembled his aunt, he was a little apprehensive of his life in the bungalow.

The kitchen was in a chaotic mess. The brother of the babu, called Chote Sahib tried to make it easy for Munoo to work, with his humour. But the babu's wife made life hell for him. She did not let him mingle with the family members. He was made

to work hard and not given enough to eat. He felt good only in the company of Chote Sahib or the babu's daughter Sheila.

Munoo came to believe that people of the town, as for example, the family of Babu Nathoo Ram, were superior to the hill people. He accepts his inferiority and position as a slave. In the presence of an important English guest, he accidentally drops the tea set for which his Bibiji slaps him. His uncle also curses him for not valuing his job.

Munnoo gets attacked by another servant boy and is wounded. Chota Babu daily dressed his wound. Sheila also sympathized, though silently, with Munoo's state of health. He was in the limbo of fever and pain. As he became aware he felt, as if he had emerged from centuries of forgetfulness. He faintly remembered that his uncle had come to inquire about his health. He hated his uncle, hated everyone except the Chote Babu and perhaps Sheila.

He slipped out of the house one evening and boarded a train for some unknown destination.

Chapter–3

Munno slept in the compartment amidst a lot of luggage. He was discovered by a childless Prabha Dyal, who felt the love of a father for him. He and Ganpat take him to Daulatpur. Though, the factory where he had to work was dingy. Munnoo was glad to have been rescued by Prabha.

Munoo started reading the signboards of shops. Munoo was happy that his master and mistress were kind. This feeling made his work in the factory tolerable. Ganpat was the only irritant. It was a hard and dark life. He greeted the day at dawn after staying awake till midnight. He would start work at the factory all tired and sleepy. Ganpat kept an eye on all the boys and was a terror for the coolies. Munno worked in the dark underworld, full of heat of blazing furnaces. He wondered why he hadn't grown taller since he left his village. Ganpat, on returning from one of his journeys, decided to break his ties with Prabha and soon the latter went bankrupt. He took ill and was advised by the doctor to go to the hills. Munno had to part with his master and mistress.

He took refuge in a shrine to get free food from there. He tried carrying load at the railway station but was shooed away by the policemen because he had no licence. With the help of a mahout from a circus, he boards a train for Mumbai.

He found work at a factory under a foreman called Jimmy Thomas. He rented huts to the labourers he employed and also gave them an advance on interest. The hut they stayed in was suffocating and the working conditions at the factory were appalling. Munoo was convinced that the poor lived in hell, irrespective of whether they were in a village or in the town. But he soon got used to it. He found a friend in the wrestler Ratan.

Ratan was fired by the foreman one day for arriving late. Ratan's case was taken up by a union of Muzaffar and Sauda. They asked the coolies to walk out of the mill and refuse to work till their working hours were shortened, their wages increased, their living conditions improved and their children educated. Anticipating the strike, the mill decided not to work for the fourth week. Munoo who went to negotiate with the owner was hit and the coolies were not left with any other option but to go on strike.

The talks transformed into a communal conflict between the Muslims and the Hindus.

He escaped the riot and was trying to get a stock of the situation when he got knocked down by a car, belonging to Mrs. Mainwaring, who took him to Shimla.

Chapter–4

Munoo regained his health before reaching Simla, even though he was physically and mentally broken. Mrs. Mainwaring was fond of his dark eyes. She was of a mixed breed, and suffered from an inferiority complex about her origin.

Munoo who had always been charmed by white people, Mr. England at Sham Nagar, to begin with, was thrilled to be in her company. To cap it all, she was a woman too.

She found herself physically attracted to Munoo. When he fell ill on his first day of rickshawpulling, she took good care of him and nursed him back to strength. He continued to serve his memsahib diligently but died of consumption after a little while.

A Critical Look

The novel is well-rounded – it moves from the hills of Kangra to end up in the hills of Shimla. Nevertheless, the novel is not simple as is the case of its outline. For one thing, it is a series of misadventures in a picaresque manner, offering a critique of money-culture; only the hero is no rogue but himself a victim of the world's rogueries, as Cowasjee says in the Introduction to the novel. Munoo is beaten everywhere he goes. But unlike Bakha in the *Untouchable*, who is abused and beaten for his caste, Munoo questions the cause of his sufferings because he is born in a Rajput family. What is questioned in his case is not the caste system, but as Cowasjee puts it, the 'cash nexus'. Munoo arrives at the hypothesis that all inequalities are because of money, as does the Havildar in *Untouchable*, despite his higher caste. And further, not all belonging to the same class love Munoo. At times, Munoo himself grows apathetic towards his fellow-sufferers.

The Metaphysical and the Practical

Anand wanted to ignore the metaphysical search for the cause of the ills of the world and stay with the practical. This search leads to barren speculation. The whole of *Coolie* shows the futility of this quest: Why does man ill-treats man? What is that makes one man superior to the other? This makes for the confusion in the novel.

Anand wished readers to abandon their curiosity to know what lies underneath the phenomena and attend to what is observable. Munoo, being a child, is ever curious to know the causes conceived as existing beneath the surface of events and as possessed of superior reality to the appearances grounded upon them. Munoo, therefore, represents not only the infancy of an individual, but also of the entire human race. Even science invokes all sorts of hypothetical entities which are just as "metaphysical" as things philosophers find behind the sensible universe.

The Allegory

Munoo's journey from the hills to the plains and back to the hills is an allegory to the evolution of individuals, of societies and cultures. At the individual level, it is a pilgrim's progress; in the context of race, it is an evolutionary social process. Munoo as an innocent child begins this journey from a scratch; his journey from innocence to experience, but it is questionable whether he really attains knowledge of the social process, for he remains inquisitive till the end, as he was in the beginning, because he wants to know the hidden laws. He is, therefore, mystified even by new discoveries. His mind, as he progresses on the path of knowledge, comes to consider all phenomena as mystical and imaginary. Cowasjee has observed:

> The magic of the book is in Munoo's innocence, in his naive warm-heartedness, his love for comradeship, his irrepressible curiosity and jest for life. He belongs with some of the most endearing juvenile characters in modern literature with Victor Hugo's Gavroche and Dickens' David Copperfield. And through him the whole misery of India speaks. In effect, *Coolie* is a tale of unheard sufferings of Munoo, mainly confused by his poverty. It is the tale of misery of an orphan who has no choice but to become a *Coolie*. As he moves along from one experience to another, he finds that the social scene moves backward. It seems to be stuck in the pre-scientific state.

Deconstructionist Philosophy

Anand believed in social dynamics. By implication, he rejected all hypothetical constructions. For him, natural laws are sounder than metaphysical laws, because the latter are no more than descriptions of how phenomena function. They are not explanations of why they function as they do. Why human beings behave the way they do is something we cannot know. The causes of these things are unascertainable. This is true not only with respect to why and wherefore of the universe in general, but with respect to each particular phenomenon occurring in sense-experience. In this regard, Anand is closer to de-construction, as Jacques Derrida also denies both theological and metaphysical constructions. This is what deconstruction means. Such preoccupations as natural laws are quasi-human; they only delay social progress. Like Derrida, Anand demolished what he called structural thinking, that is, there is a centre, a fixed origin of things. As Derrida put it in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences':

> The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure …. But above all to make sure that the organizing principle of their structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure.

Attempt at Social Transformation

Anand also holds that any search for structure, i.e. the centre or the fixed origin of cause, restricts the play and as a result human sciences do not progress, as the fixed origin such as Munoo discovers beneath human behaviour—money or egoistic impulses–do not allow people to be altruistic. To say that man is selfish by nature or that we are born selfish gets us nowhere. That is why the social sciences—what Derrida characteristically calls human sciences—are backward. Human or social science is still backward in comparison with other sciences. Precisely because while other sciences—physics, chemistry, biology—have abandoned the search for fixed causes consolidated in a single force, called nature, social scientists still search for a fixed centre.

Anand's ambition was to reorganize society in a way that would bring lasting benefit to all classes of people; that would ensure universal peace between nations, prevent economic struggle within each nation, ensure to all an advanced society and culture in every way. In this sense Anand was essentially a social reformer. But as we have seen earlier, he is no ideologue of any set of ideology. He is interested in putting

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society on a *positive* basis, i.e. reform society, as Derrida does, neither looking with nostalgia as Rousseau did, at the absent origin, nor offering freeplay, joyous affirmation of Nietzsche. The joyous affirmation, as Derrida put it, without truth and without origin. Anand would like to tread the middle course between social static and social dynamics of Augustus Comte, a French philosopher of the nineteenth century.

Anand's novels, *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, in particular, attempt to steer clear of extremes – the nostalgia of the old theological order, its monotheism and freedom from all order. We are still behaving and doing our work as it was done in the 1930s. What Anand wrote was a replica of the current society. We still believe in caste or class system of the old, and the rest of the time in terms of new and liberated thinking. Anand's creation is entirely about this confusion in human thinking. As Anand viewed, Indian society as depicted in *Coolie* is caught in the vortex of confusion of incompatible thinking. Anand believed that order and progress cannot be attained and reconciled satisfactorily until thinking and life are brought completely to the positive stage which envisages that as society advances, individualistic concerns yield to social concerns, altruism triumphs over selfish impulses and we realize that public functions are more important than private functions. It is in this respect that society is still backward. Modern man, Anand, like Comte noted, has lost the ability to identify himself with the state and society. He pretends to be modern, at least in his dress and demeanor, but he is still an egoist. We are changing our attire daily but not putting our obsoleted view on the pyre.

Although Anand takes care of his family, he is unaware of the miseries of those who fall outside his familial circle. He is still ruled by vague notions. His concern is not with phenomenon but with reality itself. Anand, for this reason, resented being called a realist. His novel describes the phenomenon, what he experienced, and though he had faith in the law of three stage of social evolution, he still seemed to concur with Francis Bacon that the mind must form theories but facts might defeat them. Mrs. Mainwaring is a liberated lady, but her egoism, her selfishness, persisted.

Activity

1. The common view of Narayan is that of a supreme ironist, who, with his gentle humour, exposes the absurdities of our situation. Do you agree?
2. Conduct a research on the Internet and write a literature review of the criticism that has congealed around the text.

Did You Know

The novel, *The Guide* was adapted as a film in 1965 starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman. It was directed by Vijay Anand, who also contributed to the screenplay. The film is widely considered to be one of the masterpieces of Indian cinema. The film was a box office hit upon release. The movie proved memorable for its award-winning performances by the lead actors and memorable music by S. D. Burman. *Time* magazine listed it at number four on its list of Best Bollywood Classics.

Check Your Progress

14. Why is Coolie called a well-rounded novel?
15. What did Munoo believe to be the cause of all inequalities?
16. Why does Anand believe that natural laws are sounder than metaphysical laws?
17. What is the positive stage of society?

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4.9 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Among the Indian writers in English, R. K. Narayan has a special place in history.
- Narayan was looked after more by his maternal grandmother addressed as Ammani.
- Reading was a passion for Narayan and as a young boy he read the works of Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy.
- Narayan studied at his father's school and disappointed his family's emerging middleclass aspirations as he failed his first attempt to qualify for the graduate course in Arts.
- A formal education did not seem to suit him as he took four years to complete his graduation, a year more than normal.
- Towards the end of the 1930s, Narayan started to contribute regularly with short stories and other pieces to The Hindu.
- His luck changed when his first story based on Malgudi titled Swami and Friends, was read by Graham Greene. With Greene's financial help it was published in England.
- Malgudi Days, his first collection of short stories, was published in November 1942.
- *The Guide* is the story of a selfish middle class hero named Railway Raju, who does not complete his schooling, but spends his life cheating himself and all those who surrounded him for reasons best known to him. in the end turns a demi-God.
- The Guide possesses perfect artistic unity. Characters, setting, story, symbol, and style, all of them are functionally related to each other to create an artistic unity.
- The story of *The Guide* revolves around a couple Marco and his wife Rosie, who had come to the town.
- The whole story in the novel goes in flashbacks. The author moves on two planes — the past and present.
- As a tourist guide, praising and flattering has become Raju's second nature and he succeeds marvelously with Rosie.
- Raju tries his trick by praising her talent for dance to the extent that he succeeds in establishing sexual relationship with her after whetting her dissatisfaction for Marco.
- Raju is mistaken for a holy man by Velan, a gullible villager.
- The novel is an essentially Western art form but Narayan has successfully used it to express Indian sensibilities.
- Indianness is seen in R.K. Narayan's stress on the family which is assigned a place of central importance in each of the novels.
- R.K. Narayan is a storyteller in the Indian tradition of story-telling.

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- Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself.
- Mulk Raj Anand was one of the three pioneers of Indian novelists written in English
- His three novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) have gathered much admiration.
- Anand's sympathies are not confined to the poor and the outcasts, as it is alleged. He is no political propagandist and resents being called one.
- *Coolie* is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, though it was published after Untouchable.
- The novel traces the journey of Munoo from the hills of Kangra to Shimla. Munoo was only fifteen when his uncle thought that Munoo was grown up and must fend for himself.
- As Anand viewed, Indian society as depicted in Coolie is caught in the vortex of confusion of incompatible thinking.

4.10 KEY TERMS

- **Pyol:** It is sort of front stoop where Indians often visit with neighbors and watch the world going by.
- **Impresario:** A person who sponsors or produces entertainment, for e.g. a director of an opera company.
- **Festoons:** An embellishment consisting of a decorative representation of a string of flowers suspended between two points; used on pottery or in architectural work.
- **Fresco:** A picture that is painted on a wall while the plaster is still wet; the method of painting in this way.
- **Satire:** It is a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice is held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule.

4.11 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. (a) 10 October 1906; (b) Grandmother; (c) Four; (d) Book review; (e) Publisher; (f) *The Bachelor of Arts;* (1937)
2. (a) False; (b) False; (c) True; (d) False; (e) True; (f) True
3. (a) Railway station; (b) Marco; (c) Railway Raju; (d) Mangala; (e) Tourist guide; (f) Sister; (g) Sainthood; (h) Albert Mission; (i) One rupee; (j) Railway; (k) Flashbacks
4. (a) True; (b) True; (c) False; (d) False; (e) True; (f) False; (g) False; (h) True (i) False; (j) True; (k) True; (l) True
5. (a) *Moksha*; (b) Money
6. (a) True; (b) True
7. (a) Box of jewellery; (b) Mempi Hills; (c) Dignified, noble; (d) Husband; (e) Space traveller; (f) Madras

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8. (a) True; (b) False; (c) False; (d) True; (e) False; (f)True
9. (a) *Swami and Friends*; (b) *The Dark Room*
10. (a) True; (b) False
11. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao are the pioneers of Indian novel writing in English.
12. According to Anand, the measure of development of society is in terms how many who are not known or recognized as human at all, are admitted within society, such as all kinds of outcasts.
13. It is because Anand's later novels are found to be weak variations on the same theme of social protest and have failed to win critical acclaim.
14. It is well-rounded because it moves from the hills of Kangra to end up in the hills again, this time of Shimla.
15. Munoo arrives at the hypothesis that all inequalities are because of money.
16. Natural laws are sounder than metaphysical laws because the latter are no more than descriptions of how phenomena behave. They are not explanations of why they behave as they do.
17. The positive stage is the one which envisages that as society advances, individualistic concerns yield to social concerns, altruism triumphs over selfish impulses and we realize that public functions are more important than private functions.

4.12 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Anwer Questions

1. What was Narayan's place in Indian english literature?
2. Write a brief note of the story of *The Guide*.
3. How does Narayan use Rosie to broach the subject of women's emancipation?
4. What was the reason for the marital discord between Rosie and Marco?
5. Who was Mulk Raj Anand? Give a brief sketch.
6. Why was Munnoo forced to leave his uncle's place?
7. What lesson did Munnoo learn from life?
8. What do you know about Mrs Mainwaring?
9. Write a summary on *Collie*.
10. What difficulties did Munnoo face on his way to Shimla?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain Raju's obsession with Rosie. What are the events that compel Raju to exit from Rosie's and Marco's life?
2. Describe the scene in Raju's house when his uncle visits them.
3. Raju's greed and insecurity brings his downfall. How?
4. Describe Raju's ultimate spiritual transformation.
5. *The Guide* is a typical picture of Indian society. Why?

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6. Discuss Raju as an anti-hero.
7. The character Munoo represents not only the infancy of an individual but also of the entire human race. Explain.
8. 'The sweeper is worse off than as slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them' Explain in your words.
9. Analyse the role of women characters in *Coolie*.
10. Social transformation is an important theme of *Coolie*. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

4.13 FURTHER READING

Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature,* Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1982.

Iyengar, K.R.S., *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1962.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Twice Born Fiction*, Arnold Heinemann, Delhi, 1971.

UNIT 5 ANITA DESAI AND AMITAV GHOSH

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5.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.11 Questions and Exercises
5.12 Further Reading

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit studies the work of two prominent authors of today— Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh; particularly their novels *Voices in the City* and *Shadow Lines*, respectively. Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* reveals a dominant characteristic of Indian society—its male-dominated culture, portrayed through an orthodox husband who is a puppet of his family and takes his wife for granted. There are three main characters in the novel—Monisha, Nirode and Amla.

The character of Monisha depicts the archetypal Indian woman and her emotional conundrums after marriage in a society that looks upon women as objects, which often rejects women their independent personality and existence. The character of Nirode bears resemblance to the youth, which is dejected and depressed when faced with life's problems. It also portrays the weakness of the young who surrender to situations and compromise, despite having the capability to fight the tide. The third character, Amla, projects the flighty dreams and ambitions of the young. But these

6. Discuss Raju as an anti-hero.
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dreams fade away in the world of reality. Unable to chase their desires, the youth often sacrifice themselves on the pyres of orthodox thoughts.

Anita Desai analyses every aspect of city life with her penetrative and perceptive vision. The urban milieu engenders a certain mindset in the people who live therein. The relation between the geo-physical background and the psycho-mental landscape has been brilliantly sketched by Desai. Desai's Calcutta also brings to the mind the hopelessness of Eliot's *Wasteland* — a place devoid of values and hope.

Born in Kolkata in the year 1956, Amitav Ghosh completed his schooling from the famous Doon School and graduated from Delhi University. He then went on to do his Ph.D. in social anthropology from Oxford University, England.

Like most authors, Ghosh too witnessed hardships as a struggling young writer, even renting the servant's quarter in his early years. His writing career began at the *Indian Express* in New Delhi in 1986 when his first novel *The Circle Of Reason* was published. The book went on to win France's top literary award.

5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Recall important aspects of Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh's biography
- Critically appreciate and summarize the novels: *Voices in the City and The Shadow Lines*
- Discuss the characters of the two novels

5.2 ANITA DESAI: A BRIEF SKETCH

Anita Desai is one of the most renowned Indian writers in English. Born in 1937 to a Bengali father and German mother, she has been writing since the age of seven. She boasts of eight novels and numerous short stories, articles and literary pieces for journals and periodicals. She has won a number of awards, both in India and abroad. She was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. The very next year *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* won her the Federation of Indian Publishers and the Authors Guild of India's award for Excellence in Writing.

Popular Works

- *The Artist Of Disappearance* (2011)
- *The Zigzag Way* (2004)
- *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000)
- *Fasting, Feasting* (1999)
- *Journey to Ithaca* (1995)
- *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988)
- *In Custody* (1984)
- *The Village By The Sea* (1982)
- *Clear Light of Day* (1980)
- *Games at Twilight* (1978)

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- *Fire on the Mountain* (1977)
- *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976)
- *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975)
- *The Peacock Garden* (1974)
- *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971)
- *Voices in the City* (1965)
- *Cry, The Peacock* (1963)
- *India- A Travellers Literary Companion*

Desai's writing goes beyond observing the mundane, superfluous realities. To quote her,

> One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search—for meanings, for values, for dare I say it, truth. I think of the world as an iceberg—the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore.
>
> Writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. Next to this exploration of the underlying truth and the discovery of a private mythology and philosophy, it is style that interests me most—and by this I mean the conscious labour of writing language and symbol, word and rhythms—to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on Chaos.

Anita Desai is concerned about "the enduring human condition". Her themes are existentialist and include: maladjustment alienation, absurdity of human existence, quest for the ultimate meaning in life, decision, detachment and isolation. Desai explains how women in the contemporary urban milieu fight against discrimination of various types, but some do surrender before the relentless forces of absurd life. A perusal of Desai's novels reveals her deep involvement in the inner emotional world of her characters. To aid her literary interests she, therefore, resorts to the use of symbols and images. She tries to drum the clouds of the varied complexities of man-woman relationship and also the varying states of human psyche. Desai is a great artist and has employed techniques of stream of consciousness, flashback, montage and reveries which suit her existential themes and her externalization of internal emotional turmoils and tumults. Consequently, her novels do not have a well-constructed plot and a tightly-knit structure. There are episodes, happenings, incidents, encounters and reminiscences. Her characters are both typical as well as individualistic. They are typical as they suffer from a universal predicament of isolation and uncertainty. They are individualistic as they appear to be more sensitive and reflective in nature rather than the mass of common humanity around them. Her canvas is also reasonably large and it encompasses a large variety of characters representing various hues and colours of humanity. In fact, Anita Desai turns novel into a serious, intellectual endeavour rather than an object of mere entertainment. In her hands, novel is a mature and evolved genre fit for expressing somber and reflective thoughts. Desai is thus a highly evocative, intense and engrossing novelist who makes the modern reader aware of a new perspective to perceive life. Her protagonists lead a tortuous and exacting existence which is made comprehensible through Desai's own keen and profound sensitivity towards life.

London's famous Arts Guardian succinctly sums up the author:

> ...One of the best known and highly regarded novelists working in English in the sub-continent. The style she has evolved is lucid, tight, undramatic... her

imagistic phase acquires an ambiguous and terrible power—the words hold down the events forcibly.

Awards won

- 1978 - Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize- *Fire on the Mountain*
- 1978 - Sahitya Akademi Award (National Academy of Letters Award)- *Fire on the Mountain*
- 1980 - Shortlisted, Booker Prize for Fiction - *Clear Light of Day*
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5.3 *VOICES IN THE* CITY: A SUMMARY AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

SUMMARY

Voices in the City is a novel with intense, expressive characters living in Calcutta, which exists more at the intellectual than the physical plane. It has three major characters, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. The three siblings interact with various other characters with the city of Calcutta as the backdrop.

The characters include the following:

- **Nirode**: The protagonist of the novel. He is a rudderless person who feels deeply depressed at times when he recalls how unsuccessful he has been in all his enterprises. He is frustrated as he has not been as lucky as his younger brother Arun, who left India for studying abroad.
- **Monisha:** Nirode's sister who is married to Jiban and is also living in Calcutta. Jiban and Monisha are incompatible, dull and stagnant. She leads the life of a recluse in her own house and is even blamed for theft by her in-laws, who seem to exist on a level different from that of Monisha. Monisha is unlike the traditional bride and keeps herself away from her husband and his family. She eventually commits suicide unable to carry on the façade any longer.
- **Jiban**: The inconsiderate husband of Monisha.
- **Monisha's in-laws**: They leading complacent, respectable life which is different from Monisha's and in which Monisha is a total misfit. This is a metaphor for Indian society.
- **Amla:** She is the youngest sibling, who arrives in Calcutta after completing her studies in Bombay. She works in an advertising firm and is a free bird. She is a liberal girl who loves Dharma. She feels that Dharma is a person with whom she can communicate. She feels that her wavelength matches with his and finds him aesthetic and humane. However, she turns out to be as disillusoned as her elder sister monisha and brother Nirode.

Check Your Progress

1. What, according to Desai, are the two preoccupations of her writing?
2. What is unique about the structure of Desai's novels?

She realizes how stubborn and self-centered Dharma is. She is shocked by his anger towards his daughter who refused to obey him and also his casual attitude towards his wife.

- **Gita Devi**: Dharma's wife who is considered an appendage by her husband. She goes about serving food to the guests silently.
- **Dharma**: He is the painter friend of Nirode.

Nirode has a deep sense of worthlessness as he has been a 'congenital failure' in all his endeavours. He wants to know the reasons for surviving in the world. He rejects all routine roles, duties and expectations and loathes every work he starts. So he thinks:

> Better to keep out of the window and end it all instead of smearing this endless sticky glue of senselessness over the world.

Nirode revolts against his past, his upbringing, his family background, his family assets and everything else which might pull him down into a routine existence. He does not like any intimacy, relationship or a sense of commitment to anyone. After the departure of his younger brother Arun, he gives up his room in the hostel and his job as a photographer. His short enchantment with a magazine also fizzles out. He tells his friend David:

> I want to fail quickly. Then I want to see if I have the spirit to start moving again, towards my next failure. I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom, I want to explore that depth. I want to descend quickly.

To this, David answers;

> That is more than defeatism Nirode, it is absolute negation.

Nirode is the voice of the novel. A voice in the wilderness failing to build any contact between itself and the world. Nirode admits the force behind his attempt,

> Where is the will to get up, select another ladder and begin the journey of absurdity all over again? ... Nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant; equally worthless.

Nirode minimizes his needs to the barest and thus rebels against any imposition of time, place, status or occupation on his personality. He is shabbily clad and instead of buttons uses staples to keep his shirt together. During his illness he comes very close to death and looks so frightfully rundown, that his sister Monisha comments:

> I realize... he has progressed beyond me. Here is a combination of acquiescence and renunciation I have not yet made. Here, it is, in this plant gesture, this wind gesture of a weak, invalid hand. Back he goes into the captivity of friendship, concern, criticism and world. Yet he will never again be a part of it as he once was with such passion and anxiety—this gesture has removed it, all to a safe distance from his self.

Later, Nirode confides in Amla that he had opted for this sense of rejection not due to morbidity, but in order to maintain his sanity,

> At the end of it I realized that the only thing I wanted to protect, what any sane man needs to protect—his conscience.

But he also admits that his pursuit of failure and isolation was wrong. The death of his sister Monisha awakens Nirode and reconnects him to normal human life. The springs of connectivity which had dried up within him once again get refurbished and invigorated.

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He seemed unable to remain still or silent, he was filled with an immense care of the world that made him reach out, again and again touch Amla's cold hand when

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he saw it shake, or embrace the old woman in the battered wicker chair when he saw her sleep. He pressed them to him with hunger and joy, as if he rejoiced in this sensation of touching other's flesh, other' pain, longed to make them mingle with his own, which till now had been agonizingly neglected.

The religious fanatic is excited by the death of a saint. The desire to touch and feel and get involved with others caused a sense of excitement as a "religious fanatic is excited by the death…of a saint."

Monisha's suicide is an attempt to break the monotony of routine existence. It is an attempt to give meaning to her death. With her self-willed deliberate act she is able to shake off the complacency and apathy entrenched in the psyche of her brother Nirode. To some extent, even her husband Jiban feels compelled to confess that he had failed his wife in their marriage.

Amla is the youngest of the three. She is charmed and mystified by the aloofness and nullity expressed by Monisha. She is never able to comprehend or analyse the real malaise behind the apparent withdrawal of her sister from normal life. Amla comes from Bombay as an energetic and vivacious girl, but does realize that Calcutta, as a city, saps up the energy and vitality of life from within a human being. Nirode's transformation comes as a rude shock to Amla, as much as does the frustrated existence of Monisha. Amla's relationship with Aunt Lila turns tense when she falls in love with Dharma, a married man much older than herself. However, Amla too has to go through her moments of remorse and disillusionment.

The mother exercises a strange, bewitching influence on the family. She is referred to as a beautiful socialite, fond of the good life. She is a refined and accomplished lady married to an idler whose only satisfaction is in criticizing his wanton-natured wife. Mother offers financial help to Nirode but he refuses angrily. She has a self-proclaimed admirer in Major Chadha who showers praise and gifts on her and earns the wrath of the three children. The mother appears rather cruel and callous in her aloofness and pithy even in moments of grief, as at the untimely death of her daughter, Monisha. When she comes to Calcutta to attend the funeral, her bond with the two remaining children is rather minimal and she soon reverts to her isolated, indifferent identity. She hardly shares soothing or comforting moments with either Amla or Nirode. Her financial self-sufficiency and good looks as well as her self-centeredness have made her more of a hateful figure than a mother-head.

The interconnection of other characters such as Sonny, Jit and Sarla, Dharma and Gita Devi, David Raghvan, Nikhil, Aunt Lila and Rita is well joined in the novel. All these characters form the fabric of the novel. The novel's ending too is very symbolic. A procession led by the beating of drums and chanting of the names of Goddess Kali is moving somewhere in the city and its sounds seem to be reverberating everywhere. A strange figure clad in white steps on to the verandah and watches them intently. Thus the novel takes the reader to a circumvented journey, a sojourn through the minds of the characters who live in their isolated cells in the otherwise teeming city of Calcutta. Throughout the novel, the readers feel a sense of identification with the characters and see their own shadow in the happenings of the story.

Critical Appreciation of the Novel

Voices in the City is based on the Middle class intellectuals of Calcutta. Caught in the cross-currents of an urban city – Calcutta, this is an unforgettable story of a brother

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and his two sisters. In different ways, this is a story of a society in transition, where the older elements are not fully dead while the emergent ones are not fully evolved.

5.3.1 Reflections on Urban Life

The novel *Voices in the City* is a peep into the recesses of the psyche of three characters, Nirode Ray and two his sisters, Monisha and Amla. Calcutta forms the social backdrop for the novel. Calcutta is a city full of noises, of 'voices'. It is the 'devil city', 'monster city', the city of Kali, the Goddess of Death, the city which entraps the denizens who feel the pressures and tensions of this "devil city in which the character of the novel Nirode is frightened of walking on its roads. He shudders and walks swiftly and is almost afraid of the dark.

> There is no diving underground in so over-populated a burrow, even the sewers and gutters are chocked, they are so full.

Feeling forlorn, even in this otherwise packed milieu, Monisha seeks escape which ultimately results in her death. Her young sister, Amla, comes to Calcutta to work in an advertisement firm. She has spent a few years in an art school in Bombay, so she finds the city (Calcutta) even more grotesque and unbearable. She finds it morbid and feels the morbidity of the place reflected in the lives of her sister Monisha and brother Nirode. This Monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red-blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of morality, had captured and enchanted—or disenchanted—both her sister and brother." She herself, who is otherwise a vivacious and enthusiastic girl, cannot escape the bizarre influence of Calcutta. She tells Nirode, "This city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it, does not it?"

5.3.2 Alienation and Existentialism

However, it is not the city alone which is responsible for the plight of the inhabitants. The seeds of self-destruction are present within the characters' individual selves. We are told that Monisha is an introvert given by nature to 'morbid inclinations'. Her father realizes that she "ought not to be encouraged in her morbid inclinations," and married her into a middle-class family thinking "that it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a stolid, unimaginative family as that, just sufficiently educated to accept her with tolerance." However, Monisha fails to establish any contact or rapport with her husband, Jiban, or his family members. She finds Jiban conceited and his family mean and petty. On their part, Jiban's folks consider her (Monisha) strange and insolent and criticize her actions openly. They even blame her of being a thief, an allegation to which even her husband accedes. She does not have any well-defined religious ideology, so she is rather rudderless. Her predicament makes her reflect:

> Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? Only a conundrum—is that, then, Life?

Monisha is also haunted by thoughts of death. She feels that love is the mission in nearly all her relationships, be it with Jiban, her husband, Nirode, her brother, or her mother. She has lost the verve to enjoy small, ordinary things. So she fails to respond like other spectators, men and women, to bawdy and lewdly suggestive songs sung by strolling street-singers. It is not that she had never possessed "this essential instinct of theirs. It is only that she has lost touch with mundane things now." She feels,

> They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth in me.

As the pain of a wasted life weighs heavily on her heart, she hurries out of her 'stale room, filled with sounds of other people's emotions' and commits suicide.

On the other hand, Nirode is more a victim of self-created complexes and afflictions, which lead him to degeneration. He is an artistic, sensitive and independent young man but the insecurities he has carried from childhood have made him unsure and unaware of his own potential. Comparing himself with his younger brother Arun, Nirode feels deprived of the money left by their father for the education abroad for one of his children. Arun was good at studies as well as games, so he could get that amount and left the grotesque city of Calcutta for brighter avenues. As a child, Nirode had once fallen from a horse and declared to his father that he would never play games or ride a horse again—an expression which denied him his father's beneficence. Nirode is reminded of this incident time and again, making him take refuge in "shadows, silence, stillness" for "that was exactly what he would always be left with." He tells Professor Bose,

> "I do not know. How can one survive? It seemed hard."

Another problem which Nirode faces and which causes his undoing is his obsession with his mother. His childhood had been regulated and conditioned by his love for his mother and hatred for his father. After the father's demise he wants to be the support and succour for her, but the mother is more inclined towards her paramour, Major Chadha. This makes Nirode exceedingly jealous and in his failure to receive her love, he starts detesting and fearing her.

To think that all through his life he had despised his father and adored his mother, only to turn after his father's death, to pity for him and loathing of that same, unchanged mother—this moved him now.

In his role of a lover-son, the mother's image of indulging in wanton escapades and amorous relations constantly gnaws at Nirode's soul. Caustically, he suggests Amla to "go home to mother for a while, and grow up a bit by listening to her experiences of love." This deeply entrenched loathing for the mother severs his relationship with the family. Nirode tells his friend Sonny,

> Look, do me a favour. Do not keep bringing my family in Sonny boy... I neither inherited nor do I now borrow a single damn thing from my family. May they rot, may they flourish-as long as they leave me alone.

He refuses to take any financial help from his mother and later when she desires him to sign the papers for transfer of money in his name, he tells Monisha,

> Tell her to go shove it up that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques... I am done with signing my name, believing my name, or having a name.

But despite his extreme alienation from his mother, Nirode cannot rid himself of her influence. When the mother comes to Calcutta on learning about Monisha's death, he goes to receive her at the airport. Even then, he cannot take his eyes off her and watches her with awe and fascination.

She is still beautiful, he thought, with fear...She is still beautiful, he repeated, and her beauty compelled him to embrace her.

Released from her embrace "he fell away and felt himself drained of blood and passion. His mother's deep composure and aloofness to her daughter's death amazes and terrifies Nirode and he visualizes her as Kali, the goddess of death. But mother is more than that. In her "Kali, the goddess and the demon are one." Reacting hysterically to her presence in Calcutta, Nirode rants before Amla:

> Do not you see, in her beauty, Amla, do not you see, the amalgamation of death and life? Is it not perfect and inevitable that she should pour blood into our veins when we were born, and drain it from us when we die.

Amongst the three siblings, it is only Amla who is able to maintain balance and composure during their sister's death. Monisha's death points the way for her and she decides she would never lose herself. She knows she would go through life with her feet planted on the ground firmly. "However, she too has certain regrets in her life—her decision to come to Calcutta instead of remaining in Bombay or going to Kalimpong. The oppressive heat of Calcutta only adds to her sense of 'general atmosphere of disintegration'." Another regret she feels is for her sister Monisha whose carefully "arranged marriage by her parents to cure her of her 'morbid inclinations'" has only increased her psychological ailments. Amla's interest in Dharma, the painter friend of Nirode, grows into an emotional attachment. But she is disillusioned when she comes to know of Dharma's cruelty towards his daughter, his apathy towards his wife, Geeta Devi and his self-imposed withdrawal from life in general. Amla reminds the readers of a vibrant spring whose waters seem to dry away with the passage of time and circumstances but whose desire to life and fight does not wither away completely.

Novel Structure

A glance at the characters of the novels would reveal the brilliant and contemporary projections by the author. However, the point of view is mostly that of the omniscient author or an observer and occasionally that of the first person. Besides the usual means of communication, letters, diaries, paintings, magazines, dreams and visions are employed to communicate the views of the main characters.

5.4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

After assessing the novel it becomes essential to study the characters individually.

5.4.1 Monisha

The character depicts the state of married women. Their condition and their intellectual conflicts after marriage in Indian society—a society in which women are considered as objects to be used and exploited; where she is always taken for granted and where the male-dominated society rejects her independent existence. In her youth, Monisha is a fun-loving and vivacious girl but turns into an introvert and self-absorbed lady following her marriage. Her marital life is like a dungeon and Jiban, her husband, is an inconsiderate life-partner. Monisha is considered odd for not thanking her stars for the family she has been married into. She cannot transform herself into the mould of a complacent, bejeweled housewife who is satisfied in displaying her material pomp. The other ladies of the household and even the children find her responses extraordinary. Monisha is some kind of a derelict as she herself confesses of having no faith in any religious ideology or the desire to establish communication with any of her relations. She is denied space and respect by her in-laws and husband who go the extent of branding her a thief. When Amla visits her, the two sister are allowed no moments of private talk and the mother-in-law insists on being a permanent fixture between them.

Check Your Progress

3. Name the principal characters of *Voices in the City*.
4. What are Amla's disillusions?
5. What purpose does Monisha's suicide serve?
6. What was the mother like?
7. What is Calcutta's note in the novel?
8. How do you know that Monisha has lost the verve to enjoy the small pleasures of life?
9. Why does Nirode despise his mother?

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5.4.1 Monisha

The character depicts the state of married women. Their condition and their intellectual conflicts after marriage in Indian society—a society in which women are considered as objects to be used and exploited; where she is always taken for granted and where the male-dominated society rejects her independent existence. In her youth, Monisha is a fun-loving and vivacious girl but turns into an introvert and self-absorbed lady following her marriage. Her marital life is like a dungeon and Jiban, her husband, is an inconsiderate life-partner. Monisha is considered odd for not thanking her stars for the family she has been married into. She cannot transform herself into the mould of a complacent, bejeweled housewife who is satisfied in displaying her material pomp. The other ladies of the household and even the children find her responses extraordinary. Monisha is some kind of a derelict as she herself confesses of having no faith in any religious ideology or the desire to establish communication with any of her relations. She is denied space and respect by her in-laws and husband who go the extent of branding her a thief. When Amla visits her, the two sister are allowed no moments of private talk and the mother-in-law insists on being a permanent fixture between them.

Check Your Progress

3. Name the principal characters of *Voices in the City*.
4. What are Amla's disillusions?
5. What purpose does Monisha's suicide serve?
6. What was the mother like?
7. What is Calcutta's note in the novel?
8. How do you know that Monisha has lost the verve to enjoy the small pleasures of life?
9. Why does Nirode despise his mother?

Monisha's loneliness is further enhanced by her inability to have a child, which leaves her even more isolated and frustrated.

Thus, Monisha is a typical example of a misfit in an established, settled society. So removed she becomes from everything and everyone that she fails to react even to the song and dance of the street singer. She too acknowledges the negative effect generated by Calcutta on her psyche.

Desai has always been interested in delineating the agony and pathos of women, especially married women, who feel inhibited and shackled by the constraints of society.

5.4.2 Nirode

The character Nirode represents the youth that is dejected and depressed, when faced with the problems of life and that surrenders before situations and compromises with the conditions despite having the capability to fight them. Nirode is the male protagonist of Desai's novel. He is a sensitive and artistic young man but who has lost the mooring and meaning of life. When the novel starts, Nirode is seen grumbling about the better lot of his brother Arun, who had been bequeathed with their father's property and thus was going abroad for further studies. Nirode feels condemned to live a suffocating and unenterprising existence in Calcutta. He seems rudderless as he keeps changing his profession. He tries to settle down with a magazine entitled *Voice* but the venture fails. This failure takes away the residual desire left in him to strive for any aim in life. He tells his friends that he would like to fail hurriedly so that things were concluded once and for all. The novel portrays Calcutta as a reason for his downfall; he 'had fallen into the city's clutches as a weak prey'.

Nirode has hardly any filial feelings for his married sister Monisha and is oblivious of the mental turmoil she is suffering. Nirode did have strong attachment to his mother but she failed him by developing an amorous relationship with Major Chadha. Consequently, Nirode shuns all attempts of financial help suggested by her. But he is still fascinated by his mother's beauty and dignified aloofness.

Nirode seems to be on better terms with his other sister, Amla who comes to Calcutta to take up a job in an advertising firm. Amla questions him about his vocation and his whereabouts to which Nirode remains largely evasive. Nirode is in reality an idler who refuses to own any responsibility as he feels life has not treated him fairly. His emotions for Monisha are aroused only after her death. He realizes the need to connect himself with her and with those mourning her. In her death Nirode realizes the meaning of life and death and is thus awakened to human considerations. Desai has projected Nirode as a typical example of bohemian youth of Bengal who fritter away life in idle, superfluous activities. Nirode is no hero as there is hardly anything heroic about him. Nor is he truly tragic as most of his loss is self-caused and self-inflicted. He is nevertheless a key character, as Desai devotes the entire first section of her novel to him. He fulfills no duties of his—neither towards his sisters, mother and friends nor towards himself. But despite this life of inactivity and alienation, Nirode is not a villain. Failures and neglect have made him passive but his behavior remains restrained and reserved. He knows he cannot change things around him and he makes no tall claims. In that sense he is pragmatic. He also realizes that Calcutta has a negative effect on him, and he surrenders to the superior might of the city. He visualizes Calcutta as some divine entity—the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer. Thus Nirode typifies a modern young man who is unable to keep pace with the demands of society and family.

5.4.3 Amla

The third character, Amla, portrays the dreams and soaring ambitions of a young girl. But these dreams and ambitions often disappear like a whiff when they face the realities of the world.

Amla is the young and vivacious unmarried sister of Nirode and Monisha. She is full of plans and vision when she arrives from Bombay after completing her studies and joins an advertising firm in Calcutta. She has a positive attitude towards life and would like others too, to share her bright and sunny approach. At the same time, she does realize that Calcutta exerts a strange defeating and despondent influence on its inhabitants. She is surprised to see the sad state of Nirode and Monisha. Both seems to have lost the zest for life and neglected themselves. She questions Nirode about his livelihood and is rather appalled to find him still drifting in uncertainty. She is at a loss to understand the problem nagging her sister, who appears to be a mere ghost of her earlier self. This bizarre transformation in both her siblings befuddles Amla at first and she cannot comprehend it.

Her emotional involvement with Nirode's painter friend, Dharma makes the reality of life dawn on her. She had considered Dharma to be an ideal with whom she could communicate on all planes. His artistic disposition and sensitive demeanor greatly influenced the young girl. She is swayed into considering him as a reliable and honest friend. But she is disillusioned when she comes to know the reality behind the apparent. She comes to know that Dharma is callous and inconsiderate towards his wife and has disowned his daughter as she had refused to accede to his will. Thus, his artistic nature was pure artifice and he was a very different man than what he appeared. The advertising firm in which she was so enthusiastic to work also turns out to be a damp squib. Hence alienation and disillusionment grow gradually in the case of Amla. She seems to be less attached to her mother and more to her brother and sister. The death of Monisha convinces her that Calcutta is definitely a discomforting and suffocating place.

Amla's life seems something of a bohemian like her brother's. She is casual and unconcerned and enjoys partying and having a good time. But she is more than that. She is far above a superficial being interested only in the mundane activities of life.

5.4.4 Jiban

Jiban plays the role of a typical Indian husband for whom the wife is nothing more than an object of utility. He treats his wife like a domestic help and an object of decoration, meant to look presentable, serve the guests and fulfill the family's never-ending demands by burning herself.

Jiban is a minor character in the novel, although, he should have been given more space, being the life-partner of Monisha, a principal character. However, the role of Jiban is insignificant since he hardly does any action worth our attention. He is a conventional man who refuses to come out of the mould into which he has been born and brought up. He is symbolic of the pretentious bourgeois mentality which believes more in pretense than in reality. Jiban fails to understand the needs and ambitions of his wife and wants her to be content performing the functions of the house just as the other ladies. Since he belongs to a well-settled, rich family of Calcutta, he has inherited their thinking as well. Monisha's father marries her off to him because

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he felt she would lead a comfortable life. What happens is quite the contrary. Jiban is busy with his work and Monisha is a mere fixture of his house, like the furniture and other objects of decoration. Monisha, on the other hand, belonged to a family which had given her vision, dreams and ambitions, none of which were appreciated by Jiban.

Desai has reflected more on the plight of Monisha than that of Jiban in her novel, so the reader is unable to visualize his character clearly. He hardly has any individual traits and is more of a symbolic force whose indifference and callousness lead to Monisha's suicide. Jiban never bothers to understand what Monisha really wants. They do not have children, which is another reason for their having drifted apart. So ignorant and unconcerned does he turn that when his mother calls Monisha a thief and accuses her of stealing money, Jiban agrees to his mother and complains that she (Monisha) could have at least told him before taking the money. This hurts Monisha intensely and she grows even more alienated from him. In fact, there is acute lack of communication and extreme passivity in their relationship. Jiban never cares to probe into her psyche, understand her hidden emotions and insecurities. He expects her to accept the household and its norms mechanically. Jiban is thus a living example of a typical well-off individual who is not accustomed to asking and looking for questions. He is more comfortable following the beaten track.

As a character Jiban does not attract much attention. His reaction to Monisha and towards life is rather passive and rigid. He refuses to acknowledge that his wife is an independent individual with a psyche of her own. After Monisha commits suicide Jiban confesses that he had overlooked her problems and had been quite ignorant and oblivious of Monisha's turmoils. He holds himself responsible for the sad plight of his wife but this repentance comes too late and is of no avail. Jiban's insensitivity had caused Monisha her life.

Desai is more committed in analysing female psyche rather than the male mindset. Her haunted protagonists are usually women. In the present novel too, Jiban exists more as a shadow and it is Monisha's complex psychological turbulence that Desai's focuses on.

5.5 AMITAV GHOSH: A BRIEF SKETCH

Although hailing from a middle-class Bengali family, varied influences of his childhood kept Ghosh away from the typical *Bhadralok* (middle class) value system. His childhood, spent at his grandfather's home where the sitting room was lined with book shelves, was where Ghosh's love for books developed. In an interview, he accepted that Bengali culture was his inspiration. He also greatly valued his father Lt. Col. Shailendra Chandra Ghosh's storytelling. Serving in the British Army, his stories about exotic lands had a great impact on young Amitav's imagination. These early childhood experiences have had a great influence on his literary creations, which is visible in his various publications.

Ghosh's career has seen a meteoric rise. Among his numerous awards include the Pushcart Prize in 1999 and the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the *Calcutta Chromosome*. Earlier *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Akademi. *An Antique Land*, a non-fiction work, was made into a documentary by BBC III in the year of 1992.

Ghosh is now settled in America. After having taught Anthropology and Comparative Literature at various universities in America, he is now associated with Queens College, a City University of New York, as a distinguished professor of comparative literature.

Check Your Progress

10. Who is represented through the character of Nirode?
11. What is Amla's perception of the city of Calcutta?
12. Why is it difficult for the reader to visualize Jiban?

List of works

Novels

- *The Circle of Reason* (1986)
- *The Shadow Lines* (1988)
- *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995)
- *The Glass Palace* (2000)
- *The Hungry Tide* (2005)
- *Sea of Poppies* (2008)
- *River of Smoke* (2011)

Non-fiction

- *In an Antique Land* (1992)
- *Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma* (1998; Essays)
- *Countdown* (1999)
- *The Imam and the Indian* (2002; Essays)
- *Incendiary Circumstances* (2006; Essays)

5.6 *THE SHADOW LINES:* A SUMMARY AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The Shadow Lines is the story of a Bengali family through which the author submits his analysis of various issues that were debated in India in those times. The story spans across characters of three generations and through, it traces the growth of Kolkata as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades. The story also draws from events in the author's own life and events of political significance.

Tha'mma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator, discusses the issues of the Bengal partition and the whole idea of nation, nationalism and nationhood. Tridib, the eccentric Historian cousin, highlights the idea of history getting problematic, while Ila is a means for the author to raise the issues of diaspora and racism. The narrator plays the central role by elaborating and integrating the ideas, viewpoints and experiences of the various characters.

Critical Appreciation of the Novel

The Shadow Lines begins when the narrator is an impressionable eight-year-old boy in a Gole Park flat in Kolkata and through the course of the story grows into an assured adult, not only physically but also in terms of his ideas on nationalism, nation and international relations.

All these issues and questions about them frame the narrator's journey into adulthood. They are not merely a male *bildungsroman,* an authorized autobiography with fixed agendas and priorities, but an open-ended dialogic telling of the perplexed interdependencies and inequalities that compose the biography of a nation.

Check Your Progress

13. Identify three factors that have impacted Ghosh's writing.
14. Which of Ghosh's books has been turned into a documentary?

Desai is more committed in analysing female psyche rather than the male mindset. Her haunted protagonists are usually women. In the present novel too, Jiban exists more as a shadow and it is Monisha's complex psychological turbulence that Desai's focuses on.

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The novel begins with the narrator talking about his experiences as a school boy in the Gole-Park neighbourhood of Kolkata. As the reader proceeds further, he/she finds two branches of the narrator's family–the family of Grandmother Tha'mma and that of her sister Mayadebi. Acclaimed literary critic Meenakshi Mukherjee says that this rendition in the novel, amongst other details, helps the reader feel the "concreteness of the existential and emotional milieu... the precise class location of his family, Bengali *bhadralok*, starting at the lower edge of the spectrum and ascending to its higher reaches in one generation, with family connections above and below its own station..."

The narrator's *Bhadralok* family is depicted as one with great socio-economic disparities, brought out through the statuses of the two sisters. Tha'mma is a school teacher and the narrator's father is a middle-rung manager in a tyre company. Mayadebi's family on the other hand is more prosperous; her husband is a high-ranking official in the foreign service; her first son is an economist with the UN, the second a civil servant, while the third son Tridib does not achieve any notable material success.

Tha'mma was married to an engineer posted in Burma but she loses her husband very early, thus forced to nurture her only son single-handedly. Subsequent pages show her struggle to meet the daily needs and build her career as a school teacher in Bengal. The novel reaches its halfway point with her retirement.

The important aspect of Tha'mma's vision to be considered here is her perception of historical events, nationhood and nationalism. In her youth, Tha'mma was influenced by the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century. She idolized the extremists fighting for nationalism and secretly desired to be a part of radical organizations such as *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*. But being educated in the Western system, her idea of Nation as an entity was entirely adopted from England. She believed wars and blood baths only build grandeur the nations **(not clear what this means)**. However, she does not pay much attention to her ideas since she belongs to a middle-class family where members are more involved in livelihood matters and she too has similar priorities.

Here the author talks of *phantom distances* through *the shadow lines* that the political machineries created in order to strengthen the idea of nation. On the other hand, in a large country like India, diversity abounds in every aspect of cultural, economic, social and linguistic existence and nationhood is imposed over these *imagined communities*.

5.6.1 The Title

The title *The Shadow Lines* is evocative of one of the major concerns of the novel, i.e. the creation of nations with boundaries that are both arbitrary and invented. This issue becomes more pertinent when viewed in the context of the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The author uses the trope of the house to explain this. As children Tha'mma and Mayadebi witnessed the family dispute between their father and his brother (*Jethamoshai*), leading to the division of the house.

Perhaps, the oblivion on Tha'mma's part of the happenings is equivalent to a deliberated non-admission of deeply disturbing facts. Tha'mma, therefore, has made this oblivion her, survival strategy.

Nationalism is redefined in many ways through experience. Whereas, the *great historical project* of nationalism first undermines community (here the Bengali community that is common between East and West Bengal) to formulate nation, it

then 'narrates the nation'. The theorist Bhaba takes this project as comprising the creation of "the narratives ... that signify a sense of 'nationness': the...pleasures of one's hearth and the... terror of the space of the other." People in the newly formed nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh are prompted through narration—'language, signifiers, textuality, rhetoric'— to create a difference where none exists. Therefore, the book looks at the creation of artificial conflict between two nations that are inherently one.

Another subtle way in which the author has exposed this strategy is by describing the experience of an Indian (Ila) outside India (London). While in London she inhabits the space where the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh differentiation does not exist. During their visit to London, Ila takes Robi and the narrator out for a dinner "at my (Ila's) best-loved Indian restaurant". As it turns out the "Indian place" is a small Bangladeshi place in Clapham. A seemingly insignificant incident ridicules the intense feeling of difference that these two countries otherwise harbor and how these differences are reduced to a naught, if viewed from a space that is outside the two. So these boundaries that are created due to political reasons seem tangible enough to be called *lines* but if analysed closely, fade away like *shadows*.

5.6.2 The Structure

Everyone lives in a story...because stories are all there to live in.

The structure of *The Shadow Lines* is dominated by two characteristics:

1. Non-linear structure
2. Digressive narrative

The Shadow Lines is a novel without any determined outset, centre and closing; instead it relies on the loop-structure of a story- within a-story and in turn is linked to the second characteristic of digressive narrative. This interferes with the 'unity of theme and action' as a hallmark of good writing as perceived by the Western poetics. This novel is told in the form of stories, therefore, we can say that the narrator is more of a listener than a speaker. His method of narration is bringing together all the available versions, rather than telling new stories. Out of this merging of varied and contradictory versions comes out a better version that is more representative and comprehensive.

Both these elements of an unnamed narrator and a non-linear progression are more peculiar to Indian than Western poetics. Indian works have also traditionally not used the Western cause-effect structures. The Western ideal of a palpable beginnining, middle and end is not present in Indian works. A story as seen in this novel is a form that is not moving towards a preconceived culmination but is being constituted of several voices, all of which serve to make it richer.

The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming Home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness which the Partition victims have experienced and that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure.

5.6.3 Theme of the Novel: Partition

The trauma of the Partition has been expressed well in the novel.

The idea of 'nation' became prominent and was at its peak in the year 1947 in India. The dream of attaining freedom from colonial rule was realized. Freedom from colonial rule was ushered in and a long cherished desire of a free country fulfilled and

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15. Is *The Shadow Lines* a biography?
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made available to the Indians. However, the arrival of freedom also signaled virtual dislocation for a big fraction of the population: the birth of the free nation was accompanied by excruciating labour pains of the event of Partition. Histories of both sides portray this event in passing as a misfortune that arose out of the power interests of the 'other' side. In the history textbooks the battle for independence is seen to have heralded the practice of the new philosophy of *ahinsa*.

Although no memorials were built in honour of this event, the Partition has very well been preserved by the communities in the confines of their homes through stories and anecdotes told by the way of mouth and passed down through generations.

Indian writing in English have seen a spurt in the publication of Partition-related literature. *The Shadow Lines* is, among other issues, a book about the Bengal partition. The story of the old uncle *Jethamoshai* captures the poignant side of human experience. The penury and destitution of Tha'mma's poor relatives in the novel describes the economic effects of Partition.

5.6.4 Community and Communal Strife

The Shadow Lines discusses the issue of Partition (1947) and the author has done an elaborate critical review of the whole idea of the nation, as it emerged in the prevailing circumstances. *Community* prior to the Partition is seen in an ideal state and the narratives that the community produced are more emblematic of their experience than history in its factuality. The natural community—what is seen as the family in the Indian subcontinent—in Punjab and Bengal was split into two nations following the Partition, resulting into the physical dislocation of 15 million people from the places that they traditionally called home. Those who crossed over to the Indian side arrived landless, clueless and resourceless to be a part of the rejoicing in Delhi on the eve of the country's independence.

A classification into natural and interest-oriented communities is used by Sudipta Kaviraj to draw up an elaborate case about the difference between *nation* and *community*. He draws heavily on the work of the sociologist Toennies to discuss two kinds of communities: gemeinschaften, which is the primary, traditional group and which according to Kaviraj "one does not make an interest actuated decision to belong." On the other hand is gesselschaften, similar to modern nations, which is based on the convergence of political and economic interests. The Partition demanded the disruption of gemeinschaften, embodied in the old communities of Bengal and Punjab, with the objective of creating gesselschaftens—India and Pakistan. Further, "these imagined communities can place their boundaries in time and space anywhere they like unlike the former which have 'naturally limited contours'." So whereas the former state reflects a cultural bonding, the latter is based on political interest.

To these groups are also then linked their own forms of narration. Narratives, according to Kaviraj, are always told from someone's point of view. "They try to paint a picture of some kind of an ordered, intelligible, humane and habitable world…literally produce a world in which the self finds home."

The gemeinschaften, therefore has its own community-specific narratives and gesselschaften acquires it in due course. Whereas, the former lives in age-old stories shared in various forms by the community, the latter finds a home in Histories.

The Partition of India is justified to have been the consequence of communal tension between Hindus and Muslims, but our literatures have presented to us far

Check Your Progress

19. Name any two structural characteristics of the novel *The Shadow Lines*.
20. What is the difference between the structure of Western novels and that of Indian ones?
21. How has the Partition been dealt with by the official histories of the sub-continental countries?

more complex designs of communities with composite structures that have for considerable time of a century or more shared cultural values regardless of religious differences. Bhalla has argued in this regard that there are hardly any chronicles, songs, *kissas* and *tamashas* in Punjab which record a long history of irreconcilable hatred between Hindus and Muslims. What the governments never addressed was the culture instead of religion.

The author also focuses on how the newspapers and the author's imagination have portrayed the varied pictures of the riots between the communities. Whereas, in the author's imagination they have stood out as the single most important event of his childhood, in the newspapers and other sources they do not even merit a mention. The author searches for the reasons that lead to the state keeping silent on the—the difficulty in representing an enemy that arises from *within* rather than *without*.

It is also ironic that post-Partition, people across the border share all their old stories but from completely separate histories. And as Ghosh points out the nature of this relationship is governed by

> … that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other Independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of the states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between people.

The Shadow Lines, shows how when communities give way to nations, their narration is taken over by a totalizing history in *The Shadow Lines.* On the other hand, riots, civil strife and communal riots do not find expression in the official records because the same incidents at one time supported the political decisions and their documentation would only raise several questions about authenticity. In any case, both the communities' experiences and their depiction had to suffer. The account of the Partition completely ignores the composite quality of relationships that existed between people of different religions and that there were other potent factors of cohesion like a shared cultural ethos. *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh talks of such a definition of community in the village of Manomajra. This book and some others show the existence of an alternate religion with people of different faiths looking upon a common shrine (in this case a sandstone slab) as religious. Interestingly, this feature about close-knit, cohesive communities later gets transported to the imagined community of the state of otherwise riot-ravaged India.

5.6.5 Nation and Home/Homelessness

In the novel, 'home' displays an allegorical relationship with nation. Tha'mma talks of her upside-down house in Dhaka and the story of that house is indeed, the story of the Partition of India. As they had spent their childhood in a joint family in Dhaka, Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi witnessed the conflict between their father and his brother, which has lead to the division of the ancestral house. This division is so tangible that an actual line is drawn in the middle of their house dividing everything including the commode. The other side of the house after the partition becomes inaccessible to the two girls. The two nations, just like the two parts of the house, were existing as a single unit but the course of history separated them and to sustain their separation a line of dispute had to be created. The stories that Tha'mma creates to bring alive to her younger sister the situation of the other part of the house are in spirit comparable to the modern version of fake national pride that is also based on false stories of difference.

Check Your Progress

22. What aspect of nation-community relationship is brought out by the author in the context of the Partition?
23. In what way is the author's idea of the riots different from that of the media's?
24. What is the partition of Tha'mma's ancestral home symbolic of?

The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming Home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the victims of Partition have experienced.

5.7 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

After looking at the various aspects of the novel, let us study the characters in detail.

5.7.1 Tha'mma

Tha'mma's character is very crucial in the novel as she personifies a conventional yet interesting belief system challenged by the other characters including the writer himself. The novel makes readers see through the acts when the country was experiencing Partition. The submission of Tha'mma's personal details along with the documentation for visa, raises fundamental doubts within her of her identity. For the first time the confident, unperturbed Tha'mma is emotionally suppressed by some fundamentally disturbing introspection. Her uncle is the only one left in the ancestral house and who disagrees to the country's separation. Her visit to her home in Dhaka is painful in many ways. Tha'mma in her childhood had heard stories about the disputed house (one half of it was occupied by her uncle's family). The artificial constrictiveness of the 'otherness' of the house is apparent and many critics have found it similar to what the state indulges in when the partition of a nation has to be justified and therefore creates differences, even if there exists harmony. The two nations of India and Pakistan were like two parts of a family which were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divided them and for sustaining their separation differences were created.

It is the fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can suddenly and without warning become as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world-not language, not food, not music-it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.

5.7.2 Tridib

Tridib, the narrator's uncle, is an unconventional character who does not fit into the genteel society of his family. He is deeply involved in researching into the ancient Sena Dynasty of Bengal. Tridib's character in this novel is more of a voice that bears the burden of a historical vision rather than a scholar of ancient history writing a thesis on the lost Sena Empire. He not only collects esoteric scraps of knowledge ranging from East European Jazz and to the intricate sociological patterning of the Incas, but has shaped his own and the narrator's preference also towards it. The narrator got his first lessons on scholarship from Uncle Tridib—a copy of Bartholomew's Atlas that remained with him as a symbol of the transference between them, reappeared in the author's hotel room in Delhi years later.

Tridib is shown to be a glib talker in the novel. The eccentric uncle has an audience at the *addas* of Gole Park. As a young man, Tridib falls in love with May, an Englishwoman. The relationship between them starts with the exchange of letters and continues till Tridib writes one in which he proposes to her and goes on to elaborate intimate love-making between two people in a war-devastated theatre in London.

May is initially confused but cannot resist the invitation and finally reaches India to see Tridib. But soon the romance in their relationship is replaced by resonance.

Tha'mma, Mayadebi and the child Robi are trapped in the communal riots during a visit to their ancestral house in Dhaka, to bring back the old uncle who had been left behind during Independence. While the three meander through the riot-ravaged streets of the city in their chauffeur driven-car, the old uncle follows them in a rickshaw, steered by the Muslim who looks after him. May observes that the mob first turned to them and upon being repulsed, attacked the old man on the rickshaw. Tha'mma, instead of saving her uncle, displays the same unconcern that Tridib had earlier shown towards a dog and asks the driver to drive on without looking back. May feels impelled to get out of the car, run towards the mob and save the old man. But Tridib cannot watch her embrace death and therefore follows her. In the scrimmage, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed.

5.7.3 Ila

Ila, the narrator's cousin is another important influence on the young, impressionable narrator. She, owing to her globetrotting father, reaches London to get settled. She has travelled extensively and her experiences of visiting various places as well as her schooling in these locations is threaded into delightful stories for the child narrator to initiate his first ever flight of imagination. Ila's experience as an Indian settled in London is the pretext to probe into the issue of citizenship, along with diaspora and the modern Calcutta bourgeoisie.

Ila's personal experiences, first as a student in London and later marrying a white man, throws up a range of polemics about the diasporic communities. When she narrates the story about the fantasy child Magda to the narrator, it is quite apparent that the child is a result of her mixed marriage. The absolute fear that she describes in the imaginary classroom of the child deceives her inner sense of complexity as a woman faced with questions about race in a mixed marriage. Ila in this conversation displays hyper-emotionalism which itself is a clear indication of deep complexities within her about race. Finally when Nick betrays her, her insecurity as a woman and especially as one disadvantaged due to her race comes out in the open.

5.7.4 The Narrator

The narrator is introduced in the novel as an eight-year-old child belonging to a genteel middle-class family where young children are generally concerned with their studies only. However, the narrator here finds support in his uncle Tridib to escape such a burden. The uncle has gifted an atlas to narrator which becomes a symbol of 'transference of knowledge' that happens between the two. The narrator has acquired from Tridib an extraordinary sensitivity towards knowledge, which becomes important for the role of narration that he attempts later. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the string that brings together the other available versions in order to make a complete story. It is significant that the author has presented himself as more of a storyteller than a historian or an anecdote teller and the stories told are in circuitry in this book which has no definite beginnings or endings; they are indiscrete and seemingly belong to no one. Here, it is pertinent to narrate that the author, in spite of his omniscience, is unnamed and his stories mostly are the renderings of other characters.

These stories become more perceivable as the narrator joins them into meaningful wholes after collecting all the possible versions of the incident described

Check Your Progress

25. When is Tha'mma torn by doubts about her identity?
26. What was the author's first lesson of knowledge given by Uncle Tridib?
27. What happens to Tridib in the novel?

from various sources. The truth behind Tridib's death in Dhaka can be viewed as an example. Tha'mma, Mayadebi, Tridib's girlfriend May and Robi have witnessed the lynching of Tridib during the Dhaka riots. However his death, its cause and manner are not brought to the narrator's knowledge in toto as most middle-class parents are not open to discussing death and related issues in the presence of young children. The child Robi, witness to the public violence in Dhaka, refers to the experience with a hyper-emotionality characteristic of a traumatic childhood experience that one hasn't forgotten even as an adult. Later, Robi talks of all that happened during an evening out with the narrator and Ila. His account is complete to the extent that he as a child could only observe partially. His partial perception is a result of his intellectual inadequacy. Not only the intellectual inadequacy but the physical limitation has also been the reason of his partial perception i.e.—'an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale'. This makes him incapable of even observing the incident objectively. His account of the incident is therefore more of a psychotherapeutic outburst because it has been long repressed than an illuminating or insightful reconstruction of the past. The last person in the chain to recall and share the experience is May to whom the narrator then turns for an adequate explanation. It is in London that the narrator is made aware of the truth behind the death.

Another aspect of modern India that the narrator unveils through the novel is the typical twentieth-century phenomenon of civil strife and rioting, especially the one that results from communal disharmony. It is important to mention here that *The Shadow Lines,* written in 1988, was the author's response to another unprecedented event in post-colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. The novel situates the 1964 communal riots of Calcutta, experienced by the narrator as a young school-goer, centrally in the boy's psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers.

The author holds the silence that he views in history as the resultant of happenings that cannot be accounted for in a given manner: "the kind of natural silence that descends when nearness /distance, friend /enemy become terms impossible to define". However it is difficult to define the terms originally in the scenario of artificial differences being imposed by the state. Riots and their memory become a case in point because as Ghosh puts it they are an instance of 'pathological inversion', i.e. violence of a state turning inwards unlike other conflicts like war where it turns outwards. The clear definition of enemy/friend, in-group/out-group, I/other becomes difficult. Who is to be called as a culprit or a victim becomes tough for the state and also the causes, if documented, subvert the idea of the nation, therefore having least value for the governments as historical objects. In the event of wars, on the other hand, there is a clearly specified enemy, a self-righteous *we group* and a legitimate action that reaffirms our belief in nationhood. Hence, there is a glory to wars, though violent, but one that makes sense within our defined notions.

Check Your Progress

28. What issues do Ila's experiences throw up?
29. What is the role of the narrator in the book?
30. The civil strife that the author deals with in the novel is a response to a more contemporary event. What is it?

Activity

Watch the 1993 Merchant Ivory production of *In Custody*, directed by Ismail Merchant. It won the 1994 President of India Gold Medal for Best Picture and stars Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri.

Did You Know

In an interview with Haper Collins Publishers, Amitav Ghosh was asked about the title of his novel *The Glass Palace* to which his reply was; '*The Glass Palace* is one particular chamber in the old Royal Palace in Mandalay. It doesn't exist any more; it was destroyed during the war, in 1945. But we have lots of descriptions and photographs. It was a huge chamber covered with mirrors and glass. It was a symbol of the palace itself, and of the royal family. The dynastic history of Burma is called the Glass Palace Chronicles.'

5.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Anita Desai lays no special emphasis on plot construction, on a well-made novel with the conventional notion of a beginning, middle and an end. Story, action and drama mean little to her. Desai feels that a story "imposed from the outside simply destroys the life of characters, reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage." So whatever action is present in her novels is part of the integral whole composed of the human psyche and the human situation.
- One of the most important aspects of Desai's work is her ability to fuse form and content. In her novel, she skillfully explores the mental and the emotional. Her characters fight the ubiquitous forces of absurd realities and feel oppressed by the burden of living helplessly in the contemporary chaotic milieu.
- Delving deeper into the complexities of human existence, Desai endeavours to evaluate the various formidable factors that render life unendurable.
- The novel *The Shadow Lines*, tells the story of a Bengali family through which the author submits his analysis of various issues that were debated in India at that time. The novel witnesses the growth of the narrator from an impressionable eight-year-old boy into an assured adult. The growth however is not merely physical only but also in terms of ideas on nationalism, nation and its states and international relations.
- Events and experiences from the author's life are also depicted significantly. The grandmother of the unnamed narrator narrates and discusses issues related to the Partition of Bengal and whole idea of nation, nationalism and nationhood. Through Tridib, the historian cousin, the idea of history getting problematic is highlighted. The author uses Ila, the narrator's second cousin to raise issues of Diaspora and Racism.
- The author has also tried to unfold facts related to riots, civil strife and communal riots which did not find any depiction in the government records due to political reasons. The book also discusses the consequences of these riots.

5.9 KEY TERMS

- **Milieu:** The particular people and society that surround you and influence the way in which you behave

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Another aspect of modern India that the narrator unveils through the novel is the typical twentieth-century phenomenon of civil strife and rioting, especially the one that results from communal disharmony. It is important to mention here that *The Shadow Lines,* written in 1988, was the author's response to another unprecedented event in post-colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. The novel situates the 1964 communal riots of Calcutta, experienced by the narrator as a young school-goer, centrally in the boy's psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers.

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Check Your Progress

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5.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

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- One of the most important aspects of Desai's work is her ability to fuse form and content. In her novel, she skillfully explores the mental and the emotional. Her characters fight the ubiquitous forces of absurd realities and feel oppressed by the burden of living helplessly in the contemporary chaotic milieu.
- Delving deeper into the complexities of human existence, Desai endeavours to evaluate the various formidable factors that render life unendurable.
- The novel *The Shadow Lines*, tells the story of a Bengali family through which the author submits his analysis of various issues that were debated in India at that time. The novel witnesses the growth of the narrator from an impressionable eight-year-old boy into an assured adult. The growth however is not merely physical only but also in terms of ideas on nationalism, nation and its states and international relations.
- Events and experiences from the author's life are also depicted significantly. The grandmother of the unnamed narrator narrates and discusses issues related to the Partition of Bengal and whole idea of nation, nationalism and nationhood. Through Tridib, the historian cousin, the idea of history getting problematic is highlighted. The author uses Ila, the narrator's second cousin to raise issues of Diaspora and Racism.
- The author has also tried to unfold facts related to riots, civil strife and communal riots which did not find any depiction in the government records due to political reasons. The book also discusses the consequences of these riots.

5.9 KEY TERMS

- **Milieu:** The particular people and society that surround you and influence the way in which you behave

- **Appendage:** Something that is joined to something larger or more important, for example a small part of your body such as a hand or foot
- **Bildungsroman:** A novel which deals with an individual's formative years
- **Bourgeoisie**: Middle class. The social class between the lower and upper classes
- **Memoirs:** Autobiography, diary, journal, account, chronicle, record, life history
- **Hearth:** An open recess in a wall at the base of a chimney where a fire can be built

5.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The search for truth and exploration of style (writing language and symbol, word and rhythms) are the two preoccupations of Desai's writings.
2. Her novels do not have a well-constructed plot and a tightly-knit structure. Her stories are told through episodes, happenings, incidents, encounters and reminiscences.
3. The three principal characters are Nirode, Monisha and Amla.
4. Dharma's stubborn and self-centered attitude, his anger towards his daughter who refused to obey him and his casual attitude towards his wife Gita Devi disillusionies Amla.
5. Monisha's suicide is an attempt to break the monotony of routine existence. With her self-willed deliberate act she is able to shake off the complacency and apathy entrenched in the psyche of her brother Nirode.
6. The mother is a beautiful socialite, fond of the good life. She is a refined and accomplished lady. But her bond with her children is rather minimal. Her financial self-sufficiency and good looks as well as her self-centeredness have made her more of a hateful figure than a mother-head.
7. Calcutta is described as the 'devil city', the 'monster city', the city of Kali, the Goddess of Death, the city which entraps the denizens who feel the pressures and tensions of this monster city.
8. Monisha fails to respond like other spectators, men and women, to bawdy and lewdly suggestive songs sung by strolling street-singers.
9. After the father's demise Nirode wanted to be the support and succor for his mother, but she was more inclined towards her paramour. This made Nirode jealous and in his failure to receive her love, he starts detesting and fearing her.
10. The character of Nirode represents the youth that is dejected and depressed when faced with the problems of life and that surrenders before situations and compromises with conditions despite having the capability to fight them.
11. According to Amla, Calcutta exerts a strangely defeating and despondent influence on its inhabitants. She finds it a discomforting and suffocating place.
12. Desai has reflected more on the plight of Monisha than that of Jiban in her novel, so the reader is unable to visualize his character clearly. He hardly has any individual traits and is more of a symbolic force.

13. Varied influences of his childhood, Bengali culture and travels/stories about exotic lands have had a great influence on Ghosh's literary creations.
14. *An Antique Land*, a non-fiction work.
15. *The Shadow Lines* is not an authorized autobiography with fixed agendas and priorities, but an open-ended dialogic telling of the perplexed interdependencies and inequalities that compose the biography of a nation.
16. Tha'mma does not pay much attention to her ideas since she belongs to a middle-class family where members are more involved in livelihood matters and she too has similar priorities.
17. The great historical project first undermines the community to formulate the nation, it then 'narrates the nation'
18. The boundaries that are created due to political reasons seem tangible enough to be called *lines* but if analysed closely, fade away like *shadows.*
19. The structure of *The Shadow Lines* is dominated by two characteristics: 1. Non-linear structure and 2. Digressive narrative.
20. The Western novels have a palpable beginnining, middle and end which is not present in Indian works.
21. Histories of both sides portray this event in passing as a misfortune that arose out of the power interests of the 'other' side.
22. The Partition demanded the disruption of the gemeinschaften, the community—embodied in the old communities of Bengal and Punjab—with the objective of creating gesselschaftens—the nations of India and Pakistan.
23. In the author's imagination the riots stood out as the single most important event of his childhood; in the newspapers and other sources they do not even merit a mention.
24. The partition of Tha'mma's house is symbolic of the partition of India. The two nations, like the two parts of the house, were existing as a single unit but the course of history separated them and to sustain their separation a line of dispute had to be created.
25. The submission of Tha'mma's personal details along with the documentation for visa raises fundamental doubts within her of her identity.
26. The narrator's first lesson on scholarship was a copy of Bartholomew's Atlas given by Uncle Tridib.
27. When Tridib's girlfriend confronts a mob to save Jethamoshai, Tridib follows her. In the scrimmage, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed.
28. Ila's experience as an Indian settled in London is the pretext to probe into the issue of citizenship, along with diaspora and the modern Calcutta bourgeoisie.
29. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the string that brings together the other available versions in order to make a complete story.
30. *The Shadow Lines,* written in 1988, was the author's response to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.

NOTES

5.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on the city of Calcutta in Amla's views.
2. What is the status of Indian women reflected in the character of Monisha?
3. Briefly talk about Nirode's character.
4. What was Nirode's relationship with his mother?
5. How is the novel *The Shadow Lines* both an example of and diversion from the *Bildungsroman* (novel of growth) tradition of novel?
6. What was Tha'mma's views on nation and nationalism. How do her experiences account for these?
7. How does the author use the trope of a divided feud-ridden house to discuss the issue of Partition of India?
8. Write short notes on the following in the context of the novel:
   (a) Partition,
   (b) Community and nation

Long-Answer Qurestions

1. Critically analyze the theme of alienation in Anita Desai's novel *Voices in the City.*
2. '*Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution?* 'Who stated this? What does it reveal about the character and her circumstances?
3. How do Desai's characters symbolize various facets of cosmopolitan life in Calcutta?
4. Discuss Anita Desai's existentialist vision with reference to her novel *Voices in the City.*
5. Desai's characters exist more as abstractions outlining mental conditions rather than living, breathing beings. Discuss.
6. According to the author *The Shadow Lines* was influenced by the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. How does the book deal with the question of civil strife and rioting in modern India? Discuss in detail the narrator's description of his experiences as a schoolboy caught in the 1964 Calcutta riots, and his subsequent questioning of their depiction in history.
7. What are the 'Shadow Lines' that the author talks about? How is the question of invented nationhood, especially in relation with the Partition of India, discussed in the book?
8. Discuss the relationship between Tridib and May.
9. Discuss Ila as a typical example of the travelling cosmopolitan. Also highlight her experiences, including that of marrying Nick, which bring out her troubled racial and cultural identity?
10. Discuss the role of the narrator's cousin Tridib in fashioning the author's perception of life.

5.10 FURTHER READING

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Iyengar, K.R.S., *Indian Writing in English,* Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1962.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Twice Born Fiction*, Arnold Heinemann, Delhi, 1971.

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   (b) Community and nation

Long-Answer Qurestions

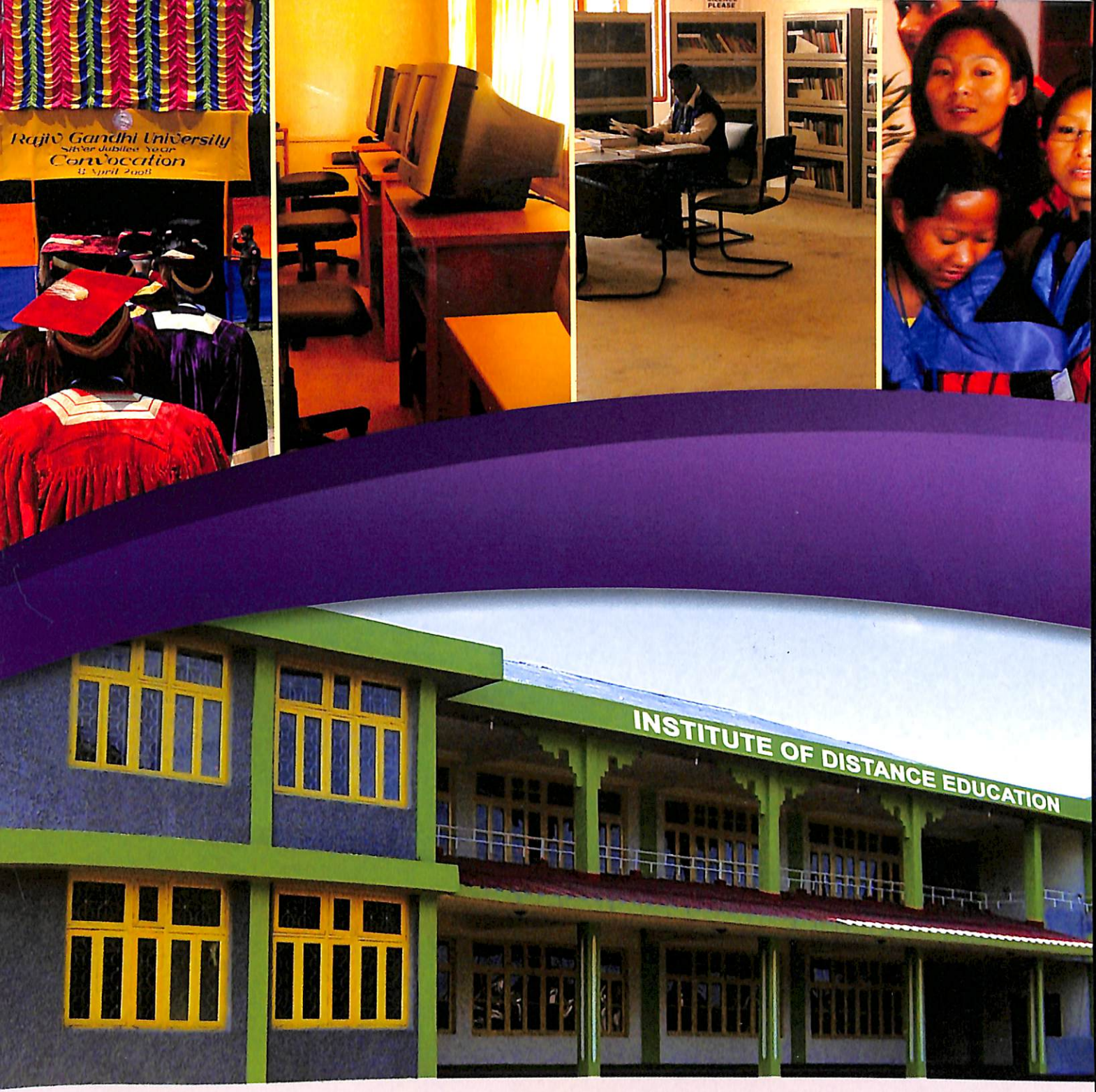
1. Critically analyze the theme of alienation in Anita Desai's novel *Voices in the City.*
2. '*Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution?* 'Who stated this? What does it reveal about the character and her circumstances?
3. How do Desai's characters symbolize various facets of cosmopolitan life in Calcutta?
4. Discuss Anita Desai's existentialist vision with reference to her novel *Voices in the City.*
5. Desai's characters exist more as abstractions outlining mental conditions rather than living, breathing beings. Discuss.
6. According to the author *The Shadow Lines* was influenced by the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. How does the book deal with the question of civil strife and rioting in modern India? Discuss in detail the narrator's description of his experiences as a schoolboy caught in the 1964 Calcutta riots, and his subsequent questioning of their depiction in history.
7. What are the 'Shadow Lines' that the author talks about? How is the question of invented nationhood, especially in relation with the Partition of India, discussed in the book?
8. Discuss the relationship between Tridib and May.
9. Discuss Ila as a typical example of the travelling cosmopolitan. Also highlight her experiences, including that of marrying Nick, which bring out her troubled racial and cultural identity?

5.10 FURTHER READING

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M.A. (English)

SECOND YEAR

MAE-503

INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
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AMERICAN LITERATURE

AMERICAN LITERATURE

MA [English]

Second Year

MAE 503

RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY
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About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

American Literature

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UNIT-II Poetry **Walt Whitman** Song of Myself (1–10) **Robert Frost** The Road Not Taken Mending Wall After Apple-Picking	**Unit 2:** Poetry by Walt Whitman and Robert Frost **(Pages 43-75)**
UNIT-III **William Carlos Williams** Revelation The Window's Lament in Springtime' A Negro Woman **Langston Hughes** I, too, Sing America The Negro Speaks of Rivers The Poetry of the Negro (1941–1970 ed.) **Claude McKay** The White Fiends	**Unit 3:** William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay **(Pages 77-107)**
UNIT-IV (Drama) **Eugene O'Neill** Long Day's Journey into Night **Tennessee Williams** A Streetcar Named Desire	**Unit 4:** Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams **(Pages 109-156)**
UNIT-V (Fiction) **Ernest Hemingway** A Farewell to Arms **William Faulkner**	**Unit 5:** William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway **(Pages 157-203)**

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INTRODUCTION

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American Literature is a book which has been designed for students who are pursuing their Post-Graduate degree in English Literature. This book aims to give a cohesive interpretation of the different impulses that went into the making of a separate canon called American Literature. It widely accepted that the written or literary work produced in the United States and its preceding colonies is the birthplace of this canon. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. Its literary tradition, for this reason, begins as linked to the broader tradition of English literature. However, in the hands of a selected few, American literature took on a shape that was exclusive and gradually came to be associated with a strong sense of the New World aesthetics.

This book, *American Literature,* has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each Unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Unit Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each Unit. The Summary, Key Terms and Activity further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

This book is divided into five units:

Unit 1: Discusses the background and history of American literature

Unit 2: Critically analyses the poetry of Robert Frost and Walt Whitman

Unit 3: Describes the poetic impulses of William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay

Unit 4: Constructs a comparative apparatus of America's two leading playwrights: Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams

Unit 5: Interprets American fiction by William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway

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UNIT 1 AMERICAN LITERATURE: BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Structure

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

American literature is the body of written works produced in English language in the United States and its preceding colonies. Earlier in history, America was a series of British colonies located on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. As a result, its literary tradition begins as linked to the broader tradition of English literature. However, it is now considered to be a separate course and tradition because of its exceptional American characteristics and extensiveness of its production.

Early American literature was mainly focused on the New England colonies. The revolutionary period of the era comprised the political writings by the Founding Fathers of the United States, Samuel Adams and Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine, an English and American political activist, philosopher and political theorist. An eminent American writer of the post-war period was Thomas Jefferson, another American Founding Father, who was noted for his work, United States *Declaration of Independence.* The nation's first novels were published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Several new literary figures emerged following the War of 1812, who expressed a strong aspiration to produce uniquely American literature and culture. Some of these eminent figures included American authors Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving.

A religious and philosophical movement was started in 1836 by American essayist, lecturer and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), which came to be known as

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Transcendentalism. During this period, American author and transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) wrote the book, *Walden*, also known as *Life in the Woods*, which insists on resistance to the dictates of organized society. The political revolution surrounding abolitionism, a historical movement, encouraged the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe in her renowned *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A masterpiece produced in this period was American novelist and short story writer Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804–1864) *The Scarlet Letter*, which is a novel about adultery.

The two most prominent poets of the nineteenth century America was Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) and Walt Whitman (1819–1892). It was in the early-to-mid-twentieth century when American poetry reached its zenith with notable writers including T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, E. E. Cummings and Ezra Pound.

Disillusionment was expressed in the writings of American authors following World War I. American author and journalist Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) was known for his works, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. Another American writer William Faulkner (1897–1962) is noted for novels like *The Sound and the Fury*. It was only in the 1920s and 1930s when American drama achieved the international position. This was possible with the works of Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize winner Eugene O'Neill. In the middle of the twentieth century, American drama was dominated by the work of playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as by the maturation of the America musical theatre.

From the end of World War II to, approximately, the late 1960s and early 1970s, the publication of some of the most popular works in American history, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, was noteworthy. From the early 1970s to the present day, the most important literary movement has been postmodernism and the maturing of literature by ethnic minority writers.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Prepare a critical review of American literature
- Discuss the importance of realism and regionalism
- Explain naturalism and determinism in American writing
- Paraphrase the dime novel
- Identify the tenets of modern literature
- Describe American literature from 1945 to the present day

1.2 REVIEW OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

The journey to the creation of the United States of America was a slow and gradual one. The cultural history of the next several generations is essentially a story of adaptation, as important ideas and material forms were modified under the pressure of America's different conditions. Both English and Colonial languages made extensive use of Latin and the philosophy, history and literature of Greece and Rome. The Ciceronian and Romish rhetoric inclusive of oratorical performances of the kind seen in English poet John Milton's *Prolusions* was also used to a great extent.

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1.2.1 The Colonial Experience

It cannot be denied that during the first century of the English Settlement, most of the literary achievements were made by the Puritans, who were a group of English Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were the most literate of the English colonists and were committed. The leaders of Massachusetts Bay Colony founded the Harvard College in 1636 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The first printing press was also established in Harvard in 1639. Puritans, along with the English Church under the Stuarts, wanted to build the Bible Commonwealth in the New World. They never wanted to be delinked from their English homeland.

The principal leader of Massachusetts was John Winthrop, who was also a wealthy English Puritan lawyer. He preached a sermon in 1630 emphasizing 'A Model of Christian Charity'. He said: 'For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.' The immigrants to Massachusetts brought their culture with them. Except in the matter of Church government, they wanted to continue with their native culture.

Generally speaking, the Puritans and the Yankees were the two halves of New England. The Puritans contributed by creating a rugged idealism of the English Reformation, while the Yankees were a product of native conditions created by practical economics. Puritan immigrants were the children of two different centuries. From the sixteenth century, they got their theology and from the seventeenth century, they got their politics with the result that an older absolutist dogma came down to the people with a later democratic concept of the state and society. Calvinism was discovered to be the enemy of democracy and liberalism was rejected.

The English as well as the colonists shared the experience and myth of the English Reformation, considering England as an elected nation: the Virgin Queen as the great deliverer of Protestant England from Spain and Bloody Mary; the providential miracles of the Armada and Guy Fawkes Day; and the apocalyptic events of Civil War, Regicide and rule by the Puritans Saints.

They also shared the great literary embodiments of that myth, which included the following:

- John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*
- William Shakespeare's history plays
- Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*
- John Milton's *Paradise Lost*
- John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*
- Vernacular Bible

The reciprocal acts of preaching and hearing were indispensable elements in the life of the Puritan congregation. The sermon that the Puritans delivered can be regarded as the first substantial literary genre produced in the English speaking New World. They insisted on simple language and plain style. The unceasing concern with salvation earned the Puritans a reputation for moral vigour. It also made them record their spiritual experience and the results of their investigations. These men and women engaged in searching inquiries into the state of their souls. This, in turn allowed, the American culture to experience a pre-occupation with the self. This further gave birth to, what we

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know today as, diaries. The first and the second generations especially produced many diaries and everyone became the authors of their own biographies. The genres of biography and autobiography during the colonial period embraced all writings about the self as a subject. However, it should be remembered that many were less interested in remaining true to factual details than in the more didactic emphasis of establishing accounts in a religious and spiritual traditional. *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover* by Richard Beale Davis, a leading scholar of early Southern literature, may be regarded as an eminent representative of autobiographies in the eighteenth century.

Thomas Shepard was the most prominent of the Puritans to have left a journal and autobiography. Shepard's life was very eventful and his dispute with Archbishop Laud and the rest of the anti-Puritan religious establishment in England is significant.

In his autobiography, Shepard wrote one of the most famous lines of literary excellence in his ship episode where he recalls how he was saved by God. In a particular passage, he says, '... the cable was let out so far that a little rope held the cable, and the cable the little anchor, and the little anchor the great ship in this great storm.' Besides, Shepard also started a journal, which was meant to satisfy the spiritual aspirants.

Michael Wigglesworth, the author of *The Day of Doom*, was the voice of the Puritans. Wigglesworth's diary is impressive for his sheer spiritual tenacity. He is dimensional but his follower Samuel Sewall is more impressive and convincing even to the modern reader. Sewall adheres strictly to the chronological order and his representations are more modern and authentic. His diary reveals a man trying, sometimes comically, sometimes with dignity, to sustain the plainer ideals of his father's, while becoming an eighteenth century gentleman without any planning or direction. Sewall was more commercial and was an elected official, i.e., the Chief Judge of Massachusetts Superior Court. He was also the classmate of the poet Edward Taylor and developed a lifelong interest in books and learning. He also presided over many theological debates, and with an unbiased mind, he was ready for any rational compromise. This made him different from the other puritans of his period.

Among his works, his confessions are famous as it chronicles the guilt for having handed down death sentences in the Salem witch trials of 1962. His is also noted for his work, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial,* the first anti-slavery tract published in New England in 1700. Later, this became the first anti-slavery tract to be printed in New England. His argument in this is based on appeals to common sense and natural law. His statement, 'Liberty is in real value next unto Life: None ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it, but upon the most mature Consideration', is very convincing. Much of his tract is given over to a reputation of the so-called biblical defence of slavery. These acts of Sewall made him very prominent. His diary was published a century after his death. Sewall with the attitudes of an inquisitive, secular, attentive man of the world reveals a different aspect of his character. His recollections are honest and his diary contains stories about murderers, his own courtships and his weaknesses, vigour and confessions of his hasty judgments.

William Bradford was one of the first historians of the New England. He started writing *Of Plymouth Plantation* in 1630 and continued to work on it for twenty years. It is the single most complete authority for the story of the pilgrims and the early years of the colony they founded. In one of the passages, Bradford says:

'But here I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor people's present condition; and so I think will the reader, too, when he well considers the same... It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked

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company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise....Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men—and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not...It is true, indeed, the affections and love of their brethren at Leyden was cordial and entire towards them, but they had little power to help them or themselves; and how the case stood between them and the merchants at their coming away hath already been declared. What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace?'

In this well-known passage, Bradford renders the pilgrim's first encounter with the wilderness that was to be their new home. The biblical references link the pilgrim to heroes of the Old and New Testaments: Moses and St. Paul. *Of Plymouth Plantation* is not merely history but a religious epic. Bradford justifies God's selection of the pilgrims and their migration to the new land. Many historians followed Bradford.

Another leading figure in the colonial Massachusetts was Edward Johnson. His book entitled the *Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Savior in New England* is both a history and early literature of New England. Johnson repeatedly invokes biblical precedents. For example, the harassment of the Saints by King Charles I is presented like the pursuit of David by Saul (Biblical account). Puritan leaders fashioned themselves like Moses (the Hebrew prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt and delivered the Law during their years of wandering in the wilderness) and Aaron (an older brother of Moses and a prophet to God) and the journey was compared to the Exodus. New England itself was thought to be Moses, leading the new nation of Israel out of the Babylon of Old World corruption. With him, we find history conjoined with literature.

The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, together with the *Faithfulness of His Promises*, written by Mary Rowlandson, a colonial American woman, is an account of her painful days in captivity and how piety and faith have saved her. This account is more like a novel and attracted readers for three centuries. Her allegory of presenting God in human form attracted many. Rowlandson uses biblical citations to comment on each episode. In the end, she compares herself to David, graceful for the scourge of her afflictions, and then to Moses whose exodus anticipated her own.

The most ambitious of the early writers is Cotton Mather, a socially and politically influential New England Puritan minister, who published *Magnalia Christi Americana* in 1702. This book is an encyclopaedic history of New England in seven volumes. *Magnalia* is as much an elegy as it is history. He wished, 'Whether New England may live anywhere else or not, it must live in our history.' Mather belongs to the third generation of puritans. As the grandson of John Cotton and Richard Mather, two of the leading ministers of the colony, and matched by his own gifts, his contribution to the literature is significant. He was enrolled in Harvard before his twelfth birthday. His service to the slaves, by opening a school for them, has been of great significance. In addition to his career as a man of letters, he participated in the debates on witchcraft and smallpox vaccination. He published over 400 separate books, tracts and pamphlets—some theological and some on natural science and politics. The book *Memorable Providences* (1689), relating to witchcraft and possessions, attracted the attention of almost all in Massachusetts and gave a new dimension to the social evil, conditioned by the religious thoughts of the day. According to this, the spiritual world was understood to be invisible but real and its agents could intrude upon earthly affairs at any moment. However, the trials in Salem had affected his health.

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He concentrated more on publishing. Several biographies that Mather included in the *Magnalia* serve both to epitomize the exceptional legacy of the ancestors and to counterpart the gloomy aspects of present decline. Mather's history helped men and women of the eighteenth century to find 'the *Graves* of their *Dead Fathers'* and recall their heroic ancestors. Mather saw Bradford as the Moses that people needed in a wilderness. Bradford learnt Hebrew so that he could 'see with his own eyes the ancient oracles of God in their native beauty'. He was glorified by Mather in his writings as a man of mythic proportions.

The population of America grew, and by 1720, it was quarter of a million. The country still remained agrarian but the cities were growing. New York, Boston and Philadelphia were getting gradually more and more populated. Charleston and New Port were the famous sea ports. Religion remained prominent in the rhetoric of America's public life but the contest for colonial leadership and ultimately for national sovereignty shifted to the secular arena of politics. Mather Cotton's *Bonifacius: An Essay Upon the Good* (1710) predicted the future of New England and was received well by the public. The book influenced even Benjamin Franklin. The Puritans substantially contributed to the creation of New England. In literature, the poems of early American poets Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor were popular. Moreover, John Cotton's preface to the *Bay Psalm Book* justified poetry as an aid to religious practice. The validity of poetry rests on its accuracy as a record of scriptural language.

Jonathan Edwards, a Christian preacher, philosopher, and theologian, was the last but the greatest of the royal line of Puritan mystics. American literary historian and scholar Vernon Louis Parrington points out in his book *Liberalism, Puritanism and the Colonial Mind: Main Currents in American Thought* that Edwards was conscious of the divine life flowing through and around him, making him one with Godhood. He wanted to build an order of his own, justifying his mysticism by a metaphysical idealism. Parrington further stated, 'There are inconsistencies in his thought as there were in his pastoral life. As the defender of the traditional theology, setting his face against the developing experience of his generation and as a rigid disciplinarian, reverting to the older Separatist's conception of a church of the elect and rejecting the "whole way of covenant" of his grandfather Stoddard, he may perhaps appear in the light of a reactionary. But as an expounder of philosophic idealism, he was looking forward to Emerson. As the advocate of the new revivalist methods, exalting the experience of conversion as the central fact of Christian life and assisting the forces that were drawing the Church and State apart, he was a pronounced revolutionist, the schismatic leader of the New Lights and the father of later congregationalism.'

An interesting phase in the early history of Edward can be seen in the transition from religious mysticism to philosophic idealism. The premeditated weakness of Edward's position remained in his belief of the divine power as a cardinal postulate. His work *On the Freedom of the Will* (1754) was his most significant contribution to theology. It was also the last important defence of the conservatism that was suffocating the intellectual life of New England. The keynote of the argument is 'will is subject to desire, and desire follows what seems to us good.' Edward was progressing along the path of transcendentalism, rediscovering the doctrine of inner light. He believed that the Holy Spirit 'acts in the mind of a saint as an in-dwelling vital principle'. He was ready for a compromise with the Quaker doctrine. With Edward's logic of the just God and his way of dealing with people, he became a popular preacher. His sermons were remarkable.

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Peter J. Conn, in his book *Literature in America: An Illustrated History*, states that examples of poetry were created by the in almost all the traditional genres. However, this was not allowed in drama which was prohibited by the same iconoclasm that led to the destruction of shattered stained glass and disfigured statues in the Old English Churches. Satire, epic, love poems and lyric were received well. With the first generation, elegies were popular as they were famous for directing emotions into consoling patterns. The elegies enrolled the deceased man or woman in the company of departed saints and it thereby attracted consolation out of sorrow. Elegies were regarded as the verse counterparts of funeral sermons. Next to elegies, biographies were received well as they built strong providential links between the individuals and the community.

One cannot forget the unfortunate and inhuman acts for which Anne Hutchinson, a Puritan spiritual adviser, was a victim. She was accused by the General Court for propagating ideas that were considered both heretical and seditious. She represented a species of antinomian rebellion against religious and civil order in the eyes of the authorities. The prosecution at her trial was conducted by Winthrop, who was serving as a deputy governor at that time. Winthrop was supported by John Cotton who had been Hutchinson's religious mentor in England. She fought her case with remarkable scholarship and vociferous courage. In Winthrop's words, even though she was 'a woman of ready wit and bold spirit', she was finally convicted and banished from Massachusetts.

Anne Bradstreet was another notable figure of the era. She was the most prominent of early English poets of North America and first female writer in the British North American colonies. Her volumes called Bradstreet's Poetry (*The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America*) were generally appreciated. However, Bradstreet was criticized for her writing mainly because of her gender. Her anger towards this kind of criticism is evident in the following lines of her work, *Prologue* of the first poem in *The Tenth Muse*:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits;
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits.
If what I do prove well, it won't advance;
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.

Through these lines, we get a sense that New England could not accept her fully. The most impressive of the poems in *The Tenth Muse* is 'a series of "quaternions" sequence of pentameter couplets devoted respectively to the four elements, the four humours, the four ages and the four seasons' (Peter Conn). Her poems show variety such as, pastoral, domestic and literary. However, most of her poems are documents of her inner debate where she made extensive use of simile. For example, a cropped flower is a conventional figure for the death of a child.

Edward Taylor was another eminent figure of the period who was known as a colonial American poet, pastor and physician. As a young man, he graduated from Harvard and took up a career as a school teacher. Unwilling to accept the demand to subscribe to the act of uniformity, he resigned his job and with his commitment towards Puritans, he started writing poems, which included *God's Determinations Touching His Elects* and the *Elects Combat in Their Conversion*. However, the tones of the poems varied ranging from its translation of the Creator into a colonial carpenter, temptation, spiritual struggle and personified abstractions, such as justice and mercy. His *Preparatory*

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Meditations show his commitment to the Bible and Christianity. Taken as a whole, these poems are the most remarkable verse sequences in American literature. His poems show many characteristics of metaphysical poetry as well. Taylor has also written some social satires.

When New England was able to get over the 'Puritan fever', it had turned to landscape and nature. Nature's appeal was both sensuous and spiritual. The literature of exploration and travel became a substantial genre. American naturalist William Bartram was noted for his evocation of the River Mississippi, which he saw for the first time in August 1777. His evocation of the river flowing through Louisiana exemplifies the distinctive mixture of science and mysticism, which further highlight the constituents of American imagination:

> *The depth of the river here, even in this season, at its lowest ebb, is astonishing, not less than forty fathoms; and the width about a mile or somewhat less: but it is not expansion of surface alone that strikes us with ideas of magnificence; the altitude and theatrical accents of its...banks, the steady course of the might flood, the trees, high forests, even every particular object, as well as societies, bear the stamp of superiority and excellence; all unite or combine in exhibiting a prospect of the grand sublime.*

Moreover, the Americans, by the mid eighteenth century, tried to establish a political identity and a cultural achievement, which would correspond with the 'grand sublime' of the New World geography that was mapped by Bartram and others. It was Benjamin Franklin who took the task to promote the finer arts and improve the common standard of knowledge.

Check Your Progress

1. Who dominated the first century of the English settlement?
2. Who was the first historian of New England?

1.2.2 Towards a National Literature

Franklin was the first American to answer the New World's needs to ascertain its cultural value. He is spoken of as the man who 'snatched the lightening from the sky and the scepter from the tyrant'. He was the link between America's past and future. Though a plebian in an aristocratic age, he was a 'true wit and a philosopher rich in learning, charming manners, ripe in the wisdom of the world, resourceful in dealing with men and events'. His parents were also English dissenters. Franklin was very much a product of the world of the new character. He epitomized the younger generation. His is a journey from ordinary beginnings to brilliant success. Employed as an editor of a newspaper the *New England Courant*, he published *Dogood Papers*, which was a series of essays in the style of the *Spectator*. The titles of the *Dogood Papers* suggest their range from 'freedom of thought' to 'drunkenness' to 'pride and hoop petticoats'. He makes use of 'double rimes such as power, flower; quiver, shiver; grieve us, leave us; expeditions, physicians; fatigue him, intrigue him' and many more.

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Franklin first entered politics as a member of the popular party. A bitter election went against him and he lost his seat in the Assembly. Subsequently, he was chosen as the Colonial Agent to England. Soon he became the spokesman of the colonial cause. Franklin was a man of divided loyalties. He loved and respected his old home, and though the idea of American Separation was repugnant, he yielded to the will of the people. Franklin wrote his autobiography in 1771. Franklin demonstrated the rational and scientific temperaments which were also shared, to some extent, by several writers and politicians of the period who shaped America's fortune in the late eighteenth century. Besides Franklin, some of the eminent figures who proclaimed the principles of the Age of Reason included writers such as Diderot, Voltaire, Jefferson and Hume.

From 1760s onward, literary and cultural aspirations were linked to the revolution of politics. Thomas Paine, who came to Philadelphia at Franklin's invitations, shared the views of Franklin but not without a vote of dissent. Poetry was also pressed into the service of nationalism. Franklin was the first American to abandon the traditional mercantile school before other America thinkers abandoned it. He was the first to accept the school of laissez faire. He also entered the field of economics.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge was another well-known figure of the period. He was American writer, lawyer, judge and Pennsylvania Supreme Court justice. Brackenridge, along with American poet Philip Freneau, wrote a prophetic poem entitled *The Rising Glory of America.*

Freneau also wrote *To the Memory of the Brave Americans* in 1781 and also elaborated Paine's rights of man. The democratic principles of Paine guaranteed the impending happiness of America. The men and women of letters such as John, Abigail Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, memorialize a dangerous and pivoted period in history. As professor emeritus at New York University Kenneth Silverman wrote:

'The time from the first Puritans and Mather to the Revolutionary generation and Franklin, thus not only covers the complex transition from Puritans piety, idealism, and provincialism to the more secular, utilitarian, and cosmopolitan values of American Enlightenment. It also marks the establishment of two enduring visions of America that have often completed for authority.'

Thomas Jefferson who descended from aristocratic Virginia families emerged as one of the new nation's most articulate democratic voices. He drafted the *Declaration of Independence.* The Declaration validated the independence of the United States by listing colonial complaints against King George III, and by emphasizing specific natural and legal rights, including a right of revolution. The opening of the United States *Declaration of Independence* states as follows:

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.'

The above passage came to represent a moral standard to which the United States should strive. Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States, promoted this view and considered the Declaration to be the foundation of his political philosophy. He asserted that the Declaration is a statement of principles through which the United States Constitution should be interpreted.

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There are several causes of the American Revolution. In the beginning, it was a clash between colonial self-government and absentee paternalism. Then it developed into an open challenge of the monarchial principle. It was very slow in the beginning. Once it precipitated, it was clear that the imperial centralization was encroaching upon the local rights. As a result, the liberal impulses in the background of the American minds assumed a militant form. There were three groups – the merchant group, the aristocratic group as well as the planner group. The merchant group supported liberalism only to the extent that liberalism meant profit. The aristocratic group could not tolerate outside dictation in their normal life. The planner group was republican in temperament and wanted their class to enjoy freedom at any cost.

Now Jefferson became the spokesman of the new order at a time of transition from a dependent monarchial state to an independent republican state. In his first inaugural address given at the Capitol Building, Washington, DC, while defining a laissez-faire government, he pleaded for:

'A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.'

To all who profess faith in the democratic ideal, Jefferson is a perennial inspiration. In *The Columbia Literary History of the United States*, Houston A. Baker says, 'Of all the genres of the literature of the revolution, the richest and most appalling—as well as the simplest and least assuming—is the personal narrative. Written by authors who range from Old World aristocrats to Yankee farmers' sons, the accounts of individual experience in the turmoil of the Revolution rival the political pamphlets in mass and provide the essential corrective to their abstract representation of the conflict.'

The prime desire and object of Jefferson's life was to preserve the government in America from such degradation and to keep the natural resources open to all. Such an effort was doomed to fail in the presence of imperious forces that shape a society. Among the greatest thinkers of the constitutional period, Jefferson remains by far the most vital and suggestive, the one to whom later generations may return most hopefully.

Americans came to believe that the development of their country had reached a point where it would be hampered by further overseas regulation; that America must be free to exploit her resources to her exclusive advantage and that such economic freedom would be possible only with political independence. By far the most important consequence of the Revolution was the striking down of this mounting of aristocratic spirit that was making rapid headway with the increase of wealth. A middle class America was to rise on the ruins of colonial aristocracy. The middle class was free to create a civilization on its own ideals. New capitalism lay on the horizon of the republic: America. The middle class was eager to speed up its development. Americanism superseded colonialism, and with new loyalty, there developed a conception of federal sovereignty, overriding all local authorities, checking the movement of particularism and binding the separate commonwealth in a consolidating union.

1.2.3 Emergence of Literary Nationalism

After the success of American Revolution, America came out of the British colonial control and became an independent nation. As a newly formed independent nation, Americans had a deep sense of novelty. They felt themselves to be men and women of a new world and considered themselves to be a new race of men. They also believed that their sources can be traced back to biblical stories and accounts. St. Jean De Crevecoeur in the letter 'What is an American' from his book *Letters from an American Farmer* defines an American based on similar ideas. He describes America as a new found nation, a New World, and an ideal place of peace and plenty. He considers America to be a modern nation inhibited by free farmers, who work and live together under the leadership of a mild government. As the American society developed, the idea of democracy, the foundation on which the nation was built, strengthened, making America one of the most celebrated democracy of the world. People of America contributed their share in the process of nation building, believing in American ideals and dreams. Literature too played its role in this process and celebrated the American idea of democracy and its idealistic vistas.

Fisher Ames, a Massachusetts conservation farmer, wrote in 1800 that 'what ranks' America 'is to maintain in the world for genius and literary attainments.' He further wrote: 'whether in point of intellect we are equal to Europeans, or only a race of degenerate creoles; whether our artists and authors have already performed much and promise everything, whether the muses like the nightingales, are too delicate to cross the salt water or sicken and mope without song if they do, are themes upon which we Americans are privileged to be eloquent and loud.'

Many artists and literary nationalists were determined in their belief that the superior position of the New World promises and ensures superiority in art and literature. However, there were also those who opposed this view and this opposition persisted that they should continue with the tradition of the old world, i.e., the European tradition in the arts and literature.

In the late eighteenth century, a group of poets and essayists became famous as Connecticut Wits. These literary figures were enthusiastic and energetic about their nationalistic fervour. Some of the prominent names of this group are Timothy Dwight, Lamuel Hopkins and John Trumbull. In addition of writing satires, epics, mock epics and elegies, they also wrote hymns about the landscape of the new world. In spite of their nationalistic fervour and belief in the superiority of the literature of new world, one can easily sense the presence of the European models in their writings.

Joel Barlow was another prominent member of the group, who was also the youngest amongst them. He was a Yale graduate and had served in the American Army. He advocated the idea of classless society in his essay *Advice to the Privileged Orders* (1792). This essay heavily influenced Thomas Paine, an English and American political activist, philosopher, political theorist and revolutionary. Barlow favoured the French Revolution, and believed that the revolution was for the benefit and advantages of the people, for the revolution had people at its core. It was initiated by the people, and also carried on and conducted by them. In composing his literary works, Barlow borrowed his subjects from the politics of the time, and to give it life or to make it alive, he blended it with the active life of the society. His poem *The Hasty Pudding*, published in 1790, is usually considered to be his best work. The poem adopts mock-epic style, and celebrates the simple American lifestyle marked by the hasty pudding. The subject and the theme of the poem put the New World and the Old World in opposing and contrasting position.

Timothy Dwight, one of the members of the group, praised America in heroic couples and asked the Americans not to embark on foreign travel. He did not see Europe in positive light and considered it a foul harlot, and believed that the pleasures of Europe are linked with 'Circe's Sensual Bowl'. He warned the American of the danger of

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falling to these mythical snares, for it will 'with eye estranged, from Columbia turn/Her Youth, her innocence and beauty scorn'. He also was opposed to the idea of going to Europe for education, and considered such an ambition as extremely fatal.

The first play of any significance to have been written and professionally staged in America was written by Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*. The play was a comedy. Noah, Webster, another significant literary figure of early America, held the belief that Europe has become old and is ridden with folly, corruption and tyranny. His view regarding America, the new world, was full of hope. He also warned against adopting the measure of the old world. He said: 'For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepit age upon the bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigorous —a durable and stately edifice can never be erected upon the mouldering pillars of antiquity.' The Americans felt a strong need to create their history; to accomplish this task, they turned to the biblical stories, classical myths, and ancient heroes of Greek and Rome.

John Trumbull, a member of Connecticut wits and a painter by profession, was a painter historian of American war of independence. In glorifying the American Revolution and American Independence, he went as far as to say that American independence is 'the noblest series of actions which have ever presented themselves in the history of man'. He firmly believed that the episodes of the American war of independence that he described as a painter historian, held the foundation of the free government, the one that will strive to achieve both national and individual happiness. Trumbull desired to contribute in the formation of American national identity through his paintings. The attempts made by these nationalist literary and artistic figures transformed the strands of history into the web of legend.

In 1807, Joel Barlow came up with *Columbiad*. *Columbiad* is a long narrative poem, written in heroic couplet. The work is of some significance, and was regarded by both Barlow and his contemporary as his best and most significant work. This epic poem celebrated the idea of love for national liberty, and attempted to show that all good morals, good government and permanent peace must be founded on the republican principle. The poem narrates the tales of Columbus, who while sitting in a Spanish prison converses with an angel, and it is through this dialogue between Columbus and angel, the whole history of North and South America is recounted. The poem also talks about the America's war of independence and then culminates in the post-revolutionary glorious future of America. The poem continued to be seen as a national epic for few years, and for some time was compared with the Homer, Virgil and Milton, but later it was dismissed as a failure. The myth of Columbus that Barlow created with his poem was later reinforced and surpassed by Timothy Wright, who called the new nation Columbia. It is, thus, apparent that Columbus continued to be the both central and recurring figure in the American imagination.

After the American independence, the idea of storytelling was still something that was not widely encouraged, and the reason behind this lack of enthusiasm for the art of storytelling was the residual of early puritanism. However, later the 'cultures of western frontier, southern plantation and northern commerce offered a fertile ground for nurturing 'fictional art'. The early American novels often deviates from the European tradition of novel writing, but such deviations are not artistically significant, for they deviate only for the sake of deviation, while offering nothing new or significant.

Susanna Haswell Rowson, an early American novelist, gained fame and recognition for her *Charlotte Temple* and *A Tale of Truth*. Hannah Foster was another novelist

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who gained some fame for her *Coquette*. *Couquette* is an epistolary novel that contains seventy-four letters. These novels belong to the romance and adventure genre. The plots are mechanical, while the language is at best theatrical. They offer nothing significant, and there importance is limited to being the novels written during early periods of post American War of Independence.

Some of the other women novelists worth mentioning are Catherine Sedgwick, Susan Warner and Anna Bartlett Warner. They also contributed to an extent in the history of American novel. Charles Brockden Brown was a novelist and a historian of early American nationalist period. Many consider him to be the most important American novelist of the period. He was deeply interested in the ideas of somnambulism and psychic abnormality. His works often contain dark themes, which not only reflect the influence of earlier works of Godwin and Walpole, but also anticipate later works of Edgar Allan Poe. He often used styles and forms of Gothic novel, already established as a genre in Europe. Many critics acknowledge Brown's place in American literary cannon, and consider him to have precedence over figures like Hawthorne and Melville. This acknowledgement affirms Brown's place at the head of the American romantic tradition. Brown's novels drew heavily from the models popularized by Imlay, and to an extent, can be considered as refuting the Jacobean principles. It is important to notice at this point that the early American fictions refuted the utopian and Jacobean ideals, and fashioned itself along the ideas established and popularized by Brackenridge and Tyle. Given the various ideas that converge in the works of Charles Brockden Brown, it would not be an exaggeration to call him a hybrid novelist, whose works used the ideas and themes of writers of both America and Europe. His works are usually categorized as the earliest fictions of America.

During this time in the southern part of America, a new genre of fiction emerged. The novels written in this genre usually took place on the southern plantations, and therefore, the genre is called the plantation novels. The central theme that became the subject of these novels was brutality and atrocities of slavery, and day dreams of the benefaction of loyalty amongst both white and black population. *Swallow Barn* is usually considered to be the first novel in the genre. It was written by the novelist Pendleton Kennedy. Another novel of the genre that became a huge success was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The success of Beecher's novel ensued surge of southern propaganda.

The three generations between the American independence and American civil war was a very crucial period in American history, for in this period, America expanded its geographical boundaries at a great speed. America was seen around the world as a nation of opportunities and means. People, from across the world, but mainly from Europe during this period migrated in a huge number. Every decade during this period saw the rise in population by almost three times the original. The population rise was also accompanied by the high birth rate and blooming trade and commerce. The increasing and flourishing commerce created the need for a better transportation system.

In 1791, the first Turnpike was constructed between Philadelphia and Lancaster. Innovations in water transport system also supported the trade and commerce. Flat boats, keelboats and packed boats were used to compete with the road transports. Soon the railroad was set up, which became the fastest mode of transportation until the invention of airways. The establishment of railroad soon became both the cause and the symbol of industrial dominance in North America. The two decades of financial crisis between 1837 and 1857 caused a major setback in banking and finance. The result was devastating.

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The small investors almost vanished from market. This also caused a major shift in the national interest. Earlier, it was governed by a sense of mission for creating national identity and history, and now it became the calculation of profit and loss. America began to consider commerce as 'the most sublime gift of heaven, wherewith to harmonize and enlarge society'.

Peter Conn writes: 'Visitors and natives alike remarked on the distinctive tone of American life tone that might be called moralizing utilitarianism. Philistinism conspired with dour piety in demanding an art and literature that would put themselves at the service of patriotism or moral uplift.'

The shock of Sydney Smith is apparent in his 1818 Edinburgh review:

> 'Literature the Americans have none – no native literature we mean. It is all imported. They had Franklin, indeed and may afford to live for half a century on his fame. There is, or was, a Mr Dwight who wrote some poems and his baptismal name was Timothly. There is also a small account of Virginia by Jefferwson and an epic by Joel Barlow – and some pieces of pleasantry by Mr Irving. However, why should the Americans write books, when a six weeks' passage brings them in our own tongue, our sense, science and genius, in bales and hogsheads?'

1.2.4 Knickerbocker Writers

Knickerbocker writers were a group of writers who were active literary figures in the first half of nineteenth century in and around New York. The name Knickerbocker came from Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York* (1809). The allegiance of the group was more regional than national. They sought to establish New York as the cultural and artistic centre of the nation, along with promoting American culture. Apart from Irving, other notable members of the group included novelist J. K. Paulding, James Fenimore Cooper and William Cullen Bryant. Some abolitionist and woman-suffrage activists were also associated with the group. Some notable names are Lydia M. Child, G. C. Verplanck, Clement Moore and Bayard Taylor. A monthly literary magazine called *Knickerbocker Magazine*, which was not the official magazine of the group, published the works of the writers associated with the group.

Washington Irving, who was the most notable writer of the group, was also amongst the first American writers to be internationally recognized. Born in the New York City, he was the youngest of the elven children. He studied law and often wrote for *Morning Chronicle*. In 1807, Irving began publishing a periodical called *Salmagundi*. His *Knickerbocker History of New York* was a phenomenal success. The book derived its name from the narrator Diedrich Knickerbocker. After his visit to England, he published a collection of tales and sketches called *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*. This book also included famous stories of *Rip Van Winkle* and the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. *Brace Bridge Hall* was another collection of tales that he published. It was also received well by critics and readers.

1.2.5 Writer of the Old South

Before the Civil War, only a handful of writers from the South made themselves noticed. The culture of American South did not support or encourage the emergence of literature, and yet the Southerners were very much convinced that the South had a 'slumbering genius' that only needed to be awakened. Before the Civil War, only one writer of great genius emerged from the old South. Edgar Allan Poe is now considered to be the father of detective fiction and a pioneer in American romantic and gothic tradition. Poe was a

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poet, a short story writer and an essayist. His ideas and theory of short story was appreciated by figures like Baudelaire. An Old South magazine called the *Southern Literary Messenger* became the centre of Southern literary activities. The significance of this magazine to an extent is because of its association with Poe, who published his stories in the magazine regularly between 1835 and 1837. A shift from the cultural makeup of North can be sensed in the writings published in the magazine during this period. The southerners did not take the contribution of the North in great esteem and respect, and as a result, they fought back in an attempt to establish their own literary identity.

During the period of American Revolution and the early days of post-war America, the myth of a separate Southern Country dominated by the class of planters was boiling under the surface. It was from this myth in making, the idea or the figure of chevalier 'Southern Gentlemen' rose to retort the image of the money making Yankee of the North. In 1820, after the Missouri compromise, a division of Free states and Slave states emerged as the abolitionist movement gained pace and became vociferous in the North. The Southerners felt the necessity of creating their own literary defence against the literary advancements of the North. The two most important literary figures to emerge from the Old South are Edgar Allan Poe and William Gilmore Simons. Both the writers made extensive use of southern landscape and characters, which renders their work an exclusive southern characteristic. Poe greatly desired to become a genuine professional, to an extent, because of the literary situation of the South. Poe felt the need of a professional man of letters in not only South or North or in America but also in the entire world. Unlike Poe, many of the writers in the South were focused regionally. Such writers, who wrote about regional themes and subjects followed the following four basic forms:

a. Nature lyrics on the Southern landscape;
b. Framed sketches and collection of backwoods character types;
c. Episodic novels or linked sketches using the model of the epic historical romance; and
d. The description of idyllic life of plantation in the romantic and satiric narrations.

The southern writers were heavily influenced by the eighteenth century British poets and the first generation of romantic poets. For this very reason, many of the poets from the South began imitating the British Tradition of poetry.

In Europe, Edger Allan Poe became a cult figure of the nineteenth century. His unyielding aesthetic commitment was praised and idolized and his poverty and early death mystified and glamorized. French symbolist poets like Baudelaire and Mallarme translated works of Poe in French out of sheer respect for him. Later in the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot called Poe's intellect as a highly gifted young person.

Poe was born in Boston. His parents died when he was still a young child. After the death of his parents, he was raised by John Allan, a Richmond merchant. Poe took Allan's name as his middle name. In 1826, he enrolled into the University of Virginia and began following his literary career. In 1827, he published his first book called *Tamerland and other Poems*. In 1831, he published poems during his short stay in New York. His first published story was *MS found in a Bottle* and was published in 1833. The story became very popular and was well received. He soon became the editor of *Southern Literary Messenger*. In 1938, Poe published *The Narrative of Arthur Gurdon Pym*. From 1839 to 1840, he worked as an editor of *Gentleman's Magazine*. He authored

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various short stories, including his famous *Black Cat*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Purloined Letter*, etc. Poe became famous and gained wide recognition from his poem *The Raven* and his lecture on the poetic form *The Philosophy of Composition.*

Early National Period

The period between 1775 and 1828 is also known as the Early National Period. This period of national fervour culminated with the triumph of Jacksonian democracy in 1828. It is also marked with the emergence of imaginative literature rich in nationalistic sentiments, including the first comedy to be staged in America, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787), one of the first American novel, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), and the establishment of the first American Magazine, *The North American Review* in 1815. It was during this period that Washington Loving became internationally famous through his stories and essay. This period also saw Charles Breakdown Brown's Gothic novels modelled on the Gothic literary tradition of Europe. James Fenimore Cooper, the first major American novelist, became popular and gained well deserved attention. The poetry of Edgar Allan Poe and William Cullen Bryant that was comparatively independent of the European models also appeared during this period. The first slave narrative appeared in 1760. Soon a long series of narratives and autobiographies written by the black slaves, who had escaped from the plantations or had been freed, emerged. Most of these narratives saw the print between 1830 and 1865, including the famous Frederick Douglass' *The Life of Frederick Douglass,* published in 1845, and Harriet Jacobs' *The Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861.

The Romantic Period

The American Romantic Period is often identified as the period between 1828 and 1865. This period is sometimes also known as the age of American Renaissance, gaining the name from the similar title of F. O. Matthiessen's influential book published in 1841 about the great writers of the age: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Quite often, this period between the Jacksonian era and the Civil War is also known as the age of Transcendentalism, after the name of the literary and philosophical movement initiated and carried on by Emerson in New England. During this period, original and influential works were produced in almost every literary genre except drama, which have not been exceeded by the later writers in American history.

Writers like Thoreau, Emerson and Margaret Fuller influenced and forged the ideas and ideals for later American writers. They gave literary aims for the later writers to strive for. This period also saw writers like William Cullen Bryant, Washington Loving and James Fenimore Cooper; novels and short stories of Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Gilmore Sims; poetry of John Greenleaf, Emerson, Whittier, Henry Wardsworth Longfellow, Poe and Walt Whitman, the most celebrated of all American poets. The African-American literature saw women poets like Frances Ellen and Watkins Harper, and the African American novel *Clotel*, published in 1853 by William Wells Brown and *Our Nig*, published in 1859 by Harriet E. Wilson.

American Realism

The period between 1865 and 1900 is also known as the Realistic period in American Literary history. After the devastation caused by the Civil War, the reconstruction of the nation began. This period was marked by heavy industrialization and urbanization, which

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changed American perspective of itself and also the literary scene of the nation. The Realistic period is called so because of the works of writers like Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and Henry James, along with John W. Deforest, Harold Frederic and the black novelist Charles. These writers produced works that stood in sharp contrast with the romance novels and poems of the writers of the Romantic period like Poe, Hawthorne and Melville. Many realistic writers of this period based their novels in the regional setting. Mark Twain is the prime example of such writing who always based his novels on the region of Mississippi River. Other writers were Bret Harte, who based his works in California, Sarah Orne Jewett in Maine, Mary Wilkins Freeman in Massachusetts and George W. Cable and Kate Chopin in Louisiana.

Chopin later gained wide recognition as the early figure in the history of feminism. Whitman remained active as a poet till the end of the century, and was joined by Emily Dickenson, though he remained unaware of it, for only even of Dickenson's poem were published in her lifetime. Dickenson is now considered to be amongst the most distinctive and prominent American poets. Sidney Lanier experimented with versification of the musical meter, African-American writer Paul Laurence Dunbar produced novels and poems, and Stephen Crane composed poems in free verse that anticipated the later experiments of Ezra Pound and the Imagist poets. Crane also published short stories and short novels that paved the ground for the two literary modes—naturalism and impressionism.

The Naturalistic Period

The Naturalistic period in American literary history spans years from 1900 to 1914, in spite of the fact that realist writers like Twain and Howells were still active. The period is so called because of the powerful works produced by writers like Jack London, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, whose characters are usually victims of both their instinctual drives and external sociological forces.

Transformation of American Literary Culture

The writings of American realistic period greatly differed from the pre-Civil War writing of the Romantic period. In order to understand this deviation from the pre to post Civil War American writing, one must undergo a closer analysis of the authors who shaped and influenced the writings of the respective periods and also of the way in which the literature was changing as a cultural institution. Literature of the time was closely linked with the lives of the American, for America was still a nation in making and literature played a crucial role in the process by establishing ideas and ideals, evoking nationalistic sentiments, establishing national dreams and aims. America, still a nation of farmers, had by the arrival of American romanticism also become a nation of avid readers. With the rapid increase in the publishing houses and literary magazines accompanied by the rise in reading interests amongst the general public, it ensured a promising future of American literature. It should be noted, though that severe geographical and economical limitations marked these publishing houses and literary periodicals, and therefore, usually they had a short life span.

Great writers of extraordinary genius like Hawthorne and Melville realized the promising aspect of the job before them, but they were also aware of the great difficulty that the job offered. According to Richard H. Brodhead: 'The minute circulation achieved for Hawthorne's Twice-told Tales (1837), Poe's Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque (1839) and Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers (1849) illustrate

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the fact that American writing of early nineteenth century is virtually undistributed literature.' Poetry of Whitman and Dickenson were still unheard of. It was the period when America was hastening with her new formed cultural history. A sudden change that occurred in the literary history around 1850 is worth noticing. Novels by Susan Warners (*The Wide Wide World*), Maria Cummins (*The Lamp lighter*) and Mrs. Southworth (*Retribution*) achieved sales that were unheard of. The sales of these novels, usually classified as domestic or sentimental genre that exceeded anything written by Hawthorne, Melville or Thoreau. The success of these novels is usually attributed to their being both agents and products of the emerging culture.

The phenomenal success of the novels of domestic genres during 1850s was largely due to the fact that these novels spoke directly to the new emerging middle class culture of family life and domestic propriety. Novels soon became the only source of entertainment for this new emerging culture. Writers like Mrs. Southworth, Caroline Lee Hentz and Mary Jane Holmes were widely read by women during their time of domestic leisure. The popularity of novels further increased with the establishment of Penny Press in 1850s. The newspaper in an attempt to benefit from the rising popularity of the novels began publishing novels instead of news. Between 1860 and 1865, around five million Beadle novels were purchased by the audience with lower level of leisure and literacy like youth and factory workers. Such developments created the low literate audience for the consumption of such novels. However, this development was not the only one happening in the American literary scene. The same decade also witnessed the formation of another literary circle, one that preferred or supported high literature.

A good account of this literary development, the prominent literary figure involved in it, and the way in which it influenced those who were associated with it can be seen in William Dean Howells's essay *My First Visit to New England* (1894) that was later collected in the volume called *Literarily Friend and Acquaintance* (1900). In this essay, Howells remembers his arrival as a young and aspiring writer at Boston, the place that was home of greater literary figures like James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Howells's account of Boston does not only present Boston as a place where great writes lived, but also as a place where a new and unique kind of value was bestowed upon the writers. Howells recalls that the Boston he visited was a place that not only fashioned the high literary culture of America but also was its centre. The literary figures active in Boston acted as a promoter and custodian of high literature. They were liked and enjoyed by the literary elite and people with a taste for high literature. This group of writers had a secular outlook, with no involvement in the urgencies of religious righteousness, which was still a common necessity in the various parts of the America. These writers were cosmopolitan in their makeup and they were concerned about the idea of high art and letters. They looked upon the European cultural world as an extension of their own. They attempted to find and locate that elemental value in arts that no longer was possible to find in the religion. With the belief that the foundation of the civilization is based on the concern for such values, they took it on themselves to impose these values on the rest of society.

In these writers, custodians and promoters of high art, literature and culture, America during the mid-nineteenth century had a group that was characteristically marked by its concern for literature as supreme value, and also with the sense to impose this concern on other groups with different values than their owns. Working with such an idea in mind, the members of this group in 1860s and also in later decades used various powerful existing institutions for the purpose of administering literacy and also created new institutions of extreme power to support their cause. They began indulging in the

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administration of libraries, where through the control of the reading habits of the less literate class, they began forming and fashioning their taste. They also moved into American schools and universities, where they attained the position of professors of literature. In American schools, the reading of classical American literature became compulsory. In the period in which magazines were the most popular mode of literary encounter, editorial control of the prominent magazines also became one of their agenda.

By keeping literary institutions under their control, they succeeded in creating what can be called the most coherent national literary culture, the likes of which was not seen before and has not been seen since then. As they created this national literary culture, they also forged a never seen before kind of environment for the authors and writers to work in. This new environment enabled almost all the writers of the post-Civil War era to support themselves financially by publishing the journals of the new cultural establishment and artistically by indulging in the new forged artistic and cultural values. Many of the figures who were then recognized and considered as important men of letters are now only known as tools for administering the high literary culture. Some names that come to the mind are novelist and editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Charles Dudley Warner. It should be noted that Howells too was a product of this literary cultural establishment. The first prestigious position that Howells found was as the editor of *Atlantic.* The novels he wrote were first serialized in the *Atlantic,* and then in *The Century* and *Harper's*. It was the editor's study column of the Harper's that conducted his campaign for realism. Moreover, the Howellian idea of realism itself has deep mark of these cultural and literary arrangements.

Another product of this literary cultural manifestation was Henry James. Though he was not as interested as Howells in the administrative side of literary creation (and for this very reason he never became an editor), he too published almost all his works in the *Atlantic*. At one hand looking from a specific perspective, he himself created his supporting artistic creed, while on the other, he derived his support from the established literary and artistic culture of 1860s, 70s and 80s. Henry James's idea of art and literature brought in an ethical aspect to the established literary culture, which sought to highlight the supreme good in the aesthetic creation, and firmly believed in the artistic imagination for its civilizing powers.

It must be noted that James and Howells were not the only two prominent writers to have come out of and gained support from this literary establishment. George Washington Cable, who in novels like *Grandissimes* (1880) attempted to capture the Creole culture, was another such writer. He published his works in *The Century.* Writers like Saraha Ornett Jewett and Constance Fenimore also published their works in the quality periodical that these gentry established, literary culture produced, and identified with their culture and ideas. It clearly shows that in the post-Civil War period, when the women writers started stepping beyond the image of a writer of domestic and sentimental novels in an attempt to assert themselves as the writers of high literature, the gentry-established literary culture offered them full support in their assertion.

American realism that rose and developed in the Post-Civil War period also came from this culture of high literature. The fact that the three major text of American realism—Twain's *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, James' *The Bostonians* and Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham*—were all serialized in *The Century*, a major periodical representing the high literary culture of the period, further affirms the idea. Regionalism, one of the most dominant literary forms of post war period that had its background in the migration from the old agrarian culture to the more urban location, was also given impetus by the cultural establishment of the high literature.

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If in one way, the establishment of high literary culture functioned as an imperialistic force that coerced the masses to follow the cultural and literary ambition and aspirations of the elite class, in another it also offered a safe environment for the serious art to develop and thrive and also offered enough security for the artists to function and indulge in their aesthetic imagination. It was highly successful in performing both these function in the post-Civil War period. However, while this system was at the peak of its power, its dominance was beginning to be challenged. While it did some good in terms of protecting artists and popularizing high arts and creating tastes in literature, the complete history of this system is also the history of its later suppression.

The important question that presents itself at this point is what caused this suppression. To answer the question, we must go back in time a little. Form the very beginning of this establishment, the reasons of its suppression were already there. In 1860, when Howells first arrived in Boston as a young and aspiring writer, with his eyes laden with dreams and hopes, there were two important developments taking place. As Howells notes in his *My First visit to New England*, his intention was to meet the literary gentry of the time, but his sponsor wanted him to get acquainted with the New England Mills and its new manufacturing processes. Howells saw New England as a cultural landscape, but he reminds us that over the hill was another landscape, not cultural but industrial. This little detail suggests that the development of high literary culture in 1850s and its eventual spread was contemporaneous to the development of capitalist and industrial establishment that was soon going to transform every aspect of American life as was known.

As the establishment of high literary culture influenced and took over the American life of letters, the other establishment influenced and took over the economic life of America. The development of this economic aspect of American life had a direct effect on the American literary history, for in the late nineteenth century, this economic and industrial growth started to assemble its own tools for the literary production that would give rise to a different literary culture and rival the high literary culture already established and developing. This intrusion of the industrial growth is most apparent in the magazine production. The 'quality' or literary magazines of the period by mid 1880s had achieved a respectable circulation of one or two hundred thousand. However, by the end of the decade, a new kind of magazine appeared on the scene. Soon the magazines of this new kind achieved the circulation of somewhat three or four times more than the circulation of the quality magazines. Some examples of this new kind would be: *Ladies Home Journal*, *Munsey's McCline's Magazines* and *Cosmopolitan*. These magazines were much cheaper in price than the literary magazines, and the reason that they could be cheaper was that they financed themselves in various different ways. They did not use subscription fee to support the magazine, but instead they dropped the fees and, thus, attained a great circulation, and then based on their reach, they sold spaces to the advertisers and built their financial base by using the revenue thus generated.

This rise and development of this new kind of magazine not only transformed the price but also the entire relation between the magazine production and the economic scene. They were no longer the modes of literary presentation, but had become tools for marketing, the source of both verbal and visual mass entertainment, and the instrument which helped the capitalist manufacturers in not only creating but also controlling the market for their commodities. In the name of verbal entertainment, these magazines were also pushed the readers in the world of created needs through advertisements. Soon the commercial world began to encroach on the world of high literature. After

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Howell resigned form *Harper's*, *Cosmopolitan* managed to hire him for their editorial staff. As the advance of these new publications increased, they began to challenge the most cherished power of the established high literary culture, which was to control the reading habit of the populace. The growing anxiety towards the popular print media can be clearly felt in the American literary writings of 1880s. In Howells' *A Modern Instance* (1882), the advertising brand of journalism is associated with the decline of the traditional community values, and in Henry James' *The Bostonians* (1885), the popular media is liked with an assault on the privacy.

When looked from the perspective of the older cultural values, the new culture brought by the popular print media surely seem like an enemy, but when looked from a perspective distanced from the older cultural values, they do not appear to be the one that destroyed or demolished the older establishment of high art, but the agents that gave rise to a new kind of culture. This new kind of culture was not a literary culture established by the gentry, instead it was a consumer culture established and fuelled by popular print and advertisements. By the arrival of the last decade of the century, the older literary established had become narrowly elitist and reactionary, except in the instances where it successfully adapted the methods of its commercially successful rivals. However, it is interesting to note that the new arrived commercial and consumer culture enforced by the magazines full of eye catching advertisements also created a space, like its predecessor, for the new writers to work in.

The case of Theodore Dreiser illustrates this point further. Dreiser, who was a generation younger than Howells, first aspired to become a writer not because of the influence of the literary circle of Boston like Howells, but because of the popular newspapers of Chicago. He wrote and contributed advertising-centred magazines. He even worked with fashion-centred magazine as a managing editor. It should be understood that the literary writings of Dreiser were not completely the product of the literary culture that he worked out, any more than the works of James and Howells, and his works have a strong touch of its cultural origin. A book like *Sister Carrie* is not associated with tradition of high literary cultural; instead it is associated with the concerns of the magazines of 1890s—the deep awareness of the desires caused by the commodities and consumerism.

There is no doubt that Dreiser represents the close connection with the popular and mass media, but at the same time, he also represents the new literary training that was made possible because of the emergence of the consumer media. Many writers of Dreiser's generation can be grouped in one category not because of their belief in the creed of high literature, but because of the fact that all these writers wrote out of similar literary cultural situation. Some examples would be Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Upton Sinclair. The works of these writers are also marked by the commercialized form of media.

To say that towards the end of the nineteenth century, the older cultural scene of high literature was replaced by the consumerist and commercialized mass media would not be the complete story, for towards the end of the century several parallel literary worlds emerged. It would not be an exaggeration to say that a diversification occurred in the American literary scene by the end of the nineteenth century. The gentry based establishment of high literary culture towards the end of the century tried to regain its control over the literary scene of the nation by institutionalizing the fact that the authors produced by their culture are America's greatest. It was also an attempt to exclude the writers of mass media generation from the literary realm.

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A portion of an older literary establishment entered once again into the literary scene, but this time with adopting the commercial attitude of their rivals. This changed their attitude towards the literary exclusiveness by making them less committed to it. The difference between high and popular literature became less prominent and zealously insisted. Soon there was a growing audience for African American writers, even amongst the white population. Charles W. Chesnutt was the first black literary writer to find readers amongst the white population. The decade which gave popular advertisement based magazines also gave a new kind of magazine, the prime example of which would be *The Chap-Book.* It was expensively printed art magazine, which did not contain any advertisement and was virtually indifferent to idea of circulation. It contained works that were only interesting to those with the knowledge of such works. The company behind *The Chap-Book* introduced various foreign writers to the American literary scene. They were the first American publishers to publish works of Shaw, Ibsen and French symbolists. They also published Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Henry James' *What Maisie Knew.* This was an emergence of a new and unique kind of publishing institution in American literary history, and it must be seen as an agency with a certain idea of culture and which attempted to create a group of audience for this very idea of culture.

One thing was common to all the literary cultures that emerged towards the end of the century. None of them was able to gain the cultural power required to support the new kind of authorship that it enabled. In spite of gaining a mainstream publisher, the works of Chesnutt failed to gain wide enough audience. The literacy scene had enough transformed for Chopin to find a publisher for her novel *The Awakening*, but yet not enough for the novel to find enough readers. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* met with the similar fate. Both Chopin and Dreiser left writing after the failure of their respective novels. Dreiser while he gave up authorship, earned his living from the popular magazines, but did not find any support for his literary career in these magazines:

The American writers of the end of nineteenth century relived the situation that was faced by earliest American writers. However, their attempt and effort to create a new kind of authorship later determined America's literary future.

Check Your Progress

3. What was the philosophy of the New World?
4. Who was the first to be identified as a Knickerbocker writer in America?

1.3 REALISM AND REGIONALISM

The difference between realism and regionalism is difficult to ascertain. One way to look at realism is as the response to growing inclination towards capital, transformation of raw material into consumer products, replacement of old agrarian values by more urban ones and a shift from private experience to public property. However, the problem with this view of realism is that it presents urban city as one of the various regions within the network of growing modernization enriched and enchanted by industrial growth and establishment of railroads and telegraph wires.

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To define realism in another way would be to say that realism was a reaction against romanticism to capture the life of ordinary people and events in the changing America of the second half of the nineteenth century. The realist writers did not wish to escape from the life of the ordinary like the romantics; instead they embraced it. Their intention and aim was to depict the life as it was during the time, devoid of any subjective colour or prejudice. In such writing, characters became more important than plot. Regionalism, on the other hand, was an attempt to capture the essence of various regions of the nation that was so rapidly changing. A fear was prevalent amongst many that soon local traditions and folkways would vanish amongst the growing standardization and urbanization because of industrial revolution. As a response to this awareness, many realistic writers set their plot in the various local regions of America in an attempt to capture the local colour of the region before it was lost forever. In these writings, they portrayed the stark realities of everyday life, growing plight of the poor and the vanishing traditions and values.

However, to understand realism and regionalism, we must not rely on mere definitions of the terms. It is important that we analyse it through the literary examples of the respective movements. In the nineteenth century, various changes in the society and politics were caused by the effects of both the Civil War and the American westward expansion. The artists, active in the nation at that time, did not find romanticism as adequate enough to capture the sentiments and concerns of the time, for example the struggle of the working class and the rise of the middle class, and as a result, they turned to something new, something different to comment on these changing attitudes. This something new was realism and regionalism. The writers of the age tried to capture the national transformation, the effects of which could also be felt in various regions, through their depiction of an unbiased and unprejudiced account of everyday life, especially of new middle class and urban poor. Two prime examples of regionalism would be Mark Twain's *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and a brilliant example of the use of realism is Henry James' *Daisy Miller: A Study*. The employment of regionalism and realism bring the characters and setting of the stories to life and allows the readers to completely immerse in them.

Both Kate Chopin and Mark Twain successfully captured the essence of the regions in which they set their stories. Usually, regionalism focuses on unique and specific features of a region and attempts to capture its local colour and essence by accurately portraying its dialect, customs, traditions, topography, history and characters. It focuses on both formal and informal attitudes of people of the region towards each other and also towards their society as a whole. In such novels, the role of the narrator is of specific importance, for he/she is not simply a narrator but also a translator, whose job is to make the reader understand the region and its various aspects. In *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn,* Twain expertly uses regionalism to bring the readers to the heart of American west in the nineteenth century. He tells his reader at the very beginning of the book: 'In this book, a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect, the extremist form of the backwoods South-Western dialects; the ordinary "Pike-Country" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last.' The use of vernacular and not the standard language, grammatical mistakes, incoherent sentences and words that cannot be found in the dictionary are some of the major composition of the language used by Huck Finn, both the narrator and protagonist of the novel. This allows the reader to feel the character in the way as if he were right next to him. It also gives the reader an understanding of the region to which the character belongs. The local stories that are

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told throughout the novels also offer a rich description of the region in which the characters of the novel live.

Another important aspect of Twain's *Huck Finn* is the role played by the Mississippi River in the story. Rather than simply being a natural landscape and setting for the story, it functions as a major character in the novel, especially because of the way in which it affects both Huck and Jim in their journey to their freedom. The river also brings the attention of the readers to other aspects of regionalism. One of the prime focuses of a rationalist work is on the region and not on the plot. There are a number of instances when Huck indulges in a detailed description of the river and landscape around him: 'The river looked miles and miles across. The moon was so bright I could a counted the drift logs that went a slipping along, black and still, hundreds of yards out from shore.' These descriptions do not help the plot in any way, but the description enhances the portrayal of the region and invites the reader to participate in the actual journey undertaken by Huck and Jim. These descriptions can also be seen as digressions from the plot, and such digressions are important in the regionalist works of fiction for they allow a better representation of regional culture.

Another such deviation from the plot takes place when Huck spends considerable time in giving a detailed account of Jim's superstition. Though these descriptions cannot be dismissed completely as digressions, for they do have a part to play in the plot, but they definitely are not the most crucial aspects of the plot. However, such detailed description of superstitions, like 'Miss Watson's nigger, Jim, had a hair-ball as big as your fist, which had been took out of the fourth stomach of an ox, and he used to do magic with it,' allows the reader to have a better understanding of the beliefs and attitudes of the people of the region.

Another important aspect of regionalism is the narrator's function as a translator. In Twain's novel, Huck, the narrator, also functions as a translator for the readers, for he explains events and his experience to the reader. He offers explanatory accounts of the actions of various characters. For example, while explaining the widow's action, he says: 'The widow cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it.' The regionalist works also tend to have a sense of sympathy for local values as against the national. In this sense, the novel criticizes the widow for trying to change the uniqueness of Huck into something standard.

Another excellent example of regional fiction is Chopin's *The Awakening*. However, Chopin's employment of regionalism in her novel is slightly different from Twain's use of regionalism. Twain intends to glorify and celebrate the region he sets his stories in. However, Chopin's use of regionalism intends to criticize the region in which her story is set. Nevertheless, in spite of the difference in intention, Chopin's depictions of the region adhere to almost same set of guidelines and regional characteristics that Twain uses in his fiction. The setting of Chopin's novel is the Creole society in Louisiana. While Twain's characters were middle and lower class people, Chopin's characters belong to high class. The use of vernacular is plenty in the novel. Through the other use of regionalist techniques, Chopin introduces the reader to the social norms and system of the particular class of the Southern region. Interestingly, the protagonist of the novel, Edna Pontellier, does not belong to the region in which the novel is set, and, therefore, becomes an effective tool in the hands of Chopin to rebel against the social norms and structure of the region. Edna is portrayed as an outsider, but her being an outsider offers

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a very explanatory glimpse into the inside culture and customs of Creole life. The narrator writes that Edna 'was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family'. Edna's observes the Creole people: 'A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable.'

The best of use regionalism in Chopin's fiction is when she critically presents the social rules and roles, most specifically in the socially assumed and acknowledged role of a mother-woman. Chopin writes: 'The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. They were women who idealized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.' This description manifests in the characters of Adle Ratignolle. Adle is a perfect example of who a Creole wife is supposed to be. She is opposite of Edna. She completely conforms to the socially accepted role of a woman as a wife and mother. She worships her husband and is always on her toe to complete her domestic responsibilities. And in doing so, she is accepted as a perfect Creole woman by the society. Chopin brings the Creole society to life through the dialects and interaction of various characters within the community.

Let us now turn to Henry James famous novella, *Daisy Miller: A Study* to study and analyse a realistic work of fiction. A work of regionalism is also a work of realism, for both depicts the objective view of everyday life of the ordinary. The only difference lies in the fact that a regionalist fiction focuses on capturing the locality and colour of a specific region, while a work of realist fiction attempts to captures the life itself. Like the regionalist works, the realist works also digress from the plot, but unlike the former, the later digresses to study the depths of the characters in an attempt to seize the essence of life as it is lived in the real time. Realism grew as a reaction against the romanticism and this reaction remains visible in the work of realist fiction. The writers of this genre do not intend to hide unpleasant through their flight in the imaginative stories; instead they intend to portray the harshness of everyday reality, the problems and the struggle to live. By remaining true to the techniques of realistic fiction, Henry James creates highly believable characters in his novella *Daisy Miller: A Study*. What makes Daisy so real is the flaws she has as a character. In his depiction of Daisy, James never offers a critical or biased description of her character, even though she may seem to be against the accepted social or traditional norms. Her traits are a radical for her time, but she retains those characteristics and remains true to who she is. As opposed to idealized and exaggerated characters of romantic fiction, Daisy is an imperfect and flawed character which makes it difficult for her to be accepted by the society. Winterbourne and his aunt describe her as 'Crude', 'Dreadful', 'ignorant' and 'vulgar'. Many of her actions, like walking with two men in public, are considered as scandalous, but they are true to her character as a flirt. Later when Winterbourne asks her to leave, for he is afraid that she might catch Roman fever, true to her character, she barks back at him: 'I don't care whether I have Roman fever or not!' The consequence of this refusal is her death. The novel does not seek to resolve everything by providing a pleasant ending to the story. The death of the heroic protagonist of the novel furthers the realist aspect of the novel.

Both realism and regionalism emerged in the later part of the nineteenth century after the Civil War as a reaction against the romanticism that has dominated the American literary landscape in the first half of the nineteenth century. The writers of realism and

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regionalism thought that romanticism was inadequate in capturing the changing attitudes and sentiments of the nation. Realism first developed in the French aesthetic theory in the mid nineteenth century. The French literature of the period sought to depict the banalities of everyday experience, instead of an idealized and romanticized version of life. The French writers who excelled in the realist mode of fiction are Stendhal, Honore de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert. In England, realism reached in through the works of George Eliot, and in America, William Dean Howells was the first to use realist techniques in his fiction. Some other American writers of the genre are Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, John Steinbeck, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Edith Wharton and Henry James.

Check Your Progress

5. State the French aesthetic theory of realism.
6. Briefly describe the essence of realism as expressed by Whitman, Hawthorne, Stowe and Melville.

1.4 NATURALISM, DETERMINISM AND DIME NOVELS

Naturalism was a literary movement that began during the second last decade of the nineteenth century out of realism as its extreme form and suggested that the human character cannot escape from being shaped by the social conditions, environment and heredity. Naturalism was not as organized as romanticism or realism and attempted to take realism to its extreme by depicting everyday experiences and reality. Like many other literary movements, it also began in France. The proponents of Naturalism were heavily influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin. They believed that social forces play a great role in determining one's character. The difference between realism and naturalism lies in the fact that realism only attempted to depict the life as it is, while naturalism tries to scientifically analyse the forces at work behind the everyday reality of life. The naturalist writers study human life and characters with the similar detached objectivity of a scientist who studies his subject. Emile Zola, to whom the sources of naturalism can be traced in 1868, said regarding his novel: 'I chose characters completely dominated by their nerves and their blood, deprived of freewill, pushed to each action of their lives by the fatality of their flesh.' Zola said that one can study human characters by studying their relationship with their surroundings, without attempting to moralize their nature.

The naturalist writers thought that by studying human characters objectively, they can understand the laws behind the forces that govern human action. They presented characters as the subject of their passion and instinct and also of the various social forces. Zola coined the term to give an impression to his readers that something new and modern was awaiting them in his fiction. George Becker famously described naturalism as the 'pessimistic naturalistic determinism'. The 'pessimistic determinism' is often associated with naturalism but replacing determinism with another would be gross generalization. The characters of the naturalist fiction have little free will and, most of the time, their actions and felling are determined by the forces beyond their control. Donald Pizer in his *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* offers the following definition:

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'[T]he naturalistic novel usually contains two tensions or contradictions, and . . . the two in conjunction comprise both an interpretation of experience and a particular aesthetic recreation of experience. In other words, the two constitute the theme and form of the naturalistic novel. The first tension is that between the subject matter of the naturalistic novel and the concept of man which emerges from this subject matter. The naturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower middle class or the lower class. . . . His fictional world is that of the commonplace and unheroic in which life would seem to be chiefly the dull round of daily existence, as we ourselves usually conceive of our lives. However, the naturalist discovers in this world those qualities of man usually associated with the heroic or adventurous, such as acts of violence and passion which involve sexual adventure or bodily strength and which culminate in desperate moments and violent death. A naturalistic novel is thus an extension of realism only in the sense that both modes often deal with the local and contemporary. The naturalist, however, discovers in this material the extraordinary and excessive in human nature.

The second tension involves the theme of the naturalistic novel. The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct or chance. However, he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life. The tension here is that between the naturalist's desire to represent in fiction the new, discomfiting truths which he has found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise.'

Many writers in America towards the end of the nineteenth century began to show their inclination towards naturalism. Some aspects of this tradition of writing became visible in the works of Hamlin Garland who was harsher than Howells in detailing farmer's struggle and more open in dealing with subjects like sex. Henry James once wrote of Garland that he was: 'a case of saturation so precious as to have almost the value of genius.' By this remark, James meant that Garland devoted himself to the accurate depiction of one particular area, and for which he is also sometimes said to be regionalist. In his famous collection of essay *Crumbing Idol*, Garland said that 'provincialism is not bar to a national literature.' He further added, 'each locality should produce its own literary record, each special phase of life utter his own voice'. He has often been called a realist as well. However, he termed himself as a veritist. He defined the veritist as a writer who 'sees life in terms of what might be, as well as in terms of what is'. However, nevertheless his novels like *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895) and his essay collection *Crumbling Idols* (1894) proved significant in the development of the naturalist movement in America.

As naturalism developed in America, many writers became avowed followers of French naturalism, led by Zola. For example, Theodore Dreiser dealt with subjects that he thought was too daring for the early realists to deal with. Like Dreiser, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane and Jack London were also naturalists. This meant that they adopted to scientific and a darker form of realism in which human agency or free will had little place, and where human actions and sentiments were determined by forces, both social and biological, beyond man's control.

In Norris's 1901 novel *The Octopus,* the central character Presley says: 'Men were nothings, mere animalcules, mere ephemerides that fluttered and fell and were forgotten between dawn and dusk'. He adds: 'FORCE only existed – FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the

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succeeding generation.' The writers of the naturalist fiction overturned the idea of individual freedom and heroism that Americans so celebrated. Humans were now nothing more than tiny specs on the vast natural landscape filled with mountains and oceans, governed what by what Norris called 'the vast rhythms of the seasons' and 'the eternal symphony of reproduction'. A similar view is put rather brutally by one of the characters of Jack London's novel *The Sea Wolf* (1904). He claims that life is 'unmoral': 'It is like a yeast, a ferment, a thing that moves and may move for a minute, an hour, a year, or a hundred years, but that in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all.'

Dreiser believed that men's action were nothing more than 'chemical compulsions', and that is why his characters fails to direct their own action and instead are subject to forces beyond their reach. He also held that 'the race was to swift and the battle to the strong,' and depicted the defeat and destruction of his characters at the hands of stronger opponents. Some of his major works are *Sister Carrie* (1900), *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914) and—much later—*An American Tragedy* (1925). Unlike the French naturalists, Dreiser was not very conscious towards the use of style and symbolism in his work. However, other American naturalists like Frank Norris and Stephen Crane paid much attention to such matters. In some of his short stories and in short novels, like *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Crane appeared to be an impressionist who presented an idea of man overwhelmed by circumstance and environment. Impressed with Norris's 'aptitude for making phrases—sparks that cast a momentary gleam upon whole phases of life—Crane too came up with phrases, scenes and whole narrative that cast gleams in such novels as *McTeague* (1899), *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Pit* (1903). Both Norris and Crane died before they could completely develop their abilities as a writer, but the experiments they did in fiction indeed helped in the further development of twentieth century novels.

Dime novels

Dime novels were a kind of inexpensive melodramatic adventure novels, with often western themes, popular in America from 1860 to 1915, and were published usually with paperback. The first Dime novel appeared in 1860 when Ann S. Stephens published *Beadles Dime Novels* No. 1, 'Malaeska, the India Wife of the White Hunter'. After the success of the first novel, the market soon flooded with numerous dime or half dime novels. The first publisher to issue cheap paper backed novels in series was Irvin Beadle. Though the term 'dime novels' seems to denote the price at which such novels were sold, in fact the term has little to do with the price. It was a term used for any 'sensational detective' 'or 'blood and thunder' novel sold in the form of pamphlet.

Erasmus Beadle gained much success in publishing various dime novels and popular songbooks featuring heroes like Nick Carter and Deadwood Dick. Dime novels published by him monopolized the market of popular literature for almost the second half of the nineteenth century. Mostly these novels used subjects like historical frontier of Ohio, New York and Kentucky, gold mining in the west, stories of sea, tales of revolutionary wars and colonial wars. From 1870s to 1890s, stories of city street boys who made their way up in the society also became a very popular subject of the dime novels.

E. Z. C. Judson was one of the most famous writers of the dime novels, who wrote under the penname Ned Buntline. Critics of the dime novels called them immoral, perhaps because of the violent themes of the novel. However, the novels in general

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attempted to reinforce conventional values like American nationalism, patriotism, self-reliance, etc. By the early twentieth century, the dime novels were taken over and replaced by the emergence of pulp magazines.

Check Your Progress

7. What was literary naturalism associated with in its early years?
8. Identify the phrase with which literary naturalism was associated.
9. Define dime novel.

1.5 EMERGENCE OF MODERNISM (1914-1945)

The dawn of the twentieth century gave a refreshing start to American politics and philosophy. It also brought about a number of experimental movements in arts and literature. Various movements like cubism, fauvism, vorticism, constructivism, Dadaism and futurism competed to influence the artistic and cultural landscape of Europe and America the most. Some of these movements were part of modernism itself. In simple terms, modernism can be defined as a philosophical and artistic movement that gained impetus in the first half of the nineteenth century around the First World War with a transformative effect on every aspect of the western society. Though modernism originated in Europe, American played an important part in the development of modernism in general and literary modernism in particular. Some of the crucial American literary figures active in the development of modernism as a literary movement are Gertrude Stein in Paris, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot in England, and Margaret Anderson and Harriet Monroe, editor of poetry magazine, in Chicago.

Modernism developed both as a reaction to the traditional practices of art and literature, and as a way to grapple with the fragmentation and disillusionment created by the war in the early years of the century. The modernist writers derided sentimentality, emotional prose and decorative adjectives. Pound and Eliot demanded a revolutionary change in literary taste. Pound became the most prominent patron of modernism. He promoted and campaigned for writers who met his demands of authenticity and contempt for the accepted notions and tradition. Soon he took Yeats, Joyce, Frost, Marianna Moore Hemingway, sculpture Gaudier Brzeska and composer George Antheil under his wings and the rest is history.

Ezra Pound, who was the champion of the modernist cause, brought out an anthology called *Des Imagist*, in which poems of writers like H. D., William Carlos Williams, F. S. Flint and Amy Lowell were included. Pound famously decreed 'make it new', but both he and Eliot saw innovation as being based in the reconstruction of the past. They looked at several traditions to locate meaning and order to reconstruct it as something new. They were aware of being radically modern, but they also felt alienated from the modern scene. Their attempts for innovation were an effort to save the elite culture of the past against the meaningless of the present. The first great work that can be called an example of American modernism is Eliot's *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, which appeared in 1915. In the poem, a suffocating sense of sexual panic haunts Prufrock, whose awareness of his own moral and emotional emptiness is what redeems his purposeless life.

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The development in industrial and technological advancement of nineteenth century also aided in the rise of modernism. In his book, *The condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey defines modernism as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one-half art, the other being the eternal and the immutable'. It is interesting to know that this definition comes from Baudelaire's essay, *The Painter of Modern Life*. Harvey highlights the 'paradoxical unity' of this definition. The modernist movement of America conveyed a rigid and short-livid aspect of both cultural and political turmoil. Most of the writers who became modernist writers had already published their works before the beginning of the war in 1914. In this sense, modernism becomes a pre-war movement. However, a movement like modernism required 'the desperate convulsion of the great struggle, the crashing of regimes it precipitated, to give [it] the radical political dimension it had hitherto lacked'.

In general, modernism grew out of the ideas and philosophy of Enlightenment, but it was the premise on which modernism developed that made it reject its ties with any historical trend or movement or philosophy. Harvey says that 'modernity can have no respect even for its own past…', and that the only way modernism can finds itself to be meaningful is by adopting the meaning materialized within the vortex of change. The basic idea of the Enlightenment philosophers was to work 'freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and enrichment of daily life'. The modernists during the early phase of the movement adopted this optimistic ideal of the Enlightenment, like the progressive attitude, break from the past, adoption of what seems fleeting and is transitory in nature, and the idea of innovation in change. However, as the war progressed, it scared these optimistic ideals of the early modernists.

As the socialist governments emerged in various nations out of the shadows of war, modernism became very cautious of the 'relation between means and ends'. With its principle of rejecting the history and the past, it developed the idea of 'creative destruction', which simply suggests that the old must be abandoned or destroyed if something innovative or new has to be created. The idea of 'creative destruction', or at least a major part of it, was first reflected in the cubist movement of early twentieth entry. Breaking ties with the past made the modernists adopt modern technology in their writings and arts. They began to see language as a mechanism designed to perform human communication. They embraced and were influenced by many contemporary advances in technology, medicine and psychology, and philosophy. Theories of Sigmund Freud and Ernst Mach greatly influenced early literature of modernist period.

As modernism developed as a movement, art and literature became the part of established elite and modernism began to be institutionalized, a situation from which it initially intended to break away. Modernism slowly transformed into what it derided—an institutionalized movement that instead of embracing the transitory nature of the art and literature started to form rigid rules and principles. It was this transformation that made modernism loose its revolutionary appeal. Within such a context in the 1960s, anti modernistic views began to develop that became the harbinger of postmodernism in America.

Modernism in America addressed a wide range of topics and issues like race, gender roles, sexuality, consciousness, and most importantly the idea of unconscious. In America, modernism reached at its peak between 1920s and 1940s. Some of the most celebrated American modernist writers include Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald and Walt Whitman. Though Whitman is considered as a romantic poet, but at times he is also regarded as the pioneer of the modernism in America.

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After the First World War, psychological war wound became quite a common phenomenon, and is well reflected in the literature of the time. Many American and English writers explored the wounds left on the people's psyche by the war. The beginning of 1930s saw a huge economic crisis in America, the influence of which can also be seen in American modernist writings, such as *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Another issue that the modernist American writings dealt with is the loss of self and need to define oneself. As urbanization and industrialization grew, the workers faded into the background of the city life stuffed with chaotic industries and machineries. The workers of this period felt an immense requirement to define themselves as human and not just another peg in the vast machine structure. Writers active within the framework of American modernism echoed this idea of building of the self, a theme which has been very well illustrated in Fitzgerald's masterpiece *The Great Gatsby.*

Another important theme modernist writers emphasized the most was madness and the ways in which it manifests. Some of the brilliant examples of this theme in American writing are Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*, Faulkner's *That Evening Sun* and Hemingway's *The Battler.* Though all these themes may appear to be pessimistic and depressing, they were the reality of first half of the twentieth century, which was scarred by the devastation of two most destructive wars of human history. Nevertheless, these themes and depressing aspects of modernism caused new hope and aspirations to arise, and soon a search began for a new and fresh beginning not only for the people, but also for the characters in modernist American fiction.

Another important aspect of modernism was the changes it brought in the perceived gender roles, especially the assumed roles of women in society. Many of the modernist literature documents mirrors the change in the assumed gender role in the social context. Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* deals with the themes like gender interaction in a mundane social situation.

Another important aspect of American modernism was the relationship between the two races, black and white. Many American writers and novels dealt with the tension or the gap between what was an assumed situation of the two races in context of each other and the reality in which they lived with prejudices and biases. Most of American modernist writers like Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Faulkner, Hemingway and O'Neill explored the race relation in their writings. Many of the modernist fictions continued to show blacks as a stereotypes dangerous, uneducated and uncivilized. However, some stories, like Hemingway's *The Battler* turned these stereotypes upside down by portraying a black African-American character as kind, calculated and polite, and who is noticeable since his first appearance in the story because of his good manners and carefully selected words.

While talking about the American modernism in literature, it is important to mention the contribution of the African-American writers, for they not only contributed to literature but also did much to elevate the self-esteem of the African Americans. Poets like Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes composed poems with folk orientations. They celebrated an optimistic view of the life in spite of the hardship that pervaded African-Americans' life in early twentieth century America. These poems offer a deep insight into the cultural identity and folk tradition of African Americans. Even white writers like Toomer and Faulkner also explored themes of cultural insight and folklore in their respective novels, *Blood-Burning Blood* and *That Evening Sun.*

After the First World War, a group of American thinkers and writers known as the Lost Generation became synonymous with the idea of modernism. After the first

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war ended, many American writers started living abroad in order to pursue their creative goals. Among these were writer and intellectual Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the famous painter Waldo Pierce. The term Lost Generation reflects the spiritual and existential hangover left by the destructions caused by the four years of cruel and devastating war. In this wake of chaos, the artists of Lost Generation attempted to find some meaning in the world. One way to do this for these artists and writers was to look inside and capture the ways in which consciousness works, which was also a signature characteristic of the modernism as a literary movement. Hemingway tried to achieve this by abandoning the stylistic and ornamental language.

Hemingway's novels are blunt in style and contain simple and straightforward sentence structure with any hidden meanings. However, his bluntness and simple sentence structure are not without irony, for the characters in his novels always have hidden motives and agendas which become the guiding force for their actions. Like the other prominent modernist of the time, the figures associated with the Lost Generation abandoned the idea that it is possible to completely know anything. Reality, for them, became relative and conditional. The only truth was the transient nature of the world. The First World War had already showed them that the world, the outside reality is not governed by any guiding spirit.

The novel as a genre saw a huge transformation because of the self-conscious and reflective impulses of modernism. A new type of narration was introduced to the novel and it soon changed every single aspect of the novel as a genre. The omniscient narrator which was so characteristic of the previous century novels was replaced by the unreliable narrator, stressing the idea that it is impossible to know anything completely and truly. The emergence of unreliable narrator compelled the readers to question even the most basic and fundamental assumptions regarding the way a novel should and must operate. Capturing the workings of mind and consciousness became a new technique at the hands of geniuses like Joyce and Woolf. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), one of the most celebrated modernist text, is a supreme example of the narrative technique which became famous as the stream of consciousness, and which attempts to capture the fleeting nature of human mind. Instead of capturing the outside world, the great modernist writers attempted to capture the inner complexity and intricacies of human consciousness. It was also the time of Psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, in which he questioned the autonomy of human consciousness. The amalgamation of these two intellectual forces forever changed the fundamental understanding of people regarding reality and truth.

Another defining characteristic of modernist literature was experimentation with the genre and form. The prime example of the manifestation of this urge for experimentation is T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922). Many critics consider this poem as the most suitable example of modernist poetry. The poem is full of references, which even the most well-read readers found frustrating. The poem is not an attempt to escape from the shocking reality of the world; instead it exposes these realities and darkness. The poem engages with the idea of self and inwardness and exposes moral and spiritual barrenness of modern life, and presents reality in the state of flux.

The alienation and cynical perspective that became so characteristic of modernism could persist for long. By the middle of the twentieth century, many voices and idea began to emerge that challenged the basic views of modernism. After the Second World War, the democratic ideals emerged as a winner over fascism of Germany and Italy. For the first time in a long period, there was a sense of hope and optimism. The elitism of

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modernism began to fade and commercialized and popular literature began to be appreciated. The audiences who indulged in such literature were not shunned and looked at with contempt. Moreover, the ideas and principles that later came to be known as postmodernism started to emerge. However, this does not mean that the effects of modernism completely disappeared, for modernism as a movement and the intellectuals and writers associated with it changed the basic understanding of truth and reality, and changed it for good.

Check Your Progress

10. What were the different movements that came to define the modern age?
11. In this age, what was the common feeling among American writers?

1.6 LITERATURE FROM 1945 TO THE PRESENT DAY

In this section, we will discuss the emergence and significance of poetry from 1945 to the present day.

1.6.1 Poetry

By the end of the Second World War, T. S. Eliot emerged as a literary dictator. According to Peter Conn, there was no sense of equality in the modernist cannon of 1958. By this time, it had become a hierarchical structure with Eliot enjoying the top most position of extreme power and eminence. The theoretical foundations of modernism as a movement were explored by John Crowe Ransom in *Poetry* and Allen Tate in *Tension in Poetry*. By the end of the first decade of the second half of the twentieth century, the *New Criticism* under the leadership of Eliot had forged a kind of hegemony that dictated the standards for most of the Academic and literary sections of America.

Poets such as John Berryman, Randal Farrell, Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, Karl Shapiro and Schwarts emerged as the prominent poets in the middle of the twentieth century. Robert Lowell termed his school of poetry as confessional school of poetry. The third generation of American poets of twentieth century include James Merrill, W. I. Merwin, Adrianna Rich, Peter Viereck and Richard Wilbur. New Criticism used *The Kenyon Review* and the *Sewance Review* as its weapon to enforce and maintain its hegemony. Charles Olson used Projective Verse to make his contribution in the poetry of the age. The emergence of beat generation of poetry began with the publication of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. Drugs and other experience of extreme nature became common amongst the poets and artists of this generation who sought to transcend the ordinary experiences into visual consciousness. The beat poets were anti traditional poets who experimented with the combination of mystical with political and psychological aspect of human consciousness. Unlike the beat poets, confessional poetry had a great and influencing impact on the poetry of the time. Women poets welcomed this school of poetry, for it gave them an adequate medium to record their personal experiences with artistic candour.

Another school of poetry that flourished in America was the Black Mountain Poets. The poets associated with this group criticized the western tradition of art as a

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form of mimesis. The poets of New York School, which include John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara and James Schuyler were most self-conscious and t programmatic poets of the period. The counter-culture prominent in 1970s and '80s continued with some of these trends of poetry.

1.6.2 Drama

The most 1.7.2 Dramafamous and prominent practitioner of American drama at the beginning of the twentieth century was Eugene O'Neill. Playwrights such as Philip Barry, S. N. Behrman, Rachael Gothers, George Kelly and Robert Sherwood followed O'Neill's brand of theatre. The next prominent playwright to emerge was Tennessee Williams. Some of his famous plays include *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Street Car Named Desire.* These plays when staged revolutionized the American drama. Williams retired after his last play *Clothes for a Summer Hotel.* The third crucial figure to emerge in American theatre in the twentieth century was Arthur Miller. His powerful plays with traditional narrative themes did in the middle of the twentieth century what O'Neill's plays did at the beginning. Miller wrote twenty plays, amongst which *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman* and the *Crucible* are considered to be his best. Amongst women playwrights, the most recognized names are Beth Henley, Tina Howe, Marsha Norman and Adele Shank.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a large number of playwrights emerged as great talents, but this period has a less number of memorable plays. As the African Americans entered the American theatre, the subjects and themes of theatre became more versatile and diverse and, therefore, classification of any kind is almost impossible during this period of American theatre. One of the most prominent and powerful African-American playwright to emerge during this period was Amiri Baraka. His play *Dutchman* is considered to be violent and yet a powerful play.

With other post war literary genres, the theatre shared a sense of alienation and internal division, which unfortunately had become a reality of the late twentieth century. *The American Dream*, *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* by Edward Albee successfully captured the American domestic and national scene on the stage. A number of women playwrights also emerged in the American theatre partly because of their talent as playwrights and partly because of the amalgamation of art and ideology that has revolutionized the idea of self-definition across the minority groups in the American society. This also resulted in various minority groups such as Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Indians and homosexuals, reinforcing their demand for equality thorough the engagement of theatre with its audience.

1.6.3 Fiction

In his *A Gathering of Fugitives* (1956), Lionel Trilling comments: 'The novelist, in his ideal character, is the artist who is consumed by the desire to know how things really are; who has entered into an elaborate romance with actuality. He is the artist of the conditioned, of the impingement of things upon spirit and of spirit upon things and the success of his enterprise depends as much upon his awareness of things as upon his awareness of spirit.' In his *An End of Innocence* (1955), Lesli Fielder writes, 'Even now, the writers of many other countries begin to stand to their own past in a relation as uneasy as our and in our novel they find raised nakedly at last the question that underlay the experimentation of the twenties, the social consciousness of the thirties, the search for formal security of the forties. Can the lonely individual, unsustained by tradition in an

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atomized society, achieve a poetry adult and complicated enough to be the consciousness of its age? To have posed that question for the world is the achievement of the American novel at the moment.'

These observations can fiction as a basic guide for us to study the American fiction after the end of the Second World War. Jean Paul Sartre, the famous French philosopher of the mid twentieth century, rightly assessed that the 'Empire of signs is prose'. It is true that the First World War caused a crisis of language. Sartre observed that the Second World War revolutionized it. The modernism of the first half of the century had successfully challenged literary tradition of realism and had attempted to capture the chaotic essence of the world after the first war. In France, Sartre along with Albert Camus attempted to take the novel towards the existential reality. In Britain, F. R. Leavis in his T*he Great Tradition (*1948) offered the insight that social and moral realism has always been the central lineage of English novels. A similar sentiment was conveyed by Lionel Trilling's influential essay *The Liberal Inauguration* (1955). In the post second world war period, the novel emerged as a quest for reality. It is important to keep in mind that Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) and Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) claimed the lack of tradition in the American novel.

By the time the third generation of American writers appeared in 1950s, older writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos and Steinbeck had already established an experimental tradition of American fiction. Some of the important writers of this period in American fiction are Vladimir Nabokov (he had migrated to America in 1940), Robert Penn Warren, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Mary McCarthy, Norman Miller, John Updike, John Barth, J. D. Salinger and Cynthia Ozick. The themes of the work that these writers produced had a sense of disorientation towards the society. Their distance from rigid social structures and their metaphysical concern for this distance made them categorize this brand of fiction as post-modernist.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, in his *Vital Centre* writes: 'Today, finally and tardily, the skeptical insights are in process of restoration to the liberal mind. The psychology of Freud has renewed the intellectuals' belief in the dark, slumbering forces of the will. The Theology of Barth and Niebuhr has given a new power to old and chastening truths of Christianity. More than anything else, the raise of Hitler and Stalin has revealed in terms no one deny the awful reality of human impulses toward aggrandizement and destruction.'

A historical tension is apparent in the American fiction produced between the end of the second war and second decade of the second half of the century. In this tension, one can see opposite claims of resistance and engagement, accommodation and alienation, isolated self and social system, and an attempt to make existential sense of one's life against process of history. The American novels that appeared after 1945 was remarkably different from the novels that preceded the Second World War in the sense that the former completely abandoned the large mythical landscapes and pastoral description, which were still powerfully present in the American fictions of modernism. Bellow in his first novel *Dangling Man* (1944) narrates the story of a man with no aim, who is awaits his induction in the army. His other novels more or less deal with the similar themes.

The American writers who appeared next on American literary scene like John Cheever, John Updike, Mary McCarthy and Alison Lurie attempted to restore the tradition that realism had earlier abandoned. In 1960s, a group of writers emerged who were known as 'The Silent Generation'. The well-known writers of this group include John Barth, Richard Brautigan, Robert Coover and Ishmael Reed.

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Many of the memorable novels of the second half of the twentieth century have been written by the writers belonging to the minority or ethnic group. This period is also notable for a wide range of talented African-American writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Richard Wright.

There is no doubt that the contemporary literary scene of America includes writers from various race, ethnic groups and religions. The diversity of it offers a possibility of the expansion of such lists and categorization, but only time will tell which of the writers who are active today will emerge to be the major literary figures in the American literary cannon.

Check Your Progress

12. Name the figures who dominated poetry and drama during the mid-twentieth century?
13. During this period, what was unique about American fiction?
14. What were the American writers of the 1960s known as?

ACTIVITY

Read the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. You may compare your notes and ideas with your colleagues.

Did You Know

Toni Morrison, the most recent American recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, writing in a distinctive lyrical prose style, published her controversial debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, to widespread critical acclaim in 1970. Coming on the heels of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, the novel, widely studied in American schools, includes an elaborate description of incestuous rape and explores the conventions of beauty established by a historically racist society, painting a portrait of a self-immolating black family in search of beauty in whiteness.

1.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The New World was colonized in the 1500s by the English, French and Spanish.
- The age of exploration opened new avenues and Europeans in large number settled in America.
- It cannot be denied that during the first-century of English Settlement, most of the literary achievements were from the Puritans. They were the most literate of the English Colonists and were committed.

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- Generally speaking, the Puritans and the Yankees were the two halves of the New England.
- The Puritans were a contribution of the Old World created by the rugged idealism of the English Reformation; while the Yankees were a product of native conditions created by practical economics. Puritans immigrants were the children of two different centuries.
- The journey to creating American was a slow and gradual one. The cultural history of the next several generations is essentially a story of adaption, as imported ideas and material forms were altered under the pressure of America's different conditions.
- From 1760s onward, literary and cultural aspirations were linked to the revolution of politics.
- Poetry was also pressed into the service of nationalism. Franklin was the first American to abandon the traditional mercantile school before other America thinkers abandoned it. He was the first to accept the school of laissez faire.
- After the American Revolution, America emerged as a new nation from its colonial status.
- Among the literary nationalists in the late eighteenth century, we have the poets and essayists known as Connecticut Wits.
- In the three generation from independence to the civil war, America expanded its geographical boundaries at a breathtaking rate.
- The period from 1775–1828 was known as the Early National Period ending with the triumph of Jacksonian democracy in 1828, which signalled the emergence of a national imaginative literature.
- The period from 1828–1865 is often identified as the Romantic Period in America. This period is sometimes also known as the American Renaissance.
- Through the period of 1865–1914, the bloody Civil War was followed by a burgeoning industrialism and urbanization in the north that profoundly altered the American sense of itself and also American literary modes. The period from 1865–1900 is often known as the Realistic Period.
- America's increasing economic and technological expansion necessitated a continual broadening and intensifying of contacts with the world culture and with movements of thoughts that were initiated and developed elsewhere.
- It is very difficult to separate realism and regionalism.
- According to French aesthetic theory, realism designated as an art based on accurate, unromanticized observation of life and nature.
- Realism as understood from the works of Whitman, Hawthorne, Stowe and Melville adds a democratic openness in subject matter and style that breaks down rigid hierarchies even as it may indulge in imaginative disorder or utopian fantasy in order to probe the limits of a prevailing social and political reality.
- Whatever be our definition of realism, it does have an anthropological dimension in which new regions are opened to fictional or journalistic exploration and analysis.
- American literary naturalism was associated with continental licentiousness and impiety and was regarded as a literature foreign to American values and interests.

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- The first dime novel was written by Ann S. Stephens, named *The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* (1860).
- The spirit of renewal that breathed though American politics and philosophy in the early twentieth century and influenced literature and the other arts as well.
- Cubism, fauvism, vorticism, constructivism and futurism competed with each other.
- Modernism constituted a concentrated attack on received artistic traditions. It had its origin in Europe. However, Americans played decisive roles as well.
- The era between the two world wars, marked also by the trauma of the great economic depression beginning in 1929, was that of the emergence of what is known as Modern Literature.
- T. S. Eliot became one of the most important literary figures in the world from 1945.
- Twentieth Century Drama had Eugene O'Neill as its pioneer.
- The War of 1914 precipitated a crisis of language.
- According to Sartre, the war of 1940 had revolutionized it. Half a century of modernism had challenged the tradition of literary realism and spoken of a crisis of the word.

1.9 KEY TERMS

- **Scourge:** It means to blight.
- **Exodus:** It means mass departure.
- **Rhetoric:** It means style of oratory.
- **Elegy:** It means a poem of serious reflection, especially a lament for the deceased.
- **Heretical:** It means profane.
- **Seditious:** It means subversive.
- **Antinomian:** It is a belief that Christians are released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law.
- **Muckracking:** It refers to the search and exposure of misconduct in public life.
- **Knickbocker:** It refers to an obsolete term for New Yorkers.
- **Avant-garde:** It refers to new (often experimental) ideas in art and literature (now extended to fashion and lifestyle).

1.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. During the first-century of English Settlement, most of the literary achievements were from the Puritans.
2. William Bradford was the first historian of the New England.
3. The New World offers images of peace and plenty. America was to be a modern society, a nation of yeomen farmers bonded together by the silken bond of a mild government.

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4. Washington Irving was the first Knickerbocker writer in America to earn an international reputation.
5. The French aesthetic theory of realism designated an art based on accurate and unromanticized observation of life and nature.
6. Realism as understood from the works of Whitman, Hawthorne, Stowe and Melville adds a democratic openness in subject matter and style that breaks down rigid hierarchies even as it may indulge in imaginative disorder or utopian fantasy in order to probe the limits of a prevailing social and political reality.
7. American literary naturalism in its early years was associated with continental licentiousness and impiety and was regarded as a literature foreign to American values and interests.
8. Literary naturalism has been narrowly identified with the phrase 'pessimistic determinism'.
9. Dime novels were a kind of inexpensive melodramatic adventure novels, with often western themes, popular in America from 1860 to 1915, and were published usually with paperback.
10. The different movements that came to define the modern age include cubism, fauvism, vorticism, constructivism and futurism.
11. Many prominent American writers of the decade following the end of World War I, disillusioned by their war experiences, were alienated by what they perceived as the crassness of American culture and its puritanical repressions.
12. T. S. Eliot dominated poetry while Eugene O'Neill dominated drama in the twentieth century.
13. The American fiction of this period from the end of the war to 1960s showed a sense of distinctive historical tension, in which the contrary claims of opposition and engagement, alienation and accommodation, an isolated self and a massed social system and a comically absurd individual struggling to make existential sense of an anarchic and terrible process of history. The American novel that developed after 1945 was in many ways different from the work of its immediate predecessors in its breakaway from the large mythic landscapes and pastoralizing tendencies that had much power even in the novel of American modernism.
14. The American writers of the 1960s were known as 'The Silent Generation'.

1.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the meaning of the New World.
2. Who were the Knickerbocker writers in America in the early days?
3. Briefly describe the concept of the Dime novel.
4. Name the important literary figures of modernism.
5. Identify the distinct features of a novel in the modern era.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write an overview of the colonial experience and the early days of the New English settlement.
2. Give a critical analysis of the meaning and significance of realism in America.
3. Discuss the emergence of modernism in literature.
4. Highlight T. S. Eliot's contribution to Modern literature.
5. Discuss the contributions of O'Neill and Williams to the American stage.

1.12 FURTHER READING

Hacker, L. M., Helene S Zahler ed. *The Shaping of American Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1947.

Bigswy, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* (2 vols.). New York: *Cambridge University Press,* 1982.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Robert Frost.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

UNIT 2 POETRY BY WALT WHITMAN AND ROBERT FROST

Structure

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman and Robert Frost can be considered poets of the people who developed their verse with the intention of making it accessible to a vast audience. Both Whitman and Frost also studied different facets of nature in their poetry. The major difference in the traditions of the two poets is the way they perceived the world. Whitman was a celebratory poet who praised himself, America and all of life. In contrast, Frost believed that life was a tragedy and adopted a philosophical stance in his poetry. His pessimistic outlook clashes with Whitman's optimistic attitude..

Song of Myself is considered to be one of Walt Whitman's most popular works. It is a part of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* comprising twelve original pieces by the poet, published in 1855. After its first publication, this ninety-five page long work was revised by Whitman. The final version is supposedly the one created by him in 1881. This was when the collection got its present name of *Song of Myself.* Before this, the collection was titled *Poem of Walt Whitman, An American.* In a couple of editions (1871, 1861 and 1860), it was even titled Walt Whitman.

Song of Myself is a blend of poetic meditations, sermons as well as biography. The poet uses commentary and symbolism to present issues of importance. The poem

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does not consist of lists. It comprises vignettes where Whitman's thoughts are displayed through scenes that are short, accurate and precise.

The change in the title of the poem gives us an insight into the personality of Walt Whitman. This piece of writing seems to suggest that as an individual, Whitman melted and merged into the abstract 'Myself'. The poem tries to explore the interaction between people. He begins with the argument that 'what I assume you shall assume'. By saying so, the poet tries to establish that he encompasses the universe and is an indistinguishable part of it.

The poem seems to follow the pattern of a quest. He tells the readers:

Missing me one place search another,

I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Robert Frost was the most popular American poet of the twentieth century. He holds a unique position in American literature as he stands at the crossroads of nineteenth-century American poetry and modernism. His verse suggests a unique mix of many nineteenth-century tendencies and traditions and modernist tendencies of his twentieth-century contemporaries.

In this unit, we will discuss the life, contributions and important works of Walt Whitman and Robert Frost. The unit will also critically analyse the prescribed poetries of the poets.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the important aspects of Walt Whitman biography
- Identify the important works of Whitman
- Describe the life and works of Robert Frost
- Critically analyse the prescribed poetries of Whitman and Frost

2.2 WALT WHITMAN: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Walt Whitman was born in 1819 in Long Island. Although he was trained to be a printer in his formative years, he became a teacher. Finally, he took up journalism and became an editor. However, his radical views brought him lots of negative popularity and made him unsuccessful. After travelling to the South in 1848, he discovered the varied hues of his country and began writing poetry on his return to New York.

In 1855, he published by himself the first edition of his poetry collection, *Leaves of Grass*. It had only twelve poems at that time. This volume did not get the attention he expected. However, he did get congratulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American essayist, lecturer and poet, who wrote him a letter offering his greetings at the beginning of a 'great career'. Soon after, Whitman published another edition of *Leaves of Grass*. This time, he added about twenty poems and also included the letter from Emerson. In 1860, Whitman came up with another edition, somewhat larger, comprising some 156 poems, brought out by a trade publisher.

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Walt Whitman

Some interesting fcts about *Leaves of Grass*

- *Leaves of Grass* plays a prominent role in the AMC TV series *Breaking Bad*. For example, episode 5.8—titled 'Gliding Over All' after poem 271 in the book—pulls together many of the series' references to *Leaves of Grass*, including the fact, noted in episode 4.4, 'Bullet Points' and made more salient in 'Gliding Over All', that the main character, Walter White, shares Walt Whitman's initials. Numerous reviewers have analysed and discussed the various connections among Walt Whitman/*Leaves of Grass*/'Gliding Over All', the character Walter White, and the show *Breaking Bad*.
- A 2010 comedy film starring Edward Norton takes its title from the book.
- *Leaves of Grass* is cited in the film *With Honors* starring Joe Pesci, Brandon Fraser and Patrick Dempsey.
- *Leaves of Grass* is cited in the film *Reds* starring Warren Beatty, Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson. In an important scene in the film, John Reed (the real-life revolutionary), played by Beatty, discovers a love letter between his wife, Louise Bryant (Keaton), and the playwright Eugene O'Neill (Nicholson), inserted in the Whitman poem. The fight that ensues leads to their separation.
- *Leaves of Grass* is mentioned in the film *Howl* starring James Franco, Todd Rotondi and Jon Prescott.
- *Leaves of Grass* is mentioned in the film *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love*, starring Laurel Holloman and Nicole Ari Parker.
- *Leaves of Grass* plays a major role in the John Green novel *Paper Towns*.
- The song Another Try by America mentions *Leaves of Grass*.
- President Bill Clinton gave copies of *Leaves of Grass* to both Hillary Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.
- Verses from *Leaves of Grass* are quoted in Counterparts' song Carpe Diem on the 2010 album *Prophets*.
- The 1989 film *Dead Poets Society* makes repeated references to the poem *O Captain! My Captain!* from *Leaves of Grass*, along with other references to Whitman himself.

Important works of Whitman

- ***Franklin Evans* (1842):** *Franklin Evans* or *The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times*, the only novel ever written by Walt Whitman, is the rag-to-riches story of Franklin Evans. Franklin Evans starts as an innocent young man, leaving Long Island to come to New York City to avail the opportunities offered by the city and to improve his life. Being young and naïve, he is easily influenced by someone whom he befriended (Colby) and eventually becomes a drunkard. He tries many times to abstain from alcohol but does not succeed until after the death of his two wives. Franklin Evans takes you through a journey of a young man living and learning through his mistakes, picking up life lessons along the way.
- ***Leaves of Grass* (1855):** *Leaves of Grass* is a poetry collection by Walt Whitman. Though the first edition was published in 1855, Whitman spent his entire life writing *Leaves of Grass*, revising it in several editions until his death. Among the poems in the collection are: *Song of Myself, I Sing the Body Electric, Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, and in later editions, Whitman's elegy to the assassinated President Abraham Lincoln, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd.*
- ***Drum-Taps* (1865):** Whitman's *Drum-Taps* is a collection of poetry, which is a sequence of forty-three poems about the Civil War and stands as the finest war poetry written by an American. Within the first group of poems, Whitman expresses both exuberance and doubts in regard to the imminent conflict. Both Lincoln and Whitman had a like-minded philosophy that the sole objective of the war was to preserve the 'more perfect union'. Lincoln often expressed this belief and stated that the issue of slavery should be and only would be addressed if it contributed to this preservation. Poems in this first section, such as *First O Songs for a Prelude*, demonstrate this vociferous Unionist pride. Besides this poem, others like it, such as *Song of the Banner at Daybreak*, serve as a rally cry for the Northern population. These poems also reveal Whitman's belief that this war is a good event for America's principles. He deems that these principles could be taken for granted and would eventually be declined without any disagreement and threat to society. Nevertheless, Whitman also knew that war brings distress along with it. He conveys this through the poem *The Centenarian's Story*. In this poem, a veteran, belonging to the campaign of Washington's Revolutionary War, remembers a helper from the Civil War, who was an epitome of bravery and heroism. The veteran admires watching such men willingly taking charge of dangerous situations and also remembers watching the slaughter of a large section of this mass.
- ***Memoranda During the War* (1875):** This work is considered within the historical framework of several nursing narratives that flourished during the Civil War. However, although the *Memoranda* is like an autobiographical writing about the war, it is not completely a nursing narrative as it also focuses on the other facets of the war. In this work, Whitman stated that 'the real war will never get into the books'. He urged his readers to 'think how much, and of importance, will be—how much civic and military, has already been—buried in the grave, in eternal darkness'.
- ***Specimen Days* (1882):** The book *Specimen Days* was first published in a volume named *Specimen Days & Collect* by Rees Welsh and Company in Philadelphia. The book, written in 1881, was significantly taken from essays, notes and sketches, as written by the author in various stages of his life during the Civil War. It strongly resembles a conventional autobiography ever published by Whitman. The book is a major source of information about the poet's experiences in the Civil War.
- ***Democratic Vistas* (1871):** *Democratic Vistas* is an important work of Whitman which focuses on his comparative politics and the letters written by him. The work demonstrates the poet's discouragement at what he saw in America. He strongly criticizes the values, culture and American politics, which was partially the result of the cynicism that existed after the Civil War. In his work, Whitman criticizes *Shooting Niagara—and After* by Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle and other literary works. He also remarks on the Industrial Revolution and the prototypes of Modernism, which opted for rationality and restraint instead of feelings and emotions.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Whitman voluntarily served as a nurse in army hospitals. He even wrote dispatches as a correspondent for the *New York Times*. During this period, he wrote poetry inspired by the war. It was published in 1865 as *Drum-Taps,* which was then included in the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass. Sequel* was another war-related volume, which included poems about Lincoln's murder.

Whitman's wartime work led him to a job as a clerk with the United States Department of the Interior, but he soon lost the job when his supervisor learned that he was the creative mind behind *Leaves of Grass*. When the Reconstruction era failed, he ended up writing the best known of his prose works, *Democratic Vistas*. This work was an argument in favour of maintaining democratic ideals. After another set of prose, there came a further expanded version of *Leaves of Grass* in 1881.

Whitman's health had begun deteriorating in the mid-1870s, and by 1891, it was known to everyone that it was a losing battle for him. Therefore, he prepared the *Deathbed* edition of *Leaves of Grass*, comprising two appendices of old-age poems along with a review essay wherein he attempts a justification of his life and works. This edition appeared in 1892, the same year in which he died.

During his life, Whitman witnessed the Civil War and saw how the US emerged as a commercial and political power. He was witness to the peak time of slavery as well as its abolition. Therefore, his poetry is centred on democratic ideas as well as ideas of equality and brotherhood. Realizing America's new-found strong position in the world, Walt Whitman attempted to develop poetry that was typically American and unique so that it reduced the load of its predecessors.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. When was Walt Whitman born? When did he publish the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*?
2. Identify the themes covered in his poetry.

2.3 CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF SONG OF MYSELF

2.3.1 *Song of Myself 1*

The collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, has never stopped puzzling readers and critics. It enthralls, inspires and also poses many questions. The symbolism and imagery

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in the poem have led critics to try and find out how they reflect Walt Whitman's life. It was believed that Whitman had expressed and explored various aspects of his personality in the poem.

1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same,
and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

Explanation

The poet celebrates his own self in this poem. Whatever he says he will do in the poem, is what he actually does. Whitman not only celebrates himself but also humanity.

He guides the readers through the poem, giving them instructions. The reader is expected to believe all that the poet believes, and at a different level, the reader is expected to assume whatever role the poet wishes. To the purpose of celebration, the poet does not withhold; he even offers his smallest bodily denomination, 'every atom' to the reader and mankind. The poem has the soul of the poet or speaker. The poet and the soul are treated as two separate entities.

These lines display Whitman's love for democracy. In fact, he believes in the power of an individual. He also expresses his desire not only to celebrate his life and his own self but mankind as well. At the same time, the poet talks about equality, a basic principle of democracy. He emphasizes on the fact that we all belong to the same democratic society and that is what brings us closer to each other. In other words, Whitman through his poetry, attempts to unite people in art. Whitman does not wish to alienate himself from the rest; he believes in growing up together. He observes the summer grass in leisure, which inspires him to mull over some remarkable facts of his own life.

Furthermore, he brings out the details about his origin, his very conception. The poet certainly has an unwavering belief in patriotism as he feels that he owes a lot to his motherland. He refers to his ancestors who originally belonged to America. He hopes to remain lively and energetic till his last breath. He believes in the revival and regeneration of antiquated ideas and invokes the forces of nature. Finally, he highlights the power of speech that would enable him to move to achieve higher goals in life.

Check Your Progress

3. 'I celebrate myself... original energy'. What do these lines exhibit?
4. What according to Whitman brings us closer to each other?

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2.3.2 *Song of Myself 5*

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged
your tongue to my bare-stript heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers,
and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder,
mullein and poke-weed.

Explanation

The poet introduces the reader to his companion, that is, the soul. The faith in his soul does not waver and encapsulates his innermost desires and instincts. He believes that the spirit should be lifted and not be allowed to degenerate. He invites his soul to spend time with him in the literal and symbolic sense. His latent instincts are represented by his soul. His interaction with the soul brings him a lot of pleasure. This communion with the soul is figurative, and reveals the poet's erotic fantasies as well as narcissism. The oneness with the soul is symbolic of his yearning for eternal peace and joy. The imagery used here is not only concrete but also explicit as the poet refers to the 'soulful' kiss that he is entirely overwhelmed by. The kiss provides him a lot of satisfaction.

Here, it is worthwhile to note that pantheism is the religious belief that God manifests himself in everything in nature and in the universe. In these lines, Whitman expresses

the same philosophy. He believes that God is present everywhere and that his presence can be felt everywhere. Once again, he refers to the other members of society as his brothers and sisters. Love, Whitman feels, is the essential force behind everything and it is love alone which leads to creation. He refers to the bounty of nature, the plethora of natural objects as well as creatures that are ubiquitous by their presence.

Check Your Progress

5. What gives the poet immense pleasure?
6. Who is the companion the poet refers to?

2.3.3 *Song of Myself 6*

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 dropt,
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, or from offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps,
And here you are the mothers' 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?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows 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 ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

Explanation

A simple blade of grass which may bear no significance for many is an important source of life for the poet. He, however, finds it difficult to describe it even to a child. He describes it as a manifestation of God's sublime creation, which reminds us of His greatness and superiority. On another level, the poet compares the blade of grass to an offspring of vegetation which is not only essential but organic. The grass, which is available everywhere and is the same irrespective of where it grows, symbolizes equality of people and things.

The poet implies the ephemeral nature of human life by comparing it with 'uncut hair of grass'. It covers the bodies which have been buried for ages. Destruction is inevitable. Hence, as things perish, the soil absorbs it easily and gets covers by grass. Whitman fondly remembers the people whom he loved and the ones whom he had known for a long time. He feels that the grass is coming from the old or from the infants who, unfortunately, died soon after their birth. It might belong to old men and women and might have its roots in the mouth of the deceased. The grass itself is a powerful utterance of nature; a manifestation of its uniqueness. He wishes to be able to unravel the mystery behind the death of all these people though it is going to be a futile attempt. He has absolutely no idea about what has become of all of them. Perhaps they still have the remaining part of their existence which still permeates nature. The sprouting of a small blade of grass is symbolic of the immutability of the human soul as it is firmly believed that the soul actually never dies.

Death is not the end; it is the beginning. The cycle of death and regeneration continues and is perennial.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. What does the poet have to say about death?
8. What does the poet try to convey through a blade of grass?

2.3.4 *Song of Myself 20*

Who goes there? hankering, gross, mystical, nude;
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,
Else it were time lost listening to me.

I do not snivel that snivel the world over,
That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth.

Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids,
conformity goes to the fourth-remov'd,
I wear my hat as I please indoors or out.

Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?

Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counsel'd
with doctors and calculated close,
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less,
And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

I know I am deathless,

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I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night.

I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.

One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself,
And whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time.

Explanation

Whitman is perplexed by life's complex mysteries. He goes on searching for solutions to these mysteries. This search is endless. His question 'Who goes there?' sets the tone of the section. He wants to know who has intruded upon his privacy and who has overwhelmed him with his presence. He questions his own existence. He wishes to involve others in his quest, in the ongoing turmoil which seems to be overpowering him. He does not complain about things which make others upset. He is not necessarily troubled by the mundane and declining nature of life (something which troubles others so easily). Without following conventional ideas, he tries to think differently, in a non-conformist way; in other words, in a completely different manner. He is in love with himself and has no faith in antiquities. He follows his will and acts accordingly. In love with himself, he prefers to 'sticks to his own bones' and believes that he can see his reflection in others.

His belief in himself does not waver. He keenly observes the ways of the world, the ever growing nature, and feels that everything has a message for him. He feels that he is 'deathless', that energy cannot be destroyed, and it permeates nature and our surroundings. He believes that he cannot be moved by any external power. It is a potent statement to implicate the power of an individual in a democratic set up as democracy celebrates the power of the self.

He believes that he is self-efficient, self-made, and it is almost impossible to destroy his latent powers and energy. He does not trouble his soul anymore and sets it free. He has no qualms about the ways he acts; he does things exactly the way he likes.

He is content with his present state of being whether others are aware of this fact or not. More than the outer world, it is the inner world which appeals to him and which actually matters to him. His interaction with his innermost being is of paramount importance than anything else. He loves to be with himself and can do so forever. He jumps at every single opportunity to be with himself. He is not at all disturbed by the thought of death and mocks at the very idea of 'dissolution' as it would never take place. He is aware of the great extent of time and does not suffer from any anxieties or worries.

Check Your Progress

9. What makes him casual towards death and bereft of all worries?
10. What makes him deathless?

2.3.5 *Song of Myself 21*

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.

I chant the chant of dilation or pride,
We have had ducking and deprecating about enough,
I show that size is only development.

Have you outstript the rest? are you the President?
It is a trifle, they will more than arrive there every one, and still pass on.

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

Press close bare-bosom'd night—press close magnetic nourishing night!
Night of south winds—night of the large few stars!
Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!

Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I to you give love!
O unspeakable passionate love.

Explanation

According to Whitman, the body and soul complement each other. They cannot be separated from each other as the bond is very strong. He proclaims that he is a poet of the body and the soul. Just as he receives the pleasures of life, he receives the pain in the same spirit. He celebrates joy and uses pain as an instrument to express himself. He also talks about gender equality as he does not dissociate women from men. He pays tribute to women by addressing them as the creators, the source of life itself. He is open in his outlook and has no inhibitions about feeling proud. He does not believe in cut-throat competition. According to him, there is enough space for everyone. The poet invokes nature in these lines and refers to the earth and sea, powerful winds and the stars. Earth has been described as 'voluptuous' and 'cool-breathed'. It has trees which have woody dreams, tranquil sunsets, snow-clad mountains, moon-lit nights, tidal waves and the shinning sky. The earth is fertile and productive, and he describes himself as her affectionate lover who is ready to embrace her.

The poet further delineates the passionate relationship between himself and the earth, and the very thought of this silent love energizes him.

Check Your Progress

11. Why does the poet consider himself a poet of the body and soul?
12. How does he pay tribute to women?

2.3.6 *Song of Myself 32*

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,

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Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?

Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among them,
Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,
Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on brotherly terms.

A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.
His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him,
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return.

I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.

Explanation

In this section, Whitman moves to the animals who look docile and content; he observes them affectionately. Unlike human beings, they never complain about their present and are not troubled by the traditional concepts of sin and punishment. In many ways, these innocent animals are better than human beings as they do not preach to him. They all are equal and treat the other as the same. They are not ambitious and they are content with their lives. The poet has the ability to see the signs of his own existence in these animals. He loves to be in the lap of nature and her beautiful creations. Then, he steps forward and showers his affection on these innocent animals. They are all loveable and venerable to him.

Eventually, he admires the fascinating beauty of a stallion that reciprocates his tender feelings for him. He highlights the physical characteristics of the horse.

Ultimately, he realizes he can move on without the horse as he himself is capable of going further and finally leaves the horse. To put it in a nutshell, Whitman attacks the orthodox Christian beliefs in this section.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

13. What makes animals content in *Song of Myself*: verse 32?
14. How does the poet attack Christian beliefs?

2.3.7 *Song of Myself 50*

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me.

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes,
I sleep—I sleep long.

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness.

Explanation

In these lines, Whitman refers to his approaching death. Here, sleep is equated with death. The poet experiences death as his body becomes 'cool and calm'. Whitman is not bothered by the 'end'. The thought of death does not disturb him at all. Death is symbolic of eternal peace and enjoyment. He invokes his fellowmen and asks them to listen to his emotional appeal. There is no ultimate death and commotion in the world. Everything is linked; the union of all things results in eternal bliss.

In brief, Whitman is commenting on the metaphysical and is making an association with mysticism in this section of the poem.

2.3.8 *Song of Myself 52*

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

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I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Explanation

In this section, Whitman tries to overwhelm the word by comparing himself to a hawk which can neither be tamed nor controlled. Being energetic and resourceful, he does not want to sit idle. Instead, he wants to get into action. He is invigorated and driven by the urge to show his immense power and strength of character. Though he is longing to go back to his roots—the quintessential grass—one can find him growing underneath the grass once again. He tries to highlight the vitality and the resourcefulness of the grass. He clearly indicates his impending death, which he realizes is inevitable. He urges readers to look for a new Whitman.

In these lines, he refers to the 'uncut hair' imagery. Earlier, he was looking for dead men and women. Now, he himself is lying buried under the grass. He urges readers to look for his roots under the grass which would mark a new beginning.

2.4 INTRODUCTION TO ROBERT FROST

Robert Frost is a well-known name not only in America but in world literature. His poetry is still quoted widely across all genres and all over the world. His immense popularity and the range and depth of his literary achievements make his critics agree that he was one of the greatest modern American poets.

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2.4.1 Personal life

Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco, California to William Prescott Frost Jr., a journalist with political aspirations, and Isabelle Moodie, a teacher and poet of Scottish descent. His father occasionally showed violent behaviour, which developed a lifelong unease in Frost towards violent and destructive impulses.

Robert Frost's personal life was astounded by grief and loss. His father died of tuberculosis in 1885, when Frost was only eleven years old, leaving the family with just eight dollars. Frost's mother died of cancer in 1900. In 1920, Frost had to admit his younger sister Jeanie to a mental hospital, where she died nine years later. Frost's family had a long association with mental illness. Both he and his mother suffered from depression, while his wife Elinor also experienced bouts of depression. His daughter Irma was committed to a mental hospital in 1947.

Elinor and Robert Frost had six children: son Elliot (1896–1904, died of cholera); daughter Lesley Frost Ballantine (1899–1983); son Carol (1902–1940, committed suicide); daughter Irma (1903–1967, admitted to mental hospital in 1947); daughter Marjorie (1905–1934, died as a result of puerperal fever after childbirth); and daughter Elinor Bettina (died just three days after her birth in 1907). Frost's wife, who suffered from heart problems throughout her life, developed breast cancer in 1937 and died of heart failure in 1938. Robert Frost died of a heart attack on 29 January 1963 in Boston. He was survived by his two daughters Lesley and Irma.



Robert Frost

2.4.2 Life and Works of Robert Frost

Frost was introduced to poetry through his mother, and at a very young age, he became acquainted with the Romantic poets as well as New England poets, such as Emerson. His mother also introduced him to organized Christian religion.

After his father's death, the family returned to New England. Frost finished high school (studying classics) from Lawrence, Massachusetts, as the class valedictorian. Three years later, he married his classmate and fellow valedictorian Eleanor White.

Frost studied for a short time at Dartmouth College, taught in schools and later enrolled as a special student at Harvard where he was influenced by American philosopher

and psychologist William James and George Santayana, a philosopher, essayist, poet and novelist. He took courses in English, philosophy and classics. From Harvard, he entered a completely different world.

His grandfather bequeathed him a farm in New Hampshire and Frost, where his wife and his four children endured years of hardship. While he was struggling with depression and thoughts of suicide, Frost was also composing poetry and establishing a close link with nature. In the years 1906–07, he wrote many of the poems that would later appear in North of Boston and Mountain Interval (1916). In 1909, Frost left the farm to teach in New Hampshire. From there, he sold his farm and moved to England in 1912 because he was unable to find publishers for his work.

Within a month of his arrival in England, he was able to publish his poems and North of Boston won praise from American poet and critic Ezra Pound for Frost's work. Within two years, his volumes had appeared in America and he won a number of honours, including election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

2.4.3 Frost's Contribution to American Poetry

Frost returned to New England in 1915 and started teaching in Amherst College two years later. English short-story writer, poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling had already pointed out that Frost's language sounded strange to English readers. Many other critics suggested that Frost's poetry sounded unfamiliar, even to Americans outside New England. Frost found this strangeness of language as an advantage—he realized that his language had the 'freshness of a stranger' and that strangeness in language or metaphor is intrinsic to poetry.

Frost inherited the technique of using the ordinary to suggest something other than itself from a variety of sources: the Bible, classics, the poetry of Wordsworth and New England writers such as Thoreau or Emerson. He admired Emerson's use of simple words and expressions to suggest something that had profound meanings. He merged the use of New England vocabulary and turns of phrase with the classical pastoral tradition and the Romantic tradition of poetry about nature.

While a poet such as Wallace Stevens was drawn to the fine arts or music as a source of influence, Frost was more attracted towards science and philosophy. He felt that poets should try to establish a link between sound, sense and emotion. Metre was considered to be important as well. He was a master in the use of a number of verse forms, such as the blank verse, sonnet, rhymed couplets and rhyming quatrains. For him, drama was also important to make writing exciting and interesting. However, he believed that the effect of poetry should be carefully controlled in order to avoid excesses. He believed that the charm of the poem was in its beauty and in its slow, dignified exploration of reality, a momentary relief from confusion. For him, a poem was an affirmative entity that emanated from belief—the belief in God, in the poet's own self, in art, in culture or in the country.

All his important poems were written before 1930. While his first love was always poetry, he also took time to teach and to recite his poems in public. His longest association was with Amherst College (1917–20, 1923–38, 1949), though he also spent time at Dartmouth, Michigan and Harvard. He was a very popular teacher. He helped establish the famous Bread Loaf School of English in Middlebury College, Vermont.

He won four Pulitzer prizes before the publication of two ambitious works of drama, *A Masque of Reason* (1945) and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947). His last work

was *In the Clearing* (1962). He won many honours, including honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge universities in 1957. He was invited to read a poem at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961, where he recited *The Gift Outright* from memory.

Robert Frost is considered to be the quintessential New England poet. His poems are spare, meditative and have a close affinity with nature, something he shares with the Romantic poet Wordsworth. Often, ordinary natural objects suggest something greater in his poems. He plays around with metre in order to capture the easy rhythms of the speaking voice. His poems flow like a good conversation—smoothly and coherently.

Important works of Frost

Poetry collections

- *A Boy's Will* (David Nutt 1913; Holt, 1915)
- *North of Boston* (David Nutt, 1914; Holt, 1914)
  - o *Mending Wall*
  - o *Birches*
- *Mountain Interval* (Holt, 1916)
  - o *The Road Not Taken*
- *Selected Poems* (Holt, 1923)

Includes poems from first three volumes and the poem *The Runaway*

- *New Hampshire* (Holt, 1923; Grant Richards, 1924)
- *Several Short Poems* (Holt, 1924)
- *Selected Poems* (Holt, 1928)
- *West-Running Brook* (Holt, 1928, 1929)
- *The Lovely Shall Be Choosers, The Poetry Quartos*, printed and illustrated by Paul Johnston (Random House, 1929)
- *Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (Holt, 1930; Longmans, Green, 1930)
- *The Lone Striker* (Knopf, 1933)
- *Selected Poems: Third Edition* (Holt, 1934)
- *Three Poems* (Baker Library, Dartmouth College, 1935)
- *The Gold Hesperidee* (Bibliophile Press, 1935)
- *From Snow to Snow* (Holt, 1936)
- *A Further Range* (Holt, 1936; Cape, 1937)
- *Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (Holt, 1939; Longmans, Green, 1939)
- *A Witness Tree* (Holt, 1942; Cape, 1943)
  - o *The Silken Tent*
- *Come In, and Other Poems* (1943)
- *Steeple Bush* (Holt, 1947)
- *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, 1949 (Holt, 1949; Cape, 1951)
- *Hard Not To Be King* (House of Books, 1951)
- *Aforesaid* (Holt, 1954)
- *A Remembrance Collection of New Poems* (Holt, 1959)
- *You Come Too* (Holt, 1959; Bodley Head, 1964)

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- *In the Clearing* (Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1962)
- *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York, 1969)
- *A Further Range* (published as *Further Range* in 1926, as *New Poems* by Holt, 1936; Cape, 1937)
- *What Fifty Said*
- *Fire And Ice*
- *A Drumlin Woodchuck*

Plays

- *A Way Out: A One Act Play* (Harbor Press, 1929)
- *The Cow's in the Corn: A One Act Irish Play in Rhyme* (Slide Mountain Press, 1929)
- *A Masque of Reason* (Holt, 1945)

A Masque of Mercy (Holt, 1947)

Prose books

- *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963; Cape, 1964)
- *Robert Frost and John Bartlett: The Record of a Friendship* by Margaret Bartlett Anderson (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963)
- *Selected Letters of Robert Frost* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964)
- *Interviews with Robert Frost* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966; Cape, 1967)
- *Family Letters of Robert and Elinor Frost* (State University of New York Press, 1972)
- *Robert Frost and Sidney Cox: Forty Years of Friendship* (University Press of New England, 1981)
- *The Notebooks of Robert Frost* edited by Robert Faggen (Harvard University Press, January 2007)

Omnibus volumes

- *Collected Poems, Prose and Plays* (Richard Poirier, ed.) (Library of America, 1995)

Spoken word

- *Robert Frost Reads His Poetry*, Caedmon Records, 1957

Source: Wikipedia

2.5 *MENDING WALL*: TEXT AND ANALYSIS

Complete Text

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:

I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,

But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.

Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
He is all pine and I am apple-orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down!' I could say 'Elves' to him,

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there,
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

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In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.' 45

Summary

A stone wall separates the speaker's property from that of his neighbour. There are a number of small animals that make holes beneath the wall to go across. In spring, the two neighbours meet to walk the length of the wall and jointly make repairs wherever there is a hole. There is a portion of the wall where there are only trees in the backyard. The speaker sees no reason for the wall to be kept there—there are no cows or other livestock to be contained, just apple and pine trees. He does not believe in walls for the sake of walls. The neighbour resorts to an old adage: 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

The speaker remains unconvinced and mischievously presses the neighbour to look beyond the folly of such reasoning. He pleads that he will never breach the sanctity of the wall and will not cause any harm to anyone across the wall. His neighbour is not swayed. Then the speaker jokes that his apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines. However, the neighbour continues to work silently and simply repeats the adage: 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

Commentary and analysis

The poem opens with the narrator reviewing the wall as he walks along the wall with his neighbour to see the damages to the wall over the years. He laments the hand of nature *(Something there is that doesn't love a wall)*, as it works on the wall and tears down some boulders. He also rues the hunters *(The work of hunters is another thing)* and other unknown animals, who insidiously make holes under the fence.

Here is the first contrast of the poem: between acts of animals and humans, and the acts of nature. However, both seem to be conspiring against neighbours, *The gaps I mean, No one has seen them made or heard them made, But at spring mending-time we find them there.*

This annual wall-mending is almost like a ritual, enacted out of habit rather than need. Both neighbours meet on the prescribed date at the suggestion of the narrator himself (though he appears to be against the entire idea of mending the wall and even questions the existence of the wall between two good neighbours) and work together diligently to find out the cracks, close all gaps and fix all the missing boulders of the wall.

Here is the second contrast of opinion about the relevance and validity of the wall between two good neighbours. The narrator feels like pointing out to his neighbour that *Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.* At the same time, it is the narrator himself who unfailingly fixes up the date of their annual wall-mending, which suggests that the narrator himself somehow feels the need of the wall, or at least wall mending for him is like an 'outdoor game' or a sociable act between two good neighbours.

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The neighbours persist and fix the wall wherever needed. What is remarkable here is the friendliness between the neighbour as they do not fret over the unnecessary work, but take it rather sportingly (*just another kind of outdoor game*), and enjoy working with each other. Despite all this good civility, the narrator does not stop from criticizing his neighbour, cajoling him to do away with the walls (*My apple trees will never get across And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him*).

But despite this verbal duel, both sincerely continue their work of mending the wall and finish it until late in the evening.

The poem uses the wall between the neighbours as a metaphor for the walls that exist in society—between the rich and poor, between religions, societies and nations. The poet questions the need for such walls, but at the same time, justifies the effort in mending and maintaining these walls.

Wall-building is an ancient and enduring enterprise that marks the beginning of human civilization. They have served their purpose since ancient times and continue to do so in modern times. Figuratively, rules and laws are also walls that protect the rights of property of the individual. Justice is the process of wall-mending that defines and protects individual rights and prevents encroachment or infringement of personal rights. The ritual of wall maintenance highlights the dual and complementary nature of human society, as by insisting on wall mending, the neighbour protects his own right to property and, at the same time, guarantees the same to the narrator. This is perhaps the reason why the narrator, while running the entire exercise of wall-mending, still participates wilfully in the act of wall maintenance.

This wall-mending also has an element of community benefit: by participating together in the exercise, the neighbours interact with each other and build mutual trust and goodwill, which would have otherwise been difficult in lonely rural settings. Perhaps the narrator does believe that good fences make good neighbours—for it keeps them happily engaged in their annual ritual of wall-mending.

Check Your Progress

15. In the poem *Mending Wall*, how does the narrator try to convince his neighbour about the futility of the wall?
16. What are the two contrasts that you notice in the poem *Mending Wall*?
17. Do you believe in the adage that 'Good fences make good neighbours'?

2.6 *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN*: TEXT AND ANALYSIS

Complete Text

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood

And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5

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Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Summary

The narrator stands in the woods, considering a divide in the road. He stands there considering the dilemma which road to take, and laments that he cannot take both. The narrator looks far into both roads, trying to visually measure their length and finds them to be nearly the same. He then tries to see which road looks more worn (meaning, which has been used more by travellers before him). Here again, he finds that both roads look equally worn.

What confounds the narrator's choice is the fact that, that morning, both ways were equally overlaid with green, un-trodden leaves, making the choice even more difficult. The narrator finally chooses one, consoling himself that he will take the other some other day, though he clearly knows that one road leads to another and he will continue on his chosen path and never be able to take the other road.

The narrator says that someday in a distant future, he would reminisce about this day that say with a sigh that two roads diverged in the woods and he took the less travelled one—and that made all the difference.

Commentary and analysis

The Road Not Taken is among the most popular, most quoted, most interpreted, misinterpreted and re-interpreted, and yet the most often misunderstood poems in the literary canon. Generations of carefree readers have been fed on the moral of the poem, usually found at the end in stories and prose, in the last three lines of the poem: *Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.*

The very idea of taking a road less travelled is so non-conformist, so romantic that it has almost become a cliché, a rather overused one. It has so often been used in the media for many different stories and references that anybody who has ever come

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across this cliché, and has read this poem, immediately forms the opinion that the narrator took the road less travelled which somehow made a great difference in his life.

However, one may want to read the poem beyond its explicit romanticism. To this purpose, let us read it again with passion or imagination, but with simple and accurate interpretation of words, phrases and expressions.

The first stanza simply states the narrator's dilemma: that he is standing at crossroads in the woods with two divergent roads. The narrator states, *I could not travel both And be one traveller*, suggesting that he realizes the fate of choosing one of the roads. He realizes that by travelling both roads, he cannot remain one traveller (each path will have its bearing on the narrator's life, adding to his experiences, and thereby, making him a different person altogether). Therefore, he stands there contemplating and analysing the possible consequences of taking the first road (*long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth*).

In the second stanza, he looks down the other road with a tinge of hope, as if trying to find a clue that could help him make a better choice (*Then took the other, as just as fair And having perhaps the better claim Because it was grassy and wanted wear*). However, the optimism wanes off soon as the narrator realizes that both roads were equally worn, suggesting that both roads nearly looked the same and perhaps had been travelled equally by the travellers before him (*Though as for that the passing there had worn them really about the same*).

The third stanza again begins with a hope, *And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black*' stating that on that particular day, both the roads were covered with fresh green leaves with no footsteps on them. This is a metaphoric expression that suggests that each day marks a new beginning, and one must start afresh without any overhang of previous experiences. So, ultimately, the narrator makes a choice to leave the first one and take the other one, fully knowing that once he makes that choice, he would never be able to make a comeback; never be able to retrace his steps and go back to the first road (*Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way I doubted if I should ever come back*).

This stanza highlights the quandary that we all face, when we have to take tough decisions in life. Whether these decisions relate to our academics, career, profession or our personal life, there comes a time in everybody's life where we have to take firm decisions. We all know that once the decision is taken, we cannot make a comeback and face the fate of such decisions later in life.

The fourth and last stanza of the poem is the most cryptic and most vehemently debated. The narrator says that sometime in a distant future, he would say it *with a sigh* that *Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.* Most cursory readers believe that the narrator took a bold step and took the road *less traveled by* and that made a great difference to his life.

However, as we have seen in earlier paragraphs, there were no indications that either of the road was *less traveled by;* both were *about the same.*

Here is a great paradox in the words of the narrator. He admits that sometime in a distant future, he would say it *with a sigh*, but a sigh can be both a sign of relief and a sign of remorse. The sigh can also be a sign of guilt—that the narrator will be telling his story in the future with a twist that he took the road less travelled and that it has made all the difference.

The narrator also says that it made all the difference, not really a happy, positive difference. So the popular perception that the narrator took the road less travelled and that made a great difference to his life is a mistaken statement, which we read objectively. All he states is a truism of human life: that he took a decision, a bold and firm decision, fully knowing that he cannot retreat any time in the future. Whether or not the decision is positive or negative is not specified. It is entirely hypothetical and there is really no definite way of knowing what difference any other decision could have made to his life as he did not take that decision.

Finally, perhaps the most quoted expression about the road *the one less traveled by* is at best a leverage that the narrator wants to use sometime in the distant future to justify his decision. In case he gets to his destination (read, success in life) through his chosen path, the narrator can state with a sigh of relief that he took the road less travelled, and make his claim to glory. However, if he fails to reach his destination (read, fails to achieve success in life) through his chosen path, he can (again) state with a sigh of remorse this time that he took the bold decision to take the road less travelled, and survived condemnation.

This ironic twist is also evident in the choice of title of the poem, which is not *The Road Less Traveled* but *The Road Not Taken*. While the narrator is convinced that he would somehow explain his predicament to the future generations, his own mind still delves on *the road not taken*. His mind cannot overlook the possibility of what can be expected at the end of the other path. This is typical of a soul-searching man who cannot but think of the full possibilities of the decisions taken and the subsequent pros and cons.

Check Your Progress

18. Why is the narrator standing at the fork in the road and what is he thinking?
19. What signs does the narrator look for to decide which road to take?
20. How does the title of the poem *The Road Not Taken* add to the irony in the poem?

2.7 *AFTER APPLE-PICKING*: TEXT AND ANALYSIS

Complete Text

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.

But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass

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,

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.

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

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,

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 surely to the cider-apple heap

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

Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Summary

This poem is about a hard day's work in the life of an apple orchard owner. The narrator describes how his ladder is still resting against an apple tree, even though he is finished with a long day of apple-picking. The narrator is tired and drowsy on a winter day and keeps flitting in and out of his reveries and dreams. Even in his dreams, he sees large-

sized apples and other cores related with his act of apple-picking. The narrator appears satisfied with his large harvest of apple and seems to go back to sleep contented. The narrator wonders whether this sleep is like a woodchuck hibernation (during the long period of winter), or is it simply some human sleep (which will last only for a few hours).

Commentary and analysis

The narrator says that his ladder is still standing at the side of the tree, as if pointing towards heavens, and there is still an empty barrel that is yet unfilled with picked apples. He says that he might also have missed one or two apples here or there on the bough. But he is now tired. The intoxicating essence of ripe apples, exhaustion of the day and the general drowsiness of winters is upon the narrator. He says he is dozing off.

The next lines are from his dream. He says that he is still not able to rub off from his eyes the strangeness of what he saw in his dream. He dreamt that he washed a glass pane in water in the trough and put it on the grass. Surprisingly, the glass melted, so the narrator allowed it to fall through and crash into pieces. However, the narrator says, that he was on his way to sleep before it fell.

Time warps such as these are natural when a person is dreaming. At one point, you see that you are doing something, when you realize that this has already happened in the past, or perhaps an event that occurred in the past may be fresh in your memory and you dream of doing it again.

The narrator again seems to know (appears to be in a conscious state, though he is not) what kind of dream is going to follow. He says that large apples are appearing and disappearing, rotating slightly and its reddish-brown skin is very clear and smooth. He seems to be holding one such large apple in his hands. Meanwhile, his hands ache and he is finding it very difficult to balance himself on the ladder while holding such a large apple in his arms.

The narrator hears a lot of noise coming from the cellar as if apples are tumbling down the cellar. The narrator says that all such dreams are occurring because he has done excessive apple-picking and is now exhausted. The paradox presented here is that, while the poet himself was looking forward to such an abundance, he has grown tired of reaping its harvests. The poet takes sensual joy in describing the plenitude of the fruits. The imagery is robust and overtly appealing to the senses.

The apples are clean even though they fall. However, since there is already abundance and the ground is strewn with apples, even the ones that fall do not get soiled. In other words, the apples are still valuable and a source of great pleasure.

The narrator says that he knows what is again going to disturb his sleep, whatever kind of sleep it is. He refers to the woodchuck, saying that if they had not already gone all into hibernation, they would have certainly explained whether it was somewhat their kind of sleep or it was just human sleep.

The reference to the woodchuck adds a mysterious meaning to the end of the poem, and to the entire poem for that matter. The woodchucks go into hibernation in winters and theirs is a very deep sleep, lasting nearly three months. However, since humans do not hibernate, the narrator could possibly be hinting here at death, which is a deep sleep and where no dreams disturb you ever. Also, the narrator seems to be dozing off after a hard day's work, after harvesting the best crop he has probably ever had, and he is contented with it. All these hints could be suggesting that the narrator is satisfied with his life's work, hardships and achievements, and now wants to go into deep sleep. The dream of putting the glass sheet on the grass, and it falling through and crashing into pieces could be another hint, suggesting at the lowering of coffin into the ground and the pane signifying the shattering of life.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

21. Write the summary of the poem *After Apple-Picking* in your own words.
22. Why does the narrator think that all his dreams are of apples only?

ACTIVITY

Read other American poets like Maya Angelou and Ralph Angel and discuss your observations with your colleagues.

DID YOU KNOW

When Walt Whitman was seventeen year old, he turned to teaching. His first job was in a one-room schoolhouse in Long Island. Whitman continued to teach for another five years, when in 1841, he set his sights on journalism. He started a weekly paper called the *Long-Islander*, and later returned to *New York City*, where he continued his newspaper career. In 1846, he became the editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, a prominent newspaper.

2.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- *Song of Myself* is a well-known work of Whitman and was one of the original twelve pieces in the 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Like most of the other poems, it, too, was revised extensively, reaching its final stage in 1881.
- *Song of Myself* is a sprawling combination of biography, sermon and poetic meditation.
- Whitman's grand poem is, in its way, an American epic. Beginning *in medias res*—in the middle of the poet's life—it loosely follows a quest pattern.
- All the poems of Robert Frost seem to have a few common threads: they all are based on rural life and they have close association with nature. His poems are deep and always have some explanations hidden carefully in the beautiful craftsmanship of words. His poems are meditative that allow you to read them, re-read them and then ponder over them.
- There is also some autobiographical content in all the poems of Frost. He talks about the villages and the woods, the dark, winter nights, deep snow and death. However, very often, there is an equal amount of hope, of renewed life, or good deeds, joy and happiness of a pleasurable life which are interwoven in his poems.

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- Overall, Frost's poems call out to the deep emotions inside the reader's mind, cajoling them and challenging them to find the same resonance in his words.

2.9 KEY TERMS

- **Vignettes:** It is a running ornament or design placed before a title page or at the end of a chapter.
- **Plethora:** It means excess or abundance.
- **Sublime:** It refers to something impressive and of very high spiritual or moral worth.
- **Omnigenous:** It refers to something which comprises all kinds/varieties.
- **Quintessential:** It represents the most perfect or typical example of a quality or class.
- **Valedictorian:** It refers to a student with the highest academic rank in a class who delivers the valedictory at graduation.
- **Bequeath:** It means to leave or give (personal property) by will.
- **Foreboding:** It is a sense of impending evil or misfortune.
- **Insidiously:** It means working or spreading harmfully in a subtle or stealthy manner.
- **Duel:** It means a prearranged, formal combat between two persons, usually fought to settle a point of honour (not to be confused with dual; meaning double).
- **Infringement:** It means a violation, as of a law, regulation, or agreement; a breach.
- **Cliché:** It refers to a trite or overused expression or idea.
- **Tinge:** It means to apply a trace of colour to; a slight added element, property, or influence.
- **Quandary:** It refers to a state of uncertainty or perplexity.
- **Predicament:** It is a situation, especially an unpleasant, troublesome one, which is morally perplexing.
- **Woodchuck:** It refers to a common burrowing rodent of northern and eastern North America, having a short-legged, heavy-set body and grizzled brownish fur; also called groundhog or whistle pig

2.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Walt Whitman was born in Long Island in 1819. He published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* on his own in 1855.
2. Whitman's poetry revolved around ideas related to democracy, equality and brotherhood.
3. In these lines, the poet celebrates the self. These lines also reflect Whitman's love for democracy. He also talks about his own origin, his ancestors, the forces of nature and the power of speech that will eventually lead him up the ladder of life.

NOTES

4. Walt Whitman feels that the fact that all of us belong to the same democratic society makes us equal and closer to each other.
5. The poet enjoys the encounter with his soul. He uses the imagery of the 'soulful' kiss which gives him immense pleasure.
6. The poet refers to the soul as his companion. He has complete faith in the soul, which embodies his innermost desires and instincts.
7. According to the poet, death is not the end like everybody would think. It is the beginning. The cycle of death and regeneration is a continual process.
8. The blade of grass, according to Whitman, is the same anywhere, irrespective of where it grows. This symbolizes equality of people and things.
9. The poet is in love with himself and is happy spending maximum time with his own self. He is not worried about death or 'dissolution' because he is sure that it will not come. He feels that the extent of time is really great and is therefore, not bothered about the end.
10. The poet says he is 'deathless' because he believes in himself and is sure that no external power can disturb him. Here, he implies that the strength of a person in a democracy cannot be underestimated. He feels that he is suffused with nature's energy. It is energy that exists in everything around him and cannot be destroyed.
11. Whitman feels that the body and the soul are strongly bonded together. They complement each other and cannot be separated, which is why he is a poet of the body as well as the soul.
12. Whitman pays a tribute to women in general calling them creators of the human life . He holds them responsible for the very origin of life. He does not dissociate them from men.
13. Unlike human beings, the poet feels that the animals are always content because the future does not bother them, they have no complaints against the present and the concepts of sin and punishment do not bother them either. They are all the same, equal and unambitious and treat each other in the same way.
14. Whitman uses the imagery of a beautiful stallion, which arrests his attention but finally he discovers that he is able to move on without the horse. He realizes that he does not really need the horse. He uses this imagery to attack the orthodox Christian beliefs.
15. The speaker sees no reason for the wall to be kept there—there are no cows or other livestock to be contained; just apple and pine trees. He does not believe in walls for the sake of walls. The neighbour resorts to an old adage: 'Good fences make good neighbours.'
16. The first contrast of the poem is between the acts of animals and humans, and the acts of nature. Both seem to be conspiring against the neighbours. The second contrast of opinion about the relevance and validity of the wall between two good neighbours. While the narrator insists on the irrelevance of the wall, he himself fixes the annual day for wall-fixing.
17. Wall-building is an ancient and enduring enterprise that marks the beginning of human civilization. Rules and laws are also walls that protect the rights of property of the individual. Justice is the process of wall-mending that defines and protects individual rights and prevents encroachment or infringement of personal rights.

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Walls are necessary to protect an individual's right to property and, at the same time, guarantee the same to the others.

18. The narrator stands in the woods, considering a fork in the road, and trying to decide which road to take, and laments that he cannot take both. What confounds the narrator's choice is the fact that, that morning, both ways were equally overlaid with green, un-trodden leaves, making the choice even more difficult.
19. The narrator looks far into both roads, trying to visually measure their length and finds them to be nearly the same. He then tries to see which road looks more worn out. Here again he finds that both roads look equally used.
20. The irony in the choice of thetitle of the poem is that it is not *The Road Less Traveled* but *The Road Not Taken*. While the narrator is convinced that he would somehow explain his predicament to the future generations, his own mind is still on 'the road not taken'. His mind is still on what might have lied at the end of the other path. This is a typical reaction of a soul-searching man who continuously weighs his pros and cons, of the decisions taken and those not taken, and their real or probable repercussions.
21. The poem *After Apple-Picking* is about a hard day's work in the life of an apple orchard owner. The narrator is tired and drowsy on a winter day and keeps flitting in and out of his dreams. Even in his dreams, he sees large-sized apples and other cores related with his act of apple-picking. The narrator appears satisfied with his large harvest of apple and seems to go back to sleep contented. The narrator wonders whether this sleep is like hibernation or is it simply some human sleep.
22. The narrator says that all dreams are related to apples because he has done a lot of apple-picking and is now over-tired. He himself desired for such a bumper crop and now he is tired of harvesting it. As he dozed off in the middle of his apple-picking day, he is getting such dreams.

2.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What does Whitman say about the body and soul?
2. Is the poet patriotic? How does he show it?
3. How does Walt Whitman celebrate himself in *Song of Myself 1?*
4. In Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken,* discuss the significance of the road less travelled.
5. Highlight the significance of sleep in Frost's *After Apple-Picking.*

Long-Answer Questions

1. ExplainWhitman's Songs as a celebration of the self and humanity.
2. Highlight the centrality of the soul in Whitman's poetry. Comment on its immutability.
3. What is Whitman's view of democracy? Elucidate.
4. Critically analyse Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken.*

5. Do you think the reference to the woodchuck in the poem *After Apple-Picking* refers to the idea of death? Exemplify.

NOTES

2.12 FURTHER READING

Hacker, L. M. And Helene S Zahler ed.; *The Shaping of American Tradition.* New York, Columbia University Press, 1947.

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Bloom, Harold, ed.; *Modern Critical Views: Robert Frost,* New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

UNIT 3 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, LANGSTON HUGHES AND CLAUDE MCKAY

Structure

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Unit Objectives
3.2 William Carlos Williams: A Brief Biographical Sketch and Poems
  3.2.1 Revelation: Summary and Analysis
  3.2.2 The Widow's Lament in Springtime: Summary and Analysis
  3.2.3 A Negro Woman: Summary and Analysis
3.3 Langston Hughes: A Biographical Note and Poems
  3.3.1 I, Too, Sing America: Summary and Analysis
  3.3.2 The Negro Speaks of Rivers: Summary and Analysis
3.4 Claude McKay: A Biographical Note
  3.4.1 To the White Fiends: Summary and Analysis
3.5 Summary
3.6 Key Terms
3.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.8 Questions and Exercises
3.9 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

American poet William Carlos Williams was closely associated with modernism and imagism. He was also a pediatrician and a general practitioner of medicine, having graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School Of Medicine. However, during his lifetime, he excelled in both these occupations.

His most notable contribution to American literature was his willingness to be a counselor for the young and upcoming poets. Although great poets like Eliot and Pound might have been more appreciated during their lifetime, yet various important poets in the generations that followed were either personally tutored by Williams or accepted Williams as a big influence on their works. He had a particularly significant influence on various American literary movements of the 1950s: the San Francisco Renaissance, poets of the Beat Generation, the Black Mountain School and the New York School. He personally mentored American poet Theodore Roethke. Second generation American modernist poet Charles Olson was also guided by him. American poets Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov were also associated with the Black Mountain School. They also studied under Williams.

Williams had a friendly relationship with Kenneth Rexroth, the founder of the San Francisco Renaissance. One of the lectures which Williams gave at Reed College was formative in inspiring three other significant members of that Renaissance: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Lew Welch. As a mentor, one of Carlos' most dynamic relationships was with fellow New Jerseyite Allen Ginsberg. The latter claimed that Williams effectively 'freed his poetic voice'.

As a matter of fact, several letters of Ginsberg was included by Williams in his poem *Paterson*. He has admitted that the fifth section of this poem was inspired by one of these letters. Williams also wrote the introductions for the books produced by Ginsberg, one of them being the 1956 collection of poetry titled *Howl*. He also extended his support to unfamiliar poets, including Communist American poet Harold Harwell Lewis. Williams strongly believed that Lewis was the poet of the common people. He paid more attention on the interaction of expression and form.

James Mercer Langston Hughes was a well-known American poet, novelist, social activist, columnist and playwright. He was among the pioneers to introduce jazz poetry, the then-new literary art form. Hughes was famous as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that traversed the 1920s. Hughes's signature poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* was first published in 1921 in *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). This poem was later collected in his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926). He published his first novel *Not Without Laughter* in 1930. His first collection of short stories was published in 1934 with *The Ways of White Folks*.

Hughes, along with his contemporaries, criticized the men known as the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance for being excessively obliging and adapting eurocentric values and culture in order to achieve social equality. Hughes' works mostly depicted the 'low-life' and the real lives of the working-class blacks in the lower social-economic sections of America. He strongly criticized the divisions and prejudices based on skin colour within the black community. He quoted: 'My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind.'

He emphasized the theme of 'black is beautiful' as he studied the black human condition in different complexities. Besides poetry, Hughes also wrote short stories, novels, plays, essays, operas and works for children.

Claude McKay was a Jamaican-American writer and poet. Like Hughes, he was also an eminent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He authored four novels comprising *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929), *Banana Bottom* (1933) and a manuscript called *Amiable With Big Teeth: A Novel of the Love Affair Between the Communists and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem* (1941; this work has not been published yet).

He also wrote collections of poetry, a collection of short stories including *Gingertown* (1932), two autobiographical books, titled *A Long Way from Home* (1937) and *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (published posthumously), and a non-fiction, socio-historical treatise entitled *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940). Moreover, *Harlem Shadows*, his 1922 collection of poetries, was published during the Harlem Renaissance, while his *Selected Poems* was published in 1953, after his death.

In his early life, he was attracted to communism strongly. However, he gradually became disillusioned with communism and started writing negatively about it by mid-1930s. McKay became an American citizen in 1940. He was conferred the national poet by the government of Jamaica in 1977.

In this unit, you will be introduced to the life and works of William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, their contributions to American poetry and their personal life events that shaped their poetry.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the poetic impulse of William Carlos Williams
- Explain the prescribed poetry of Langston Hughes
- Paraphrase the meaning of Claude McKay's poem: *The White Fiends*

3.2 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND POEMS

William Carlos Williams was born in 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey, where he received his primary and secondary education till 1897. After this, he went to a school near Geneva and later went to the Lycée Condorcet School in Paris. He joined the Horace Mann High School after returning to New York. He attended the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania in 1902 and completed his graduation from here in 1906.

His first book, *Poems*, was published in 1909. He married Florence Herman in 1912 after returning from Germany. In the following year, his second book of poems, *The Tempers*, was published (1913).



William Carlos Williams

Although Williams prospered in his literary career, his main occupation was as a doctor. His work includes novels, plays, short stories, poems, autobiography, critical essays, translations and different types of correspondence. His friends mostly comprised poets, writers and artists, including the poets Marianne and Moore Wallace Stevens, and the modern painters Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. Williams was also a part of the Imagist movement. However, his views soon started differing from his poetic contemporaries, including T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Later, he travelled all over United States and delivered lectures and poetry readings.

During World War I (1914–1918), Williams supported the avant-garde members including Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Man Ray. In 1915, he was closely associated with 'The Others', a group of New York writers and artists. This group was started by Alfred Kreymborg, an American poet and novelist, and Man Ray, an American modernist artist. It included eminent figures like Wallace Stevens, Walter Conrad Arensberg, Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, among others. Carlos association with this

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group made him an important member of the early modernist movement in America. These engagements further associated Carlos with the Dadaist movement, which was an artistic and literary movement of the European avant-garde in the early twentieth century.

Williams strongly criticized the works of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, particularly for their use of insinuations to foreign languages and classical sources. He preferred to take his themes from what he termed as 'the local'. Williams' *Paterson*, a modernist epic collage of place, gives an explanation of history, people and the quintessence of *Paterson*. In this, he examined the role of the poet in the American society. His poetic method is summarized in his quote 'No ideas but in things', which is from his poem *A Sort of a Song* and in *Paterson*. He believes that poets should focus on the world as it is rather than pondering on traditional poetic forms and unnecessary literary references.

During his lifetime, Carlos did not receive much recognition from Britain as in the United States. In 1963, the poet died at the age of seventy-nine, after suffering from several health problems. He had always protested against the influence of English on American poetry. A few days after his death, a British publisher declared that he would be publishing his poems soon.

Some of the most important works of Williams are as follows:

- *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920)
- *Spring and All* (1923)
- *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962)
- *Paterson* (1963)
- *Imaginations* (1970)

In his book of poetry, *Spring and All*, the poem *The Red Wheelbarrow* is the most anthologized work, which is considered as an example of the principles and styles followed by the Imagist movement. However, by the time this poem was published, Carlos had rejected the Imagist movement and became strongly associated with the American Modernist movement in literature. He perceived his project of poetry is completely American. He made every possible effort to renovate language through the use of creative idioms, which developed out of the social and cultural heterogeneity of America. Nevertheless, he also tried his best to do away with the worn-out language of the British and European culture.

Williams also attempted to create a completely new form of American poetry wherein the subject matter focused on the day-to-day events in lives of the common masses. Carlos did not use the traditional metre in most of his poems. One of his unique creations was his collection of poems in his book *Journey to Love*, which he dedicated to his wife. The poem *Shadows* in this collection has the following famous lines:

Shadows cast by the street light
under the stars,
the head is tilted back,
the long shadow of the legs
presumes a world taken for granted
on which the cricket trills

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We can see that the pauses in this poem attempt to find a natural break spoken in the American idiom. This also reflects the rhythms available with 'jazz sounds that also touch upon Sapphic harmony'. Carlos also experimented with different types of lines, which enabled him to finally discover the 'stepped triadic line', which means a long line divided into three segments. This form is evident in his work in *Paterson* and in poems *To Elsie* and the *Ivy Crown.* Williams' another objective was to represent the truly American rhythm, as opposed to the European tradition, which is present in commonplace American language, although unnoticed. He also worked with modifications on free-form styles, which is evident in his famous poem *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*. This poem is a distinguished example of the 'triadic line'.

American literary critic Christopher Benfey commented the thematic objective of Williams' poetry. He said: 'Early and late, Williams held the conviction that poetry was in his friend Kenneth Burke's phrase, "equipment for living", a necessary guide amid the bewilderments of life. The American ground was wild and new, a place where a blooming foreigner needed all the help he could get. Poems were as essential to a full life as physical health or the love of men and women.'

According to modern liberals, Carlos was associated with liberal democratic issues. However, his publications in more politically radical journals show that his inclination was more towards the left than the world 'liberal' refers to. Carlos believed himself to be a socialist and an opponent of capitalism. He published another poem *The Yachts* in 1935, which indicated 'the rich elite as parasites and the masses as striving for revolution'. In another book of poetry, *The Wedge*, published in 1944, he asserts that socialism is an unavoidable development of the future and as a requisite for the correct proliferation of true art. Another publication *The Pink Church* (1949) discussed the human body, which was, however, mistaken to be highly pro-communist.

In 1952–53, Carlos lost his consultantship with the library of Congress due to the anti-communist movement. As a result of this incident, he was affected with clinical depression.

Important works of William Carlos Williams

Poetry collections

- *Poems* (1909)
- *The Tempers* (1913)
- *Al Que Quiere!* (1917)
- *Sour Grapes* (1921)
- *Spring and All* (1923)
- *Go Go* (1923)
- *The Cod Head* (1932)
- *Collected Poems, 1921–1931* (1934)
- *An Early Martyr and Other Poems* (1935)
- *Adam & Eve & The City* (1936)
- *The Complete Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, 1906–1938* (1938)
- *The Broken Span* (1941)
- *The Wedge* (1944)
- *Paterson* Book I (1946); Book II (1948); Book III (1949); Book IV (1951); Book V (1958)
- *Clouds, Aigeltinger, Russia* (1948)
- *The Collected Later Poems* (1950; rev. ed.1963)
- *Collected Earlier Poems* (1951; rev. ed., 1966)

- *The Desert Music and Other Poems* (1954)
- *Journey to Love* (1955)
- *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962)
- *Paterson* (Books I–V in one volume, (1963)
- *Imaginations* (1970)
- *Collected Poems: Volume 1, 1909–1939* (1988)
- *Collected Poems: Volume 2, 1939–1962* (1989)
- *Early Poems* (1997)
- *By Word of Mouth: Poems from the Spanish, 1916–1959* New Directions Publishing (September 2011)

Prose books

- *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920) — Prose-poem improvisations
- *The Great American Novel* (1923) — A novel
- *Spring and All* (1923) — A hybrid of prose and verse
- *In the American Grain* (1925), 1967, repr. New Directions 2004 — Prose on historical figures and events
- *A Voyage to Pagany* (1928) — An autobiographical travelogue in the form of a novel
- *Novelette and Other Prose* (1932)
- *The Knife of the Times, and Other Stories* (1932)
- *White Mule* (1937) — A novel
- *Life along the Passaic River* (1938) — Short stories
- *In the Money* (1940) — Sequel to *White Mule*
- *Make Light of It: Collected Stories* (1950)
- *Autobiography* (1951) W. W. Norton & Co. (1 February 1967)
- *The Build-Up* (1952) — Completes the Stecher trilogy begun with *White Mule*
- *Selected Essays* (1954)
- *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams* (1957)
- *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet* (1958)
- *Yes, Mrs. Williams: A Personal Record of My Mother* (1959)
- *The Farmers' Daughters: Collected Stories* (1961)
- *Imaginations* (1970) — A collection of five previously published early works
- *The Embodiment of Knowledge* (1974) - Philosophical and critical notes and essays
- *Interviews With William Carlos Williams: Speaking Straight Ahead* (1976)
- *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists* (1978)
- *Pound/Williams: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams* (1996)
- *The Collected Stories of William Carlos Williams* (1996)
- *The Letters of Denise Levertov and William Carlos Williams* (1998)
- *William Carlos Williams and Charles Tomlinson: A Transatlantic Connection* (1998)
- *The Humane Particulars: The Collected Letters of William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke* (2004)

Drama

- *Many Loves and Other Plays: The Collected Plays of William Carlos Williams* (1962)

Source: Wikipedia.

3.2.1 *Revelation:* Summary and Analysis

Text

I awoke happy, the house
Was strange, voices
Were across a gap
Through which a girl
Came and paused,
Reaching out to me—

Then I remembered
What I had dreamed—
A girl
One whom I knew well
Leaned on the door of my car
And stroked my hand—
I shall pass her on the street
We shall say trivial things
To each other
But I shall never cease
To search her eyes
For that quiet look—

Summary

In the *Revelation*, Carlos established himself as the best line-breaker of his time. It meant that he had a highly polished and sensitive sense for judging which word should end a line and how the syntax should turn against the flow of lines. This skill shapes free verse and gives it the 'organic form'. This poem can be characterized as one of the poems whereby Williams is able to fix the atmosphere of a moment. The poem starts with the narrator awakening from sleep. He is still nurturing the memories of a dream. The form of the poem clearly substantiates the poet's belief that new verse structures and rhythms are needed to embody the individual experience and specifically of a 'moment'. It is a sort of verse vignette, a kind of piece which Hemmingway wrote in prose as inter-chapters in his work *In Our Time*. The lines and sentences are in the staccato form. It also reminds us of the medieval dream poem, very much in vogue during the times of Geoffrey Chaucer, the greatest English poet of the Middle Age. Williams himself said: 'The poem being an object...it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day.' In the present case, the definition of the poem appears to hold good. In case of Williams, verse does not follow the preconceived rules.

At the same time, it is not, in the real sense of the word, to be 'free' either. In fact, it is to obey, in its language and rhythm, the exigencies of the particular occasion. Particularly in this poem, it is brief but the similes are unified; it is like all of reality melts together in those sort of moments.

Commentary and analysis

Words are often futile to feelings; so much can be behind them that very often we cannot fathom the reality that lies beneath strong emotions. The poem persuades us to

go back to a time when our focus was narrowed on just one person. It is being thought that we belong to an age where this reference will make sense. A reader can only find the basic rhythm by taking note of the poet's deliberate notation of syllable count, poetic feel and accent, as it does in the poem, *Revelation*.

If we analyse the poem line by line, we can observe certain basics hidden in the meditative pause in the middle, and at the end of the first line, the delicate, monosyllabic tread of the second, and the echoing effect of the word 'voices'. All these help to capture the sense of mystery and lost bearings, which majority of us experience when drowsy. In lines 3 and 4, the convoluted syntax, a sort of clumsy rhythm represents the narrator's struggling attempts to remember his 'revelation'—the girl just dreamed about. She still appears to be present in the room when he wakes up. In lies 5 and 6, the 'revelation' returns to the narrator for a moment. As it takes place, the lines assume a kind of stillness or breathless wonder and are left unfinished. It is very much like an unconsummated desire. The lines 7 to 12 possess the broad memory of the dream, which comes back just as a memory now. It is not a moment of transcendent vision. In line 9, the pause which makes us linger over the word 'girl' is intentionally used to enable us to discover in it an excitement and sense of possibility which it does not generally have. As a poet, Carlos tried to revitalize simple words like this one, and hence, avoided what Wordsworth had disparagingly termed as 'poetic diction'.

In lines 11 and 12, the stress on 'leaned' and 'stroked' recaptures the girl's movement. Further, the reference to 'my car' gives an indication about how far this dream is from the conventional poetic dream, and how close it is to the dream of the common man. In lines 13 to 18, the poet comes back to the waking world. Nonetheless, he does it with the intention of finding in it the strange beauty of his dream. So the poem turns out to be at once an affirmation as well as demonstration of the belief that only in ordinary, everyday kind of experience can the 'absolutes' be explored. As Williams himself said, 'This is the poet's business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal.' Coming from a practicing doctor, we understand what force this formulation possesses in the context of Williams's own poetry.

In the monotonous rhythm of lines 13 and 14, 'other' prepares us for the clinching affirmation of the last three lines. It is characteristic of Williams to cling (as he does in lines 16 to 18) to the specific. The larger, universal meaning of the poem never gets separated from the specific moment. It leaves off on a note of expectancy, with the poem, grammatically speaking, still unfinished. The poet's objective was to capture the movement of things, as well as their individuality. We can say that 'living' rather than 'life' was his absolute. That is why Williams always attempted to impart to his work a sense of possibility, to leave it open as though it could continue to change like the world it imitated. Here again, Williams's poem comes out to be a verse counterpart of Hemingway's open-ended short stories, which the publishers, to begin with, always found 'unfinished' and asked for the 'rest'.

3.2.2 *The Widow's Lament in Springtime:* Summary and Analysis

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.

Summary

The poem, *The Widow's Lament in Springtime* by William Carlos Williams, describes the misery of a woman who has been widowed.

The poet has successfully blended nature's beauty with the gloom that pervades human life. The poet is greatly inspired by nature. He attempts to establish a connection between the widow's grief and the beauty of nature. Even while he talks of a sad incident, he chooses to associate it with the best season of the year, that is, spring.

The woman cannot help comparing the spring season of the year that has gone by with the spring season of the present year. The two are so different. Last year, she had enjoyed the season with her husband who was alive. This year, however, the same elements of nature that appeared beautiful last year, take on a totally different meaning.

The spring season is different from other seasons. It is associated with good things. Spring is associated with warmth that is essential for life to go on easily. It is associated with greenery, colour and fruits which are symbols of life, joy and fertility. It is considered a season of rebirth; a season when diseases are at a minimum.

The poet, however, has given a totally different meaning to this season of rebirth. Instead of linking it to joy, hope and positivity, he chooses to associate it with the grief that has taken hold of the woman. He associates the season with the loneliness, sorrow, frustration, negativity, pessimism and a sense of vacuum or emptiness that has engulfed the woman. He feels that the colours of spring cannot diminish the sorrow in her heart which is stronger than all the sweetness that the season is associated with.

Commentary and analysis

Through the poem *The Widow's Lament in Springtime*, William Carlos William uses twenty-eight lines of free verse to express the sadness that dwells in the heart of a woman who has lost her husband.

The sight of the spring flowers and the growing plants around her reminds her of the emptiness in her life that has come about due to the death of her husband. This pastoral elegy uses the images of nature to draw our attention to the sorrow experienced by a person who loses a loved one to death.

The poem revolves around the central character of a woman who finds herself overwhelmed with sorrow due to her husband's death. She is unable to come to terms with the loss. The association of all the beautiful things of spring with death makes the readers forget the beauty of the season. Instead, the readers are forced to focus on the woman's loss, on death and heartache. The widow herself is unable to appreciate the beauty of the season. She does not notice the beauty around her. She can only think about what she has lost. Everything around her makes her grieve for her dead companion.

The imagery created by the poet is rather vivid. He describes the colours of spring, the flowers, the cherry trees and the green bushes. The readers are able to visualize the beauty of the season in lines 11–14.

The effect of the poem increases manifold just because it is set against the backdrop of the spring season. Spring brings to the mind images of flowers in full bloom, warm weather, joy, and of course rebirth. However, in stark contrast, the woman who has lost her husband associates this beautiful season with sorrow. However, she does not deny that the season had brought her pleasure in the past as is clear by lines 15–19.

The power of the poem cannot be denied. The poet manages to allude to the readers' experience of sorrow and not the widow's. She merely reflects the loss that most readers can understand but only relate to in shadow.

The widow is unable to confront the beauty of the spring season because it only gives her pain. She finds herself thinking about the absence of her husband. This confrontation culminates in the experience of the overwhelming whiteness of the blossoming trees. The blossoms are so white that the whiteness makes one want to merge with it and lose oneself in it.

According to Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist and author James E. Breslin, 'Crowds are white, the sea is dark: immersion in either gives relief, a union with One, but halts the cyclic process of renewal.' The world is way beyond us for its structure to affect our souls. A silence finally sets in which, if represented materially, is like a cold wall that cannot be destroyed; a wall that goes into the infinity. Therefore, white affects human psyche as absolute silence. White is like a pause that is capable of bringing about a temporary break in what is otherwise melodious music. It conveys a sense of nothingness.

The protagonist of the poem is not the poet but the widow. Her soliloquy familiarizes the readers with what is going on in her mind. The conflict between the bright colours of spring and the drabness of her life is quite strongly portrayed albeit overshadowed by the flaming 'cold fire'. The enclosure of this very 'cold fire' foreshadows the 'white' conclusion. A conclusion that is full of whiteness, emotional as well as physical.

The protagonist (widow) attempts to express herself through short, restricted sentences. However, her emotions appear to burst through, not once or twice but thrice.

It first breaks through in the initial metaphor, then again with more force in the middle of the poem and finally through a surge of feeling in the concluding sentence.

The usage of simple vocabulary only makes the piece more poignant. It shows how distraught and inarticulate the widow is. The simple 'Thirty five years/ I lived with my husband', is quite a stark statement and is no doubt a very genuine one that comes straight from the heart.

The use of 'formerly' and 'before' in contrast with 'this year' and 'today' drives home the point that the widow's loss is not a very old one. It is quite recent.

The poem is very complex, in terms of structure. The poet has successfully played with both emotional as well as descriptive statements. The two are juxtaposed and serve as figurative expression. Following the first metaphor, personal narrative becomes more prominent than factual description. The climax is undoubtedly reached when the white flowers are associated with the wish to die. This is the final result of sorrow.

3.2.3 *A Negro Woman:* Summary and Analysis

Text

carrying a bunch of marigolds
wrapped
in an old newspaper:
She carries them upright,
bareheaded,
the bulk
of her thighs
causing her to waddle
as she walks
looking into
the store window which she passes
on her way.
What is she
but an ambassador
from another world
a world of pretty marigolds
of two shades
which she announces
not knowing what she does

other
than walk the streets
holding the flowers upright
as a torch
so early in the morning.

Summary

Carlos Williams' poem *A Negro Woman* portrays a black woman carrying flowers from one place to another early in the morning. She represents various good qualities, like strength (represented by the manner of her walking), care and love (symbolized by the way she takes care of the marigolds), and power (indicated by Williams' use of the term 'ambassador'). Holding the flowers upright as a torch appears to compare her status to the Statue of Liberty, symbolizing freedom. The poet is trying to prove that this woman's ability to simply carry flowers from one place to another makes her possess various other good qualities. When Carlos writes that she is looking at the store window, it may mean that she wants to be able to go inside, even though segregation on the basis of race was a basic issue during that time. The poet wants the readers to get into her psyche and have an inclination about her urge to go into the store, or even getting a job there. It is very hard to find out which of these she is wanting more. However, she still shows her pride and strength once she passes the store. It gives her even more power. The readers can visualize that the way this poem is written, it represents the manner of her walking, side to side waddling with the bulk of her thighs. This sort of swaying motion appears to be evident in this poem.

Commentary and analysis

There was a time when people brought (actually bought) from Africa and kept as slaves for domestic, industrial or agricultural work were derogatorily termed 'niggers'. A more formal and racial expression was 'Negroes'. However, there was an assertion of human and civil rights during the twentieth century. Consequently, these people came to be termed as 'black Americans', but were still kept as a separate community of the 'others', and not accepted as equal to the 'more equal' white Americans. Presently, they have secured more rights and maintain their self-respect as 'Afro-Americans'. So we can see that the terminology has been changing with more and more acceptance of these people as a part of the mainstream American society. Nonetheless, socially and psychologically, the distance still persists between the two communities, although officially there is no 'discrimination' against the people of African origin. This poem belongs to the early decades of the twentieth century. At that time, these people were called 'Negroes'. It is interesting to observe how Williams, as a white American poet, views a black woman.

It is ironical that Carlos' poetical theory to concentrate on the object as a specific reality in time and space as well as his limitations as a white American to possess any interest in the personal life of a Negro woman stops him from going beyond the mere physical description of the woman. As we can see, the woman described in the poem is not different from a non-living object—a tree or a stone. Still certain items or gestures in the description give a clue to the white man's stereotype attitude to the Negro woman. For instance, consider the lines 'the bulk/ of her thighs/ causing her to waddle/ as she walks'. Here, the characteristic image of the Negro woman, her excessive fat in comparison to the white woman's slimness, surfaces in the poem which is common in the white American literature. A certain sense of superiority is implied here by the poet about the white artist or man who concentrates on nothing else but the thighs of the Negro woman. What about her face, eyes, her emotions and sentiments? In the modern-day criticism in which all types of deconstructive stances are being taken, the poet ends up ignoring the 'other', or the life and society in general. It reveals or betrays the artist's racial, cultural and gender biases. Here, it is racial.

Also important in Williams's description of the Negro woman is the glance the woman throws in the lines next to the ones mentioned above: 'looking into/ the store window which she passes/ on her way.' Here, the Negro woman's 'looking into the store window' expresses a good deal about her social and cultural deprivations. She is not among the privileged ones who can just walk into the store and buy whatever they like. She is among those unprivileged who can only 'look into the stores' from outside, for they are not rich enough to afford buying anything from the 'store', which in itself is a symbol of a class. Nor is she, perhaps, as a Negro woman entitled to enter such stores where only the Whites do shopping. The 'look' here is a hungry look, a metaphor for deprivation. She does not belong to the world of stores; she is an outsider, racially, economically, socially and culturally. The binary of 'we' and 'they' is operational here. The poet, of course, being a part of the privileged community would not have much concern about the inequality and injustice implied in the power structure. Or even if he does, the poem refuses to reveal any indication to that effect.

In fact, the woman's 'otherness', and the poet's smugness come out all the more clearly and directly in the subsequent lines. Here, the associations of the Negro woman with the 'other' world as its ambassador, the world of flowers, seem positive, not negative. The world of nature and fragrance, as against the world of stores, does give the woman a privilege of a different sort, a nature's privilege. However, we can see how the emphasis is on the other world as such, not so much on the woman representing it. Her link with this world is no more than that of a flower vase or a cart carrying fruits or flowers. The comparison of the flowers held in her hand to a torch may suggest her being a torch-bearer for the change that would flow from the other world. Here, we as readers face the difficulty of knowing what precisely the poet is trying to convey through these metaphors. The difficulty arises from Williams's philosophy of poetry which refuses to go beyond the word 'painting'. Some subtle suggestions that might slip from the concrete description, too, are not very eloquent. We have to rest content with talking about the various possibilities that seem to be there in these suggestions. It is owing to this rock-like nature of Williams' poem that he is considered a poet of mute pictures, not a poet of ideas. Whatever, we might work out in the name of interpretation of a poem, it comes out more of a superimposition than deciding of the mute picture. The pictures he draws are so solid that they refuse to yield to any 'solution' we choose to dissolve the solid in.

Check Your Progress

1. How was William Carlos William's writing different from other American poets?
2. Write a short note on *The Widow's Lament in Springtime*.
3. What is the central theme of the poem *A Negro Woman*?

NOTES

3.3 LANGSTON HUGHES: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE AND POEMS

The Harlem Renaissance was a black cultural movement that was prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s. It was also called the 'New Negro Movement'. Though the movement was initially confined to the Harlem neighbourhood in New York, many black writers from the Caribbean and African colonies were also subsequently influenced by it.

James Langston Hughes was amongst the greatest poets of the Renaissance. At a time when segregation was widespread and the black community was still considered a second rate, he was one who was unabashedly proud of his colour and his culture, a trait which is reflected in a majority of his poems. In this unit, we will be taking a brief look at the poet as one of the most significant African-American figures in literature. We will also be analysing eleven of his best and most influential works of poetry.

Brief biographical sketch of James Langston Hughes

James Langston Hughes was born on 1 February 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His parents separated when he was still a small child, and his father moved across the border to Mexico. He lived with his grandmother till he was thirteen. Later, he moved to Lincoln, Illinois, to live with his mother and his stepfather. Their family was to finally settle down in Cleveland, Ohio. It was in Lincoln, Illinois, that James Langston Hughes started writing poetry. After graduation, he lived in Mexico for a year and he spend another year at Columbia University. In this period, Langston Hughes held odd jobs, such as a cook and a busboy, among others, and later travelled to Europe and Africa plying his trade in the seas. He moved to Washington, DC in November 1924. His first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926. In 1929, he finished his college education at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania.



Langston Hughes

Hughes was influenced by African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, American writer Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman. He is particularly famous for his perceptive, effervescent portrayals of the lives of black people in America. Though he is remembered as a poet, he was not a one-trick pony, and successfully dabbled in short stories and plays. He was deep into jazz music and that can be clearly felt in some of his works, most notably in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Langston Hughes' contribution was significant in shaping the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Unlike other prominent black poets of that period, Hughes wrote about everything affecting blacks in America. He did not hold back from penning down his own experiences. His stories and poems reflect black culture, including their suffering, their love of music, laughter, etc.

Langston Hughes suffered from prostate cancer. He died on 22 May 1967, in New York. Subsequently, his residence at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem, New York City, has been renamed 'Langston Hughes Place'.

Apart from poetry, Hughes wrote eleven plays and several other works of prose, including the popular 'Simple' books—*Simple Speaks His Mind*, *Simple Stakes a Claim*, *Simple Takes a Wife* and *Simple's Uncle Sam*. His autobiography, *The Big Sea*, is also a much acclaimed work.

Important works of Langston Hughes

Poetry collections

- *The Weary Blues*, Knopf, 1926
- *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, Knopf, 1927
- *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations*, 1931
- *Dear Lovely Death*, 1931
- *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, Knopf, 1932
- *Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play*, Golden Stair Press, New York, 1932
- *Let America Be America Again*, 1938
- *Shakespeare in Harlem*, Knopf, 1942
- *Freedom's Plow*, 1943
- *Fields of Wonder*, Knopf, 1947
- *One-Way Ticket*, 1949
- *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Holt, 1951
- *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 1958
- *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*, Hill & Wang, 1961
- *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times*, 1967
- *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Knopf, 1994

Novels and short story collections

- *Not Without Laughter*, Knopf, 1930
- *The Ways of White Folks*, Knopf, 1934
- *Simple Speaks His Mind*, 1950
- *Laughing to Keep from Crying*, Holt, 1952
- *Simple Takes a Wife*, 1953
- *Sweet Flypaper of Life*, photographs by Roy DeCarava, 1955
- *Tambourines to Glory*, 1958
- *The Best of Simple*, 1961
- *Simple's Uncle Sam*, 1965

NOTES

- *Something in Common and Other Stories*, Hill & Wang, 1963
- *Short Stories of Langston Hughes*, Hill & Wang, 1996

Non-fiction books

- *The Big Sea*, New York: Knopf, 1940
- *Famous American Negroes*,1954
- *I Wonder as I Wander*, New York: Rinehart & Co., 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
- *Tambourines to glory*, 1956
- *Simply Heavenly*, 1957
- *Black Nativity*, 1961
- *Five Plays by Langston Hughes*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 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
- *Black Misery*, illustrated by Arouni, 1969, reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1994

Source: Wikipedia

3.3.1 *I, Too, Sing America:* Summary and Analysis

Text

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.
Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
'Eat in the kitchen,'
Then.
Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.

Summary

In *I, Too, Sing America,* the speaker starts by claiming that he too 'sing(s) America'; in other words, he too sings the national anthem of the country just like any other citizen. The words 'the darker brother' (line two), refers to the colour of his skin. He later makes reference to how he is ordered to 'to eat in the kitchen/ when company comes' (lines three and four), clearly indicating that he is a black slave working for a white master. The oppression, however, does not seem to make him weak; in fact, it makes him laugh.

Then the speaker dreams of a future where he is no longer ordered to go to the kitchen, and where he would be on equal terms with the rest. They (possibly referring to the white majority) will eventually see how beautiful he is and be ashamed of what they had done to him in the past. The poet concludes the poem by asserting that he is just as American as everyone else.

Commentary and analysis

At the time of writing *I, Too, Sing America* (1932), African Americans were not accepted as being equal to the white populace. The oppression in fact gained embarrassing proportions: blacks were killed violently and, in many places, not allowed to use the same facility as the whites. The division between whites and blacks were clear and as wide as ever before. In essence, America was then still a racially discriminatory society that had racist laws.

Langston Hughes took the medium of poetry to speak against these ills, as is evident in *I, Too, Sing America.* The first line of the poem clearly indicates one thing—the servant (speaker of the poem) may not be white but he sings the National Anthem in the same way as the white folks do. Thus, he is an American.

The poem shows how the servant is blatantly disrespected and how he is sent away every time visitors come to the house. He is ordered to eat in the kitchen as he does not belong to the same class as the visitors or the owner. However, this treatment does not seem to bother the speaker too much; in fact, he finds humour in it, as evidenced by line five: 'But I laugh'.

Also, while he is banished to the kitchen, he does not sulk, but eats well. In fact, the isolation serves him well, and he gains strength, as evidenced by line seven: 'And grow strong'. This line proves that while he is under the yoke of slavery, his spirit and conviction will not die.

The following lines are the most stirring lines of the poem and show the hope and strength of the black slave who refuses to quit:

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
'Eat in the kitchen,'
Then.

These lines show the courage of the slave. His body may be under slavery but his self-esteem cannot be conquered. This strong mind gives makes him something of a rebel.

Moreover, the slave feels that, one day, they (here, he is possibly referring to the white Americans) will recognize the beauty of the black American, and will be ashamed of what they have put him through in the past.

The message of the poem is crystal clear— blacks deserve the same freedom and equality as whites. The last line, 'I, too, am America', best sums up this belief.

3.3.2 *The Negro Speaks of Rivers:* Summary and Analysis

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 bathe 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.

Summary

The Negro Speaks of Rivers is in so many ways Langston Hughes' signature poem. In this poem, he highlights the African American's historical journey to America. Dedicated to American sociologist and civil rights activist, W. E. B. Du Bois, the poet uses the river to symbolize the source of life. *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* traces the movement of African Americans from the Euphrates and Nile rivers in Africa to the Mississippi river in the United States.

Commentary and analysis

Hughes subtly condemns slavery and racism through the refrain: 'My soul has grown deep like the rivers'. The first appearance of this line in the poem (line four) is preceded by the speaker's declaration that he has seen rivers 'ancient as the world and older than the flow of/ human blood in human veins' (lines two and three). The second and the last time the line appears in the poem (line thirteen) takes place immediately after the poet refers to Mississippi, New Orleans and Abraham Lincoln. This time, the poet suggests that he is not the same person who 'bathed in the Euphrates' and 'built [his] hut near the Congo' but he is worse off now. Today, he is a black man who has had his share of slavery and pain and carries the scars of those experiences with him. Of course, when he talks about himself, he is referring to the entire black race in America.

The poem is something of a historical account of where the black Americans came from, and it shows them to possess power and ability. *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* touches upon various places and times where the Negroes have established themselves. Here, Hughes manages to make a strong point. He establishes the black race in the same footing as the Caucasian race, especially with regard to history.

The poet has also successfully uses the metaphor of the river to put his point across. Historically, it well known that civilizations have been built near rivers, and many communities even today are tied historically and sentimentally to rivers. Thus, by joining rivers and the Negro race and highlighting their respective contributions to the development of history, Hughes points out the importance of his community to the world.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers as such highlights the equality of the Negro race with respect to other races and how it has contributed to history. The final line 'My soul has grown deep like the rivers' is perhaps the most powerful in the poem. Open to many interpretations, the most obvious one is that the poet is trying to point out how his race, over time, has managed to fashion itself a place in history, the same way rivers, over millions of years, have helped form soil, rocks and mountains.

Indeed, the poet in *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* successfully tells of how Negroes over generations have shown that they are not inferior to any other race and have a lot more to offer still.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. What is the dream of the speaker in the poem *I, too, Sing America*?
5. What does the river symbolize in *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*?

3.4 CLAUDE MCKAY: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Claude McKay played a key role during Harlem Renaissance which was a literary movement of the 1920s. His poetry touches a variety of subjects such as vernacular verse celebrating peasant life in Jamaica to fairly militant poems challenging white authority

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in America; from generally straightforward tales of black life in both Jamaica and America to more philosophically ambitious fiction addressing instinctual and intellectual duality. This, according to McKay, was central to the black individual's efforts to cope in a racist society. Visible across all his writing is the disdain he has towards racism and bigotry.

Professor emeritus of African and African-American Studies Arthur D. Drayton has said in his essay, *Claude McKay's Human Pity*, 'McKay does not seek to hide his bitterness. But having preserved his vision as poet and his status as a human being, he can transcend bitterness. In seeing . . . the significance of the Negro for mankind as a whole, he is at once protesting as a Negro and uttering a cry for the race of mankind as a member of that race. His human pity was the foundation that made all this possible.'



Claude McKay

Claude McKay, christened as Festus Claudius McKay, was born in 1889 is Sunny Ville, Jamaica. He was born to peasant farmers who infused in him a huge sense of his African heritage as well as racial pride. English poetry became his literary interests early in life. Guided and supported by an English neighbour (Walter Jekyll) and his own brother (school teacher Uriah Theophilus McKay), McKay made a study of the British masters, such as Alexander Pope and John Milton. He even studied the Romantics and philosophers from Europe, like Arthur Schopenhauer. At that time, Jekyll was performing the task of translating the works of Arthur Schopenhauer into English from German. Jekyll gave McKay the advice to pen verses in the Jamaican dialect and not mimic the English poets.

When he was seventeen, McKay left Sunny Ville for Brown's Town to become a woodworker apprentice. After a brief stay there, he headed to Kingston to become a constable. McKay both encountered and experienced rampant racism in Kingston. This was possibly his first experience with racism. Mostly blacks lived in Sunny Ville, while in Kingston, the population was mostly of whites, and blacks here were looked down upon as being inferior and fit only for menial tasks. The city disgusted McKay because of its bigotry. He was back in Sunny Ville in less than one year.

Even when away for home on his apprenticeship and constable's job, McKay did not stop his poetry writing. On his return to Sunny Ville, with encouragement from Jekyll, he had his verses published in 1912 in London. It came out as a collection titled *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*. The two collections display totally opposing

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aspects of life of blacks in Jamaica. In the volume *Songs of Jamaica*, a picture of peasant life is displayed, which is near celebratory, and the poems it contains touch upon subjects like McKay's mother's peaceful demise and the ties that the black people have with the Jamaican land. In the volume *Constab Ballads,* there is a bleak representation of the plight faced by the Jamaican blacks and many of its poems openly criticize the life in urban Kingston.

Scholar of African-American literature and a professor of English at Columbia University Robert Bone in *The Negro Novel in America* has made note of the reverse sentiments seen in the two volumes. He also asserts that both volumes have a share sense of directness and also a candour that is much refreshing. He has written: 'These first two volumes are already marked by a sharpness of vision, an inborn realism, and a freshness which provides a pleasing contrast with the conventionality which, at this time, prevails among the black poets of the United States.'

McKay got both a stipend and an award for the collection *Songs of Jamaica* given by the Jamaican Institute of Arts and Sciences. He used this money to go to America. He landed in South Carolina in 1912. From there, he headed to Alabama where he joined the Tuskegee Institute and spent about two months studying there. Then he took a transfer to Kansas State College. McKay left for New York City in 1914 where he took up menial jobs. New York City, too, was a city rampant with racism and McKay did not escape it, and he was compelled by that racism to carry on with his poetry writing.

McKay adopted the name Eli Edwards to publish two poems in 1917. These were published in the periodical *Seven Arts.* Literary critic Frank Hattis discovered the verses and then printed some of McKay's other poetry in the publication *Pearson's Magazine.* One of the famous poems of McKay's that belongs to this time is *To the White Fiends*, in which the racists and white oppressors are thrown an acerbic challenge. American writer Max Eastman was befriended by McKay some years later. *Liberator* magazine's editor, Max Eastman was a communist sympathizer. He had McKay's poems published in his magazine, one of which was *If We Must Die*, an inspirational poem defending the rights of the blacks and threatening to counter abuse and prejudice with retaliation.

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Writing about *If We Must Die* in *Black Poets of the United States,* French scholar of African American poets Jean Wagner expresses that it rises above all race specifics and is extensively 'prized as an inspiration to persecuted people throughout the world'. Wagner has written, 'Along with the will to resistance of black Americans that it expresses, it voices also the will of oppressed people of every age who, whatever their race and wherever their region, are fighting with their backs against the wall to win their freedom'.

After *If We Must Die* was published, McKay began a period of work and travelled abroad for two years. He spent some duration of 1919 in Belgium and Holland, from where he travelled to London and spent time working on the periodical *Workers' Dreadnought.* Another and the third collection of verses was published by McKay in 1920. It was titled *Spring in New Hampshire,* which contained the notable poem *Harlem Shadows*. This poem brought out the predicament of the black prostitutes living in the urban environment which was extremely degrading and, in a broader sense, representing

the plight and degradation of the black race. Later, this poem was used by McKay as the title of his next collections.

In 1921, McKay went back to the United States where he devoted his time to social causes. In the following year, McKay formed a collection of writings from his previous volumes and from his publications in periodicals and published it under the title *Harlem Shadows*. Contained in this collection are some of those poems of McKay which have been instrumental in making him an acclaimed component of the Harlem Renaissance. McKay made full use of his acclaim to work with redoubled effort towards the cause of the labourers and blacks. Towards this end, he associated himself with the Universal Negro Improvement Association and also wrote a number of articles that went into *Negro World,* their publication. He once again went off to the Soviet Union where he had gone before with Eastman. There he participated as an attendee in the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party.

In time, McKay visited Paris. There he acquired an acute respiratory infection. He took up assignments as an artist's model to support himself. Due to the respiratory infection, he had to be hospitalized. Once he recovered, he again set out on his journeys. Over the following decades, McKay travelled across Europe and various parts of northern Africa. During this period, he published a collection of short stories and three novels. Published in 1928, *Home to Harlem* was the first of the novels and is considered to be his most recognized one. The novel is about Jake, a black soldier, who suddenly goes to his home in Harlem, deserting his military duties. Jake is representative of, though in a majorly overt manner, the individual's instinctual nature. He manages to find his happiness with Felicia, one who was at a past date a prostitute; this was due to his nature of being true to the self. Another character in the novel, Ray displays a behaviour exact opposite to that of Jake. Ray aspires to be a writer and carries the burden of despair. His bleak attitude is the result of the intellectualized perspective he has of life, and this very perspective finally drives him to return home to Haiti from the racist and alien America.

Robert Bone has written in *The Negro Novel in America* that both Jake and Ray, one instinctual the other intellectual, 'represent different ways of rebelling against Western civilization'. However, he went on to say that McKay's depiction of the relations that his protagonists had in white society were not successfully articulated. Writing about *Home to Harlem*, he says that it was 'unable to develop its primary conflict' and it, therefore, 'bogs down in the secondary contrast between Jake and Ray'. In the novel, there is even an elaborate depiction of the darker aspects of urban life of the blacks, including the gamblers and prostitutes. Literary author and critic Alan L. McLeod in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* has applauded for McKay for having designed 'a work of vivid social realism'. Yet, according to McLeod, it appears that McKay himself 'stressed that he aimed at emotional realism—he wanted to highlight his characters' feelings rather than their social circumstances'. Readers prized and black leaders condemned McKay's depiction of 'unsavory aspects of New York black life'.

Home to Harlem was applauded as the first novel from a black author to be commercially very successful. It was a very popular novel, which depicted some extremely harrowing, sordid sights of ghetto life. On the tail of *Home to Harlem*, McKay published *Banjo: A Story without a Plot.* Banjo, the black protagonist of this novel, is a vagabond who resided in Marseilles, a French port. Banjo lives an instinctual life much like Jake (from *Home to Harlem*) did, but he is portrayed to be sharp, witty and enterprising than Jake. *Home to Harlem's* intellectual Ray is also seen in *Banjo: A Story without a Plot.* He is facing the same fate as most artists who were a struggling face, forced to resort to conventional employment to support themselves due to the adverse social circumstances. The novel depicts Ray and Banjo both being disturbed and dissatisfied with the restricted roles that they have to play in the white society. By the time the novel concludes, both Ray and Banjo are set to leave Marseilles.

The commercial success and acclaim that *Home to Harlem* had received did not come to *Banjo.* Yet it did go a long way to give McKay a confirmed status of a provocative and serious artist. McLeod has pronounced, 'It was apparent to critics that McKay's imagination had been somewhat strained and that the novel was essentially an autobiographical exercise'. It has been seen by commentators that a common thread runs through the two novels *Banjo* and *Home to Harlem* in the form of the character portrayed by Ray, who, much like the author, leads a travelling life and also admires the beauty of the bodies of young men. Patti Cappel Swartz has sought to find indications of McKay's sexuality in his fictional writings, and based on a dream sequence of *Home to Harlem*. The fact that 'for Ray, the bonds with men will always supersede those with women,' as is shown in the conclusion of *Banjo*, Swartz opines, 'Like McKay, Ray is not the marrying kind, but rather the vagabond who must always travel on'.

McKay, in *Banana Bottom,* his third novel, provides readers a more insightful study of the main theme which is the quest of a black person in a society of whites for cultural identity. In this novel, Bita, a Jamaican peasant girl, and her experiences are depicted. Bita, after being subjected to the horror of rape, gets adopted by white missionaries who expose her to the British educational system and organized Christianity, thus attempting to compel her to adopt their cultural values. They end up bungling it all horribly by trying to get Bita married to a would-be minister, who turns out to be aberrant sexually, and this leads to the fleeing of Bita from the society of the whites. Finally, Bita weds Jubban, a drayman, and they provide their child an environment which is Jamaican and idealized peasant. McLeod remarked, 'Bita has pride in blackness, is free of hypocrisy, and is independent and discerning in her values. Praise for *Banana Bottom* has been unanimous.'

According to critics, most skilful delineation by McKay of the predicament of a black individual in white society is depicted in *Banana Bottom*. When the book got first published in 1933, no one paid much attention to its thematic worth. Most praise went to the author's mastery of melodrama and exceptional evocation of the Jamaican tropics. The years that followed made people believe that it was the finest fiction that Kay had ever written and it was acknowledged as being the culmination of Kay's attempt to express the unease and tension he himself felt.

In the last few years that McKay spent abroad, the fiction he wrote which was of worth noting was a short story collection with twelve stories, *Gingertown*. While six stories centred on the life in Harlem and displayed the preoccupation that McKay had with humiliation and exploitation of the blacks, the others six are located in North Africa and Jamaica. After being in North Africa for some time, McKay went back to the United States in the mid-1930s. On return to Harlem, McKay started upon *A Long Way from Home,* an autobiographical writing. It depicts the problems that he himself had to deal with in a white society. However, as an autobiography of McKay, the book is unreliable. As has been shown by McLeod, in the book, McKay has said he was not a member of the communist party. Yet, in the book *A Long Way from Home*, the author depicts the long-held belief that American blacks must come together and participate in the struggle against oppression, segregation and colonialism.

Catholicism had become a keen interest for Kay towards the close of the 1930s. Through Ellen Tarry, an African-American author of literature for children and young adults, Kay participated actively in the activities of Harlem's Friendship House. Kay's collection of essays entitled *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* is the result of his unusual religious interest and the experiences he had at the Friendship House. The essays provide a description of Harlem's black community of the 1920s and 1930s. This collection did not do well with the reading public. People seemed to be tired of writings about and by blacks. According to a more recent evaluation by critic McLeod, 'The book has been superseded by many more scholarly studies, yet it retains value as a re-examination of Harlem by one who had established a necessary critical distance.' During this time, Kay's reputation was on the decline. As a result, he relocated to Chicago where he joined a Catholic organization as a teacher. By the end of 1940s, Kay's health deteriorated and he faced various health troubles. He passed away in 1948 May due to a heart failure.

After his death, the little reputation that he had had during his list day also declined and his critics dismissed him as shallow and conventional. Of late, McKay has regained reputation as someone who was intensely committed to making known the predicament faced by the blacks, and today he is acclaimed as having devoted all his life and art to the cause of social protest. To quote literary critic Robert A. Smith's, *Claude McKay: An Essay in Criticism*: 'Although he was frequently concerned with the race problem, his style is basically lucid. One feels disinclined to believe that the medium which he chose was too small, or too large for his message. He has been heard.' Despite the fact that McKay spent most of his life outside of Harlem, he is considered to be an important part of the Harlem Renaissance. McKay has a large fan following among readers of gay and lesbian literature and commonwealth literature. The essay by McLeod in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* concludes with: 'That he was able to capture a universality of sentiment in 'If We Must Die' has been fully demonstrated; that he was able to show new directions for the black novel is now acknowledged; and that he is rightly regarded as one of the harbingers of (if not one of the participants in) the Harlem Renaissance is undisputed.'

Important works of Claude McKay

Poetry

- *Songs of Jamaica* (1912)
- *Constab Ballads* (1912)
- *Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems* (1920)
- *Harlem Shadows* (1922)
- *The Selected Poems of Claude McKay* (1953)

Fiction

- *Home to Harlem* (1928)
- *Banjo* (1929)
- *Banana Bottom* (1933)
- *Gingertown* (1932)

Non-fiction

- *A Long Way from Home* (1937)
- *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (1979)
- *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940)

Source: Wikipedia

3.4.1 *To the White Fiends:* Summary and Analysis

Text

Think you I am not fiend and savage too?
Think you I could not arm me with a gun
And shoot down ten of you for every one
Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?
Be not deceived, for every deed you do
I could match—out-match: am I not Afric's son,
Black of that black land where black deeds are done?
But the Almighty from the darkness drew
My soul and said: Even thou shalt be a light
Awhile to burn on the benighted earth,
Thy dusky face I set among the white
For thee to prove thyself of higher worth;
Before the world is swallowed up in night,
To show thy little lamp: go forth, go forth!

Summary

Right from the beginning of the poem, starting from the title itself, *To the White Fiends*, we see a focus of the poet on racial tensions. This tells us implicitly that the narrator of the poem will not be a white individual. In line 4, it becomes explicitly clear that the narrator is black when he clarifies that they are black, shown by the familial 'black brothers'. Again, in line 6, this is clarified through the indication of their being 'Africa's son'. As the focus of the title is *To the White Fiends*, it becomes clear that the narrator is suggesting that the targets of the poem are the fiendish whites and not every white. Then on, the narrator goes on to clarify the reason for these specific whites being fiends—their actions are fiendish, for example, in line 4, 'murdered, burnt by you'.

Commentary and analysis

The poem *To the White Fiends* written by Claude McKay has a narrator who employs the sonnet form for posing a challenge to the racial stereotypes. Rather than using violence to fight the situation, poetry is used by the narrator for displaying and dispersing the anger which is, no doubt, overwhelming the poet. By having selected to employ poetry rather than violence, all racist perceptions have been reversed by the narrator.

The poet has employed the iambic pentameter's metrical pattern and also a sonnet's structure to provide an elegance and rhythm to the voice of the narrator of the poem. Mostly, the pattern of the rhyme scheme of the poem is ABBAABBA CDCDCD, and this provides a smoothly inter line flow to the poem. The poet has employed slant rhyme in the final two lines of the sonnet. In the first stanza, the poet has expressed emotions that are strongly negative, and in the second stanza, the tone shifts gears to become positive.

In the first line of the poem, the title is further expanded and emphasized by repetition of the word 'fiend'. A possibility is stressed upon by the narrator that blacks and racist whites could both be just as fiendish and savage. This possibility is addressed through: 'Think you I am not fiend and savage, too?' In this line, it is clearly visible that the narrator throws a challenge to the beliefs of the white racist that the blacks can be equally savages and fiends. Despite the fact that line 2 repeats the beginning of the line, there is no forcing of realization of equality by the narrator. Contrary to this, it expresses the intensity of anger felt on count of the racism practiced by the whites.

The first stanza's tone is aggressive and clearly brings out that there can be retaliation to the savage and fiendish behaviour of the whites. In line 2, 'arm me with a gun,' the narrator says that if a gun is given to them, they will strike back. The racist whites' acts of violence on the blacks depict possible retaliation through the words 'And shoot down ten of you for everyone/ Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?' The use of 'burnt' and 'murdered' in context of the 'black brothers' provides a context to the poem which is historical of the times of racial oppression and slavery. When looked at in this historical context, it becomes more evident why the narrator has such an angry and aggressive personality.

In the two lines, 5 and 6, deception is address. The words 'Be not deceived' are a warning for the reader. The narrator is specifically warning the reader to be cautious when he judges a black person. It will surprise them when they equal or surpass all murderous actions performed by the whites. This is expressed in the lines 5 and 6 'for every deed you do/ I could match-outmatch'. The employing of a caesura between 'match' and 'outmatch' in the form of a dash lays stress on the assertion made by the narrator. The five lines (2 through 6) contemplate the fears that the white racist have and these are depicted by explaining how, if he so desires, the narrator could turn 'savage'. There is more entertaining of the fears in line 7 through the reinforcement of the perception of the racists of blacks being 'savages' and 'fiends' through the modification of what the blackness means.

The seventh line looks at 'black' not referring to the colour of the skin but to evil. When the narrator claims in line 6 of being 'Africa's son', he becomes the black people's spokesperson. Then in line 7, it is brought out that since the blacks come from a place of evil action, they must be feared: 'Black of that black land where black deeds are done'. Here, the narrator is also mocking the perceptions of the white racists—if true evil lurks within the black people, then racist whites need to be so scared of the blacks that they should not oppress them. Herein, we find a reference of the retaliation threat which was thrown in line 2, line 3 and line 6. Despite the fact that the basic theme of the first stanza is retaliation, anger and aggression, there is a shift in tone to positive in the second stanza.

Line 8 has the use of the word 'but' which is the point of moving from the first stanza's aggressive and violent tone. According to the narrator, though they hold all capacity for violence, it is a thing that they shall not indulge in as the narrator has been inspired by God or 'the Almighty' to stay away from it. Lines 8 and 9 carry the words, 'But the Almighty from the darkness drew/ My soul', which depict this thought. The implication of the word 'darkness' is violence, which was the threat wielded in the poem's opening stanza. The inspiration gained from God by the narrator also aids him to realize the reason blacks live among white racism and oppression.

Interpreting the words of line 9 'Even thou shaft be a light', it appears that God shows even the narrator could become a guiding source. Use of 'light' shows the narrator

to be guidance. With the narrator openly rejecting violence in line 8, it is implied that those who are staying in the 'darkness' are the white people. In line 4, the use of the words 'my black brothers murdered, burnt by you' depicts that it is the white racists who resort to violent acts, and it is the choice of the black narrator to not resort to violence. Line 10 again works to support this, and this contains the equating of the narrator to a candle, by the use of the words 'awhile to burn'. This is just the opposite of the violence that the narrator had so vehemently threatened of performing in the opening stanza. Through this metaphor, it has been brought out that the narrator could become a guide for the corrupt world or the words or the narrator, 'benighted earth'.

Line 11 and 12 form an enjambment which provides an explanation of the reason for God, the 'I,' deciding that the narrator, who is depicted using 'thy dusky face' has to exist in the midst of white oppression, as shown in the words of line 11 'set among the white'. The reason is that the narrator has to let the racist whites realize that black people do not conform to racial stereotypes. According to line 12, due to the fact that the God choose the narrator to 'prove thyself of higher worth', there is a deconstruction of colour associations, providing positive associations with 'dusky' rather than negative associations as done traditionally. The 'higher worth' of the narrator is to be the emissary in a world which is also inhabited by the oppressing whites. Line 9 carries the word 'light', which is a reference to the narrator's role of emissary. In this line, it is explained by God that the narrator could be a guiding source. The choice made by the narrator to go along with the purpose defined by God rather than give in to violence is clearly indicative of being in contradiction to the perceptions of the white racist which the opening stanza had addressed—depicting the blacks as 'savage' or 'fiend'. It is also noted by the narrator that the actions a person chooses are more important than the colour of the person's skin.

Stanza 2 has a very Christian illusion which is depicted by the use of archaic forms of second-person possessives and personal pronouns mostly used in the Bible and also the use of white verses black and dark verses light. This allusion of Christianity is a suggestion that the God is the same for both the whites and the blacks. If they worship the same God, then there is a questioning by the narrator of the soundness of what the white racists claim of regarding the blacks—that they are savages.

There is a warning given by the narrator in the poem's closing lines, 13 and 14. A sense of urgency is created with the phrasing of the last two lines as imperative. Line 13 says 'Before the world is swallowed up in the night' implying that it is a must for the narrator to play the role of a guide so that the world can be saved from total and complete corruption. In line 14, a sense of urgency is achieved by introducing a slant rhyme, which is a deviation from the existing end-rhyme scheme of the poem. According to line 12, the narrator is urged by God to put forth the 'higher worth' as a beacon, 'show thy little lamp'. The dual role of the narrator is to be a guide as well as to lead; this is evidenced in the words of line 14 'go forth, go forth!'

The sonnet is employed by the narrator for expressing anger and is also an evidence of the fact that even the blacks can be as educated and literate as whites. By employing various literary techniques like tone anaphora and rhetorical figures, the poet has created a questioning, challenging and aggressive piece of poetry. In this, the existence and nature of violence stemming from racism is addressed and the path that can be followed to enlighten the world. The poem lends a sense of urgency and urges the reader to be one with the narrator in challenging racist perceptions.

Check Your Progress

6. What are the concerns that are expressed in the poetry of Claude McKay?
7. Name McKay's first novel.
8. Comment on the form of the poem *To The White Fiends*.
9. Give the rhyme scheme of the poem *To The White Fiends*.
10. State the significance of the two closing lines of the poem *To The White Fiends*.

ACTIVITY

Read the novel *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell and record your observations of the characters who appear at the marginal level.

Did You Know

For nearly the first half of the twentieth century, from about 1915 to 1955, jazz was the dominant form of popular dance music in the United States. It was more than just music; at the height of its influence, jazz was a cultural movement, particularly influencing the young in dress, language and attitude. Historically, jazz was largely the creation of black Americans as they have figured disproportionately among the major innovators of this musical expression.

3.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- William Carlos Williams was closely associated with modernism and imagism. His most notable contribution to the American literature was his willingness to be a counselor for the young and upcoming poets.
- Although Eliot and Pound might have been more appreciated during their life time, yet various important poets in the generations that followed were either personally tutored by Williams or accepted Williams as a big influence on their works.
- Carlos' main collections comprise *Kora in Hell* (1920), *Spring and All* (1923), *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962), *Paterson* (1963) and *Imaginations* (1970). *The Red Wheelbarrow* is his most anthologized poem. It is considered as an example of the Imagist movement's style and principles. Nonetheless, Carlos, like his associate Ezra Pound, had long ago rejected the Imagist movement by the time this poem was published as part of *Spring and All*.
- With *Revelation*, Carlos established himself as the best line-breaker of his time. It meant that he had a highly polished and sensitive sense for judging which word should end a line and how the syntax should turn against the flow of lines.

- For Williams, as well as for Keats, the essential experience is contact, the bridging of the gap between the perceiving subject and the perceived moment or object.
- The Harlem Renaissance was a black cultural movement that was prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s. It was also called the New Negro Movement. Though the movement was initially confined to the Harlem neighbourhood in New York, many black writers from the Caribbean and African colonies were also subsequently influenced by it.
- Hughes was influenced by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman.
- He is particularly famous for his perceptive, effervescent portrayals of the lives of black people in America.
- Though he is remembered as a poet, he was not a one-trick pony, and successfully dabbled in short stories and plays. He was deep into jazz music and that can be clearly felt in some of his works.
- Claude McKay's poetry touches a variety of subjects such as vernacular verse celebrating peasant life in Jamaica to fairly militant poems challenging white authority in America; from generally straightforward tales of black life in both Jamaica and America to more philosophically ambitious fiction addressing instinctual and intellectual duality.
- McKay adopted the name Eli Edwards to publish two poems in 1917. These were published in the periodical *Seven Arts*.
- Despite the fact that McKay spent most of his life outside of Harlem, he is considered to be an important part of the Harlem Renaissance.

3.6 KEY TERMS

- **Staccato:** This refers to a musical term where each sound or note is sharply detached or separated from the others:
- **Jazz music:** Jazz is a music genre that originated at the beginning of the twentieth century, arguably earlier, within the African-American communities of the Southern United States.
- **Harlem Renaissance:** This refers to what was called in the '20s as the New Negro Movement and was largely a cultural movement.
- **Racism:** This refers to the belief that all races have certain inherent characteristics that set them apart from others, thereby making them more or less desirable.
- **Bigotry:** This refers to a kind of intolerance that can be seen in the behaviour of some individuals against others.
- **Commonwealth literature:** The Commonwealth of Nations, also known as the Commonwealth or the British Commonwealth, has manifested a distinctive literary development, marked by its cultural and historical diversity.
- **Line break:** A line break in poetry is the termination of the line of a poem and the beginning of a new line; within the standard conventions of Western literature, this is usually but not always at the left margin.
- **Enjambment:** This refers to the continuation of sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line or a stanza.

3.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Williams tried hard to invent a completely fresh form—an American form of poetry—with its subject matter focused on everyday circumstances of life and the lives of masses.
2. *The Widow's Lament in Springtime* revolves around the central character of a woman who finds herself overwhelmed with sorrow due to her husband's death. She is unable to come to terms with the loss. The association of all the beautiful things of spring with death makes the readers forget the beauty of the season.
3. Race and the prejudice against the blacks is the central theme of the poem *A Negro Woman.* The poem portrays a black woman carrying flowers from one place to another early in the morning.
4. In the poem *I, Too, Sing America*, the speaker dreams of a future where he is no longer ordered to go to the kitchen, and where he would be on equal terms with the rest.
5. In the poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, the poet uses the river to symbolize the source of life.
6. Racism and bigotry are McKay's primary concern in his poetry.
7. *Home to Harlem* was McKay's first novel.
8. The poem *To the White Fiends* written by Claude McKay has a narrator who employs the sonnet form for posing a challenge to the racial stereotypes. Rather than using violence to fight the situation, poetry is used by the narrator for displaying and dispersing the anger which is, no doubt, overwhelming the poet.
9. The pattern of the rhyme scheme of the poem is ABBAABBA CDCDCD and this provides to the poem a smoothly inter line flow.
10. There is a warning given by God in the poem's closing lines, 13 and 14. A sense of urgency is created with the phrasing of the last two lines as imperative.

3.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Comment on the significance of *Revelation* as an example of a line breaker.
2. What was the main philosophical concern of William Carlos Williams?
3. What is the central concern of the poem *The Widows Lament in Springtime*?
4. Highlight the importance of 'I' in the poem *I, Too, Sing America.*
5. Give a synopsis of Claude McKay's *To The White Fiends.*

Long-Answer Questions

1. 'Words are often futile to feelings.' This has often been the governing philosophy of William Carlos William's writing. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Comment on Williams' use of syntax in the poem *Revelation.*
3. Highlight the tension of the poem *The Widows Lament in Springtime.*
4. Critically analyse the predicament of the negro woman in the poem *A Negro Woman.*
5. Write a detailed analysis of speaker in the poem *I, Too, Sing America.*

3.9 FURTHER READING

Hacker, L. M., Helene S. Zahler ed. *The Shaping of American Tradition.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1947.

Bigswy, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* (2 vols.). New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Robert Frost.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

UNIT 4 EUGENE O'NEILL AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Structure

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4.2 Eugene O'Neill: A Brief Biographical Sketch
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  4.10.1 Appearance and Reality4.10.1 Appearance and Reality
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4.0 INTRODUCTION

Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams were one of the greatest American playwrights of the twentieth century who were well known for their timeless works.

Eugene O'Neill was an Irish American playwright, the first and only American dramatist to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature and the Pulitzer Award four times, including one for *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, an autobiographical drama. His plays, which were usually poetically titled, were one of their first types to introduce the techniques of realism in the American drama. This tradition was initially associated with Henrik Ibsen (Norwegian playwright), Anton Chekhov (Russian playwright) and August Strindberg (Swedish playwright).

Eugene O'Neil's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is an agonizingly autobiographical play, which depicts the disturbed relations between a father, mother and two sons. Posthumously produced, the play strips the strained and complex relations of the main characters, layer after layer, in a day's time. As the play progresses, the audience witness a drug-addict mother, a professionally failed father, an alcoholic older son and an ailing younger son. Although no one dies in the play, still, as a tragedy, the undercurrent is that of perpetual loss, morbid relations, failed communication, guilty pasts and disillusioned present.

Tennessee Williams was an American playwright who was born in the Mississippi region. His birth name was Thomas Lanier Williams III. He studied at the University of Iowa and graduated in 1938. His initial writings were one-act plays and were performed by amateurs and students. Later on, these one-act plays were compiled in *27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other One-Act Plays* (1946) and *Dragon Country: A Book of Plays* (1970).

Tennessee Williams is the critically acclaimed author of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. This play won him the Pulitzer Prize and contributed a great deal in shaping the history of American drama.

In this unit, you will get acquainted with the life and works of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. You will also study the important themes in the works of these playwrights and understand why their writings appeal to contemporary generations.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the important biographical aspects of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams
- Summarise the plays: *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- Critically examine the characters of the two plays under study
- Discuss the important themes of the two plays under study

4.2 EUGENE O'NEILL: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was the first American dramatist to be conferred with the Nobel Prize in Literature—the pioneer American playwright who made theatre a strong medium of serious thoughts. He had cherished the idea of making it a forum for the tragic sensitivities of life. He could bring the sublimity of ancient Greek tragedies together

with the characters' emotional strength. His theatrical masterpieces won him critical acclaims during his life and after his death. He had become a living literary icon with many awards and nominations to his credit but just like his tragic heroes, O'Neill died a solitary death in a hotel room with his third wife and a few visitors on his side.



Eugene O'Neill

Long Day's Journey Into Night is one of Eugene O'Neill's later plays. He began writing the play in 1940 and completed in 1942, but he did not get it published then. Rather it was kept as a sealed copy with Random House with the contract that the play will be published/performed only twenty-five years after his death. As O'Neill had written this play to show the world the truth of his family and the environment in which he was raised, and in order to do so, he laid forth his own upbringing in a compassionate nature. He tried to make it an unbiased work, which is why none of his characters show any hint of sympathy or bias. The play was written at a personal level, but eventually, it attains universality just like Shakespeare's plays. The play depicts the personal problems of a family that take a universal colour with the conflicting world of disturbed relations, taking its roots from a bitter distressed past.

O'Neill died in 1953 and the play saw its first performance in 1956 in Sweden, a country which always loved and honoured him the most. In fact, it was O'Neill's third wife, Carlotta Monterey who broke the contract with Random House when they refused to publish it against his last wishes. Instead, she gave the rights of publication to the Yale University Press. Whatever is said or written about Carlotta's act, one thing is for sure that the play cemented O'Neill's reputation as the foremost figure of American theatre.

O'Neill's life had been a tumultuous one. He was the son of a theatre artist father and a mother who had to accompany the father at different places without much interest. O'Neill did not taste success till his play *Beyond the Horizon* was performed in 1920. He lost his father before he became a literary success which disturbed him a lot as, in spite of differences, O'Neill shared a revered relationship with him. Then came his three marriages and somewhat failed relationships with his wives and children of which his eldest son committed suicide at the age of forty, while his younger son became emotionally unstable and his daughter infuriated him by marrying a much older Charlie Chaplin (of almost O' Neill's age). He himself suffered from tuberculosis early in his life. Moreover, his final years were also full of grim frustration.

The early part of his troubled life forms the plot of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. His troubles and experiences gave him a rich source for this autobiographical work in which the character of Edmund carries the burden of a parallel with the writer himself.

After achieving success in 1920, O'Neill remained a dominant figure of the American theatre throughout his life. While O'Neill remained troubled throughout his

life, he was most captivated by his experiences while growing up (the years before he found fame). The early part of his life is the subject of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which will forever remain O'Neill's goodbye to the world—the play that showed America who O'Neill was and where he came from.

Important Works of Eugene O'Neill

Full-length plays

- *Bread and Butter*, 1914
- *Servitude*, 1914
- *The Personal Equation*, 1915
- *Now I Ask You*, 1916
- *Beyond the Horizon*, 1918; Pulitzer Prize, 1920
- *The Straw*, 1919
- *Chris Christophersen*, 1919
- *Gold*, 1920
- *Anna Christie*, 1920; Pulitzer Prize, 1922
- *The Emperor Jones*, 1920
- *Diff'rent*, 1921
- *The First Man*, 1922
- *The Hairy Ape*, 1922
- *The Fountain*, 1923
- *Marco Millions*, 1923–25
- *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, 1924
- *Welded*, 1924
- *Desire Under the Elms*, 1925
- *Lazarus Laughed*, 1925–26
- *The Great God Brown*, 1926
- *Strange Interlude*, 1928, Pulitzer Prize
- *Dynamo*, 1929
- *Mourning Becomes Electra*, 1931
- *Ah, Wilderness!*, 1933
- *Days Without End*, 1933
- *The Iceman Cometh*, written in 1939, published in 1940, first performed in 1946
- *Hughie*, written in 1941, first performed in 1959
- *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, written in 1941, first performed in1956 - Pulitzer Prize, 1957
- *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, written 1941–1943, first performed in 1947
- *A Touch of the Poet*, completed in 1942, first performed in 1958
- *More Stately Mansions*, second draft found in O'Neill's papers, first performed in 1967
- *The Calms of Capricorn*, published in 1983

One-act plays

The Glencairn Plays, all of which feature characters on the fictional ship *Glencairn*—filmed together as *The Long Voyage Home*:

- *Bound East for Cardiff*, 1914
- *In The Zone*, 1917
- *The Long Voyage Home*, 1917
- *Moon of the Caribbees*, 1918

Other one-act plays include:

- *A Wife for a Life*, 1913
- *The Web*, 1913
- *Thirst*, 1913
- *Recklessness*, 1913
- *Warnings*, 1913
- *Fog*, 1914
- *Abortion*, 1914
- *The Movie Man: A Comedy*, 1914
- *The Sniper*, 1915
- *Before Breakfast*, 1916
- *Ile*, 1917
- *The Rope*, 1918
- *Shell Shock*, 1918
- *The Dreamy Kid*, 1918
- *Where the Cross Is Made*, 1918
- *Exorcism*, 1919

Awards Won BY Eugene O'Neill

The Eugene O'Neill Award is considered to be one of the best acting awards in Sweden for theatre artists. The award is also known as *The Eugene O'Neill Scholarship Award* or *The Eugene O'Neill Acting Award.* It was introduced by Eugene O'Neill in 1956. Before his death in 1953, O'Neill prepared a will wherein he gave his play *Long Day's Journey Into Night* to the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Sweden's national theatre, along with exclusive first performance rights. Later, his third wife Carlotta Monterey O'Neill gave the rights to stage the play to the Royal Dramatic Theatre, along with the performing rights for *A Touch of the Poet* (written in 1942), *Hughie* and *More Stately Mansions*.

The award is given every year on 16 October (O'Neill's birthday) to the 'highly deserving actors of Dramaten'. The prize money currently consists of approximately 4,000 USD.

Source: Wikipedia

4.3 *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*: AN INTRODUCTION

The play begins in a summer morning of 1912 when Mary Tyrone returns home from a sanatorium after her treatment of morphine addiction. It is a family of mainly four—James Tyrone, his wife Mary and his two sons, Edmund and Jamie. So far as the plot of the play is concerned, there is no 'action' per se. In other words, nothing transpires in this room other than exchange of dialogue over drinking.

As the play unravels, it becomes evident that Mary is still addicted to morphine and Edmund's coughing is actually due to tuberculosis. These are two medical revelations that constitute the plot of the play. Meanwhile, the family members continue to hurt and blame each other; in most parts, this forms the only action of the plot. At times, the topic of bickering is the stinginess of Tyrone and the addiction of Mary, or at times, it is the youngest son's ailment or the failure of both sons. As the day comes to an end, the father and the sons drink more and more and Mary continues with her morphine addiction. Most of the plot of the play is monotonous. The arguments in the family occur throughout the four acts and five scenes. For example, all acts are set in the living room, and all scenes but the last take place either just before or after a meal. The repetitive plot also helps develop the belief that this particular day is not astonishing in any way instead it is one in a long sequence of similar days for the family, filled with unpleasantness, conflict and at the same time an underlying affection.

The husband and the sons thought that Mary had finally given up her addiction, but they are now suspicious that she may be back on the drug. Jamie is at home for the summer as he is without a job, whereas Edmund has been taken seriously ill. Through the course of the day, it is revealed that Mary is in the habit of taking morphine for the past twenty-three years ever since she gave birth to Edmund. It was because of the stinginess of James that he hired a less competent doctor for a lesser fee and the doctor put Mary on morphine to alleviate her pain, never realizing that such a drug could turn a person into an addict.

Jamie heads towards a brothel, whereas James and Edmund come back after a few drinks. Mary, meanwhile, takes a hurried drive into town to get some morphine and then she spends the afternoon chatting with the house maid, Cathleen, about her youthful days. Once James and Edmund return, Mary engrosses them in a talk while her peculiar, morphine-influenced behaviour drives James to get more whiskey and Edmund to leave. James comes back in time for dinner, but Mary decides she has to go upstairs and sleep instead.

In the final Act, Edmund comes back from a stroll down the beach to find his father in the living room. Both are drunk and begin to open up to one another about their pasts and feelings. Edmund has his own views of reality like a would-be-poet, whereas James had always been indignant of overindulgence and sluggishness.

On the other hand, Jamie, too, comes home drunk and with stories of an overweight prostitute for whom he could manage a fair deal. Jamie confesses that he has not been the best son to Mary or brother to Edmund. In fact, privately, he wants to jeopardize Edmund's life as he himself is a failure and does not want to see his younger brother succeed.

In the final scene, Mary comes down carrying her old wedding dress, high on morphine and acting like the youthful girl she was when she had first met James. Jamie finds another opportunity to have a hearty laugh at her expense and Edmund strikes him for being insolent. Mary keeps narrating of the time when she was young and it is evident that she is not quite in her senses. The play ends with Mary's sense of loss and despair as she keeps talking about her past and how her dreams got shattered after she married James.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the opening scene of the play.
2. What are the two medical revelations that form the plot of the play?

4.4 ACT WISE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*

In this section, we will discuss the play act wise and critically analyse the acts.

4.4.1 Act I

O'Neill opens up the play with a detailed account of stage directions describing the living room of the Tyrone summer home in August 1912. The playwright continues to use the stage directions to tell us about James and Mary Tyrone, the Irish-American parents who enter the living room after breakfast. Mary, James' wife is fifty-four and has a young, healthy figure with a pale, thin face. She looks pretty even without any make-up and she has thick, white hair and big, beautiful brown eyes. Her once lovely hands are now gnarled with rheumatism, which keeps moving her hands uneasily. O'Neill very obviously mentions that she has not lost her 'convent-girl youthfulness' and 'unworldly innocence'.

James is sixty-five years old and shows signs of being a handsome ageing actor with a robust bearing—broad gestures and a reverberating voice, typical of his former career in acting. However, his shabby clothes are indicative of his present state of affairs.

James always wanted to be a classical actor, especially a Shakespearean one but his 'vehicle' play, with which he had toured for years, established his reputation and although served him well financially, could not add versatility to his acting. As a result, he never got the opportunity to explore and became confined to just one role. In spite of his

good earning through theatre, his impending financial hardship can be gauged through his dress and appearance. While his demeanour and manner of speaking establish otherwise, James' current condition and trials get betrayed by his shabbiness.

His wife had recently returned from treatment for morphine addiction and was looking much healthier, and they made frequent remarks on her improved appearance. However, she retains the haggard facial features of a long-time addict. Like many recuperating addicts, she is impatient and nervous and suffers from insomnia, aggravated by her husband and sons' loud snoring.

Although the younger son, Edmund, is only twenty-three years old, yet he is 'plainly in bad health' and shows signs of nervousness. Jamie begins to stare at his mother, thinking that she is looking much better. The dialogue turns unpleasant, however, when the sons begin to make fun of Tyrone's loud snoring, a matter which drives him to lose his temper. Edmund tells him to calm down, which leads to a squabble between the two. After this, James turns on Jamie and attacks him for his lack of drive and sluggishness. Edmund tries to calm everyone down by narrating an anecdote but the father is not amused by the anecdote. At this, Edmund gets distressed and walks out in a fit of coughing. Jamie makes a point that Edmund is really not keeping well these days, to which James urges him to stay quiet so that Mary can remain unaware of the situation. While evidences to the contrary, it is Mary's belief that Edmund's illness is nothing more than a case of common cold that will eventually heal. This delusion can be interpreted as Mary's deep mistrust of doctors. James and Jamie make her self-conscious by staring at her. She reflects on her worn-out beauty, recognizing that she is in the stages of decline.

After Mary's exit, the father and the older son are left wherein James scolds Jamie for talking about Edmund's illness in front of Mary. As she has been recuperating, she is not supposed to worry herself during her recovery from her addiction to morphine. Jamie and Tyrone both are suspicious that Edmund might have been suffering from tuberculosis. They argue over Edmund's doctor, Doc Hardy, who charges a low fee, to which Jamie comments about James' stinginess and compromise on quality to which the father retorts that he himself knows the value of money as he had to earn every single penny to fulfil his needs. On the other hand, his sons have always taken a comfortable life for granted. To this, both of them start accusing each other. While the father accuses the son of squandering money on whores and liquor, Jamie alleges that James has always engaged inexpensive doctors in an attempt to save money which in any case gets squandered on real estate speculation and liquor. To this, James points out that most of his holdings are mortgaged. The blame game continues and the father accuses Jamie of being lazy and condemns him of his failure. He continues to blame Jamie of never being grateful to his father in spite of his support throughout. The father also believes that Jamie as an elder brother would be a bad influence on Edmund to which Jamie counters that he always made an effort to convince his brother to lead a pious life and not follow his habits.

Both sons are alarmed about Mary's movement in the bedroom—the very same one in which she used to satisfy her narcotic urges. James and his sons do not trust Mary for the same and keep questioning her.

The whole family is concerned about Edmund's constant coughing which could be a symptom of tuberculosis and this concern has placed them all under further worry. They are nervously awaiting the diagnosis of his condition. Edmund is more concerned about the effect of a positive diagnosis might have on his mother than on himself. That is why he asks her to 'promise not to worry yourself sick and to take care of yourself'. 'Of

course I promise you', she answers, but then she adds with a sad bitterness: 'But I suppose you're remembering I've promised before on my word of honor.' This is not the first time that Mary has lied to her family. As Edmund leaves, she becomes restless and tense.

In the second part as well, there is a dialogue between the father and the older son, Jamie. They continue discussing Edmund and his professional life as a writer as well as his illness. They discuss that although some editors are not happy with Edmund, still he has a strong creative urge which drives him to work. They also feel happy about Mary's health and her coming back from the sanatorium. They even discuss steps to hide Edmund's illness from Mary so that they do not have to disclose any unpleasant news to her. They apprehend that they might not do so in case of Edmund's stay at a sanatorium. Jamie reveals his concern about Mary that she might still be addicted as he had seen her walking around the bedroom where she used to take her morphine dose. To this, James retorts that this could be only due to his snoring.

Meanwhile, the audience learns that Mary got addicted to morphine some twenty-three years ago when she gave birth to Edmund. The doctor hired by her husband was not qualified enough and he put her on morphine to relieve her pains. In other words, the economical yet incompetent doctor put her on the potential risk of addiction. Many a times throughout the play, Tyrone's stinginess is blamed for Mary's condition. Opposed to this, Tyrone himself explains it as a kind of prudence and not stinginess.

For the moment as they are discussing, Mary enters and asks them about the topic of their discussion. To which they lie and say that they had been discussing Edmund's doctor. As they do not wish that Mary should be disturbed, they plan to leave to trim the hedges outside. Mary knows that both have been lying to her. As they exit, Edmund enters with a coughing fit and tells his mother that he is not keeping well. At the same time, he tries to comfort his mother by telling her that she should take care of herself and not her son. Mary criticizes her sons for engaging whores and other women of ill-repute. Her fear is that they might never find suitable ladies if they continue to live carelessly. She also criticizes their spying habits and tells Edmund that both her sons have been cruelly distrustful towards her. Yet she confesses that Edmund has reasons not to believe her as she had broken some promises in the past. Edmund exits and Mary keeps sitting all alone.

In the beginning of *Long Day's Journey Into Night,* O'Neill gives elaborate stage directions to give the audience indications as to what the Tyrone family is like. The bookshelves are full of a wide range of books that indicate the family is educated. Since the family is Irish-American, the bookshelves display a collection of Irish literature. The character portrayals also foretell some of the play's encounters. Mary is styled as a rheumatoid morphine-addict, yet she maintains a 'youthfulness she has never lost'.

The description of Tyrone and his shabby utilitarian clothes suggest his financial practicality. Physically, he is very fit as he looks ten years younger than his age. Again, it is through stage directions that the playwright gives an idea of the habits and attitudes of his characters.

As a great playwright, O'Neill presents his characters with equal sympathy and objectivity. The characters lie to each other, blame each other, and are cruel towards each other but, at the same time, feel an undercurrent of affection for each other. Therefore, with all their faults, the characters appear to be convincing and form an integrated family which has been together in all times—good as well as bad. Not one particular character is the protagonist or the villain. At the core of their relationship, they all are affectionate and compassionate.

Even in the frenzied second and third acts, where we see the characters pulling away from one another in torrents of deception, suspicion and recrimination, there are recurrent outbursts of genuine anguished love. The love exists and may be expressed by any of the three men, but it must come first from Mary, who turns the flows of kinship on and off in these acts as her fears and affections dictate. When she is haltingly and desperately able to admit her awareness of her condition, or Edmund's, the feelings of kinship are immediately apparent.

During the course of the play, the audience learns that there are two main events—the two major illnesses form the backbone of the plot—Mary's morphine addiction and Edmund's confirmation of consumption (nowadays called tuberculosis). Although they have been hinted at from the beginning of the play, yet it is through the course of the play that the two afflictions are confirmed as the core of the play. Both these problems bring all the family members to different situations of painful conflicts. Mary does not accept the harsh truth of her own addiction or Edmund's illness. She believes that her son suffers from plain cold and will recover soon. Many a times, she lies to herself as well as to her other family members. Her husband and sons try to hide certain facts from her, especially Edmund's medical condition so that she may recuperate. James has his own share of conflicts as he is also responsible for Mary's condition as he did not pay a good doctor's fee and instead called a quack who eventually made Mary an addict. Almost similar is the situation now when he is hesitant to pay for the high cost of Edmund's treatment which will be revealed in the later part of the play. Then both sons have their own issues. They have not been successful in their respective lives. They are into drinking excessively and squandering money on loose women.

The Act also unfolds another conflict within the family between the Sr. Tyrone and Jamie. The father believes that Jamie has never understood the value of money and he always takes things for granted, whereas he himself had to earn every single penny. On the other hand, the son believes that his father is stingy because of which his mother and other members had to suffer. He does not show any traits of respect for his father and turns a non-conformist. Eventually, the relationship between the father and the son turns out to be full of disappointment.

The relationship between Mary and Edmund presents an aspect of strength of relationships. Both are similar in many ways, sharing a romantic vision of life and innate affection for each other. Edmund had romantic ideas of writers and he drank to his satisfaction and Mary thought of the success of her children and a high way of life, but the fact remains that James and Mary both are there in their children's lives throughout, which gives thematic strength to the characters. The play's internal unity is affected through these relationships of the characters.

The relationship of past with the present events and situations is another thematic concern of the play. The past keeps hovering and influencing the present. All the characters are controlled by family's history in one form or another. The men of the family are not ready to believe either Mary or her promises as she had not maintained her commitments in the past, and towards the end of this Act, she herself confesses it before Edmund that there have been reasons for her not to believe her. James' past decisions are partially responsible for Mary's condition today. Her past dreams have been shattered as she always had dreams of a youthful girl who would have been a successful pianist or would have entered the church as a nun but her marriage changed her life. She seems to have

fostered resentment for James for the devastation of her dreams. The problems of the past are effective even today; neither can they be overlooked or discounted.

Another aspect which is revealed in the first Act is the flaw related to communication within the family members. The men in the family keep on hiding it, while Mary chooses to misunderstand. It is ironic that the men keep on hiding Edmund's illness from Mary and on the other hand, she continues hiding her addiction from them. Although they are all concerned about each other, yet they seem incapable of communicating this in a straightforward manner. They blame and argue with each other, but are neither ready nor willing to accept and share the truth. There seems to be a kind of resolution of this conflict towards the end of the play when Jamie shares his true feelings of wanting his brother to fail. Another aspect where communication fails is Mary's own specific notion of home. She is not happy with her life which she spent after her marriage touring with her husband to different places. She always wanted to have a feel of a home which she could not get by accompanying her actor husband. Moreover, she could not express her thoughts until lately.

Check Your Progress

3. Briefly describe Mary as she gets introduced to the audience in Act 1.
4. Comment on James' visage as a classical actor.

4.4.2 Act II

The next Act again begins in the living room of the Tyrones on the same day. Cathleen, the home maid, enters the stage with a bottle of whiskey and some water for a round drinking before lunch. Edmund is already there and he tells Cathleen to call his mother and father for a drink. Meanwhile, Jamie enters and pours some drink from the bottle and adds some water to the bottle so that his father cannot make out that the drop in level. Jamie and Edmund sneer at each other about stealing their father's alcohol and watering it down so that he would not notice it.

Then Jamie expresses his concern about Edmund's health as he believes that Edmund might be suffering from a serious disease rather than simple malaria and they are waiting for the results of the tests. Next, Jamie starts accusing Edmund for leaving Mary alone unattended throughout the morning. Both of them seem to be concerned about Mary's morphine abuse. Jamie also informs Edmund that he and his father knew about Marie's addiction almost ten years ago and they hid the fact from him for all these years.

Mary enters and finds Edmund coughing. When Jamie makes a sarcastic remark about his father, Mary advises him to respect his father and stop finding faults with others. Then she talks of human destiny and how events in one's lives are pre-determined. She also expresses her dissatisfaction with the maid and wishes that they could have kept a better maid. Edmund goes outside to call his father in. Meanwhile, Jamie stares at his mother with suspicion as he internally knows that she is back on morphine.

James and Edmund enter and all have a drink. Suddenly, Mary speaks of her frustration with their summer home, its temporariness and dilapidation, and her husband's unresponsiveness to his surrounds. Mary explodes about Tyrone's failure to appreciate what a home is. She has always had a romantic vision of a home which her husband could never provide. Ironically, she indicates to her belief that this air of disinterestedness may be the very reason that he has endured her addiction for so long. She keeps accusing him for the same till they begin lunch. Then she criticizes James for letting Edmund drink, as she thinks it will kill him. Jamie and Edmund exit to have lunch in the dining room. James too stares at Mary with suspicion. With self-justification, she lies to her husband's unexpressed allegations, but he too knows that she is back on morphine. She grumbles again of his drinking and here the scene ends.

There is a gap of half an hour between the ending of this scene and the next scene. The family has its dinner and they are coming out. James gives the impression of being annoyed and detached, whereas Edmund appears to be 'heartsick'. Then there is a small talk between Mary and James about home. It seems that Mary is to a certain extent indifferent while she speaks because she is on a dose of morphine. Right then, the phone rings and James goes to answer it. He has a brief talk and agrees to a meeting at 4:00 in the evening. He comes back and informs about that the caller was Doc Hardy and that he has fixed an appointment with him for Edmund. Mary immediately expresses her disdain for Doc Hardy as she believes him to be incompetent. Once again, we witness how Mary accuses Tyrone for hiring an inexpensive doctor. She exits after a short confrontation.

As Mary exits, Jamie gets suspicious about her. He remarks that his mother must have gone upstairs to get morphine to which his father and brother get angry at him and tell him not to be suspicious all the time. Jamie tells them both not to evade reality and how it is better that they face it instead of running away from it. Edmund argues with Jamie that he is very pessimistic. At this point, the father accuses the sons for not practicing Catholicism in which he himself has a deep faith. Edmund ends the row by telling them that he is going to speak to Mary upstairs about her problem.

After Edmund's exit, the father informs Jamie that Doc Hardy has confirmed Edmund's illness as consumption and Edmund needs to stay in a sanatorium for recovery. Doc Hardy thinks that if Edmund goes to a sanatorium at the earliest, he shall be cured within six months to one year. Jamie demands that Tyrone should not send Edmund to a cheap place. He tells his father that consumption is a curable disease if treated properly. He should not think of saving money by sending Edmund to an inexpensive place. Jamie decides to accompany Tyrone and Edmund to the doctor and exits.

Mary comes back with her notion of a real home as she remarks that Jamie would have been a good son if he would have been brought up in a real home. She is not happy about Jamie's habit of squandering money and alcoholism. She tells James not to give Jamie money so that he cannot waste it on liquor. Tyrone indirectly accuses her of taking drugs again. Though she denies, yet pleads with him not leave her lonely. The husband suggests her to take a ride in the car which he had bought for her. To this, Mary retorts that she has hardly any friend whom she can visit after her marriage. She also makes a reference to one brief scandal about James and a mistress due to which all her friends had abandoned her. James tells her not to talk of the past. Then Mary continues with her history of morphine addiction and how James had hired a cheap quack for the child birth. Indirectly, she puts the blame of her addiction on James. James retorts not to dig up the past. To this, Mary replies, 'Why? How can I? The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us.'

Rather Mary continues opening up some facts of their life like the birth of her second son, Eugene, who died in infancy at the age of two and how she had taken a vow not to have another baby as she always blamed herself, and indirectly James, for his

illness. When she had gone on a tour with her husband and left her mother for babysitting, the child had caught measles from Jamie. James urges Marie not to talk of the past but she still continues and talks of Edmund who had always been weak and of sensitive health. She further says that it was at the birth of Edmund that she picked up the morphine addiction. She tries to justify by calling it her punishment.

As she finishes her speech, Edmund enters. He asks Tyrone for money and his father stingily produces. Edmund is sincerely thankful to him but then tells his father that he might regret it later on as he believes that his son might die soon and his money will be wasted. To this, the father is deeply hurt and Edmund apologizes and they make amends. They then talk of going to meet the doctor and James leaves. Mary tells Edmund not to visit Doc Hardy. Edmund retorts that she needs to quit morphine addiction. Mary denies the accusation. Mary reminds Edmund not to be home late, and the boys leave. Mary stares around the room, one hand drumming, the other fixing her hair. While alone, Mary confesses that she keeps telling lies to herself and pleads guilty that she can 'no longer call my soul my own'. She hopes for reclamation one day through Virgin Mary. She is left alone and is happy that they are gone but feels lonely. Mary closes the Act by asking, 'Mother of God, why do I feel so lonely?'

Act II introduces the great motif of alcohol, which presents a medium on the part of the characters to be away from the conflicts that disturb the family members. If the males of the family find in alcohol a way to escape, then Mary has chosen a different means to escape her pains. It is notable towards the end of the play that all three men and even Cathleen are drunk and Mary has taken a high dose of morphine. The play comes to an end with all the characters in a state of complete inebriation. It can be concluded that all the characters are escapists and they have a strong urge for addiction and escape problems of their everyday lives. Mary had recovered in the sanatorium, but when she came back, she could no longer resist her addiction to relieve herself of the mental tensions. The alcohol motif furthers the main theme of the play which is to suggest that this is like any other day in the life of the family wherein they fight and drink and try to escape the present. Just like the cycle of the day, this cycle of alcoholism, too, continues along with problems in the life of the Tyrones. A very pessimistic inference can be drawn that the family's problems in this play do not get resolved and the conflicts do not abate. Each character passes the day functioning towards inebriation and disagreeing with each other.

In this Act, we undoubtedly see Mary's inclination to blame fate for the problems of the family. Mary's fatalistic view is one of her personality defects as it always affords her an easy way to escape. Similarly, she blames much of her own problems on her unachieved dreams and disillusionment. The fatalistic point of view proves to be an obstacle to solving issues.

Another problem with the characters is that they fail to communicate with each other effectively. Jamie begins to put it to her about her look as somewhat haggard because she is on morphine. Mary, however, instantaneously denounces the assumption and makes up not to understand what Jamie is saying. She will not acknowledge even to her own sons that she has reclaimed her habit. Similarly, her sons will not antagonize her fully and force her to admit, even though they know that she is back on morphine. O'Neill does not put the blame on any one character; rather, all of them are responsible for the common fate of the family and the complete breakdown in communication.

All the characters in this play try to gather a positive attitude at times. Tyrone always anticipates that Jamie will one day be successful. Mary still is optimist that

Edmund will get better and that her husband will finally get her a real home. As a romantic youth, Edmund has hope for the whole family to make amends. Even Edmund has an inclination to evade clashes by laughing them away. He has his outpourings, yet he is less responsible that his father or brother. Mary also tries to hold the family together in part through forthcoming chatter. She seems to loath silence, as every time she is on stage, she makes pointless dialogue even when no one cares for what she has to say. Some of her speaking institutes an effort to even out her struggles.

Act II strengthens the notion that in terms of structure, the play is built around meals. Act I is set just after the family returns from breakfast; Act II, Scene I takes place as the family prepares for lunch; Act II, Scene II is set as the family returns after their lunch; Act III is set as the family prepares for dinner; Act IV takes place late at night when the men are having their last drinks. The structure of meals specifies the criticality of meals to the Tyrone family as it brings all four people together in a traditional way. Still the Tyrones are not actually seen at any one of these main meals. Thus, the play has a sense of waiting and mending in each of the scenes. This arrangement of meals like the configuration of alcoholism is monotonous and puts forward the invariable of life of the characters.

Another point which comes in this Act is the issue of religion, which is for the most part important to Tyrone as well as to Mary. Although neither practice Catholicism, Tyrone and Mary both proclaim to pray every day and they say that they fear God. The two sons, by disparity, are disbelievers. The cessation of the Tyrone family principles from one generation to the next is an important point. While Tyrone was raised up on Shakespeare, Irish authors and the Bible, his sons have despised that same nurture, turning towards unalike type of literature and a nonexistence of reliance. The denunciation of the old way by the second generation is something that Mary and Tyrone both have trouble accommodating, and it further harks back the reader that they are an couple being supplanted by new youngsters.

Finally, Mary's remarks that she cannot fail to recall the past because 'the past is the present' further advocates the uninteresting nature of life in the Tyrone kinfolk. The actions of the past recur in the present, just as the proceedings of each distinct day are repeated based on the hallucinations induced by alcohol and morphine. It must be noted that the title, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, indicates that the day is not really distinctive; it is just another day in the life of the family, not too much dissimilar from most other days except that it is the day that Edmund comes to know that he is suffering from consumption and he needs to visit a sanatorium.

Check Your Progress

5. Identify the event around which the play is structured.
6. State Mary's remark about her inability to forget the past. Write its significance.

4.4.3 Act III

Mary and Cathleen have returned from their visit to the chemist to buy her morphine prescription. As the scene opens, both are alone in the room and Cathleen, at Mary's offer, has been drinking. Mary does most of the speaking and deliberates her love for

fog but her hatred of the foghorn and her husband's obvious obsession with money. It is understandable that Mary has already taken some of her 'medicine.' Mary delves into her past reminiscences of her life and family. As a pious Catholic schoolgirl, she says that she never liked the drama; she did not feel 'at home' with the theater gathering. She keeps on talking about her past in a Catholic convent and the dream she once had of being a pianist and also the fact that it was once thought that she might become a nun. She mentions that in fact, she used to have these two dreams in her life: to become a nun and to become a well-known professional pianist. She also specifies that while she fell in love with her husband from the time she encountered him, she had never been to the theatre to watch a performance. Mary becomes increasingly preoccupied with her hands, which used to be slender and good-looking but have worsened since her addiction. She tells Cathleen that she needs her prescription to cure her arthritis – a justification which is a lie and not easily taken by Cathleen. When Mary falls asleep under the influence of the morphine, Cathleen exits to cook dinner.

Mary awakes and begins to have unpleasant reminiscences about how much she loved her life before she met her husband. She also decides that her prayers, coming from someone who is an addict, are not being heard by the Virgin. Irrespective of this she gets up to take another dose and at that pint James and the sons return. They are immediately able to tell that she has taken a heavy dose of Morphine. Mary tells them that she is startled they returned, since it is 'more cheerful' uptown. Although both the men are drunk, they are able to apprehend that she is back on morphine although Mary attempts to pretend as if she is not. Jamie, the other son, has not returned as he chose to go to a brothel instead and continue drinking.

Mary meanwhile laments Jamie's lifestyle, who she thinks was very smart until he started drinking. After calling Jamie, a 'hopeless failure' Mary cautions that his bad impact will negatively impact his brother as well. After seeing the condition that Mary is in, James gets angry and says that his attempt to come on time has been meaningless and he regrets her blaming him all the time for things that have gone wrong with her. Then, almost as a routine in the play, the quarreling duo make amends and set aside their bitterness. They even make incomplete remarks about their love for one another. When James goes to the basement to acquire another bottle of whiskey he realizes how he has been be fooled by his sons who added water to the whiskey bottle. Mary meanwhile carries on her talk with her son Edmund.

Edmund shares with his mother that he has consumption (tuberculosis). Mary denies it and tries to discredit Dr Hardy, due to her lack of ability to face the reality and most importantly cruelty of the situation. She reproaches Edmund of making an attempt to get more attention by blowing everything out of proportion. In retaliation, Edmund reminds his mother that her own father died of tuberculosis, and then, before exiting, he adds how challenging it is to have a 'dope friend for a mother.' Firmly resisting James's charges, Mary accuses James of meanness when he is drunk as she walks away. He is as bad as Jamie or Edmund, adds Mary. By herself, Mary admits that she needs more drugs and is hopeful that someday she will 'accidentally' overdose, because she knows that if she did so knowingly purpose, the Virgin would never pardon her. She, in other words, wishes herself dead.

When James comes back with more alcohol, Mary's tone unexpectedly changes as she reminisces about meeting her husband. Tyrone then begins to cry as he thinks back on the memoirs, and he tells his wife that he loves her. Mary retorts, 'I love you dear, in spite of everything.' But she regrets marrying him because he drinks so much.

Mary says she will not fail to recall, but she will try not to all the time. She mentions that she was spoiled awfully by her father and that spoiling made her a bad wife. Mary again calls him stingy.

She opens her heart to James and confides her deepest anxieties about Edmund to him. She feels that her youngest son does not care for her as she an addict. When James tries to raise her spirits, Mary again blames herself for giving birth to Edmund, who appears to have been conceived to replace a baby Mary and James lost before, interestingly called Eugene. When Cathleen declares that dinner is ready, Mary points out that she is not hungry and is going to lie down. James goes for dinner all alone knowing well that Mary is in fact going upstairs to get morphine. James wanders off, broken, into the dining room.

As pointed out in the previous Act, the play is structured around the motif of meals: either waiting for meals or recovering from them. In this case, the family is waiting for dinner to be laid. However, the course of having meals together breaks down over the sequence of the day. Breakfast goes easily, but lunch is slowed down for a long time as the family waits for James Tyrone to return from the garden. Dinner itself is a misadventure as Jamie is not home from his night of revelry. Mary does not have it because she has lost her desire for food; her addiction reaches a hilt as she takes more drugs. In this way, the principal action of the family eating together falls apart.

The idea of a home is also carried forward in this act. Again a more developed idea of Mary's desire for a home is fully conveyed. In fact, she dislikes Tyrone's idea of a home so sturdily because she links it with the death of Eugene, who died when Mary was traveling with her husband. Mary allies James with the traveling home of the theater actor and, metaphorically spurns the way in which she was forced to live life with him.

The frequent use of morphine sends her often into her past. In fact the use of morphine provides her an opportunity to escape from the present conflicts. It allows her to leave the present and live in the past – to a time which is happy for her. It actually happens in the last Act that Mary idealizes her youth to a point where she could not distinguish between the past and the present. It is important to note, however, that while the men dislike Mary's morphine addiction, they themselves are not much better in their abuse of alcohol. While Mary certainly disappears mentally when she is intoxicated, the men do the same, even though they think their choice of drug is more suitable. Of course, it can only be assumed that Mary will carry on losing more of her dreams as she gets older. O'Neill seems to suggest that as individuals get older, they display tendencies of glorifying the past to the point where living in the present becomes intensely agonizing.

This is a very pessimistic outlook but O'Neill unmistakably evades despair by proposing that there is restoration through forgiveness. Mary restates that she cannot forget the past, but she says that she will attempt to forgive. While she cannot be trusted to make such an effort, it seems that forgiving Tyrone's past misbehavior and neglect is the only way that Mary can bear to come back to the present. Without a doubt, the title *The Long Day's Journey into Night* has more than one connotation. If the play was just about Mary, it could be called *The Long Day's Journey into the Past*. There are two movements in the play; on one hand, the family is moving forward in time as embodied by each passing day. On the other hand, all characters are prone to going back into their past as a means of escaping the present and reliving happier times. The title, in its indistinct use of the word 'night', seems to suggest the twin nature of the play.

Act III noticeably shows us the rapport between Edmund and Mary. It is important to be familiar with the suggestion that Mary has never stopped seeing Edmund as an infant who replaced Eugene. On the one hand, Mary has concerns of seeing Edmund as anything other than her offspring who cannot perish because of an affliction. The very idea of Edmund dying is particularly distressing for Mary as she thinks that Edmund may be God's way of punishing her. In a different way, she also sees Edmund as God's punishment on her.

Check Your Progress

7. Comment on Mary's desire for a home.
8. To what purpose are inebriants used in the play?

4.4.4 Act IV

At midnight, James is sitting alone in the living room, drinking and playing solitaire. As the Act begins, a foghorn is overheard in the distance. Tyrone is drunk, and soon Edmund enters, also drunk. They reason about keeping the lights on and the cost of the electricity. Tyrone's acts are persevering and Edmund reproaches him for believing whatever he wants. Edmund has just come back from a long walk in the icy night air even though doing so was a bad idea for his health. He states, 'To hell with sense! We're all crazy.' Edmund tells his father that he loves being in the fog because it lets him live in a different world. He cynically mocks Shakespeare, saying, 'We are such stuff as manure is made of, so let's drink up and forget it. That's more my idea.' He then quotes from the French author Baudelaire, saying 'be always drunken.' He then quotes from Baudelaire about the decadence in the city in allusion to Jamie. Tyrone condemns Edmund's literary interests; he thinks Edmund should spare literature from God.

While criticizing Edmund, the father grows annoyed and threatens to strike Edmund, then stops himself. He gives up and switches on all the lights. While the two are about to drink, they have a rare gentle conversation. James elucidates his stinginess and exposes that he ruined his career by remaining in an acting job for money. After countless years playing the same part, he lost his flair for versatility.

They hear Mary moving upstairs and they talk about her father, who died of tuberculosis. Edmund notes that they only seem to argue over unhappy topics together. They then begin to play cards and Tyrone tells Jamie that even though Mary had dreams of being a nun and a pianist, she did not have the strength of will for the former or the skill for the latter. They are able to sense that is coming downstairs but pretend not to notice. Edmund then accuses Tyrone for Mary's morphine addiction because Tyrone hired an inexpensive quack. Edmund then says he has aversions for his father and blames him for Mary's persistent addiction because Tyrone never gave her a home. Tyrone protects himself, but then Edmund says that he thinks that Tyrone should accept that he will die from consumption. Edmund continues blaming his father that he spends money only on land and not on his sons or his wife. Edmund states that he chooses over a sub-standard sanatorium.

Tyrone disagrees with his comments, saying that Edmund is drunk. However, Tyrone promises to send Edmund anywhere he wishes to make him better, 'within reason'. Tyrone tells Edmund that he is prudent with money because he has always had to work

for everything he has. Edmund and Jamie, by contrast, have been able to take everything in life for granted as they easily got everything they wanted. Tyrone reasons that neither of his sons sees the value of money. Edmund, exploring into his deeper passions, reminds Tyrone that he, Edmund, once tried to commit suicide. Tyrone says that Edmund was simply drunk at the time, but Edmund maintains that he was cognizant of his actions. James then begins to cry lightly, narrating events from his deprived childhood and his disappointing father.

James and Edmund make amends and both of them agree together on a sanatorium for Edmund, a place that is more expensive but considerably better. Tyrone then tells Edmund of his great acting blunder that disallowed him from becoming widely famous. In fact, he remained confined to one particular role and was typecast, making it challenging for him to magnify his horizons and find new work. James confesses that he only ever, in truth, wanted to be an artist, but his hopes were ruined when he sold out to a brief money-making success. Edmund begins chuckling 'at life, it's so damned crazy,' at the mention of his father as a performer.

Now it is Edmund's turn to share some of his memories as the father and the son open up their hearts to one another. Edmund begins with some of his stories related to the sea. He reveals certain instances when he felt dissolved or gone astray in the ocean. He considers that there is truth and significance in being vanished at sea, and he shares his desire that he should have been born a 'seagull or a fish' and he would have enjoyed his life.

In the play, this is the first time that real interaction between Tyrone and Edmund is explored. This is a relationship that has not been explored comprehensively in the play before this point. They discuss Edmund's preoccupation with literature and it becomes evident that Tyrone wishes to use his authority over Edmund by ordering what Edmund ought to read. One of James's great dreams is to see his sons grow up to be like him and he openly thinks that Edmund's curiosity in literature has led him down at a dissimilar path. All the same, it is fascinating that Tyrone and Edmund are both scholarly figures. Tyrone is charmed by Shakespeare and the art of acting. He acknowledges that his only dream was to be an artist. Edmund laughs at this merely because Tyrone tells Edmund that his quest of art will get him nowhere in life. Tyrone looks as if to be at struggle with his own interest in art as dissimilar to his son's interest.

In this Act, a new side of Edmund comes before the audience. He shares that he likes to take walks unaccompanied at night by the sea. To Edmund, the fog and the ocean hold a symbolic value comparable to that of alcohol. Edmund feels like he can get lost in the large sea, as though he were getting drunk on liquor. The ocean becomes a way to escape from the family in addition to alcohol and morphine. The persistent sound of the foghorn throughout the night is a continuous reminder of the symbolic importance of fog in this play. The foghorn itself is envisioned to help direct ships through the fog to safety. The question for the audience as well as readers is what will escort the Tyrone family through its foggy communication and relationships.

Jamie approaching the house is overheard and James retreats to the next room to avoid a confrontation. He drinks more, but he will not let Edmund drink at first, because of his poor health. Jamie says that he spent the evening at a brothel, where he paid for a fat whore whom no one else was willing to take. He says that he picked a prostitute named Fat Violet, which gives Edmund a chuckle ('she weighs a ton'), but Jamie says it's no jest: her appearance is affecting her source of revenue. Jamie, in turn, feels rather generous about himself. When the owner of the brothel tells him that she will have to fire

Fat Violet because no one wants her, Jamie jumps at the chance to do a good deed. He hires Violet just for a heart-to-heart about the despondency of life. Edmund assaults Jamie with a knock when Jamie begins admiring himself and reprimanding others.

In an unexpected turn of events, Jamie thanks Edmund for sobering him down. He blames his incoherence on Mary's addiction. He and Edmund both begin to cry as they ponder about their mother. Jamie is also vexed about Edmund, who may die from consumption. Jamie says that he adores Edmund and that, in a sense, he is responsible for who he is at present.

Jamie owns up to that fact that he has been a bad influence and he says that he did it on purpose. Jamie confesses that he has always been envious of Edmund and has wanted him to fail in all his endeavours. All these years, he has deliberately set a bad case in point to bring Edmund down. Jamie confesses that even though he loves Edmund more than anyone else, he has wanted him to fail. He then cautions Edmund by saying, 'I'll do my damnedest to make you fail,' but then he concedes, you are all I've got left'.

Edmund is shocked and looks with exceeding pain at Jamie's frank hatred. In an impulsive burst of indignation, Edmund jumps out of his chair and punches him in the face. For a moment, Jamie gets ready to strike back, but then the urge to fight goes out of him and Jamie come to an understanding that his comment was out of line. Edmund asks for forgiveness for hitting him, but Jamie says that it was right to do so.

In fact, this Act throws some light on the character of Jamie. With Jamie's account of his evening in the city, it becomes clear that even though he is wasting his life away on prostitutes and alcohol, he still feels a certain obligation to help other people and decides to visit an obese prostitute who gets no customers. Jamie is willing to accomplish some degree of self-sacrifice for the upward mobility of others, which is one of his stronger abilities. Although he attempts to help someone else, he is still unwilling to help his own brother. His declaration of guilt to Edmund is noteworthy for a kind of philosophical maturity; he is willing to admit to his own deep complications, even though he is not ready to engage from them. In this case, Jamie may be better off than his parents and brother who have more trouble divulging to their inadequacies. Right until the completion of the play, for instance, Mary never admits to her morphine addiction. Jamie, however, confesses about his mishandling of his brother and the carelessness of his own life. Jamie's confession has added richness and complexity to his character. Eugene's critic Manheim comments:

> 'Jamie's confession reveals man at both his gut-level worst and transfigured best—unsentimentalized and unadorned, yet capable of giving as much as it is possible to give to another person. And that is a great deal. Jamie warns of his certain propensity to harm his brother even if that warning loses him the one thing in life which makes him capable of going on—his brother's love. The warning reveals love which risks the sacrifice of one's own emotional life support system. Jamie gains great dignity his confession, a dignity often lacking in the central figures of modern drama while essential to the heroes of ancient drama, heroes who had to face terrible truths about themselves which others had not the stature to face.'

At this point, James re-enters, having heard all that Jamie had said. Tyrone says that he has been giving that same caution to Edmund for many years. Tyrone calls Jamie a 'waste' to which the two get into a long argument.

The father and the sons are alerted by the sound of Mary playing piano in the following room. The sound stops and Mary appears on stage. The three men help themselves with drinks in a circle. James highs his glass and his sons follow the same,

but, before they can have their drink, Mary begins speaking. The three keep their drinks at the table at the sound of her voice. Although Mary is very pale yet she looks awfully young and innocent, with an enthusiastic and unquestioning smile. It is very obvious that she is on a substantial dose of morphine. Mary is hallucinating, thinking that she is back in her youthful days. She considers that she is in a convent. In her hands, she is holding her bridal robe, which she took out of the attic earlier. Seeing this Jamie, begins to cry and Tyrone furiously says that he will throw Jamie out of his house if he continues to cry.

Edmund abruptly tells Mary that he has consumption, but she tells him not to touch her as she wants to be a nun. She explains that she has spoken with Mother Elizabeth, whom she loves sincerely, even more than her own mother. Mother Elizabeth, at all times, understands, without Mary having to say anything. Her eyes see through Mary and she cannot keep any secrets from her. Still, Mother Elizabeth is not as understanding when Mary tells her she wants to join the convent as a nun. Mother Elizabeth recommends that Mary should be sure of her wish. First, she should try to live like an ordinary girl. If, after a year, Mary still feels the same way, she can come back and they can consider it. Mary is noticeably upset, but will do anything Mother Elizabeth suggests. She feels confused and asks for sanctuary at the shrine to hope for peace again. Mary is sure that the Blessed Virgin hears her and will always bless her, as long as she maintains faith. Mother Elizabeth had told her that she should experience life out of the convent before choosing to be a nun. Mary tells all three of them that she followed that advice and went home to her parents. But then, a few months passed, and something happened. She came across and fell in love with James Tyrone, 'and was so happy for a time'. Her hallucinations make the sons sit motionless and Tyrone stirring in his chair as the play ends.

It is left open to the audience to decide whether the play ends on a note of resolution or not. At the outset, it seems that some conflicts are still left open, particularly Mary's morphine addiction, which is witnessed at its worst in this Act. Mary can no longer even visualize the domain of the real as she falls into a hallucinogenic state in which she thinks she is young again and is back in her convent. It is very distinct now that she takes her morphine to escape the actuality of the present and to bring herself back to a period when her life was full of hope and options. Her final speech ends the play with the hope that the situation will not get better overnight. Rather, the play ends leaving the audience with the feeling that the day is not particularly special; the events of this August day are likely to be repeated by the family on any other day of a year as they are trapped in an endless set of fragmented reveries, struggles and their remedies through morphine or alcohol.

Still, if one believes that there is a resolution to some extent in the last Act, it comes from owning up to faults in an attempt to better the future. Jamie, for instance, warns Edmund to be careful of his jealousy and before that, Tyrone too admits his own stinginess and comes to an understanding to send Edmund to a high-class sanatorium in a hope of curing him. Thus, at least two of the major family conflicts are in some measure resolved by the end of the play.

A motif of fate too appears in this Act, though by different characters now. Generally, it is expressed by Mary, but now Edmund picks up the issue when he mentions that he should have been born a fish or a seagull as he loves the ocean so much. Also, one must notice the astonishing weight that is placed on Edmund's birth in this play by all the characters. Mary and James both attribute the morphine addiction to Edmund's birth. The audience also comes to know that Edmund himself is not fully delighted with

his birth as a human, although apparently he is half jesting. The playwright prompts the audience once again of a firm fatalistic point of view on life in which humans cannot control their fortune or their heritage. O'Neill seems to suggest that real hope in a fatalist world is to try to pardon and to express the fact.

If thematically certain issues seem to be resolved partially towards the end of the play, yet so far as characterization is concerned, O'Neill has created four complete characters with abundant strengths and flaws. Some of both parents can be seen in both sons, but within the family, one can undoubtedly see some specific variations that have taken place between the two generations. O'Neill does not end the play on any specific note of criticism of any character. Rather, the play ends with a splitting image of a resigned family that was once great but has since fallen into despondency.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is unquestionably a tragedy in its portrayal of the characters, but it is important to notice that it does end on a promise of hope for the future if the characters can transform the way they interact and treat one another. Therefore, O'Neill does not end the story of the Tyrone family on a negative note.

Check Your Progress

9. Comment on the motif of fate that emerges towards the end of the play.
10. Is there a suggestion of hope in the play?

4.5 CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

James Tyrone (James Senior)

He is sixty-five years old and still looks young. He is about five feet eight but gives the impression of being taller due to his military-like posture and demeanour. He is wide shouldered and broad chested. The husband of Mary and the father of Jamie and Edmund, James Tyrone was once a famous actor who travelled with his wife. As his Irish father had abandoned him at a very tender age, he was forced to start working at the age of ten to support himself.

James has a moral belief and a value for money that leads to a resilient monetary prudence—bordering on stinginess. His dialogue and movement are those of a classical actor with a premeditated modus operandi, but he is very simple, down-to-earth and not volatile at all with 'inclinations still close to his humble beginnings and Irish farmer forbears'. His outfit is to a certain degree threadbare and run down. He wears his attire to the limit of usefulness. He has been in good physical shape his entire life and is free of apprehensions except for the fear of 'dying in the poorhouse' and preoccupation with having money. He has 'streaks of sentimental melancholy and rare flashes of intuitive sensibility'. He smokes cigars and hates being talked about to as the 'Old Man' by his sons. He is unhappy about his sons' habit of squandering money and not following Catholicism.

Mary Tyrone

The wife of James Tyrone and mother of Jamie and Edmund, she is of medium height with a young elegant figure, a little fleshy with distinctly Irish facial features. She was on one occasion very pretty and is still remarkable. She has an easy-going and striking voice with a 'touch of Irish lilt when she is merry'. She struggles from a morphine addiction that has lasted almost over two decades beginning from the time of the birth of her younger son, Edmund, who is now twenty-three. While she has denied the addiction several times, she at all times resumed her morphine intake after spending more time with her family. She is on morphine in each scene of the play and her usage escalates steadily as the day progresses.

Although she loves her husband, yet many a times, she has disappointing remarks about him, especially as her marriage put an end to her potential career as a pianist or a convent nun. She is also upset with the fact that Tyrone never gave her a permanent 'home' for which she always longed for. Her hallucinations of being a youthful girl at the closing of the play give no hope from her addiction and betterment of her life.

Jamie Tyrone (James Junior)

The elder Tyrone son is in his early thirties. As he squanders money on liquor and brothels, he has to bank on his parents for financial sustenance. He has never been scholarly and dropped out of more than a few colleges and has very little motivation, much to the disappointment of his parents.

The older son has some of the father in him 'on the rare occasions when he smiles without sneering, his personality possesses the remnant of a humorous, romantic, irresponsible Irish charm—the beguiling ne'er-do-well, with a strain of the sentimentally poetic'. He indicates signs of premature crumbling and degeneration. He also wears a habitual appearance of skepticism. He is considered attractive amongst women and widely held amongst men. He is an actor similar to his father but has much striving finding work due to an ill reputation for being a reckless, unreliable womanizing alcoholic. His father and he reason a great deal about this.

In spite of having all these traits, he rises in the eyes of audience on at least two occasions: one, as he chose a fat whore whom no one else was ready to hire and the other in his confessing his jealousy for his younger brother Edmund, followed by a word of caution.

Edmund

Ten years younger than Jamie, Edmund is more proficiently inclined towards arts. He is lean and resembles both his parents but more his mother. He has her large dusky eyes and touchy mouth carved in a long slender Irish face with shady brown hair. Like his mother, he feels uneasy all the time. In addition to this, his political inclinations lie with the communists.

He is unwell and has shallow cheeks. Later in the play, he is diagnosed with consumption. A scholarly and passionate romantic, he learns during the play that he will have to spend up to a year in a sanatorium to be cured of his deadly disease. Like his brother and father, he is to some extent an alcoholic and has a propensity to squander money, although he works harder than Jamie. He appears to have journeyed the world by being employed in the merchant navy and caught the fatal tuberculosis on one of his trips abroad. He always dreams of being a romantic hero from a Shakespearean play or any other classic. His mother Mary never gives up hope that someday her son Edmund will be restored to perfect health and success in life.

4.6 ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

Indeed, some of the parallels between *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and O'Neill's life are striking. O'Neill himself appears in the play in the character of Edmund, the younger son who, like O'Neill himself, suffers from consumption. Let us look at some important points in the play.

4.6.1 A Note on the Autobiographical Content in the Play

Long Day's Journey into Night presents an explosive home life of the dramatist himself. Certain biographical facts may be brought in here like Eugene's own time spent at a sanatorium to get treated for tuberculosis.

Edmund Tyrone has an imaginative and artistic talent just like the playwright himself. Eugene O'Neill's biographer Louis Sheaffer writes about the dying Eugene as he uttered, 'I knew it. Born in a hotel room and died in a hotel room'. Tyrone leads a similar life of a vagabond and his wife keeps complaining of not having a real 'home'.

Like Tyrone, O'Neill's father was an Irish-American Catholic, an alcoholic and a Broadway actor. O'Neill's father, as an actor, spent most of his time in voyages, touring for the theatre.

Like Mary in the play, O'Neill's mother too was a morphine addict and she became so around the time when O'Neill was born.

Like Jamie Tyrone, O'Neill's elder brother did not take his life seriously, choosing to lead a life of a libertine and wasting money on prostitutes, alcohol and the fast-paced irresponsible life of Broadway. O'Neill's elder brother, Jamie died of too much drinking.

Eugene O'Neill had an older brother named Edmund who died in infancy, whereas in this play, Edmund has an older brother named Eugene who died in infancy.

The writer's own son by his first wife suffered from alcoholism and committed suicide at the age of forty.

Eugene's third wife Carlotta later became addicted to potassium bromide and his son a heroin addict and eventually committed suicide.

All these aspects can also be dealt with reference to literary author and critic Michael Manheim's treatment of the issue of autobiography in the play:

'This play grows not out of O'Neill's autobiographical agony, but out of his triumph over that agony, a triumph which is obvious in the very fact of the play's searing explicitness—especially regarding Mary Tyrone. The whole point about her addiction is that in this play, it is no longer seen as the most shameful of horrors. Mary's affliction and her accompanying guilt are treated here with a detachment made all the more effective by being anything but clinical.'

4.6.2 *Long Day's Journey into Night*: A Tragedy

The question as to whether or not it is a tragedy can be answered by describing a tragedy and its major components like leaving the audience with a sense of catharsis or emotional purgation through the viewing of powerful events, and depicting the fall of something/one systematically and the characters, analysing the events. The Tyrone family was once a close family which has deteriorated over the years for a number of reasons:

Mary's morphine addiction; James, Jamie and Edmund's alcoholism, Tyrone's stinginess, the boys' negligent attitude toward work and money, and a number of other factors. As the play is set, the parents are ageing, and while they always anticipated that their sons would accomplish great things, that hope is beginning to be supplanted by a resigned despair. Also, it can be discussed whether the play ends on an optimistic note or does the pessimism continue.

The play becomes all the more tragic as it leaves little scope of optimism for the future. In other words, the future of the Tyrones can only be seen as one extended cycle of a repetitive past along with an addiction to alcohol and morphine.

4.6.3 Use of Images and Symbols

The following symbols and images have been used in the play:

- **Meals:** Meals symbolize time for family union but, more often than not, it falls apart. Moreover, a lot of time is wasted either in waiting for meals or recovering from one.
- **Day:** Time is an important symbol in the play.
- **Fate:** Fate or destiny is another take on time and plays a significant role in the play.
- **Broken dreams:** Broken dreams function as a painful reminder of a time that once was. Especially for Mary who suffers the most as she could not fulfill her dreams, the realization is particularly traumatic.
- **Present:** The present is an illusion. No one is really sure of the present and none of the action (if at all any) appears to be propelled by the present.
- **Past:** The past is an important motif in the play and keeps coming back to the characters. In other words, the conflicts arise from unresolved issues in the past and the characters seem doomed to relive it every day. It is important to note that *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is not only a journey forward in time, but also a journey back into the past lives of all the characters.
- **Home:** Home appears as a symbol of stability and marital bliss. It is also an idealized construct which is never attained by the one character who desires it the most, i.e., Mary.
- **Addiction:** The play foregrounds two kinds of addiction: morphine and alcohol. All the characters (including Cathleen, the maid) take recourse to some form of addiction to escape the present.

4.6.4 Ailment, Disappointment and Addiction

The play opens with a sense of monotony as if each day is doomed to be the same. Action in this regard, appears to be stunted. The possibility of it being any other day is clearly established by the title.

All the present events in the life of the family have most of the strengths that need gathering emerge in the past, which is extraordinarily alive for the Tyrones.

Mary in particular is unable to banish the past and all the dreams she once had of being a nun or a pianist. Tyrone too has, at all times, high hopes for Jamie, who has been a continual disappointment. The addictions give excuses to escape from the conflicts of real life.

The audience has all the time a strong realizing fact that the family is not making improvement or progressing towards betterment. Instead, it rather persistently slides into hopelessness, as they continue to remain tethered to a past from which they can never recover.

4.6.5 Characterization in the Play

One of the play's greatest strengths is its fair and unbiased characterization. The play has all the characters with certain flaws, yet O'Neill's presentation displays a great level of honesty. He has not been reproachful in nature; no one character is meant to be seen as particularly good or bad.

The play constructs a world in which communication has failed amongst all the characters. One of the great struggles in the play is the characters' mysterious helplessness to communicate, despite their constant conflicts and bickering. For instance, the men time and again fight amongst themselves over Mary's addiction, but no one is prepared to confront her directly. Instead, they permit her to lie to herself about her own addiction and even about Edmund's illness. Edmund and Jamie do not communicate properly until the last Act, when Jamie finally confesses about his own jealousy for his brother and his secret desire to see him fail. Tyrone, likewise, can only disapprove of his sons, but his obstinate nature will not allow him to accept criticism for himself.

All the characters in the play *Long Day's Journey Into Night* seem to be wrecked with desperate love and aching loneliness. In spite of their skirmishes and comments, there is an undercurrent of love and concern for each other.

4.6.6 The Posthumous Publication of the Play

The play was written in 1940–42 but was published posthumously in 1956. It was O'Neill's wish to publish it at least twenty-five years after his death. However, this wish was not fulfilled.

The play was received well by the audience. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize when it was first published and it has continued to be one of the most prized plays of the twentieth century.

Possibly, the most important reason for its commercial success has been the reason that nearly every family can see itself replicated in at least some parts of the play. The Tyrone family is not an atypical family in the sense that it foregrounds a deep philosophical concern with moving forward and the struggles it has to face as a result of this.

4.6.7 Role of the Past

The play is as much as a long day's journey into the past as anything else. The characters are, to varying degrees, fixated with the past and they are all unable to forget or forgive.

Although the playwright suggests that tolerance and pardon can be an appropriate form of redemption, the characters have trouble forgiving one another. The family is at the end of the day paralyzed because of its incompetence to let go of past pains and wounds. Tyrone cannot be condoned for his stinginess and Mary cannot be absolved for all the assurances which she has not kept because of her addiction. The past is very much alive in the play and all the characters have a tendency to view it through rose-tinted glasses.

4.6.8 The Structure of the Play

The structure of the play in parts presents a similarity to the disintegration that occurs over the course of the day. Meals form a crucial part in the structure. The first four scenes are constructed around meals, either before or after. If it is before a meal, the scene functions with an air of expectation of something important to come, i.e., the meal itself and its accompanying drama. It is worth noting how the family makes several earnest attempts to come together before the food gets cold. In the scenes set after a meal, the family is shown as engrossed in the discussion of how to kill time until the next meal is served.

Meals are very important as they bring the whole family together, but the meal cycle itself breaks down at the end of the play. As the play progresses, it gets harder to gather the family for each meal, and by the end of it, Jamie does not even come home for supper, while Mary is intoxicated and goes back to her room before having her meal.

4.6.9 O'Neill's use of language in the Play

The question can be addressed from the point of view of the characters wherein they use language to describe themselves in their unique ways. They express their attitudes and expression. Actually, this issue can be dealt with on two levels: first, the play presents a politicized language that attributes high significance on meaning, yet the characters emphasize the right to their own selection of names. Taking an instance from the story, Mary is at all times very certain to never permit others to talk about Edmund's illness as something other than a bad cold. Similarly, Tyrone considers himself as 'prudent' while other calls him 'stingy'. Jamie does not wish his lifestyle to be called reckless; he has a preference in calling himself an independent young man.

Secondly, O'Neill does a worthy job of attributing the two sons a comparable diction, a diction that is different to that of their parents. On the other hand, some of the parents' physical response and body language manifest themselves in the language of the sons, who intermittently replicate their parents' words.

The *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is invested heavily in the politics of language.

Check Your Progress

11. Write a short note on Jamie Tyrone.
12. What is the significance of broken dreams?
13. What is unique about the structure of the play?
14. Highlight the characters' inability to forget and forgive the past.

4.7 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tennessee Williams was an American playwright and author of several stage classics. He was born as Thomas Lanier Williams III on 26 March 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi. He attended Soldan High School in Missouri, and later, studied at University City High School, also in Missouri. From 1929 to 1931, he attended the University of Missouri in

Columbia for journalism classes. In 1936, Williams attended the Washington University in St. Louis where he wrote the play *Me, Vashya* (1937). By 1938, enrolled in the University of Iowa, from where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. He later studied at the Dramatic Workshop of The New School in New York City. Around 1939, he adopted 'Tennessee Williams' as his professional name.

His plays *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) established him as a playwright of stature. Both the plays revolved around the theme of individuals who possess a self-punishing nature. *The Rose Tattoo* (1951) reveals Williams' genius in the realm of comedy, which appears as an undercurrent of this otherwise serious play. His *Camino Real* (1953) was experimental in nature. However, his latter works including *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1956) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1959) move around the familiar domain of family lives and cultures of Southern areas, a theme which keeps recurring in Williams' works. His other plays includes *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1962), *In the Bar of A Tokyo Hotel* (1969), among others.



Tennessee Williams

In The Winter of Cities (1956) and *Androgyne, Mon Amour* (1977) are the two collections of poetry composed by him. Williams also published a novel called *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950). His *Memoirs*, which came out in print in 1975, record the playwright's conscience plagued by grief and anger, and a constant sense of not achieving success—a familiar theme which his readers/audience were exposed to through the central characters of his major plays.

Tennessee Williams as a playwright

Tennessee Williams wrote twenty-five complete plays. Almost all his plays had a lyrical quality that was plagued with loneliness, and violence had a liberating effect in them. He presented the world theatre lovers with memorable characters, an exceptional vision of life as it appeared in the South, and an unparalleled sketch of the human condition. He was passionately involved in what he called 'poetic realism'. It means the use of mundane daily objects which, when observed repeatedly and in proper contexts, appear to be encoded with symbolic meanings.

His plays also give the impression of being preoccupied with the excess form of human violence and sexual behaviour including insanity, sexual abuse, incest, nymphomania, and brutal and unnatural deaths. Williams himself considered the violence in his own work as normal and ordinary because he considered it to be a part of the human condition. He was also conscious that the violence in his plays was set in a certain American context.

Williams' writings reflected deep sympathy and extensive humour about the castaways in our society. As stated above, although his depictions were often violent, his work, especially his poetry, reflected his kind behaviour.

His first successful play is *The Glass Menagerie,* which was considered to be his 'memory play'. However, his several other plays were his nightmares. Even though the plays were rarely autobiographical, they were based on his personal experiences, reflecting his private suffering and apprehensions.

He has penned down one of his experiences about his sister's room in their family home in St. Louis. According to him, the room, which had his sister's collection of glass figures, represented 'all the softest emotions that belong to recollection of things past'.

As compared to the works of his contemporaries, Williams' works are full of unsurpassed passion and imagination on one hand, while on the other, they reflect a barrage of struggles and dismays.

Just like the works of Edward Albee were criticized by his certain contemporaries, the critics who objected the excessive use of violence in Williams' work, often held their grudges on the use of sexuality. The topic of homosexuality was not an openly debated or examined subject in Williams' time. However, in his plays, Williams plays around with the themes of desire and isolation, which unfold, among other things, the consequences of having grown up as a homosexual in a world which was homophobic in nature. He left behind a perfect body of work which included his prominent plays that are still performed throughout the world. His works are not creatively or technically stimulating, but are melodramatic. Nevertheless, his best ones are creatively and socially powerful, adding to their timeless appeal.

Awards and recognition

Tennessee Williams won many acclaims and laurels for his contribution to literature and theatre. Some of the prominent ones are listed below:

- Group Theatre Prize (1939)
- Rockefeller Grant (1939)
- Sidney Howard Memorial Award: *The Glass Menagerie* (1945)
- Donaldson Award: *The Glass Menagerie* (1945)
- New York Drama Critics' Circle Award: *The Glass Menagerie* (1945)
- New York Drama Critics' Circle Award: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948)
- Donaldson Award: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948)
- Pulitzer Prize: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948)
- Tony Award: *The Rose Tattoo* (1952)
- Pulitzer Prize: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)
- Tony Award: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)
- New York Drama Critics' Circle Award: *The Night of the Iguana* (1961)
- Tony Award: *The Night of the Iguana* (1961)
- Presidential Medal of Freedom (1980)

Important works of Tennessee Williams

Apprentice plays

- *Candles to the Sun* (1936)
- *Fugitive Kind* (1937)
- *Spring Storm* (1937)
- *Me Vaysha* (1937)
- *Not About Nightingales* (1938)
- *Battle of Angels* (1940)
- *I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix* (1941)
- *You Touched Me* (1945)
- *Stairs to the Roof* (1947)

Major plays

- *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)
- *Summer and Smoke* (1948)
- *The Rose Tattoo* (1951)
- *Camino Real* (1953)
- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)
- *Orpheus Descending* (1957)
- *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1958)
- *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959)
- *Period of Adjustment* (1960)
- *The Night of the Iguana* (1961)
- *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* (1962, rewriting of *Summer and Smoke*)
- *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963)
- *The Mutilated* (1965)
- *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* (1968, also known as *Kingdom of Earth*)
- *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1969)
- *Will Mr. Merriweather Return from Memphis?* (1969)
- *Small Craft Warnings* (1972)
- *The Two-Character Play* (1973)
- *Out Cry* (1973, rewriting of *The Two-Character Play*)
- *The Red Devil Battery Sign* (1975)
- *This Is (An Entertainment)* (1976)
- *Vieux Carré* (1977)
- *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* (1979)
- *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980)
- *The Notebook of Trigorin* (1980)
- *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* (1981)
- *A House Not Meant to Stand* (1982)
- *In Masks Outrageous and Austere* (1983)

Novels

- *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950, adapted into a film in 1961)
- *Moise and the World of Reason* (1975)

Screenplays and teleplays

- *The Glass Menagerie* (1950)
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)
- *The Rose Tattoo* (1955)
- *Baby Doll* (1956)
- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)
- *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959)
- *The Fugitive Kind* (1959)
- *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* (1966)
- *Boom!* (1968)
- *The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond* (2009; screenplay from 1957)

Short stories

- *The Vengeance of Nitocris* (1928)
- *The Field of Blue Children* (1939)
- *The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin* (1951)
- *Hard Candy: A Book of Stories* (1954)
- *Three Players of a Summer Game and Other Stories* (1960)
- *The Knightly Quest: a Novella and Four Short Stories* (1966)
- *One Arm and Other Stories* (1967)
    - o *One Arm*
    - o *The Malediction*
    - o *The Poet*
    - o *Chronicle of a Demise*
    - o *Desire and the Black Masseur*
    - o *Portrait of a Girl in Glass*
    - o *The Important Thing*
    - o *The Angel in the Alcove*
    - o *The Field of Blue Children*
    - o *The Night of the Iguana*
    - o *The Yellow Bird*
- *Eight Mortal Ladies Possessed: A Book of Stories* (1974)
- *Tent Worms* (1980)
- *It Happened the Day the Sun Rose, and Other Stories* (1981)

One-act plays

Williams wrote over seventy one-act plays during his lifetime. The one-acts explored several of the same themes that dominated his longer works. Williams' major collections are published by New Directions in New York City.

- *American Blues* (1948)
- *Mister Paradise and Other One-Act Plays*
- *Dragon Country: A book of one-act plays* (1970)
- *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays*

- *27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other Plays* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *Something wild...* (Introduction) (1953)
  - o *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *The Purification* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *The Last of My Solid Gold Watches* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *Portrait of a Madonna* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *Auto-da-Fé* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *Lord Byron's Love Letter* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *The Strangest Kind of Romance* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *The Long Goodbye* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *At Liberty* (1946)
  - o *Moony's Kid Don't Cry* (1946)
  - o *Hello from Bertha* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *This Property Is Condemned* (1946 and 1953)
  - o *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen...* (1953)
  - o *Something Unspoken* (1953)
- *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Volume VI*
- *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Volume VII*

Poetry

- *In the Winter of Cities* (1956)
- *Androgyne, Mon Amour* (1977)

Source: Wikipedia

Check Your Progress

15. What was Tennessee Williams' birth name?
16. Which play of Williams reveals his genius in the realm of comedy?
17. Name the two collections of poetry that were composed by Tennessee Williams.
18. When was *A Streetcar Named Desire* published?
19. How many complete plays did Tennessee Williams write?
20. What kind of impression do his plays give?
21. What are the themes that Williams experiments with in his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*?
22. Which of Williams' works earned him a Pulitzer Prize?

4.8 *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*: AN INTRODUCTION

Characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- **Blanche DuBois** – The sensitive, female protagonist with a moth-like appearance who represents the dwindling Southern aristocracy.

- **Stella Kowalski** – Blanche's sister who has wiped off the memories of her aristocratic upbringing in order to be able to lead a more mundane, commonplace marriage.
- **Stanley Kowalski** – Stella's husband and an ordinary, common working-class man who is engrossed in a sexually gratifying life.
- **Harold Mitchell/Mitch** – Stanley's friend, who has been with Stanley during the phase of the war. Mitch, a bachelor has a sick, dying mother for whom he discharges all his responsibilities with utmost care and devotion. He gets involved with Blanche romantically for a short duration.
- **Eunice Hubell** – Wife of Steve Hubell who quarrels with her husband and owns the apartment in which Stella and Stanley live.
- **Steve Hubell** – Plays poker with Stanley and husband of Eunice.
- **Pablo Gonzales** – One of the poker players who disrupts the games with his Spanish phrases.
- **The Doctor** – The doctor who arrives towards the end to take Blanche on her 'vacation'.
- **The Nurse** – The nurse is portrayed as a severe, strong and brutal character who manages to wrestle and bring Blanche to the ground.
- **A Young Collector** – He is the young man who comes to collect money for the paper.
- **A Mexican Woman** – She sells flowers for the dead.

4.9 SCENE WISE SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Scene One

The initial section of this scene introduces the readers to the quintessential Stanley Kowalski through the use of various symbols and actions that are performed by him. Stanley enters the scene wearing a loud-coloured bowling jacket and work clothes. He is also shown carrying 'a red-stained package'. He roars at Stella and throws at her the uncooked meat which he has brought with him. Catching the meat, Stella laughs nervously. The neighbours taking a note of the freshly brought meat laugh at the package—a clear sexual imagery which confirms Stanley to be similar to what Blanche perceives him to be a 'survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle; and you—you here—waiting for him'. This scene, establishes Stanley as a strange and rude man. The scene also sets the table for regular violence and nasty reality into which oversensitive Blanche would soon be a part of.

Williams here uses Freudian sexual imageries to initiate the sexual tension that is about to loom over the text. Apart from the use of the raw meat, the playwright exposes the audience to bowling balls and pins.

Interestingly, at the beginning, Blanche explains that she took a 'streetcar named Desire, and then...one called Cemeteries'. It seems almost as if Williams is being moralistic and wants to suggest that desire leads to death, which in turn becomes an

escape route to the Elysian Fields. However, ironically, in the context of the play, the streetcar took her to the French Quarter which is definitely not Elysian Fields.

Blanche is sketched as wearing white and has a moth-like appearance. It must be kept here in mind that Williams usually dresses his most corrupt characters in white, the symbol of purity. Chance Wayne in *Sweet Bird of Youth* and Sebastian in *Suddenly, Last Summer* also appear in white. Blanche's dress helps conceal her inner sins. Her action implies the fluctuations of a delicate moth. Just as a moth is drawn towards light and consequently gets killed in the similar fashion, we are told Blanche is scared of light, and later on Mitch forcing Blanche under the light acts as a stepping stone towards Blanche's destruction.

It is important to bear in mind that names used throughout the play have a symbolic connotation. Blanche DuBois literally translates into white of the woods. The colour white is a play on Blanche's presumed innocence and the word woods is used as a Freudian sexual connotation. The word Stella means star. The plantation home was called 'Belle Reve', which means a beautiful dream. Moreover, the loss of Belle Reve echoes through the loss of the beautiful dream that Blanche had.

Scene Two

This scene draws the readers' attention towards Blanche's baths. Her indulgence in the process of bath constantly relieves her nerves. However, this process of bathing also implies cleansing. Through the ritual of baths, Blanche subconsciously longs to cleanse her sins away. The baths are also another factor which irritates Stanley because the hot baths make the apartment even warmer.

It is amusing to notice the open and reprehensible manner in which Blanche flirts with Stanley. The buttons, the expression of desire for a drag on his cigarette and the trunk are sexually implicit. The use of these actions and objects only restates the idea that Blanche is making an effort to seduce Stanley. Her unobstructed display of her desires makes Stanley say, 'If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you.' This scene in a way justifies the later scene when Stanley finally rapes Blanche.

Scene Three

This scene is set against the wild game of poker. Stanley is losing unexpectedly and is running out of patience due to this reason. We find Mitch appearing as a contrast to the rest because of his concern for his unwell mother. Blanche's oversensitivity helps her identify Mitch's goodness. However, Stanley is not blessed with such a quality.

Blanche consciously moves into the light while she is undressing so that she can be noticed. This act symbolises Blanche's desire to remain in the limelight of actions. She uses her body to draw others' attention. The light motif is repeated here again. Blanche requests Mitch to conceal the naked light bulb. Ironically, later on, he will only take off the paper lantern so as to 'get a better look' at Blanche.

As the story progresses, the reader is made aware that Blanche's desires to lie is an obsessive urge. She lies to Mitch regarding her decision to visit Stella and about her own age. However, as Blanche explains her lies, she says these are certain tiny illusions that a woman invents to survive.

In this third encounter between Blanche and Stanley, Blanche becomes the witness to the brutality and roughness that Stanley displays. The violence that he uses is unknown

to Blanche. However, what Blanche finds more shocking is that Stella comes back to Stanley as the fight gets over. Nevertheless, the developing attraction between Mitch and Blanche only highlights the contrasts of the wild and brutal attraction that is shared between Stanley and Stella. The sensitivity and the tranquillity of the relationship between Blanche and Mitch emphasize the delicate foundation of their attraction for each other.

Scene Four

This scene only establishes Blanche as the outsider in the Kowalski family. In trying to convince Stella that Stanley is a brutal person, Blanche only ends up creating distance between herself and Stella. Blanche, unable to deal with desperate situation anymore, decides to get in touch with one of her old acquaintance, Shep Huntleigh, who, in the later stage of the play, will act as a symbol for her anticipated escape from this world.

Towards the end of this scene, we see Stella throwing herself at Stanley. This act of Stella represents Stanley's victory. Though Stanley feels victorious momentarily after this incident, yet he never forgets Blanche addressing him as common, bestial and vulgar, and had added that he is a savage and a brute. Blanche had the courage to call him names in his own house. This scene partly justifies his resentment towards Blanche and his desire to no longer see her in his house. Later on when he rapes her, the act of rape can be seen as partly motivated by his anger towards her for nurturing such attitude towards him.

Scene Five

Here Blanche boasts about being born under sacred signs. Ironically, her revelation about her association with the sacred divine turns out to be the moment of her destruction, when Stanley at this very moment, enquires her about Shaw. Blanche is uncomfortable and left disturbed with this cross-examination. As Blanche's past life unfolds, her present is jeopardized. This moment also informs the audience about Stanley's intentions to destroy Blanche. Thus, in this encounter between Blanche and Stanley, Blanche foresees her world disintegrating and she is losing grip over her surroundings.

This scene carries some Tennessee Williams' use of hallmark symbols. The signs of the cosmos, Blanche's white dress getting spoiled and the cherry soda being carried by young man, all hint towards the impending crisis.

The appearance of the young boy at this juncture of the play is not out of context. Blanche's earlier marriage to a young boy was unsuccessful as she was cruel towards him. Her sexual promiscuity haunts her in the present. She cannot overcome the guilt of not helping her needy young husband who shot himself as he was unable to cope with his life. Blanche intends to undo the past by longing for a young lover who would take the place of her now dead, earlier young husband.

Scene Six

This scene is comforting in a sense as it manages to provide with hope and a sense of salvation for Blanche. At this juncture, the movement of the play seems to imitate the tradition of classical tragedy where, towards the middle of the play, the characters are provided with a scope/possibility of redemption. Blanche's optimism rests with her capturing Mitch. However, later, Stanley conveys about Blanche's past to Mitch that acts as an end to all of Blanche's hopes. Nevertheless, at this juncture, it seems as though Blanche still has a ray of hope at her disposal to free herself from this trapped situation.

This scene also reasons why Blanche has an aversive attitude towards lights. Blanche explains that her cheerless marriage with the young Allan laid the foundation for rest of her difficulties. Blanche's love for her man was 'unendurable', yet she could not help. Her love emerged like a 'blinding light', and after Allan's death, she never faced a source of light 'that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle!' Thus, Blanche's difficult equation with lights can be read in correspondence to the troublesome memories it connects with.

Moreover, here we realize that essentially both Blanche and Mitch are lonely from within, who are expecting happiness in each other's company, each trying to compliment the other to turn out to be fuller human.

Scene Seven

Contrasting functioning of mind is presented here. Blanche is shown to be engrossed in the bathroom taking her shower and singing and lost in her make-believe world. On the other hand, Stanley is all practical and pragmatic. He is ready to unmask Blanche and is equipped with facts and has generated a list of all the lies she has taken recourse to. In a classic ironic situation when Blanche is bathing (her way of cleansing herself), her past sins are waiting to take on her in the form of Stanley.

Stanley's actions, as already discussed, are due to several reasons. The most prominent reason is Blanche being a threat to his otherwise successful marriage. His marital life has undergone turmoil in the past—Blanche's arrival scenario. Secondly, his ego cannot accept him being insulted time and again by Blanche. He had to bring an end to it by reaffirming his supremacy, which is possible only by exposing the dark past of Blanche. Thirdly, Stanley is a rational pragmatic man who likes 'his cards on the table'. He cannot appreciate make-believe worlds. Thus, for him to survive, he has to bring to an end to all the illusions of Blanche.

Scene Eight

The violence in this scene is significant. Stanley in a violent fit of rage reiterates his supremacy in the household. Yet the main culprit behind Stanley's rage which surfaces from his near dysfunctional marriage is Blanche's presence.

Stanley providing the return ticket to Blanche results in the Varsouviana music being heard by Blanche. The initiation of music brings to the notice of the audience that she is now slipping into a situation in which she will be trapped meeting with similar fate as the death of her ex-husband Allan. As Stella points out, Blanche was once 'tender and trusting' but people took advantage of her, thus underlining that Blanche is one of those people who are unfit for the real world at any point of time.

Scene Nine

The initial description of Blanche had her in old haggard clothes—her last connection with her past life. The Varsouviana music—the music that was playing when Allan killed himself—is heard in the backdrop and Blanche is drinking to submerge herself into her non-real world. The appearance of Mitch, unclean and under his work dress, highlights that he probably is Blanche's one last chance.

Mitch's forcing Blanche to appear under the light has multiple layers of significance. On the surface level, Blanche's lie about her age unravels itself under the light. Blanche had denied herself exposure to the light ever since her young husband killed himself. Since then, she had survived with light that was no stronger than a candle light. Thus,

Blanche, having grown up and surviving in semi-darkness, finds herself being forced into the light, a violation within herself. Thirdly, the physical act of forcing Blanche translates into symbolical reappearance of the truth about her past life. Fourthly, Blanche's survival strategies revolve around magic and illusion. She is far removed from reality. She survives through and within the magic of illusion. Instead of leading a life as it is, she lives for 'what *ought* to be'. Thus, bringing Blanche into the light helps her see life in its real colours, however ugly it might be.

Scene Ten

This scene depicts the final conflict between Blanche and Stanley. The end results in Stanley emerging as the ultimate authority.

In his state of excitement as a would-be-father, Stanley turns into an untamed beast on the look for a prey. For the first time, he visualises Blanche as a potential prospect who 'wouldn't be bad to—interfere with'. With this idea, the plan for seducing Blanche germinates. He also calculates that since Blanche has been 'swilling down my liquor' all summer, it will not be wrong to see the act of seduction as an act of repayment. Moreover, it was beyond Stanley's understanding as to why a woman who has had many a men partner would shy away from sleeping with him. And, most significantly, Stanley has always insisted on using things that are his as per his desires—his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. Blanche, who has taken refuge in his house, has consumed his food and his liquor, which is anything but his. She is not grateful to him; instead, she possesses an antagonistic attitude towards him. Thus, his act of rape is motivated by various reasons apart from what he thinks will lead him to establish his unconditional authority in the household.

Scene Eleven

The poker game last experienced in Scene Three is played here again. While in the last game Stanley was on the wrong side of the game, now he emerges as the clear winner, symbolizing his undisputed control over the household.

4.10 IMPORTANT THEMES IN THE PLAY

Tennessee Williams understands the need to go back to fantasy to survive the harsh realities of life. However, he does not advocate for complete detachment of reality either. He cannot ignore the necessity of the realistic perspective. His plays carry the essence of the unresolved battles that took place between Pirandello's stage manager and the characters. In every play of Williams, one encounters the basic human requirement for placing faith in human values and dignity despite being set against a harsh reality. It is just the way symbolism is set against realism. The playwrights preceding Williams were able to concentrate on absolute human values. However, Williams was unable to do so as he believed otherwise. He firmly believed that there is a 'real' world within and outside each individual which is forever unfriendly to any belief in the holiness of man. His realism depicts this expression existing in this world. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is Williams' best articulation of the human dilemma, which results in the dramatic dilemma. We come across two diametrically opposite ways of looking at life in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: the realistic perspective of Stanley Kowalski and the 'non-realistic' perspective of his sister-in-law, Blanche DuBois. Williams successfully shows the conflicting nature of the two viewpoints.

4.10.1 Appearance and Reality

In Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois is the protagonist who is a romantic at heart. The play is a social drama depicted in realistic mode. Blanche explains to Mitch that she keeps creating her own version of the world because she cannot accept the predestined fate at her disposal. Continuously lying either to herself or to the world makes her believe that she is leading the life as it should be lived rather than as it comes to us. Stanley, a man of practicality who has his feet firmly grounded in the material, physical aspect of the world, cannot accept Blanche's world of fantasy and does his best to expose her falsehood. The disharmonic relationship that Blanche and Stanley share results in a metaphorical struggle between illusion and reality. It becomes one of the catalytic agents which keeps the story progressing and creates an overarching tension throughout the play. Finally, Blanche's good intentioned attempts to reconstruct her own and Stella's marital life simply fails to bring any positive results.

Tennessee Williams' play draws the juxtaposition of fantasy lover's incapacity to understand reality through an exploration of the difference existing between the world within and outside. The play moves within the uncomfortably closed two-room apartment where the Kowalskis reside. Williams' use of a setting that gives the power to view the street along with the interior of the house tries to convey his idea that the home is not a domestic shelter. The Kowalskis' apartment does not appear to be a world unto itself that is beyond the greater reality. The characters move in and out of the apartment at their own free will almost throughout the play. Most of the times, these characters are shown to emerge in the house laden with the problems they encounter in the outside environment. Let us consider Blanche: she refuses to change her prejudices against the working class even after she takes refuge with one such family. The most prominent example of this effect in the play can be identified as that moment when Stanley is about to rape Blanche. The back wall of the apartment gradually loses its opaqueness to present the struggles taking place on the street, overtaking the brutality that is about to get executed in the Kowalskis' home.

Though by the end of the play, reality triumphs over fantasy, yet Williams seems to suggest in *A Streetcar Named Desire* that fantasy holds an important place in surviving. At the end of the play, we see Blanche goes back into her exclusive private fantasies which helps her to partially protect herself from the shocking reality which she is unable to face. Blanche's mental disequilibrium gets exaggerated as she retreats completely into herself. By now, she seems to have left behind the objective world long behind so that she does not face the unpleasant reality. However, to break loose completely, Blanche needs to come to terms with the exterior world so that she feels the world is exactly the way she imagines. We can see that objective reality is not a solution to Blanche's illusionary world; rather, Blanche fits herself into the exterior world to carry on with her illusions. Thus, in both the worlds, material and psychological, the watertight distinction between fantasy and reality is shaken. Blanche's ultimate deceived joy implies that, at times and under certain conditions, fantasy acts as a vital force at play and every individual takes recourse to it at some point or the other despite the inevitable triumph of the reality.

4.10.2 Downfall of Blanche DuBois

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois attains a kind of tragic stature where she almost achieves 'victory' while struggling to reach towards victory, and then the unexpected moment occurs when this struggle turns to defeat.

Blanche's fear of death emerges from her fears of getting older and losing physical charms. She obsessively lies about her true age. In fact, her reason to not step in light (apart from the psychological factors) is associated with her fear of exposing her aging looks. She is under the impression that by attracting younger men towards her by using her sexuality, she will be able to retain her youthfulness, and in turn, may be, delay death and go back to the times of youthful bliss she enjoyed before her husband committed suicide.

In the beginning (Scene One), Williams mentions that Blanche's history of sexual promiscuity is in fact a cause of her ruin. When she first reaches the Kowalskis' household, Blanche explains that she boarded a streetcar named Desire, then she changed another streetcar called Cemeteries, which took her to another street named Elysian Fields. This journey which takes place before the play starts, symbolically addresses the various junctures of Blanche's life. The name Elysian Fields has its origin in Greek mythology—it is the land of the dead. Blanche during her lifetime kept pursuing her sexual passion which led to her being thrown out from Belle Reve. This attitude of hers also leads to her being banished from society, though at a different level.

As we read the play, we realize Blanche is haunted by the memories of her dead ancestors, which she relates to their 'epic fornications'. Her young husband's death was an outcome of her not approving of his homosexuality. The play revolves around the idea of unrestrained promiscuity, paves the path for unexpected departures and unwanted ends. In Scene Nine when the Mexican woman is shown selling 'flowers for the dead', Blanche is horrified to meet her because the woman also predicts Blanche's fate. Her being trapped in insanity can be read as the ending which she brought upon herself by her flaws—her inability to channelize her desires in the proper way and her unexplained fear of death. Sexuality and mortality are intertwined fatally in Blanche's life.

Mostly after the late 1940s, it became very common for the literatures to discuss about the universal 'common man' of modern American drama. This common man is described as already defeated. As the motion of the play is set out, this character struggles the best possible way but meets futile ends and possesses low moral standards.

4.10.3 Significance of Light in Blanche's Life

In the play, light becomes a part of Blanche in an odd way. Blanche is reluctant to appear in direct, bright light, especially when her suitor, Mitch is around. She denies revealing her age, and as the story progresses, it becomes clear that she avoids light just to prevent Mitch from seeing the reality of her eroding beauty. At a deeper level, light symbolizes the reality of Blanche's bygone days. She is constantly plagued by the memories of what she has lost—her former husband, her perception of life, her reputation and the refined society (whether real or imagined, it is not clear) which she was a part of.

Blanche veils the uncovered light bulb in the Kowalski home with a Chinese paper lantern. Moreover, she strongly denies going on meetings with Mitch during the sunlit hours or to venues with proper lighting. Mitch mentions his observations regarding Blanche's avoidance of light in Scene Nine, when he narrates her of the details Stanley has provided him of her past. Mitch then insists Blanche to appear under the direct light. Mitch in a state of rage and desperation tells her that he has no issues with her age, but he cannot stand deceitfulness. To this, Blanche justifies herself by saying that her intentions were good. She understands that illusions, rather than worldly truth, represent life as it

ought to be; hence, that should be the way of life. Blanche's inability to face light also suggests her loose grip over reality, announcing her expected end.

In Scene Six, Blanche confesses to Mitch that when she was in love with her former husband, Allan Grey, she felt as if she was enjoying the world revealed in bright, vivid light. Since Allan's unexpected death, Blanche recounted, the bright light has moved away. Even Blanche's casual sexual relationships with other men have brought her closer to dim light. Bright light, in a way, represents Blanche's young, colourful innocent life, while the poor light explains her sexual maturity and disillusionment with the world around her.

4.10.4 Significance of the Varsouviana Polka

The Varsouviana Polka is the very same tune to which Blanche and her young husband, Allan Grey, happily danced to and that was the last time she saw him alive. Earlier that day, she had discovered him in bed with a male friend who was older than him. However, like matured people, the three of them got involved in dancing together, putting up a face as if everything was normal. In the middle of the Varsouviana tune, Blanche had moved towards Allan and had declared that he 'disgusted' her. That very moment, he left the place and shot himself in the head.

This polka music resurfaces and plays at various instances in *A Streetcar Named Desire,* especially when Blanche is plagued with guilt for Allan's death. The first time the audience gets to hear it is in Scene One, when Stanley encounters Blanche and enquires her about her husband. The second time we hear the music is when Blanche narrates Mitch the life of Allan Grey. From this juncture, the polka music plays more frequently and it nearly leads Blanche to destruction. Blanche confesses to Mitch that the music ends only after she hears the roar of a gunshot inside her head.

The music represents the moment of Blanche's loss of happiness. The untimely and unexpected death of the young husband whom Blanche loved so dearly resulted due to her error in judgment and sets off her mental disability. After this moment, Blanche continues hearing the Varsouviana whenever she gets nervous and loses her hold on reality and mostly takes recourse to heavy drinking to keep the reality at bay.

4.10.5 Bathing and Intoxication

Closely related to the recurrence of Varsouviana Polka is the frequent act of drinking and bathing. As readers get acquainted with the Kowalski family, they realize that both Stanley and Blanche drink unapologetically at various junctures of the play. As readers, we notice that Stanley's drinking is restricted to social calls: he indulges in drinking when he is with his friends at the bar, or playing a game of poker, and to celebrate some occasion. Blanche's drinking, as it turns out, is not just restricted to social courtesy, and she prefers to keep her drinking habit secret. She drinks so that she can stay away from the harsh reality. In her intoxicated state, she lapses into flight of imagination, which helps her release herself from reality, such as creating a getaway with Shep Huntleigh. In case of both Stanley and Blanche, drinking paves the path towards their destruction or makes them destructive. Stanley gets into domestic violence and Blanche releases herself into fantasy. Yet Stanley is able to come back from his drunken state, whereas alcohol leads Blanche to depart from reality.

Throughout *A Streetcar Named Desire,* Blanche is shown to be cleaning herself. Her sexual escapades have resulted in turning her hysterical, but these baths, as she claims, helps her calm her nerves. In view of her desire to forget and wipe off the remains of her illicit past in the new society of New Orleans, these baths become her way of trying to cleanse herself of her dark history. But however much she may try as she cannot undo the past, even her bathing is never completed. Even Stanley gets into water to take a shower to cleanse himself of his misdeed of beating Stella. The shower serves to soothe his violent temper. Therefore, both alcohol and shower has a psychological impact on the life of Stanley and Blanche.

4.10.6 The Decaying South and the Emerging South

Stella and Blanche represent a world that is on the verge of eroding away. Belle Reve, the sisters' ancestral plantation property is now gone, and the two sisters are the only surviving members of this genteel family. In fact in a symbolical way, the sisters are the only remains of the old charms of cavaliers and cotton plantations. Their strain of Old South, unlike what would seem obvious, was not captured by the General Sherman's army; rather it withered away under the forces of time. Moreover, as Blanche falls victim to the web of time and her beauty gradually fades, so does this essence of civilization, which gets blurred with the passage of time.

Blanche's lapsing into fantasy is her attempt at holding back time which just turns futile. However, Stella manages to live and survives by mixing her DuBois blood with the common middle class man from the Kowalskis. The Old South, as it turns out, can only survive in an impure form, maintaining an imbalanced harmony with the New Souths.

4.10.7 Representation of Violence

The only unpardonable guilt, according to Blanche, is inflicting cruelty knowingly. Unfortunately, Stanley masters this. His final attack on Blanche is an unforgiveable assault against a weak opponent who has indeed lost all her battles. Blanche, on the other hand, is guilty of being dishonest but her intentions have never been bad. The unforeseen outcomes of her lies are unintentional. Often, as we see she lies under a preconceived notion that such lies are important. Throughout the play, we come across violent reactions occurring as a result of decisions taken by characters—Blanche's well-intentioned lies, Stella's dishonesty and Stanley's intentional and unguarded wickedness. Tennessee Williams' plays are full of ways how human beings can hurt each other. It is just that some are more horrible than others.

If we take a closer look at *A Streetcar Named Desire*, we realize that Stanley Kowalski is an abuser. His abuses, rather of the violent nature, are veiled under his sensuality and charm that he displays. His violent temperament finds itself expressing on and off because of his desire to keep running under his control.

Stella, Stanley's wife, is a victim of her husband's abuses. Nevertheless, like every other woman, she tolerates him and completely surrenders herself to his misbehaviours. As one reads through the play, one realizes that the Kowalski couple share an abuser/abusive relationship where each plays his/her role without any question. This unquestioning liberty sanctioned to and acquired by Stanley leads to his indulging in one of the most brutal acts of violence—raping Blanche DuBois (Stella's sister).

Tennessee Williams was probably not familiar with the legal aspects of domestic abuse and violence of his times because it was still not much of a debated thing in those days. However, Williams was aware of the abusive life women lead within the confined walls of domesticity and his play underlines this unequal representation in a normal household.

4.10.8 Indispensable Men

A Streetcar Named Desire acts as Tennessee Williams' mouthpiece to articulate his dislike for the way the institutions and mentality of post-war America imposed restrictions on women's lives. Williams successfully manages to put light on this situation by presenting before the audience Blanche's and Stella's reliance on men. He criticizes the way society (men) treated women as the transition from the old to the new South was taking place and bringing various changes with it. Both Blanche and Stella, despite their dissimilar nature, view male companions as their only opportunity to conquer bliss. They also rely on men for their daily existence and to build their self-image. Blanche understands that Stella indeed will be happier if her abusive husband Stanley goes out of her life. Yet, the other probable means of sustenance that Blanche proposes—trying to get in touch with Shep Huntleigh for economic support—also includes men for support. When Stella decides to continue staying with Stanley, she places her faith on love, and stay with a man and not with her sister. Williams does not possess a critical approach towards Stella—he only underlines the fact that Stanley is representative of a much more secure future than Blanche offers.

As for the protagonist Blanche, she sees her alliance with Mitch as a fool proof idea for escaping a desperate state. Repeated exploitation of Blanche's sexuality by men has left her with bad memories and unreliable supports. Moreover, her association with various men has also tarnished her image completely. Her dubious reputation leaves Blanche as an unsuitable marriage alliance. However, her deteriorated material state makes Blanche feel that marriage is her only option for survival. When Mitch reveals his plans to leave Blanche because of her ill reputation, Blanche, within no time, considers going to another man—the wealthy Shep Huntleigh—who probably can rescue her. Nevertheless, since Blanche is unaware of her dependence on men, she cannot comprehend realistically how to help herself. Blanche, till the end, does not understand that her unnecessary dependence on men only brought her closer to her downfall and did not help her in her salvation. By depending on people of the other sex, Blanche put her fate in the hands of others, which naturally brought her disaster.

4.10.9 Attraction and Desire

Blanche describes Stanley as ape-like and primitive. Stanley defines that kind of manhood which is wild and unrefined, a Romantic image of man and manliness that has escaped the effeminizing pressures of the civilization. His physical attractiveness is beyond question: Stella is unable to resist him, and even Blanche, who was repulsed by him, is attracted towards him at one point. Stanley's crude ways encompasses within him a terrifying immorality. He has no issues about leading his sister-in-law towards madness, or even physically abusing her. If we analyse the situation in Freudian terms, then Stanley would represent pure id, Stella would represent the ego and Blanche the super-ego. However, unfortunately in the play, the balancing act between the id and super-ego is not feasible through Stella's mediation, but works through the tension between these forces which resides within Blanche herself. A deeper introspection will reveal that Blanche finds Stanley's primitivism alarmingly threatening simply because it is something she knows resides within her as well.

Closely related to the above discussion on physical attractiveness is the concept of desire which is the central theme of the play. Blanche tries her best to deny it, though as we get deeper access into Blanche's world, we learn that desire is one of the most motivating factors of her life. She is a prey to her desires which has been the reason behind her being driven out of town. Physical desire rules the relationship between Stella and Stanley. They are not driven or regulated by subtle feelings like intellectual or spiritual needs. However, Williams makes it loud and clear that their physical compatibility does not imply that their love is nurtured on a weaker base. Desire finally leads to Blanche's downfall because she cannot find a balanced middle path to handle it.

Loneliness is closely associated with the theme of desire. One of the main reasons for desire to germinate is a deep sense of loneliness that prevails within the characters. Oscillating between these two ends of the spectrum, Blanche finds herself lost. She desperately looks for security and companionship even amidst strangers. More unfortunately, she never manages to overcome the tragic loss and consuming love for Allan. Blanche, as the story starts, is in need of a secured protector. Ironically, her arrival in New Orleans only results in her being left more vulnerable, finally falling prey to the predator Stanley.

4.10.10 *A Streetcar Named Desire:* The Film and the Play

The film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* appeared in 1951. It was directed by Elia Kazan. The film had Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden appearing in the prominent roles. The film received a lot of appreciation. It won several Oscar awards, Best Actress (Leigh), Best Supporting Actor (Malden) and Best Supporting Actress (Hunter). Marlon Brando, who played the role of Stanley Kowalski, was nominated but never received the Oscars, despite delivering one of the most outstanding performances.

Williams' Blanche was a representation of the South and Stella was, on the other hand, the new upcoming American woman in certain ways. However, Stanley definitely was the typical man oozing with sexuality and also representing the emerging concept of masculine American man. The story also narrated the transition from the agrarian economy and plantation life to a life perpetuated by industrial surroundings, in a way highlighting the pain that people undergo while trying to live through such transitional periods.

The celluloid adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* captured a few interesting details that were there within the play but were reflected in the film even brilliantly. Marlon Brando appearing as Stanley provided the much required visual representation of the raw, masculine and powerful man that Stanley was. His appearance within no time made it apparent that he was far different from the Southern men who were more of the 'Gentleman' variety devoid of the kind of manliness that Stanley possessed.

Blanche maintains a Southern accent, soft-spoken tone throughout the movie which was not present in Stella. Stella is shown as physically strong and aggressive unlike Blanche, because Stella at a number of occasions is shown to be hitting and yelling at Stanley. The body language between Stanley and Stella conveyed their passion and desire that they nurtured for each other.

The play dealt with controversial themes like rape and homosexuality. So to keep in terms with Hollywood standards, the production house had to rework on the original play over a number of times to sanitize the work for general viewing. Hence, the swear words were done away with and the rape scene was made less shocking. The other significant aspect is the presentation of Blanche's husband, Allan Grey. Allan Grey decides to take away his own life after Blanche discovers him involved in homosexual activities. Yet the film water downs this important point by just saying that Blanche drove her

husband to kill himself because of her hatred towards him. This definitely shadowed away one of the major critical concerns of Williams' as a social commentator.

In the play, Stella towards the end is portrayed as someone physically drained out (because of child delivery) and emotionally hurt because of her husband's brutal actions towards her sister. Her sister's subsequent departure forces her to take recourse in the arms of her man (Stanley) and one can never be sure if she was able to forgive her husband willingly or despised him forever. However, the film showed a Stella who was very vocal about her husband raping her sister. She is shown to be under so much distress that she appears to be on the verge of leaving her husband's dwelling.

Despite its mellowed down tone to appease the Hollywood rulebook, the film was one of the best adaptations which was well appreciated by both critics and viewers.

Check Your Progress

23. Who is Harold Mitchell or Mitch?
24. How does Scene One establish Stanley?
25. What Freudian symbols are used in Scene One?
26. What kind of an appearance does Blanche possess?
27. To which obsessive compulsive disorder of Blanche does Scene Two introduce the readers?
28. In Scene Three, what game is Stanley losing?
29. With which old acquaintance does Blanche think of reconnecting in Scene Four?
30. What kind of feelings does Blanche nurture towards light?
31. What kind of man is Stanley?
32. Why does the 'Varsouviana' music bother Blanche?

ACTIVITY

Read Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*.

Did You Know

The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was adapted into a film in 1951. Williams collaborated with Oscar Saul on the screenplay and Elia Kazan who directed the stage production and went on to direct the film. Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden, all members of the original *Broadway* cast, reprised their roles for the film. Vivien Leigh, who had appeared in the London theatre production, was brought in for the film version in lieu of Jessica Tandy, who had created the part of Blanche DuBois on *Broadway*.

4.11 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt that:

- *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is an autobiographical drama by Eugene O'Neill, one of the greatest American playwrights, the first and only American dramatist to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature and the Pulitzer Award four times, including the one for *Long Day's Journey into Night*.
- Eugene O'Neill's agonizingly autobiographical play depicts the disturbed relations between a father, mother and two sons.
- Posthumously produced, the play strips layer after layer the strained and complex relations of the main characters in a day's time.
- As the play progresses, the audience witness a drug-addict mother, a professionally failed father, an alcoholic older son and an ailing younger son.
- Although no one dies in the play, still as a tragedy, the undercurrent is that of perpetual loss, morbid relations, failed communication, guilty pasts and disillusioned present.
- Tennessee Williams (1911–83) was an American playwright who was born in the Mississippi region.
- His birth name was Thomas Lanier Williams. He studied at University of Iowa and graduated in 1938. His initial writings were one-act plays and were performed by amateurs and students. Later on, these one-act plays were compiled in *27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other One Act Plays* (1946) and *Dragon Country: A Book of Plays* (1970).
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* came to theatres in 1946. The play consolidated Williams' reputation as one of the best contemporary American playwrights, and fetched him the prestigious New York's Critics Circle Award and Pulitzer Prize.
- The play's greatest strength lies in its depiction of the psychology of working-class people. The play produced during Williams' times portrayed life of working-class in a didactic way, which focused on social aspects, appearing more like documentary drama.
- Moving away from the established norms, Williams' play intended to represent the working-class characters as psychologically-evolved individuals. To a great extent, Williams manages to portray his blue-collar characters as they are, without unnecessarily romanticizing them.
- Tennessee Williams did not appreciate the early American playwrights; his li was largely influenced by the famous Russian playwright, Anton Chekhov. Chekhov, who mastered the art of putting together the cheerful and the tragic, presenting lonely characters mixed with his hallmark dark sensibilities. These turned out to be a powerful inspiration for Tennessee Williams' plays.
- It is beyond argument that Williams' plays are deeply rooted within American setting and character. The other significant influence was the novelist D. H. Lawrence, whose writings made Williams understand and depict sexuality as a potent force of life. Lawrence is remembered in *The Glass Menagerie* as one of the favourite writers of Tennessee.

- The American poet Hart Crane played an influential role in Williams' plays. Crane, who had lived a tragic life and faced an equally tragic death, was open about homosexuality and created poetry which did not conform to blind mimicking of European sensibilities. Williams also admired the tradition of great Southern writers who included literary language and poetics of the Southern English culture.
- Being influenced by Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams too challenged some of the existing conventions of the naturalistic theatre. *Summer and Smoke* (1948), *Camino Real* (1953) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) are testimonies to some of his early experiments in this regard.
- In *The Glass Menagerie,* music, projections of screen and effects of lightening were used to create the haunting and dream-like condition which is important for a 'memory play'.
- Like Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* Williams' works invents various ways of using the stage to represent the subconscious mind and memories of a character.
- In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, special effects on stage are used to represent Blanche's progression towards madness. The madness inducing polka music, jungle sound effects and odd shadows assist in representing a world that Blanche experiences/lives in.

4.12 KEY TERMS

- **Posthumous:** It is an award or a publication that comes out after the death of the originator.
- **Sublimity:** This means of great beauty.
- **Inebriation:** It is a state of being intoxicated.
- **Gnarled:** It means twisted or bent.
- **Nonconformist:** It refers to a person who is a rebel.
- **Pianist:** someone who plays the piano professionally.
- **Nun:** It refers to a woman member of a religious community who vows to always follow the rules of chastity, poverty and obedience.
- **Hallucination:** It means fantasy or delirium.
- **Melodrama:** It is a drama characterized by exaggerated emotions, stereotypical characters and interpersonal conflicts.
- **Playwright**: It refers to one who writes plays.
- **Nymphomania:** It means excessive sexual desire in and behaviour by a female.
- **Homophobia**: It means fear of or contempt for lesbians and gay men.
- **Promiscuity**: It means having many casual sexual relations.
- **Quintessential:** It refers to the pure, highly concentrated essence of a thing.
- **Effeminate**: It refers to something which is characterized by weakness and excessive refinement.

4.13 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, begins in a summer morning of 1912 when Mary Tyrone returns home from a sanatorium after her treatment of morphine addiction. It is a family of mainly four persons—James Tyrone, his wife Mary and his two sons, Jamie and Edmund.
2. As the play unravels, it becomes evident that Mary is still addicted to morphine and Edmund's coughing is actually due to tuberculosis. These are the two medical revelations which form the 'plot' of the play.
3. Mary, James' wife, is fifty-four and has a young, healthy figure with a pale, thin face. She looks pretty even without any make-up and has thick, white hair and big, beautiful brown eyes. Her once lovely hands are now gnarled with rheumatism and keep moving uneasily. O'Neill very obviously mentions that she has not lost her 'convent-girl youthfulness' and 'unworldly innocence'.
4. James always wanted to be a classical actor, especially a Shakespearean one but his 'vehicle' play, with which he had toured for years, established his reputation and although served him well financially, it could not add versatility to his acting. As a result, he never got the opportunity to explore and became confined to just one role.
5. Act II strengthens the notion that in terms of structure, the play is built around meals.
6. Finally, Mary's remarks that she cannot fail to recall the past because hr statement 'the past is the present' further advocates the uninteresting nature of life in the Tyrone kinfolk. The actions of the past recur in the present, just as the proceedings of each distinct day are repeatedly based on the hallucinations induced by alcohol and morphine.
7. The idea of a home is is an important concept dealt with in this play. A more developed idea of Mary's desire for a home is fully conveyed. In fact, she dislikes Tyrone's idea of a home so sturdily because she links it with the death of Eugene, who died when Mary was traveling with her husband. Mary allies James with the traveling home of the theatre actor and, metaphorically spurns the way in which she was forced to live life with him.
8. Alcohol and morphine are the two regular inebriants used in the play. The purpose suggested by the characters is to escape the harsh acknowledgement of their present reality.
9. A motif of fate too appears in this Act, though by different characters now. Generally it is expressed by Mary, but now Edmund picks up the issue when he mentions that he should have been born a fish or seagull as he loves the ocean so much.
10. *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is unquestionably a tragedy in its portrayal of the characters, but it is important to notice that it does end on a promise of hope for the future if the characters can transform the way they interact and treat one another. O'Neill does not end the story of the Tyrone family on a negative note.

11. The elder Tyrone son is in his early thirties. As he squanders money on liquor and brothels, he has to bank on his parents for financial sustenance. He has never been scholarly and dropped out of more than a few colleges and has very little motivation, much to the disappointment of his parents.
12. Broken dreams function as a painful reminder of a time that once was good. Especially for Mary who suffers the most as she could not fulfil her dreams, the realization is particularly traumatic.
13. The structure of the play in parts presents a similarity to the disintegration that occurs over the course of the day. Meals form a crucial part in the structure. The first four scenes are constructed around meals, either before or after. If it is before a meal, the scene functions with an air of expectation of something important to come, i.e., the meal itself and its accompanying drama. It is worth noting how the family makes several earnest attempts to come together before the food gets cold. In the scenes set after a meal, the family is shown as engrossed in the discussion of how to kill time until the next meal is served.
14. The play is as much as a long day's journey into the past as anything else. The characters are to varying degrees fixated with the past and they are all unable to forget or forgive. Although the playwright suggests that tolerance and pardon can be an appropriate form of redemption, the characters have trouble forgiving one another. The family is at the end of the day paralyzed because of its incompetence to let go of past pains and wounds.
15. Tennessee Williams' birth name was Thomas Lanier Williams.
16. The play, *The Rose Tattoo* (1951) reveals Williams' genius in the realm of comedy.
17. *In the Winter of Cities* (1956) and *Androgyne, Mon Amour* (1977) are the two collections of poetry that were composed by Tennessee Williams.
18. *A Streetcar Named Desire* was published in 1947.
19. Tennessee Williams wrote twenty-five complete plays.
20. Tennessee Williams' plays give the impression of being preoccupied with the excess form of human violence and sexual behaviour including insanity, sexual abuse, incest, nymphomania, and brutal and unnatural deaths.
21. Williams plays around with the themes of desire and isolation in his play *A Streetcar Named Desire.*
22. Williams got a Pulitzer Prize for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (in 1948) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (in 1955).
23. Harold Mitchell or Mitch is Stanley's friend. He has been with Stanley during the phase of the war. Mitch is a bachelor. He has a sick, dying mother for whom he discharges all his responsibilities with utmost care and devotion. He gets involved with Blanche romantically for a short duration.
24. Scene One establishes Stanley as a strange and rude man.
25. Raw meat, bowling balls and pins, and Belle Reve plantation home are the Freudian symbols used in Scene One.
26. Blanche possesses a moth-like appearance.

27. Scene Two introduces the readers to Blanche's habit of bathing every now and then.
28. In Scene Three, Stanley is losing the game of poker.
29. In Scene Four, Blanche thinks of reconnecting with Shep Huntleigh, her old aquaintance.
30. Blanche is averse to light as it has a very strong relation with her past, especially with the death of her ex-husband Allan. .
31. Stanley is a rational pragmatic man.
32. The Varsouviana music bothers Blanche because it was the same music which was playing in the background when Allan killed himself.

4.14 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the figure of Mary Tyrone.
2. What is the importance of the past in the lives of the characters in the play *Long Day's Journey Into Night*?
3. Write a short description of Stanley Kowalski as he makes an appearance in Scene One.
4. Write down in brief the significance of Blanche's baths.
5. Describe in your own words the significance of Scene Three in *A Streetcar Named Desire.*
6. Express in your words the resurgence of hope and salvation in Scene Six of *A Streetcar Named Desire.*
7. Describe in brief the importance of light in Blanche's life.
8. List out the various reasons that leads Stanley to finally rape Blanche (especially based on your understanding of Scene Seven and Scene One).
9. Write a short note on the film *A Streetcar Named Desire.*

Long-Answer Questions

1. Comment on the motif of meals and home used in the play *Long Day's Journey Into Night.*
2. Discuss James Tyrone as a classical actor.
3. Highlight the euphemistic use of alcohol and morphine consumed by all the characters in the play *Long Day's Journey Into Night.*
4. How are the themes of attraction, desire and need for men projected in *A Streetcar Named Desire?*
5. What significance does the Varsouviana Polka and 'light' hold in Blanche's life? Elucidate.
6. How do appearance and reality reflect in *A Streetcar Named Desire?* Exemplify.
7. What according to you leads to the downfall of Blanche?

8. 'The text of *A Streetcar Named Desire* displays a lot of violence.' Critically analyse this statement.

4.15 FURTHER READING

Hacker, L. M. Helene S. Zahler ed. *The Shaping of American Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1947.

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UNIT 5 WILLIAM FAULKNER AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Structure

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 Faulkner as a Novelist
  5.2.1 Detailed Summary of the Novel
  5.2.2 The Sound and the Fury: Feminism
5.3 Different Motifs used by the Author in the Novel
  5.3.1 Time Motif
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  5.3.3 Caddy (Candace)
5.4 Title of the Novel
  5.4.1 Resemblance with Macbeth: Act V, Scene V
  5.4.2 The Sound and the Fury: A Tragic Novel
5.5 Ernest Hemingway: A Brief Biographical Sketch
5.6 A Farewell to Arms: Characters, Themes, Motifs and Symbols
  5.6.1 Analysis of Primary Characters in the Novel
  5.6.2 Themes, Motifs and Symbols in the Novel
5.7 Detailed Summary and Analysis of the Novel A Farewell to Arms
5.8 Summary
5.9 Key Terms
5.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.11 Questions and Exercises
5.12 Further Reading

5.0 INTRODUCTION

There have been several great novels in the history of American literature. The use of styles and themes were very important for writing a good novel, besides the use of words and phrases. Great authors whose style and theme enabled people to understand who and what was being written are William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway.

William Faulkner belongs to that generation of writers like Hemingway and Tennessee who rejected what was dead in tradition and innovated perpetually. The nation's character was yet shaping itself and it did so by experimenting with its various institutions. Its people surged forward to help. Among its writers, the United States could boast in those crisis-ridden early years, the achievement T. S. Eliot, Ezra pound, Wallace Stevens, John Dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather whose works gave rise to a breading of perception about the function of formal element and thematic concerns. This generation of writers helped the audience to understand their times and the anxieties of the new age much better through a highly sensitized literary convention that was born out of the stress and pressures of new contingencies.

Today, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemmingway stand as one of the greatest novelists of the world. They gave novel-writing in America a new turn which marked a break in formal treatment of the subject and the rapid shift in perception of realities. Both baffled the readers and critics for the dazzling novelty with which they made their appearance.

Faulkner experienced a peculiar sense of alienation within family; for instance, when his third brother was born, he felt that he was being neglected. With his father already hostile, it was loneliness that drove him to writing. As a schoolboy, he failed miserably, creating a greater emotional void. At this juncture, there appeared a person named Phil Stone in 1914 who was a striking contrast to Faulkner's brooding nature. This new acquaintance, talkative, exuberant and inclined to literature, introduced him to literature in a way that opened the golden gates of new fascinating world for him. Having left school, he joined his grandfather as a bank-keeper, but continued to feel miserable owing to the absence of anything positive to give him the sense of fulfilment. To further add to this came his failure to get recruited to the Air Force, for his ambition was to become a fighter pilot. His physical attributes did not measure to the required standards to get admission. Faulkner took to drinking which became his lifelong habit in addition to visiting prostitutes. Another blow came when Estelle Oldham with whom he had fallen in love, married someone else.

He kept writing, mainly poems, and managed to join the RAF (Rapid Action Force) in Canada as an officer cadet and went to Toronto for training. Before he could fly the plane, the war ended, thus terminating his dream to become a fighter pilot. His wanderings took him to the classes at the University of Mississippi where he attended some sort of course and worked at odd jobs—a perfectly aimless career. However, through all this, William never stopped writing poems, essays and stories, and got them published in small periodicals. One of the first collections of his poems entitled *The Marble Faun* was published in 1924. Faulkner went to New York to do a job in a bookshop, which was managed by a woman who later on married American novelist and short story writer Sherwood Anderson. After a brief stint, he returned to Oxford and worked in a post office. However, like Tennessee Williams working in a shoe company, Faulkner too found the job uninspiring and difficult for his rebellious spirit to adjust to. He was asked to quit the job in 1924.

With the beginning of World War II, Faulkner's anxiety to join the army again began to trouble him. However, there was one way he could get the position; nevertheless, he was offered a contract to write a book on 'air force operation overseas', but due to his inebriated drunken state at the time of interview with officials, he did not get the contract. His Hollywood stint was marred by his foolish steps which landed him in a self-destructive phase. From 1940 to 1947, he appears to be stuck to writing *Go Down Moses* (1942) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) barring which nothing came out of his pen. From that point, however, the great author's days of worldwide recognition dawned. In the 1950s, he became an established master of modern fiction. The National Book Award was given to him in 1950. The same year, Faulkner became the recipient of Nobel Prize for Literature, the third American to be given this honour.

In January 1962, he fell from his horse. He was careless about his injury and took to drinking as a cure. But on 6 July 1962, he died of heart attack. William Faulkner's biography presents the characteristic career graph of an independent minded writer, carving his way through challenging circumstances of life with which he was perpetually at war.

Nobel Prize winner Ernest Hemingway is one of the great American twentieth century novelists, who was known for his economic and understated style of writing. He is best known for works like *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Sun Also Rises* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Hemingway was born on 21 July 1899 in Cicero (now in Oak Park), Illinois. Unlike the dreams of Faulkner, Hemingway served in World War I. He also worked in journalism before publishing his story collection *In Our Time*. He published seven novels, six short story collections and two non-fiction works. Additional works, including three novels, four short story collections and three non-fiction works were published posthumously. Many of his works are considered classics of American literature. He committed suicide on 2 July 1961, in Ketchum, Idaho.

In this unit, we will be looking at the semi-autobiographical novel, *A Farewell to Arms,* by Ernest Hemingway that covers numerous events of the Italian campaigns during the First World War. In Hemingway's early works, war used to be a major theme. Hemingway's own wartime experiences led to the construction of the main plot in *A Farewell to Arms*. The novel outlines the themes of love and war that run side by side. It portrays how, the war actually acts as a powerful catalyst in creating, as well as reinforcing, relationships between human beings. This novel goes a long way in establishing Hemingway as one of the most futuristic authors of the twentieth century.

In this unit, we will, therefore, study the life and works of the two great twentieth century writers, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. We will also study their styles of writing and evaluate the themes in their works.

5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand Faulkner as a great novelist
- Explain the meaning and significance of motifs used in *The Sound and the Fury*
- Discuss feminism in Faulkner's novel
- Assess *The Sound and The Fury* as a tragic novel
- Interpret the use of the stream of consciousness in the novel
- Recognize Faulkner's style of writing
- Recall the important aspects of Hemingway's biography
- Summarize Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*
- Analyse the main characters of the novel *A Farewell to Arms*
- Evaluate Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* as a twentieth century novel

5.2 FAULKNER AS A NOVELIST

William Faulkner's writing was adventurous and unconventional. His descriptions are loaded with observations on the historical and cultural relation in a domain which witnessed much racial unrest and economic oppression. Relations are subject to these forces. Faulkner realized it clearly and did not leave his scenes innocent of this awareness. Whether he was a moralist in novels or not may be open to debate and some are emphatic that he was a moralist; generally speaking, his passages have a peculiar, almost allusive force of dispassionate presentation. He does not take side as Dickens would prefer to do, and with a furious insistence that would leave little doubt regarding where he stands. On the country, William Faulkner's descriptive passages are 'basically

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informative'. His comments are brief and relinquish the burden of making judgemental statement on social conditions.

However, behind his strong narrations was the burning sense of the central importance of human dignity, which he saw trampled upon arbitrarily, particularly in the politically bristling South.



William Faulkner

Another significant theme which Faulkner deals with is the continuous conflicts with life with which he must have been well familiar.

On a broader scale, his antithesis between traditional and non-traditional positions or ideologies involved the clash of interests within the large families affecting relations in significant ways within which the racial factor also becomes active.

Faulkner is a difficult novelist to read because of his use of various technical devices, which is made with a view to bring out the modernist existential confusion. The reader encounters 'apparently grotesque disturbances and distortions', which became the author's personal novelistic mark.

William Faulkner stands at the topmost position of world fiction, not just English or American, for the precise reasons which are often attacked by critics—the portrayal of confusion, indeterminacy and human soul caught in the whirling storm of efforts to grapple with the sense of the present that is irrevocably involved with the past. That is what keeps interest in his art and fictional world enduring.

Born on 17 August 1870 as William Cuthbert Falkner in New Albany, Mississippi, Faulkner was the first of four sons of Murry Cuthbert Falkner and Maud Butler. Faulkner's artistic imagination was strongly influenced by his family, particularly his mother, his maternal grandmother Lelia Butler and Caroline Barr (the black woman who raised him from infancy). As a schoolchild, Faulkner had much success early on. He also spent much of his boyhood listening to stories told to him by his elders, which mostly included war stories shared by the old men of Oxford, the Civil War, slavery, the Ku Klux Klan and the Falkner family. In adolescence, Faulkner began writing poetry almost exclusively.

In 1927, Faulkner wrote his first novel, entitled *Flags in the Dust*. In 1928, at the age of thirty, he started working on *The Sound and the Fury*. In 1929, Faulkner married Estelle Oldham. In the same, he started writing the novel *As I lay Dying*, which was published in 1930.

Faulkner served as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville from February to June 1957 and again in 1958. He suffered serious

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injuries in a horse-riding accident in 1959, and died from a myocardial infarction at the age of sixty-four on 6 July 1962.

Awards won by William Faulkner

In 1949, the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Faulkner for 'his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel'. However, he did not like the grandeur and fame that resulted from his recognition. Faulkner donated a part of his Nobel money for setting up a fund to encourage and support upcoming fiction writers. This resulted in establishing the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. He donated another part of the prize money to a local oxford bank for setting up a scholarship fund to support the education of African-American teachers at Rust College in Mississippi.

Faulkner was also awarded two Pulitzer Prizes for his novels *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962). He was also awarded the US National Book Award twice for *Collected Stories* in 1951.

5.2.1 Detailed Summary of the Novel

The extraordinary merit of *The Sound and the Fury* lies in the perfect harmony between form and theme which the author achieved by the sheer exercise of his literary genius. It tells the tale of the Compson family, already in its final stage of disintegration, and for that a peculiar sense of time, where past and present have spilled over the barriers, is used. The story is narrated in four stages, employing the viewpoints of three separate characters. However, despite the seemingly repetitive re-run of the story, there is a peculiar freshness in each narration—as the characters are different, hence, their contexts are different. There is Benjy Section, dated 'June 2, 1910', which is followed by Jason Section, dated 'Friday, April 6, 1928' and concluded by Easter Sunday Section dated 'April, 8, 1928'.

From the very beginning, the feeling that the Compson family is in crisis and that it is filling apart is conveyed with vividness. The children appear to be already homeless, though not in the literal sense. Their old, invalid mother is looked up in her house in perfect isolation 'with a hot water bottle and her Bible, and the father locks himself up in the den with a nice big bottle of whisky'. The life is far from sunny and cheerful; with the prospect of improvement almost hopelessly absent. The three brothers in a first person account narrate their past at different stages in the novel. The novel begins with the narrative of Benjy (Benjamin) who is mentally challenged and the youngest son of the family. Mostly, he is seen roaming around on the margins of the town which is located in Mississippi, where he sees golfers busy with their games and yelling 'Caddies" now and then. To Benjy, the word recalls Caddy (Cadence), the loving sister who is married and gone, but with whom he had spent many happy moments. Caddy had played a large role in Benjy's life; remembering her, he becomes agitated emotionally. At this time, 7 April 1928, he is thirty years old. His memories are incoherent and unconnected, more in the form of sense-impressions and lack of continuity of sequence. This makes the entire section a mass of episodes or incidents which freely move backward and forward across the past and the present.

Faulkner shows a fine-tuned artistic sense in portraying Benjy's inner state of psychological response to the agitated emotional condition. This is occasioned by the memories in devising a technique of narration, which relies mostly on the stream-of-consciousness method. Very few authors have shown a complete mastery and easy handling of this particular theme. In this regard, Faulkner has proved to be a master par excellence. We come to know the meaning of his relationship with Caddy and his great

emotional dependence on it through various recollections coming to surface in a haphazard manner.

His existence in a shadowy world of memories and swirling mental impression puts him in a different situation from that of others. He is the subject of everybody's sympathy and pity, but it is only Caddy, and to some extent Dilsey, who take special care of this utterly dependent person. He feels a reassuring experience of comfort in their company. Besides these, there are other thingd that gives him support—the mirror on the wall, the sight of the fire and the golfers whom he sees busy playing in the field. This section also reveals Benjy's special gift of the sixth sense—a power to sense the impending or imminent crisis which is looming over the family. No one else shows this talent, but living, perhaps, on the level of instinctual knowledge, Benjy works his way through am animal-like reliance on extra-sensory signals as opposed to a calculated reasoning like any other human beings. The first section is presented through the eyes of Benjy and contains those perceptual markers and vision which are indeed special. It is this that plunges the unprepared reader into a world of chaos and accumulated impressions which the reader finds so difficult to comprehend.

Caddy has been shown as a free and fun-loving girl whose wanderings all over the area meet with little approval from others. 'We see her...as a rather daring and enterprising girl. She is not concerned with appearance but instead reaches out to find the truth and reality of the situation.'

She is completely vulnerable and Dalton is exactly the symbol of the kind of danger she is exposed to. He is muscular, physically strong and a bully who impregnates her. He has a low opinion of woman in general. Quentin is quite unhappy about his relationship with Caddy, but Dalton tells him that someone else would have impregnated her, if it had not been him. Quentin quarrels with him, Dalton is stronger and gives him a loaded revolver and drives him to shoot. However, the weak and utterly morbid Quentin falls unconscious without a fight.

Quentin is also not happy with Herbert Head whom Caddy marries soon after her pregnancy is discovered. He looks at him unfavourably. Herbert is not aware of Caddy's pregnancy and tries to win her brothers favour by offering him money and a job for Jason in the bank in which he is employed. Jason blames Caddy for depriving him of the job which probably Head was not serious about. However, Quentin remains hostile and these offers have no effect on him. Caddy's promiscuous behaviour has already earned her a good deal of bed reputation as Herbert Head tells Quentin on his face that 'he is neither the first nor will he be the last of Caddy's lover'. 'Soon after marriage, Herbert discovers Caddy's pregnancy. The outcome is predictable enough. He abandons her. The child she gives birth to is named Quentin and is taken to the Compson house by Mr Compson.

Caddy's marriage leaves a vacant spot in Benjy's life. He becomes melancholic and his pitiful slobbering increases, aggravating his agony and discomfort for others. Luster, the black boy, seeks to lighten his pain by showing the golfers on the meadows and making him sit before the fire.

Eighteen years after the suicide committed by Quentin, we are taken to the Compson household in Jefferson. Caddy's daughter Miss Quentin is now seventeen years old and reminds one of her mother. She is least interested in studies and has begun to be absent from her school and movies about with young fellows. Then she falls in love with a person who is with a Carnival on a brief visit to Jefferson. Her uncle Jason feels

outraged and gives her a sound thrashing, but the girl shows a defiant attitude, which he recognizes as her mother's. However, this is not the whole story. Quentin shows the full potential of a full blooded heroine of any entertaining work of fiction. When she sees that she cannot have her ways, she gathers all the money which Jason has accumulated over many years, steals it and runs away without so much as a hint. This is the same money which her mother had been sending to Jason and which he has been using for his own pleasures instead of using it for the girl's maintenance. Destiny takes a full circle here. Jason is out-witted and floored by the girl whose mother he has been cheating. The amount is about three thousand dollars. Jason is beside himself and launches a search for her.

> 'Look here', Jason said. 'My house has been robbed. I know who did it and I know where they are. I come to you as the Commissioned Officer law and I ask you once more are you going to make any effort to recover my property, or not?'
>
> 'What do you aim to do with that girl, if you catch them?' 'Nothing', Jason said. 'Not anything. I wouldn't lay my hand on her. She has cost me a job, the one chance ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life everyday and made my name a laughing stock in the town. I won't do anything to her', he said, 'Not anything' (189).

That is where the novel ends. The last scene is the final humiliation of the family which emerges from the rapid disintegration of its structure, each of its members is detached from the other, isolated in a private limbo of suffering with which others have no concern. It is only Dilsey, the old God-fearing faithful housekeeper, existing in the lowest arduous life of relative unimportance without any hope of improving her position and torture, who appears perfectly balanced, sensible and united to destiny of all. She visits Church and sheds tears at the sufferings of the saints, showing the capacity for humane feelings for the condition in which the Compson family has sunk and suffers silently not for herself but for others—for Benjy, Quentin, Jason, Mrs Compson, Mr Compson IV and all those whose behaviour ensures the final collapse of the family. The last scene of the novel is quite touching. Dilsey is sitting in the Church listening to mass—with her had bent, fully absorbed, a tear trickles from her eyes and rolls along her cheek. This is the last symbol of the feeling heart of an ordinary human amidst the glory of the saints. The very last sentence is symbolically significant:

> 'The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as Cornice and façade smoothly one more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place' (190).

5.2.2 *The Sound and the Fury*: Feminism

'Whatever I do, it's your fault, If I'm bad,
It's because I had to be. You made me. I wish
I was dead. I wish we were all dead.'

Miss Quentin

It is quite difficult to see William Faulkner as overtly engaging himself with the women's conditions in the Southern society of his time and focusing on their problems. On the surface, his world is a man's world—a harsh, tough, masculine world of business ambitions, farmers, servants and drinking and gambling masters who have their way both, in society and family. Women figure in this universe are not centre characters, eager to play a decisive role or even turn the course of events, but peripheral landmarks in the uneven

terrain, serving men as either servants or grudging members of the family. Men in general have an unsympathetic attitude towards them, regarding them as mere objects that facilitate their plans or manager their daily lives. They can be generally classified along two axes: age-wise, woman are shown as quite young and serve as an object of men's uniformly identical opinion on womankind in general. The older sets of woman are recipient of a higher degree of respect and admiration. They are all beyond the age of sexual attraction.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, women are placed in crucial locations vis-à-vis centrally important characters. There is Candace, Mrs Compson and Dilsey, the major women characters, each quite distinct from the other, but each exercising a powerful influence on men's destiny and, thus, the narrative also. Ironically, men like Quentin and Jason have very low opinion regarding women. They are not capable of thinking, men feel, and are uniformly wanting in morality and usually are promiscuous. Men not only treat them as objects of sexual fulfilment and consider them as useful only for child-bearing. They consider women to deserve physical abuse like beating because it is their confirmed opinion that women are devils and temptresses and possess no morality. They also think that it is their nature not to be loyal to men in any relationship and can betray them without shame or remorse. They are merciless and unforgiving and without a sense of charity, and so on.

There is a strong opinion among a large number of scholars and students of William Faulkner that the celebrated author was unsympathetic to the word 'women', and his portrayal of them does not enhance his image as a champion of woman's cause. This opinion receives plenty of support from the surface reading of his fiction. Though Caddy can be said to have been epitomized as symbolizing the complete decline in normal standards not only by her in deference to the accepted norms of restrained behaviour, but also in the manner others regard her, her daughter Miss Quentin evokes equally uneasy response in others.

She is a self-absorbed girl, representing a free spirit, closer to instinctual way of life, deriving her strength and character from the passionate sources of nature. Perhaps Compson is right when he observes, 'purity is a negative state and, therefore, contrary to nature. It's hurting you Caddy ...He is taking to his son Quentin. '

In the oppressive air of the Compson family Caddy is bound to be subjected to male dominance. The Quentin dreams of having incestuous relation with her is suggestive of the forms of exploitation that go back to ancient past; for weak spirited Quentin, she is no better than an object of sexual fantasy turning it into such an alluring mantel preoccupation that he begins to identify the imaged life (with her) in reality. His idea of Caddy's worth fits in with the decadent air that hangs over the family. Quentin is morbid with ideas of his own futility and hopelessness, and his unable to think about in a healthy way is not surprising. Faulkner's portrayal of the Southern society underlines, as literary critic Richard Moreland puts it, 'alienation and hysteria not just of single characters of types, but of whole communities.' Their problems are one of general lack of a cohesive relationship based upon mutually fulfilling sense of a family, living or working for a future. They as units are not only independent of one another but is a mutually disruptive grid. If Caddy is the focal point of her brother's dissatisfaction, her daughter Quentin is no less a source of disturbance for them. Except for Dilsey, these two women epitome Faulkner's projection of women in this novel as living on the level of scum and fifth, unable to invest them with the light of dignity. To use the famous modern critic Noel Polk's words, 'There is throughout Faulkner, something disturbing about the blood and

excrement and death.' In the case of Caddy, she does not rise above her association with sexual fantasy in almost every male's imagination.

However, there is another side of her personality. We see in Caddy not only an unusual level of sexual freedom but also a surprising degree of strength of personality. She belongs, as literary critic Katie Kinkel says in her brilliant study, *Sexuality and Narrative Structure in the Novels of Williams Faulkner*, to the common experience of social 'traumas of the post bellum South' which projects sexuality as a 'culturally marginalized experience of Southern trauma of the Southern woman forming an individual sexual and personal identify at the close of an era of inequality and sexual dominance'. In this scholar's opinion, the virulent sexuality of Caddy and Quentin in this novel and of other women characters in other novels of Faulkner constitute a passionate reaction to the attitude of men who treat them with a coercive and blind masculine sense of ownership: 'deviations from norms of sexual and intimate relationships in Faulkner are challenging to the established social, racial, and gendered order. Women in Faulkner therefore become the effective "property" of the men who govern their sexual beings—unable to escape the strictures of white womanhood either by "being sexual" or "being pure", they are coerced into a narrative—or rather—a fiction—of female purity and male chivalry.'

From Caddy's point of view, her escapes may be seen to open up for her avenues of self-discovery, filling her with a sense of her separate (sexual) identify and personal power over men and the system that brings her into variegated relationship with them. It is this power of the self that is so evident in Caddy and sets apart from her self-absorbed brothers.

We have already underlined Caddy's qualities of humane concern for Benjy, a differently challenged brother, with whom she has a special emotional attachment. Benjy appears to be emotionally dependent on her, assuring presence or signs of her existence like the sight of her slippers. The author's brilliant introspective vision presents this highly positive side in the Compson family as something that nature perpetually nurtures and nourishes in man's degenerate ways. This is brought out by Benjy's repeated assertion that Caddy 'smells like trees' or like flowers. In considering the feminist aspect of the novel, one cannot ignore this dimension of Caddy's character.

Despite the oppressive attitude of men, and her own brothers' tendency to exploit her in the most deplorable manner, Caddy shows great patience and perseverance in protecting her brother and daughter. Much has been made of her muddy drawers by critics and scholars, dwelling upon her sexual promiscuity in lengthy studies, but her fighting spirit in safeguarding her daughter appears to have caught little attention. She goes into a universally detested profession to earn money, out of which a little portion is saved, which she regularly sends to Jason for Quentin's upkeep. She becomes a victim of her brother's dishonesty and deception. Instead of forwarding the amount to Quentin, Jason puts it into his own cashbox, keeping, on one hand, the young girl in ignorance, and on the other, getting his mother's signature on the blank cheque. Both Caddy and her daughter come to know of this. Quentin is angry and fights with Jason; her bitterness of heart can well be understood as a justified reaction to blatant act of robbery.

The irony of the situation is that, instead of confessing his crime, Jason goes to the Sheriff to report a robbery that, he complains, has been committed on his money because Quentin in a fury of protest, stomps up to his room, takes money out of his box, which her mother has been sending to her but never reaches her. Though Faulkner portrays women in this particular phase of southern community's history as facing serious problems of male dominance, having been pushed into an utterly vulnerable position, he highlights

a deeply embedded genderist exploitative relationship within the family and keeps them subjugated by robbing them of their own rights and normal conditions of life. Quentin belongs to a new generation, growing up in these troubled times. There is a difference of perception of social relations and attitude towards personal rights, need to assert and ways of resisting attacks on those rights between Quentin and her mother, Caddy. This difference is already marked by the intemperate bursts of reaction we witness from Quentin. In a fretful mood one evening, while chewing her bread with Jason and with her grandmother sitting at the table, Quentin asks frankly, 'why does he treat me like this, Grandmother?' She says, 'I never hurt him.' When the grandmother tries to remind her that she is young and should not talk like that about elders, she jumps up and puts blame squarely on the elders.

'It's his fault', she says, she jumped up. 'He makes me do it. If he would just'

And then,

'Whatever I do, it's your fault', she says, 'If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead.' Then she ran. We heard her run up the stairs. The door slammed.

Caddy did not show this courage. Quentin's defiance is symbolic of the changing attitude of a new woman, who is aware of her being exploited and restricted, and is determined to wage a war against it. While Caddy's affairs are talked about, Quentin's affairs are quite visible; she perhaps deliberately plans it in such a way that she can be seen by her uncle moving in a car with her boyfriend. The tyre of his car, exacerbating his own mood of annoyance not only with her, but his own general failure and frustration at all fronts, is sufficient proof that here is one female who is not going to put up with the nonsense coming from overweening males simply because they are her elders or she was expected to be obedient in a family where hierarchy matters.

Both the women, Caddy and Quentin, despite their apparently disadvantageous positions, show capabilities of putting the men into an extremely helpless positions by exposing their fraudulent dealings and deeds, and uncovering to their own eyes their hollow cores of dithering personality, which cannot face ordinary challenges of life. All male members of the Compson family appear to be victims of this intrinsic weakness resorting in their desperation to greater repressive and abusive methods like calling names, robbing lies and other unscrupulous tricks. The pathetic dilemma of Quentin and Jason is not limited to their own ambivalent views, but such characters as Uncle Maury and Father Compson display in ample measure similar tendencies. As the patriarch of the family, the father has no role at all; he lives in his ideas which are a queer set and at best of little help to give direction to the affairs of his children or shape to a family which is threatened with imminent disintegration. Given to fixed and sedentary existence in the shadows of past glory of a big family, the father sinks into a life of inactivity and drinking. So is Maury, who is another symbol of self-centred avarice. These men lend no support to the family as a system for they possess no love for it. Each one of them is engaged in achieving his selfish end by depriving others, especially women, of their rights.

It needs to be made clear that the prevalent critical opinion makes it appear that the novelist William Faulkner is a misogynist, a hater of women who has intentionally portrayed women in dark colours, demeaning their image as mere objects of consumption. Apparently this may appear to be so, as the same story is recounted from three prints of view by three different persons and at least two women's promiscuous activities get local attention. However, a closer reading reveals that the author is narrating the downfall

of a family in terms of its loss of the essential values of morality and humanity in the larger context of the rapid and tragic degeneration of the southern community.

Faulkner was both a gifted writer with an extra-ordinary introspective vision which penetrated the thick layers of insensitivity that marked society and its members. His portrayal of women is in consonance with his aim, which is to show how men exploit women and how women stand up to their machinations in full resistance and defiance to the patriarchal system society. A significant aspect of Faulkner's universe in *The Sound and the Fury* is that human drama takes places in a family which turns out to be, to use the feminist vocabulary, a site for gender prejudices, discriminations and unrestrained exploitation.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the name of Faulkner's first collection of poems that got published?
2. How did William Faulkner die?
3. Where does the extraordinary merit of *The Sound and the Fury* lie?

5.3 DIFFERENT MOTIFS USED BY THE AUTHOR IN THE NOVEL

Motif is a literary device. It is an image which assumes, by virtue of its recurrence, symbolic significance because its frequent occurrence adds to the meaning of the overall narrative and intensifies its general effect. In William Shakespeare's work, the motif of time is a recurring element which is used to emphasize a ruthless march and the destructive work that is its chief function. In Kamla Das' work, the noted Indian English poetess, the motif of crow, the funeral pyre log and sexual brutality are some of the persistent motifs, which allow her to lend semantic density to certain aspects of her presentation.

In a similar manner, in *The Sound and the Fury*, we come across some motifs which surface again and again, urging us to delve deeper into the novel's sub-textual level of meaning and significance.

5.3.1 Time Motif

What we are aware of primarily is the intense dramatization of the inner life of the chapters through interior monologue. In the first two sections dealing with the mentally different Benjy and Quentin, the sense of time is neatly divided into past, present and future. Time exists in a turbulent, fluid state here; past mingling with the present; and the future dissolving into the present. The events are presented not in a linear order as is normally the case is in storytelling. The point of view taken is that of the character's conscious and sub-conscious flow of impressions in which there is no relevance of past and the present.

Shadow creates a wonderfully dramatic effect in Faulkner's novels, particularly this novel where the impression of the characters' agitated minds project the interior drama that takes place in the family arena. The author was writing a novel in which people of substance turn their life into shadowy matter. The word 'shadow' can mean many things in the novel: it may refer to the looming danger of inescapable gloom and

bleak prospect with which the Compson family feels increasingly hedged in; it may also imply the perpetual darkness where the sense of relatedness and human warmth is eternally frozen; thirdly, Shakespeare's utterance in Macbeth, 'Life but a walking shadow' lends an overall feeling of shadowy life that each one of the inmates of the house leads. There is a lack of self-will, strength of character and conviction of faith in one another that makes them shadowy.

Benjy is a handicapped character. His intensity of perception draws its strength from the resources of his impressions that are independent of time-sense of the normal order. He is unable to contribute meaningfully in the growth of family. He lurks there as a shadow. For Quentin, the 'shadow motif' acquires greater intensity as the word occurs almost fifty times in the section dealing with him. He is floundering amidst shadows of his own imagined moments with Caddy and his desperation arises out of his inability to come to grips with tangible realities like Caddy's relation with Dalton Amis, and his friends who can at will humiliate him or beat him up without meeting resistance.

Quentin's life floats from one phase of inner oscillations into another like cloud-shadow. His parents help him get a good education at Harvard University, but he cannot make anything out of it. He is worried bitterly over the truth of time and frets. His father tells him a few things about time being the tragedy and misfortune of man which he takes seriously. He learns from Mr Compson that Jesus Christ died not because he was crucified but because of time. Quentin smashes his watch to stop time, which is, again, like Macbeth, an attempt seeking to master the circumstances of life by banishing those who opposed him. The motif of shadow occurs in order to remind us of the futility of our ambitious when our efforts are not properly coordinated and pooled to counter the forces of disintegration. Everyone in this endangered family floats down the turbulent stream of life like shadows at the mercy of density. When Quentin commits suicide, he is shown jumping into the water—the reflection/shadow of his own self rises out of the water to meet him.

5.3.2 Water Motif

Reference to water comes many a times in this novel with the same haunting repetitiveness as the earlier two motifs discussed. In the Benjy section, children play close to the pool of water. Caddy's own character with all its deposition to a defiant free will evolves in close association with her frolics in the water.

It is said that Faulkner himself wished to tell the story of a girl who fell down and got out of water emerging with her drawers turned muddy. These images of Caddy's muddy drawers later become a celebrated theme with Faulkner's critics and scholars. It is difficult to say whether it is a coincidence or there is a deeper significance in the novelist's suggestion about the girl/woman's independent character by portraying their indulgence in water.

5.3.3 Caddy (Candace)

Caddy is the sister of the three brothers, the only daughter of the Compson parents. She occupies a pre-eminent place in this interesting saga of the family's downfall. And yet while all the three male members have been given each a section to present the tale, Caddy's direct presence is not devised by the author. On the other hand, we know her through the narratives of Benjy, Quentin and Jason. We, therefore, have to fall upon the three different portrayals in order to construct our picture of Caddy.

It is through Benjy's monologue, in the first section, that we get the idea of Caddy's caring, compassionate nature almost similar to that displayed by Dilsey to her and Benjy. In a prominent scene, after Caddy's marriage and her departure from the house, Benjy sees her slippers and becomes so agitated that he wails and slobbers aloud. Their attachment is exceptionally close; Benjy can be claimed by none else but Caddy alone, and while she is away, he feels lonely and sometimes disconsolate. Through the narration of others, different narrators express different opinions about her. Her confidence in her own self and capabilities do not need corroboration from others. It is her elemental quality of being, the essentially Southern spirit of free will and unrestrained passion for enjoying that freedom, untouched, we can say by the awareness of social norms that appeared to be admired by Faulkner's pen. That is why it traces out in prominent lines her breezy, carefree personality, while her two brothers and parents make it quite clear that they resent her scandalous behaviour. The only person who expresses frankly his wonder and admiration is Benjy. Caddy's freshness and exhilaration make him exclaim repeatedly, 'Caddy smelled like trees!'

To Benjy, Caddy becomes a 'mother figure'. In the words of the famous critic Lawrence, 'Caddy, motivated by her comparison for her younger brother, has eagerly given Ben the kind of motherly attention previously denied to him because of his own mother's inadequacies. Tenderly, solicitously, Caddy has discovered ways of appearing to Ben's limited responses to satisfy his instinctive and unreasoning hunger for orderliness, peacefulness, serenity. Therefore, the red-yellow cushions, the smooth satin slipper, are only a few of the objects used by Caddy to provide him with values, which are positive to him because they are somehow sustaining.'

Caddy's fussy, flustering mother says, 'you humour him too much … you and your father both. You don't realize that I am the one who has to pay for it …' To this Caddy says, 'you don't need to bother with him …. I like to take care of him. Don't I, Benjy.'

He is obviously far more comfortable with Caddy than with his mother. To quote Thompson again, 'Her presence was Ben's joy; her absence his grief, her possible return his hope.' Benjy is, thus, somehow acting as a moral mirror for her. When Caddy had her first sexual experience, she returns home bristling with quilt and shame—Benjy in all eyes is looking at her. He somehow evokes in her a greater and deeper sense of guilt. Nevertheless, in a way, she makes his chaotic world of feelings and impressions more shapely and organized. She helps him 'to find within himself the power to convert even darkness refuge unfailing, in which conflict [was] tempered, silenced, reconciled, as Quentin phrased it.'

In relation with Caddy, the externals do not much matter; she is absolutely raw and elemental. She does not care about her dress and appearance. She has been shown to enjoy her life amid trees, free air, open sky and streams. One critic has remarked, 'Caddy herself is love, the one who can quiet Benjy down with the touch of her hand. She is also the boldness of youth as both her dirty underwear and confident assumption of the mother's role indicate.'

In some places in the novel, we also see that she does not care even for her parent's advice about the hours of play and places where it is safe for her to go, and so on. She sees no danger to herself. Her nature is to go exploring the world and life with a degree of exuberance that is rarely found in Compson family members. It is interesting to see that she has been presented here as an important contrast to family's repressive atmosphere. In the words of literary author Michael Millgate, 'Caddy finds an out less

from family repression in sexual activity but she is also both a principle and a symbol of social disruption'. She reminds us of Ursula Brangwen in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. Faulkner created her as a breaker of traditional pattern and spoke of her with intense passion: 'To me she was the most beautiful one… she was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of Caddy.'

Quentin's love for Caddy is different from Benjy's love. He harbours a peculiar sexual fascination for her. He fears that her careless free activities may land her in serious difficulty; therefore, he advices her to remain within moderate limits. In fact, Quentin scolds her for her misdemeanour. Caddy gives him a shock when it is revealed that she has become pregnant by Ames Dalton. In his agitation, he keeps asking whether she dislikes him or not. She might or might not have felt a sense of guilt; it is Quentin who had instilled her to feel guilty. Quentin represents the sensitive minds that is surrounded by the rotting set of dead values and have no use for anyone. He himself embodies another inadequacy of that family and his extreme morbid possessiveness with regard to Caddy points to it.

Caddy's sexuality is the expression of the consequence she has to bear of her unbridled free behaviour. She is married off in a hurry to Herbert Head, a worthless man far below her character. He, having discovered her illegitimate child, abandons Caddy and the child. As a mother, Caddy has a new focus of attention, her baby whom she named Quentin. She is worried about the proper growth which her daughter needs, so she takes her to the Compson family. It is in the section of Jason that we see the anxiety expressed by Caddy as a responsible mother for her child. Caddy has not been informed about her father's death. She reads about it in the newspaper and secretly visits the funeral, suggesting her deep love and reverence for her father. It also indicates a child's obligation to her father, a level of cultural value, who regularly used to send cheques to cover her daughter's expenses. This money, on one hand, represents a compassionate girl's love for her child, while on the other, it reflects unscrupulous tendency of her brother who shamelessly goes on misappropriating the contribution for fifteen years.

Caddy appears in all the glory and all the possible flaws of a human character that evokes a mixed response in our hearts. In the beginning, we feel that she is too unmindful of the damages which her free behaviour is likely to provoke, and it is created by her brothers and others with insulting words. Caddy's assertive and powerful personally cannot be expected to provoke administration among those who are happy to keep her as a woman under their control. The difference between William Faulkner and D. H. Lawrence is that while Lawrence raises her women to the level of existence where pure passions are interpretable as spiritual urges and yearnings, Faulkner keeps his women to the level of earthly humans, inheriting both the splendour and weakness of human character. They show the flaws that any human being would show, but their spirited adherence to human values and their practice is equally elevating, transforming their characters into angelic mould. Caddy's character is conceived in such view of her joys and sorrows.

Check Your Progress

4. What kind of a character is Miss Quentin?
5. What is a misogynist?

5.4 TITLE OF THE NOVEL

The title of the novel is a fragment of a speech, a monologue, delivered by Macbeth in Shakespeare's tragedy by that name. It is one of the memorable pieces of dramatic poetry full of philosophical wisdom. Several extracts from Shakespeare's various plays have this quality of functioning independently when taken out of context and imparting a profound thought upon the general human condition. It would be worthwhile to cite that particular extract and see what a splendid composition it is:

Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor play
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

5.4.1 Resemblance with *Macbeth*: Act V, Scene V

Act V, Scene V in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* reminds us of another one which occurs in the great dramatist's comedy, *As You Like It*, where it is highlighted that the world is a stage on which we are destined to play our roles. The individual scepticism and despondency take a flight in wider circles to reveal unclouded grasp of things.

The two key words, 'sound' and 'fury' foreground with ruthless precisions the disorders into which the great Compson family has fallen. This is exacerbated by self-centred, whining inmates, the three brothers and one sister, who instead of thinking in terms of larger interest of the family and restoring its lost strength and glory, hold one another in contempt. They also indulge in fraudulent business and undertake unscrupulous ways to the great sorrow of the simple-hearted black servant Mrs Dilsey.

The biggest crisis that the family faces is the crisis of confidence. The members live together without a sense of attachment and trust and treat one another with bitter hostility. The elders, particularly the parents of the children, appear to have resigned themselves to their own fate. Each one of them gives the impression of leading his or her life separately and involved in the pursuit of selfish ends. While Mr Compson, Caddy's father, talks like a cynical person shrouded with nihilistic ideas, Quentin, his son, is wallowing in gloomy prospect of life, rooted totally in inaction. He fantasizes about his own sister in sexual terms and imagines having getting intimate with her. Mr Compson has a particular philosophy of life and time. In another of his peculiar notions, chastity is a concept invented by man. In nature's kingdom, there is nothing like virginity—all women have a natural affinity of evil.

Mrs Compson is equally a picture of miserable, fretting woman who cannot get over her notion of declining health. She has been portrayed as perpetually on the edge, whining and whimpering about her children's wayward behaviour. She stays mostly in her bed, and is well-looked after by the faithful black servant Disley. Mrs Compson is also unconcerned about the family and does not do anything to retrieve its position, though she has strong opinions about Caddy's behaviour and her daughter Miss Quentin, who grows into an equally wayward and wilful girl.

Mrs Compson shows a special favour to Jason, her second son. Jason is a rough, uncouth violent-tempered young man who works in a store but harbours high ambitions. He is an epitome of crass selfishness and unbridled greed. He regularly robs Miss Quentin of the money which Caddy sends to him for her upkeep, keeping everybody, including his mother in the dark about his evil doings. If the old parents are symbolic of the morass into which the family has sunk, Jason represents the final decline of the moral and cultural values of this family which has lost its centrifugal force. He is callous and called-hearted. He dreams of prospering on the money of others which he tries to obtain through cheating and dishonesty. Faulkner shows that Jason, the next head, after the death of his father and his brother, works his evil ways in his own family. There is a painful absence of love and affinity for anyone in his heart. Caddy, whom he dislikes for her independent personality, remains dependent upon Jason for her daughter's upkeep, but he robs of the portion of money which she sends to him.

In the novel, the other person who is emotionally dependent upon him is his mother. She has a great regard for him and pins all her hope on his abilities and thinks that whatever hopes this dissolving family entertains can be fulfilled by him alone. However, even she is not spared by him. He hustles her and takes possession of the keys by force. He keeps her in dark regarding how he has been using her for the money which he does not allow to reach Caddy's daughter. Towards this young and growing girl, his behaviour is one of brutal treatment and insult. He is domineering, crude and heartless, provoking Quentin into rebellion against his uncivilized ways. Though they live in the same house, Miss Quentin feels the atmosphere oppressive and insufferable. She belongs to the times that have changed and continue to change.

There is a lot of 'sound and fury' between Miss Quentin and Jason as the two represent a clamorous conflict between two opposite temperaments. Jason treats Caddy and her daughter the way that is dictated by the sharply declining level of culture of the community.

Jason's brother Quentin is perpetually surrounded by the gloomy and despairing ideas, living a life of weak-hearted withdrawal within himself. He has been offered the best advantage to get educated in Harvard University, for which a portion of the land belonging to Benjy is sold. However, Quentin is a man who is just incapable of making the best of the chances that are given to him. He lives among young men who are physically strong, arrogant and profligate. Quentin's worst aspect is revealed when he dreams of having incestuous physical relations with his sister Caddy. Her open, ill-concealed sexuality provokes rabid desires in him, and for the better part of his time, he keeps brooding over his imaginary relation with her. He even tells his father that it is he who has made her pregnant. His decision to commit suicide can be seen as the logical conclusion of a life that has been intrinsically weak, a mind that is completely debilitated and a personality that has lost touch with reality. Such an unhealthy and inward looking life can only wilt. With Quentin also, we see plenty of storm, sound and fury.

Caddy's daughter, Quentin is a perfect individual person who follows her mother's footsteps in going out with her boyfriend. She shows little sense of responsibility toward either her family members or preservation of the values of a family. She is slave to her whims and passions and has no affection for anyone. This, in short, is a family in which we observe plenty of drama on individual levels in terms of frustrated hopes that mark everybody's life. Each individual thinks only in terms of himself, but even in that pursuit of the self-interest, there is blundering and precipitous movement.

5.4.2 *The Sound and the Fury*: A Tragic Novel

The entire subject-matter of this novel is projected in an unmistakable light. William Faulkner focuses his interest on the tragic implication that marks the life of south in the crucial juncture of its history. The author had lived in the region which was witnessing a decline in the standards of behaviour, the moral values and the sense of binding which he emphasized so vehemently in his Nobel Prize Ceremony speech. One must link this speech and sundry other expression of ideas recorded in various interviews and other occasions with what is presented in his novel.

His anti-racist stand and pronouncements are well-known which in the world of transition in the 1940s–50s was in the tune with the strengthening democratic spirit. His famous work *Intruder in the Dust* is unambiguously an anti-racist work.

It is the direct experiences with the demeaning systems of society exercising their crushing power over individual's freedom of choice and reducing him to a mere cog in the gigantic wheel of relentless exploitation, particular in racially sensitive South that the author became more responsive to the basic 'Christian virtues of self-respect and mutual respect, forgiveness of others as well as oneself, fortitude, a proper balance between humility and pride and charity' (William Van O' Connor: 150). This led him to the exploration of the essential bases of human relationships, those foundations which tragically lost their location in the troubled times of the early twentieth-century.

Though his novels tell the tales of decline of families that come into contact with the trends of a changing world, the inner anxieties go beyond the particular drama and touch the subject of humanistic values. The extraordinary merit of *The Sound and the Fury* lies in the perfect harmony between form and theme, which the author achieved by sheer exercise of his literary genius. It tells the tale of the Compson family; already in its final stage of disintegration and for that a peculiar sense of time, where past and present have spilled over the barriers, is used. The story is narrated in four stages, employing the viewpoints of three separate characters. However, despite the seemingly repetitive re-run of the story, there is a peculiar freshness in each narration; as the characters are different, hence, their contexts are different.

From the very beginning, the feeling that the Compson family is in crisis, that it is falling apart is conveyed with vividness. The children appear to be already homeless, though not in the literal sense. The old, invalid mother is locked up in her house in a perfect isolation 'with a hot water bottle and her Bible, and the father locks himself up in the den with a nice big bottle of whiskey'. The life is far from sunny and cheerful; with no prospect of improvement, which is almost hopelessly absent. The three brothers in a first person account narrate their past at different stages in the novel. The novel begins with the narrative of Benjy (Benjamin) who is mentally challenged and the youngest son of the family. Mostly, he is seen roaming around on the margins of the town which is located in Mississippi area, where he sees golfers busy with their games and yelling 'Caddies' now and then. To Benjy, the word recalls Caddy (Cadence), the loving sister who is married and gone, but played a large role in Benjy's life; remembering her, he becomes agitated emotionally.

At this time, 7 April 1928, he is thirty years old. His memories are incoherent and unconnected, more in the form of sense-impressions and lack of continuity of sequence. This makes the entire section a mass of episodes or incidents which freely move backward and forward across the past and the present. Faulkner shows a fine-tuned artistic sense in portraying Benjy's inner state of psychological response to the agitated emotional

condition occasioned by the memories of his sister. He devises a technique of narration which relies mostly on stream-of-consciousness method. Very few authors have shown complete mastery and easeful handling of it. Faulkner has proved to be a master par excellence in it. We come to know the meaning of his relationship with Caddy and his great emotional dependence on it through various recollections coming to surface in a haphazard manner. His pain and desolation are brought out most touchingly at differently stages when he is shown slobbering and yelling aloud.

His existence in a shadowy world of memories and swirling mental impression puts him in a different situation from that of the others. He is the subject of everybody's sympathy and pity, but it is only Caddy, and to some extent Dilsey, who takes special care of this utterly dependent person. He feels a reassuring experience of comfort in their company. Besides these, there are other things that give him support, such as the mirror on the wall, the sight of the fire and the golfers whom he sees busy playing in the field. This section also reveals Benjy's special gift of the sixth sense—a power to sense the impending or imminent crisis which is looming over the family. No one shows this talent, but living, perhaps, on a level of instinctual knowledge, Benjy works his way more through the animal like reliance on extra-sensory signals than a calculated reasoning manner like any other human being. The entire first section is presented through the eyes of Benjy. It contains those perceptual makers and vision frames which are his especial possession; hence, the wandering, jumbled and chaotic accumulation of impressions are difficult for the unprepared readers to comprehend.

Caddy is represented in the novel as a freedom-loving girl. 'It is Caddy who climbs the tree to see what is going on in the household at her grandfather's funeral. Caddy also functions as type of mother.' (Batra: 111). This unrestrained behaviour also suggests the crisis into which she is likely to get, as little precautions or vigilance is seen in her nature that would protect her from probable troubles. This is clearly seen in the incestuous desire which Quentin shows for her —a desire which remained frustratingly unfulfilled. It makes him a victim of self-accusations, guilt and other contrary tugs of emotions that drove him deeper into mystery. Quentin's lust for his own sister does no good to Caddy's reputation. Dalton represents the kind of danger she is exposed to. He meets her and makes her pregnant.

Dalton is a low-lying muscular, physically strong and bullying type of a man. As we know, he has a low opinion of women in general and abuses them. Quentin is quite unhappy about his relationship with Caddy, but Dalton tells him that Caddy would be made pregnant by someone else if it had not been him. Quentin quarrels with him, but Dalton is stronger and gives him a loaded revolver and drives him to shoot. However, the weak and utterly morbid Quentin falls unconscious without a fight. Later on, Dalton offers him his horse so that he would not have to walk all the long distance home. Dalton's role brings out the perfect debasement of the family at the hands of an outsider who not only seduces a girl of the family, but beats down any resistance to this shameful assault on family honour which may be put by any male member. It is not only Quentin who protests Caddy's affair with his man, but even Benjy in his weak-minded reaction tugs at her clothes when he finds them kissing. She attempts to calm down Benjy by assuring him that she will not repeat this again. Benjy may be jealous or angry or just outraged by his sisters' behaviour. However, his unconscious reaction is significant for the element of protest in it.

Caddy is also dumped by Herbert Head after marriage when he comes to know about the illegitimate child. She becomes a prostitute and sends money every month to

Jason for her daughter's upkeep. Caddy, the daughter of a famed and big family, is thus reduced to the level of the miserable and unworthy being, losing not only her own face but damaging the name of the family whose ultimate shame is symbolized by her total decline in a life of sin.

Caddy's affair with Dalton haunts Quentin all along. He goes to Harvard University for studies. Caddy's fate weighs down heavily on his heart. He considers both Herbert Head and Dalton Ames as the destroyers of his beloved sister. Besides, his own sexual fixation on her does not tolerate the idea of someone else taking possession of her sexually. She spins a web of charm around his thoughts, making him more and more miserable so that ultimately he sees no way out of this condition and he decides to commit suicide. He decides to put an end to his life on 2 June 1910. However, several other unfortunate things happen to drive him to the mental brink. He has been accused of seducing a small Italian girl, though he is not at all guilty of it. He has a quarrel with his college mate named Gerald Bland whom he comes to identify with Dalton Ames, the seducer of Caddy. He receives sound thrashing at his hands. The day turns out to be full of bad developments and helps him in no way in mitigating his sense of loss. On the contrary, it brings a series of more humiliating experiences and, finally on the appointed day, he commits suicide.

As stated earlier, Benjy's life becomes desolate after Caddy's marriage. The sight of Caddy's slippers makes Benjy more aware of her absence. For Dilsey, the old faithful housekeeper, the house without Caddy and Quentin is heavy on her mind, and demanding her attention. She had been an important member of the family, as everyone from the old Mrs Compson to Benjy looks up to her for care and order at home. Dilsey feels that her responsibilities have doubled. Her central worry is to keep Benjy calm. Caddy is married, Quentin has committed suicide, father Compson is dead; Jason, the remaining brother becomes the head of the family. He is crook, a selfish person who is ready to go to any extent to achieve personal ends. It has already been pointed out that Jason dupes Caddy of the money she has been sending for her daughter Quentin's maintenance. He is interested in promoting his own interests and is prepared to go to any extent. He lives entirely for himself, feeling that everyone should agree with what he thinks, his utterance with sharp wit and sarcastic remarks. His conversation with the Sheriff is an example. He is also sardonic in his account of his father's funeral. Jason's role is to give a particular direction to the events, for he represents the inexorable force of crisis that does not brook any interference and will destroy anything which will come in his way.

Check Your Progress

6. What does *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V remind us of?
7. What is the biggest crisis faced by the Compson family?

5.5 ERNEST HEMINGWAY: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born at Oak Park, Illinois, in the summer of 1899, Ernest Hemingway is known to have condemned his middle-class parents for their conventional morality and values.

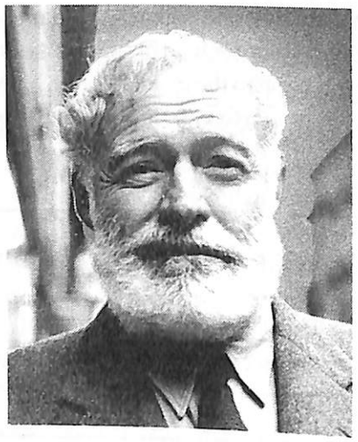
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Hemingway left home at a young age and became a newspaper reporter in Kansas City. He joined the Italian Red Cross in early 1918 where he served as an ambulance driver in Italy during the First World War. During his stay abroad, a couple of incidences in Hemingway's life became the source of inspiration, as portrayed by the characters of his work *A Farewell to Arms*. The first incidence was a mishap that took place on 8 July 1918, when a trench mortar shell struck Hemingway while he squat beyond the front lines with three Italian soldiers. Though the story was exaggerated over the years, it was a fact that when Hemingway was transferred to a hospital in Milan, he fell in love with Agnes von Kurowsky, a Red Cross nurse. Though there are divided opinions on the role played by Agnes in Hemingway's life and writing, there is a modest doubt that his relationship with her inspired the relationship between Lieutenant Henry and Catherine Barkley in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*.

After recovery, Hemingway worked as a reporter for many years. This helped him in improving his writing skills, where his style had clarity, precision and an emotional expression. In September 1921, Hemingway got married to Hadley Richardson, first of his four wives, and settled in Paris. Here, he made valuable connections with American expatriate writers that included names like Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Hemingway's first collection of short stories, *In Our Time,* introduced Nick Adams, one of the Hemingway's favourite protagonists, whose difficult road from youth to maturity he chronicled. By then, Hemingway's reputation as a writer was firmly established by the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

A Farewell to Arms is considered to be Hemingway's most accomplished novel that gives a powerful description of life, during and just after the First World War. The novel also maps the psychological complexities of its characters with the aid of revolutionary and pared-down prose style.

In 1952, regardless of bouts of depression, Hemingway wrote the novel *The Old Man and the Sea.* Hemingway's novel received the Pulitzer Prize in May 1952, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. On 2 July 1961, Hemingway committed suicide at his home in *Ketchum, Idaho*.



Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway was brought up in Oak Park, Illinois. He joined the Italian front to get recruited with the World War I ambulance drivers. In 1918, he was seriously wounded and returned home. His wartime experiences formed the basis for his novel *A Farewell to Arms*. He divorced his first wife Hadley Richardson in 1927. After this, he married Pauline Pfeiffer, whom he divorced after returning from the Spanish Civil War where he had been a journalist. Following this, he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. He married Martha Gellhorn as his third wife in 1940. However, they too got separated when he met Mary Welsh in London during World War II. Hemingway was present at the Normandy Landings and the liberation of Paris.

Soon after *The Old Man and the Sea* was published in 1952, Hemingway went on safari to Africa, where he was almost killed in two successive plane crashes that left him in pain and ill health for almost the rest of his life. Hemingway had permanent residences in Key West, Florida (1930s) and Cuba (1940s and 1950s), and in 1959, he bought a house in Ketchum, Idaho, where he committed suicide in the summer of 1961.

Important works of Ernest Hemingway

- ***The Torrents of Spring* (1926):** *The Torrents of Spring* is a novella, which was published in 1926. The novel was subtitled as *A Romantic Novel in Honor of the Passing of a Great Race*. Hemingway used the work as a satire of the world of writers. It is Hemingway's first long work and was written as an imitation of Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*.
- ***The Sun Also Rises* (1926):** *The Sun Also Rises* is a 1926 novel. It is about a group of American and British expatriates who travel from Paris to the Festival of San Fermín in Pamplona to watch the running of the bulls and the bullfights. An early and enduring modernist novel, it received mixed reviews upon publication. Hemingway's biographer Jeffrey Meyers writes that it is 'recognized as Hemingway's greatest work'. Moreover, Hemingway's scholar Linda Wagner-Martin calls it his most important novel. The novel was published in October 1926 in the United States. In 1927, the London publishing house Jonathan Cape published the novel with the title of *Fiesta*. Since then, it has been continuously in print.

  The basis for the novel was Hemingway's 1925 trip to Spain. The setting was unique and memorable, showing the seedy café life in Paris, and the excitement of the Pamplona festival, with a middle section devoted to descriptions of a fishing trip in the Pyrenees. Equally unique was Hemingway's spare writing style, combined with his restrained use of description to convey characterizations and action, which became known as the Iceberg Theory. Additionally, Hemingway investigates the themes of love, death, renewal in nature, and the nature of masculinity.
- ***A Farewell to Arms* (1929):** *A Farewell to Arms* is a novel set during the Italian campaign of World War I. The book was published in 1929. It is a first-person account of American Frederic Henry, serving as a Lieutenant (Tenente) in the ambulance corps of the Italian Army. The title is taken from a poem by sixteenth century English dramatist George Peele.

  A Farewell to Arms focuses on a romance between the expatriate American Henry and Catherine Barkley, whose nationality is described as English or Scottish, against the backdrop of the First World War, cynical soldiers, fighting and the displacement of populations. The publication of this, Hemingway's bleakest novel, paved his importance as a modern American writer. It became his first best-seller, and is described by biographer Michael Reynolds as 'the premier American war novel from that debacle World War I'.

  The novel was first adapted to stage by Laurence Stallings in 1930, then to film in 1932, with a 1957 remake.
- ***To Have and Have Not* (1937):** *To Have and Have Not* is a 1937 novel about Harry Morgan, a fishing boat captain who runs contraband between Cuba and Florida. The novel depicts Harry as basically a good man who is forced into black-market activity by economic forces beyond his control. At first, his fishing charter customer Mr

Johnson tricks Harry by slipping away without paying any of the money he owes him. Harry then makes a critical decision to smuggle Chinese immigrants into Florida to make ends meet. To continue supporting his family, Harry begins to regularly ferry different types of illegal cargo between the two countries, including alcohol and Cuban revolutionaries. The Great Depression features prominently in the novel, forcing depravity and hunger on the poor residents of Key West who are referred to as 'Conchs'.

- ***For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940):** *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a novel published in 1940. It tells the story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to a republican guerrilla unit during the Spanish Civil War. As a dynamiter, he is assigned to blow up a bridge during an attack on the city of Segovia. Hemingway's biographer Jeffrey Meyers writes that the novel is regarded as one of Hemingway's best works, along with *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Old Man and the Sea* and *A Farewell to Arms*.
- ***Across the River and into the Trees* (1950):** *Across the River and Into the Trees* is a novel published by Charles Scribner's Sons in September 1950. Prior to publication by Scribner's, the novel was serialized in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The title is derived from the last words of Confederate General Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson.

  A central theme in the novel is death and how one faces death. One biographer and critic sees a parallel between Hemingway's *Across the River and Into the Trees* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Generally, critics agree that the novel is built upon successive layers of symbolism. As in his other writings, Hemingway uses the style known as the Iceberg theory in which much of the substance of the work lies below the surface of the plot itself.

  The novel was written in Italy, Cuba and France. *Across the River and Into the Trees* was the first of Hemingway's novels to receive consistently bad press and reviews. In the years since its publication, however, some critics have come to believe it is an important addition to the Hemingway canon.
- ***The Old Man and the Sea* (1952):** *The Old Man and the Sea* is a novel published in 1952. It was the last major work of fiction to be produced by Hemingway and published in his lifetime. It is one of his most famous works, which centres upon Santiago, an aging fisherman who struggles with a giant marlin far out in the Gulf Stream. *The Old Man and the Sea* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 and was cited by the Nobel Committee as contributing to the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Hemingway in 1954.
- ***Islands in the Stream* (1970, posthumous):** *Islands in the Stream* (1970) is the first of the posthumously published works of Ernest Hemingway. The book was originally intended to revive Hemingway's reputation after the negative reviews of *Across the River and Into the Trees*. He began writing it in 1950 and advanced greatly through 1951. The work, rough but seemingly finished, was found by Mary Hemingway from among 332 different works Hemingway left behind after his death. The novel was meant to encompass three stories to illustrate different stages in the life of its main character, Thomas Hudson. The three different parts of the novel were originally to be entitled *The Sea When Young*, *The Sea When Absent* and *The Sea in Being*. These titles were changed, however, into what are now its three acts: *Bmiini*, *Cuba* and *At Sea*.
- ***The Garden of Eden* (1986, posthumous):** *The Garden of Eden* is the second posthumously released novel, published in 1986. Begun in 1946, Hemingway worked on the manuscript for the next fifteen years, during which time he also wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Dangerous Summer*, *A Moveable Feast* and *Islands in the Stream*. The novel is fundamentally the story of five months in the lives of David Bourne, an American writer, and his wife Catherine. It is set mainly in the French Riviera, specifically in the Côte d'Azur, and in Spain. The story begins with their honeymoon in the Camargue. The Bournes soon meet a young woman named Marita, with whom they both fall in love, but only one can ultimately have her. David starts an affair with Marita, while his relationship with his wife deteriorates. The story continues until the apparent separation of David and Catherine.
- ***True at First Light* (1999, posthumous):** *True at First Light* is a book about Hemingway's 1953–54 East African safari with his fourth wife Mary, released posthumously in his centennial year in 1999. The book received mostly negative or lukewarm reviews from the popular press and sparked a literary controversy regarding how, and whether, an author's work should be reworked and published after his death. Unlike critics in the popular press, Hemingway scholars generally consider *True at First Light* to be complex and a worthy addition to his canon of later fiction.

  In the book, Hemingway explores conflict within a marriage, the conflict between the European and native cultures in Africa, and the fear a writer feels when his work becomes impossible. The book includes descriptions of his earlier friendships with other writers and digressive ruminations on the nature of writing.

  Source: Wikipedia

Check Your Progress

8. Who was Ernest Hemingway?
9. Where was he born?

5.6 *A Farewell to Arms:* Characters, Themes, Motifs and Symbols

In this section, we will analyse the characters, themes, motifs and symbols of the novel *A Farewell to Arms*.

5.6.1 Analysis of Primary Characters in the Novel

The primary characters in the novel are as follows:The primary characters in the novel are as follows:

- **Lieutenant Frederic Henry:** The novel's narrator and protagonist, Henry is a young American ambulance driver in the Italian army during the First World War. Henry's quiet stoicism is evident in the manner he conducts his military duties. Though he has no faith on abstract terms like 'glory' and 'heroism', he displays courage in the battle. These terms have no value to him and he is portrayed as a realist rather than an idealist. His life is mundane until he meets the love of his life, Catherine Barkley.
- **Catherine Barkley:** Catherine Berkley is the beautiful nurse and the female protagonist of the novel. The opening of the novel portrays her sorrow for her dead fiancé. In order to forget the tragic event, she gets into a playful and reckless game of love with Henry. Her feelings for him, however, soon change and she becomes his lifelong companion.
- **Rinaldi:** Henry's closest friend and a surgeon in the Italian army, Rinaldi is wry, naughty and oversexed. His primary interest lies in seducing beautiful women, though he was an efficient and skilled doctor.

- **The priest:** Often at the wrong end of the soldier's jokes, the kind young priest is employed by the Italian army to provide spiritual guidance to young officers. He responds to the soldier's jokes in his usual good-natured manner. The author challenges abstract but popular notions of honour, glory and loyalty through Henry's conversations with the priest.
- **Helen Ferguson:** She is Catherine's beloved friend and a nurse's aide in the American hospital. Her outburst at Catherine and Henry's 'immoral' affair portrays her as an unhappy and lonely woman.
- **Miss Gage:** An American nurse who helps Henry to recover at Milan. She soon becomes Henry's friend as she is easy-going and unorthodox. They are shown to share a drink and a few gossips.
- **Miss Van Campen:** The superintendent at the American hospital, Miss Van Campen is cold, strict and unpleasant. She dislikes Henry and maintains a distance from him.
- **Dr Valentini:** A stoic and aggressive doctor who operates upon Henry immediately, thereby rubbishing the claims of other surgeons that Henry would have to wait for his operation for six months. The novel celebrates the self-confidence and assurance that the character portrays.
- **Count Greffi:** The ninety-four year old count represents a mature version of the protagonist, Henry. Though he dismisses the label 'wise', he lives his life according to his own terms. In the novel, Henry values him as a father-figure.
- **Ettore Moretti:** Moretti is a soldier in the Italian army just like Henry. He is an obnoxious braggart who instigates people to fight. He pursues the glory and honour that war veterans believe in and Henry despises.
- **Gino:** Henry meets this young Italian in a devastated village. His patriotism is sharply contrasted with Henry's antagonism towards war.
- **Ralph Simmons:** Simmons is an opera student and the first person Henry meets after fleeing the battle. He provides Henry with civilian clothes so that the latter could venture to Switzerland without drawing any suspicion.
- **Emilio:** A bartender in Stresa, Emilio helps Henry and Catherine unite after the war.
- **Bonello:** Henry's subordinate ambulance driver, who shows his ruthlessness by unloading a pistol on an uncooperative engineer who was already been shot by Henry.

We will now analyse in detail the primary characters in the novel in the subsequent sections.

Frederic Henry

Henry portrays himself as a man of duty whenever he explains his experience in war. He is someone who just keeps to his duties as a soldier and does not bathe in the vainglory that war-mongering fetches. He despises the aftermath of war, and even after being mortally wounded, does not pursue a medal of distinction. Through his conversations with the priest, Ettore Moretti, and Gino, he proclaims his apathy for nonfigurative notions of war, honour, glory, patriotism, etc. These to him are no more significant than the names of cities he has fought in and the streets he has seen decimated. While we notice the nonchalance and unexcited behaviour of Henry in the perspective of war, he surprises us with his passion for Catherine. It seems as if she is the remedy to him for war; an antidote, maybe to the hatred he has for war. Initially, he only looks forward to a night's simple pleasures with her, just like his friend, Rinaldi. However, he returns to her, not for the physical attraction, but for a passion he has never known before. We get to see a sudden vulnerability, earlier hidden by his stoicism and masculinity, in his love for Catherine; he swears his love for her even when she asks him to stop playing around. The words he uses to describe her hair and her presence in bed is enough to vouch for his genuine intentions for her. The power of the pathos of an elegy that is evident in his narration after Catherine's death suffuses the whole novel; probably, this was the author's intention of using Henry as a narrator of the novel.

Catherine Barkley

Hemingway's portrayal of female characters has always come under scanner; more so after the genre of feminism rose to prominence. Women readers have openly criticized him as a novelist who likes to keep his women in traditional garbs. Literary critic Leslie A. Fiedler has mentioned that his portrayal of women may be divided into two vivid categories. First, being a dominant shrew, such as the character of Lady Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, and secondly, the overtly submissive, such as Catherine in the novel in discussion. Fiedler also maintains that Hemingway is clearly uncomfortable portraying his women characters. He is smarter while handling the men. He stays in comfortable domain with his women and retreats into uncomplicated stereotypes. Catherine surrenders to blissful domesticity, particularly at the novel's end, which is evident with lines like, 'I'm having a child and that makes me contented not to do anything'. This hardly goes down well with feminists and progressive women readers who get rankled at reading such a stereotypical suggestion to a bygone era where women were happy in the traditional roles of a homemaker.

Though Catherine's desire to lead the proverbial happy life often makes her look archetypal, she cannot be denied her moments of grandeur as well. She alludes herself as slightly 'crazy' in her initial days with Henry, though she is aware that they have no serious relationship. She is aware that her feelings for him are primarily physical and that she is using him to keep the memories of his dead fiancé at bay. She capably draws a line and does not wield when Henry claims that he loves her. She tells him that she had had enough for the night and that this love of his is nothing but a lie. She doubts his love and tells him that she imagines that dreadful things are awaiting them and that she would never be able to love her baby as she had never loved anyone truly. This scepticism that she professes about love and their future together may be reflections of a mind of the war-torn social conditions. Though her inner conflicts and their intensities are always open to debate, her loyalty to Henry is absolute. She is a loving, dedicated woman whose desire and ability for a redemptive, otherworldly love makes her the inevitable victim of tragedy.

Rinaldi

An unbelievable womanizer, Rinaldi serves an important function in the novel. Hemingway often celebrates this kind of masculinity, where a man lives life on his own terms, living boldly and truly. Rinaldi professes his love for Catherine when the novel opens, but soon claims that he is relieved that he is not tied down with the emotional baggage that a women's love brings along. He regularly visits brothels, and at one point of time, Henry maintains that he will succumb to syphilis. Though there is no sermonizing in this statement, Hemingway presents this with an air of detached morality. Rinaldi dominates the other minor male characters.

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5.6.2 Themes, Motifs and Symbols in the Novel

Themes

Themes are the primary and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

(i) Grim reality of war

The title of the novel makes it obvious that the novel primarily deals with war and its aftermath. This is evident by the way Henry's life is affected by war and the manner in which he abhors war. Gino and Moretti support the author to bring out the vagaries of war. Though Gino is naïve and Moretti a braggart, they are the only ones who have their own glorious notions of war; most of the other characters remain inconclusive about the war. Through evocative scenes such as the Italian army's retreat, Hemingway paints masterful pictures of the mindless brutality and violent chaos caused by war. The soldiers' nerves, minds and capacity of rational judgment crumble along with the columns of men. The engineer, who is shot by Henry due to the uncooperative behaviour of the former, mostly upsets readers as, through this violent act, he deviates from his usual calm and detached self; and second, the setting of the scene robs it of its moral import as the conniving fellow soldiers legitimize the murder. The legitimizing of the act is seen to justify the spiralling disorder and hatred that the war has brought in. Through these brutal incidents, Hemingway suggests that the war is nothing but an extension of the dark, murderous addendum to the world that refuses to acknowledge and protect humanity and love.

(ii) Relationship of love and pain

In this novel, the author offers a deep, sombre meditation on the relationship between love and war. The game of seduction that Catherine plays with Henry soon turns into a serious affair of the heart for both. She initiated this game because she was mourning for her dead fiancé and desperately wished to forget him. Henry and Catherine start finding solace in each other from the things that plague them in this world. Henry's passion for Catherine is so strong that he flees the war and looks for her. Once they are reunited, they start planning an idyllic life that could salvage them from the horrors of war. They become each other's social, psychological and emotional healing amidst the Swiss mountainside. The tragedy of the novel lies in the fact that their genuine love can only be temporary in this cruel world.

Motifs

Motifs are persistent structures, contrasts or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

(i) Masculinity

Hemingway's novels almost always celebrate a swaggering, virile, domineering and supremely confident masculine power. In *A Farewell to Arms*, some of the minor characters portray a fine example of manhood. While Dr Valentini exudes virility as an expert surgeon that poses as competition to Rinaldi's womanizing, Rinaldi proves to be a faithful friend. Bonello, who shoots the fleeing engineering sergeants, has a touch of cruelty that sort of pervades the entire novel. Hemingway has almost always used humour, if not contempt to portray their opposite characters. The success of these men depends on the failure of the other. Rinaldi attacks the guileless priest, thereby establishing his manhood; the overly cautious, almost mousy three surgeons challenge Dr Valentini's reputation by refuting Henry's claims to an early operation.

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(ii) Games and divertissement

The novel abounds in games, intrigues and divertissement which we notice right from the opening of the novel. Catherine and Henry start flirting with each other in order to forget their personal troubles. Flirting helps Henry to 'drop the war' and also diverts Catherine's thoughts from her fiancé. Henry blocks out the worrying thoughts of his return to the front by attending horse races with Catherine. Ironically, his involvement with Catherine becomes the reason for his suffering. Though the war turns out to be a primary divertissement for him, he tries to forget the pain of being separated from his lover while playing pool with Count Greffi. When Catherine tells him not to think about her when he was in the front, he tells her, 'That's how I worked it at the front. But there was somewhat to do then.' Hemingway portrays the temporariness of happiness by using the war and pain as divertissements in the novel. Though happiness is temporary, it is imperative human nature to pursue it. The count claims that though love is a pleasurable pastime, he is well-aware of its vagaries to fall in love with a lady. He hedges against the transitory character of love by finding pleasure and amusement in games, birthday parties, and the taking of 'a little stimulant'. That one can depend on their simple pleasures lends games and divertissement a definite dignity; while they may not match up to the nobility of pursuits such as love, they prove quietly constant.

(iii) Loyalty versus abandonment

The ideas of loyalty and abandonment apply equally well to love and war. Hemingway suggests that one should be loyal to one's love than to war and political causes. While Henry is portrayed as a serious soldier, he does not attach false importance to unreal notions of glory and honour. Though he shoots an uncooperative sergeant who fails to comply with his orders, his reaction needs to be treated as a violent outcome of the all-pervasive nature of war, rather than a personal failure. He eventually follows in the fleeing engineer's footsteps and deserts his regimen. At times, he feels guilty that he has abandoned his regimen when it needed him, his supreme loyalty lay in being true to Catherine. Hemingway wished to impart upon his readers his take on loyalty and abandonment—for him, these are not the opposite ends of an ethical spectrum, but the practical priorities of an individual life.

(iv) Illusions and fantasies

The novel begins with a sense of illusion and fantasy. When the protagonists meet for the first time, they create the illusion of falling in love with each other. While Catherine seeks solace in Henry from the death of her fiancé, Henry fantasizes about her when he is away, thereby urging himself to fall in love with Catherine. Their relationship, at the initial stage, was absolutely artificial and based on illusions and fantasies. Henry is reminded by Catherine that the love they have is nothing but flirting. He is sent away many times by her once she has her fill for the night. When he gets injured at war, the care and tenderness that he experiences from her transforms his feelings for her to love. His love begins to sustain him through his journey through recuperation. It blossoms into an almost surreal passion.

The couple is genuinely passionate about each other; however, they never escape the temptation of dreaming of a better world. The boundary between actuality and illusion blurs often. After Henry and Catherine have spent months in the desolate Switzerland, Hemingway depicts their relationship as a mixture of reality and illusion. Boredom had started to set in, and the couple effects small daily changes to reinvigorate their lives and their passion: Catherine gets a new haircut, Henry sports a beard. Still the

relative dullness of real, mundane life makes them turn to fantasies of a more perfect existence. They dream of life on a Swiss mountain, where they will make their own clothes and require nothing but each other, suggesting that fantasizing is a part of coping with the banal, sometimes damaging effects of reality.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, typescript, figures or colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

(i) Rain

Throughout the novel, the symbol of rain has been used as a potent symbol of disintegration of the happiness of life. When Catherine and Henry lie on the bed, listening to the storm growing larger every minute, Catherine admits her fear of the rain. She says that the rain has a potential of ruining everything in life. Her fears prove prophetic as they are eventually doomed. Catherine dies on a rainy day and Henry walks in the rain as he banishes the thoughts of missing her from her heart. The rain may also be understood as a symbol of the bleak future that he faces without his lover to support him anymore. Catherine's anxiety over rain finds its destiny in the tragic separation of the lovers forever, confirming the fact that like everything else, great love too, cannot last forever.

(ii) Catherine's hair

Catherine's hair serves as an important symbol in the novel, though not recurrent. In the initial days of their relationship, when the lovers were in bed, Catherine had untied her hair and let it cascade around Henry's face. Henry remembers the inside of a tent or the seclusion of the waterfall. The lovely description that Henry provides of Catherine's hair stands as a symbol of their isolation from the world. The hair acts as a protective covering that secures Henry from the rest of the world. It also stands for temporariness and fragility of life. When they are cut off from the rest of the world and live peacefully in Switzerland, they learn the harsh lesson that love is as ephemeral as life.

Check Your Progress

10. What are the themes, motifs and symbols used in the novel?
11. How is masculinity used as a motif in the novel?

5.7 DETAILED SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

In this section, we will go through a detailed summary and analysis of the novel under discussion.

Chapters I–V

Chapter I

The novel opens with a description of the small Italian village where Lieutenant Henry, the narrator, lives. It is the summer during the First World War; troops often march down the road and officers pass in 'small gray motor cars'. Henry speculates that one of the fast-moving cars may carry the king, who travels out of the palace almost every day to assess the battle. As winter approaches, an outbreak of cholera sweeps out about seven thousand soldiers.

Chapter II

The second chapter opens with Henry's unit moving to the city of Gorizia, away from the actual scenes of the fight. The life in Gorizia is relaxed and pleasant. The buildings are still undamaged and there are cafés and two brothels in the city; one for the officers and the other for enlisted soldiers. Henry sits in the mess hall one day, with a group of fellow officers who declare that the war is over as there is snowfall. They are disrespectful of religion and taunt the priest with their crude remarks about sex. A captain jokingly tells him not to horse around in the presence of ladies. This makes the priest blush. The officers then discuss Henry's travel routes and the priest urges him to visit the Abruzzi region, where his family stays. However, others tell him to visit Palermo, Capri, Rome, Naples or Sicily. The conversation then moves towards opera singers and the group proceeds toward the brothels to spend their night.

Chapter III

The chapter opens with Henry describing his trip to his roommate and fellow lieutenant Rinaldi. He tells Rinaldi that he has travelled all over Italy, and Renaldi comments that travel is no longer necessary to seek beautiful women. Here we get the first glimpse of the larger-than life, womanizing character of Rinaldi. Rinaldi further informs Henry that he has fallen in love with a beautiful young nurse, Catherine Berkley. Henry lends Rinaldi some money so that he could impress the woman as having come from a moneyed background. During dinner, Henry tries to calm the priest who feels hurt that Henry did not visit Abruzzi. A drunken Henry tries to explain the situation as best as he can; the chapter ends with the soldiers picking on the priest again.

Chapter IV

Awakened by a battery of guns, Henry goes to the garage and chats briefly with the mechanics working on the ambulances. When he returns to his room, Rinaldi asks him to come along so that he could be introduced to the nurse. At the British hospital, Rinaldi talks to Helen Ferguson, another nurse, while Henry gets acquainted with the beautiful Catherine Berkley. He is struck by his beauty and especially her beautiful, long blond hair. She carries with her a stick that resembles a 'toy riding-crop', which when enquired, is revealed to be her deceased fiancé's who was killed in the Battle of Somme. She, in turn, asks him whether he has ever fallen in love; he replies that he has not. On their way back home, Rinaldi maintains that Catherine likes Henry to him.

Chapter V

The chapter opens with Henry calling on Catherine the next day. At the British hospital, he is told by the head nurse that Catherine's duty would not be over before the evening, so she would be unable to meet him in the morning. She also expresses surprise at the fact that an American has joined the Italian army. While driving back home along the trenches, Henry surveys if the road can be used for an offensive at a later date. After dinner, he returns to talk to Catherine, whom he finds with Helen. Helen leaves them alone and the duo talk about Catherine's job. They decide to 'drop the war' as a subject of conversation. When he puts his hand around her, she initially resists but later agrees.

However, when he attempts to kiss her, she slaps him. Henry notes, with laughter, that their little drama has taken them away from the talk of war. Catherine lets Henry kiss her and starts crying, saying that 'We're going to have a strange life'. Rinaldi comments on his romantic glow when Henry returns home.

Analysis: Chapters I–V

Hemingway's bold, declarative, pared-down prose style has changed the tenor of twentieth century American fiction than any other author. His is a clear departure from the Victorian baroque style that was considered the signature of the high literature; the booklovers of the 1920s and 1930s considered his writings to be purely experimental. Though the first chapter is short, it has probably one of the best descriptive sceneries of American literature. Hemingway sketches the description with a detached, journalistic prose style which is emotionally poignant too: 'The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops rally along the road and the dust rising…' With relatively few but remarkably precise details, Hemingway captures life on the battlefront of a little Italian town during the First World War.

CHAPTERS VI–IX

Chapter VI

Henry decides to visit Catherine again after spending two days at the posts. On asking him whether he loves her or not, Henry says yes to her. On hearing this, Catherine requests Henry to address her by her name and not by her surname. After this, both of them take a stroll in the garden and kiss each other. Although he said yes to her, Henry is aware that he does not love her and thinks her to be 'probably a little crazy'. He also realizes that he is a complicated game of love. Catherine takes him by a surprise when she says, 'This is a rotten game we play, isn't it?' Following this, he persuades her to kiss him but she breaks away suddenly from the kiss and sends him away. Henry's loving confusion is sensed by Rinaldi. He feels relieved not to get involved with a British nurse.

Chapter VII

The following afternoon, while driving back from his post, Henry picks up a soldier suffering from hernia. The soldier discloses that he does not want to return to the front and so he threw away his truss— a support for a hernia. He dreads to face his commanding officer. On hearing this, Henry asks the man to bump his head on the wall to get admitted in the hospital and therefore avoid facing his commander. The soldier does as Henry says and thus earns a visit to the hospital. Henry, however, thinks about the impending attack which is scheduled to start in two days. He aspires to be with Catherine and enjoy a first-class wine in Milan. During dinner, the men drink and make fun of the priest. As Henry is heavily drunk, Rinaldi takes him to the hospital and feeds him coffee beans to sober him up. At the nurses' cottage, Henry is informed by the nurse Helen Fergusan that Catherine is not well and does not want to see him. On hearing this, Henry feels very 'lonely and hollow'.

Chapter VIII

On the following day, Henry hears of an attack which was scheduled for that night. Henry asks his car driver to stop on seeing cars passing the British hospital on their way to the front. He rushes into the hospital and requests to see Catherine. He tells her that is off for 'a show' and she should not worry. Catherine gives him a medal of St. Anthony

with the wish to protect him on the front. Henry comes back to the car and the group moves towards Pavla, where the war is scheduled to take place.

Chapter IX

While on his way to Pavla, Henry observes that trenches are filled with artillery and Austrian observation balloons hang ominously above them. The soldiers are installed in a dugout, where the conversation veers towards the ending of the war. As the soldiers are hungry, Henry and a fellow ambulance driver gets some cold macaroni and a slab of cheese from the nearest wound-dressing station. While they are eating, suddenly heavy shelling begins. There is 'a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open'. Henry finds his two fellow soldiers, Passini and Gordini dead by a trench mortar and finds himself unable to breathe. He is carried to the wound-dressing station, where a British doctor tends to his broken leg. He is later sent to the hospital.

Analysis: Chapters VI–IX

These chapters serve the purpose of bringing out the supreme indifference that Henry has for the war. The Italian army is not taken seriously by Catherine and the other British nurses. Being a part of this army, Henry is detached and nonchalant about the ravages of war. He says that the war does 'not have anything to do with me'. The manner in which he helps the soldier with the hernia to deceive the army and enter the hospital on the pretext of having been hurt, is a vivid example of his unpatriotic feelings and distaste for war. Through the display of such unacceptable behaviour, Henry proves once and again that he is not the perfect soldier. Though he is their senior, the other ambulance drivers openly discuss their negative opinions on the war and against Italy, in Henry's presence. He is not angered at the disregard these men show the country and defends the Italian army with a cool, philosophical manner. Henry's objective is ridiculous, pathetic and decidedly not heroic. This sight follows on the heels of a conversation in which the men maintain that 'war is not won by victory' amplifies the doubt cast upon romantic ideals such as glory and honour.

Henry's dealing with the other ambulance drivers in the battlefront portrays him as a stoic soldier. The manner in which he discusses victory and defeat is almost academic rather than passionate. He appears unresponsive to the sense of loss, fear and anger that fuels the Italians' arguments—indifferent even to whether he lives or dies. Opposed to this, his growing love for Catherine is beautifully juxtaposed by Hemingway. The thought of being with Catherine overwhelms him even when he prepares to face the offensive and go to the front. In a very beautiful, sensuous passage, Henry pictures himself and Catherine stealing away to a hotel, where she pretends that he is her dead lover: 'we would drink the capri and keep the door locked and with it hot and only a sheet and the entire night and we would both love each other all night in the hot night in Milan'. Even though his attachment to Catherine is, at this point, casual, Henry is beginning to develop feelings that expand beyond the game he plays with her. The sorrow that he feels when Helen Ferguson announces that Catherine is sick and cannot see him surprises him and hints at the depth of feeling, obligation and attachment of which this usually stoic soldier is capable.

NOTES

CHAPTERS X–XIII

Chapter X

The chapter opens with Henry lying in pain in the field hospital. When Rinaldi visits him at the hospital, he informs him that he (Henry) will be decorated for displaying tremendous courage in the face of adversity. He leaves a bottle of Cognac with Henry and promises to send Catherine to see him soon.

Chapter XI

The priest comes to visit Henry at dusk. He tells him that he misses him at the mess hall and gets a mosquito netting, a bottle of vermouth and English newspapers as gifts for which Henry is grateful. The men drink and talk about the war. Henry admits to hating it, and the priest theorizes that there are two types of men in the world: those who would make war and those who would not. Henry laments that 'the initial ones make [the second ones] do it . . . and I help them.' They discuss if ending the war is a genuine probability and whether this would bring any good out of it. The priest tells Henry that he knows that the latter is capable of true love; people who visit brothels are completely unaware of this kind of love, where one needs to give oneself completely to one human being. The priest maintains that he is sure Henry will find his love someday.

Chapter XII

Henry needs to be shifted to Milan for better treatment of his injured leg; the doctors are apprehensive of sending him there. However, they have to move him out of the hospital as they would require all the beds once the offensive begins afresh. Rinaldi and a major from Henry's company visit him the night before he moves to Milan. They tell him that America has just affirmed war on Germany, and the Italians are very excited and hopeful. Rinaldi asks if President Wilson will declare war on Austria, and Henry responds that Wilson will within days. The men get drunk, conversing on the war and life in Milan. Rinaldi informs Henry that Catherine will be going to serve at the army hospital in Milan. Henry sets off for Milan the next morning. He describes the train ride, throughout which he gets so drunk that he vomits on the floor.

Chapter XIII

Henry reaches the American hospital in Milan. He is in great discomfort as he is shifted to his room by the ambulance drivers. He rests for the day. The next day he meets a young nurse, Miss Gage and is visited by the supervisor of the hospital, Miss Van Campen. Henry and the supervisor take an instant dislike for each other. When Henry asks for wine along with his meals, he is informed that he would only be allowed alcohol after the doctor prescribes it. In the evening, Henry sends a porter for a few bottles of wine and the evening newspaper. At night, he is sent a glass of eggnog spiked with sherry by Miss Van Campen, and there is temporary truce between the two.

Analysis: Chapters X–XIII

Henry's disillusionment with the war is vividly portrayed through his stoicism against Rinaldi's excitement for his recommendation for decorations. He is unmoved even after being mortally wounded. Though no one wants to fight in wars, soldiers are expected to show unconditional patriotism towards the countries in the battlefield. Henry's conversation with Rinaldi furthers the expression of men's sympathy and care towards each other.

Loyalty, strength, resilience in the face of difficulty and a healthy sexual appetite—these are the age-old metaphor of masculinity that the novel celebrates.

In the light of Henry's indifference to decorations, it is interesting to note the arguable comparison between Hemingway's Henry and another Henry—Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming, the overzealous, glory-seeking character of *The Red Badge of Courage.* Towards the end of the masterpiece, which Hemingway greatly admired and included in his 1942 collection *Men at War: The Best War Stories of All Time,* Fleming's self-absorption change into a mature dignity. One can make a strong case that the stoic Frederic Henry is an outgrowth of this newly self-possessed and reputable Henry Fleming.

The priest acts as a perfect foil to the oversexed Rinaldi. He believes that deep love awaits Henry; the type of love that would prompt people to sacrifice one's self for the lover. This is absolutely distinctive from the visits to the brothels that Rinaldi advocates. Though Henry is sceptical of this true love, the serious turns that his love towards Catherine takes, makes the reader wait with bated breath for Henry to realize the intensity of his love. The characters in this novel are eternally seeking solace from the war-ravaged world. This solace has been shown to come from alcohol. Throughout the novel, drinking of wines and alcohol has been shown to be consumed. Henry too depends on alcohol. He arranges for bottles for himself when Miss Van Campen declines to keep his request of providing wine with food, as he feels alcohol will help him recover faster. The escape that alcohol gives is absolutely understandable, given the grim surroundings of the war-torn country. The novel now questions, through Henry and other characters who similarly dislike war, whether it is worth wasting one's life on warfare. Hemingway questions the authenticity of engaging in mindless warfare in romantic and philosophical manner. By portraying a hero who risks his life to top his pasta with cheese, he brings out the ridiculous nature of war. Likewise, once Henry arrives at the hospital in Milan, the reader witnesses an equally pathetic and ludicrous world in which clumsy ambulance drivers cannot manage the weight of a wounded soldier and inept nurses cry somewhat than care for their patients.

CHAPTERS XIV–XVII

Chapters XIV and XV

Miss Gage finds the vermouth bottle in Henry's room. While Henry panics that she might report this to the superintendent, she surprises him by asking the reason for him not to have called her to join him. She also informs him that Catherine has arrived at the hospital. Catherine comes to visit him and Henry realizes that he is actually in love with this woman. He pulls her onto bed with him and they make love for the first time. In the next chapter, doctors consult on his case and agree that they would have to wait for six months before they can operate on him. However, Dr Valentini, who is cheerful, competent and energetic and poses a perfect foil to the other three mousy doctors, arrives on the scene. Henry and the doctor have a drink together and the latter agrees to operate upon him the next day.

Chapter XVI and XVII

Henry and Catherine spend the night in his room. Henry is afraid that they might attract attention; Catherine relaxes him. In the morning, Catherine prepares him for the operation. Henry urges her to come to bed and Catherine declines. She tells him that the anesthesia will make him chatty, and he better not disclose their relation to anyone in his post-operative grogginess. She asks him how many women he has made love to till then. He

replies that he had slept with none other than her. Though she knows he is lying, Catherine is pleased. Henry feels weak and sick after his operation. Henry develops affection for Helen Ferguson, who passes his notes to Catherine when she is on duty. She maintains that her friend is working rather hard and that she should get a few nights off from her duty. Henry speaks to Miss Gage, who arranges for her rest. The lovers spend a passionate night after a few days of rest.

Analysis: Chapters XIV–XVII

Just as the novel opens with a strong sympathy towards a strong, virile type of men, evident through the soldiers' quips for the pious priest, in Book Two, this trend is further strengthened. Hemingway describes the doctor who begins to diagnose Henry's injuries as 'a thin quiet little man who seemed disturbed by the war'. There is a self-assurance and stoicism in Henry that sets him apart from the mousy doctor who lacks the confidence to pronounce Henry's prognosis without first consulting his colleagues. Dr Valentini sharply contrasts this doctor with his good-natured gregariousness. He works hard, drinks hard and wears his sexual appetite on his sleeves. There seems to be a fraternal bond that Hemingway supports—of men fond of wine, women and good times—whether it is on the battlefield, in the bedroom or on the operating table.

Henry conforms to this kind of masculine ideal by rushing boldly into a passionate affair with Catherine. When she appears in his room, he is struck by her beauty and declares the depth of his love for her in: 'Everything turned over inside of me.' Henry's exchange with Catherine in Chapter XVI is incredibly powerful and suggestive. Through simple conversations, inquiring whom the other has loved and made love to, the line between game-playing and true passion begins to blur. Both Henry and Catherine feel more than they say or can say. Grief, fear and a profound desire to be protected from an antagonistic world are among the forces that bring them together. However, these confessions are beyond them; somewhat, they speak in basic unromantic terms:

'You've such a lovely temperature.'

'You've got a lovely everything.'

'Oh no! You have the lovely temperature. I'm awfully proud of your temperature.'

Hemingway rescues these apparently foolish lines from absurd sentimentality by establishing a multifarious psychological motivation for them. For Henry and Catherine, such foolishly romantic lines offer a respite from their war-torn world. Hemingway adopts this suggestive style of writing to maintain the decency that was required in a twentieth century novel. He hoped the readers would be able to read between the lines and get a hint that the lovers were discussing their first episode of physical relation here. Even though such scenes spared puritanical readers of details, the novel was plagued by charges of indecency. A public outcry in Boston, for example, led to the excision of such professed profanities as 'balls' from the novel.

CHAPTERS XVIII–XXI

Chapter XVIII and XIX

During summer, he learns to walk on crutches and the lovers enjoy their time together in Milan. Though the couple discuss marriage but Catherine retorts, 'I couldn't be anymore married' hinting that their stay together exemplifies the strong bond they have. Though

Catherine knows that she could get respite from the war once she marries, she refuses to get married to Henry. She pledges to be faithful to him saying that even if she is sure 'all sorts of dreadful things will happen to us', unfaithfulness is not one of them. The next chapter introduces the character of Moretti, an Italian from San Francisco, serving the Italian army. He is the epitome of patriotism and false war pride. Henry calls him a 'legitimate hero' but maintains that he is quite dull. When he arrives at the hospital, he chats with Catherine, who cannot stand Moretti; she prefers the quieter, English gentleman-type heroes. As the couple talks on into the night, it begins to rain. Catherine fears the rain, which she asserts is 'very hard on loving', and begins to cry until Henry comforts her.

Chapter XX and XXI

Henry and Catherine visit the races and bet on a horse. They win, though not satisfactorily. They then decide to observe the remaining races by themselves and away from the crowd. They both claim to feel better, or less lonely, when they are alone together. The next chapter opens with news that the Allied forces are taking a beating and will be defeated in the near future. Henry is granted another three weeks' of leave and would have to report to his post after that. Catherine surprises him by telling him that she is three months' pregnant. She promises not to bother him and wishes to travel with him. She also talks about the obstacles they would face. Henry tells her that cowards die many times before their death, while brave men die only once.

Analysis: Chapters 18–21

This part of the novel develops situations and the characters of the lovers fully. While in Book One, Catherine appeared to be an emotionally damaged woman on the lookout for companionship and protection, her character is fully shaped in Book Two, where her relation with Henry ventures beyond the ordinary and the mundane physical attraction. As Henry's mobility improves, they take a short trip outside the hospital, thereby getting to know each other better. The trip to the racetrack, for example, shows her fundamental independence: she would rather lose money on a horse that she herself chooses than win rooted on a tip. When she announces her pregnancy to Henry, she does so with trepidation as she does not want him to feel trapped. Though portrayed as an over-the-top romantic in the earlier chapters, here we get to see her steely resolve and love for freedom in the war-torn world. She assures Henry of her faithfulness though she does not want to be married to him. Though not as developed as Henry's character (which is a typical flaw in Hemingway's novel), her courage and determination show through these chapters.

Ettore Moretti brings Henry's character into greater focus by acting as a foil. The Italian-American soldier is boastful, ambitious and arrogant; he is quick to insult others and equally quick to sing his own praises. Henry, on the other hand, is reserved, detached and disciplined. Uninterested in the glory for which the army awards medals, Henry maintains a calm level-headedness that helps to convince the reader that his feelings for Catherine are indeed authentic.

Henry's words concerning cowards echo Julius Caesar's defiant utterance in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar:* 'Cowards die many times before their deaths;/ The valiant never taste of death but once' (II.ii.32–33). Henry, like Caesar, remains philosophical and unafraid in the face of potential peril. His inability to contextualize the reference suggests short-sightedness about the progress of his relationship with Catherine.

CHAPTERS XXII–XXVI

Chapters XXII, XXIII and XXIV

The rain brings bad news for Henry: he is diagnosed with jaundice. Miss Van Campen accuses him of inviting the disease through his drinking binges. She clears away his stash of liquor bottles from the room. The next chapter opens with Henry's preparation of going to the front. He passes by a café, notices Catherine inside and beckons her to join him. When Henry observes, 'They're like us,' Catherine unhappily responds, 'Nobody is like us.' They go to a hotel to spend some time together. Henry asks her how she would cope with the baby; she reassures him that she will set up a cosy home for him to come and rest after the war is over. He arranges for a wagon to travel to the railway station. He urges Catherine to take care of herself and the baby. He argues with a Captain who protests against his bringing a machine-gunner to reserve a seat. Ultimately, he gives up his seat and sleeps on the floor.

Chapter XXV and XXVI

The chapter opens with Henry's arrival in the town of Gorizia. He looks for Rinaldi and thinks about Catherine while waiting for his friend. They discuss Henry's wound and his recuperation. Rinaldi maintains that he should not have been sent to the war. He also enquires if he has married to Catherine. They drink a toast to Catherine and go down to dinner. Rinaldi half-heartedly picks on the priest, trying to animate the almost deserted dining hall for Henry's sake. The mood in the dining hall is sober. Henry and the priest speculate if the war is going to end soon. The priest mentions that most of the soldiers have become 'gentle' these days; Henry retorts that probably the defeat has made the soldiers gentler.

Analysis: Chapters XXII–XXVI

Catherine's farewell to Henry has cast a dark shadow on the romantic idealism she professed earlier. Catherine's comment 'nobody is like us' betrays the pathos that was the base of their relation. By removing their relationship from the supercilious realm of idealized love, Hemingway makes Catherine and Henry's love for each other more real, more complicated and more convincing.

The lines of poetry that Henry speech marks are from Andrew Marvell's poem *To His Coy Mistress* (1681). The poem depicts a man addressing his lover and trying to convince her of his love. He tells her that the social norms of chastity and virginity are but fake in the face of imminent death. The poem intensifies the farewell scene between the couple. Catherine feels like a prostitute, sleeping with her lover, without the sanctions of marriage; buying costly lingerie for the purpose. She knows she is deeply in love with this man with whom she is willing to share her life, but remains satisfied as a lover. She quickly overcomes this feeling and actually wants to do 'something really sinful' with Henry. A sin, she imagines, would bring them nearer together by throwing them into sharper contrast with the outside world. As she says at the racetrack, she feels she is at her best and least lonely when she and Henry are alienated from everyone around them. The final lines of Marvell's poem evoke this feature of Catherine and Henry's relationship:

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.

Catherine wishes to unite with Henry against life's harsh realities and seeks comfort in a man she has long loved.

CHAPTERS XXVII–XXIX

Chapter XXVII

This chapter begins with the news that Italian army is taking a beating. Gino tells Henry that Austrians have modern guns and would destroy the Italian army once they decide to attack. That night, it rains as the Italians are attacked by the Germans and the Austrians. The Italian army slowly starts falling back and moves back to the town of Gorizia. Henry notices that the prostitutes from the known brothels are being transferred in trucks. Bonello, one of the drivers working under Henry offers to go with the women. Henry comes to know that Rinaldi too has left for the hospital and everyone else is evacuated too.

Chapter XXVIII and XXIX

The men drive gradually through the town, forming an endless column of retreating soldiers and vehicles. Henry takes a turn sleeping; shortly after he wakes, the column stalls. Henry exits his vehicle to test out on his men. He discovers two engineering officers in Bonello's car and two women with Aymo. The girls seem suspicious of Aymo's intentions, but he eventually, if crudely, induces them that he means them no harm. Henry returns to Piani's car and falls asleep. His dreams are of Catherine, and he speaks aloud to her. That night, columns of peasants join the retreating army. In the initial morning, Henry and his men decide to gradually from the column and täke a small road going north. They stop briefly at an abandoned farmhouse and eat a large breakfast before going on their journey. Aymo's car gets wedged in soft mud and Henry asks others to help. He eventually shoots a fleeing engineering sergeant while his friend escapes. They get stuck after some time and decide to complete the journey to Udine on foot. He gives money to the girls and asks them to leave.

Analysis: Chapters XXVII–XXIX

The descriptive passages of the retreat given in this novel are among the best in American novels. As the lumbering columns of army vehicles wind throughout the country night, Hemingway's prose mimics the dark and streaming motion of the men. When the movement of the columns becomes choppy, so do Hemingway's sentences: 'Then the truck stopped. The entire column was stopped. It started again and went a little farther, then stopped.' These three chapters are noteworthy for their powerful, unromantic and uncompromising attitude towards war. Abstract concepts of honour, courage and glory find no place in the cruel reality of war. In describing the retreat, Hemingway strips war of its romantic attire and provides the reader with solid, evocative and accurate details.

The focus of the novel switches clearly from love to war in Book Three. Hemingway reports from the battlefront with a journalistic style that heightens the realism of the narrative and proves quite unsettling. When Henry shoots at the two engineering officers for refusing to help free the car from the mud, Hemingway's detached prose stops short of passing moral judgment on his action. This spare, disinterested tone sets Henry's wanton violence against an unethical landscape; shooting a man out of anger is given the same weight as pushing a car out of the mud. Hemingway challenges the reader to contact with the scene on his or her own terms by keeping to his nonchalant

way. Certainly, the support that Henry receives from his fellow soldiers suggests that his actions are not abnormal and that there is a persistent irrationality at work in the battlefront. The world has been stripped of its moral garbs, exposing men to set their own morality and value system. While some, like Gino, fight for their homeland since they believe in ideals such as patriotism and sacrifice, others, like Henry, attach no such grandeur or meaning to their behaviour on the battlefield. The confusion and meaninglessness portrayed by war has been beautifully depicted in the scene where Henry shoots the engineering officer. Bonello's ruthless show of wrath on an injured man underlines this senseless situation.

CHAPTERS XXX–XXXII

Chapter XXX

Crossing a bridge, Henry sees a German staff car crossing an additional bridge nearby. Not wanting to get captured, Henry decides to take the smaller road instead of the main road. Meanwhile Aymo is killed by the Italian rear guard. Now the small group is not only at risk with their enemies, they are also at risk with their own rear guard. They find an abandoned farmhouse and decide to spend the night there. Piani and Bonello go out in search of food. Piani returns alone, saying that Benello has deserted the front in the hope of being arrested. They spend the night in the barn and head out at dawn to re-join the Italian army. They come across a large gathering where officers were being interrogated by the Italian police and killed if found to desert the battlefront. Sensing danger, Henry dives in the water to evade death, just as he was seized by two officers. He could hear gunshots as he swam but as he went further from the shore, the gun shots stopped.

Chapters XXXI and XXXII

Henry floats in the cold water for what seems like eternity. He climbs out of the water and removes all identification of being an officer. He jumps on board a military train at night. When he is observed by a young soldier, he momentarily freezes on his tracks. However, the soldier ignores him. While lying under a canvas, he thinks about the injured knee. He then thinks about Catherine, though the thought of not being able to meet her drives him crazy. Thoughts of loss plague him. He thinks he has put the war past him, and misses the priest, Rinaldi, and his friends, to whom he will never be able to return. 'It was not my show anymore', he ruminates.

Analysis: Chapters XXX–XXXII

The fragile world of the Italian military falls completely in these last chapters of Book Three. Henry's normally calm exterior is shown to crumble, which prompts him to shoot the engineering sergeant. The world descends even further into chaos: the panicky Italian rear guard begins shooting at its own men; Bonello, fearing death, abandons Henry and Piani; and the neat columns that typify the retreat at its beginning have broken into a confused mob. Battle police randomly pull officers from the columns of retreating men and execute them on sight. Hemingway expertly stirs up the horror, confusion, and irrationality of war. Two types of characters have been painted in these last chapters. On one hand we have the terrified officers such as Bonello and Henry and on the other, the overzealous police patrols that pull out Italian soldiers and execute the defecting ones openly. The officer who is executed has resigned to his fate and accepts death as inevitable. He chides the police for pestering him with stupid questions just before he is shot. Henry is not resigned to his fate and jumps into the water in the face of adversity. Again, Hemingway portrays through his hero, not the proverbial, archetypal hero who challenges his enemies, but a hero who uses common sense and uses trickery to save his life. He flees not out of cowardice but out of an unwillingness to make a give-up for a cause that, to him, seems meaningless. His escape through the river is a baptism of sorts, an act that washes away his anger and obligations and renews his sense of what truly matters in the world. His thoughts return to Catherine. In these chapters, Henry creates a 'separate peace', as he later calls it, with the war—the farewell to arms that gives the novel its title.

As Henry ponders the decision to bid farewell to arms the narrative switches from the first person to the second. This shift doesn't mark the first time that Hemingway uses the second person, but it brings about the most comprehensive usage of it in the text. Here, as in its earlier occurrences, the second person affects a colloquial, storytelling tone. More important, it asks the reader to identify with Henry and get within his head. This device, which Hemingway reserves for Henry's more philosophical moments, is as startling as it is engaging. The repeated 'you' jumps out of a text that has applied 'I' fairly consistently. To heighten the reader's sense of being inside Henry's head, Hemingway lets slide conventional rules of grammar and style. Semicolons proliferate and sentence fragments are strung jointly. Even after the narrative returns to the first person, this stream-of-consciousness style intensifies. Hunger intrudes upon Henry's thoughts about his supposed death and the welfare of his friends, and the narrative follows Henry as he drifts off to sleep with the diffuse sentence, 'There were many places.'

CHAPTERS XXXIII–XXXVII

Chapter XXXIII, XXXIV and XXXV

Henry goes to Milan looking for Catherine, learning later that she has moved to Stresa. He meets Ralph Simmons, an opera singer whom he had met earlier, and the latter offers his help to Henry to venture to Switzerland. He explains the travel routes to Switzerland and also provides him with civilian clothes. Henry leaves for Stresa. Once in the city, he settles in a hotel called Isles Borromees. Helen and Catherine are having their dinner when Henry walks into their restaurant. While Catherine was overjoyed, Helen berates Henry for his irresponsible behaviour towards the pregnant Catherine. Henry and Catherine spend the night at the hotel together. Henry describes the night spent with Catherine: he has returned to a state of bliss, while his thoughts are darkened by the knowledge that the 'world breaks everyone' and that good people die 'impartially'. They decide to move to Switzerland to start their family life. In the morning, Henry goes angling with Emilio and Catherine visits Helen for the last time. In the evening, Henry plays billiard with Count Greffi, a ninety-four-year-old nobleman, talking about the war and religion.

Chapter XXXVI

Later on that night, Emilio wakes Henry to inform him that the military police plan to arrest Henry in the morning. He suggests that Henry and Catherine row to Switzerland. Henry wakes Catherine, and they pack and head down to the wharf. Emilio stocks them up with brandy and sandwiches and arranges for them to take the boat. He takes fifty lire for the provisions and tells Henry to send him five hundred francs for the boat after he is set up in Switzerland.

Chapter XXXVII

The water in which the couple rows is rough because of the storm. Henry rows all night till he cannot anymore. Catherine rows for a short time, and Henry resumes again. After staying out of sight of coast guards, the couple lands in Swiss lands. They are eventually arrested by the guards and taken to Locarno, where they receive provisional visas to remain in Switzerland. They are so tired that they retire to a hotel and promptly fall asleep.

Analysis: Chapters XXXIII–XXXVI

Up till now in the novel, those involved in the war have raised their voices and reactions to the war, including soldiers, officers, surgeons and nurses. When Henry escapes the front line of the war, he comes across several civilian characters during his travel whose opinions about the war are similar to the attitudes of the military personnel. Characters including Count Greffi, Emilio and Simmons do not support the war. Furthermore, Simmons and Emilio help Henry to abscond from his duty. The novel is seen presenting one-sided perception of the public about war. This shows the novel's central argument that war offers destruction and loss instead of honour and glory.

As Henry and Catherine prepare for their journey to Switzerland, there is a looming sense of doom. Hemingway strongly uses realism to depend on traditional methods of foretelling. However, he envisages the advancing misfortune is several ways. We witness the unexpected outbreak of Helen Ferguson in the hotel, which reflects her fear of loneliness. More than this, however, we see through the novel that the world is a dangerous place where true love cannot survive, as is Henry and Catherine's. One of the most beautifully written passages of the novel is Henry's night time meditation. It is during this time that the echoes of loneliness and the danger of love surviving in an unsafe world are reflected the most. Henry feels that the world was designed mainly to bring an end to the good.

CHAPTERS XXXVIII–XLI

Chapter XXXVIII

With the arrival of the autumn, Catherine and Henry took over a wooden house to stay, which was located outside Montreaux, a village. They were enjoying life together, along with Mr Guttingen and his wife, who lived downstairs. One day, Catherine goes was a hair do, after which she goes out with Henry for a beer, as she thinks this will keep the size of the baby small. She has been very worried about the size of the baby and the deliver process as the doctor had warned her that her pelvis was narrow. The couple discuss marriage again. Catherine agrees to get married someday as this will give a legitimate status to their child. However, she prefers to talk about the sights she wants to see, such as the Golden Gate Bridge and the Niagra Falls. Before the arrival of Christmas, the couple remember Rinaldi, the priest and the men on the front and wonder where they are. Catherine asks Henry to change something in himself, which will not only make him look different but also make him feel good. On this suggestion, Henry agrees to grow a beard. Catherine suggests for herself a haircut to look good and different. However, Henry does not like this idea. Henry is unable to sleep when Catherine asks him to try to sleep together at the same. He lies awake and continues to look at Catherine and thinks for some time.

Chapter XXXIX

Henry started growing a beard for his changed look as per the suggestion of Catherine. Along with Catherine, he went to a restaurant, where they take pleasure in their isolation and contemplate if things would be the same or get spoilt after the arrival of their baby. Catherine again tells Henry her wish to get a haircut to look young and different and so that Henry falls in love with her over and over again. To this Henry replies that he loves her dearly and asks, 'What do you want to do? Ruin me?'

Chapter XL

The couple move to Lausanne in March so that they can stay near the hospital as the delivery date was close by. Here, they stay in a hotel for about three weeks. Catherine purchases clothes for their baby and Henry exercises in the gym. Both feel that as the baby will come soon, they should not waste time away from each other and be together the most.

Chapter XLI

One morning, around three o'clock, Catherine experiences labour pain. Henry rushes her to the hospital, where she is given a room and a nightgown to change her clothes. Henry goes out to have breakfast on being asked by Catherine to do so. However, when he returns from his breakfast, he finds that Catherine has already been taken to the delivery room. On going inside the delivery room, he sees the doctors standing beside Catherine helping her inhaling anaesthetic gas to get her through the painful contractions. However, till afternoon, Catherine is able to make little progress through her labour as a result of which the doctors suggest that a Caesarean operation would be a considerate solution to the complications in her condition. Catherine goes through unbearable pain and, therefore, requests for more gas. Finally, she is taken out on a stretcher and prepares her for the surgery. Henry watches the rain outside, remembering Catherine fears the rain, which she asserts is 'very hard on loving'.

Soon, the doctor comes out of the delivery room with a baby boy. However, surprisingly, Henry does not feel any emotions for the child. Although he observes the doctor worrying about the child, he rushes to see Catherine without talking to the doctor. Catherine asks Henry about the child and he replies that he is fine. On hearing this, the nurse looks at him surprisingly. He takes him outside and tells him that the baby was stillborn.

After returning from his dinner, the nurse informs him that Catherine is haemorrhaging. Henry fears that his beloved will die. He desperately wants to see her, and on being allowed finally, Catherine tells him that she knows she will not live for long. She requests him not to utter the same words of love that he had used for her during their pleasant time together. Henry stays with Catherine until she dies. After her death, henry tries to bid adieu to her but is unable to do so. He leaves the hospital and returns to his hotel in the rain.

Analysis: Chapters XXXVII–XL

The first half of this section highlights Catherine and Henry's happiness together. This bliss, illustrated in Chapter XL, is efficiently shown by Hemingway, who marks their distance from the outside world. The following lines show this clearly: 'It was March, 1918, and the German offensive had started in France. I drank whiskey and soda while

Catherine unpacked and moved around the room.' However, a slight nervousness hangs over the tranquillity. Hemingway portrays Henry as one of his typical heroes who yearns for adventure. He is shown to become restless even with his content life. We also find Henry strange when we see him later not feeling any emotion for his son who was stillborn. Although Henry longed for isolation from the world and a life of solitude with Catherine, their togetherness poses a new problem for him—a problem of maintaining some independence for himself. We see him confessing, 'I haven't any life at all any more', when Catherine is happy to have their lives 'all mixed up'. By the end of novel we realize that Henry still loves Catherine. However, when Catherine wants to make love, he wants to play chess. Thus, we see that loves proves to be a challenge, like honour and glory.

Throughout the novel, we see Hemingway foretelling Catherine's death. These are highlighted when Catherine drinks beer to keep the size of the baby small, expecting the painful labour which she would have to go through. She also claims that the world has 'broken' her reminiscence. This intense feeling is highlighted in the passage in which Henry fears the death of the good and the gentle. These sensitivities cast despair on the satisfaction and hopefulness that Henry and Catherine feel. When Catherine is about to die, Henry states this in the most simplest and austere terms: 'It seems she had one haemorrhage after another. They couldn't stop it. I went into the room and hang about with Catherine until she died.' We see Hemingway's power of writing with his ability to stir up so much by using so little.

Although the novel ends with the tragic of death of Catherine, we do not see any signs of epiphany in Henry. Her death is not the medium for a revelation or a great change. The major thematic focus of the novel is both love and war lead to losses for which there is no compensation. The novel ends with a description of the storm, which reminds the reader about Catherine's fear of the rain. The rain which falls on Henry as he leaves the hospital after Catherine's death has such destructive forces that make one hopeless, speechless and powerless.

Check Your Progress

12. Where did Henry's unit move to in the second chapter?
13. Why does Catherine flirt with Henry?
14. What suggestion did Henry give to the soldier with hernia?
15. Why is drinking alcohol used repeatedly through the novel?
16. Who was Dr Valentini?
17. What was the priest's view on true love?

ACTIVITY

In order to understand Faulkner's preoccupation with the non-linear progressions of the mind, read his poems and short stories.

Did You Know

In September 1932, Paramount bought the film rights to Sanctuary. The first film version, entitled *The Story of Temple Drake*, was released in May 1933. It toned-down the more deviant behaviours and included a completely new scene at the end, but did manage to retain most of the suspense of the original story.

5.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Very few novels can be said to have been surrounded with the storm of controversy about their form and technique as this novel has been, yet at the same time, it has been regarded as exceptionally brilliant.
- The division of *The Sound and the Fury* into sections, with each of the major characters narrating the same tale from his point of view, was a unique experimental step.
- The first thing to note is that on the formal level, the novel is organized into four loose sections, which, though connected through a common family experience, are mutually isolated sections.
- The focus shifts continuously from one character to another. This technique sets it apart from other novels of this author, which normally weaves a tale around the growth of one character. This difficulty is not lessened when we consider that chronology is not an important factor in arrangement of the four sections.
- While the opening section narrates the events of 7 April 1910, the third section dealing with Jason is quaintly located in 8 April 1928. This involves the reader's own back and forth movement over the course of the disjointed time and narrative.
- There is no doubt that this disorderly form of the novel is a deliberately contrived structure which parallels the thematic level in its declining fortunes; the warmth of unity, the controlling commonalty of interests and the cementing force of affinity have evaporated, leaving the Compson family bereft of hope.
- This scene of anarchy is reinforced by the formal and structural aspects in the way a poet would organize his long narrative poem. Many scholars are in a hurry to express their opinion about it as the novelist's failure on the technical front.
- However, if we look at it as another significant functioning in tandem with the thematic stands of the story, we find ourselves in a position to appreciate the relevance of the formal aspects.
- Perhaps, *The Sound and the Fury* is no novel at all; it is a discontinuous, unorganized narrative that lacks a beginning and an end.
- Caddy is one element which runs through everybody's narrative, she obsessively occupies everybody's thoughts and propels the story; but the author chooses to assign her a peripheral existence, thus denying a function of binding the novel as it emerged from the beginning—a conglomeration of sections.

- Caddy disappears after the Quentin section and finds a brief mention in the section with Jason. This is one point which stands out as a regrettable gap in the organization of the novel; if Caddy had been allowed to dominate the tale till the last section, a more effective form would have emerged. However, the novel ends in as scattered manner as it begins and progresses throughout.
- All this apparent lack of a better formal structural and logical progression from different angles suits the mission well of investigating the inner world of the characters like Benjy and Quentin, which was difficult to present in any other manner. This is claimed as a justification for adopting it.
- Benjy's view of the world is vividly brought out as a succession of impressions of a mind that cannot comprehend it in a liner straightforward manner.
- For him, past is as significant a potential force of the present and there is no neat distinction between the two.
- The author, in order to present a rush of impressions, took recourse to two techniques—selective and ingenious use of steam-of-consciousness technique and the poetic symbolism in which certain motifs carry out the role of portraying the various states of mind of the two main characters.
- Ernest Hemingway was a twentieth century author and journalist. His style of writing was economical and understated, influencing contemporary literature in a big way. His adventurous lifestyle and public image in turn, influenced the younger generations.
- *A Farewell to Arms* by Hemingway covers numerous events of the Italian campaigns during the First World War.
- In Hemingway's early works, war used to be a major theme. Hemingway's own wartime experiences led to the construction of the main plot in *A Farewell to Arms*.
- The novel outlines the themes of love and war that run side by side. It portrays how despite serving as a miserably disconsolate situation, the war actually acts as a powerful catalyst in creating, as well as reinforcing, relationships between human beings.
- The title of the novel makes it obvious that the novel primarily deals with war and its aftermath. This is evident by the way Henry's life is affected by war and the manner in which he abhors war and warfare.
- Gino and Moretti support the author to bring out the vagaries of war. Though Gino is naïve and Moretti a braggart, they are the only ones who have their own glorious notions of war; most of the other characters remain inconclusive about the war. Through evocative scenes such as the Italian army's retreat, Hemingway paints masterful pictures of the mindless brutality and violent chaos caused by war.
- In this novel, the author offers a deep, sombre meditation on the relationship between love and war.
- The game of seduction that Catherine plays with Henry soon turns into a serious affair of the heart for both. She initiated this game because she was mourning for her dead fiancé and desperately wished to forget him.
- Henry and Catherine start finding solace in each other from the things that plague them in this world. Henry's passion for Catherine is so strong that he flees the war and looks for her. Once they are reunited, they start planning an idyllic life that could salvage them from the horrors of war. They become each other's social, psychological and emotional healing amidst the Swiss mountainside. The tragedy of the novel lies in the fact that their genuine love can only be temporary in this cruel world.
- The ideas of loyalty and abandonment apply equally well to love and war.
- Hemingway suggests that one should be loyal to one's love than to war and political causes.
- While Henry is portrayed as a serious soldier, he does not attach false importance to unreal notions of glory and honour. Though he shoots an uncooperative sergeant who fails to comply with his orders, his reaction needs to be treated as a violent outcome of the all-pervasive nature of war, rather than a personal failure. He eventually follows in the fleeing engineer's footsteps and deserts his regimen. At times he feels guilty that he has abandoned his regimen when it needed him, his supreme loyalty lay in being true to Catherine.
- Hemingway wished to impart upon his readers his take on loyalty and abandonment—for him, these are not the opposite ends of an ethical spectrum, but the practical priorities of an individual life.

5.9 KEY TERMS

- **Gloaming:** It means the faint light after the sun sets.
- **Odd jobs:** It refers to small jobs of various types.
- **Grotesque:** It means strange in a way that is unpleasant or offensive.
- **Indeterminacy:** It means the virtue of not being easily identifiable.
- **Sedentary:** It means without activity or passive.
- **Motif:** It is a subject, an idea, or a phrase that is repeated and developed in a work of literature or a piece of music.
- **Semantic:** It means connected with the meaning of words and sentences.
- **Stoicism:** It is a repression of emotion and indifference to pleasure and pain.
- **Realist:** It refers to a person who represents things as they really are.
- **Idealist:** It refers to a person who cherishes and pursues noble principles.
- **Decimated:** It means devastated.
- **Sermonizing:** It means preaching; imparting moral lectures.
- **Sombre:** It means extremely serious; grave.
- **Masculinity:** It refers to qualities such as strength and boldness ascribed to men.
- **Illusions:** It means a false sense of reality.
- **Fantasy:** It means extravagant and unrestrained imagination.
- **Antiwar novel**: It is a genre of novel that condemns war and its glorification.

5.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. One of the first collections of Faulkner's poems entitled *The Marble Faun* was published in 1924.
2. In January 1962, Faulkner fell from his horse. He was careless about his injury and took to drinking as a cure. However, on 6 July 1962, he died of heart attack.
3. The extraordinary merit of *The Sound and the Fury* lies in the perfect harmony between form and theme, which the author achieved by sheer exercise of his literary genius.
4. Miss Quentin is a self-absorbed girl, representing a free spirit, closer to instinctual way of life, deriving her strength and character from the passionate sources of nature.
5. A misogynist is a person who has a dislike for women or girls.
6. *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V reminds us of another instance which occurs in the great dramatist's comedy.
7. The biggest crisis that the Compson family faces is the crisis of confidence. The members live together without a sense of attachment and trust and treat each another with bitter hostility.
8. Ernest Hemingway was a twentieth century author and journalist. His style of writing was economical and understated, influencing contemporary literature in a big way. His adventurous lifestyle and public image in turn, influenced the younger generations.
9. He was born at Oak Park, Ilinois.
10. The themes of *A Farewell to Arms* are: grim reality of death; relation of love and war. Motifs used in the novel are: masculinity, games and divertissements, loyalty versus abandonment, illusions and fantasies. Symbols used include rain and Catherine's hair.
11. Hemingway's novels almost always celebrate a swaggering, virile, domineering and supremely confident masculine power. In *A Farewell to Arms*,some of the minor characters portray a fine example of manhood. While Dr Valentini exudes virility as an expert surgeon that poses as competition to Rinaldi's womanizing, Rinaldi proves to be a faithful friend. Bonello, who shoots the fleeing engineering sergeants, has a touch of cruelty that sort of pervades the entire novel. Hemingway has almost always used humour, if not contempt to portray their opposite characters. The success of these men depends on the failure of the other. Rinaldi attacks the guileless priest, thereby establishing his manhood; the overly cautious, almost mousy three surgeons challenge Dr Valentini's reputation by refuting Henry's claims to an early operation.
12. Henry's unit moves to the city of Gorizia in the second unit.
13. Catherine flirts with Henry as she wished to forget the pains of the memories of her dead fiancé.
14. Henry asked him to injure his head so that the soldier did not have to go back to the front.
15. Drinking alcohol has been used repeatedly as the characters of the novel wish to seek refuge in illusions and fantasies in the war-ravaged world. They drink to forget the painful memories associated with war and its aftermath.
16. Dr Valentini was an intelligent, cheerful and competent surgeon who operated upon Henry's injured leg confidently.
17. The priest tells Henry that he knows that the latter is capable of true love; people who visit brothels are completely unaware of this kind of love, where one needs to give oneself completely to one human being. The priest maintains that he is sure that Henry will find his love some day.

5.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the significance related to the characters of Benjy, Quentin and Jason.
2. Comment on the structure of the novel.
3. Comment on the use of stream of consciousness in the novel.
4. Do you find any symbolic devices used in the play? Analyse them briefly.
5. Give a brief sketch of Hemingway's life.
6. Who was Catherine Berkley?
7. Discuss the themes used in the novel *A Farewell to Arms*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Evaluate *The Sound and the Fury* as a tragic novel.
2. Write a note about women characters in the novel.
3. Discuss the art of characterization in the play.
4. Discuss *A Farewell to Arms* as an antiwar novel.
5. Analyse Henry's character in *A Farewell to Arms*.

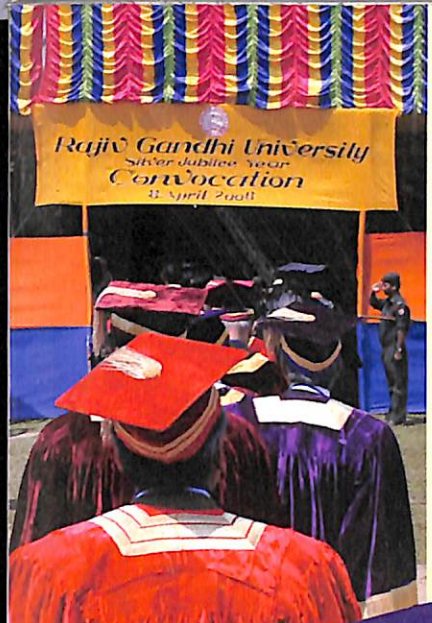
5.12 FURTHER READING

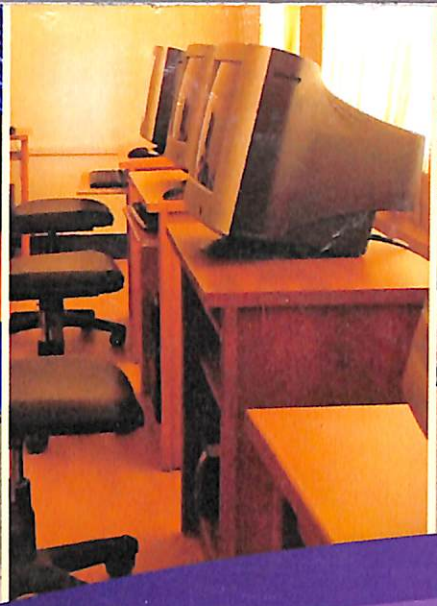
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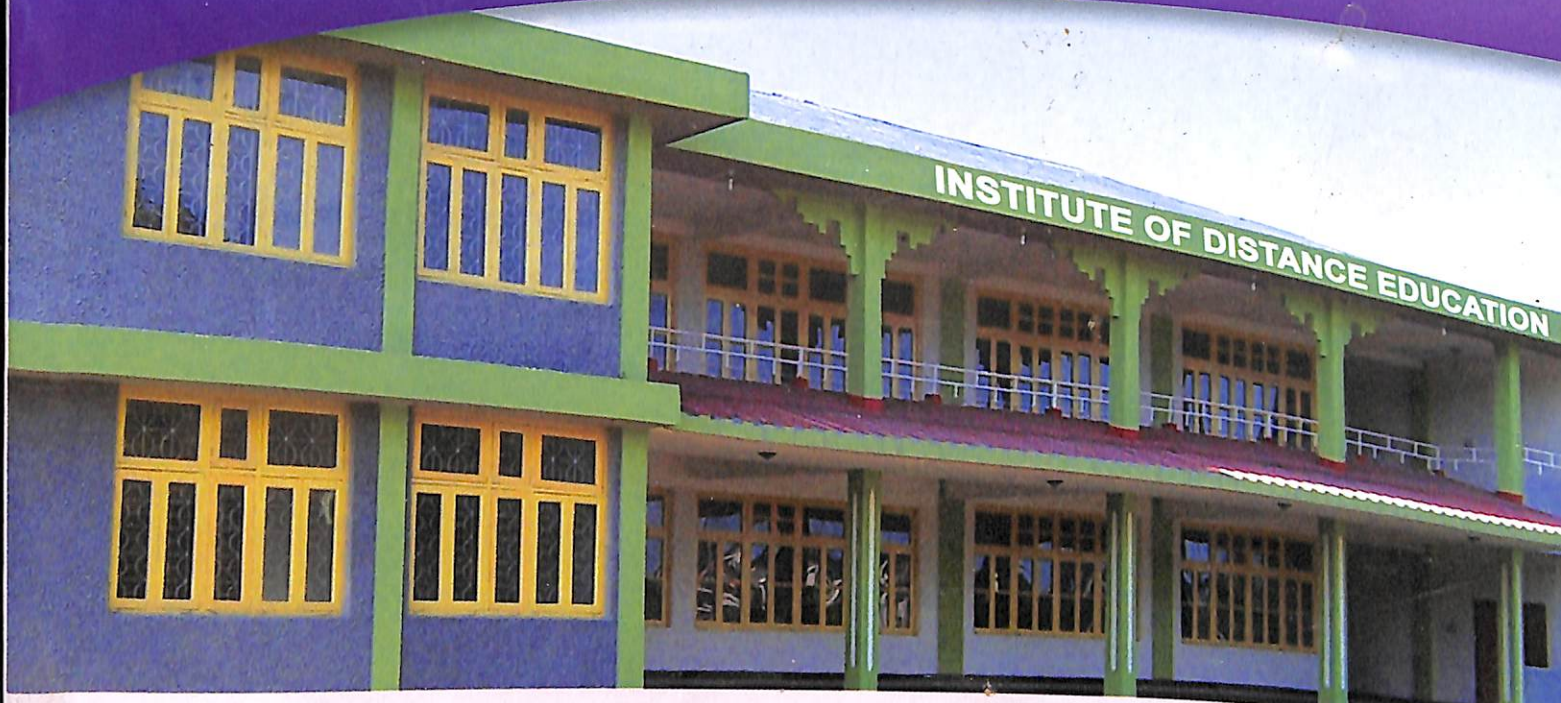
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About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Literature and Gender

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
UNIT-I	
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR	**Unit 1:** Simone De Beauvoir
The Independent Woman	**(Pages 3-19);**
VIRGINIA WOOLF	**Unit 3:** Virginia Woolf
A Room of One's Own	**(Pages 35-65);**
TORIL MOI	**Unit 2:** Toril Moi
'Anglo-American Feminist Criticism' from *Sexual/Textual Politics* by Toril Moi.	**(Pages 21-33)**
UNIT-II	
VIRGINIA WOOLF	**Unit 3:** Virginia Woolf
Mrs. Dalloway	**(Pages 35-65);**
ALICE WALKER	**Unit 4:** Alice Walker
The Color Purple	**(Pages 67-82)**
UNIT-III	
SAROJINI NAIDU	**Unit 6:** Sarojini Naidu
Songs of Radha	**(Pages 93-114);**
Pardah Nashin	**Unit 7:** Emily Dickinson
EMILY DICKINSON	**(Pages 115-137);**
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain	**Unit 5:** Kamala Das
Because I could not stop for Death	**(Pages 83-92)**
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The Old Playhouse	
UNIT-IV	
SHASHI DESHPANDE	**Unit 8:** Shashi Deshpande
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INTRODUCTION

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The study of literature, be it poetry, prose or drama is fraught with gender issues. Indian women writers have received critical acclaim for not just their literary prowess but also for making social issues a major part of their work. This has made Indian women authors writing in English popular across the globe. However, a number of Indian women writing in regional languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada, among others, have gained wider recognition. This is because the market for quality Indian fiction has increased and is growing by leaps and bounds.

This book *Literature and Gender* deals with the works of not just Indian women writers but also with that of women writers from other parts of the world, who have used the pen to make a difference. It has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the **Introduction** followed by the **Unit Objectives** for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with **Check Your Progress** questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of **Questions and Exercises** is also provided at the end of each unit. The **Summary**, **Key Terms** and **Activity** further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

This book is divided into ten units:

Unit 1: An introductory overview to the literary works of Simon De Beauvoir

Unit 2: Toril Moi

Unit 3: Virginia Woolf

Unit 4: Alice Walker

Unit 5: Kamala Das

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UNIT 1 SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

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Structure

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir (1908 –1986), a French national, was a feminist, an existentialist philosopher, political activist and social theorist. *The Second Sex,* one of her most acknowledged work, laid the foundation for contemporary feminism. It takes a look at history from the feminist point of view. The book earned de Beauvoir several admirers as well as critics.

Today, however, this meticulously researched volume is considered a pillar of feminist thought. De Beauvoir's primary argument has been to oppose the concept of women as 'others' as characterized by men after oppressing them. The women or the other are considered the exact opposite of the men; while the man considers himself to be the subject and plays the role of the self. This makes the man the absolute. He is the only essential and transcendent. The woman is inessential, incomplete, helpless and even amputated. De Beauvoir has tried to fight this distinction in all her works. Human, she says, by nature study themselves as opposed to others. The same logic does not work in case of gender issues. By referring to the woman exclusively as 'the other', man is denying her humanity. This unit will understand the body of work by Simone de Beauvoir, with emphasis on 'The Independent Woman', one of the last chapters of *The Second Sex.*

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand Simone de Beauvoir as a feminist writer
- Describe significance of 'The Independent Woman' in *The Second Sex*
- Recall the author's understanding of women and liberation

1.2 BEAUVOIR, THE FEMINIST WRITER

Simone de Beauvoir was a feminist writer, existentialist philosopher and public intellectual. Her close relationship with fellow philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre that lasted

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a lifetime is well known in the field of literature. In 1949, she wrote *The Second Sex*, a work of feminist literature that details women's oppression. Her legacy has only grown since her death. There is a bridge in Paris in her honour. She was a French writer and feminist, a member of the intellectual fellowship of philosopher-writers who have given a literary transcription to the themes of Existentialism. She is known primarily for her treatise *Le Deuxime Sexe,* 2 vol. (1949; *The Second Sex*), a scholarly and passionate plea to abolish the myth of the "eternal feminine." This seminal work became a classic of feminist literature.



Fig. 1.1 *Simone De Beauvior*

She did her schooling in private institutions, and went to the Sorbonne, where, in 1929 where she studied philosophy and met Jean-Paul Sartre. Before taking up writing as a full time profession, she worked as a teacher from 1931 to 1943 at a number of schools. In 1945 she and Sartre founded and began editing a monthly review titled *Le Temps Modernes.*

Her novels highlight existential themes, demonstrating her conception of the writer's commitment to the times. *L'Invitée* (1943; *She Came To Stay*) describes the subtle destruction of a couple's relationship brought about by a young girl's prolonged stay in their home; it also treats the difficult problem of the relationship of a conscience to "the other," each individual conscience being fundamentally a predator to another.

Of her other works of fiction, perhaps the best known is *Les Mandarins* (1954; *The Mandarins*), for which she won the Prix Goncourt. It is a chronicle of the attempts of post-World War II intellectuals to leave their 'mandarin' (educated elite) status and engage in politics. She also wrote four books on philosophy, including *Pour une Morale del'ambiguité* (1947; *The Ethics of Ambiguity*); travel books on China (*La Longue Marche: essai sur la Chine* [1957]; *The Long March*) and the United States

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(*L'Amérique au jour de jour* [1948]; *America Day by Day*); and a number of essays, some of which are long enough to be books. The best known of which is *The Second Sex.* In 2009 a new English-language translation of *The Second Sex* was published, making the entire original text available to English-speaking readers for the first time; the earlier translation (1953) had been severely edited.

Several volumes of her work are devoted to autobiography. These include *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958; *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*), *La Force de l'ge* (1960; *The Prime of Life*), *La Force des choses* (1963; *Force of Circumstance*), and *Tout compte fait* (1972; *All Said and Done*). This body of work, beyond its personal interest, constitutes a clear and telling portrait of French intellectual life from the 1930s to the 1970s.

In addition to treating feminist issues, de Beauvoir was concerned with the issue of aging, which she addressed in *Une Mort trs douce* (1964; *A Very Easy Death*). This was based on her mother's death in a hospital, and in *La Vieillesse* (1970; *Old Age*), she reflects bitterly on how indifferent society can be towards the elderly. In 1981 she wrote *La Cérémonie des adieux* (*Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*), an account of how Sartre spent his last years. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography, by Deirdre Bair*, appeared in 1990. Carole Seymour-Jones's *A Dangerous Liaïson* (2008), a double biography of de Beauvoir and Sartre, explores the unorthodox long-term relationship between these two individuals.

Simone de Beauvoir came across as a courageous woman who possessed integrity and whose life reflected in her thesis: the basic options of an individual must be made on the premises of an equal vocation for man and woman founded on a common structure of their being, independent of their sexuality.

Throughout *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir refers to a number of historical figures. This short list attempts to place them in their context and, in some cases, to explain how De Beauvoir uses them in her work.

1. **Alfred Adler (1870–1930)** - He was a psychoanalyst known for the 'inferiority complex' theory. He disagreed with Freud over the role of the libido in individual psychology. He developed a new branch of psychoanalysis, which he called individual psychology. According to him, the urge be superior or attain self-realization drives men. If men fail to fulfil this desire, they develop an inferiority complex and various neuroses follow.
2. **André Breton (1896–1966)** - He was a French poet, critic, and major proponent of the Surrealist movement. He was once a student of medicine and was deeply influenced by Freud's theories of the unconscious. He was interested in eliminating the distinction between subject and object, dream and reality, sanity and lunacy. De Beauvoir talks of his work in Chapter X, 'The Myth of Woman in Five Authors.'
3. **Casanova (1725–1798)** - He was an Italian adventurer who left behind a collection of memoirs and was known for his association and affairs with women.
4. **Paul Claudel (1868–1955)** - He was a poet, playwright and a popular figure in French literary circles in the early twentieth century. He had immense faith in God, a rarity in the age of Modernism. The conflict between human and divine love tormented Claudel throughout his life. De Beauvoir analyzes his work from a feminist perspective in Chapter X, "The Myth of Woman in Five Authors."

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5. **Colette (1873–1954)** - She was a French novelist known for her sensual descriptions and her intimate depictions of the sentimental life of women. Colette led an unconventional life, with several husbands and innumerable lovers. De Beauvoir frequently cites Colette's work for insights into female psychology. Colette's fictional heroines, while inhabiting traditional roles, display a rare depth and complexity.

6. **Havelock Ellis (1859–1939)** - He was an English doctor and writer who shocked polite Victorian society by tackling the unmentionable subject of sex. Ellis's landmark work, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928), a seven-volume compendium of case studies, was initially banned as filthy, and for many years it was available only to the medical profession. Ellis was a champion of women's rights and sex education.

7. **Friedrich Engels (1820–1895)** - He was a central theorist in outlining the principles of socialism and communism. With Karl Marx, Engels developed a 'materialist' interpretation of history that posited the proletariat, or working class, as the eventual winners of the ongoing class conflict. Engels believed that the Industrial Revolution would result in women's liberalization. However, he failed to consider that women would be more oppressed than men.

8. **Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)** - He was the father of psychoanalysis and one of the first theorists of the sexual nature of hysteria. Freud's first major works were *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), his first manifesto of psychoanalysis, followed by *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). In the years leading up to World War I, Freud's theories attracted many followers, including Carl Jung, Willem Stekel, and Alfred Adler, although many of his original Simon De Beauvoir adherents later broke with him. De Beauvoir finds many deficiencies in Freud's thinking as they relate to the development of women.

9. **Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956)** - He was an American zoologist and sex therapist known for his revolutionary work on human sexual behavior, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Because this landmark work was published in 1948, only a year before *The Second Sex*, its influence is keenly felt throughout De Beauvoir's study. Kinsey followed this report five years later with *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Both reports, based on tens of thousands of interviews, came under scrutiny for the witnesses' unreliable testimonies.

10. **D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930)** - He was an English novelist, poet, and short story writer. Among Lawrence's most famous works are *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), and *Women in Love* (1920).

    Lawrence had a famously stormy relationship with his wife, Frieda, a subject that interested De Beauvoir. She gives an analysis of Lawrence's theory of "phallic pride" in Chapter X of *The Myth of Woman in Five Authors*.

11. **Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)** - She was New Zealand's most famous writer. She is credited with reinventing the short story in English. Mansfield's two celebrated works are *Bliss* (1920) and *The Garden Party* (1922). De Beauvoir often cites passages from Mansfield's fiction to illustrate the frequent swoons and spasms of sudden revelation that seize her respectable, outwardly conventional heroines.

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12. **Karl Marx (1818–1883)** - He was one of the primary theorists of socialism and communism. Marx's masterpiece, *Das Kapital* (*Capital*) (1867), is the most sweeping critique of capitalist society and had a deep impact on de Beauvoir.

13. **Henri de Montherlant (1896–1972)** - He was a French novelist and playwright known for his domineering, arrogant personality and writing. Montherlant's most famous series of novels, translated as *The Girls* (1936-1940), is about a libertine artist's relationship with a series of young girls. This work that appears misogynistic is a sort of celebration of male supremacy and dominance. It looks down upon feminine possessiveness and sentimentality.

14. **Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919)** - She was a socialist, Polish revolutionary who led German workers' uprisings immediately following World War I. Luxemburg overcame the usual temptations of "femininity," De Beauvoir claims, because her ugliness immunized her from the temptation to "wallow in the cult of her own image."

15. **Marie Curie (1867–1934)** - She was the Polish physicist known for discovering radium. De Beauvoir cites her as an example of "what women can accomplish when they begin to feel themselves at home on the earth" (132).

16. **Otto Rank (1884–1939)** - He was a psychoanalyst and psychologist who focussed on the importance of the will, human relationships and creativity. Rank also laid the groundwork for existential, Gestalt, and relationship theories.

17. **Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)** - This French existentialist philosopher, playwright, and novelist dominated three decades of intellectual life in France and was the lifelong companion of de Beauvoir. Sartre's major works include the philosophical treatise *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and the plays *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1944). He rejected the institution of "bourgeois marriage" and took the lead in pursuing "contingent" affairs with other woman, but he remained allied to De Beauvoir until his death. As is evident throughout *The Second Sex*, his ideas influenced hers immensely—sometimes too much, as her detractors often claim.

18. **Gertrude Stein (1874–1946)** - He was the iconoclastic American writer whose Paris home became a legendary salon after World War I, attracting artists including Picasso, Braque, and Matisse. Stein's most famous work, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), purports to be the memoirs of Stein's longtime companion but is actually a history of Stein's own life. De Beauvoir mentions Stein in her discussion of the lesbian, believing that Stein chose to love in a state of equality.

19. **Stendhal (1783–1842)** - He was the writer most credited with developing the French novel from romanticism to realism in the nineteenth century. Proof of Stendhal's realism surfaces in his portrayal of women in classic novels like *The Red and the Black* (1831) and *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). In *The Myth of Women in Five Authors*, de Beauvoir argues that Stendhal displays unique understanding of women as real flesh-and-blood creatures, doomed by the mediocrity of their circumstances.

20. **Wilhelm Stekel (1868–1940)** - He was a Polish psychoanalyst whose case studies De Beauvoir cites throughout *The Second Sex*.

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21. **Emile Zola (1840–1902)** - She was a French novelist, journalist, and founder of the naturalist movement in late nineteenth-century French letters. Zola's novels, especially *Nana* (1880), are known for their stinging depiction of the moral decay of French society. De Beauvoir cites Zola's realistic depiction of the situation of women.
22. **Isadora Duncan (1878–1927)** - She was a legendary American dancer whose performances were inspired by Greek classical art. Duncan wore a Greek tunic, flowers in her hair, and flowing headscarves. Her autobiography, published the same year of her death, supplied de Beauvoir with many examples of female vanity but also of the rewards of artistic accomplishment and of achievements independent of male influence.
23. **Helene Deutsch (1884–1982)** - She was an early follower of Freud who became known as one of the first psychoanalysts to introduce theories of female sexuality into public discourse. A pioneer for women in fields of medicine and psychology, Deutsch had a troubled relationship with her parents, which she used as the basis for many of her later theories in her most famous book, *The Psychology of Women* (1944–1945). She argued that girls' problems stemmed from the inability to detach from their mothers.
24. **Juliette Drouet (1806–1883)** - She was Victor Hugo's first and most important mistress. Drouet was his companion for such a long time that his family eventually accepted her. De Beauvoir discusses Drouet's never-ending devotion in "Justifications."
25. **Marie Bashkirtsev (1858–1884)** - She was a Ukranian-born painter and writer who made a huge splash when she arrived in Paris. Her diaries, first published in1889, five years after her death, provide De Beauvoir with an example of female narcissism.
26. **Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764)** - She was a middle-class woman who used her intellect and guile to become mistress of King Louis XV of France. Madame de Pompadour was hugely influential in matters of art and culture.
27. **Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–)** - He was a French anthropologist and pioneer of structural anthropology, a theory that values the structure of myths over their specific narrative content. Rather than see Western civilization as elevated and unique, Lévi-Strauss sought connections between primitive and modern societies. He believed that the savage man was equal to the civilized man and that man's character was identical everywhere, regardless of culture or epoch. De Beauvoir leans on Lévi-Strauss's theories in her analysis of myths.
28. **St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380)** - She was a fourteenth-century nun who lived through the Black Death and one of the few positive examples de Beauvoir provides of a woman transcending her given options. De Beauvoir rejects Joan of Arc as a role model and instead praises Catherine of Siena, whose benevolence and inner visions gave her authority over some of the most important men of her age, including two popes. She experienced numerous visions and ecstatic encounters with the divine, and was also known for her cogent writing style.

Check Your Progress

1. What is De Beauvoir's primary thesis?
2. What is the main theme of the book *The Second Sex*?
3. Name a book written by Andre Breton.
4. Who wrote the book *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*?
5. When did Freud write his book *The Theory of Sexuality*?

1.3 'THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN'

NOTE

'The Independent Woman' is the first chapter of Part VII of Beauvoir's famous work *The Second Sex*. In this chapter, while insisting upon the importance of economic independence of women, Beauvoir enunciates the difference between a male, who has enough freedom to move to a new city and get a hotel, and a female, who does not share this independence with the male and, therefore, feels the necessity to establish a household.

Carrying on the same line, she talks about women with successful careers to show how economic freedom helped them escape masochism and sadism of the essentially patriarchal society. Beauvoir mentions that in spite of women being granted the right to vote and French law not recognizing obedience as the duty of a wife, women are far from achieving social and economic autonomy. In fact, only handful of women, according to Beauvoir, has attained the state of social and economic autonomy and equality. In a footnote, she cites the example of Clara and Robert Schumann. Beauvoir argues that an attempt to be a good wife can be consuming and overwhelming, for a good wife means to be elegant, excel in housekeeping and be a fulfilling mother. Such a demanding role that women have to play in almost every social and cultural setting makes women victim of forgetfulness of herself. And it is this forgetfulness acts as an impediment for women to accomplish great things.

But for Beauvoir there are women who are immune to this forgetfulness, for their profession reinforces 'their femininity', instead of discouraging it. To this category of women belong singers, actresses, and dancers. These women, says Beauvoir, are able to 'transcend their given characteristics' through their 'artistic expressions'. But expressive arts are not the only form of art that women are getting increasingly engaged with. The social situation of the women compels them to get inclined towards literature and art.

While talking about literature Beauvoir mentions women writers like Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf, and Mary Webb (she also fleetingly mentions Colette and Mansfield) as an example of writers who tried to decipher the conundrum of 'nature in its non-human freedom'. And in spite of such the great achievements of Bronte, who to deal with the idea of death, Woolf, who addressed the life, and Mansfield, who, though 'not very often', dealt with the idea of everyday suffering and contingence, no woman ever wrote books as great as *The Trial*, *Moby Dick*, *Ulysses*, or *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* – books diving as deep in to the human situation as one could ever possibly imagine.

Beauvoir argues that the reason women fail to contest the human situation is that they have barely even begun to understand and come to terms with it. It should be noted that the majority of the men share the similar limitation, but there are a few who do not – few rare men who deserve to be called great artists, and when the women of achievement are compared with these few rare great men, they appear to be mediocre. But the reason behind this apparent mediocrity of women is not some special destiny but social, cultural and economic circumstances.

Beauvoir says that it is easily comprehensible that why women have not been able to achieve the loftiest limits in the sphere of art and literature, and hints that they may not be able to attain the said limits for some time. The few men, who we call great artist, before creating what they did took the burden of the world on their

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shoulders, which no woman has been able to do, and that it why a woman could never have been a Van Gogh or a Franz Kafka, for she could never have felt the misery and the pain of her fellow human begins as the consequence of her own crime and, in her confusion and anxiousness, she could never have comprehended the anguish and pain of 'man driven from paradise.'

Beauvoir claims that except Saint Theresa there is hardly any woman who has lived the human situation in the state of complete desertion. She asserts that woman will only be able to speak through her life and work to reveal the reality in its totality and not only her personal self, when every human being is able to transcend the pride resulting from the sexual differentiation. But as long as a woman struggles to become human beings, how could she possible become an artist – a creator?

In the 'Conclusion' of the book, Beauvoir envisions a future world when men and women would be equals, something on the line of the world promised by Soviet Revolution:

> ...women raised and educated exactly like men would work under the same conditions and for the same salaries; erotic freedom would be accepted by custom, but the sexual act would no longer be considered a remunerable 'service'; women would be *obliged* to provide another livelihood for themselves; marriage would be based on a free engagement that the spouses could break when they wanted to; motherhood would be freely chosen—that is, birth control and abortion would be allowed—and in return all mothers and their children would be given the same rights; maternity leave would be paid for by the society that would have responsibility for the children, which does not mean that they would be *taken* from their parents but that they would not be *abandoned* to them.

In order to stop the unending debate concerning the ambiguity surrounding the words 'give' and 'take', Beauvoir explicates 'a basic law of political economy'. She argues that women must understand that the negotiation of an exchange depends not upon the value that the merchandise has for the seller, but on the value that the merchandise has for the buyer. And the problem with women is that they have been gulled into believing that they are priceless. Beauvoir stops to answer her critics but soon comes to the end of her book:

> ...to carry off this supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood.

In the final two chapters of *The Second Sex* – 'The Independent Woman' and the 'Conclusion', Beauvoir illustrates the then contemporary situation of women, while tracing the achievements already accomplished in the past and the changes to be done in the future. Beauvoir does not undermine the importance of Marxist and liberal solutions to the problem of women's situation, like women's right to vote and the idea of women achieving economic freedom, but at the same time she also thinks that these solution by themselves are not sufficient to bring enough changes in the situation of women in the society. Beauvoir's dissatisfaction with such solutions lies in the fact that they do not address the social and cultural position of women and the consequence of her interaction in these settings. Moreover, they also fail to bring their attention to the fact that even today masculinity is continued to be considered as the standard in almost every social and cultural setting.

According to Beauvoir, it is imperative that women, who are liberated or who want to attain the position of being liberated, must break herself free from the bondage of two limiting ideas: first, that she can only be free or independent if she behaves or fashion herself in the image of men, and second, that the only option she is free to choose is to be passive while in the process of being socialized.

Both the ideas threaten the identity of women in their own peculiar ways. The first idea threatens to alienate her from her own sexuality, while the second causes her to cease risking herself in order to attain her ideals. Keeping in mind this state of affair and the complicated role of body and sexuality in this context, Beauvoir offers two essential requirements for women's liberation. The first requirement is that women must learn to socialize and engage with the world, and the second is that she must be allowed to discover new ways of the real world engagement of their embodiment. To put it in different words, the idea or the myth of woman must be demolished.

Beauvoir argues that as long as this myth continues to prevail, the political and economic advances in the context of women's situation will not will be able to achieve the goal of liberation.

Addressing the idea of sexual difference, Beauvoir mentions that the dismantling of the myth of woman does not necessarily mean that the future will be androgynous, for the sexual differences will continue to prevail, given the biological reality of the body. But, once this myth is demolished, these biological differences will not be manipulated to justify the difference between a subject and his essential other.

For Beauvoir, the liberation aims to attain a state marked by the mutual acknowledgement of one another as not only free but also as other. She argues that today this mutual acknowledgment exists, though only sometimes, in the heterosexual erotic encounter. Talking about this intimate encounter, she opines: 'The dimension of the relation of the other still exists; but the fact is that austerity has no longer a hostile implication' (*The Second Sex*, 448). The important question to be asked here is – why? The experience of people involved in this close intimate encounter of themselves and of each other has a sense of ambiguity, which arises from the fact that they experience themselves as both the subjects and objects of erotic desire, instead of being delineated, which the institutionalized position of man and woman would have them experience.

Beauvoir writes: 'The erotic experience is one that most poignantly discloses to human beings the ambiguity of the condition; in it they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as the subject' (*The Second Sex*, 449). Beauvoir abstractly developed this idea of ambiguity in her 1945 lecture *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and uses and develops this idea in erotic context in *The Second Sex* to present it as an essential ingredient for surpassing the subjugation of patriarchy. Beauvoir's description of liberating and transcending qualities of sexual encounter is one of several examples where she draws from the Merleau-Ponty's idea of phenomenology of embodiment. While re-working Ponty's explanations of the various ways in which humans are world-making and world-embedded subjects-objects, Beauvoir exposes the ways in which humans are passionately drawn to each other as subject-objects 'for the world', 'to the world', and 'in the world'.

Simone de Beauvoir starts her essay by telling the readers that according to the French law 'obedience is no longer included among the duties of a wife…'.

Before moving on she tries to explain that the 'wife' is a role that is must for a female to undertake. The human society, almost unanimously accepts that marriage is the final destination that a woman can avail. It is only marriage that provides her dignity as she starts getting identified as the wife of a certain person. However, the problems of a female never get erased from her life once she turns into a wife. There

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are certain socially defined set 'duties' that is expected of a wife and that she will perform them perfectly. But in the midst of highlighting 'duties' the 'rights' are completely overlooked and somehow these duties start defining the women and their existence. A good wife follows the socially set codes of 'how to do 'things religiously'. A woman is never detached from the designated mythical and stereotypical image that is attached to her all the time even as she changes her roles and positions. These myths only put the women in an even more delicate position because she is now married and has to discharge her responsibility towards her new family and world at large.

The biggest challenge a woman faces is that is 'not permitted to do anything'. But the greater trouble lies in the mindset that a woman is not efficient enough to do anything. In a husband-wife relation a woman is never an equal but ends up being the 'other'. Man, who stays at an elevated scale occupies a more subjective position and becomes the automatic qualifier for the 'doer', whereas the woman is relegated to the margins of an object. She becomes and remains submissive and passive as that is how she is supposed to be and nothing else. She transforms into the silent 'other' but this does not imply that she is devoid of a voice. The real issue lies with the androcentric world that is just not capable enough to comprehend her language. Thus, she tries to do things which will make her reach that 'true self' that she has lost in the maze of her role playing.

Simone de Beauvoir suggests that religion or love is the two means which are viable to women to attain that 'true self'.

1.3.1 Themes

Immanence vs Transcendence

Beauvoir uses the word 'immanence' for the domain which has been historically assigned to women. It is a place where women can remain passive, static, and spend time with themselves. While the word 'transcendence' is used for the opposing characteristics of men, like being active, productive, creative, powerful, engaging and interacting with the outside world. Beauvoir argues that one's life must have the interaction of both immanence and transcendence, but unfortunately woman has been denied the latter by man throughout the history. While explain the women's situation in the society, Beauvoir exposes the ways in which women have been compelled to dispense with their right to transcendence and accept the passive and circumscribed incarceration. And the only way to escape through this incarceration for woman is through man, and this is what makes the entire situation of women problematic. Where man has various things to occupy himself with and look forward to, woman has only man.

Nature vs Nurture

Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex,* argues that women's inferior and passive position in the society has little to do with biological difference between the bodies of a male and a female. She designates the difference between the social position of man and woman to the difference between the ways they are brought up. She argues that the male social domination is not a result of some inherent quality or predestination but is a social conditioning that one can witness at every stage of his development. She writes that the power a man enjoys is not innate to him, and says that a 'man learns his power'.

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Following the same line of argument, Beauvoir asserts that a woman is not born passive, mediocre, and powerless. These are the qualities which she is conditioned to learn during her development from a girl to a woman. She is made to believe that these characteristics are essential to her development as a woman, and that the only way for her to achieve happiness and gain acceptance is to deny her own self. Beauvoir says such conditioning of young girls and boys to become what they do must change. And since both boys and girls are born equal, there is a strong possibility of their being equal as men and women in their adulthood. But, for such a change to take place it is imperative for the society to change its traditional perspective through which it sees and defines the roles and responsibilities for men and women.

Production vs Reproduction

Women's ability to reproduce is one of her characteristic which is both treasured and reviled, and according to Beauvoir, one of the most crucial aspect of the women's situation is problems and difficulties faced in harmonizing her productive capacity with her reproductive capacity. Productive ability of woman means her participation in labour and her contribution in the economy of the society she live in. And it has been widely believed that it is because of her reproductive function that women cannot harness the productive side of her personality. But in a closer study of these two functions, Beauvoir shows they are not mutually exclusive, i.e. the performance of one function should not hinder the performance of the other. She says that a woman's ability to reproduce must not stop her from contributing to her society. A woman should neither be considered exclusively as a womb nor exclusively as a worker.

It is apparent throughout history that the functions of the women have been restricted to her ability to reproduce, which has been the only contribution that she has made or has been allowed to make to the society. Her life, even till the present time, has been but a sequence of uninterrupted pregnancies. Most of the time she is left alone to carry the burdens of childbearing, an exhausting task even for the most energetic women. And because of these burdens, a woman has never been able to find her ways into the workplace.

Liberation of women and change is her social position is not possible unless they are able to leave the boundaries of their homes and enter the workplace as men's equals. And for such a thing to happen, it is crucial that the idea of nuclear family must be reconfigured so as to allow the women freedom to engage and interact with the outside world. Women should be able to take charge of their own bodies and pregnancies, and for this to happen it is important for the society to do away with the stigmas associated with unwed mothers and abortion. Beauvoir says women must not only aim to enter workplace and participate in work, which she insist is important, but they must become the part of the 'totality of human reality'.

The writer is of the opinion that if a woman can earn for herself, she can bring about change in her status: 'When she is productive, active, she regains her transcendence; in her projects she concretely affirms her status as subject; in connection with the aims she pursues, with the money and the rights she takes possession of, she makes trial of and senses her responsibility.'

Even women know the importance of having a job that helps them fetch money. De Beauvoir does not believe that 'the mere combination of the right to vote and a job constitutes a complete emancipation'.

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Participation of women in the workplace in the outside world is no solution to the complex problem for the trouble in the psyche still remains. Men have always dominated women and they still nurture similar thoughts.

The issue of women taking up paying job is very complex. 'The majority of women do not escape from the traditional feminine world; they get from neither society nor their husbands the assistance they would need to become in concrete fact the equals of the men. Only those women who have a political faith, who take militant action in the unions, who have confidence in their future, can give ethical meaning to thankless daily labour.'

Many women feel that the work they do outside home leaves them more fatigued and burdened. They definitely work hard at working place for a fixed number of hours — be it a factory or an office — yet after coming home they are expected to carry out all the designated work that a house wife is expected to do. The only reason for taking up an outside job is that it makes one economically independent which indeed is a great support but that does not bring an end to 'house-keeping–burdens'.

Sometimes, a woman takes the risk of doing anything for the sake of gaining her economic self-sufficiency. Yet she might at some juncture volunteer to remain at home, being dependent on other. 'She often retains both sources of income and each serves more or less as an escape from the other; but she is really in double servitude: to job and to protector.' Despite her earnings, a women can never consider her earning to be sufficient or enough. It is always labeled as the 'pin money'.

1.3.2 Motifs

The Eternal Feminine

Beauvoir delves deep into the myth of what she calls 'the eternal feminine' or the 'vague and basic essence, femininity,' only to demolish the myth and to expose how it has worked its way up for centuries to aid in the suppressed and passive social position of women. She explains that this myth of 'the eternal feminine' can be realized in various different forms, such as a mother's sacred position, the innocence and purity of a virgin, the fertility associated with the earth and with woman's womb. But whatever the form, this myth traps woman within the shackles of unrealized and unattainable ideals, while offering them an illusion and denying them their own individuality. Beauvoir also uses the phrase 'the eternal feminine' to designate the horrifying and reproductive processes that caused the man's discomfort with the reality of his birth and unavoidable certainty of his death. Throughout history, man has limited the importance of woman to her womb. And to do away with his own discomfort with the reality of birth and inevitability of death, which is both confusing and frightening to him, he has swept everything that related to the mysterious processes of life and death under a single myth. Beauvoir argues that there is no such thing as 'eternal feminine' as there is no such thing as 'eternal masculine'. In other words, there is no such thing essence, either of male or female, but only experience. Beauvoir asserts that everyone has the right to fashion and define their existence, instead of being the subjected to labour under the obscure notions like 'femininity'.

Drawing our attention to some contemporary debates that prevailed then, the writer points out that feminists and anti-feminists perceived the subject of emancipated women differently. Anti-feminists clearly spell out that 'the emancipated women of today succeed in doing nothing of importance in the world and that furthermore they have difficulty in achieving their own inner equilibrium'. While, feminist organizations do not agree with the idea of importance of 'inner equilibrium', they focus more on the results produced by professional women. No one can conclusively prove that the professional women are involved in immoral acts and are on the wrong side, yet the women are at loggerheads with their own discovered space.

Simone de Beauvoir underlines the idea that life of a man is never contrasted or compared in relation to female. Yet the same technique is adopted to define a woman. De Beauvoir writes, 'Through the identification of phallus and transcendence, it turns out that his social and spiritual success endows him with a virile prestige. He is not divided."

Having said that the author adds, 'Whereas it is required of woman that in order to realize her femininity she must make herself an object and prey, which is to say that she must renounce her claims as a sovereign subject. It is this conflict that especially marks the situation of the emancipated woman.'

Elaborating on the above said conflict, de Beauvoir writes, 'She refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation; but it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex.' Moving on, she tells with conformity that, 'Man is a human being with sexuality; woman is a complete individual, equal to the male, only if she too is a human being with sexuality. To renounce her femininity is to renounce a part of her humanity'.

For a financially liberated woman it is difficult to come to terms with her independent status and her previously acquired femininity is slowly getting lost in the process of emancipation. She gets more and more distanced from the process of making herself beautiful for retaining the male attention. Needless to say that with 'fame and fortune' she is thought to be 'attractive', though she no longer retains the feminine charm. 'Feminine charm demands that transcendence, degraded into immanence, appear no longer as anything more than a subtle quivering of the flesh; it is necessary to be spontaneously offered prey. But the intellectual knows that she is offering herself, she knows that she is a conscious being, a subject…'

Simone de Beauvoir tries to work out a few options that a woman can avail. She claims that woman can take someone from the street so that the man can fulfil her demands of passions, yet this would come with a baggage of risk, like transmission of some kind of venereal disease because of lack of protection or getting the lady pregnant.

There are other problems like facing people with bad intentions, such as a robber. On the other hand, trying to opt for a safer option, the woman can think of the option of a 'permanent lover'. The way men keep a mistress and provide her financially in the similar manner the women can use her 'permanent lover'. But this method has its own complexities. The bigger issue is that 'they (women) must be old to be able to dissociate sex and sentiment so crudely, since in feminine adolescence the two are most profoundly associated'. The difference between 'flesh and spirit' is not very readily accepted by any human — be it men or women. Such a situation will invariably ignite guilt in women as they are prone to be more sensitive than men in such arrangements. 'Masculine pride conceals the ambiguities of the erotic drama from the male; he lies to himself unconsciously. More easily humiliated, more vulnerable, woman is also clearer sighted; she will succeed in blinding herself only at the cost of entertaining a more calculated bad faith. Even granted the means, woman will never find the purchase of a male a satisfactory solution.'

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De Beauvoir is of the opinion that women tend to think that in an arrangement like this they use men for their satisfaction, yet at the same time they are also taking away something. In reality, no such thing may happen. In a sanctioned relationship, desire and dignity play together. But here, 'when a male enjoys a woman and gives her enjoyment, he takes the position of the sole subject; he is imperious conqueror or lavish donor; sometimes both together. Woman, for her part, also wishes to make it clear that she subdues her partner to her pleasure and overwhelms him with her gifts. Thus, when she imposed herself on a man, be it through promised benefits, or in staking on his courtesy, or by artfully arousing his desire in its pure generality, she readily persuades herself that she is overwhelming him with her bounty. Thanks to this advantageous conviction, she can make advances without humiliating herself, because she feels she is doing so out of generosity'. No man will like if the woman makes the first move.

Talking about the sexual activities carried out by men and women, de Beauvoir claims that women can under no circumstance forget the superior status of men. He always asks for her to surrender. Explaining herself further de Beauvoir suggests 'he is eager to take and not to receive, not to exchange but to rob'. But problems crop up when she tries to make herself heard. The 'tension', thus surfaced boosts the ego of man. Yet ironically when the woman detaches herself from her passivity 'she breaks the spell that brings on her enjoyment, if she mimics dominance in her postures and movements, she fails to reach the climax of pleasure'. This, according to the author, this turns most women frigid.

ACTIVITY

Draw a comparative analysis of the views of Toril Moi's with those of Julia Kristeva.

Did You Know

The chapters of *The Second Sex* (original French title *Le deuxième sexe*) first appeared in June 1949 in a French Journal called *Les Temps modernes*. The second volume of the book appeared after few months of the publication of the first volume in France. The book was quickly translated as *The Second Sex* in English by Howard Parshley, who translated the work at the insistence of Blanche Knopf, wife of the publisher Alfred A. Knopf. Though, this translation allowed the book to be published in America quickly, but it also affected the content and the message of Beauvoir. Parshley was a biology professor in Smith College. His understanding and familiarity with both French language and philosophy were limited and therefore his translation of the Beauvoir's book completely distorted the meanings and the arguments. The book was not only mistranslated but also inappropriately cut, thus distorting the very basic ideas. For several years Knopf did not allow an accurate translation of the Beauvoir's work, in spite of various efforts made by the existentialist scholars. The second translation came recently in the year 2009, marking the 60th anniversary of the first publication of book. The second translation was done by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, which is the also the first complete translation including one third of the original work which was previously cut from the first translation.

Check Your Progress

6. What is the focus of The Independent Woman?
7. Beauvoir abstractly developed this idea of ——— in her 1945 lecture The Ethics of Ambiguity
8. According to Beauvoir, Liberation of women and change is her social position is not possible unless they are able to leave the boundaries of their homes and enter the workplace as men's equals. (True/False)

1.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Simone de Beauvoir (1908 –1986), a French national, was a feminist, an existentialist philosopher, political activist and social theorist.
- *The Second Sex*, one of her most acknowledged work, laid the foundation for contemporary feminism.
- Of her other works of fiction, perhaps the best known is *Les Mandarins* (1954; *The Mandarins*), for which she won the Prix Goncourt. It is a chronicle of the attempts of post-World War II intellectuals to leave their 'mandarin' (educated elite) status and engage in politics.
- De Beauvoir's primary argument has been to oppose the concept of women as 'others' as characterized by men after oppressing them.
- In addition to treating feminist issues, de Beauvoir was concerned with the issue of aging, which she addressed in *Une Mort trs douce* (1964; *A Very Easy Death*).
- 'The Independent Woman' is the first chapter of Part VII of Beauvoir's famous work *The Second Sex*. In this chapter, while insisting upon the importance of economic independence of women, Beauvoir enunciates the difference between a male, who has enough freedom to move to a new city and get a hotel, and a female, who does not share this independence with the male and, therefore, feels the necessity to establish a household.
- Beauvoir argues that the reason women fail to contest the human situation is that they have barely even begun to understand and come to terms with it.
- Beauvoir claims that except Saint Theresa there is hardly any woman who has lived the human situation in the state of complete desertion.
- In the final two chapters of *The Second Sex* – 'The Independent Woman' and the 'Conclusion', Beauvoir illustrates the then contemporary situation of women, while tracing the achievements already accomplished in the past and the changes to be done in the future.
- Addressing the idea of sexual difference, Beauvoir mentions that the dismantling of the myth of woman does not necessarily mean that the future will be androgynous, for the sexual differences will continue to prevail, given the biological reality of the body.
- For Beauvoir, the liberation aims to attain a state marked by the mutual acknowledgement of one another as not only free but also as other.
- Before moving on she tries to explain that the 'wife' is a role that is must for a female to undertake. The human society, almost unanimously accepts that marriage is the final destination that a woman can avail.
- The biggest challenge a woman faces is that is 'not permitted to do anything'. But the greater trouble lies in the mindset that a woman is not efficient enough to do anything.
- Following the same line of argument, Beauvoir asserts that a woman is not born passive, mediocre, and powerless.

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- Women's ability to reproduce is one of her characteristic which is both treasured and reviled, and according to Beauvoir, one of the most crucial aspect of the women's situation is problems and difficulties faced in harmonizing her productive capacity with her reproductive capacity.
- Liberation of women and change is her social position is not possible unless they are able to leave the boundaries of their homes and enter the workplace as men's equals.
- Beauvoir delves deep into the myth of what she calls 'the eternal feminine' or the 'vague and basic essence, femininity,' only to demolish the myth and to expose how it has worked its way up for centuries to aid in the suppressed and passive social position of women.
- Drawing our attention to some contemporary debates that prevailed then, the writer points out that feminists and anti-feminists perceived the subject of emancipated women differently.
- Anti-feminists clearly spell out that 'the emancipated women of today succeed in doing nothing of importance in the world and that furthermore they have difficulty in achieving their own inner equilibrium'. While, feminist organizations do not agree with the idea of importance of 'inner equilibrium', they focus more on the results produced by professional women.
- Simone de Beauvoir underlines the idea that life of a man is never contrasted or compared in relation to female. Yet the same technique is adopted to define a woman.
- Talking about the sexual activities carried out by men and women, de Beauvoir claims that women can under no circumstance forget the superior status of men. He always asks for her to surrender.

1.5 KEY TERMS

- **Existentialism:** It is a theory that states humans are free and responsible for their own actions in a world without meaning.
- **Transcendence:** It has been used to describe the opposing characteristics of men, like being active, productive, creative, powerful, engaging and interacting with the outside world.
- **Eternal feminine:** It is a psychological archetype or philosophical principle that idealizes an immutable concept of woman.
- **Androcentric world:** The world which is dominated, focused or centred on men.

1.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. De Beauvoir's primary thesis is that men fundamentally oppress women by characterizing them, on every level, as the 'other', defined exclusively in opposition to men.
2. The main theme of the book *The Second Sex* is women oppression.
3. *Nadja* is one of the many books written by Andre Breton in 1928.
4. Havelock Ellis had written the book *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*.
5. Freud wrote *The Theory of Sexuality* in 1905.
6. 'The Independent Woman', the first chapter of Part VII of Beauvoir's famous work The Second Sex, talks about the importance of economic independence of women. Here Beauvoir enunciates the difference between a male, who has enough freedom to move to a new city and get a hotel, and a female, who does not share this independence with the male and, therefore, feels the necessity to establish a household.
7. Ambiguity
8. True

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1.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. List a few books written by Simone De Beauvoir.
2. When was *L'Invitée* written?
3. What is *Les Mandarins* about?
4. In which book did De Beauvoir address the issue of ageing?
5. Write a short note on Alfred Adler.
6. List a few works of Sigmund Frued.
7. Who was Juliet Drouet?
8. Trace a few lines to reinforce De Beauvioir was a feminist writer.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on a couple of writers referred by De Beauvoir in her works.
2. Explain a few qualities that De Beauvoir appreciates in women.
3. Explain the theme of 'The Independent Woman' from *The Second Sex*.
4. Quote a few instances which make you understand that De Beauvoir was a feminist writer.
5. Based on your reading, explain how men are different from women?
6. Write the part which you like the most in the essay and also state why?

1.8 FURTHER READING

Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: New Interdisciplinary Essays, (edit: Evans Ruth) Manchester University Press, UK, 1998.

Translating Women, (edit: Luise von Flotow), University of Ottawa Press, 2011.

De Beauvoir Simone; *The Second Sex*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012.

UNIT 2 TORIL MOI

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Structure

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 About the Author
2.3 'Anglo-American Feminist Criticism' from *Sexual/Textual Politics*
  2.3.1 Feminist Literary Criticism
2.4 Summary
2.5 Key Terms
2.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.7 Questions and Exercises
2.8 Further Reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the major contributions of Anglo-American feminist criticism, which spread its wing in the 1980s, lay in its ability to figure out and carry out a gendered literary criticism encompassing a multitude of perspective. For the first time, it was realized that literature was not just an amalgamation of major books and texts. It was characterized by various political discourses steeped in structured patterns of social as well as sexual ideologies. Moreover, the writings of women, it was proven conclusively, carry a few social nomenclatures, which are constructed and defined within the space they are created in. Needless to say there still exists hidden politics within this umbrella term of 'pluralism'.

Annette Kolodny's essay, *Dancing through the Minefield* (1980), angered various groups like the working class and lesbian organizations for shadowing the pluralistic aspect by working through heterosexuality and racial dimension. Yet, this was also a period where innovation was visible in the writings of authors such as Alice Walker and Adrienne Rich.

Feminist criticism was not limited to a mere critical approach. It also moved into the broader aspect of literature taking into consideration the creative productions in the form of biographies, autobiographies, fiction and histories. This movement towards a multi perspective approach led to the birth of a few poststructuralist and postmodernist criticisms in the form of Catherine Clement's *The Newly Born Woman* (1987). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar dealt with the theme of authorship in relation to woman writer and the anxiety hidden underneath. This approach found its concrete critical form in Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985). *Sexual/Textual Politics* is considered to be the first feminist text which adopted a deconstructive approach to analyse the existing body of female works. Although Moi's work takes a critical view of the Anglo-American and French criticism, it does not consider the entire gamut of Black writing.

This unit will try to understand the meaning of Anglo-American feminist criticism as interpreted by various writers. The unit will also look into the works of Toril Moi and her views on authors writing on Anglo-American feminist criticism. The emphasis will be on Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*.

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2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Recognize the concept of the Anglo-American feminist criticism and appreciate Toril Moi's role in it
- Explain the significance of the *Sexual/Textual Politics* in the study of feminist criticism
- Summarize the *Sexual/Textual Politics*

2.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toril Moi was born in 1953 in Norway. Currently she holds the position of James B. Duke Professor of Literature and Romance Studies and Professor of English, Philosophy and Theatre Studies at Duke University. Previously she thought French at the University of Oxford and worked as Director of the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Bergen, Norway. Her academic areas of interest are feminist theory and women's writing; intersection of literature, philosophy and aesthetics, and 'finding ways of reading literature with philosophy and philosophy with literature without reducing the one to the other'.



Fig. 2.1 *Toril Moi*

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It was her lectures at the University Oxford which took the shape of *Sexual/Textual Politics.* She edited *The Kristeva Reader* (1986) and *French Feminist Thought* (1987). The 1990s saw Moi coming out with her most impressive work which identified French critic, de Beauvoir, as one of the most prominent feminist of the twentieth century. Eventually, Moi brought out her ideas in print in *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir* (1990) and *Simone de Beauvoir.* Her seminal work, *What Is a Woman?,* earned Moi the Guggenheim Fellowship (2001) and a fellowship at Harvard University (2002-03). At Harvard she got herself busy in studying Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.

2.3 'ANGLO-AMERICAN FEMINIST CRITICISM' FROM *SEXUAL/TEXTUAL POLITICS*

Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) is neatly divided in to two prominent sections. One section deals with 'Anglo-American Feminist Criticism' and the other one deals with 'French Feminist Theory'. This book throws a clear light on the seminal aspects of the present day feminist criticism and also brings in new prospective.

Moi discusses about 'Anglo-American Feminist criticism' in the first segment of her book. In this segment of her book. in this section Moi deals with the works of theorists like Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Kate Millet and Annette' Kolodny and also discusses some major feminists from African-American and lesbian sections of the society.

Toril Moi, in her discussion asserts that Anglo-American feminism deals with the quintessential from of female self and represents itself through liberal humanism. But she also argues that since Anglo-American feminism mostly revolves around the parameter set by western theories therefore it is unable to properly address the culture set by patriarchal society.

Anglo-American feminist criticism is more of an attempt to understand the sociological dimensions of literature written for women or construction of gender roles (especially female) through various existing social boundaries. These branch of study intended, in its early phase, to include itself in the educational canons where female literary figures and critics would appear more often and make themselves more prominent in the world of intellect. Initially this field of study was very avert to the idea of theorizing itself. But with the inclusion of French feminist theories into Anglo-American criticism a major change was noticed where Anglo-American feminist were found to be becoming theoretically mere equipped.

Moi tries to bring into light the politics of canonizing certain texts over the others. She feels that the canonical texts are always selected by 'male bourgeois critics' who select male writings and pass it on to future generations. They do not take into account the various non-confirmist approaches and experiences that are recorded in the various 'ethic and working class' writings of women. Anglo-American criticism has indeed raised a voice against these self-assured canonization process initiated by the middle class values of the male dominant society. But Moi is critical of the fact that Anglo-American critics have 'rarely challenged the very notion of canon'.

The main 'Anglo-Americans' considered for discussion in The *Sexual/Textual Politics* are mostly American. Some of the early attempts at studying women's criticism reflects in the works of Cell Man and Millett and Susan Cornillon's edited *Images of*

Check Your Progress

1. Name the books Toril Moi edited.
2. Who wrote *What is a Woman?*

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Women in Fiction : Feminist Perspectives (1972). But the Cellen Moers's *Literary women* published in 1976 is considered as more of a bench mark effort as it makes a conscious effort to trace the alternative tradition of writing which is regulated by women that over shadows the dominant male culture of writing. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad woman in the Attic* (1979) claims that the female authors of post Jane Austen scenario have managed to create a very distinct female voice for themselves the notions of 'angel' and 'monster' are both accepted and rejected simultaneously. Here, Moi's contribution lies in highlighting the reiteration of female victimization by the patriarchal society. Moi links at taking a recourse to the 'psychoanalytic' perspectives for a way out.

Moi is more inclined towards French feminism in their effort to theorise matters. But her investigation of Anglo-American feminist body of work identifies it to be following a Lukacsian approach to present various social realities though deeply steeped within the circumscribed space of patriarchal ideology. Moi puts forward that the prominent American feminist literary critics such as Annette Kolodny, Myra Jehlen, Susan Guber et al are engrossed politicizing creative works by reading them from a sexual perspective. But they are completely obliterating the problematic that are posed by the patriarchal aesthetics. Though Moi gives credit to the Anglo-American feminist critics for taking an assertive political approach to things , they are at the same time not considered a coherent approach by Moi because she considers just the dealings of sexual politics is not sufficient enough. Moi says, '... new impact of feminist criticism is to be found not at the level of theory or methodology, but at the level of politics. Feminists have *politicized* existing critical methods and approaches. If feminist criticism has subverted established critical judgments it is because of its radically new emphasis on *sexual politics*...' (*Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory,* page 86). She further argues that the main problem with Anglo-American feminist lies in its ambivalent core. Moi argues, '...despite its often strong, explicit political engagement, it fails to go *far* enough along the political spectrum, but in the sense that its radical analaysis of sexual politics still remains entangled with depoliticizing theoretical paradigms' (*Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory,* page 86).

2.3.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is cannot be united under one umbrella. Its beauty lies in its difference and its variety. It represents various approaches of understanding. Feminist literary criticism is full of ideas belonging to oppositional school of thoughts. Somewhere in midst of all one can place Moi's critique. Moi analyses the exaggerated concern of feminist criticism on sexual politics by assimilating sexual with textual politics. She creates a new term 'sexual/textual politics'. She does this to highlight how a text becomes a branch of differences. She argues that any text dealing with sexual politics has to be a part of both male and female politics. Under no circumstances can it be segregated as meant for any specific gender. Moi prefers to place her sexual-political agenda within the domain of deconstruction studies. She argues that a feminist literary text falls short of propaganda because of its variety that embedded in the text itself. This does not imply that it is silently regarding its political aspect, but the political part is explained in an aesthetical manner. As Moi sums it up, 'As a political approach to criticism, feminism must be aware of the politics of aesthetic categories as well as of the implied aesthetics of political approaches to art.'

Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literature Theory is known for its critical commentary on mainly of Anglo-American feminist criticism, particularly of its radical

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politics developed at the cost of the aesthetics of politics. Before embarking on her analysis about the lacunas of Anglo-American feminist criticism, Moi brings into the forefront important feminist critics, such as, Virginia Woolf, so that she can bring her out of the debris of darkness where radical feminists like Showalter had decided to leave her. In her introduction to *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literature Theory* titled 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf', Moi argues that many feminist are scared of Woolf.

Though it is not amusing to see many male critics considering Woolf as 'a frivolous Bohemian and a negligible Bloomsbury aesthete', yet Moi intends to explore deeper to understand why many female Anglo-American feminist rejected Woolf, the 'great feminist writer', as Moi puts it. Both male and female critics sidelined Woolf because she neither conformed to the radical feminist's ways nor to the male chauvinists with her ideas.

Moi points out that Showalter distances herself from Woolf, yet adhered to her (Woolf) unconsciously. The name of Showalter's work, *A Literature of their Own,* unintentionally echoes the name of Woolf's seminal work *A Room of One's Own.* Moi argues that Showalter's understanding of Woolf is definitely skewed because of her repeated presumptions which are sometimes theoretical and sometimes political in nature. Moi makes an honest effort to save Woolf from the wrong accusations Showalter's has hurled on her and then goes on to offer an alternate persuasive argument of Woolf which is brighter in note.

Showalter puts in an effort to analyse Woolf in the first chapter of her work, where she invests a significant amount of space discussing Woolf's *A Room of One's Own.* The title of the chapter is called 'Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny'. This title reveals Showalter's idea that Woolf denied exclusivity to women, this perception serves to fulfil Showalter's political agenda. This stance is further justified when Showalter's defines androgyny as 'full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements'. Moi considers this to be a myth used by Showalter to hide her own troublesome feminine existence and helps he suppress and eliminate aim and anger. Showalter, registering her disagreement, suggests that Woolf as a feminist failed 'even in the moment of expressing feminist conflict. Woolf wanted to transcend it. Her wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience'.

Showalter, while discussing Woolf's concept of androgyny, i.e. possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics, is very critical of her. She writes it off as 'a flight away from a troubled feminism'. It is a familiar literary mistake whose wrath is subjected to many works where the contemporary criticism is made by the critic keeping in mind his/her current positioning and not by trying to place himself/herself in the context of the original writer.

Moi takes a different route. She argues that the book deals with sexual politics and views it in harmony of both the sexes. Woolf indeed is aware of the plight of women and the pain they have lived with for ages. In fact, she is extremely wounded on coming across women who are tortured to death by the male-dominated society. For example, since Mrs. Ramsay could not express that she indeed loved Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay paved her way towards death. Men consider women as subordinate. Women were projected inferior because men believed themselves to be superior. Woolf tries to raise some valid question like why were men allowed to take wine whereas women survived on water? Why was there social disequilibrium between both the sexes? How many books have women managed to author in comparison to

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those authored by men? She tries to come with some valid argument regarding this established social codes. Women were thought to be dim witted. Yet there were handful men who respected woman like Goethe. Yet on the other hand there were people like Mussolini who hated them.

Moi on Woolf's vision of androgyny

Woolf's concept of women is subtle and deals with their psychological aspect. Unlike radical feminists who give only one-sided perspective. If someone like Mr. Ramsay vouched upon the inferiority of women, it was to prove his own superiority. He was desperately trying to protect under the grab of anger and unnecessary exaggeration, because that was all that he could have for himself. Life, according to Woolf, for male and female were equally difficult and a gruesome struggle. Both desperately need confidence to survive. In the struggle to keep surviving one tries to belittle the other. Patriarchy justifies its superiority through various means- wealth, or rank, or sex. It proves itself to be better and wiser then rest by indulging in vulgar display of various means it adheres to. Either of these are one of the reasons for his rise to power.

If a woman challenges or wounds a man's vanity, she is labeled as a hot-headed feminist. Woolf opines that for ages women have led the life of looking-glasses where they possess the extra ordinary power of making a man appear twice his usual size. This has added the much required fuel to a man's ego, which helped him build his own concrete world. Woolf insists that apart from its social function, a mirror always results in bringing out violent and heroic activities. It was because of this that both Napoleon and Mussolini championed the idea of inferiority of women, for if women did not remain inferior than men cannot grow.

According to Woolf, demoting women from their rightly justified position helps men psychologically conquer themselves and elevate their sense of self.

Woolf goes on to say, 'For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks.' Showalter calls Woolf's ironical statement as 'wimsy'. She does not consider it a serious statement to label Woolf as a feminist. Yet, Woolf indeed is serious when she claims women are abused by men because it is their instincts which make them brutal and cannot control it. Directed by these over-powering instincts men have chosen to torment women, abuse them and chosen life partners for them (in extension being the creator of women's destinies).

But ironically women always were the perfect subject for poetry. This brings before us the paradox of a woman's life — her poetic transformation and her prosaic reality, her life in everyday space and the fiction that she becomes in creativities. A woman is denied the power to hone her creative prowess yet she remains the fundamental inspiration of poetry and music.

Woolf says in her book:

> A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover. She is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact, she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger.
>
> .... Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

But on a positive note, Woolf says there is nothing for women to feel bad about. She suggests laughing out will help woman to come out of this, but this laugh should be devoid of bitterness. Her laugh should be like George Eliot's who had the audacity to make fun of man's vanities. The other way to get over this repression is to try being comic, because comedy brings out the truth as was done by Jane Austen.

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What Samuel Taylor Coleridge meant by his statement and Shakespeare, earlier showed in his plays, was that an androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than that a single-sexed mind. For Coleridge, there is no distinction between men, birds and beasts; or between great or small. In Shakespeare, daughters are viewed at par with sons. What Coleridge perhaps meant was that an androgynous mind is resonant and porous; it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided. It is a mind – semitransparent. In fact, as Woolf also says, one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as a type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly or woman-manly mind, though it is impossible to say what Shakespeare thought of women. In essence, one should not seek to know what Shakespeare thought of either women or men. He was an integrated mind, not sharply conscious of either sex.

Woolf's vision of androgyny does not bring any call for any sacrifices in man-woman relationship, rather it proposes for a more balanced approach to life and relations. This is way different from Showalter's feminism that tries to segregate the two sexes. It creates a clash and not an accord between the sexes. Woolf reads the problem of the women in her aesthetic way. An exceptionally talented creative genius, someone resembling the quality of Shakespeare, cannot segregate sex exclusively from other aspects of existence. Though it is not easy to become one more Shakespeare in the present day. Even during Woolf's period, the society was as concerned about sex as our own times. Woolf opines that the more women draw attention towards feminine issues, the men become more assertive in their desire to express themselves. Which makes Woolf say that men are 'now writing only with the male side of their brains'.

Works created by Galsworthy and Kipling cannot be appreciated by women because these creations are devoid of suggestive power and without any such power, a book, however effective it might be, otherwise cannot create an impact on mind.

The idea of Woolf has made many feminists consider her to be outdated in approach. Moi is someone who follows Woolf's legacy. Moi is definitely impressed by Woolf's liberal attitude. Showalter points out about the 'impersonal' aspect of *A Room of One's Own.* She accuses Woolf of using multiple narrative voice but Moi counter argues saying it is a positive trait because it provides the readers to have a multiplicity of perspectives. But this attitude of impersonality that Woolf adopts leaves Showalter puzzled and creates confusion in her mind regarding over Woolf's things. The whole text takes a different meaning for Showalter.

Moi speaks about the theoretical premise which conveys the idea that in real life the relationships are existential in nature. She opines that any text is a conglomeration of ideas as experienced by the writer, yet it is successful only when most of the readers are able to relate with it and also the text adds value to its own positioning.

Moi considers Showalter's stance to be wrong, for she (Showalter) demands for a radically different view of women just like Marcia Holly (who was an admirer of

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Showalter's ideas), which is detached from their original humanism. Holly's recreation of a new-age woman appears in the image of a strong and blissful tractor driver. But as Moi points out, feminists like Showalter and Holly don't realise that the new image they are creating (deviating away from the traditional image) is to a certain extent affected by patriarchal ideology. Moi further adds that in the centre of this patriarchal ideology 'man' is situated.

Moi opines, that Showalter's idea to remain distanced from the narrative tropes of a piece of work is like not going through a text at all. For example, to believe that the humans, the masculine half and the feminine half as simple independent entity is to overlook the entire concept of the complete being. This also means to erase away the process of the unconscious that help define our conscious being.

Moi as well as her contemporary Julia Kristeva both are appreciative of Woolf's free spirit. Julia Kristeva says that modern poetry is revolutionary in its ability to use symbolic language to challenge the existing orthodox social structure. These writings are subversive just like sexual or political revolution is for any society.

In her seminal work *Toward Androgyny* published in 1973, Carolyn Heilbrun gave her own understanding of the term androgyny by referring it as a concept of an 'unbounded and hence fundamentally indefinable nature.' Seen from this perspective, Woolf is not a feminist, because under no circumstance a feminist will long for androgyny, because androgyny eliminates the difference between both the sexes. But Moi was a complete and definite deconstructionist. She argued along with Kristeva that any line of thought that asks for the deconstruction of sexual identity is definitely a feminist approach.

Considering the very specific instance of Woolf, Moi opines that probably Woolf's understanding of feminism stopped her from being a part of political activism related to feminist agendas. Moi points out that Woolf in *Three Guineas* exhibits remarkable precision in reflecting upon the problems of liberal as well as radical feminism. The biggest problem lies in the forced segregation of male and the female entity.

After extending her tribute to the deserving Virginia Woolf in her 'Introduction' of *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Moi investigates the complete range of Anglo-American feminist criticism to figure out why it failed. She starts off her analysis by surveying the scenario of feminism in the 1960's. The 1960s was the time when women gained the right to vote. This emancipation in the political sphere armed feminism with a political perspective which was still absent in the Western world.

Betty Friedan came out with her *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. American women became more visible in the public sphere with extending their participation in the civil right movement and registering their protest against the Vietnam War. This combing back of feminism with such a force had its political reasons. History suggests that people like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Antony worked hard to abolish slavery. The twentieth century marked many movements which were political in nature. Anti-war movement made women realize there is a gap between masculine egalitarian promise and their discrimination towards female counterparts.

It is important to mention here that these literary studies were never considered to be of much significance during the early phase of this new movement started by women. This movement was marked by its concern towards the social and political cause and change that followed it.

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Gilbert and Gubar argue that the real identity of the text rests on the anger projected by the novelist which also is their (Gilbert and Gubar) idea of adopting a non-conformist attitude towards patriarchal bias generating a hierarchical divide between text and author. But they fall in their own loopholes as they end up bringing in Edward Said to prove their point.

Moi rightly claims that Anglo-American feminist critics have stayed out of the circle of theory, something that might give the impression of being a masculine territory. Moi points out that this is not as it was since the 1980's. To highlight the phase of change Moi speaks about three writers whom she consideors to be the precursors to the Anglo-American feminist criticism if located from the theoretical perspective.

Annette Kolodny

Moi considers Annette Kolodny as the foremost author to associate with theoretical world among the feminist critics. Moi studies Kolodny's essay 'Some Notes of Defining a "Feminist Literary Criticism"' which came out in print for the first time in *Critical Inquiry* in 1975. Kolodny mentioning about her contribution in the 'notes' section said she took the initiative to bridge the gap between both the worlds and claimed her definition as 'exacting'. She clearly mentions that the study of women's writing is a different segment of study. She initiated a new kind of women comparative study aspect where the uniqueness of women writings were compared and contrasted against male writing. This kind f analysis method is similar to the one that was adopted by Jehlen almost six years after Kolodny came out with her work.

Kolodny goes on to explain that feminist politics is the foundation of feminist critics, but she also agrees that it is difficult to explain the exact components of feminist politics and theory. Moi is skeptic about adhering to such a view because she feels that the plurality that Kolodny is referring to will ultimately produce no result. Moi is definitely not against the politics that the feminist adopt because she knows that without it feminism cannot progress. She definitely supports the debate that run within the feminist politics. But she cannot agree with excess of pluralism that haunts the feminist criticism because she fears this will reduce the impact of feminist criticism.

Kolodny's input to the theoretical debate as per Moi provides negligible attention to the significance of politics in the theoretical scenario. It is not as if Kolodny is blind to the flaws of adopting a neutral approach when it comes to discussing criticism yet she ignores that even criticism carry with them their own political agenda.

Elaine Showalter

Kolodny in her work tries to initiate the process to understand feminism criticism. Showalter takes the process further and delves into deeper aspects of the criticism in her essays 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' (1979) and 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1981). In the first essay, she expresses her views on woman, women as reader and women as author. Showalter distinguishes female as reader under the category of 'feminist critique'. She calls women as author as 'gynocritics'. Feminist critiques deal with texts produced by male writers and investigates it. In gynocritics, Showalter analyses general aspects of literary women which cover areas such as past, genres, psychoanalytic aspect of female authorship etc. Both the ideas can be used to understanding of existing criticism of literature.

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Showalter opines that if we create a new feminist poetics and then we study the way women were represented by women we will end up understanding what male point of view and not realize what women went through.

This lack of information about women makes Showalter ask for developing gynocriticism which would mean a specific branch for the study of women's witing so that women experience can be understood. Despite her genuine urge Moi points out that Showalter's traditional humanism approach will not bring out the ideal experience that she is trying to investigate, rather it is going to reinstall the patriarchal values that she is opposing.

In the second 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', Showalter progresses in the similar territory as her previous essay. Here she analyses the familiar topic employing four different parameters — biological, linguistic, psychoanalysis and cultural criticism. At the starting of her essay she begins to wonder if feminist criticism at all should deal with theory. Thosuhg she seems to be slightly daunted with the idea of theorizing at that is a male domain she nonetheless thinks it to be a good idea to theorise. Though, as Moi points out Showalter definitely maintains a distinction between 'feminist critique' or feminist reading and 'gynocriticism'.

This, Moi feels, acts as a hindrance for gynocriticism. Showalter seems to be caught up in the battle of theory. She says 'too much theoretical study prevents us from achieving a close and extensive knowledge of women's texts' yet at the same time despite her efforts she is unable to prevent male influence of academics. It is also true that her aim was to create a distinct discipline for women and not to eliminate al the existing disciplines. By reading women's text in absence of theory would be like imposing another form of rule which would be dictated by women and not men.

Check Your Progress

3. Why is *Sexual/ Textual Politics* important?
4. What is Moi's contribution to theoretical world?
5. Why is Moi interested in French feminism?
6. Who does Moi gives credit for taking an assertive political approach to things?
7. What is *Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literature Theory* known for?
8. Does Woolf's vision of androgyny call for any sacrifices?
9. What in Showalter impresses Moi?
10. What does Woolf do with words?
11. Kolodny's input to the theoretical debate as per Moi is flawed. Why?

2.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- One of the major contributions of Anglo-American feminist criticism, which spread its wing in the 1980s, lay in its ability to figure out and carry out a gendered literary criticism encompassing a multitude of perspective.
- Feminist criticism was not limited to a mere critical approach. It also moved into the broader aspect of literature taking into consideration the creative productions in the form of biographies, autobiographies, fiction and histories.
- It was Toril Moi lectures at the University Oxford which took the shape of Sexual/Textual Politics.
- Toril Moi's Sexual/Textual Politics (1985) is neatly divided in to two prominent sections. One section deals with 'Anglo-American Feminist Criticism' and the other one deals with 'French Feminist Theory'.
- Anglo-American feminist criticism is more of an attempt to understand the sociological dimensions of literature written for women or construction of gender roles (especially female) through various existing social boundaries.
- Moi tries to bring into light the politics of canonizing certain texts over the others. She feels that the canonical texts are always selected by 'male bourgeois critics' who select male writings and pass it on to future generations.
- Moi is more inclined towards French feminism in their effort to theories matters. But her investigation of Anglo-American feminist body of work identifies it to be following a Lukacsian approach to present various social realities though deeply steeped within the circumscribed space of patriarchal ideology.
- Feminist literary criticism is cannot be united under one umbrella. Its beauty lies in its difference and its variety.
- Though it is not amusing to see many male critics considering Woolf as 'a frivolous Bohemian and a negligible Bloomsbury aesthete', yet Moi intends to explore deeper to understand why many female Anglo-American feminist rejected Woolf, the 'great feminist writer', as Moi puts it.
- Showalter puts in an effort to analyse Woolf in the first chapter of her work , where she invests a significant amount of space discussing Woolf's A Room of One's Own.
- Showalter, while discussing Woolf's concept of androgyny, i.e. possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics, is very critical of her. She writes it off as 'a flight away from a troubled feminism'.
- Woolf's concept of women is subtle and deals with their psychological aspect. Unlike radical feminists who give only one-sided perspective.
- Woolf's vision of androgyny does not bring any call for any sacrifices in man-woman relationship, rather it proposes for a more balanced approach to life and relations.
- Moi speaks about the theoretical premise which conveys the idea that in real life the relationships are existential in nature. She opines that any text is a conglomeration of ideas as experienced by the writer, yet it is successful only when most of the readers are able to relate with it and also the text adds value to its own positioning.
- Moi considers Annette Kolodny as the foremost author to associate with theoretical world among the feminist critics.
- In gynocritics, Showalter analyses general aspects of literary women which cover areas such as past, genres, psychoanalytic aspect of female authorship etc. Both the ideas can be used to understanding of existing criticism of literature.
- Moi feels Showalter seems to be caught up in the battle of theory.

2.5 KEY TERMS

- **Sexual politics**: It is the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex.
- **Gynocriticism**: It is the historical study of women writers as a distinct literary tradition.
- **Anglo-American feminist criticism:** It is an attempt to understand the sociological dimensions of literature written for women or construction of gender roles through various existing social boundaries.
- **Modernist poems:** It is a form of writing in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have managed to break through the strict rational defenses of conventional meaning.

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- **Deconstructive form of writing:** It engages with and thereby exposes the two-faced nature of a discourse.

2.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Toril Moi edited The Kristeva Reader in 1986 and French Feminist Thought in 1987.
2. Moi wrote *What is a Woman?* It was her seminal work which earned her the Guggenheim Fellowship (2001) and a fellowship at Harvard University (2002-03).
3. The book *Sexual/Textual Politics* throws a clear light on the seminal aspects of the present day feminist criticism and gives a new prospective.
4. Moi's contribution lies in highlighting the reiteration of female victimization by the patriarchal society through their writing.
5. Moi is more inclined towards French feminism in their effort to theorize matters.
6. Moi gives credit to Anglo-American feminist critics for taking an assertive political approach to things.
7. *Sexual/Textual Politics*: *Feminist Literature Theory* is known for its critical commentary on mainly of Anglo-American feminist criticism, particularly of its radical politics developed at the cost of the aesthetics of politics.
8. Woolf's vision of androgyny does not bring any call for any sacrifices in man-woman relationship, rather it proposes for a more balanced approach to life and relations.
9. Moi is impressed by Woolf's liberal attitude.
10. Woolf's does not pretend to erase differences, but uses her words to bring them together to form a coherent unity.
11. Kolodny's input to the theoretical debate as per Moi provides negligible attention to the significance of politics in the theoretical scenario.

2.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a brief note on concept of androgyny.
2. What is Moi opinion on Showalter's idea to remain distanced from the narrative tropes?
3. What is Moi's opinion of Woolf in *Three Guineas?*
4. What is Carolyn Heilbrun's notion of feminism?
5. What is Moi's opinion on Annette Kolodny's work?
6. Write a note on 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' by Showalter.
7. What does Toril Moi assert in her discussions?
8. Who are the main people considered for discussion in the *Sexual/Textual Politics*?

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Long-Answer Questions

1. What are the positive aspects of Showalter's work?
2. What does Moi criticize in Showalter's work?
3. Write a detailed answer on various aspect of Showalter's work.
4. What is so significant about Elain Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own?*
5. Describe the Anglo-American feminist criticism.
6. Elucidate the main themes of Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*.
7. Summarize the feminist struggle, as reflected by Julia Kristeva.
8. Briefly compare Showalter and Woolf.
9. Describe Woolf's opinion about women.

2.8 FURTHER READING

Moi, Toril; *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York, 2002.

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UNIT 3 VIRGINIA WOOLF

Structure

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Unit Objectives
3.2 About the Author
3.3 *A Room of One's Own*
  3.3.1 Critical Appreciation
3.4 *Mrs. Dalloway*
  3.4.1 City: A Symbol of Trajectories
  3.4.2 The Narrative
3.5 Summary
3.6 Key Terms
3.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.8 Questions and Exercises
3.9 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf is considered one of the earliest modern writers. From an early age she was acquinted with literature and art. Her parents were renowned personalities from the field. Though she never had any formal education, Woolf went on to produce a number of literary work and even delivered lectures at Cambridge University. Virginia's marriage to Leonard Woolf resulted in the founding of the Hogarth Press which went on to publish not only her works but also works of authors like T. S. Eliot and Laurens van der Post. She committed suicide by drowning on 28 March 1941.

This unit will study the life and work of Virginia Woolf and critically assess two of her works — *A Room of One's Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway*.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of Virginia Woolf
- Summarize the theme of *A Room of One's Own*
- Describe Woolf's creative genius by analysing her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*
- Explain Woolf's significance in the literary world
- Evaluate *Mrs. Dalloway* critically

3.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Virginia Woolf was born on 25 January 1882 at 22 Hyde Park Gate in London. Her father Sir Leslie Stephen was a founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was also a renowned historian, author, critic and biographer. Her mother Julia Prinsep Duckworth (née Jackson) was a renowned beauty and modeled for the pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones. It was a second marriage for

both her parents. Consequently Virginia Woolf was surrounded by three sets of siblings: those from her parents' first marriages, respectively, and her own biological siblings. Her father's professional commitments meant that the influences of Victorian literary society surrounded the children in their impressionable years. They had interactions with Henry James, George Henry Lewes, and James Russell Lowes among others.

She was home schooled as a child. Along with her sister Vanessa she was taught the classics and English literature from the extensive Stephens' library at home. Her brothers, however, went to Cambridge, a fact she would resent later in life. Her memories of her childhood years find expression in her work. The Godrevy Lighthouse near the family's summer home Talland House plays a central role in the novel *To the Lighthouse*.

Her mother's death in 1895, followed by her sister Stella's demise in 1897, catapulted Virginia Woolf into a nervous breakdown. Despite this trauma she successfully completed courses, some at degree level, in Greek, Latin, German and history at the Ladies' Department of King's College London. Her second nervous breakdown was occasioned by her father's demise in 1904. This was so severe that she had to be institutionalized briefly. Many biographers attribute the sexual abuse Virginia Woolf suffered at the hands of her half brothers George and Gerald Duckworth as the cause of these recurring bouts of depression. She mentions them herself in *A Sketch of the Past* and *22 Hyde Park Gate*.

Their father's death and the subsequent depression caused the sisters to sell their house and move to a new residence; 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury. Here they came into contact with many intellectuals like Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Rupert Brooke, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Duncan Grant, Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, David Garnett, and Roger Fry. Together they came to be known as the Bloomsbury Group. The group's ethos encouraged a liberal approach to sexuality. Woolf indulged in this with Vita Sackville-West. Her experiences are recorded in the novel *Orlando*. In fact, Sackville-West's son called the novel the 'most charming love letter in literature.'

In 1906, Virginia lost her brother Thoby. The incident broke her mentally. This was just the beginning of a series of mental problem that plagued Woolf's life. The following year, Woolf's sister Vanessa Stephen married Clive Bell. In 1912 Virginia married Leonard Woolf. She called this a 'complete' marriage. Around this time she completed her first novel *The Voyage Out*, which was published in 1918. The same year Hogarth Press published Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude* (1918) followed by T. S. Eliot's *Poems* in 1919 and *The Waste Land* in 1923. Virginia's next work, *Night and Day,* was published in 1919. Based in London, the novel sounds rather realistic and juxtaposes the lives of two friends, Mary and Katherine. In 1922 she wrote *Jacob's Room,* which was based on the life and death of her brother Thoby. With the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), Virginia Woolf consolidated her position as a modernist writer.

Woolf wrote two biographies *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933). The former was dedicated to a close androgynous friend, V. Sakville-West and the latter narrates the romance between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning as seen from the point of view of Elizabeth's pet dog (Cannine). The experimental work, *Between the Acts* (1941) was published posthumously.



Fig. 3.1 *Virginia and Leonard Woolf*

The world of literature considers Woolf a major proponent of the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique. Her contribution to the feminist critics has been rather significant. Her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and its sequel *Three Guineas* (1938) are now acknowledged as the most important creations in this area. Virginia Woolf drowned herself during one of her nervous attacks.

This was brought upon by many things; she was depressed by the lukewarm reception of her biography of Roger Fry. The destruction of her home during the Blitz and the onset of the Second World War only worsened her malady. Her completing the manuscript of her last novel she realized that she could not write any more; hence there was no incentive left to live anymore and she committed suicide.

Work

Woolf's first professional piece was a journalistic piece on Haworth, the home of the Bronte family, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1900. Most of her work was published by her own publication house, the Hogarth. In 1925 she published *Mrs. Dalloway* and followed it with *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The latter novel deals among other things with the theme of the creative process. It also explores the passage of time, and how women are forced by society to allow men to take emotional strength from them. She was invited to Newham College and Girton College, the only women's colleges at the time to deliver a series of lectures on women and fiction in 1928. These lectures were published in book form in 1929 and were called *A Room of One's Own.* Since their publication they have become synonymous with feminist

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criticism. In 1931 she published *The Waves*, a novel whose narrative technique is akin to a prose poem. She wrote *Flush: A Biography* (1933) from the viewpoint of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel. *Between the Acts* (1941) is written in verse and is her last work. It encompasses almost all the themes she spent her life writing about: the transformation of life through art and sexual ambivalence. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) delineate the difficulties female writers face because the reins of legal and economic power in the hands of men. This power implies that they are in the position to make decision for women concerning all areas of their welfare without consulting them. She argues that such a position further weakens the female sex. The situation can only be altered when women challenge the status quo and work actively to thwart and change it.

Characteristics of her work

Virginia Woolf was an innovator and experimented with stream of consciousness in her works. In her novels the narrative is refracted and sometimes collapses beneath the characters' receptive consciousness. What is interesting about the narrative is that it is extremely uneventful and commonplace to begin with, nothing out of the ordinary happens in the novels. Her narrative style is lyrical and projects a world full of auditory and visual impressions. In other words her narrative style lifts the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. According to many critics Woolf's work is marked by an attempt to negotiate with the Bloomsbury group, especially its tendency towards doctrinaire rationalism.

3.3 *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*

A Room of One's Own is a comprehensive composition by Woolf. Initially published on 24 October 1929, the composition was based on a sequence of lectures she gave at Newnham College and Girton College, the two women's colleges at Cambridge University. Although this comprehensive composition actually make use of an imaginary storyteller and storyline to look at women, both, as writers of and characters in fiction, the text for the delivery of the series of lectures, named 'Women and Fiction' and consequently the essay, are regarded as non-fiction. The composition is by and large viewed as women-oriented and is well-known in its argument for both, a factual and outlining space for women writers in a literary practice governed by.

Chapter 1

The chapter opens with Woolf saying she has been asked to give a lecture on women and fiction. She tells her audience that the topic made her think on subject matters from a woman's viewpoint: what was it that made a uniquely female experience, what were the salient features of the fiction women themselves wrote and how was it different from the creative output of men when they talked of women in their works. She goes on to say that she could not come to any definitive conclusion in her ramblings. She did, however, come to one conclusion and that was 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'. To further explain her point she decides to use the fictional narrator Mary Belton as her alter ego.

She goes on the say that a week ago she was sitting by the riverside and thinking about the topic. However, her thoughts were not very productive. She compares them to the measly catch of a fisherman who throws the half grown fish back into the water since it is useless to him. However she is excited by the simile and rushes over the lawns of Oxbridge to go to the library. However she is stopped and told that she cannot be there since only 'fellows' and 'scholars' are allowed. She forgets whatever she was thinking about at this interruption. Her thought changes direction and she wonders as to the creative genius of the literary giants like Milton and Shakespeare. She decides to research their creative minds in the library. However, she is denied entry again: women can enter only if they are accompanied by a scholar or if they can produce a Letter of Introduction written by one of them. She is angered by this denial and refuses to enter the library again. While leaving she passes the chapel and notices a service about to begin. However she doesn't contemplate entering: she would only be denied entry. At this point she looks at the wealth that was consumed to create these magnificent structures and realizes men can create these because they have money.

She goes to lunch and sees a huge variety laid out before her: soles, partridges, a delicious dessert, and excellent wine. The relaxed atmosphere and the food inspire 'rational intercourse' in the conversation. At this point she sees a tailless minx cat and feels as is something is lacking in the scene. When she goes back to Fernham College, where she is staying as a guest, she has a plain dinner. The food is starkly different from that served in Oxbridge: it comprises of plain soup, mediocre beef, vegetables, potatoes, bad custard, prunes, biscuits cheese and water. She starts a conversation with her friend Mary Seton. As the conversation meanders she thinks of kings and magnates and their contribution to the field of education. Looking at the bare food and surroundings she is reminded of the opulence she saw in the morning. The women wonder what lies beneath their building and Mary talks of the perpetual shortage of funds required to run the college.

Their strained circumstances make the women realize that their own mothers did not leave them nay monetary legacy; had they done so they would have been financially independent and could have lived a life of luxury as enjoyed by their male counterparts in Oxbridge. However, as they discuss this the narrator realizes two things: one, women never had ownership of their own wealth and it passed from father to husband. The situation had changed only in the last 48 years. She also realizes that their mothers would have had gone into business to earn financial independence and there is a real possibility that they would not have been born. In other words it seems a Hobson's choice. On the way back to her inn, the narrator ponders over issues of wealth and poverty and how the former is assigned to men and the latter to women. This in turn leads her to think of the issue as to whether this has any impact on the literary tradition or the lack of it when it comes to creative writing by women. This is her last thought as she goes to sleep.

Chapter 2

The next day the narrator goes to the British Museum in London in an effort to get some answers to questions regarding men, women, creativity and wealth, that had occurred to her in her ramblings. When she reaches the hallowed halls of the Museum she realizes that there is no dearth of books on women. However, she is dismayed to learn that most of these are books about women, but written by men. In other words the male mind has been constructing the approved female mind and is playing it for consumption for a long time. In contrast she finds that there are very few books on men written by women. She selects some of these books randomly and studies them in order to get a satisfactory answer to the question as to why women are poor. Trying

Check Your Progress

1. What caused Virginia Woolf to commit suicide?
2. What was Woolf's first professional piece?
3. Which of her works delineate the difficulties female writers face because the reins of legal and economic power in the hands of men?
4. When was *The Voyage Out* published?
5. Which press did the Woolf couple establish?

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to come up with an answer for why women are poor, she locates a multitude of other topics on women in the books, and a contradictory array of men's opinions on women. She is frustrated in her endeavors and imagines that these tomes expounding the inferiority of women have been written by a dour, angry looking professor. It is at this point that she realizes that it is the professor's anger towards women that is making her angry as well. She realizes her reaction would have been different if he had written about women 'dispassionately.' She returns the books since she finds them useless. When her anger dissipates she is left wondering as to why these men are all angry towards women.

During lunch while reading the newspaper she is struck with the realization that every news item and opinion in the paper underlines the fact that England is a patriarchal society. She realizes that men hold all the power and money in their hand. They are in the position to make decisions and the decisions they make are those that are in their interests. She wonders as to why men are angry when they hold so much power in their hands. One reason that she can think of is that they are fearful that their power may be snatched from them and this fear causes anger in them. She qualifies her statement when she realizes that men are angry only in their interactions with women. This leads her to the realization that when men claim women to be inferior to them, they are in effect laying claim to their own superiority. The narrator acknowledges that both the genders find life difficult. She believes that the only way to make some sense of the disappointments of life is to live it with a modicum of self-confidence. It is easier to generate this self-confidence if one considers the other to be inferior. Her belief is that male self-confidence comes from their belief that women are inferior. Such a formulation immediately raises questions about the supposed innate inferiority of women and proves it false. The narrator states that throughout history, women have served as models of inferiority that enlarge the superiority of men: 'Looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.' She extrapolates her argument to suggest that men become angry and violent with women whenever the latter criticizes them because such a criticism directly challenges their inferior status when compared to men.

At this point the narrator is grateful for her inheritance of 500 pounds a year which she receives from her aunt. She recalls that before she received this largesse she had to rely on menial degrading work to earn money. This work made her feel like a slave with no soul. Her inheritance serves as an antidote to this feeling of powerlessness. She further goes on to say that her money has changed the tenor of her relationship with men: since she does not rely on them for her well-being she does not fear or resent them anymore. She also goes on to point out a basic difference between men and women. She suggests that while she was happy ad satisfied to be able to feel free and was happy to be able to 'think of things in themselves,' men do not respond to money and power in a similar way. They are never satisfied with the power or money they have and are constantly looking for ways to enhance it. On her way back home, she witnesses men working on the street. She ends the day's journey in the hope and anticipation that a day will soon come when women will no longer be considered the weaker sex in need of 'protection' and will have access to the same jobs and opportunities as men.

Chapter 3

This part of the essay begins with the narrator expressing her disappointment at failing to draw any conclusion as to why women are poorer than men. While she was

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wondering about this question her attention is drawn to the relative lack of female writers in the most fertile period of literary creation in British history. She suspects that this disjunction exists because there is a connection between living conditions and creative works: it is difficult to be creative if one is living in difficult and strained conditions. When she studies the history of the age she realizes that even though there were strong women during the age they did not have many occasions to express this strength of character simply because they did not have any rights. However she cannot arrive at any firm answer and her query remains incomplete.

At this point she recalls the bishop's statement that Shakespeare is the greatest creative genius of his age. His recognition leads her to conjecture as to what would have been the fate of his equally talented sister, if he had had one. This leads her to comparing the lives of Shakespeare and his mythical sister Judith. She realizes that while Shakespeare would have gone to school, married, gone to work in the theatre where he would have met interesting people and made a name for himself; his sister's life would have been radically different. Despite possessing an equal talent not only would it not have been acknowledged, in fact steps would have been taken to actively stifle it. She would not have been allowed to go to school and would have been forced to marry before she was willing to do so. Instead she would have been forced to become pregnant. The narrator conjectures that these disappointments in life would have so broken her spirit that she would have committed suicide. In other words there was no place for a female Shakespeare in the time. Despite this she agrees with the bishop's statement that no woman of the time could have been a comparable genius simply because a genius likes Shakespeare's is not born among laboring, uneducated, servile people. Another point she makes that the age must have witnessed female talent of some sort, even if it was not of the caliber of Shakespeare. The tragedy is that even if this creative voice succeeded in surmounting obstacles and was successful in creating a literary work it would have survived as an anonymous piece.

This leads her to explore the question of what is the desirable state for the mind to reach the optimum creative level. She realizes that creativity is a very difficult process. The artist has to face a perpetual scarcity of privacy and money; at the same time the world is indifferent to the writer's ability or inability to write. The situation is even direr for women since the indulgence granted to male authors is denied to them. The world is indifferent to the female writers' creative desires and impulses which in time are subdued if not totally killed by an unsympathetic public. She believes that the male gaze is unsympathetic to the female desire for creativity simply because it gives him another item to express his superiority. However, she believes that the truly creative mind rises above such mundane matters and is 'incandescent.' It filters out personal 'grudges and spites and antipathies' to present the distilled essential human experience. Her argument here is that for all its supposed superiority a lot of the work the male mind produces is worthless since it is inspired by a desire to prove superiority over women. Such a work is not 'free and unimpeded' like Shakespeare's is.

Chapter 4

The narrator continues her search for an unimpeded creative mind during the Elizabethan Age. She fails to find any creative female voice. The only candidate she can find is Lady Winchilsea. However she discounts her because according to the narrator her writing is marred by fear and hatred. She believes that if she had not been consumed by these negative emotions she had the potential of writing brilliant verse. She finds the same drawback in the writings of Duchess Margaret of Newcastle. She

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believes that Margaret too would have been a better poet had she lived in the modern age. She finds that the letters of Dorothy Osborne another Elizabethan to reveal a similar insecurity. Though brilliant she was an insecure writer since looked for affirmation not within herself but from the patriarchal society. As long as women do this they will never succeed in creating a viable creative piece.

She considers Aphra Behn a milestone in the history of women's literature. She is the first middle class female voice who was forced to enter the public realm to earn money after the death of her husband. The narrator considers the first female writer who successfully achieved 'freedom of the mind' and surpasses even her own innate skill as an artist in her work. She further goes on to present Behn as a model younger women can use in their literary journeys. Though she did not influence her immediate descendents since being recognized as an author was considered nearly sacrilegious, nevertheless she did influence women writers from the 18th century onwards. Another importance of Aphra Behn lies in the fact that she was living proof that monetary stability made one immune to snide comments ad unflattering statements which anyway decreased as a writer became financially successful.

The fact that nineteenth century women writing primarily produced novels, in spite of the fact that women began with poetry writing, confuses the narrator of the essay. She wonders why all women writers of the nineteenth century chose to write novels. She thinks about the four famous novelist of the said period — George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, and Jane Austen — and concludes that they had little in common apart from the fact that they all were childless. The narrator tries to speculate regarding their choice of novel form. All the four mentioned novelists belonged to the middle class, which meant the lack of privacy. Perhaps, it was this lack of privacy that prompted them to choose novel form, for they might have seen it as harder form than poetry or plays in the climate of middle class distraction. For example, it is a known fact that once when Austen was distracted in her family's sitting room whilst writing, she hid the manuscript. Another reason could have been that these writers might have found the novel form an absolute fit for her talents, given the customary training of nineteenth century women in the art of social observation.

The narrator does not find any sign in the work of Austen that might suggest that her work was affected due to her lack of privacy or her personal hatred or fear. She writes: her novels are 'without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching'. The narrator suggests that Charlotte Bronte might have had more genius than Austen but the reason that she is not able to write with the same incandescence is that her works bear the shadows of her own personal hatred and wounds. The narrator thinks that amongst the four mentioned novelist, Charlotte Bronte could have gained most from some travel, experience, and a better financial situation.

While talking about diverse effects of a novel on different readers, the narrator comes to talks about the integrity of a novel, which she thinks is the quality that makes a novel universal in nature. She defines integrity as 'the conviction that' a novelist 'gives one that this is the truth'. According to the narrator, integrity not only holds the entire novel together, but also makes the novel exciting and interesting. She then comes to the question of whether the sex of the writer affects the artistic integrity.

Considering the works of Bronte, the narrator thinks it certainly did. She writers: 'She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance. She remembered that she had been starved of her proper due of experience.

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...Her imagination swerved from indignation and we felt it swerve.' In Bronte's case, the gender residue leads not only anger, but also to fear, pain and ignorance. She asserts that Bronte was not the only novelist whose work was affected by her own personal grievances: 'One has only to skim those old forgotten novels and listen to the tone of voice in which they are written to divine that the writer was meeting criticism; she was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation. ...She was thinking of something other than the thing itself.' The only two female novelists, according to her, who successfully maintained their artistic integrity in the face of misunderstanding, criticism, and opposition are Austen and Emily Bronte.

The narrator argues that tradition had masculine values, such as war, as the subject of novels and other forms of literature, instead of more feminine ones, like character studies in a drawing room setting. And because of such tradition the women writers of nineteenth century had to adapt by adjustments and compromises in order to escape the inevitable criticism of their works being insubstantial. The compromises affected their works, for they had to deviate from their original ideas to suit the critical and traditional demands. The narrator thinks that it is no less than a miracle that in such an uncongenial climate, writers like Austen and Emile Bronte were able to survive and thrive as a writer.

The greatest impediment for the women writers of the nineteenth century was the nonexistence of any literary tradition to follow, for they could not possibly have followed the existing male literary tradition. They might have had a little help from the male writers, but the narrator says that 'the weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully'. 'There was no common sentence' for these women writers to follow. The masculine sentence of male writers like Johnson could not have done much to help her. .'

According to the narrator, Austen successfully created her own 'natural, shapely sentence' which enabled her to articulate her deeper expressions, unlike Charlotte Bronte and Eliot, who could not successfully deal with the lack of feminine sentences. The narrator thinks that this could have been another reason for their inclination towards the novel form, for it was the only literary form 'young enough to be soft in their hands'. She predicts that in future women writers will move onto other forms of literature, for they have poetry inside them that is still unexpressed. This does not mean that women will begin writing poems. They may find some 'new vehicle' to express what resides within them still unexpressed.

Chapter 5

The narrator shifts her focus on the book shelve which contains books by her contemporary male and female writer on wide variety of topics. The number of books produced by women is nearly as much as men, and interestingly they are not only novels; they cover all sorts of subjects. She feels that women could not possibly have touched these subjects a generation ago. The narrator feels that women have grown past novels to express themselves. In order to assess the development in the contemporary women's writing, she picks a novel called 'Life's Adventure or some such title', by Mary Carmichael. This is the first novel of Carmichael. The narrator sees this young writer as a direct descendent of other female writers like Lady Winchilsea and Aphra Behn. She goes on to assess her novel to see that how this young female writer has inherited from the women writers of the past, both their 'characteristics and restrictions'.

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The narrator finds the prose uneven and not as good as Austen's. She writes: 'The smooth gliding of sentence after sentence was interrupted. Something tore, something scratched.' She then corrects her previous remark and says that Carmichael is attempting something very different from that of Austen and that there is nothing common between the two writers. She then says that perhaps the unevenness of her prose style is a break away from the 'flowery' writing style that is so characteristic of women's writing. But she cautions that the breaking is good if it is done for the purpose of creating: 'First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating.'

As the narrator continues her reading, she comes across a simple sentence – 'Chloe liked Olivia'. The narrator is surprised. She considers this to be a critical moment in the Carmichael's innovation as a writer. How rarely, she realizes, has literature viewed women in relation to other women. For centuries women in literature have been seen only in relation to other men, and that is why the narrator finds the idea of friendship between two women as something very innovating and groundbreaking. The romance, says the narrator, in the life of a woman has a role to play, but a minor one.

The problem arises when the writers have their fictional women characters concern excessively about it, for it is this excessive concern with romance that results in their portrayals as either beautiful and good or depraved and horrific: 'Hence, perhaps, the peculiar nature of woman in fiction; the astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror; her alternations between heavenly goodness and hellish depravity— for so a lover would see her as his love rose or sank, was prosperous or unhappy.' Such an attitude towards the women characters in fiction changed by the nineteenth century, and the women characters grew more complex in novels and other forms of literature, but the narrator still holds that both men and women are limited in their knowledge about the opposite sex.

The narrator continues to read Carmichael's novel to find that the women characters in the novel are not confined in the limitation of their house, and that they have interests and pursuit outside the home. Both Chloe and Olivia have work in a laboratory. This little fact greatly changes the dynamics of their friendship. The narrator speculates about the significance of this detail and how important a transition this little detail could bring about, 'for if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been'.

The narrator contemplates on the destituteness of literature if men were perceived only in relation to the women. She firmly believes that a little more genius in her work, and Carmichael's book will have a significant place in the history of women's literature. She continues reading the novel and come to a scene that has both the women in it. The narrator reflects that it is a 'sight that has never been seen since the world began.' She has grown very fond and hopeful for the Carmichael's descriptions of the complexities and female mind, and it is this hope that makes her realize that she has betrayed her original aim, i.e. not to praise her own sex. She acknowledges that in spite of whatever genius or greatness they may possess, women have not yet made much of mark in the world when compared to the achievements of men. But still, the narrator thinks that all the great men in history received 'some stimulus, some renewal or creative power' from the women, something that they could not possibly have received from other men. She asserts that there is a vast difference in the creativity of men and women, and 'It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how we should manage with one only?'

The narrator is of the opinion that 'merely as an observer', Carmichael has much to do. She will have to explorer the lives of 'courtesan' and 'harlot' who, for a long time, have been stereotyped by the male writers. The narrator, however, expresses her fear that while writing about these subjects controversial in nature, Carmichael will be self-conscious. While writing about the countless women, whose lives are still not recorded, Carmichael will have to resist the anger against men. As the narrator continues to read her novel, she feels that even though Carmichael's writing bears no traces of anger or fear, she is 'no more than a clever girl'. The narrator feels in a century or so, with a room of her own and a little money, Carmichael will evolve as better writer than she is now.

Chapter 6

In the last chapter the narrator is left wondering if her thoughts regarding the differences between men and women have had a negative impact on her view of the two sexes. She sees a young couple get into a taxi and there unity soothes her. There unity forces her to question as what 'unity of the mind' actually means especially since it keeps changing. Remembering the couple in the taxi, she concludes that this unity could also mean that the two are in 'complete satisfaction and happiness' and are living in harmony. This leads her to the conclusion that what Coleridge meant by a creative mind being 'androgynous' is that it does not think as male or female. His belief was that the androgynous mind does not think in terms of gender. The narrator explains this when she says that the 'androgynous mind transmits emotion without impediment it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.' She considers Shakespeare to be the perfect example of such an androgynous mind and rues the fact that such minds are not found in the present age.

She believes the Suffrage campaign for the women's vote provoked men's defensiveness over their own sex. To prove this point she reads a novel by a respected male writer. She notes that though the writing is strong and clear it betrays a bias against women. She notes that he protests 'against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority.' This is destructive since it prevents the representation of women as viable creatures capable of expression in their own right. She uses his argument to state that only a truly androgynous mind can foster 'perpetual life' in its reader's mind. She finds both male and female writers at fault in this and posits the idea that as long a sexual identity and a sexual bias permeates a text the writer and the writing is not free and will not be 'fertilized.' In other words there is a dire need in both sexes to rise above the self-consciousness of gender in their works.

The narrator says that women's suffrage campaign to gain the right to vote incited the men to be more defensive against their own sex. To illustrate further, she chooses a respected male author's novel to read. She points out the novel betrays a sense of bias against women, though she acknowledges that the writing is strong and clear. She highlights that in order to protests 'against the equality of the other sex,' he asserts the superiority of his own sex. According to the narrator, such an attitude is destructive, for it does not allow women to be represented as capable of expressing in their own right. She takes his own argument back to him in order to assert that it takes

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a true androgynous mind to further 'perpetual life' in the minds of the readers. She argues that both male and female writers should be blamed for this, and continues with the idea that there is no possibility for the writer and the writing to be free and 'fertilized' as long as the sexual identity and sexual bias continues to influence a text.

At this point in the text, Virginia Woolf takes over the narrative voice. She anticipates and responds to the two possible criticism of the narrator's voice. First, she points that it was not a mistake that's he did not express any opinions regarding the relative merits of the two genders, it was a deliberate decision, for such a judgment is neither possible nor desirable. Second objection that may come from the reader is that she excessively emphasized the importance of thing material in nature, while underplaying the role of mind, which is perfectly capable of overcoming poverty and lack of privacy. To respond to this objection she cites an argument of a professor claiming that only three amongst the best poets of the last century were well educated, and all but Keats was fairly well off. She asserts that without material freedom one cannot possibly imagine to have intellectual freedom, and without that creation of great poetry is impossible. Women who have been less fortunate as far as the material things are concerned, have not yet produced anything to be called as great. She writes:

> Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. . . . Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own.

She then talks about her position on women's writing, and explains why she consider it to be important. She says that she is an avid reader, and of lately she has been disappointed by the writings that are masculine in nature. Besides, she believes that a good writer are good human beings, who are more close to reality than anyone else, and through their writings they can communicate this sense of reality to the readers of their works. She asks her readers to 'Think of things in themselves,' and write not only in the genre of fiction but in all kinds of genre. She urges her readers to remember what men have thought of women. She acknowledges that in spite of the various opportunities that presented themselves to the young women in the audience, they have taken but few steps ahead. But she is not disappointed, and asserts that Judith Shakespeare still lives in all women, and with little financial freedom and privacy, she will soon be reborn.

3.3.1 Critical Appreciation

A Room of One's Own (1929) is an extended essay by Woolf. In the essay she employs a fictional narrator and narrative to explore women in their role as writers of fiction and as characters in it. The title of the essay focuses on the author's need to create art and her need for poetic license. She also examines the question as to whether women can actually produce a viable piece of art. The central premise of the essay, which the title further exemplifies, is that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'. In other words, it is the lack of independent financial resources and not an inability to create viable art that prevents women from creating it. It is not a woman's limitations but the limitations imposed on her from outside that prevent her from creating art. Here it should be pointed out that while Woolf never received a formal education, here audience was getting precisely such an education. So her purpose in the essay becomes manifold: on the one hand she wants her audience to understand the significance of the education they are receiving and not waste it; she also wants them to be conscious of the burden they carry vis a vis other women who are not present in the university with them; and she also wants them to realize that their education and freedom can easily be taken from them and so wants them to work to prevent such a thing from happening.

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The essay is a partly fictionalized narrative that led her to the belief that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.' The dramatic setting of the essay is that Woolf has been invited to speak on the topic of Women and Fiction. She creates a fictional narrator; the four Mary's who dramatize the process she took before she arrived at this conclusion.

The fictional narrator starts her exploration by delineating the different educational and material experiences of both men and women. She then talks of her experiences researching the British Library only to find that it is the male voice that presents the authoritative female experience. She also shares another discovery: most of these experiences are written in anger with an aim to control if not silence the subversive female voice. Another discovery she makes is that the female voice and persona is absent from history: it is almost as if women do not exist in the history. She uses this absence to justify her project of creating her own female history of the world. When she tries to do so she realizes that history is unforgiving to women. She uses the fictional character of Judith Shakespeare to prove this point. The intelligent woman faces a tragic future simply because she cannot reconcile her limited constraining reality to her unrealized potential. The fictional narrator then travels further into time to re-create a feminine canon which any aspiring authoress can draw inspiration from. When she does this she realizes that very few writers are expounding a truly female voice and experience and an only these need to be emulated. Then the narrator goes on to survey her contemporaries and finds them wanting. The essay concludes with the fictional narrator expounding her audience to build on the tradition they have been bequeathed and to enrich it further.

In the essay Woolf argues that women be granted a literal and figurative space as legitimate writers within a male dominated literary tradition. In other words she stakes claim for the acknowledgement of female writers and their creative endeavors. The ideas propounded by the essay were revolutionary for their time, especially if we consider the fact that while men were encouraged to forge their own path in life, women were expected to do nothing more than support their men in this effort. The essay verbalizes the dissatisfaction and resistance to this discriminatory patriarchal system. In the essay she states: 'Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, and no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.'

In the essay she insists the only way to ensure independence was having access to one's own money, i.e. money for which one did not have to give explanations to anybody. Since she spent her life on the 500 pounds per annum she received as inheritance from an aunt; she postulated that this was the amount necessary to achieve financial freedom. In the essay she asks the question 'What effect has poverty on fiction?' Her answer is that 'Intellectual freedom depends on material things. Poetry depends on intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time.' Her argument is that women are intellectually poor and unable to express themselves, not because they don't know how to do so but because they are not allowed to do so. She further states that if one's survival depends on the approval of the other, creativity will be stifled. To ensure creativity therefore material freedom is a must.

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In the essay Woolf presents George Eliot, Emily Bronte, Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte as the 'four great novelists' to be studied, emulated and appreciated. Through these writers she attempts to create a female canon that can rival the patriarchal canon. She considers this attempt important also because she believes that only female writers can express female experience in all its shades. She considers them to be worthy of study and presents them as proofs that if allowed to be themselves women of any age can produce literary works which will not just stand the test of time but will also rival the literary creations of the best male writers. She also uses their example to point out the fact that it is only when women write of women that the true depth and complexity of the female mind and soul is revealed in the character they create. She further adds that when masculine writers present female characters in their works they project flat characters devoid of any richness of emotion and feeling. In fact these female characters serve as foils to the male protagonists. Instead of standing on their own they gain their identity and legitimacy within the text only in relation to their role with respect to the male protagonist. Therefore not only is the presentation of female characters flawed, such a representation detracts from the value and role of literature in society. In the essays she posits this idea when she says: 'Suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreams; how few parts in the plays of Shakespeare could be allotted to them; how literature would suffer.'

Another argument she makes is that the writings of earlier women novelists can be attributed to either one of two reasons: either they wrote in defiance of masculine standards or in deference to them. In most of these authors we rarely find the true female voice. She argues that George Eliot and the Bronte sisters wrote as per the prevailing notions of a masculine idea of the novel. Hence their works are inferior. By contrast she considers Jane Austen's novels to be reflective of the female voice and experience. Virginia Woolf goes on to criticize her contemporary novelists of being sex-inhibited. She goes on to argue that though one's sex is important the effective artist is androgynous. By this she means that the artist is harmoniously bisexual in comprehension (which affects a creative fusion). This argument links with her statement regarding lesbianism in the sense that the artists' sexual orientation is irrelevant while considering the efficacy of his/her work.

Therefore she conjectures that a great deal of literary wealth has been lost since women are unable to write as they deem fit. As proof of this she points out the fact that even Jane Austen a recognized canonical author was forced to hide her work because she feared that she not only would not be accepted but instead she would be ridiculed. In the essay she writes: 'Imaginatively [a woman] is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant.' This bold statement highlights the wealth of fiction and poetry written about women and the lack of it actually written by them. She highlights the difficulties women face in their effort to create art through Judith, Shakespeare's fictional sister. She argues that while Shakespeare is encouraged to go to school and learn new ideas and thoughts, Judith is confined to the life of performing household chores. Though she wishes to learn, she is scolded by her parents whenever they find her holding a book: they believe that any time she spends reading detracts her from completing here household tasks. As they grow up she is forcibly betrothed to a man she does not love. When she resists she is beaten into submission. After marriage she is condemned to a life of drudgery and more household work. In contrast Shakespeare is encouraged to go out in the world and make a name for himself. He succeeds spectacularly and his name is synonymous with literature.

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In contrast Judith's talents are not just lost; tragically they are never even given an opportunity to be realized. She highlights the tragedy of Judith's life when she says that 'She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school.' The 'but' makes it clear that her desires do not matter and that she is considered valuable only in the degree to which she fulfills social roles assigned to her. Woolf's argument here is that it is a woman's gender and not her lack or presence of skills that closes doors for her. This is the reason she wants her listeners to be conscious of their role in history: they are the privileged few who have the opportunity to have an education and make intelligent choices. They should ensure that they do so that others may find it easier to follow. At the same time she does not deny the fact that the way will not be easy for them. Nevertheless, it is the one which has to be travelled to ensure that women receive their due not just in the field of art and literature but in other areas as well. The argument she makes here was used by later feminists to work against the glass ceiling in various professions and to demand for more inclusive policies in various fields of public life.

In addition to the four novelists she also refers to the feminist scholar Jane Ellen Harrison and also to Rebecca West. She presents them as proof of a woman's ability to think critically. At the same time she uses their example to present the extent to which the patriarchal set up is uncomfortable with decisive feminist voices and the extent to which it will go to discredit them. To support this claim she refers to Desmond MacCarthy's (referred to as 'Z') claim that West a mere 'arrant feminist' and need not be taken seriously. She also refers to F. E. Smith, 1st Earl of Birkenhead and his retrogressive attitude to women; especially his resistance in granting them suffrage. Through these examples she shows that women will only be indulged if they expect men to treat them seriously and with respect. These will have to be snatched from them and only the financially independent woman will be able to do this. She refers to the term Oxbridge, a not too subtle amalgam of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge to suggest that such regressive idea are shared by the intellectuals residing in these hallowed walls as well. The idea she wishes to put across is that the dice is laden against women since they can expect no support from either the intellectual or the political front. They will have to fight their battles on their own. Moreover, in this way they can rely only on their fellow sisters for support. In this too the essay lays a central argument of the feminist movement: the essential universality of the female experience and its discriminatory nature across class and social barriers.

To argue her viewpoint Woolf creates a fictional narrator. At several points in the text she is identified as 'Mary Beaton, Mary Seton, or Mary Carmichael.' This line refers to the 16th century ballad of Mary Hamilton, a woman who was hanged since she refused to don the socially accepted roles of wife and mother. This made her a subversive figure which needed to be silenced. It needs to be remembered that Judith too commits suicide when she becomes pregnant and is expecting an actor's child. Her death is the only way available to her to register her protest at the life imposed on her. Through all these examples Woolf is trying to underline the point that the imposition of socially sanctioned role on women while reprehensible will continue until women develop strategies to resist them. Art therefore becomes not just an expression of the essential female experience; it is also a tool of resistance.

The reference to the four Mary's is important on many levels. On a personal level it draws attention to Woolf' own position as someone who is not a mother, and so by extension someone who is not nurturing and can, therefore, be destructive. On

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another level this reference draws attention to the fact that the narrator's demand that her female audience chart their own path of freedom and redefine art and create the same according to a feminine sensibility is not without danger. It can have severe repercussions on the physical well being of the individual since the exercise is a direct challenge to held patriarchal beliefs. The reprisal can take many forms ranging from being indulged as a child to being dismissed as being unimportant. To support this argument she gives the example of female critics and the reaction of the establishment to them.

Woolf acknowledges that fact that in her essay she offers no opinion and puts a lot of importance on material things. She justifies this by suggesting that creative output is possible only when one is financially secure. She also states the purpose of the essay is not so much to create an artifact for her; it is instead a clarion call to her sisters around the world to realize that the creative instinct lives in them as well and needs to be given voice. She justifies the right of women to create a literature about themselves and for themselves and says in the essay that even though Shakespeare's sister never wrote a word she 'lives in you and in me... For great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.'

Woolf lays claim that women's attraction towards each other is a legitimate emotion. In other words she brings lesbianism to the free both as a sexual choice and as a political statement. She suggests that any sexual attraction women feel for each other is legitimate emotion since only they can truly understand each other. As a political statement it implies that women can only find comfort and a sense of self only in the community of other women. It is this idea that is later used to justify the creation of a purely female literature. Since only women can understand the deeper emotions of each other, therefore it is only in the literature of women that the true in the backdrop of the obscenity trial and public uproar resulting from the publishing of Radclyffe Hall's lesbian-themed novel, The Well of Loneliness (1928). Jane Marcus believe that in her talk of lesbianism and the way she approached it, Woolf was showing the way on how to treat this issue in public: 'Woolf was offering her besieged fellow writer a lesson in how to give a lesbian talk and write a lesbian work and get away with it.'

Woolf's central premise and the justification of her call for a feminist fiction that presents the true female character and the true female experience is evident in the following extract from the tract. The tract also highlights her fundamental objection to the canon: it deifies the woman and in doing so do defamiliarizes her experiences from herself. A female fiction is the only solution to this: 'Women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time. Indeed if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some would say greater. But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room. A very queer, composite being thus emerges. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words and profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read; scarcely spell; and was the property of her husband.'

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Alice Walker criticized Woolf on the grounds that in her assertion that a woman needed her own room and money in order to create art she was referring to a purely white female Anglo-Saxon identity. Her charge is that Woolf's conception of a primarily female art form excludes women of colour and so is reductive and discriminatory in its own way. Nevertheless Woolf' argument was an improvement on the current debates regarding women's issues and their capabilities and skills and paved the way for opening doors for them.

3.4 *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* was published in 1925. It soon generated interest among readers both in Britain and the United States regardless of the experimental approach to storytelling. Mrs. Dalloway and Woolf's later works like *To the Lighthouse*, have generated the most interest from the academic critic's point of view and are the most talked of works among all of Woolf's novels.

The events in *Mrs. Dalloway* are played out in a span of a single day sometime in June 1923, London. This seemingly unorganized narrative poses an exceptional difficulty for the novelist: how to create interesting and well-rounded characters and convey all the underlying complexity while describing just one day in the life of each character. Woolf addressed this difficulty by incorporating what she calls a 'tunneling' method. By this she meant the way her fictional characters recall their pasts that very day the author is describing. In experiencing these characters' as they are revealed through their memories, readers draw for themselves a backdrop and time frame for each individual character that, under normal schema of writing would have been provided by a narrator.

In a certain way, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a fiction without a plot. Instead of conceiving of actions for each of the characters to build up situations in order carry forward the story, Woolf shifted her narrative by highlighting each progressing hour of the day. The story progresses by tracing the psychological movement of each character.

Mrs. Dalloway chronicles a particular day in the month of June sometime in the1920s. Geographically the whole novel moves in and around London, although the readers get to see London, France, Burton and India through their interactions with the various mindscapes the novel offers. Let us first look at the characters in the novel.

Characters

- **Clarissa Dalloway:** She is Mrs. Dalloway. She is a middle aged, shallow and sensitive upper class British woman.
- **Richard Dalloway:** Clarrissa's husband. A Member of Parliament, who aspires to get into the Cabinet but is yet to succeed. Neither a perfect husband or nor a perfect father.
- **Elizabeth Dalloway:** Single child of Clarissa and Richard. She is beautiful and intelligent. Loathes superfluous social civilities like parties, nurtures a soft corner for Miss Kilman the history tutor.
- **Miss Kilman:** Middle aged history teacher of Elizabeth. Deprived of physical beauty and economic affluence and molded by socialistic ideas. Loves Elizabeth and tries to mould her in the best essence of socialism and religion, totally different to the external vanity that Clarissa's life revolves around.

Check Your Progress

6. What does Virginia Woolf's dinner at Fernham College comprise?
7. How does Chapter 3 of the essay begin?
8. Why does the narrator mark down the literary work of Lady Winchilsea?

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- **Septimus Warren Smith:** A victim of World War I who suffers from post war trauma and exhibits streaks of schizophrenia.
- **Lucrezia Smith:** Also referred to as Rezia Septimus' wife. Loves her husband dearly but is helpless in trying to single handedly attend her ill husband. Moreover, her inability to understand his problems or help him overcome it makes her feel handicapped about her life in general.
- **Evans:** Septimus' friend and the commanding officer during war.
- **Sir William Bradshaw:** Septimus' doctor, an acquaintance of Dalloway family.
- **Mrs. Filmer:** The kind-hearted cook of Lucrezia and Septimus' family who is unable to comprehend the doctor's insistence on separating the young couple.
- **Dr. Holmes:** General physician, who finds Septimus to be normal after examining him.
- **Peter Walsh:** Currently involved with Daisy, shared a romantic relationship with Clarissa during their young days.
- **Daisy:** Has affair with Peter but is married to someone else and is a mother to two children.
- **Lady Burton:** Rich socialite, famous for her exquisite lunch parties. Clarissa had once been invited with Richard to Burton's place.
- **Sally Seton:** Clarissa's companion in her youth. Clarissa's love for Sally matured because of her wild ways because this was what Clarissa admired but could never imitate herself. Now she is mother of five boys and married to rich Lord Rosseter.
- **Hugh Whitebread:** Common friend to both Peter and Clarissa from the olden days, and unpopular due to his arrogance.

Commentary

The novel opens with Mrs. Dalloway, that is, Clarissa Dalloway, deciding to buy flowers for the party she is hosting at her house, that very evening. As she is buying the flowers, the narrative transports the readers into her mind which reveals thoughts of her past lover, Peter Walsh, and Clarissa's decision to accept Richard Dalloway as her husband instead of Peter. Simultaneously, the readers are introduced to Septimus Warren Smith and his Italian wife Lucrezia Warren Smith. Septimus is presented to the readers as a shell-shocked victim still bearing the burden of World War I. In his 'insane' state he is shown to be carrying out an imaginary conversation with his friend Evan, who has died in the war.

In the meanwhile, we are informed that Clarissa is back at home, mending her dress for the evening. However, unexpectedly Peter Walsh drops by. Both Clarissa and Peter awkwardly continue a social conversation. However, a peep into their mind shows that they are daunted by the memories of their intertwined past. As Elizabeth, Clarissa's daughter, arrives Peter excuses himself and goes to the park. Sitting on the park bench, fiddling with his pocket knife, Peter recollects his association with Clarissa, her reasons to select Richard as her husband, his own eventual journey to India and his unsuccessful marriage.

Returning back to Septimus and Lucrezia, the narrative shows them to be still in the park where Septimus almost reasonably advocates on the usefulness of suicide, much to Lucrezia's dismay. When Peter sees them he thinks that the couple is engaged

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in an amorous tiff which is nothing out of the usual. Soon enough, readers are admitted into Septimus' thoughts that reveal his sensitivity and are admiration for Shakespeare and his dream of being a poet one day. But with the War breaking out everything changed – he joined the War, witnessed many deaths including Evans' and now finds his world to be very different from the world of others who surround him, like his wife Lucrezia. From the park, Lucrezia takes Septimus to meet Sir William Bradshaw, a doctor who prescribes him isolation in the countryside.

Richard Dalloway returns home with flowers for his wife with the intention of telling her how much he loves her, but could not do so. His inability to communicate his feelings leaves Clarissa feeling left out. She feels men are unable to appreciate her. We are shown that Mrs. Dalloway does not like Miss Kilman, Elizabeth's history teacher. The focus shifts to the Smith household where Septimus unexpectedly jumps out of the window to meet his own death. Peter hears the calls of the ambulance as they pass by carrying Septimus' body.

Sir Bradshaw and his wife arrive late to the Dalloways' party and Mrs. Bradshaw excuses themselves for their delay informing them about the unexpected news of the death of one of Bradshaw's patients – a war veteran (Septimus). On hearing this Clarissa concludes that the patient must have found people like Bradshaw insufferable so must have gave up his life. As the party approaches its end and guests start leaving Clarissa is shown approaching Richard who feels excited.

3.4.1 City: A Symbol of Trajectories

Often, the autobiographical aspects of an author do not translate into the fictional elements of his/ her work. In case of Virginia Woolf all her creativity – the non-fictional essays, letters, diaries as well as the fictions are uncannily intertwined with her personal life so much, that it becomes difficult to isolate the writer from her work and pay attention to only the words that the author has written for the readers. Those who have read Woolf's other works, and understand her philosophy can understand *Mrs. Dalloway* better.

In the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, the city emerges as a symbol for trajectories of the narrative itself. In the text, the modern city appears as an amalgamation of almost surreal and nearly shocking antithesis and it functions within its own polarities of extreme poverty and opulence, aesthetics and grotesque all of which exist parallel.

In the literature of the city, the city, more often than not, takes the center stage and becomes the protagonist to be understood and interpreted. Woolf, through her narrative technique, vividly describes the city through a word portrait which resembles cinematic visual qualities peppered with the new cinematic approaches – flashback, montage, track shots, etc.

Woolf describes three long city scenes strategically inserted in the narrative at the beginning, middle and end. These scenes are pivotal aspects of the novel, embellishing it with a polyphonic quality and providing it with a multiline perspective. Woolf's perambulation and locomotion around the city gives her ample scope to explore the dynamics that rule an ordinary individual's regular day about which she mentions in her essay 'modern fiction'.

In the opening section of the novel, the life of the city gets celebrated (in parts) through Mrs. Dalloway's consciousness. The relationship between the apparently chaotic appearance of the city and the cutting short of the urban rhythms, bears not

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only on the ways in which art gives formal order to the flux and welter of perception and mental impression, but is linked to the relationship between individuals and group consciousness and motion which Virginia Woolf explores in Mrs. Dalloway.

In parts *Mrs. Dalloway* is divided between memories of Clarrisa Dalloway's country house where she spent her youth, Burton and London of June 1923 (i.e. five years after the end of First World War. In contrast to the streets of London city, the parks of London play a pivotal role in the narrative as they help in creating a space for country living in the city, thereby simultaneously establishing and transgressing the country-city divide.

Woolf in one of her diary entries relates her 'scene making' ability (one of the prominent features of her art) to the walks that she regularly took which helped her weave stories. In another essay of hers 'Street Haunting: A London Adventures' (1927) Woolf explains her pleasure of wandering through the London streets in winter. This essay, is one of the most striking accounts of the '*flâneur*', the female counterpart of male version of '*Haneur*' (stroller). The significant role associated with a *flâneur* in a modern day urban scape is discussed by both Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin in their works. The essay explores the pleasures of the purely spectatorial aestheticisizing 'eye' which replaces the singular 'I' of identity.

Woolf's earlier novels are also to some extent about urban experiences. In *Night and Day* the movement of the story takes place against the backdrop of London. Again, in *Jacob's Room*, the mapping of the city becomes analogous for the exploration of human character. In both *Flush* and *Orlando* London is of crucial importance. In one of her diary entries dated January 1919 Woolf has written:

> I drove on top of a bus from Oxford station to Victoria station and observed how the passengers were watching the spectacle.

The view from the top of omnibus recurs throughout Woolf's novel often as a contrast or counter point to the sensations and impressions of the walker in the city. Woolf is fascinated by the relationship between consciousness or states of mind and the city.

The concept of the 'uncanny' as put forward by Freud is applicable to the nature of urban experiences as well as in the form of homelessness resulting from the rise of the great cities in which human beings are strangers to each other and to themselves. With this kind of experience, Woolf practices her art of scene making which she herself terms as 'fabricating a lifetime from a word in painting.'

3.4.2 The Narrative

The narrative vehicle that Woolf uses to explore the heterogeneous aspect of modern life is the symbol of modernity itself—the motor car and aeroplane travel. This form of transport opens up the fragmental nature of the individual. The car and the airplane represent the state and commerce, respectively. They are forms of social organization which bring together and also disturb social consciousness and collective life.

Through her narrative structure Woolf lets her readers follow Clarissa Dalloway in her walk and then lets the readers access Clarissa's consciousness and brings them out of it as well. Moving away from Clarissa, the narrative immediately focuses on the car on its way to Buckingham Palace. The car is replaced by the aeroplane as narrative object, which in turn, acts as a linking agent. As the plane passes over Regent's Park it grabs the attention of Lucrezia Warren Smith who points it out to Septimus and as readers we again gain access to both Lucrezia and Septimus' thoughts. As readers keep alternating between the consciousness of the Smith and the Dalloway couples, they are made more aware of the glaring dissimilarity and gap between their respective thoughts and existence. The readers gain some sporadic knowledge about a few incidental figures who appear in the park and whose relation to the central characters is only a matter of chance encounter, which is a prominent feature of a modern city. These incidental figures are not elaborated upon, and the novel does not pursue their lives further, rather it shifts its focus to a woman who is looking at the sky following the movement of the plane, thus exporting back the readers to the flight of the plane. The omniscience of its aerial view makes it a parodic version of the omniscient narrator, finally liberated from any semblance of this narrative task, it is released into ecstatic emissions of 'pure delight' before it and Woolf finally abandons the scene.

The vehicle of state and monarchy that had drawn all the attention is abruptly disrobed of its awe as the attention of the spectators is suddenly and abruptly taken over by another spectacle: the sky writing of an aeroplane. The collective consciousness of the crowd is now focussed by the workings of advertising and commerce. The phenomenon of skywriting is presented in such a manner that it takes on a transcendental hue. Merging of the smoke letters and clouds blurs the distinction between cultural and natural order. The use of the sky as a medium to advertise a product signifies the importance that advertisements have gained in the fast emerging bourgeois culture establishing itself in the post World War Europe. But the irony of the situation is that the advertisement which is meant to target the general public (to fulfill their private dream) is read by Septimus Smith as a personal message for him alone. By just opposing the strange worlds of 'sane' and 'insane' Woolf attempts to explore the deeper levels of absurdities involved in both 'sane' and 'insane' world views.

The Socio-political background

Through almost the whole of the nineteenth century the British Empire was seen as unconquerable. It kept conquering and bringing distant lands under its control, including India, Nigeria, and South Africa. It naturally became the biggest Empire ever known to human civilization. However, World War I came as a rude shock. For the first time in almost a hundred years, the English were left susceptible within their own territory. The Allies definitely defeated the Axis Powers, but the extent of damage that England endured during the war made it a cruel victory. Young men were most affected since they were part of the army so they were either left hurt or killed. In 1916, after the Battle of the Somme, it was revealed that England had 60,000 casualties—the biggest scale of human tragedy in England's history. Needless to say, the English people lost much of their belief in the powers of the Empire. England could no longer call themselves invincible. Soon citizens began to critically view the social hierarchy of England and realized that it protected just a chosen few.

The disgust associated with the War still remained an unanswered trauma for the citizens, even as England attempted to move on towards modernization, past this devastation, matching its footsteps with the rest of the world. For some, it was a period of opportunities. London slowly saw a deluge of airplanes, motorcars and businesses. Youngsters were no longer pondering over the past but preferred to explore the present and visualize a bright future. Various forms of commerce were expanding; the elite were still wealthy. But there was a slight improvement in the situation of a

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certain segment of the employed class that were enjoying better salaries and better living standards than they did before the War. Women enjoyed more privileges and liberty; it was feasible for a young lady like Elizabeth Dalloway to envisage a vocation in the government for herself. Numerous experimentations and developments were taking place in the arena of art, music, and literature: Cubism, Jazz, Modernism, and other movements had made their presence felt and were already making the traditional English world, which was yet to fully recover from the shock of the war, uncomfortable with their presence. Literature too had its share of innovators (Woolf's innovative work would be one). New areas of interest were being explored in psychology, anthropology, physics, and other areas. In short, a revolutionizing change was taking place in the world in general.

The story of *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place in the year 1923. During this time the old world with its oppressive standards was coming close to a natural death. English people, like Clarissa, Peter, and Septimus, seem to be identified with the malfunction of the state as clearly as they are able to understand their own individual failures. Those people who continued to be the flag bearers of English custom, like Aunt Helena and Lady Burton, are already feeble. Aunt Helena is shown to be wearing a glass eye (perhaps symbolic of her inability to see or her unwillingness to view the crumpling of the Empire's disintegration due to its incompetency). Foreseeing the inevitable end of the Conservative Party's reign, Richard makes up his mind to chronicle the annals of the large British family involved in the military, the Burtons, who in any case are memories of the past. The traditional world comes to an end, and the sudden collapse of the socio-political order exposes the English citizen at a crucial juncture.

War and Masculinity

All the characters establish different points of consciousness. They are independent world views. Peter Walsh defines himself by his relationship with women in his life. The co-related idea of war and masculinity that existed in the late Victorian period became somewhat fragmented after the end of World War I. *Mrs. Dalloway* presents how the lives of the people are in turmoil in the post-War England. In the depiction of post-War Britain, certain issues are constantly dealt with in this novel related to the newly emergent discourse of a 'modern' Britain. These were issues like:

- Greater prevalence of women in public sphere.
- Relationship between war and masculinity
- Defining of national identity
- Shifting nature of family
- Politics of the urban environment
- Rise of consumer oriented society
- Increasingly bourgeois nature of the upper class
- Questioning the patriarchy

Peter Walsh's notion of an imagined, conservative upper-class England despite his own reservations about what he is invoking is fore-grounded in the city scene. He himself is not English but the product of an Anglo-Indian family that has served the British Empire for three generations. The precariousness of his English identity is compounded by his dislike of India, Empire and the army.

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Through Walsh's musings, as readers, we are confronted with the actual contradiction in post-war British life, anxiety of war and the Empire on one hand and Englishness and masculinity on the other. Woolf explores the importance of fantasy in the principal discursive formations of Englishness, empire, masculinity and sexuality. In Walsh's case the fantasies that he has defined his 'self' with his relation to women. With the help of the episode of the fleeting encounter between Peter Walsh and an unknown lady, Woolf shows how the modern consciousness emerges in city life; consciousness developed within the 'hard city' of buildings and concrete structures as well as in the realm of the 'soft city' of experience and imagination, of illusions, aspirations and nightmares.

The text shares a problematic relationship with the concept of female emancipation. Female emancipation is highlighted by showing women taking part in public sphere and as emerging sexually. Peter Walsh is the patriarchal figure who destroys Clarissa and Sally's relationship like a father destroys a mother and daughter relationship. The relationship is on an equal basis. But in Doris and Elizabeth's case Doris is the 'male' partner of this lesbian relationship she dictates Elizabeth's life.

Both consumerism and imperialism are represented as patriarchal in nature. They both use women as objects. In pre-war discourse the text represents overt masculinity of imperial England. Clarissa appears as the alter ego of Septimus and Septimus is the feminine tendency of post war English society. In both the cases, the attributes of humanity are taken away.

Stream of Consciousness

Stream-of-consciousness is a narrative technique that is used mostly in fictional prose works with the intension of acquainting readers with the thought process that is going on inside the mind of a character. The subconscious mind of the character appears in the narration is presented to the reader along with the character's rational and coherent awareness of the environment he is part of. This is done in such a way that the author does not have to use any narrative space to elaborate on the character separately. Psychologist William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) had first used the term 'stream-of-consciousness'. As the psychological novel germinated in the twentieth century writers experimented with various techniques. They used the stream-of-consciousness mode to present the sublimity of the mind and the innumerable associations that an ordinary mind under normal circumstances gets absorbed in. This process also helped the writers to put across perspectives of those minds which were considered to be deviant, insane or abnormal for the 'normal' people.

The seemingly structured narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* covering a time span of twenty four hours and situated in the city of London gives the illusion of adhering to the classical unities of time and place. But the actual narrative covers a wide gamut of almost eighteen years traversing across India, London, Burton and France (during the World War I). A cursory glance at the novel will give the impression that it is probably about two characters Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith – but a close reading would suggest that there are at least a dozen characters whose lives are intricately interwoven in the course of the narrative. The floating structure of the narrative gives the reader the power to penetrate into the minds of the various characters that the author creates. The reader can then understand and interpret them as she (author/narrator) perceives them.

NOTES

The unity of time is achieved in the novel by constantly referring back to the hourly notifications that the Big Ben produces just the way light house was the unifying device in *To the Light house*.

In the Regent's Park we come across a number of characters and hear a cacophony of their voices. There are the Smiths' who are stuck in their own complicated world. Septimus' strong inward confrontations and Lucrezia's doubts and apprehensions are misunderstood as sweet nothings of lovers by Peter. Peter Walsh in turn is lost in his own memories of past and the twists and turns in his life. Maisie Johnson's point of view provides another aspect of the fragmented existence. She considers the Smiths to be strange. Readers are allowed to gaze at Maisie through Mrs. Dempster's eyes. We come across the old Mr. Bently. The narrator's perception keeps blurring. Life seems to have gone astray for most of the persons we have come across since Clarissa Dalloway decided to get out of her house that day with the intention to buy flowers.

The scene finishes off with the gimmick of sky-writing taking place with airplanes silently drawing distorted words in the sky. What the words read is not important. They always remain incomplete. As they etch out one word the other starts blurring. We can understand its meaning in any way we prefer, just as Clarissa, Septimus, Lucrezia, Maisie, Mrs. Dempster and Mr. Bently each conclude distinctly about London, people and about life in general. Each human being perceives the truth differently. In this scene we glimpse life through the consciousness of the normal, the lunatic, the foreigner, the newcomer, and the elderly. By successfully using the trope of stream-of-consciousness Virginia Woolf is able to create multiple perspectives of strangers and people who have met each other through chance encounter in a city.

Communication

As the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* progresses the readers realize that almost every character including Clarissa, Septimus and Peter, struggle to put across their personal feelings. Their inability to communicate coupled with their desire for privacy makes it difficult for them to lead a life of satisfaction. Clarissa in a desperate attempt to camouflage her real feelings tries to hide behind the crowd at her place as she organizes parties. She feels claustrophobic with her surroundings and her life. She cannot communicate either with her daughter or husband. She leads a life which is surrounded with memories. Clarissa is in awe of the old woman who resides on her own in her flat which is right across Clarissa's house. Even though Clarissa longs for the solitary life the old woman leads along with her independence, she is simultaneously aware of the loneliness that the old lady suffers. Peter tries to analyze this strange desire to be both part of a world where communication is possible, at the same time yearning for a space of his own by giving the analogy of a fish that swims through the muddy water and then rises for a few second to the surface so that it can enjoy the waves. This inability to connect and communicate can be seen as a *repercussion* of the post war scenario where life is fragmented and trying to communicate becomes not only difficult but also at times futile. As Clarissa analyses Septimus' desire to kill himself seems to be a desperate but legitimate way to get into the process of communication.

Richard's communication with Clarissa is almost negligible. At one point when Richard tries hard to leave behind his usual formal mask and have a heart-to-heart discussion with Clarissa he is unable to do so. He is so caught up in his stiffness and shyness that he is unable to express his love for Clarissa. He decides to repress his words and not utter it out to Clarissa because he does not know what to say and secondly because the last time he had uttered his feelings was long back and so now he is not sure if it would be appropriate to say.

This inability to communicate is also reflected in the lives of Lucrezia and Septimus. The young bride Lucrezia, away from home in near unfamiliar surroundings, is not sure how to survive. She is unable to understand her husband. Despite her best efforts to reach her husband's thoughts and her desire to help him out in any possible way she is not able to do anything. She finds herself to be completely helpless. She does not share his imagination or his memories. On the other hand, her husband Septimus Smith is portrayed as a very sensitive person. He is a shell-shocked victim who is now labelled as insane by the world.

As we see him, we realize that the post-war Septimus is cocooned within his own private world. When the sudden unexpected noise of car backfiring is heard Clarissa's reflex action suggests that she might have heard a gunshot. Clarissa's reaction is viewed as rational. There is nothing unnatural for her to have considered the noise as gunshot, any 'sane' man in that context would have thought so. The period of in insane death and violence was just declared to be over. Yet the English mind was still lurking under the fear of the just concluded devastation. Septimus Smith too hears the noise. Being a soldier it was expected of him to first perceive the noise as gunshot. But it was not so, because ironically, it is the noise of the gunshots which once ruled the life of Septimus. It is the main culprit responsible for Septimus Smith's inability to communicate with reality. For Septimus, the noise appears to him as the sound of the cracking of whip. He says 'The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?' A noise that surprised everybody scares Septimus.

The doctors in *Mrs. Dalloway* are shown to be unable to understand their patients. For example, Holmes does not believe in any illness that might trouble the mind. He simply considers it as 'funk'. On the other hand, Septimus – the person with expertise to deal with mentally troubled patients belongs to the other end of the spectrum. For him any aberration to sanity is a matter of grave concern as it means some form of social radicalism and hence a form of danger. While talking with Septimus, Sir William realizes that he repeatedly used the word 'war' which the doctor identifies as something serious. The character of Sir William has reflections of Woolf's own doctor who had insisted that she should be cut off from all human contact until she has recovered fully. Sir William also prescribes sanatorium for Septimus because there he will not come across any human, which will mean he will not be able to weave any fancy ideas. Septimus' strong inward confrontations and Lucrezia's doubts and apprehensions are shown to be submerged within their own selves as they are unable to share it with anybody.

Another character who finds herself cut off is Maisie Johnson. Just like Lucrezia, she is unfamiliar with London. She has a Scottish origin. Very recently she has arrived from Edinburgh. The exuberant English people and the 'prim' blossoms of London everything that excited Clarissa appeared strange to Maisie. She was unable to relate herself to her new surroundings.

Septimus' final words before he jumped off the window were 'I'll give it you'. The words are ironic because Holmes wanted to take away Septimus. Instead Septimus volunteers to hand over his corporeal body to the doctor. But Septimus' soul had not surrendered. He jumps out to keep safe, even through death, the privacy of his entity.

Holmes labels Septimus as a coward. He cannot comprehend why Septimus had to kill himself, but for the first time Rezia was able to realise Septimus' thought process.

Death and Oppression

Ideas of death constantly permeate the everyday life in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This is especially true for Clarissa, Septimus and Peter. But what makes this thought threatening is the awareness that troubles the characters making even the most trivial incident and interactions appear meaningful. Early in the novel when Clarissa starts off her day with the intention of going to the market to busy flowers for the party (scheduled for the evening) she is unexpectedly reminded of a moment during her adolescent phase when she had anticipated the occurrence of an unpleasant event. As Big Ben reminds one of the passing hours, Clarissa keeps reiterating a line to herself which appears in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* : 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages.' The line is quoted from a funeral song which appears in the play. The song speaks of death as celebration because it arrives as a state of comfort after a living out the hardships of life. Clarissa, within her lifetime has lived death in various forms - the death of her father, the death of her mother, and the death of her sister. She has experienced the devastating effects of the war. These experiences have firmly made her believe that living itself is a dangerous affair. Death keeps her thoughts occupied and the quote from *Cymbeline*, as well as Septimus' voluntary acceptance of death, finally helps Clarissa to come into terms with her own life. Peter Walsh, on the other hand is so apprehensive of his own identity that he grows scared with the idea of death and starts randomly following a young woman whom he does not know to keep his mind out of the thought of death. Septimus voluntarily welcomes death. He feared it the most. But he opts for it over the other unbearable option that was available to him—surviving another day.

Clarissa and Septimus as Alter Egos

Septimus' feeling of being distanced from his lived reality is similar to Clarissa's feeling as she goes around the London city. Septimus' 'Fear no more' induces comfort in her. From what Septimus has narrated to Rezia, he seemed to have found his way to deal with death, a subject that keeps haunting Clarissa's mind. Septimus' belief that 'there is no death' echoes in Clarissa's belief that some amount of her will be left behind even after she has left this mortal world in the form of trees, water, air, and people. The glimpses of the neurotic tendencies in Clarissa and at times in the psyche of other characters finds a resonance and culminates in the form of insanity in Septimus. Yet Septimus is a victim of cruel treatment but he is not inhuman. People who nurture the idea to dominate and oppress are ruthless — be it within the politics of war or in the hierarchy of relations. In Septimus' instance he was harassed by society as well as his supposed well wishers. The war took its toll on him and then the doctors were unsympathetic about him.

Oppression is a feeling that both Clarissa and Septimus experience in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Septimus at the end of the novel commits suicide in order to release himself from the oppressive demands of the society or to conform himself to its codes of conduct. The demands to subscribe to the societal norms come in variety of guises. Miss Kilman and Sir William Bradshaw are two characters who are presented in the role of oppressors in the novel: Miss Kilman tries to exert her superiority over Clarissa through her beliefs, and Sir William took it displeasingly when anyone dared to contradict his sense of the world. Both wished to see a world which followed in their footsteps and adhered to their belief systems. This thought filled them with a sense of power and a sadistic feeling to dominate others. Their sense of rigidity affected everyone who had the misfortune of coming in contact with them. Kilman and Bradshaw loved to oppresses all. But people like Clarissa, despite their power to raise their voice against such repressive social structure, chose to remain silent. Though Clarissa is very much a part and parcel of the social system and she often feels suffocated but she does not revolt. She rather accepts it. She and people like her are partly responsible for the death of Septimus. After hearing the news, she ponders over on Septimus' suicide and thinks, "Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace.'

Time

Time provides alignment to the fluid ideas, recollections, and meetings that form the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Big Ben, an emblem of England and its power, makes itself heard every hour unfailingly, making sure that the fleeting of time and the perception of over looming death, is in conjugation. Clarissa, Septimus, Peter, and other individual characteristics are shown to be in the confines. Clarissa, specifically, senses the route of time, through the appearance of Sally and Peter Walsh, her close associates from the past, and wonders what amount of time has gone by since she herself was a small girl. As the hour clock strikes, although the sound evaporates—it becomes "leaden circles dissolved in the air…' This sign recurs numerous times all through the narrative, showing how ephemeral time is, regardless of the strike of Big Ben and regardless of people's concern with it. Rezia informs Septimus, 'It is time,' as they sit idle in the park waiting for the time to approach when they can meet the doctor on Harley Street. The old woman whom we come across at the Regent's Park Tube opines that man understands no boundaries of time, since she prolongs to vocalize the identical recital for what appears like eternity. She realises that human existence is circular and not uni-dimentional or linear. But this kind of time is what Big Ben tracks. Time is so significant to the topics, structure, and individual characteristics of this creative piece that Woolf nearly entitled her book *The Hours* after which she renamed it as *Mrs. Dalloway*.

ACTIVITY

Write a review on the story, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

DID YOU KNOW

Virginia Woolf could be famously mean and snobby. Her first reaction upon meeting the writer Katherine Mansfield—a gifted writer whom admired Woolf tremendously—was 'that she stinks like a—well civet cat that had taken to street walking. In truth, I'm a little shocked by her commonness at first sight; lines so hard & cheap.'

3.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The theatrical background of *A Room of One's Own* is that Woolf has been given an invitation to deliver a lecture on the theme of 'Women and Fiction'.

Check Your Progress

9. Who is Miss Kilman?
10. What does the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* chronicle?
11. Which place does Lucrezia Warren Smith hail from?
12. What is the full name of Mrs. Dalloway?
13. What was Peter doing as he sat in the park recollecting his memories of Clarissa?

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She puts forward the theory that it is a must for a woman to have money and her own room for her to become a writer of fiction.

- Her essay is built on a pattern of partially-fictional account of the mindset that guided her to take up this thesis.
- According to her dramatization, the mental processes in the character of an imaginary storyteller, who is in the same position as she, struggle with the same topic.
- The storyteller starts her quest at Oxbridge College, where she reminisces about various educational experiences of men and women, in addition to the material disparities in their lives.
- She then runs through the British Library for an entire day, scrutinizing the scholarship on women, all of which men have wrote and specifically, that which has not been written amiably.
- Shifting her focus to history, she finds that information on the lives of women is very insufficient, and so she decides to use her imagination to recreate their existence.
- The character of Judith Shakespeare is created as an instance of the unfortunate fate that a woman of extreme intelligence would have met with in those circumstances.
- Pertaining to these circumstances, she focuses on the accomplishments of prominent women authors of the 19th century and indicates the significance of customs for an aspiring writer.
- This is followed by an assessment of the existing state of literature, carried out by reading the first novel of one of the narrator's contemporaries.
- Woolf brings the essay to an end by urging her women audience to adopt the customary practice that has barely been bestowed on them and to increase the endowment for their own daughters.
- *Mrs. Dalloway* has its roots in two short stories that Woolf had written previously, *Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street* and the incomplete *The Prime Minister*.
- *Mrs. Dalloway* is a book about Clarissa Dalloway and her life as an aristocratic politician's wife. The story stars in mid-June. Clarissa Dalloway is a woman who lives in the Westminster section of London. She is enjoying the beautiful weather and missing her friends, who are not there at that time. Clarissa is thinking that the War is over, the King and Queen are cozy in their palace and though there are a large number of things one may not be happy about, the fact is that the people there loved life.
- *Mrs. Dalloway* is not a characteristic mundane routine story, but it is a routine story of an innovative kind. It deals with one day for Clarissa Dalloway (with some other significant characters, also) as she gets ready for a big party that will occur that evening.
- With the interior progression of the characters in the novel, the story proceeds forward and moves back to comment on the post World War social structure.
- The novel throws light on many sensitive issues including focusing towards the homosexual bonding that the characters treasure in their memories.

NOTES

- Even thirty-four years later, Clarissa Dalloway remembers the passionate kiss that she and Sally had exchanged at Burton and considers it to be the happiest moment of her life.
- Clarissa is arranging a party that will comprise all prominent people in London from the Prime Minister to people in eminent social circles. Clarissa worries about the party and endeavors to make it perfect.
- Septimus is unable to get rid of the memories of his close friend Evans.
- Evans, whom Septimus met during the war, is described as 'undemonstrative in the company of women' and the two were like 'two dogs playing on a hearth-rug'.
- Dutch film director Marleen Gorris had translated *Mrs. Dalloway* novel into celluloid in the year 1997.

3.6 KEY TERMS

- **Conjectures:** It is an opinion or conclusion formed on the basis of incomplete information.
- **Ambivalence:** It is the state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone.
- **Schizophrenia:** It is a severe mental disorder where the patient shows signs of hallucinations, delusions, social isolation, disoriented speech, etc.
- **Stream-of-consciousness**: It is a narrative technique that is used mostly in fictional prose works which intends to introduce the readers with the thought process going on inside the mind of the characters.

3.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Virginia Woolf's suicide was brought upon by many things; she was depressed by the lukewarm reception of her biography of Roger Fry. The destruction of her home during the Blitz and the onset of the Second World War only worsened her malady. Her completing the manuscript of her last novel she realized that she could not write any more; hence there was no incentive left to live anymore and she committed suicide.
2. Woolf's first professional piece was a journalistic piece on Haworth, the home of the Bronte family, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1900.
3. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) delineate the difficulties female writers face because the reins of legal and economic power in the hands of men.
4. The Voyage Out was published in 1918.
5. The Woolf couple founded the Hogarth Press.
6. Her dinner at Fernham College is starkly different from that served in Oxbridge: it comprises of plain soup, mediocre beef, vegetables, potatoes, bad custard, prunes, biscuits cheese and water.
7. This part of the essay begins with the narrator expressing her disappointment at failing to draw any conclusion as to why women are poorer than men.

NOTES

8. The narrator marks down the literary work of Lady Winchilsea because according to the narrator, her writing is marred by fear and hatred. She believes that if she had not been consumed by these negative emotions she had the potential of writing brilliant verse.
9. Miss Kilman is a poor middle aged lady who taught history to Elizabeth. She was influenced by socialistic ideas. She appears to be in love with Elizabeth whom she tries to mould in the best essence of socialism and religion.
10. Mrs. Dalloway chronicles a particular day in the month of June in the 1920s.
11. Lucrezia Warren Smith hails from Italy.
12. Mrs. Dalloway's full name is Clarissa Dalloway.
13. Peter was fiddling with his pocket knife as he sat on the bench in the park recollecting his memories of Clarissa.

3.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the characteristics of Woolf's work?
2. What makes Woolf decide that England is a patriarchal society?
3. Why does Woolf consider Shakespeare as the greatest creative genius of his age?
4. What is the importance of time in *Mrs. Dalloway*?
5. Write a note on depiction of women in the *Mrs. Dalloway*.
6. List some of the novels written by Virginia Woolf.
7. Write a note on the narrative structure of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.
8. Write a short note on stream-of-consciousness technique used in literature.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Give a biographical overview of Virginia Woolf's life.
2. What types of conflicts (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) can be seen in *A Room of One's Own*?
3. Why is *A Room of One's Own* usually considered a piece of feminist literature?
4. What is the role of women in the text? How are mothers represented? What about single/independent women? What is important about women—in the historical context?
5. What is the importance of city in *Mrs. Dalloway*?
6. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a social commentary. Do you agree?
7. Show how communication is a major issue in *Mrs. Dalloway.*
8. How do death and oppression manifest themselves in the novel?

3.9 FURTHER READING

Zwerdling, Alex; *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, University of California Press, California, 1986.

Nicolson, Nigel; *Virginia Woolf*, Viking, New York, 2000.

Albee, Edward; *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?;* Scribner Classic, New York, 2003.

UNIT 4 ALICE WALKER

NOTES

Structure

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Unit Objectives
4.2 About the Author
4.3 *The Color Purple*
    4.3.1 Critical Commentary
4.4 Summary
4.5 Key Terms
4.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.7 Questions and Exercises
4.8 Further Reading

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker is an eminent Afro-American writer and social activist. She has won several international awards for her acclaimed novel *The Color Purple*. Born in radically divided South America, Walker's writings reflect her roots in economic hardship, racial terrorism and folk wisdom of African American life and culture. Her work transverses the relationship and understanding shared by women. Her works began to be published during the latter years of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s. As an activist, she has supported anti-nuclear causes and other environmental issues along with oppressive rituals of female circumcision in Africa and the Middle East. Today, she is a strong voice in the Black feminist movement.

This unit will give an understanding of the writings by Alice Walker, with emphasis on the novel *The Color Purple*.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the Alice Walker as a writer and a social activist
- Discuss the important aspects of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*
- Explain the significance of *The Color Purple*
- Critically appreciate *The Color Purple*

4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Walker (born 1944) is a prominent American novelist, short story writer, essayist, biographer and poet, who own the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for her work, *The Color Purple* (1982).

Walker hailed from a family of sharecroppers. Her first published work was a book of poems, *Once* (1968). This collection narrates her journey to Africa and her experiences of civil rights movements. Her next publication, *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973), was also a collection of poems. It was Walker's mouthpiece for identifying the plight of those who struggle against racism and oppression.



Fig. 4.1 *Alice Walker*

Walker's first novel appeared in 1970, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland.* The narrative of this novel revolves from 1900 to 1960s. It tells the story of three successive generations of farmers belonging to the coloured community. In 1973 came her short story collection, *In Love and Trouble*: *Stories of Black women*. This collection recounts the legacy of black women and their sufferings. Even her next story collection, *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981) wanders along the similar territory as the previous collection.

Walker bagged the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Color Purple.* This novel is about the life a coloured woman, Celie who is overburdened with sufferings and finds a mean of expression when she starts writing her despairing situation to God through her letters addressed to Him. This novel revolves around Celie's letters to God and Nettie, her sister and also Nettie's communication with Celie through letters.

Her work *Langston Hughes: American Poet* (1974) is a biography of the American poet Langston Hughes. In her next novel *Meridian* (1976), Walker focuses on civil right workers of the 1960s. Walker published the two poetry collections *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning* and *Horses Make A Landscape Look More Beautiful* in 1979 and 1984, respectively. In 1983 came out her essay collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose.*

Works

Novels

- *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, 1970
- *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, 1973
- *Meridian*, 1976
- *The Color Purple*, 1982
- *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories*, 1982
- *To Hell With Dying*, 1988
- *The Temple of My Familiar*, 1989
- *Finding the Green Stone*, 1991
- *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, 1992
- *The Complete Stories*, 1994
- *By The Light of My Father's Smile*, 1998
- *The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart*, 2000
- *Now Is The Time to Open Your Heart*, 2005
- *Devil's My Enemy*, 2008
- *Everyday Use*, 1973

Poetry

- *Once*, 1968
- *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*, 1973
- *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning*, 1979
- *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful*, 1985
- *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems*, 1991
- *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth*, 2003
- *A Poem Traveled Down My Arm: Poems And Drawings*, 2003
- *Collected Poems*, 2005
- *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing: New Poems*

Non-fiction books

- *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 1983
- *Living by the Word*, 1988
- *Warrior Marks*, 1993
- *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult*, 1996
- *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism*, 1997
- *Go Girl!: The Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure*, 1997
- *Pema Chodron and Alice Walker in Conversation*,1999
- *Sent By Earth: A Message from the Grandmother Spirit After the Bombing of the World Trade Center and Pentagon*, 2001
- *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, 2006
- *Overcoming Speechlessness*, 2010
- *Chicken Chronicles, A Memoir*, 2011

Honours

- Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Color Purple*, 1983
- National Book Award, 1983
- O. Henry Award for 'Kindred Spirits', 1985

Check Your Progress

1. Which was Alice Walker's first published book?
2. What is the significance of the collection *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973)?
3. Name the biography that Walker composed.
4. Which were the honours Alice Walker was awarded with as the first black woman?
5. Which award did Walker receive for *Kindred Spirits*?

NOTES

4.3 *THE COLOR PURPLE*

The Color Purple was Alice Walker's third novel. It was published in the year 1982. The novel was not just a financial success but also a critical one. It came to be considered a milestone in Walker's creative journey. In addition to praise, the novel invited a lot of criticism for dealing with controversial and unorthodox themes. Many critics were opposed to her manner of portraying black men, which was thought to be negative. The novel was made into a film in 1985 directed by Steven Spielberg. While the movie brought more fame, Walker was criticized for improper portrayal of men in her novel.

On the other hand, she was appreciated for her real depiction of black women. The use of the epistolary technique was welcomed by critics. Walker's ability to incorporate the language of the black folks also caught the attention of the critics. Walker's involvement during her early days in the civil rights activities that took place during the 1960s, finds resonance in the novel.

In *The Color Purple*, as also found in her other works, Walker focuses on the issue of dual repression faced by black women in the American context. Walker argues that black women are marginalized by the white community, and also face discrimination from black males. The civil rights movement affected Walker's critical perception regarding racial problems at home, simultaneously drawing her attention towards the African continent. During the 1960s, an extraordinary interest in ethnic and racial tradition brought many African Americans to investigate their origins in Africa. The central theme of *The Color Purple* identifies Walker's desire to reflect a positive side of life, even when faced with harsh conditions. Her central character emerges as a winner by fighting adverse situations and characters. Even the other significant theme of the good overpowering evil is undoubtedly another reason for the book's great success.

Characters

- **Celie** – The poor, illiterate black woman and also the protagonist and narrator of the novel
- **Nettie** – Celie's younger sister who is prettier than her. She moves to Africa to preach and faithfully writes letters to Celie for decades
- **Alphonso** – He is Celie and Nettie's stepfather, who the sisters think is their real father. He remains an abuser till the end
- **Mr. Johnson/ Albert** – Celie's husband who abuses her for years but gets transformed at the end and seeks friendship
- **Shug Avery** – A beautiful blues singer who becomes Celie's friend and then her lover. She nurtures Celie physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- **Eleanor Jane** –The mayor's daughter who develops a strong attachment to Sofia who works as a maid in their house.
- **Germaine** –The younger man who manages to win Shug's heart
- **Harpo** – Celie's oldest stepson who owns the local juke joint
- **Miss Millie** – The mayor's racist wife

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- **Kate** – Mr. Johnson's sister who insists that Celie should stand up for herself
- **Olivia** – Celie's daughter
- **Adam** – Celie's son
- **Sofia** – Harpo's wife. She is headstrong and independent
- **Squeak** – The nickname of Mary Agnes, Harpo's girlfriend
- **Tashi** –The girl from Olinka village who finally marries Adam, Celie's son

4.3.1 Critical Commentary

Letters 1-10

The letter-writing structure of *The Color Purple* gives the impression of a daily diary, since Celie tells her narrative through confidential messages drafted to God. Therefore, Celie narrates her life's experiences with honesty. As a financially backward African-American woman of the countryside of Georgia and being a sufferer of domestic violence, Celie is voiceless and left alone in society. However, Celie's messages empower her to shatter confidentially the voicelessness that is usually inflicted upon her.

Celie's confessional narrative reminds one of the African-American slave narratives which took shape during the nineteenth century. These former slave narratives, which took the form of a piece of music or a rhythmical motion, a form of storytelling or other artistic creations, ruptured the muteness inflicted on the black community. Though dissimilar from Celie's messages, these slave narratives were engaged in symbols, icons, comedy, and other techniques to obscure their accurate intent. Slaves took these steps to stop the masters from understanding the slaves' skills to convey, articulate, and consider their discontent, but Celie takes no such defensive measures. Celie's messages, though absolutely candid and confessional, are at times difficult to interpret because Celie's skills to narrate her life experiences are highly limited. When Celie's cursing mother requests who fathered Celie's baby, Celie recollecting Alphonso's order to remain silent, declares the baby is God's because she has no clue what other explanation could be given. Similarly, Celie does not know what to narrate about her mother's death, or about her violent life, or her stolen babies. Celie understands how to state the issues plainly, but often she does not understand how to interpret them. Despite the mishandlings she endures, Celie has little knowledge of injustice and expresses little or no anger.

Walker's use of Celie's own voice, even though underdeveloped, allows Walker to narrate the past lives of black women in the countryside of the South in a sensitive and practical way. Unlike a historian's consideration, which can be protecting and overly analytical, Celie's messages offer a strong first-person narrative of the tales of racism and sexism. Celie's lucid narrative introduces us to her isolated world with expression that uncovers both painful and detached numbness: 'My momma dead. She died screaming and cussing. She screamed at me. She cussed at me.'

Like her voice, Celie's trust is significant but underdeveloped. Celie relies thoroughly on God as her listener and source of empowerment, but she at times forgets the distinction between God's agency and that of Alphonso. She confides that God, and not Alphonso, murdered her baby, and she does not make any association with the injustice she is familiar with in her life, and the power of God to overturn or stop this injustice.

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Letters 11-21

In this part, Walker starts to evolve the concept that a person can attain power by reinforcing his/her own voice. The Celie we have seen so far is absolutely devoid of power. She is vitally an object for others. She is very passive in her interactions, particularly those with men. However, Celie displays she understands that others perceive her as a powerless object when she confides to Sofia that she is envious of her aggressive, self-defensive personality. When Kate tells Mr. Johnson that Celie desires a new apparel, Celie is shown to know that Mr. Johnson conceives of her as hardly anything more than dirt, saying that when he examines her, it's like he's looking at the soil, seeking to work out if it desires anything.

Initially, Celie's recommendations that Harpo should abuse Sofia appears to be unlike her, but we soon realize that it is an outcome of the cyclical environment of misuse and oppression she has been exposed to. When Harpo inquires Celie for recommendations, Celie is granted an uncommon exercise to take part in the command and misuse of a woman other than herself. In her flaw and agony, Celie seizes this scope, but she rapidly recognizes that it comprises a 'sin against Sofia's spirit'. Celie explains her own behaviour with astonishing sophistication, revealing and confessing to Sofia that she gave those recommendations because she is envious of the way Sofia battles back when confronted with abuse.

Sofia's observation that Celie has tight-knit connections with her five powerful sisters suggests that deep bonding amidst women can prove mighty weapons to battle sexism and abuse. Celie first observes Sofia's assertiveness and autonomy when Sofia encounters Mr. Johnson and withstands his endeavours to command her. Sofia refutes Mr. Johnson's allegation that she has problems and thus will land up on the streets. Sofia denies despairing at her own pregnancy and rejects Mr. Johnson's acts to make her miserable. Likewise, Sofia's denial to stop communicating when Mr. Johnson or Harpo go into the room illustrates that she does not consider her persona as a woman to be taken lightly just because of her dependence on men. Sofia's defiance of the culture of patriarchy astonishes Celie.

Walker contends that mastering one's own tale and finding somebody to hear and reply to it are vital steps in the direction of self-empowerment and autonomy. Celie's need for voice becomes more evident in this part, as Nettie observes that viewing Celie with Mr. Johnson and his young children is like 'seeing [Celie] buried'. Nettie is the first woman who insists Celie to retaliate. Celie's interpretation to Kate that she does not desire to battle because it is too perilous appears laid-back and self-defeating, but Celie is right—there are important, probably even mortal hazards inherent in resistance. Walker discovers this tug and pulls between security and hazard all through the novel.

Celie is furthermore reluctant to oppose because she needs the devices she desires to battle back successfully—namely, an essence of self and a proficiency to conceive and articulate her own story. Nettie endeavours to assist, involved constructing Celie's sense of self by conveying to Celie Mr. Johnson's praises, which Celie admits boost her self-image. Soon after, Celie starts her first efforts at self-expression when she intends to express gratitude to Kate for buying her a new dress. She becomes discouraged and flushed, incapable to find the words. Celie's struggled advances to assert her own sentiments and her admission that she feels she warrants more than she has are significant first steps in Celie's method of empowerment. Yet simultaneously, Celie's incompetence to express her sentiments of thankfulness to Kate, illustrates the deepness of Celie's need of self-understanding.

Celie has problem characterizing, understanding and talking about herself because, as she confesses to God, she has fallen completely numb in the face of adversity. She confesses that to get over, she imagines she is a tree. Rather than cope strongly with adversity, Celie has discovered it simpler and less troublesome to become wooden—to stay stone-faced and unthinking instead of trying to contemplate, understand, or narrate.

Letters 22-33

Here, as in the earlier segment, Celie is not able to correspond what she feels with what she says. When Shug comes and wants care, Celie feels ecstatic, but she expresses nothing because she is not aware of anything and because she feels she is not in a position to speak. Celie has been voiceless for so long that she has adapted herself to believe of having no voice of her own. Her natural response is to declare nothing.

However, Celie soon realizes that her awareness of herself varies from the way other people suppose her to be. Reacting on the way she is and on people like her, Celie expresses, 'I might as well be under the table, for all they care. I hate the way I look, I hate the way I'm dress.' These reflections of self-awareness represent the baby step that Celie takes as she progresses towards empowerment.

As her understanding of self resurfaces, Celie gradually understands the inherent gaps and shortcomings in the men who try to dominate her. She also learns to counter her oppressors in an assertive manner. Analysing Mr. Johnson, Celie critically points out that he has a frail chin and wears unwashed clothes. Losing her temper at Mr. Johnson's father for his heartless remarks about Shug, Celie retaliates secretly but assertively. She plans spitting in the aged man's drinking water and menaces to put Shug's urine in his cup whenever he pays them a visit next. Celie in addition, displays her confident self when Harpo requires her suggestions regarding Sofia. Surprisingly here, Celie finds exact remarks to verbalize her accurate emotions, and advises Harpo that causing pain to Sofia is not the right way to approach things.

Walker's thought of the mixed, multilayered natural world of closeness between women arises through Celie and Shug's relationship. Alice Walker proposes sexuality and sexual preference as a parameter of possibilities and not just an alternative to two contradictory choices. Thus, like competition, sexuality can be difficult to explain, and may turn out to be more multifaceted than a conservative understanding of just heterosexuality or homosexuality. Celie's emotions for Shug have sexual undertones, but it also has its foundation on fellowship, gratefulness, solidarity, and liking. Celie does feel sexually excited on seeing Shug unclothed. But it is as sacred as her emotions of maternal tenderness that she nurtured for Shug as Celie had confessed to God when explaining how she interns Shug to bring her back to health.

Letters 34–43

Continuing with the tendency glimpsed in her preceding notes, Celie starts to take more serious approach in understanding herself and the environment she is part of. When Celie informs Shug that Mr. Johnson abuses her for 'being me and not you,' she illustrates that her self-analysis is progressively turning intense and critical.

One motivation that can be a cause for Celie's critical self-assessment is the sexual awareness that she gathers as she gets familiar with Shug's education. Shug

affirms Celie is still innocent and rechristens her as Miss Celie, providing Celie a new persona both metaphorically and literally. Shug's identification that Celie is a virgin and the new title Shug bestows on Celie are significant steps towards Celie's empowerment. And in her process of narrating her story, it gives a boost to her self-esteem.

Shug's rechristening of Celie defies the traditional concept of the issue of virginity. Shug reconstructs the notion of virginity in her own way. According to her, virginity is not lost when a man and woman develops a physical relation rather it is lost when a woman decides to indulge in pleasure of sex and finds it emotionally and physically appealing. By reconstructing the definition of virginity, Shug boosts Celie to glimpse life from a different perspective where she should be in command of events. The sudden change of perspective provided by Shug to a woman with two kids as virgin, points out to a certain desire to unravel the hidden aspects of Celie's life. Shug makes Celie understand that there are alternative ways to live a life than to surrender to the existing social norms. Identification with these thoughts plays a major role in Celie's movement towards liberation.

Yet Sofia's penalty underlines that rebelling against and questioning existing perspectives often demands a lot of sacrifice. Sofia, who is physically sound, has an adoring family and a comfortable life, does not conform to the white society's stereotypical notion of the suppressed coloured woman. Sofia asserts her disinterest to fall prey to the expected stereotypical role by responding to Miss Millie's job prospect with a definite 'Hell no'. However, this refusal leads to Sofia having a cleft skull, broken ribs, a body marked with bruises, and twelve years of servitude. Similarly, when Squeak opposes the action taking place by attempting to free Sofia from jail, she is raped. It is clear from the narration that whereas Walker views challenging the irrational orthodox outlooks as vital, she does not unnecessarily desire to romanticize the pains and paint a rosy picture as if it is devoid of agony or consequences.

Fortunately, Sofia and Squeak are not defeated by misfortunes. For Walker, the most important aspect of triumph is the power to narrate one's own life, and both Sofia and Squeak retain their voices. Sofia continues with her opposition even when she is made to serve Miss Millie's maid. Similarly, when Harpo endeavours to inform others of the incident of Squeak's rape, Squeak cuts off him, nudging him to keep the knowledge to himself because she intends to tell her story her own way. Just as Celie's new name endows her with the power to reinterpret her surroundings, Squeak's renaming unleashes her talent that was long buried within her. She starts singing.

Letters 44–60

After hearing Celie's narration, Shug makes Celie express herself emotionally. When Celie eventually articulates the difficult times she has survived, she does not respond like 'wood,' rather she sheds tears when she understands the unhappiness of her own history. Even though Celie's latest life is a miserable one, it is way better than her previous life because of her increasing sexual and emotional connection with Shug. Celie's self-esteem evolved as an outcome of her observation and discovery through Shug. Shug represents everything that Celie is not. Through Shug's perspective, Celie sees the likeness of her own suffering. Gradually, Celie's and Shug's influence on each other soon turns reciprocal. They start imitating each other. Celie's nurturing qualities are adopted by Shug while Celie becomes assertive.

This connection between Celie and Shug is centralized around the concept of storytelling. Innumerable times Celie informs how much she and Shug converse with each other. Their strong connection is a significant step which is radically different from Celie's previous silence. Nettie's communications furthermore foreground a narrative that was buried by silence. In discovering the notes, Celie revives Nettie's interred voice and starts to feel liberated. However, only with Shug's assistance Celie could decipher the meaning and the disconnected aspects of her life that she was unable to understand so far. The news of Nettie being alive has a positive impact on Celie. She gets exposed to the oppression and suppression that exists outside her life, in the continent of Africa.

Nettie's notes furthermore informs Celie of the larger world one is part of. As of now *The Color Purple* was limited to exploring the lives of a few people residing in a little village in country of Georgia. Nettie's notes not only brings Celie out of her closed world but also relates her personal grief with the general suppression and exploitation that one comes across in rest of the African countries.

Another significant component of Nettie's exposure was her meeting with the liberated blacks who are economically well placed in the Harlem district of New York. The concept of economically prosperous and free blacks is mostly unheard of in the southern world, especially for coloured women like Nettie and Celie, who are used only to living a doubly colonized life both with their white masters as well as their coloured male counterparts. We realize that Nettie's knowledge of liberated blacks has made her more confident. Even though initially Celie does not understand this but the Harlem empowerment news too has a positive impact on her individuality and her subconscious mind.

Letters 61-69

Every now and then in *The Color Purple,* Walker reminds the readers that storytelling and communicating are vital to the understanding of self. We have glimpsed difficulties in the novel due to improper/lack of communication arising between Celie and Alphonso; between Celie and Mr. Johnson; amidst Nettie, Samuel, and Corrine; and between Celie and Nettie. As the story progresses, we see some of these distances are mended as narrative of some kind or the other takes place. One comes across communication in various forms. Celie discovers Nettie's notes, Samuel informs about his young children to Nettie, and Celie exchanges this narrative with Alphonso, discovering in the process the reality of her own life and the history of her family. Apart from highlighting these unsuccessful communications which was central to the above mentioned relationships, Walker points out towards larger communication difficulties in the world which nearly remains unaddressed. She points to the more serious problems of unsuccessful association between men and women; between Americans of black and white origin, between coloured people in America and Africans, and between Africans and European colonizers.

Celie seems to grow more independent with the revelation of her family history. She stops depending on God for emotional and moral support. In her last letter, she tells God 'You must be asleep'. Instead she starts addressing letters to Nettie. Nettie also has turned into a different being. She has become more articulate. She has developed a strong intellectual faculty which her life as missionary has bestowed on her. Nettie is assertive in her dissatisfaction over native Africans self-centeredness and sexist attitude. By addressing the plights of women in Olinka community Walker

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highlights a more serious problem. Though the people of Olinka community are suppressed by the white masters (the rubber industry), the community itself is segregated between the oppressor and the oppressed. The internal domination along with Olinka's cold attitude towards the culture of African-American slavery makes the whole notion of oppressor and oppressed very complicated.

Letters 70-82

In this part, Walker presents individual religious conviction as a significant constituent to develop a powerful self. Celie has until now visualized God as someone who is placed in a distance and is probably unconcerned towards her pleadings. For her, God transforms into a white man who is no different from the other men that she has come across and who does not bother to hear the 'poor coloured women.' This concept of God visualized by Celie—and, ironically, by Nettie, Corrine, and Samuel during their missionary philanthropy—is not an exact view. In imagining God as a white man who is not concerned about her, Celie indirectly acknowledges white and male suppression and presumes that her voice can never be heard.

A significant aspect of Celie's empowerment is her new acquired financial independence. Celie's apparel design is a mode of creativity which helps one to express herself. But it also turns into entrepreneurship and paves the way towards self-sufficiency. Celie has taken stitching, conventionally a household chore, and transformed it into an equipment of independence. Walker suggests that such financial self-reliance is vital for women to liberate themselves from dominance. When she gets her family's ancestral house, Celie's life comes to full circle, her self-reliance evolving into a completely independent woman, with her own finance, enterprise, article, and group of friends.

Letters 83–90

Celie's final letter gives us a glimpse of the maturity and growth her character has undergone. By introducing the aspect of writing as a key component in the process of Celie's evolution, Alice Walker underscores the significance of literacy and makes an indirect allusion to African-American slaves who are not allowed to study, to read or compose. They were marginalized by keeping them away from knowledge. Celie and Nettie wield the power of literacy to battle oppression. They managed to survive over the years by writing to each other which was the only way to fight oppression. Even though Celie is comparatively inferior in terms of imagination to her sister, she too learns a lot from her act of writing. In this way, Walker propounds that knowledge and awareness is vital and redeeming for every individual and should not be seen as a barricade creating a hierarchy between the educated and the uneducated.

Though Walker celebrates heterogeneity and individuality in *The Color Purple*, the work finishes with the acknowledgement that not all dissimilarities can be assimilated. Along with the novel's significant conciliation, for example between Celie and Mr. Johnson some issues remain unanswered at the end of the novel. Problems continue to remain between the Olinka community and the rubber company and between Nettie and the traditional Africans. Similarly, Sofia has her doubts that she and Eleanor Jane can truly accept each other. Even Eleanor Jane's gradual sympathy with Sofia's anger is not sufficient to change the cruel past that Sofia has endured.

Walker's wants to highlight that certain differences are really unbridgeable. Though at the outset Walker's outlook may appear rather pessimistic, yet it is significant

to understand that *The Color Purple* is a narrative about successful changes. Though certain issues remain unanswered as the novel comes to an end, we came across the metamorphosis of a deprived, despised woman of colour into an economically successful entrepreneur who takes pleasure in her own sexuality and is surrounded by a supportive and like-minded community.

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The Society and *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker, through her epistolary novel, *The Color Purple*, intends to educate readers on various aspects of the societal problems. This approach to creativity reminds one of the novelist Ishmael Reed. Reed is a coloured American. Reed's works mostly satires, threw light on the existing racial problems and social issues. *The Color Purple* underlines the fact that men are not aware of the requirement and the realities of women. It also deals with the theme of women helping and supporting each other to overcome and survive the problems of life. The kind of female bonding that one comes across in *The Color Purple* is also reflected in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), the autobiography of Maya Angelou. In her work Angelou celebrates the mother-daughter relationship.

Although no concrete dates/years are provided, we can still identify that the novel is set sometimes in the early part of the twentieth century, sometime between 1910 and 1940. African Americans underwent a lot of economical constraints. But with the emergence of twentieth century, many opportunities were available them to reach the path of success. Many got education, and a lot many migrated from the rural South of America to the developing industrial North. Those who migrated carried their cultural heritage along with them, especially their songs and their stories. By the 1920s the Jazz Age had started taking shape. In this emergent culture, African-American culture and tradition came together to constitute what we call 'The Harlem Renaissance'.

In *The Color Purple* such changes are subtly expressed. The entrepreneurial abilities of Harpo finds shape as he sets up his own juke joint. Moreover, here he employs the already famous blues singer Shug to popularize his shop. Shug's achievement is a reflection of the age in which Celie is composing her letters for we are told she hums Bessie Smith, and wants to wipe off anxiety about the bygone times or the impending years. As we reach towards the end of the novel, the movement of opportunity is unexpected; Celie starts her own business. Celie initiates her business from the same place where her father survived and earned. Thirty years prior to Celie starting up her business, her father's was brought to an abrupt halt by white rivals who were keen to keep him out of race. In this new era, Walker tells us there is no reason to be concerned about Celie's opportunities, and we as readers are sure that Celie will continue to be prosperous.

When Walker's novel came out in 1982, one of the most significant and talked about aspect of the book was the way language was used. Mel Watkins of *The New York Book Review* had written that the novel 'assumes a lyrical cadence of its own... The cumulative effect is a novel that is convincing because of the authenticity of its folk voice.' The language was seminal to Walker's novel. She once recounted that after she finished her novel she sent it to a prominent women's magazine concerned about black women but they rejected the novel explaining that 'black people don't talk like that' (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 229). The later success of the novel identifies such statement to be unfounded, because it is Celie's specific voice that identifies her difficult situation and echoes the lives of many African Americans of her time.

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Women Bonding

Throughout *The Color Purple,* Walker depicts female bonding as an alternative way for women to build the courage to narrate stories to each other. As a result of this storytelling, the session becomes their weapon to resist suppression and dominance. Bonding between women translates into a form of shelter which is filled with nurturing and caring concerns and helps to recover from aggressive male dominance.

Female relationships are multilayered: sometimes they are motherly, sometimes sisterly. Sometimes they also represented in the form of teacher and pupil. Some of them have strong sexual undertones, and some reflect happy friendships. Sofia asserts that her ability to stand against the wrong doers comes from the support she gains from her sisters. Nettie's closeness with Celie helps her survive her years in the strange and unaccustomed culture of Africa. Samuel highlights the strong bonding that Olinka women share with each other that helps them survive through the polygamous world. Most importantly, Celie's bonding with Shug helps Celie emerge into a stronger being who is self-reliant and independent.

Tradition and Change

The Color Purple presents many characters that come out of the traditionally sanctioned gender defined roles. Sofia is full of strength, Shug never shies away from displaying her sexual desires, and Harpo almost throughout comes up as an insecure person. Under a traditional parameter a man is always expected to be secured, a woman is expected to be weak and less demonstrative of her sexual desires. But these characters bring out those aspects of their gender sanctioned roles which are not stereotypical. This display of gender deviant traits also at times throws light on other aspects of gender roles. For example, we see a strong sexual attraction developing between Celie and Shug despite the fact that they have had men in their lives and are opposite in nature.

Deviation from sanctioned gender roles sometimes creates unexpected situations. Harpo's insecurity regarding his masculine abilities has bearing on his marital life and leads him to make efforts to abuse his wife Sofia in a desperate attempt to prove his manliness. Similarly, Shug's uninhibited display of her sexual powers and her constant challenge to male social world earns her names like being called a tramp. In her novel, Alice Walker tries to underline the multifaceted meaning that is associated with gender and sexuality. They are neither mere words nor do they have a unilinear approach to certain social functions. They are more complicated then they seem on the surface. Walker's novel calls for our attentions to understand the dynamics of male-female, female-female and male-male relation.

In *The Color Purple* sewing plays an important role. It is emblematic of the creative powers of women. If they are capable of channelizing their creative power effectively they can become powerful. Sewing is a traditional form of creativity which women indulge in within their domestic confines. Sofia and Celie reach through a process of peace after their difference of opinion is expressed over Harpo episode, by preparing a quilt. The quilt symbolizes unity within diversity. A quilt is created by putting together various patterns and it is mostly a collaborative effort. It is a process which helps people to be bound together. Like the patchwork one finds in a quilt, as the novel progresses Celie finds herself being surrounded by people who are diverse in their approach and thoughts but are closely bound by their family and love for each other.

Another significant function of sewing is revealed in the novel when Celie starts her own pants-sewing enterprise. With the support from Shug, Celie challenges the perception that sewing is an unimportant aspect of women's labour. She turns this art into a promising, and powerful medium of gaining economic access.

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Communication

Alice Walker uses the epistolary mode of narration to highlight her idea of importance of communication. Celie pours out her heart in the letters she addresses to God. Celie perceives God as her audience and supporter even though she is not sure who God is. Her impression of Him as a white man 'don't seem quite right' even to her, yet she continues with the image until Shug insists Celie to visualize God as a different entity– Not just as 'he' but as 'it' a neutral person. But soon her communication with God ceases as she emerges as an independent woman, one with a mind of her own.

Nettie describes her experiences through letters to Celie. For both the sisters, letters are symbolis of power and the act of letter writing empowers them. But their real redemption takes place only when their letters are reciprocated. Though speaking out (through the act of writing) provides a sense of power, it cannot achieve its full potential unless there is someone to share it or listen to it or there is an audience. When Celie fails to reply to Nettie she feels caught up in the maze of life. Celie is the only person she could share her life with and if Celie does not answer then she is completely at loss. Nettie is torn between the disinterested imperialist and the self-centered Olinka villagers. Nettie feels liberated only after she is able to narrate her experience to Celie.

Yet when Shug and Celie are told of the world outside, they feel odd. The information they got from Nettie sounded 'crazy' to them. Communication broadens their scope of knowledge and paves a way for imagining an oppression free future. But what is important here is that the story being set in a small closed community finds itself cut off from the world outside. There is no communication with the world beyond the enclosed confines of the small town. Once the people come across the larger world their ideas change and they are willing to take risks and chances for a better life. Walker universalizes the theme of need to exchange ideas by broadening the location of the events taking place and exposing her characters to the world which exists beyond their cocooned selves.

ACTIVITY

Do you agree that Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an example of a woman's novel. Give your views.

Did You Know

Alice Walker is active in environmental, feminist, and animal rights causes, and has campaigned against female genital mutilation.

Check Your Progress

6. From which village does Tashi hail?
7. Who is also addressed as 'Pa'?
8. What kind of singer is Shug Avery?
9. What does Celie's confessional narrative remind one of?
10. Why does Celie recommend Harpo to abuse Sophia?
11. What had Celie started to believe in the early part of the narrative?
12. Why is Shug's renaming of Celie important?
13. Whose notes inform Celie of the world outside?
14. Which community did Nettie interact with?
15. Why is Celie's final letter important?
16. Which tradition does *The Color Purple* have its origin in?
17. What does Harpo's insecurity leads to?

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4.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- *The Color Purple* is often seen as a 'woman's novel'. For Walker, women-oriented writings concentrate on African-American women living in twentieth-century America. In such novels, more often than not we encounter women who fight all odds to justify their own and their families' survival.
- In their fragmented communities, these women tend to be motherly characters who wish to protect and secure their families for the sake of their posterity.
- Other prominent authors apart from Toni Morrison who have dealt in this tradition of writing include Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou.
- Their female characters always tend to be subjugated for a long while before they manage to retaliate, fight and learn to survive.
- These characters are often found to be safeguarding the present, so that a healthy future can be ensured, especially while negotiating with the past. For instance, it has often been said that *The Color Purple* deals with the genre of the slave narrative.
- The tradition of slave narratives came into existence when slaves started narrating the stories of their experiences.
- It is believed that around six thousand former slaves narrated their experience during the period of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- One of the often mentioned slave narratives is Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845).
- As in Walker's novel and as apparent in slave narratives, the subjugated position of the speaker is of utmost importance, revealing heart wrenching treatment that had previously been ignored.
- *The Color Purple* like the slave narratives emerges from the rich African oral traditions which include the methods of storytelling and song composing.
- The Africans transported to America nearly always as slaves were barred from communicating in their own mother tongues (just the way Celie's speech was suppressed), so they invented alternative means of conveying themselves, especially through acting and singing.
- Their narratives were believed in the plantation and narratives of their native Africa. These stories continued from generation to generation and soon turned out to form the core of most of African-American storytelling tradition.
- In her process of storytelling, Celie made sure that her life as a black woman living in early twentieth-century America is conveyed and documented for future generations.

4.5 KEY TERMS

- **Slave narrative:** It is a literary form which grew out of the experience of enslaved Africans.
- **Womanism:** A form of feminism focused on the conditions and concerns of black women

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4.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Alice Walker's first published work was a book of poems, *Once* (1968).
2. *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* was Walker's mouthpiece for identifying the plight of those who struggle against racism and oppression.
3. *Langston Hughes: American Poet* published in 1974, was the biography Walker had composed.
4. Walker was the first black woman to be awarded with Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and National Book Award.
5. Walker received O. Henry Award for 'Kindred Spirits'.
6. Tashi is the girl from Olinka village.
7. Alphonso is also addressed as 'Pa'.
8. Shug Avery is a blues singer.
9. Celie's confessional narrative reminds one of the African-American slave narratives which took shape during the nineteenth century.
10. Celie's recommendation to Harpo to abuse Sophia is an outcome of the cyclical environment of misuse and oppression she has been exposed to.
11. Celie has been voiceless for so long that she has adapted herself to believe of having no voice of her own.
12. Shug's rechristening of Celie is important because it defies the traditional concept of the issue of virginity.
13. Nettie's notes inform Celie's of the larger world, one is part of.
14. Nettie interacted with the Olinka community.
15. Celie's final letter gives us a glimpse of the maturity and growth her character has undergone.
16. *The Color Purple* emerges from the rich African oral traditions which include the methods of storytelling and song composing.
17. Harpo's insecurity regarding his masculine abilities has bearing on his marital life and leads him to make efforts to abuse his wife Sofia in a desperate attempt to prove his manliness.

4.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How do Nettie's letters differ from those of Celie?
2. Why Sofia was imprisoned?
3. Do you think Celie's letters are like prayers? Why?
4. How does Celie succeed in overcoming her low self-esteem?

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5. How does the death of Celie's mother change Celie's relationship with her family, with herself and with God?
6. The main sub-plot revolves around Nettie in Africa. How does this relate to and impact the main plot of Celie?
7. What is the significance of the act of communication?

Long-Answer Questions

1. In what ways are Nettie and Celie different? In what ways are they similar?
2. What impact does Celie's revelation of her past have on her?
3. Trace the development of Albert's character. How does he change and why?
4. Narrate some instances of racism in the novel.
5. Why is *The Color Purple* a feminist novel?
6. List, analyze and evaluate the various gender crossings in the novel.
7. Write a note on the female bonding as it appears in the novel.
8. Write a note on the representation of society as it appears in *The Color Purple.*

4.8 FURTHER READING

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NOTES

UNIT 5 KAMALA DAS

Structure

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 About the Author
  5.2.1 Das as a Poet
  5.2.2 Memorial for Kamala
5.3 *The Old Playhouse*
5.4 Summary
5.5 Key Terms
5.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.7 Questions and Exercises
5.8 Further Reading

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das is one of India's most renowned contemporary women writers. Expressing herself in two dialects, English and Malayalam, Das has authored numerous autobiographical works and books, some critically acclaimed collections of verse in English, many volumes of short tales, and prose on a variety of themes. Immediately after the publication of her first collection of poems, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), Das was identified as a significant voice of the contemporary period which was exemplified by moving beyond the existing voices and composing in a distinctly Indian tone rather than taking up the methods of the English modernists. Das's challenging verses are characterized by their intense investigation of the self and feminine sexuality. It revolves around city-centric life and women's functions in an Indian surrounding. It mentions the political and individual conflicts of marginalized people. Das's work, especially written in English, has been read and published in India, Australia, and the West. She has brought home numerous accolades and honours. This unit will focus on Das as a poet and writer and her work. Attention will be paid to one of her poems '*The Old Playhouse*'.

5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Assess Kamala Das as a poet and littérateur
- Discuss the important aspects of *The Old Playhouse*

5.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiyya, was an Indian poetess born on 31 March 1934. A distinguished Indian writer, she composed both in English and Malayalam, her native language. Much of Das's writings in Malayalam are published under the pen-name 'Madhavikkutty'. Her mother was a Malayalam short story writer. Das also embarked on her literary career as a writer by publishing short stories in

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Malayalam. But after the publication of her Indian English verse collection *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), she gained a wider recognition as an author and creative writer. The success of this collection paved her way to the publication of two other collections of poem: *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973).



***Fig. 5.1** Kamala Das*

Das's work celebrates the spirit of the Indian women of contemporary times and chronicles their agony of being bereft of love and longing for emotional fulfillment. The nature of her poetry is confessional. Her poems express her inner-most desires in their existing sentiments stripped of any superfluous veil of emotions. Her poetry reflects the desires of the physical body and a quest for the beautiful and the serene that is not within her reach. This Indian poetess was also fond of writing about memories of childhood, family relations, and the family's great house.

Love and marriage are ever-permeating themes in Das's poetry. These themes are mostly always rooted in her Nair heritage, her own home situated in Kerala and her grandmother's place. Her poems like 'Summer in Calcutta', 'In Love', 'Composition' 'The Suicide', 'An Intensity' reflect the intensity of her feelings with an underlined feeling of protest.

Das's autobiography *My Story* was published in 1976. She wrote two novels, *Manas* (1975) and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). She was honoured with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985 for her literary contributions.

Works

- *The Sirens*, 1964
- *Summer in Calcutta*, 1965
- *The Descendants*, 1967
- *The Old Playhouse* and Other Poems, 1973
- *My Story*, 1976
- *Alphabet of Lust*, 1977
- *The Anamalai Poems*, 1985
- *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories*, 1992
- *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing*, 1996
- *Yaa Allah*, 2001
- *Tonight, This Savage Rite*, 1979
- *My Mother At Sixty-six*, 1999

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5.2.1 Das as a Poet

Kamala Das released six volumes of verse between 1965 and 1985. Drawing upon devout and household symbolisms to investigate a sense of individuality, Das notifies of intensely individual knowledge, encompassing her development into womanhood, her failed quest for love within and outside the ceremony of wedding, and her existence in a male dominated world within the rural confines of southern India, especially after inheriting the home that belonged to her forefathers.

Das has been courted controversy with the publication of *Summer in Calcutta*. She soon became renowned for her use of odd imagery and outspokenness in her poems. For example, in her poems 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' and 'The Freaks', Das sketches the exotic to talk about her sexuality and her journey to fulfill her need. In 'An Introduction', Das takes the problems of women to a universal level and addresses openly those topics which were hitherto conventionally considered as personal knowledge, proposing that women's individual sentiments of yearning and parting are part of the collective know-how of woman's life. In next collection of poems *The Descendants* (1967), the verse 'The Maggots' interlinks the agony of lost love with existing Hindu myths. And the verse, 'The Looking-Glass', explains that women are expected to carry out in love and passion, those very things that humanity usually marks as unclean. Yet, these are things the women are presumed to deliver when in love. The verse suggests that an unexpressed love is equal to no love experience; only a total engrossment in the emotion of love can provide fairness to this experience. In *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1975), verses like 'Substitute', 'Gino' and 'The Suicide' analyze the malfunction of corporal love to achieve fulfillment, to help oneself release from his/her own self, or to invoke the past. Works like 'The Inheritance' looks into the integrity of the creative self in the light of devout fanaticism. *In Tonight, This Savage Rite:* The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy (1979), Das remembers Krishna in her investigation of the stress between personal love and religious transcendence. *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), is a sequence of short verses which was written after Das lost the parliamentary elections in the year 1984. Some poems like 'Delhi 1984' and 'Smoke in Colombo' remind the readers the massacre of the Sikhs in India and the civil war that rocked Sri Lanka.

5.2.2 Memorial for Kamala

By K. Kunhikrishnan

It was on 21 December 2011, that the work for the Kamala Surayya Das' memorial began after a long wait. The land chosen for the construction of this memorial is the

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same that she once donated to the Kerala Sahitya Akademi at Punnayurkulam in Trissur.

Das, an iconoclast, and also a fiction writer, possessed 17 cents of ancestral property in Trussur district which she readily donated to the Kerala Sahitya Academi claiming the land and trees to be her 'kingdom of emotions', which greatly influenced and inspired her to compose and create stories. She hoped to 'bring a bit of fragrance' to Malayalam literature through the donation that she made. Many writers have come out of her ancestral home, Nalappattu, including her mother Balamani Amma, who was a poetess, and her great uncle Nalappattu Narayana Menon, who was a poet. Her ancestral home in its heyday was a center of literary debates amongst various celebrated and famous writers. Therefore, it would not be unjustified to say that her family was one of those with the richest Malayalam literary heritage.

Das' works are loved and read by the masses and have often gained the status of being best sellers. No matter where she lived, Kamal's home have always been crowed with the visits of both new and old writers.

The Sahitya Akademi at Pune, as she had left Kerala, formalized the taking over of the land in March 2009, two months before Kamala's death. The presence of a serpent grove and the Kerala Sahitya Akedemi's lack of proper and necessary means for building a memorial caused some controversies to plague surface. Once the land was formally possessed, the necessity of doing something more than just the construction of a building was felt. 10.25 cents of the property was donated to the Akademi by K. B. Sukumaran, who had originally purchased the property from Das and her sister Sulochana Unnikrishnana. The cost of the memorial complex was estimated by the Akademi to be somewhere around 18 million.

10.2 million was sanctioned by the Government of Kerala for the construction of the memorial complex. The first installment that the government sanctioned was of 20 lakh which was handed over to the Kerala Public Works Department to begin the construction work.

More Contributions

Noticing the delays and complexities in the planning and procedure of the construction of the memorial, Kamal's friends and well-wisher came together to form a Kamala Surayya Trust at her native place. The famous writer and orator Sukuma Azhikode was chosen to be the director of the trust, and K. B. Sukumaran was appointed the secretary. Various literary personalities are associated with this Trust. The Trust primary objectives are to promote literature and arts, to project the contribution made by Kamala Das in the world of literature, and also to establish awards in literature. Among other activities, the Trust conducted two award presentations of Kamala Surayya Trust Award. The award offers ₹51,000 cash prize to the winner. The first award ceremony was conducted on 31st March 2010, Kamala's birthday. Writer Vaisakhan for his short story collection, *Silencer*, and Savithri Rajeevan, for her poetry won the awards, respectively.

The second Kamal Surayya Trust Award went to Punathil Kunhabdulla and K. G. Sankara Pillai. K. B. Sukumaran is one of the most energetic and active members of the Trust, who has spent a considerable amount on the Trust. As of now, the Trust lacks capital in order to continue with its activities. The amount required to continue the literary and humanitarian activities of the Trust is somewhere around ₹25 lakh.

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After the completion, the memorial lacks proper infrastructure for maintenance and administration. In spite of the Akademi having no facility, the chairman Prempadavam Sreedharan is very ambitious about it. 20 memorial and 14 institutions and performing art organizations in Kerala are assisted and financially helped by the Kerala Cultural Affairs Department. The Shaitya Akademi has funds only to support the memorial, but if its activities are to continue, the local support and involvement is essentially required.

Awards and Recognition

Kamala Das's contribution to literature through her poetry of rebellion and confession got her *acclaim* from various literary quarters. Some of the awards are mentioned below:

- Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize in 1984
- Asian Poetry Prize (1998)
- Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries (1999)
- Asian World Prize (2000)
- Ezhuthachan Puraskaram (2009)
- Sahitya Academy Award (1985)
- Vayalar Award (2001)
- Kerala Sahitya Academy Award (1969)
- Muttathu Varkey Award (2006)

The Canadian writer Merrily Weisbord was a good friend of Das. They knew each other for a long time. Their friendship is celebrated in Merrily Weisbord's memoir, *The Love Queen of Malabar*, published in 2010.

5.3 *THE OLD PLAYHOUSE*

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge
Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every
Lesson you gave was about yourself. You were pleased
With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow
Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

Check Your Progress

1. What was the pseudonym Das used to write in Malayalam?
2. What was the native language of Kamala Das?

OTES

Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. The summer
Begins to pall. I remember the rudder breezes
Of the fall and the smoke from the burning leaves. Your room is
Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always
Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little,
All pervasive is the male scent of your breath. The cut flowers
in the vases have begun to smell of human sweat. There is
No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old
Playhouse with all its lights put out. The strong man's technique is
Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses,
For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.

In *The Old Playhouse*, Kamala Das expresses the moroseness of her life. The flowers cut off from the branches are displayed in the vase. However, flowers in the vase do not tantalize with their fragrance. Rather, for the poet, they seem to be filled with the stench of human sweat. She goes on to narrate her joyless life by saying: '...There is No more singing, no more dance, my mind an old Playhouse with all its lights putout.'

The ideal love which the poet has been looking for everywhere finds an exact description in this poem. When the poetess speaks of 'love' in particular she ascertains that it is unconditional and selfless. She says,

...Love is Narcissus at the waters' edge, haunted
By its own lovely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors
To shatter and the kind night to erase the waters.

In this phrase, which is swallowed with narcissism, the lovers/couples are incapable of moving beyond their petty egos which leads to a definite constrain making it impossible for the lovers to get totally submerged within each other. They are over indulgent in their love for their own self. There is no scope and space for the other. But soon they manage to get 'total freedom' from this phase and move on to the next level. It is in this level of passion that the lovers seem to have moved beyond their ordinariness to a greater plane where they are freed from their ego and get complete freedom to understand and enjoy the transcendental love. This kind of love, which was exemplified by Radha and Krishna, as depicted in myths and religious scriptures, entices Das. She tries to imagine herself as Radha who is in search of her Krishna. Radha and Krishna are always considered as the ideal lovers despite their being married with different partners. Despite her invocation of Radha and Krishna figure, the element of 'bhakti' is not found in her works because she simultaneously oscillates between two worlds—the physical world where love is superficial and the transcendental world where love is more intense.

As Das explains, the body and the soul are entrapped within the confines of the regime to 'tame'. The wildness is preferred over domestication and a definite wish to detach the narrator from her previous life, her identities associated with it along with her passion and dreams. Instead of teaching the narrator 'to learn to grow' the lessons imparted were more restricting and regressive as they told only about the partner. The existence of the learner soon gets lost in the process.

As a wife, the narrator gets converted into a more robot-like existence where she is expected to fill in her husband's said and unsaid demands and this turns the narrator into a 'dwarf'. In presence of the 'monstrous ego' of the husband the wife identified herself as a dwarf. In this poem, the poetess shows the desire to demolish the concept of male domination and his egoistical superiority over her. Her voice is reduced to some mumbling and incoherent words. Put under the surveillance of his question the wife is just a mere existence who has lost the 'will and reason' to live.

The narrator laments that the freshness that the change of seasons invoke is also missing from their lives because it is sheltered under 'artificial lights' and 'air conditioners'. Their life is a painful routine exercise which just goes on. And one cannot expect any change to take place because any scope of change is distance through the narrator's mental association with her 'old Playhouse with all lights put out'.

The Old Playhouse puts light on the plight of a woman and her doubly subjugated position in society. She not only exists in a society where men are preferred in the hierarchical social domain but even in the confines of the private space, the role of a woman is relegated to satisfying her husband. The colonization, which is so permeating, is shocking. When the narrator says, 'You called me a wife', she is drawing the readers' attention to the unequal status that a man and woman share in a marital life. Women are expected to live and function in a certain way, a way of life that is determined and executed by the male-dominated world. By adopting this way of life, a woman not only loses her voice, but in the process of trying to fit herself into the sanctioned mould, she also loses her dignity, self-respect and rational perception.

But in this journey of colonization, there is also a sense of realization. A realization that affects her conscious and sub-conscious mind and which realizes that the self is now 'cowering beneath' the husband's 'monstrous ego'. The poem depicts the female journey from victimization to consciousness. Das raises her voice against this system which does not view the people of two genders as equal rather they are always visualized as sharing a hierarchical position. This role performance has led many women to submerge their selves into the egos of men. The narrator condemns the gender division created by the male-dominated society and pities the women lot because of the sexes. In the male-governed society, it is impossible for a woman to rebel against the male's overwhelming sense of superiority because a male, she was given to understand, was no less than God.

ACTIVITY

Discuss Kamala Das as a confessional poet.

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Check Your Progress

3. What is the role of the flower in the vase?
4. What finds an exact expression in this poem?
5. What happens when couples are swallowed in narcissism?
6. Where are the body and the soul entrapped?
7. Why does the narrator call herself dwarf?

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DID YOU KNOW

Das was part of a generation of English-language Indian writers whose work centred on personal rather than colonial experiences, and her short stories, poetry, memoirs, and essays brought her both respect and notoriety.

5.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Kamala Suraiyya, also known by her one-time pen name Madhavikutty, was a major Indian English poet and littérateur and at the same time a leading Malayalam author.
- She is popular in Kerala, mainly because of her short stories and autobiography, while her work in English, authored under the name Kamala Das, is well-known for the intense poems and overt autobiography.
- Her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power, but also marked her as a nonconformist of her generation.
- She was renowned for her numerous Malayalam short stories and also a large number of poems written in English.
- She was born in a traditional Hindu Nair (Nallappattu) family that belonged to a royal lineage. She converted to Islam in 1999, at the age of 65 and changed her name to Kamala Surayya.
- Kamala Das in her poem *The Old Playhouse* explores the temperament of lust and disappointment. In this perspective, she looks into the male personality in addition to her own agonized self.
- Kamala Das appears to be possessed by the idea that feminine self is just a plaything in the unsympathetic hands of the male. Her ego-self has acknowledged that man is a brute.
- She wants honesty between her physical as well as her inner self.
- Her poems indicate that Kamala Das wants to be her own self. She feels it necessary to make a place for herself in a public world, at her home and even in her own bedroom. However, every time she is faced with disgust and shock.
- Although she looks for the excellence of masculine being in every lover, in the end she fails because she finds it impossible to realize this model in the form of a human being. Her encounter with frustration makes her conscious of her rebellious way of thinking.

5.5 KEY TERMS

- **Littérateur:** One who is devoted to the study or writing of literature is called a littérateur.
- **Imagery:** It is language that produces pictures in the minds of people reading or listening.
- ***Symbolism:*** It was a late 19th century art movement of French, Russian and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts which used symbols to represent ideas, especially in art and literature.
- **Narcissism:** It is the habit of admiring oneself too much, especially the appearance.

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5.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Much of Kamala Das's writings in Malayalam are published in the pen name 'Madhavikkutty'.
2. Kamala Das also wrote in Malayalam, which was her native language.
3. The flowers in the vase do not tantalize with their fragrance, rather, for the poet, they seem to be filled with the stench of human sweat.
4. The ideal love which the poet has been looking for everywhere finds an exact description in his poem.
5. When the couples are swallowed in narcissism, the lovers/couples are incapable of moving beyond their petty egos which leads to a definite constrain making it impossible for the lovers to get totally submerged within each other.
6. The body and the soul are entrapped within the confines of the regime to 'tame'.
7. As a wife, the narrator was converted into a more robot-like existence where she is expected to fill in her husband's said and unsaid demands and this turned the narrator into a 'dwarf'.

5.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. When and why was Das identified as a significant voice of the contemporary times?
2. Name some of the works of Kamala Das in English.
3. What does *The Love Queen of Malabar* represent?
4. What do the flowers signify in *The Old Playhouse*?
5. What is the gist of *The Old Playhouse*?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on Kamala Das as a poet and littérateur.
2. Discuss the significant features of *The Old Playhouse*.
3. Summarize the awards and recognition given to Kamala Das for her contribution to literature.
4. Discuss the mindset of Kamala Das, while writing *The Old Playhouse*.

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5.8 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 6 SAROJINI NAIDU

Structure

6.0 Introduction
6.1 Unit Objectives
6.2 Works of Sarojini Naidu
6.3 Characteristics and Themes in her Poetry
6.4 *Pardah Nashin*
  6.4.1 Summary of *Pardah Nashin*
  6.4.2 Critical Assessment
  6.4.3 Naidu's View on the *Pardah* System in India
6.5 *Song of Radha, the Milkmaid*
  6.5.1 Summary of the *Song of Radha, the Milkmaid*
  6.5.2 Critical Assessment
6.6 Summary
6.7 Key Terms
6.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
6.9 Questions and Exercises
6.10 Further Reading

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad on 13 February 1879. Her father, Aghornath Chattopadhyay, was a doctor of science from Edinburgh University. He settled in Hyderabad, where he founded the Ahmedabad College. It was later called the Nizam's College. Her mother, Barada Sundari Devi, was a Bengali poetess. After completing her matriculation from the University of Madras, Naidu continued her education in England, first at King's College London and later at Girton College, Cambridge. It was while studying here that she met Edmund Gosse, who convinced her to stick to Indian themes in her poetry. She followed this advice and depicted contemporary Indian life and events in her poetry. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali and Persian.

While in England, she met her future husband Govindarajulu Naidu, who was a non-Brahmin doctor. They married, when she was 19 years old. Even though it was an intercaste marriage, they did not face any opposition; her father approved of the match and it was a happy marriage. They had five children Jayasurya, Padmaja, Randheer, Nilawar and Leelamani.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 inspired her to join the Indian National movement. Her interaction with luminaries like Tagore, Gokhale, Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru, honed her political beliefs and increased her political activism. She traversed the length and breadth of the country, talking about social welfare, women empowerment and nationalism. In fact, the years from 1915 to 1918 can be seen as her activist years. During these years, she successfully garnered the support of Indian women and was instrumental in bringing them out of their homes to participate in the freedom movement in any capacity that they could. She also helped to establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA) in 1917. Her work was recognized by the British government, which awarded her the *hind kesari* medal for her work. She also went to jail along with other leaders like Gandhi and Nehru during the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movement.

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Sarojini Naidu's accomplishments are legendary. She was one of the framers of the Indian Constitution. She was also the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress, as well as the first female governor of Uttar Pradesh. She died in her sleep on 2 March 1949.

Sarojini Naidu plays an important role in the history of Indian literatures in English. When she first began writing poetry, there were many poets in India, who were imitating their British idols. As a result, the late 19th and early 20th century is replete with an imitation of the romantic poetry, in both form and matter. The situation was so dire that the British despaired of ever encountering a native voice that elaborated the Indian experience in an Indian lingo using native symbols and images. Toru Dutt was the first one to do this. She was influenced by the Puranas and the culture of ancient India. She interpreted Indian life in front of the Western world by recapturing the legendary past of India in her verses.

Sarojini Naidu followed her footsteps. Her poems are rooted in India myth, legends and folklore. Her poetry can be regarded as a mirror of India. She portrays the customs, traditions, festivals, myths and legends, men and women, flora and fauna, landscape and skyline of India through her poems. It was this aspect of her poetry that prompted Edmund Gosse to praise her poetry in the introduction to *The Bird of Time*. In it he wrote: 'What we wished to receive was not a rechauffe of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul.' The fact that this is the case with Sarojini Naidu's poetry is further borne by A. A. Ansari's praise. According to him, the most characteristic feature of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is its lyrical wealth and the preponderance of a purely Indian character.

This unit will, hence, look at the works of Naidu with special emphasis on *Pardah Nashin* and *Song of Radha*.

6.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- List the works of Sarojini Naidu
- Summarize the characteristics and themes in her poetry
- Interpret the theme of *Pardah Nashin*
- Interpret the theme of the *Song of Radha*

6.2 WORKS OF SAROJINI NAIDU

She was a child prodigy and began writing at the age of 12. *Maher Muneer*, her first play impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad. It was written in Persian and is indicative of the wide influences that can be seen in her work. She was given the sobriquet 'The Nightingale of India' for her poetic work. In recognition of her work on women's issues her birthday is celebrate as Women' Day in India. Her contribution to the field of Indian poetry cannot be doubted. This reputation was cemented when *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 and earned her the title '*Bul Bule Hind*.'

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Fig. 6.1 Sarojini Naidu

She was a virtuoso of English metrical forms and her poetry is replete with romantic imagery. A look at her work reveals her growth as a poetess. She began writing poetry influenced by the British models. In her early work she used English metrical forms and Western themes and images. It was Edmund Gosse who read her work, realized her potential and advised her to incorporate Indian subjects and themes into her work. *The Golden Threshold,* her first collection of poems was published in 1905.The book combines traditional poetic forms with images of Indian life. This book was extremely successful and readers adored her deft handling of English as well as her representation of Indian life. Her second volume *The Bird of Time* (1912), deals with the issues of death and grief. Some poems in this volume also give voice to her patriotic and religious beliefs. Gosse, in the foreword of the volume praised Naidu for her skill in exploring complex issues in a delicate romantic language. The dominant note in *The Broken Wing* (1917) is patriotic and she focuses exclusively on the description of Indian culture. This volume contains some of her best poems and was the last volume published in her lifetime. These three volumes occupy a place of eminence in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry. In 1918 *Feast of Youth* was published. Later, *The Magic Tree, The Wizard Mask* and *A Treasury of Poems* also came out. *The Sceptered Flute: Songs of India (1937)* was a collection of the first three volumes of her poetry. *The Feather of the Dawn (1961)* published posthumously, contained poems written in 1927 by Naidu.

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Works

- *The Golden Threshold*, 1905
- *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring*, 1912
- *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring*, 1917
- *Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity*, 1916
- *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India*, 1943
- *The Feather of the Dawn*, 1961
- *The Indian Weavers*, 1971

Famous Poems

- *Damayante to Nala in the Hour of Exile*
- *Ecstasy*
- *Indian Dancers*
- *The Indian*
- *Indian Love-Song*
- *Indian Weavers*
- *In Salutation to the Eternal Peace*
- *In the Forest*
- *In the Bazaars of Hyderabad*
- *Leili*
- *Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad*
- *Palanquin Bearers*
- *The Pardah Nashin*
- *Past and Future*
- *The Queen's Rival*
- *The Royal Tombs of Golconda*
- *The Snake-Charmer*
- *Song of a Dream*
- *Song of Radha, the milkmaid*
- *The Soul's Prayer*
- *Suttee*
- *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus*
- *To the God of Pain*
- *Wandering Singers*
- *Street Cries*
- *Alabaster*
- *Autumn Song*
- *Bangle Sellers*
- *The Coromandel Fishers*
- *To youth*
- *The Festival of Memory*

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While Sarojini Naidu worked for the overall uplift of Indian women, her approach was not confrontational. She was not working along the lines of Western feminists when they campaigned for 'emancipation.' Instead her aim was to generate a sense of harmony between the two sexes so that they would co-operate and work together for freedom and progress. She worked on the need for education for women and also protested against social practices that led to discrimination against women. She argued that it was imperative to equip women with skills and to free them from the burden of outmoded thoughts. In the Calcutta Session of the Indian, National Congress in 1917, she declared: 'Womanhood of India stands by you today. When your hour strikes, when you need torchbearers in the darkness, standard bearers to uphold your honour... the womanhood of India will be with you as holders of your banner, sustainers of your strength.' She linked the woman's movement with the national struggle.

It was under her initiative that the Patna session of the Women's Conference campaigned against *pardah*. Gandhi inaugurated the campaign and exhorted the women of India to discard the veil. Her poem '*Pardah Nashin*' can be seen in this light. While critics have seen the poem as a glorification of the sheltered life led by women of the royal family in Hyderabad, this is a misreading of the poem. The poem is, in fact, an indictment of the *pardah* system.

Sarojini Naidu gave a systematic and organized form to the women's movement in India. She also helped Indian women realize the intimate connection between their own progress and the nation's progress towards political and economic freedom. She stressed that women had an important role in the national life through their patient service and their aptitude for reconciling divergent interests and attitudes. She also encouraged women of the higher classes to go out of their comfort zones and take the women's movement to the villages and the masses. She dealt with various issues concerning women's issues: franchise, seclusion, economic security, political representation, right to divorces, and the importance of women in the country's cultural progress. She was convinced that instead of looking to the West for inspiration Indian women should look at their own heritage for inspiration. She praised the ancient Indian concept of ideal woman in the Asian Relations Conference in 1947. *The Statesman* took her to task for it in an editorial. It charged the poetess for ignoring the ugly side of the picture and presenting a highly idealized and romantic image of women in ancient India. However, this is a misreading since through the poem she is trying to suggest the detrimental effect of preventing women from interacting with the world around them.

Before we make assessment of her poetry, especially with regard to the representation of women it is important to remember that her images are steeped in Indian ethos. Therefore, the women in her poetry are quintessentially Indian in their beliefs and behaviour. This does not mean that Sarojini Naidu thinks that there is no room for improvement. Instead even as she shows the 'Indian' experience she steadfastly refuses to romanticize it. She looks at the experiences of women across class and religious lines and realizes that all of them suffer from the same limitations and constrictions. Her poetry can, therefore, be seen as the manifesto of the direction she wants the women's movement in India to take. She wants it to address specific Indian problems in a very Indian way. The fact that such an approach is necessary is evident from the women represented through the poems 'Song of Radha' and 'Pardha Nashin.' In the former women can find a place of their own only in the throes of a religious ecstasy. And even then this has to be forced from a begrudging society. The

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argument coming from patriarchal society is that women's actions and roles are controlled in all spheres. This idea is repeated again in the second poem. Women's minds need to be freed. The comfort their physical bodies are in becomes irrelevant in the face of mental slavery. Considering the fact that at the time these poems were written the nation was involved in the freedom struggle her agenda becomes even more important. It will be impossible to create a truly free and independent India if its women continue to be enslaved by outdated ideologies. Therefore, we can see these poems as her clarion call for the intellectual and spiritual freedom for Indian women.

6.3 CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES IN HER POETRY

Sarojini Naidu earned the sobriquet 'Nightingale of India' (Bharat Kokila). This was not without merit. Her poems were praised for having an 'Indian soul' even though she used the English language to pen her thoughts. A characteristic feature of her poetry is that even though the words are English the soul of her poems is very Indian. They project an Indian ethos in the imagery, sound, rhythm and ideology. She was a gifted poetess whose work reflects her keen sensibility and rich imagination. Her poetry is replete with metaphors and similes which are drawn primarily from the natural world around her. At the same time these similes and metaphors are also drawn from the rhythms of life in the Indian landscape and reveal her familiarity and appreciation for the same. She also draws her images from folklore, myth and legend. Her images are unquestionably delicate, sensuous and romantic.

However, it must be remembered that she is not blind to the faults and drawbacks of her country and its culture. Her poetry reflects her involvement with Indian life. She said about herself:

> The lyric child had grown into the lyric woman. All the instincts of her awakening womanhood for the intoxication of love and the joy of life were deeply interfused with the more urgent need of the poet's soul. For a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision its subtle and inexpressible thoughts.

There is a psychological element in her poetry. Sarojini Naidu explores the deeper recesses of the mind in her poems. A look at her work reveals the poetess's acknowledgement of the fact that sometimes the subconscious mind overrules the conscious.

The poetess uses symbols to convey a sense of irony and a sensuousness that is very unique to her and is indicative of her ability to tap into the 'Indianness' of her readers. She also uses symbols and allegory to present her thoughts, feelings and mystical visions. For example, the figure of Radha is indicative of the poetess's scorn of people who consider faith a matter of following customs and going through the motions. At the same time her joy at the world around her and the physical pleasure her friends take in the dance are indicative of her understanding and appreciation of the basic sensuousness of her countrymen. In fact, she uses words to create sensuous images in her poetry.

There is a pictorial quality to her poetry and she greatly resembles D. G. Rossetti in this. She focuses on all senses—sight, sound, smell, taste and touch—in her poetry and in doing so brings India and her very Indian scenes to life on the page.

Lyricism is another marked characteristic of her poetry. Her lyrics are full of music, charm and fascination. Though there is an undercurrent of melancholy and

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1. Which was the first play written by Sarojini Naidu?
2. Which was her first collection of poems and when was it published?
3. What is the dominant note in her poem, *The Broken Wing*?

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pessimism in her work, the poems are nevertheless forward-looking and anticipate the soul's union with the eternal and the infinite. S. Z. H. Abidi remarks:

> A study of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is a delightful affair. She is a poet of colour and melody and beauty while her poems, one is bound to be deeply involved in her aesthetic response to things.

Her poetry reveals the influence of Persian poetry with its dominant theme of love. Hafiz, Khayyam and Rumi influenced her greatly.

She was influenced by romantic poets Shelley and Keats. Others like Masefield, Yeats and Tagore were also influential figures for her art. Persian artists like Omar Khayyam also influenced her. Since her early years were spent in the Hyderabad it is not surprising that Muslim influences can be seen in her poetry. Another reason is the fact that a large part of her adult life was spent in espousing the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity since she believed that the country could progress only when the two communities shed their suspicions and worked together.

A salient feature of her poetry is the freshness of the imagination which transforms common objects from the world of nature as well as the human world into highly suggestive and imaginative images. It is the sensuous nature of her imagery that has prompted people to compare her to Keats. Naidu's poetry is exceptional also because these sensual images are extremely picturesque. Her descriptive prowess is so remarkable that she succeeds in painting pictures through her words. Her most memorable lines are those wherein she presents beautiful and graphic pictures by fusing together several visual impressions. She combines concrete and abstract images in her poetry to create a composite of meanings. However these images are evocative only for those readers who still have some feelings for aspects of Indian life and are connected to their roots.

Naidu uses folk tales and themes in her poetry. She invests these with allegory and symbolism. Her images are pictorial, visual, vivid and graphic. Her command over the English language is reflected in her metrical dexterity. The central tone of her poems is joyful and optimistic. It would not be wrong to say that despite the sadness and sorrow she refers to, in the poems, she is not a poetess of sorrow or pessimism. This is so because she believes that a life fully lived is one where the individual has experienced a wide gamut of emotions; and these include the sorrowful and tragic. For her life and death are not adversarial but are instead two aspects of a single reality. Her poetry leads us out of the murky atmosphere of doubt and gloom into the clear fresh area of life's elemental experience and perennial youthfulness. Life for her is not an obsession but possession, not an experiment but an adventure. Life for her is both a mystery to be adored and a glory to be celebrated. Death to her is not an extinction of life but a gateway to new life.

Naidu was a poetess of great technical skill, sensibility and imagination. Her imagery is impressive, impressionistic, varied and sublime. She draws from a variety of sources; her experiences as a woman, life in India around her, her Western influences, the world of nature, folklore and other sources like Persian and other literatures. Since her formative years were spent in Hyderabad her work also reveals an understanding of Muslim life, culture and the Islamic world in general. Later in life when she became involved in women's issues and the freedom movement, this knowledge stood her in good stead. It sensitized her to the cultural and emotional beliefs of the Muslims in India and at the same time helped her understand how some of these beliefs were hindering the development of the community, especially its

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women. Seen in the backdrop of Naidu's personal belief that it was important that women be educated and free to create an open and liberal nation, her poems dealing with the experiences of Muslim women in India can be seen in a new light. A salient feature of her poetry is its freshness of imagination which transforms even the commonest of experiences into profound ones. Moreover, she expresses these incidents in an extremely sensuous imagery which is reflective of the Indian ethos. This sensuousness of imagery coupled with her ability to create vivid graphic images has sealed her place as one of the premium poetess in Indian literature. It is in the combination of the sensuality and vividness of imagery that she succeeds in projecting aspects of India. She invests the folk theme with richness of allegory and symbolism.

Themes

An aversion to tyranny, overthrow of the tyrant and a love of liberty and the regeneration of India through independence are the major themes of her poems. Sarojini Naidu believed that the Supreme Being is reflected in all creatures. Therefore, she tries to find ameliorative characteristics in the most reprehensible of them. Her poetry was purely Indian in themes and background. She sang in full-throated ease about the festivals, occupations and life of the people of India. Lyricism, symbolism, imagery, mysticism and native fervor are the remarkable qualities of her poetry. Naidu dealt with themes of nature, folk life, love, life and death and mysticism.

Patriotism

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was among the first to realize Naidu's talent and skill. He encouraged her to compose patriotic songs. He convinced her that through her representation of images of the typical Indian life and beliefs she could give immediacy to the cause of independence in the minds of the populace. Naidu was successful in doing so and a theme of belief in the nation and a confidence that it will one day be free to decide and govern its own destiny runs through her poems. There is a faith in the motherland and a desire to serve, protect and help her prosper in the poems. Poems addressed to Gandhi and his vision of the freedom movement and a free India fall under this category.

A salient feature of these poems is her ardent wish that her countrymen rise above the narrow concern of caste and creed to work in a united manner to achieve freedom. She was an idealist and her poems are full of idealistic notes and visions.

States of being

Her poems also deal with the various stages of human existence from childhood, youth to old age and death. Her poems point to the inevitability of the passage of time and death. In her poems based around these theme, she explores the various ways one can live one's life and comes to the conclusion that since death, sorrow and decay are certain all one can do is do one's duty. In these poems she also highlights the fact that change is the law of existence to which we are all subject irrespective of the class, caste or religion we may belong to. In other words these poems also highlight the essential similarity underneath surface difference. This aspect of her poetry is important if we consider the fact that as the nation neared Independence dissonance in the political discourse became prominent and almost threatened the freedom movement.

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Religious faith

Her poetry is replete with figures associated with matters of faith. The figure of Radha figures prominently in her poetry. She also uses the figure of Gautam Buddha to suggest the need for meditation to attain eternal peace of mind. Meditation helps the individual in the search for truth. It enables the individual to rise above the evils and ills of a worldly existence and achieve true transcendence. The image of Radha also implies a state of existence wherein the individual rises above the travails of mere existence to attain a true knowledge of himself and the world around him. Since these characters figure prominently in the cultural, historical, philosophical and mental landscape of the country and its people; through their use she taps into a latent desire of her countrymen to accept the inevitability of facing both joys and sorrows in their life and yet to remain unaffected by them. In her poems dealing with these themes she reflects desire for love, truth and spiritual gain. She has no interest in worldly delights. It is her sublime nature that she wishes to see all satisfied.

Love

Naidu views love more than just a physical state; for her it is a sublime and spiritual state as well. According to her true love may begin from the awareness of the physical but it quickly transcends this when the lovers attempt to achieve a spiritual state of union. Her love poems also reveal her mysticism. They reveal the love of the human soul for the divine. In her poetry women are projected as sacred beloveds who are willing to surrender before their lovers.

The lover and the beloved are the two persons with one soul. She does not undermine the importance of the physical between lovers since it is the physical which leads to spiritual and intellectual fulfillment. The passionate mutual love breaks down the hard walls of the ego and produces a new being composed of two-in-one.

Women

They form a major element of her poetry. Even when she talks of the common man and woman she is sensitive to the loneliness and hopelessness that women, face in the country. In her poetry she presents the woman's point of view and demands freedom for woman. In her poems she represents women from different sects dancing, enjoying and involved in the thoughts of their lovers. The aim is to universalize the female experience across class, caste and religious lines. Sarojini's poems breathe an Indian air with particular light on women and their glory. They are mellifluous and catching and disclose an image of ideal woman of Ancient times.

She wants to give proper importance to woman as a human being instead of being treated like an animal. In view of the reprehensible conditions women are forced to live in her love poetry becomes even more important. True love liberates and is the antidote to loneliness and sorrow. Therefore her representation of the union of physical and spiritual desire can also be seen as a desire to renegotiate gender relations in the new country that was being born during the struggle for independence.

Mysticism

The tone of mysticism is very strong in her poetry. This mysticism is more of a mood rather than a systemized philosophy of life. It is a tendency of religious feeling marked by an effort to attain to direct and immediate communion with God. Commenting on

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this aspect of her poetry Rajyalakshmi observed: 'She is goaded by a hunger for the eternal, the unknown and the infinite and seeks, poetically rather than metaphysically, to relate herself to the universe.' In Sarojini Naidu's mystical poems one finds an ardent quest of the poetess to unite with the Infinite. In 'Song of Radha' the poetess described herself as a devotee in search of the Infinite leaving all worldly pleasures.

Her mystical poetry reflects her faith in the language of the Hindu mystic poets and the Sufi mystic poets, it also the conveys the romantic aspect for 'The essence of Romantic poetry is that in catching the fleeting moments of joy it opens the doors to an eternal world.' The mystic bent in her poetry bears the seal of Vedic concept. She blended mysticism with the Indian mythology giving it a unique character.

6.4 *PARDAH NASHIN*

Her life is a revolving dream
Of languid and sequestered ease;
Her girdles and her fillets gleam
Like changing fires on sunset seas;
Her raiment is like morning mist,
Shot opal, gold and amethyst.

From thieving light of eyes impure,
From coveting sun or wind's caress,
Her days are guarded and secure
Behind her carven lattices,
Like jewels in a turbaned crest,
Like secrets in a lover's breast.

But though no hand unsanctioned dares
Unveil the mysteries of her grace,
Time lifts the curtain unawares,
And Sorrow looks into her face . . .
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?

This poem is taken from her collection *The Golden Threshold* (1916). It reflects a powerful female sensibility. The sense of anguish at being confined and denied freedom strikes a very personal note. This poem can be seen as a confession with its frank, candid and realistic attitude to women. Commenting on the feminine sensibility in Indian English poetry, Murli Das Melwani suggests that such poems deal with a very limited theme: thwarted desire, the frustration of living in a male-dominated world, sex and live. In addition these poems have a distinctly feminine viewpoint, a distinctive tone and deploy an imagery that suggests personal reactions.

Before we discuss the poem it is worthwhile to note that the venerated figures of antiquity are mostly Hindu in origin: Sita, Anusuya and the like. Such representations of women perform multiple roles. On the one hand they are indicative of repressive, orthodox beliefs and on the other they are also used to posit ideas of righteousness, love and peace. At the same time they also give Sarojini Naidu an opportunity to explore and reveal the mysterious feminine nature. This is one which braves danger to reclaim her husband (as Savitri does for her husband). *Pardah Nashin* is important

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4. What is the psychological element in Naidu's poetry?
5. Who were the romantic poets who influenced Sarojini Naidu?
6. Which themes did Naidu deal with in her poetry?

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because in this poem she jumps the religious divide and universalizes the female experience. Although the poem deals with the *pardah* system as practiced by Muslims and its negative impact on the spiritual and mental well-being of Muslim women. Her argument seems to be that the suppression of women occurs across class and religious lines. This needs to be condemned and resolved before a vibrant free India can take shape. The poem highlights the fact that Indian women have been imprisoned within a whirlpool of pain and suffering by orthodox society. Although reformist efforts are going on they are few and far between: more needs to be done. The poem further points out that tradition-bound society is yet to liberate the Indian women fully.

6.4.1 Summary of *Pardah Nashin*

The poem literally means one who sits or lives behind the veil. The opening lines of the poem show the poetess's fascination with the life of the harem she witnessed in the palaces and mansions of Hyderabad. According to Naidu, the women in the harems were cloistered in a life of luxury. They were surrounded by beautiful and hedonistic things, dressed luxuriously in rich and colourful clothes, and covered in diamonds and other jewels. Her contention is that at first glance it appeared as if these women enjoyed a life of perpetual relaxation. They were sheltered from all obstructions and unwanted attention. Sarojini Naidu acknowledges that this is a world within a world. She does not deny that this primarily female world was not without its charms. It allowed the women to relax and enjoy the calmer pleasures of life. Nevertheless she is aware that such an existence is not totally desirable. Though the harem is a world of courtesy and charm, she is clear that this way of life is already obsolete. According to Naidu women were to play an important role in the freedom movement. For this it was important that they came out from their closeted existence and questioned all prevailing norms of social behaviour.

In the poem, Naidu refers to Muslim ladies whose faces are always covered by a veil. She comments on the clothes and jewels these women of the harem are wearing. The poetess notices that these women enjoy a life of unending ease and comfort. They do not want for anything; instead they enjoy all imaginable comforts: they have good, exotic food to consume; they are covered in dazzling jewels and luxurious clothes of the brightest colours. These bright and shining jewels and clothes only heighten their beauty. At the same time they make these women appear magical creatures who do not belong to this world.

In a sense these women do not belong to this world: their fathers and husbands believe that they are fragile creatures who need to be protected from the hurly burly of life. To this end these women are sequestered behind the *pardah*. The irony is that while the *pardah* protects the women from lascivious eyes it also stifles them. The *pardah* protects the women from undue attention of undesirable people; it also denies them access to free air. All their experiences good and bad are filtered through the gaze of their male protectors. In other words they define who and what these women are. The poem makes it clear that these efforts to protect the women are only partially successful because they cannot protect them from the vagaries of existence and the passage of time. Behind the lattice of their residence these women are not immune to loss and sorrow which is an inevitable part of living. Also all their wealth and luxury cannot defend them from ageing. What is worse, having all their actions censured by the men in their family ensures that these women have no opportunity whatsoever to explore their capabilities and try new things in life. The *pardah* becomes a gilded cage which needs to be rejected.

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The last stanza of the poem makes it clear that the poetess realized that a life of mere beauty, splendor and ease would lead to a world of inner frustration and pain.

6.4.2 Critical Assessment

In this poem, Naidu depicts the world of inner frustration and pain of Indian Muslim women under the rigid *pardah* system. She points out that the feudal society sees the '*pardah*' as a marker of high status respectability. It is so prevalent that its absence is seen as proof of shamelessness and the woman is considered outside of decent society. But the reality of the *pardah* is different: for all its claims of being a means of protecting the fragile woman and giving her a safe haven, the *pardah* hides the pathetic condition of Indian women. For all its claims of grace, beauty and colour the *pardah* covers the despair and hopelessness that women feel for having been divorced from all life affirming experiences. The poem is important because it gives voice to the silent despair of women. The *pardah* becomes even more stifling because for all its efforts to protect the woman the veil cannot stop the march of time as it casts its shadow on the face: the veiled face becomes lined and the eyes are tearful. Sarojini Naidu seems to suggest that no amount of protection can shield the woman from the vagaries of time and age. An effort to protect her only serves to deny her the opportunity to experience life in all its glory and pain. In other words it prevents the woman from living her life and only adds to her sorrow. Tears are said to be the true companion of her untold sorrows and unexpressed emotions. The poem highlights a point that the poetess makes in her work: Indian women have suffered at the hands of men from antiquity to the modern age. The fact that the women in *pardah* are Muslim and not Hindu only universalizes this suffering as the fate of all Indian women. This in turn makes the project of ameliorating this suffering even more desirable and urgent. This poem can also be seen as proof of Naidu's skill in handling all stages of a woman's life from girlhood to womanhood, from innocence to courageous nature, and from joyous spirit to pathetic condition.

At one level it may seem that she is romanticizing the *pardah* system and the life of women in ancient times. But a realization that the life the poem depicts is incomplete, runs through the poem. This is evident from the conclusion of the poem when it is stated that all the luxuries of the *pardah* cannot prevent the women from experiencing old age and suffering. Since Naidu was not confrontational by nature this poem is indicative of her strategy. Instead of chastising Muslim men for stifling their women, she is sanitizing them to the fact that the lives these women are leading are incomplete. To give their lives a sense of purpose it is important to introduce them to the issues of the day. Considering the fact that at the time Naidu believed that a prosperous India was possible only if the women were liberated this comparison becomes important. The poem is also important because though she focuses on the experiences of Muslim women in the houses of the Muslim aristocracy, nevertheless she extrapolates these experiences to include all women and universalizes the emotion and experiences of these women. All women in India, irrespective of caste and creed, are exploited and stifled. The poem, therefore, can also be seen as a clarion call by the poetess to reform Indian society and to recognize its women as individuals and not just as possessions to be bartered from father to husband.

6.4.3 Naidu's View on the *Pardah* System in India

In the poem Sarojini Naidu penetrates the very heart of those women who are tormented by the dictates of male dominated society. In the poem she does not rally against the *pardah*. Instead she asks a rhetorical question which is more in the nature of a protest against apparent social prejudice: 'Who shall prevent the subtle years,/Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?'It is clear from the poem that here, as elsewhere in her work, Naidu presents the discrimination against women in a sensitive manner to suggest that this behaviour runs counter to the glorious culture of the past. The *pardah* then is the physical *pardah*, but it also refers to the *pardah* of the mind and soul. In other words it is indicative of a state of mind, which according to Naidu, was instrumental in hindering the development of Muslim women. In Naidu's larger vision of the country, women were to play an important role in the progress of the nation. Therefore, if the women were regressive in their thinking it would lead to a regressive nation. The poem, *Pardah Nashin,* then can be seen as her dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs.

In her speech 'Indian Women and the Franchise' given at the Bombay Special Congress Naidu said:

> Man ought to share with woman all his rights. He should remember the immutable principle that woman has equal rights with man...
>
> We ask for franchise, ...vote, not that we might interfere with you in your official functions, your civic duties, your public place and power, but rather that we may lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that we hold upon our laps and instill them with the ideas of nationality. We want the franchise to wield that power that says our sons will not be denationalized. We want the franchise to say that our education shall not be an imitation so unsuitable and alien things but rather that our nationality shall be for enlightening our national traditions and that our national characteristics shall be the outcome of our own needs and capacities....
>
> How shall my country take her predestined place worthily in the noble world federations of liberated people, until the women of India are themselves free and enfranchised, and stand as guardians of her national honour and the symbols of her national righteousness?

Naidu campaigned for women's issues all her life. Yet this poem seems to be a praise of an antiquated past: it seems to praise *pardah*, the veiling and the seclusion of women. However, as the extract above proves such a reading of the poem is incorrect.

In her life Naidu championed two causes: women's issues and Hindu-Muslim unity. Her representation of Indian customs and traditions need to be seen within this framework. She recognized the stubborn persistence of tradition and the security it gave the people. They followed these traditions not because they were just but because they were familiar. Therefore, when she presents the prevailing *pardah* system and seems to romanticize it, the reader has to be careful with his reactions. Sarojini Naidu does this to highlight the historical record of the past even as preserves the culture of India. More importantly she does this to portray the fact that these practices belong to a bygone era and need to be abandoned.

Highlights of the Poem

While negotiating with Naidu's work it is important to remember that even though she deals with Indian issues, life and images; she does not look at these through tinted eyes. She is not blind to the faults and drawbacks of her country and its culture. This is best reflected in the poem *Pardah Nashin.* At one level the poem reflects an intimate knowledge of the *pardah* system and the life behind it. This knowledge would be

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impossible for someone to possess if they had not been a part of it from a very early age. The fact that the poetess was brought up in Hyderabad means that she had absorbed the ethos and idea behind the *pardah* system at a very young age. Moreover she was intimately familiar with the life behind the lattice windows, having seen it as a child. This intimate knowledge is responsible for the two strains that we see in the poem. On the one hand there is a sense of nostalgia for a world that has gone, for the glory days that can never return. At the same time, the poem is also tinged with a very adult knowledge that the lifestyle depicted is extremely decadent and is more of a cheap imitation of life rather than life itself. It smacks of a life missed rather than a life fully lived. This idea is further exemplified in the poem when the speaker asserts that even as the *pardah* protects the women from the unwanted gaze it does not protect her from the passing of seasons and approaching old age. In other words life with its mixture of happiness and sorrow will happen. What matters is how you face them. In this manner this poem, even as it is nostalgic, is very revolutionary: it demands that women not be cloistered and mollycoddled anymore. It demands that women be allowed access to a greater world than just the confine of their homes. His idea is in synchronization with her demand that women be given education and given a greater role in nation building.

6.5 *SONG OF RADHA, THE MILKMAID*

Where'er thy subtle flute I hear
Beloved I must go!
No peril of the deep or height
Shall daunt my winged foot;...
Impede my heart that pants to drain
The nectar of thy flute!

The Jamuna's waters rush by so quickly,
The shadows of evening gather so thickly,
Like black birds in the sky...

But my heart was so lost in your worship, Beloved,
They were wroth when I cried without knowing:
Govinda! Govinda!
Govinda! Govinda! . . .
How brightly the river was flowing!

Couldst thou not find upon my sheltering breast
Thy rapture and thy rest?
Whose are the fingers that like amorous flocks
Raid the ambrosial thickets of thy locks?
Ah, whose the lips that smite with sudden drouth
The garden of thy mouth?

What shall it profit to revile or hate
Thy fickleness, her beauty or my fate,
Or strive to tear with black and bitter art
Thine image from my heart?

O like a leaf doth my shy heart shiver,
O like a wave do my faint limbs quiver.
Softly, softly, Jamuna river,
Sing thou our bridal song.

This poem is taken from her collection *The Bird of Time* (1912). The poem is a folk-song based on Radha's love for her lover Govinda. The milkmaid Radha goes to Mathura to sell her milk-products. Since she is engrossed in the thought of Govinda she fails to sell anything. The poem is an ironical representation of the fact that most of religious people have no sense of true religion. In the poem Naidu resembles Mirabai, a devotee who had written many prayerful songs (*bhajans*) in her devotion to Krishna, the divine lover. In the last stanza of the poem Radha stands in the sanctum with folded hands, seeking shelter and surrendering her soul with a contrite heart. Radha offers gift of her soul to her divine lover. The devotee is completely lost in devotion and is not concerned about the world around. She gains spiritual awareness of the highest order when love as personal desire is transformed to divine love. Radha attains a transcendental experience by identifying herself completely with her divine love.

Mulk Raj Anand was highly impressed by the poem and commented: 'Here the poetry of romanticism, of ornate epithets and delicate similes, has become infused with transcendental experience. Sarojini has transferred love as personal desire into divine love, and given it a sense of eternity, of the Universal. Similarly, when James H. Cousins read the poem, the chanting, 'Govinda! Govinda!', impressed him.

6.5.1 Summary of the *Song of Radha, the Milkmaid*

This poem deals with Radha's love for Krishna. The poem opens with Radha's journey to Mathura where she hopes to sell her curd. The scene when she begins her journey is pastoral and one can hear the calves lowing in the background. This image reminds the reader of Krishna, the cow herder. However, when Radha reaches the city of Mathura she finds that she is unable to focus on selling the curd. The curd is as soft as the creamy white clouds that dot the sky. This image is interesting since the poem centers around the Shravan season when the sky is overcast with dark rain laden clouds. The contrast between the white clouds of Radha's imagination and the dark clouds that are overhead suggest two things: they bring into sharp focus Radha's complete disconnect with the world around her: she is totally absorbed in her transcendental love for Krishna; it also suggests that her emotions are as pure as the white clouds. Interestingly, Radha is not perturbed by the fact that she can't sell any curd. She is so completely involved in her worship of Krishna that she chants his name instead of shouting and attracting the attention of prospective customers. The reaction of the people of Mathura is revealing: they find her state of entrancement hilarious and laugh at her. The river Yamuna that gurgles nearby seems to echo Radha's enchantment with Krishna to the exclusion of all else.

The poem then shifts to the rowers who had helped move her pots of curd to the city of Mathura. Radha notes that these rowers are jovial. Her own friends and companions are feeling the same joy. In fact, a general sense of well-being pervades the atmosphere. Everyone is celebrating the advent of spring as it associated images of rebirth and life. Radha is detached from this celebratory mood and finds that she cannot divorce her thoughts from Krishna. Her love for her lord finds expression when she utters his name with same sense of abandonment and joy as the people around her show in their singing and dancing. Paradoxically this marks her reaction to be blatantly different from the norm. The reaction of her compatriots is swift: they

Check Your Progress

7. From which collection is the poem *Pardah Nashin* taken from?
8. What was Murli Das Melwani's comment about feminine sensibility in Indian English poetry?
9. What does *Pardah Nashin* literally mean?

do not find her response funny anymore. Instead of indulging her eccentricities (as they see it), they become more aggressive and mock her for her divergent behaviour. This does not faze Radha who continues in her feelings of love and devotion for Krishna. This idea is expressed in the repetition of the line: 'How gaily the river was flowing!' Her feelings are eternal and unchangeable as the flowing of the Yamuna: it does what it must; in fact, what it is fated to do without question or pause. Similarly, Radha does what she knows to do: love Krishna without pause or question.

Radha's withdrawal from the world is complete in the third section of the poem. Not only does she not wish to sell the curd anymore, she now deems it fit only as offerings to her lord and beloved Krishna. She carries the curd to the gaily lit temple of Krishna. If one considers the fact that it was in the *shravan* (monsoon) month that Krishna was born, Radha's personalized worship becomes important. The dancing and the general tone of merriment of the earlier passage carry into the temple. The devotees inside the temple are praying to the deity. Their worship and wishes are extremely personal. They wish for their own personal well-being. In contrast, Radha has transcended the merely physical. For her, Krishna is not just her beloved but also the protector of the world. Her wishes, therefore, are not personal: she wants that all of creation be happy and safe from harm. Her heart is lost in the vision of her Beloved Lord and she starts chanting his name again. The response of the people around her is enlightening: instead of simply mocking her they become aggressive and are not averse to causing her harm. Radha is unaware of the increasing hostility of her comrades. She is engrossed in her love for Krishna. This idea is strengthened by the last line of the poem: 'How bright the river was flowing!' Just as the river is lit by the reflected lights of the torches in the temple; similarly the love of Krishna has lit all corners of Radha's spirit and soul making her incapable of feeling any ill will for her fellows. Just as the river reflects the light of the temple, similarly Radha is a repository of the best feelings Krishna's love and worship invokes in an individual.

6.5.2 Critical Assessment

The poem revolves around the *shravan* season. It is a time of fertility and new beginnings. Through the season the poem transports the reader to an environment of fertility and abundance. The white curd reflects the white clouds that dot the sky. This mirroring of the colour all around symbolizes affection and nurturing of life. Radha carries the curd to Mathura. She, therefore, is the medium that brings life and growth to all living beings. In other words she is the creative principle of all life. In the Bhakti tradition the deity and the devotee share a symbiotic relationship: both derive sustenance and a reason for living from the other. In other words Radha is more than just a woman selling curd: she is the harbinger of creativity and fertility to mankind. Without her mankind would be barren and lifeless. This is evident from the fact that while her friends and compatriots make fun of her and reject her at every turn they are unaware of the fact that it is her worship of Krishna and her presence amongst them that gives them a world that they can inhabit and also an opportunity to celebrate this world. At the same time the creative principle she embodies would be meaningless if not for the deity giving it a certain direction and shape. The white clouds in themselves are useless. It is only when they transform into the dark clouds of the *shravan* season and are churned by the winds that there is life giving rain. It is when the wind blows and the clouds are present that it rains. In other words it is the creative power of the deity that works through the devotee to give birth to new thoughts and ideas.

It is interesting to note here that Radha as mother earth brings to mind another figure in Indian culture which embodies the same idea: Sita. Sita is the archetypal mother earth for two reasons. She was raised from the earth in a pot and was finally subsumed by the earth and is, therefore, the original daughter of the Earth. She is the archetypal mother because she gave birth to raise two sons who could imbibe and carry forward the legacy of their illustrious father Ram. In other words, she is the 'true' mother in so much that she helped in perpetrating the patriarchal order from father to son. Similarly, Radha is the creative principle because she carries the 'essence' or 'meaning' of life from the divine to the common man. Radha's characterization is more subversive than Sita's. This is so because while Sita was never reviled even while she was in exile, Radha is the butt of jokes and snide comments even as she tries to enrich the lives of those around her. The fact that this rejection does not faze her is interesting: she is a woman who is willing to define what the divine means to her on her own terms and also one who is willing to encourage others to do the same. In other words in the poem Radha is positing a very personal relationship between the devotee and the divine, between the self and the other and between the female form and the external social expectations from it. This reflects Sarojini Naidu's unhappiness with the status of women not just in her contemporary world but also her fight for giving them a larger role in the freedom struggle.

In the poem Radha yearns for a union with the divine in all its glory and manifestations. This desire for union changes form from a purely carnal desire of the flesh to a metaphysical merging of the selves till all sense of individuality is gone. In the poem Mathura is more than just the residence of Krishna. It is the center of the created world. When Radha travels to Mathura with the curd it is a potent image symbolizing her desire for a union with the mystical as embodied by the divine. At the same time this image also symbolizes her subconscious desire to attain a union with the mystical within herself, i.e. a union with her carnal and metaphysical nature.

Highlights of the Poem

Radha

In her Radha poems Naidu uses Radha's love for Krishna in both his divine and human manifestations to delineate and critique the traditional Indian concepts of love and woman's destiny. In these poems Radha is not the passive, submissive subject. Instead she is vocal in expressing her feelings for Krishna in both his divine and human guises. When she presents Radha doing this, Sarojini Naidu transfers agency to the woman and projects her as a rational being capable of making informed choices. This representation is central to her belief that women would play an important role in independent India. In other words, her Radha is very forward looking and modern. At the same time she is deeply rooted in the cultural mythology and folklore of the country. At heart she remains a country girl who enjoys the simple pleasures of life. It would do to remember that Radha in this form is celebrated in the Bhakti tradition. Where Sarojini Naidu charts a new course is in presenting Radha as being unapologetic in her demand for reciprocity of feelings from her beloved.

In the Bhakti tradition the devotee and the divine derive sustenance from each other. The existence of one justifies the existence of the other. In other words there is an egalitarianism and democracy with respect to hierarchy in the Bhakti tradition. Neither party is more important than the other. Therefore, when Radha takes on an active role in determining the parameters governing her relationship with her beloved

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in both his divine and human form she is running against held patriarchal beliefs which view the woman as the passive, silent, asexual 'eternal feminine'. Instead of waiting for Krishna to turn his gaze toward her, Radha is unapologetic both about her passion for Krishna and in her expression of it. In other words in her poetry, through the figure of Radha, the poetess legitimizes the project of Indian women to circumvent the repressed roles assigned to them and to chart a new spiritual, political and sexual identity for themselves. This is reflected in her speeches where she demands greater roles for women in the freedom movement and voting rights for them among other things.

In her Radha poems the persona of Radha takes various forms. Sometimes she is the archetypal Indian woman who risks all for love. In this she reminds the reader of Savitri who challenged Yama for her husband's right to live. When the poetess draws this parallel she suggests that social strictures have become meaningless to Radha and that only Krishna's love matters. In fact, this love is libratory since it has freed her from the shackles of life and the need to submit to social strictures in silence. This is evident in the poem when Radha is unperturbed by the mocking laughter and outright anger that her actions evince. She is willing to face all condemnation if it will ensure the fulfillment of her deepest desire. In other words, even as Radha is the figure of myth Sarojini Naidu redraws her as a rebel who justifies actions founded on personal belief. Through the figure of Radha the passion of the female persona is given immediacy. It also gives agency to her arrested life as she chooses to follow her beloved.

Sometimes the persona of Radha wishes to sublimate herself in complete surrender to her divine beloved. In the Bhakti tradition this union between the devotee and the deity is the desired state of existence. In her usage of this tradition the poetess seems to be giving legitimacy to the sexual desires of her female protagonist. If one were to consider Radha the prototype of Indian womanhood then such a representation can be seen as the poetesses desire to deconstruct the asexual image of Indian women as mere mothers, sisters and daughters. In other words through the image of Radha, the poetess is attempting to create a more complete version of what it means to be a woman in India. In the backdrop of her belief that women were critical to the formation of a strong, prosperous nation capable of fulfilling its destiny in the world; such a representation of Radha can be seen as her desire to project strong female role models for future generations to emulate. Another aspect of the desire of Radha to sublimate herself with the divine is the fact that she equates herself with the divine. Radha does not consider herself inferior to the deity in any way. Interestingly, the bhakti tradition operates under the same premise. But its ramifications are far reaching. If Radha is at par with the divine, it implies there is nothing implicitly 'divine' about the deity. This in turn implies that no external agency is required to negotiate a relationship with or to understand the divine. This is a body blow to all religions, especially in their efforts to subjugate women. If one doesn't need an external agency to negotiate with the deity then not only are these agencies (in the garb of religious figures and institutions) superfluous, but more importantly any image of the deity the individual creates is legitimate. This personalizing of the deity, its democratization and unification with it hints at a spiritual/sexual amalgamation.

In the *Song of Radha*, Radha's persona charts a journey from the material to the mystic, from the physical to the spiritual. Her all-consuming love for her beloved

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makes her impervious to social strictures and expected forms of behaviour. She obliterates all memories of her own mundane self, trapped within the confines of society and customs and gains mystic consciousness—the pure Light of Divinity itself. When she openly defies conventional norms she upholds only the supreme independence of the spirit which allows no barriers to corrupt its self-awareness, converting the temporality of the body into a momentary phase in the search for the self. She stakes claim to being equal to all of creation purely on her ability to forge a direct and immediate communion with the divine. At this point she regains her autonomy and independence.

The persona of Radha in Naidu's poems breaks out of stereotypes; radically rejects the existing social structure, its norms and values and behavioral modes and transcends the accepted codes of womanhood, the tradition and the orthodoxy that seek to control and shape the lives of women in a patriarchal culture.

Curd

The curd can be seen as the sign of fertility and has life giving powers in the poem. The fact that it was Krishna's favourite food gives it mystical powers. Further, the fact that Radha goes to Mathura, Krishna's place of residence is also significant. It suggests that she is imperative to Krishna's existence both as ruler and as God. In the bhakti tradition, from which this poem draws inspiration, the figure of the creator or 'God' gains significance only when there is a supplicant or a worshipper. Just as the divine gives the human significance and helps him create a sense of the world around him; similarly it is the faithful who in the act of worship give, the deity any cause or justification for existence. It is a very symbiotic existence where both are incomplete without the other. Seen in this light the curd becomes important. It is an acknowledgement of the fact by the deity that Radha is crucial to his continuation as the omniscient, omnipresent God.

The curd is produced from the milk that is produced by the cows mentioned in the poem. It therefore is also indicative of the cycle of birth and abundance in nature. Just as Radha carries the curd in pots to Mathura to sell to its residents; similarly the energy and power from the natural world around us orders all existence. The curd becomes symptomatic of Mother Earth in all her creative prowess. Radha, in her garb as the one who brings this life giving force to all human then is Mother Earth incarnate in human form. This further highlights the role of women as life givers and nurturers, a theme that is prevalent in Sarojini Naidu's poetry.

One can note the adjectives used for the river Yamuna: it flows 'softly,' 'gaily' and 'brightly.' Since the river is an extension of Radha who embodies the life affirming powers of the deity, it implies that the closer the relationship of the devotee to the divine the closer he is to achieving a transcendental state of existence.

ACTIVITY

Write a review on any poem of Sarojini Naidu, which we have not read in this unit. Write like a critic, focusing on both, the positive and the negative factors of the respective poem.

Check Your Progress

10. What is the theme of *The Song of Radha?*
11. In the poem, *The Song of Radha*, what does the contrast between white and dark clouds suggest?
12. Why is Sita considered the archetypal mother earth?

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6.10 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 7 EMILY DICKINSON

Structure

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7.3 *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*
  7.3.1 Themes
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7.4 *Because I could not stop for Death*
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7.0 INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson was never short of ideas and creativity pertaining to her writing skills. 1862 was a very important year for her because in the midst of the Civil War, she wrote 366 poems. This mathematically indicates more than one poem per day. These were not mundane poems, but were some of the most eminent ones that an American had ever written.

Scholars were curious to find out what was the source that propelled Dickinson to churn out such extraordinary output, but she was very discreet about her personal life. Most of her time was spent at her home in Amherst, Massachusetts, where she interacted with her family and close friends. She was a very intense person, by nature. Thomas Higginson, who was one of the few admirers of her poetry, wrote after he paid Dickinson a visit: 'I never was with anyone who drained my nerve power so much. Without touching her, she drew from me. I am glad not to live near her (source).' Considering this, Dickinson has one of the most absorbing and mystifying biographies among all literary people that are known to us.

Dickinson had an incredible collection of her own poetries. Although, she had written more than a thousand poems in her lifetime, very few of them were published. Those published were edited thoroughly to project Dickinson like an ordinary person. Most of her poems were often hand stitched in small volumes and kept in a drawer in her room. The poem *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain* is from this collection of booklet. It was published only after 1896, which was almost ten years after her death.

However, people were not mentally ready for Dickinson's literature till the middle of the 20th century, when her remarkable fashion and unconventional symbolism could be appreciated, separately from the norms of conventional poetry. *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain* is one of her most renowned and also one of her most

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mysterious poems. Just like most of her other poems, no one very well knows what it is all about. Obviously, the feeling of a funeral in one's brain is not a positive aspect. Nevertheless, in addition to that, it may be a poem about despair, or the process of overlooking some distressing feeling. Whatever the inspiration, this poem is one of the most impacting poetic trips one would ever come across.

Moving on, *Because I could not stop for Death*, which was initially published in 1862, belongs to the list of Dickinson's poems infatuated with the idea of death. In this specific poem, though the speaker stumbles upon death, yet the story is conveyed quite serenely. Consequently, the poem gives rise to many questions such as: Is the speaker happy to embrace death? Is this actually a poem about death, or does the concept of death imply something else? Is this a poem about belief? There is ample scope for interpretation.

There is none among us who has not thought about life after death. This unit delves into that inquisitiveness by generating a death scene that is very commonly imagined by the living, whether they like it or not. The unit also makes a critical assessment of her another poem *Because I could not stop for Death* and her style of writing.

7.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Summarize the biography and style of writing of Emily Dickinson
- Interpret the basic message in the poem *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*
- Explain the theme of the poem *Because I could not Stop for Death*

7.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Dickinson was born on 10 December 1830 in the farming town of Amherst, Massachusetts. She was the middle child and had two other siblings, Austin and Lavinia. It seems she had a distant relationship with her mother but shared warmer ties with her father, Edward Dickinson. Nevertheless her relationship with him often turned sour. Her father was a Congressman. He was also the treasurer of Amherst College. The family had deep ties with New England history: the Dickinson's came to America with John Winthrop in 1630 in the Great Puritan Migration. By the time Emily was born the family had been living in the Connecticut River Valley region for nearly two hundred years. She was a regular church goer. Here her eccentric nature was revealed even as a child when she refused to join the church officially or even to call herself a Christian. However, she was not a recluse. As a young woman she was fairly social and witty. She attended parties and sparkled in them. What turned this vivacious, funny, intelligent woman is one of the greatest mysteries of her life.

She attended Amherst Academy from 1840 to 1847 and later went to Mount Holyoke Female Seminary from 1847 to 1848. She was a good student, but she had to leave Mount Holyoke after a year due to ill health.

Not much is known of her personal life since she turned into an extremely reclusive woman. She stayed cloistered in her room, writing poetry and refused to have visitors. Her father was liberal in his beliefs. He was aware of the fact that she

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was writing poetry in the confines of her room even as she shunned society unnerving. For this reason she kept her collection of poems hidden from him in her room. These poems were discovered only after her death when her sister Lavinia went through her stuff. The poems were published in volumes from 1890 onwards.



Fig. 7.1 Emily Dickinson

She was aware of the happenings around her but surprisingly they did not reflect in her poetry. America saw great social and political upheavals during these years. The Great Revival was one such movement. It was a socio-religious movement aimed at renewing the religious faith and fervor amongst the people. She suffered from Bight's disease and died in 1886 in Amherst.

7.2.1 Her Style

Dickinson wrote nearly 1800 poems in her lifetime, most of which were published posthumously. She is considered an iconic poet in the history of American literature. Her poetry deals with the themes of death, grief, faith, truth and fame. She never named her poems and the titles were assigned to them by later editors of her work. Some of her poems are unfinished and many exist only in the form of rough drafts. An interesting feature of her poems is that since she included many of her poems in her letters, she often changed them to her subject matter or her correspondent. Therefore, multiple versions exist and editors have to decide on the final version. Her idiosyncratic spelling, punctuation, word choice and word order also make it difficult for readers to

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comprehend what she is saying. Again editors have had to change her text to conform to modern usage.

She considered poetry as an exalted calling and dedicated her life to poetry. According to her only that verse which moved the reader profoundly could be called poetry: 'If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?' She considered poetry as a balm; it helped her to cope with the vagaries of life and to escape the pain of life caused by the deaths of loved ones and also by her inability to resolve her doubts about God. In her poetry she is concerned with the dichotomy between the transitory and the permanent, especially that between mortality and immortality.

She adopts a variety of poetic personas in her poems ranging from a young girl, to a queen to a bride and a bridegroom etc. In nearly 150 poems she presents herself as the fictional 'I.' It is important that these poems should not be read as autobiographical accounts they are indicative of issues that she considered important. In fact, she insisted on the distinction between her poetry and her life: 'When I state myself, as the representative of the verse, it does not mean me but a supposed person.'

Her language is relatively simple but it is a set of off-rhymes and an unconventional punctuation that marks her poetry as different from her contemporaries. She wrote short poems which subvert the traditional forms of poetry prevalent in her day. These poems are difficult to paraphrase as they are complex in theme, form and execution. Her poetry is written in the customary four line stanza and rhymes ABCB. She uses a variety of meters and alternates between the tetrameter and the trimester while using the iambic meter. She derives these forms from Psalms and Protestant hymns. She appropriates these styles completely – she does this by introducing long, rhythmic dashes (her favourite technique in poetry) – to interrupt the meter and to indicate pauses. Most of her rhymes are exact rhymes. However, she also uses near rhymes with similar vowels, consonantal, identical, visual and suspended rhymes in her poetry. It should be pointed out that a salient feature of her poetry is her violation of poetic norms: she uses rough, irregular rhythms, imperfect rhymes and faulty grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Her poetry is a random record of her emotion and experiences in a life devoted to reflection and creativity. Despite this she does not posit her 'philosophy' of poetry in the sense that she does not present any idea of what her poetry means and how to approach it. There is no preconceived philosophical system behind her work. Her sentimentality and coyness are characteristic features of her poetry. In addition to this her poetry reveals a tendency to look both inwards and also beyond the actual. She writes aphoristically and compresses a large amount of emotion and meaning into a small number or words. Often in her poetry she leaves out verbs and other connecting words; she often drops endings from verbs and nouns. It is not always clear what her pronouns refer to; sometimes a pronoun refers to a word which does not appear in the poem. This gives her language a diamond-hard quality and makes them difficult to comprehend. She uses the dash very often in her poetry. She uses it to emphasize, to indicate a missing word(s), or to replace a comma or period.

At the same time her poetry is often descriptive and reveals her power of observation. Her broken meter, unusual rhythmic pattern, unusual imagery and metaphors struck a note of assonance and discomfited her contemporary publishers

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and readers alike. However, many of her innovations are central to the development of modern poetry. She is now regarded as an innovative pre-modernist poet. Her poetry is also characterized by a balance between abstract and concrete words. The abstract words are generally Latinate in origin. In addition to this she also uses irony, metaphors and personification to present her varying moods (ranging from joy to grief to despair) in her poetry.

7.2.2 Themes

Her poetry is extremely self-referential in the sense that she explores her own feelings and emotions in them. It is interesting to note that the events in the America of her time find no mention in her poetry. However, even as she analyses her own emotions, she universalizes them and therein lies her importance as a poet. Her themes can vary from bizarre death fantasies to descriptions of domestic and natural scenes. Her poems are her 'letters to the world' and record her life, its tiny ecstasies and her responses to the mysteries of life and death. They are also candid insights into her state of consciousness.

Broadly her poetry deals with the themes of love and the joy and danger it brings and death personified as a monarch or a kindly but irresistible lover. Her poetry also reflects the tension between faith and doubt as well as a sense of loss. Finally nature as both a threat and a source of joy is present in her poetry. She views life as something difficult, painful and as one full of loss were gains, if any, are temporary and fleeting. Her poetry also reveals her Calvinistic beliefs intermingling with a kind of Transcendentalism. For example, a belief in the 'inevitability of the spiritual struggle' is accompanied by a sense of delight in nature. She also saw physical, everyday things as symbols of spiritual things.

Quotes by Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all.

Saying nothing... sometimes says the most.

They might not need me; but they might. I'll let my head be just in sight; a smile as small as mine might be precisely their necessity.

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry.

Truth is so rare that it is delightful to tell it.

Find ecstasy in life; the mere sense of living is joy enough.

People need hard times and oppression to develop psychic muscles.

A wounded deer leaps the highest.

The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.

My friends are my estate.

For love is immortality.

I dwell in possibility

Forever is composed of nows.

If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain.

Dogs are better than human beings because they know but do not tell.

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Beauty is not caused. It is.

Behavior is what a man does, not what he thinks, feels, or believes.

Because I could not stop for death, He kindly stopped for me; The carriage held but just ourselves and immortality.

Morning without you is a dwindled dawn.

Love is anterior to life, posterior to death, initial of creation, and the exponent of breath.

A word is dead when it is said, some say. I say it just begins to live that day.

To love is so startling it leaves little time for anything else.

Not knowing when the dawn will come I open every door.

If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.

The brain is wider than the sky.

7.3 *I FELT A FUNERAL, IN MY BRAIN*

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought
My Mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -

Check Your Progress

1. How was Emily Dickinson's relationship with her parents?
2. Why did Emily have to leave Mount Holyoke after a year of joining?
3. How many poems did Emily Dickinson write in her lifetime?
4. How was Emily different from her contemporaries?

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The poem begins by describing the death of the speaker's mind. In the first stanza she describes the slow process which marks the beginning of this death. At this point of time the mourners seem to be the speaker's passing thoughts and their increasingly chaotic nature which signaled the advent of a loss of reason. The second stanza continues this process. In fact the beating drums here seem to suggest the inevitable march of the destructive process which continues to dismantle all remaining rational thought. In the next stanza as the pall bearers lift and carry the coffin for the final burial the speaker makes a last fateful attempt to stem the loss of reason and fails. The image seems to suggest that soon her mind too will be buried and she will be left with nothing except unmitigated silence. The last stanza describes the actual burial. In a sense it points to the point in time when the speaker's precarious hold on reason and rationality is lost and she tumbles into an unreasoning not-knowing insanity.

In the poem '*Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord*' death is presented a joyful journey done on the Day of Judgment in the company of Christ. The poem '*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*' however carries the emotion to the other extreme. According to Richard Sewall, 'She seems as close to touching bottom here as she ever got.' This poem deals with the anguish of death and all that it entails. The poem never clearly tells us why the speaker feels such sorrow but it does describe the emotions she feels at her demise. In the beginning of the poem she describes her funeral surrounded by mourners, as she can imagine it in her mind. This does not disturb her very much. The horror increases when she is left alone and all the mourners have departed. It is then that she realizes that she is, 'wrecked, solitary,' possessing Being but in Silence. It is when this happens that her reason snaps. This image is given by the plank of the coffin breaking. When this happens she plummets past worlds, knowing nothing and realizing that there is nothing left to know. The last word of the poem 'then' followed by a dash seems to suggest that there may be something more and her loneliness and lack of knowledge may not be a permanent state.

7.3.1 Themes

Funeral

The death of the individual whose funeral people are attending emblematizes the death of the speaker's sanity. She feels bogged down by the mourners who surround her at the funeral and feels claustrophobic. The funeral rituals are metaphors for the unconscious working of the mind. It is interesting to note that the speaker occupies two roles: she participates in the funeral and is separate from it as well. This feeling is heightened when the box is lifted and it creaks. She feels the creak carry into the depths of her soul and is perturbed. The mourners are the faceless masses who go about their actions with no regard to what the speaker feels. At the same time they are also representative of the speaker's inner emotions. As the funeral proceeds and her emotions became more volatile and difficult to pin down the mourners become more disjointed. In a sense they reflect her emotions even as they signal her essential separation from the events happening around her. If the mourners had any conception of the feelings she was experiencing they would have shown some emotion which they do not. This lack of emotion is indicative of the speaker's loneliness which is cemented further when she is lowered in to the world of madness. Seen in this light the mourners can also be seen as all the people who inhabit the speakers' physical space. They are representative of the people she knows. Since the funeral is symbolical of her own impending death through madness they are representative of her

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acquaintances. Their reactions in this funeral then can be taken to be indicative of their reaction at her metaphorical and physical funeral. Their total lack of emotion therefore terrorizes the speaker since it brings to her notice her complete divorce from the world around her. In other words though they live their lives connected to hers in some way, they and she are essentially divorced from each other. Therefore they are in no position to help her in matters that are crucial to her survival and will be unable to help her when her end comes.

Sound and sense

The breakdown of language occurs in the latter half of the poem and indicates the deterioration of the speaker's mind. For instance instead of saying 'Heavens were a Hell' she uses the word 'bell' indicating that her inner turmoil drowns all other voices in her mind and is the dominant emotion that she feels. The only sense perception that she is capable of is her ability to hear and that too has been reduced to cacophony.

The loss of rational thinking

The more the poem proceeds that more acute is the loss of the speaker's rational self. It also serves to underline her essential loneliness and underlines her distance from her fellow mourners. The word 'race' implies that she is now involved in a journey which has no possible destination and finds it terrifying. At the same time the word also serves to remind the reader that the speaker's mind has taken her far from the community of men and her fellow mourner. She is now alone in more ways than one: not only is she emotionally and intellectually disconnected from her fellow mourners, but now a metaphorical distance exists between them as well. She is alone and 'solitary' and her reason hangs by a mere plank. This image serves to highlight the speaker's precarious position which may become dire at any moment. This implies that the slender control that she has on her reason may soon be lost as well heralding her descent into darkness and madness. Even as she falls into her metaphorical death ever greater depths of her psyche are revealed to her. This happens because the human mind is infinite. However every realization is a temporary halt for her. The poem ends in a disjointed sentence revealing total discord. The poem ends with the speaker's acceptance of the fact that just as a physical death is the ultimate reality; for her this ultimate reality will be her impending madness. The burial at the end of the poem marks the burial of all rational thinking by the speaker and marks a total death of a sense of self.

7.3.2 Analysis

In the poem the speaker delineates the loss of her mind. The poem is an allegory and compares the death of an individual and the consequent cessation of the person to the cessation of the poetic persona when the speaker's mind ceases to function. In other words the funeral is an attempt to externalize the internal emotions of the speaker. The 'funeral in her brain' then is a metaphorical death of the mind. The funeral is a commonplace occurrence and allows the speaker to create a distance between herself and her emotions. This in turn enables her to express these emotions without having to acknowledge the emotional and psychological turmoil they cause. At the same time the projection of the funeral creates a distance between the reader and the speaker and allows the latter to maintain a modicum of privacy even as she bares her deepest fears and paranoia to the public gaze. This strategy proves useful in the latter half of the poem when the speaker makes it clear that the funeral the reader was witnessing

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was a mirage and never really occurred. According to Cynthia Griffin Wolf, the funeral plays a critical role in the poem and without it the reader would be at a loss to comprehend the experience the speaker was presenting. It is only the funeral and the familiar funeral rites that Dickinson uses in the poem that enable the reader is in a position to comprehend what the speaker is saying. Therefore it is the funeral rites that give a coherence and unity to the poem. It is the familiar funeral rites that help the reader to negotiate the unfamiliar terrain of the speaker's mind as they are revealed in the poem.

Through the funeral therefore the speaker dramatizes her mind's decent into madness, a kind of death. Since the funeral rites reconcile the death of a beloved to the individual; similarly they serve to familiarize the horrifying process of losing one's mind and being aware of it happening to the reader. The sense of sorrow and loss that the former event entails is easily transferred to the latter event. This emotion is further strengthened when the speaker uses the image of breaking the coffin open. It reminds the reader of the unnaturalness of the dead coming alive and connects to the horror of realizing that one is losing one's mind even as the process is occurring.

It is interesting to note that the funeral is recounted in the past tense. It is an event that has already occurred and lends a sense of finality and inevitability both to the death and the descent into madness it refers to. At the same time it evinces a sense of resignation in the speaker: it is an event that cannot be prevented. The difference between the speaker and the people attending the funeral is that the latter do not know when they will die or what their end will be. Therefore the speaker who could monitor her impending madness is rendered lonely and divorced from the world of the living people around her. This sense of loneliness is further heightened by the closed casket. The poem seems to suggest that the madness is death because it implies an erasure of self. Therefore even though the physical body per se lives, the spirit and soul of the speaker is dead and needs to be mourned. Another point of departure between the speaker and the mourners is the fact that while the mourners are physically present at the funeral service the speaker does not 'attend' the funeral. In other words while she describes her 'funeral,' i.e. her descent into madness there is no record of how she actually felt while this was happening. In this way she succeeds in separating herself from the other mourners. One needs to ask why this separation between the two occurs. One reason could be that even as the speaker describes her death she finds it an unpalatable event.

A salient feature of the poem is the complete lack of emotions the mourners display. Not only are they a faceless mass, they also do not express any sorrow at the funeral and death they are witness to. In fact they are a silent almost detached presence at the funeral. Their response echoes the speaker's response: she feels nothing for the mourners and is totally alone in her suffering. The idea seems to be that while others may sympathize with her for her diminishing control on her faculties they cannot help her at all. This implies that the speaker is alone in her experiences and faces her emotions alone. The silent mourners underline this sense of loneliness and distance her from the real world. This is also an example of the extreme interiority that we find in Dickinson's works.

As the poem progresses there is a marching cadence to the poem which serves two purposes. On the one hand it places the reader along with the mourners at the funeral service and on the other it hints at the impending loss of rationality. This feeling is given credence by the word 'treading' that recurs in the poem. The idea is

that as the mourners move so are her thoughts chasing each other in her mind till it becomes a mass of confused thoughts. At this point in the poem the speaker feels that she is as nameless and faceless as the mourners who surround her. This image hints at her ever unraveling sense of control. The term 'race' used here further separates her from the mass of mourners. Her sense of loss of control is further heightened by the words

Kept treading-treading-till it seemed

That Sense was breaking through-

These words give the impression that only is the speaker isolated from the world around her, but also she feels unhappy at any effort they make, however unconsciously, to burst into her inner self. The lines make it clear that the mourners moving around her, are not making any attempt to forge any connection or relationship with her. Their unfeeling behaviour serves to unravel her mind even more. The mourners do not seem to realize that while they are going through the motions of expressing their sorrow their actions hurt her deeply. The poem has a dirge like tone that gives it a tone of a funeral procession. However, while the mourners go through the rituals a funeral entails these create a parallel world where the speaker realizes she is all alone. The loss of life the death implies reminds the speaker of the loss of the mind. This similarity traps the speaker in a world all her own from which there is no escape. After this the poem can only move in one direction: the burial of the dead body and the total loss of all rational thoughts on the part of the speaker.

The repeated motion of the 'treading' and the 'beating' batters in her mind until the speaker can bear no more. The poem makes it clear that even as these noises increase around her she tries to make one last effort to control the rising madness and fails. She endures as long as she can until she goes numb. The word 'beating' is significant in more ways than one: it reminds the readers of the beating drums that herald approaching madness; and it also refers to the slow but steady erosion of the speaker's confidence and sense of self until nothing remains. The word in conjunction with 'treading' is indicative of the psychological torture she underwent even as the funeral went on. If the funeral is representative of the loss of reason, the speaker has been tortured over a substantial period of time by a perceptible loss of reason and approaching insanity. The use of the word 'bell' here reminds the reader of the tolling bells in the church when death occurs. This image accompanied as it is by the 'beating' drums further heightens the sense of tragedy at the inevitable conclusion of the poem. The word 'bell' also leads the speaker to the inevitable conclusion of the funeral ceremony: the lowering of the casket into the grave. It is at this point that the speaker's mind balks and it makes a final effort to cling to its remaining glimpses of reality and rational thought.

The speaker realizes that though the mourners are present at the service they are disconnected from the events happening there. Similarly, though they are present around her they are both unaware and unconcerned about her rising panic and terror at her approaching death. Just as she has created a distance between them so have they. This technique serves to depersonalize her tragedy as far as the mourners are concerned and absolves them of any role in her death and tragedy. It was the collective 'they' that were responsible for her demise. Beyond when they were directly treading on her, to when they were seated is perhaps a reference to when she secluded herself from people and she still could not escape what was going on inside her head. Clearly she holds the people in her life, and not herself, responsible for her own mental demise.

They were unaware of what was happening, contributing to her demise without knowing that they were doing it.

The fact that the mourners don't care for the destruction they wreck is further exemplified in the lines

And then I heard them lift a Box

And creak across my Soul

As they move the coffin for the final burial they wreck even more suffering on her soul almost as if the death of her mind was not enough. At this point they strip her mind of any remaining sense and hasten its descent into madness. The creak implies that the mourners did not intend to make a decisive strike; instead they wanted to erase any remaining sense through a series of deft strokes which were fatal in their softness. The phrase 'same boots of lead' implies that the trauma the mourners caused as they walked about is being repeated. The difference is that while earlier she could feel her emotions and thoughts running around trying to make sense of what was happening and trying to prevent a total descent into anarchy, now her faculties are so completely decimated that she can do nothing more than watch and follow tamely as she is led to her death and destruction.

There is a change in tone in the last two stanzas of the poem. The jagged meter highlights the stress and the chaos the speaker is undergoing and feeling. The regular meter of the earlier part of the poem indicated the presence of the familiar and the known. It reminded the speaker that she was in a world she was familiar with. Although she had withdrawn from it, it was not alien to her and a return was still a possibility. The jagged meter, however, heralds the complete deterioration of the speaker's mental landscape. It also underlines the fact that all that was familiar and known no longer exists and so she can never go back. All that she can do is go forward and embrace the madness that this experience has brought with it. The separation marked by the words 'race' and 'ears' is so complete that she can never revert to the earlier state of not knowing. She had separated herself from the other people around her stating they were a different race: i.e. had different sensibilities from her. Her argument was that since they could not understand her there was no reason in interacting with them. It is interesting to note that as her death approaches this idea is repeated. At this point of time she uses the idea of difference to suggest that the mourners and others like them are incapable of understanding her emotions and therefore she finds herself alone. More than that the image implies that she would not be able to connect with them and forge a human bond which could sustain her even if she tried.

At this point there is a change in the tone of the poem and the focus shifts from the funeral per se to discuss the reason for her personal tragedy. When this discussion ensues the speaker is unable to come to a viable answer. The only answer that she can come up with is that she is facing this tragedy simply because she is broken and alone. The 'Silence' can also be another reference to her isolation with its implication of separation from the rest of the world.

When in the last stanza:

And I dropped down, and down-

And hit a world at every plunge (19)

The idea behind the portrayal of death in different worlds is to make an attempt to find the right one and also herself. This reflects the poet's attempt to [illegible] opportunity to save herself.

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The final stanza uses 'and' at the beginning of every sentence. This recitative use of 'and' has a dual function. Apart from offering a rhythmic support to the poet's fall, it also heightens the sense of fall and her subsequent 'hit'. The repetition highlights the action. Her fall into abyss is not merely a description of her being dropped into the grave, but a statement of her suffering and misery. The poet is trying to imply that she suffered pain with every attempt she made, as she 'hit a world at every plunge.' On her way down, she did not just pass the world, but hit each one of them.

According to Paula Benet this plunge has a religious significance. She writes: 'There is neither a sustaining God nor a sustaining scaffold of meaning to support her. Like the trapdoor on a gallows or like the planks supporting a coffin until it is dropped into the grave, the 'bottom' drops out of reality.'

This illustrates her view regarding the existence of God or at least the role he plays in her life. It also works toward emphasizing her loneliness and shows that her suffering is even beyond the help of God.

The image presented in the line – 'And then a plank in reason, broke,' offers a frightening vision of a coffin waiting to be taken down into the grave, but instead when the plank breaks, it is plunged into the hole in the ground. The image that materializes here is one of a pain and disrespect, the final indignity that strips away the hope of a respectable departure from the world. Perhaps, it implies a social injustice and disregard of human dignity, even till the end of life. It also emphasizes the duration of the fall, making it clear that the drop, instead of having taken place in an instant, was a long process that allowed her to go 'down and down'.

The poet also highlights her frenzied efforts for her own survival, as she 'hit a world at every plunge'. In order to illustrate and emphasize her will and efforts to survive, she dramatizes her pain until the very final moment.

As her fall ends, she is finished knowing, but then the poet indicates that the possibility of an end is still far away, for the poem ends in a dash, suggesting that this could not possibly be the end. It could also imply a possibility of an enteral life, life after death.

7.3.3 Style of the Poem

The poem is written in the ballad meter and rhymes ABCB. The tone is similar to a funeral dirge and adds to the somber atmosphere of the poem. The rhyme scheme is relieved by the slant rhyme of the last stanza:

> And I dropped down, and down-
>
> And hit a World at every plunge,
>
> And Finished knowing-then- (20)

The poem is written in five quatrains. There is a preponderance of visual imagery, a characteristic feature of Dickinson's poetry and the reader can picture a funeral service as he reads the text. The poem is replete with alliterations: 'felt' & 'funeral,' 'treading', 'treading' & 'till' and 'being' & 'but.'

The cadence of the poem reminds one of a marching contingent and echoes throughout the poem. The alliteration in the poem creates an auditory image wherein the mourners are 'trading' the drums are 'beating' and the speaker is going 'down, down.' These negative images heighten the tragic deathlike mood of the poem, creating a spiral like movement that hastens the poem to its inevitable conclusion: the speaker's insanity. There is kinesthesia in the descriptions of 'Kept treading-treading-till it seemed' (3) as well as in 'Kept beating-beating-till I thought' (7) and 'And I dropped down, and down-(18), with each double use of the word appealing to the kinesthetic sense of motion, so that we could almost feel the rhythm of the action.

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7.4 *BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH*

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed us –
The Dews drew quivering and chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
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 –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

In this poem Dickinson personifies death as a gentleman caller who takes a leisurely carriage ride with the poet to her grave. In the poem she also personifies immortality. The poem is written in six quatrains with the iambic meter alternating between the tetrameter and the trimester. Dickinson uses end rhyme in the poem. She also uses a variety of literary devices like alliteration, anaphora, paradox, and personification in the poem. The poem provokes controversy because it presents a complex and multi-dimensional view of death, a concept too mysterious to be fully expressed simplistically.

Check Your Progress

5. How is the poem *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain* different from *Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord*?
6. What does the latte half of the poem indicate?
7. What does Cynthia Griffin Wolf say about *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*?

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At the same time the poem forces the reader to take an unvarnished look at his exertions in life and ask the question as to why he or she is trying as hard as they are.

7.4.1 Synopsis

Death calls on the speaker in the garb of a gentleman caller. He takes her for a ride in his horse drawn carriage. On the way she sees a variety of scenes. She sees the peaceful scenes of children playing, fields of grain and the setting sun. With the approaching dusk the speaker feels cold. She is clothed in thin silk shawl for coat. In the journey they stop at her grave and it is revealed that she has been dead for centuries. However, the speaker feels that she embraced death only a short time ago. The horses' heads in the poems signify the transition from life to death to afterlife.

This is one of Dickinson's most enigmatic poems. In it the speaker communicates from beyond the grave and through her words one can trace the movement from life to afterlife. In the poem death is a gentleman; he patiently waits for the speaker because she is busy and cannot spare time for him. She is impressed by his civility and willingly abandons the tasks she was involved in when he first arrived. Later the two of them embark on a carriage ride. During the ride the two observe the passing scenery and she notices evidence of life all around her. She sees the children playing in the parks and notices fields of grain spread out all around her. The changing scenery impresses upon the reader the fact that the ride is carrying the reader from an urban to a primarily rural landscape. Both death and the speaker are active agents when the ride begins; but the speaker's role changes as the ride reaches its conclusion. When the two observe the sunset the speaker is reminded of the fact that she is dead and cannot participate in the world around her. In other words, instead of creating the landscape in the act of viewing it she is a part of it. This is further underlined when the two visit her grave and her tombstone. Her transitory state is highlighted by the fact that she feels cold because she is dressed in gossamer clothes. The cold she feels is reminiscent of the cold hand of death.

Another interesting feature of the poem is the fact that the physical movement of death and the speaker mirrors their metaphorical movement. In the beginning of the poem death visits her 'home' and escorts her around town and country in a loving manner. The image reminds us of two lovers who are preparing to spend eternity together in a loving marriage. This journey is inverted at sunset. Death after escorting the speaker on a memorable trip (and nothing is more final than the final march to death) escorts her to her true home: the grave where she will live for eternity in the loving embrace of her 'true' love death. The idea that the poem seems to be positing by paralleling these two scenarios is that death is the ultimate reality. What is interesting in this formulation is that the terror of the poem 'I felt a funeral' is missing in this poem. While both poems deal with death in one the speaker faces a complete annihilation of the self while in the other the speaker embraces death as the ultimate pleasure. The poem also hints at immortality when the speaker asserts that even though she has been dead for centuries she feels that no time has passed at all. It is not just any day that she compares it to, however—it is the very day of her death, when she saw 'the Horses' Heads' that were pulling her towards this eternity.

7.4.2 Analysis

Death as a theme recurs in Dickinson's poetry and this poem is an example of that. However, instead of evoking emotions of terror and horror death invokes emotions of

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civility and gentility. In the poem, death is a gentleman caller who is prepared to wait because his arrival is importunate. Interestingly, it is this civility that motivates the speaker to abandon her pursuits and join him in the carriage ride.

The scene is almost romantic: the two; the speaker and death spend a day in joyous pursuits. The day ends with the speaker accepting graciously death's mark and being happy in the graveyard. In fact, death is personified as a consummate gentleman who makes the speaker feel comfortable and gently leads her to eternity. The fact that the speaker is not frightened and goes willingly is apparent from the fact that the tone of the poem is not frantic and the speaker never panics. This is in direct contrast to the poem 'I felt a funeral.' Another salient feature of the poem is that as the poem proceeds, the speaker moves physically from the centre of the civilized world, i.e. London to the outskirts. This journey parallels the speakers journey from a life wherein she gets her validation from external sources to life lived internally where she gets validation from within herself. This is indicative of the interiority of Emily Dickinson's poem which is a salient characteristic feature of her poetry.

After death meets the speaker he introduces her to the world around them. She in turn sees this as an act of kindness and is happy to be escorted. Moreover, death gives her personal attention. Like a true gentleman she is the focus of his attention and he does not demur in interacting with her. This individual attention is further emphasized by the fact that they are alone in the carriage (something contrary to custom and acceptable forms of behaviour) and through the use of words like 'held' and 'ourselves' in an internal rhyme in the poem. This internal rhyme serves to highlight the extreme interiority of the speaker's thoughts. She is in such a thrall of the gentleman that she does not hesitate to abandon her 'labour' and her 'leisure' to follow him. The image is used to suggest that the speaker feels no pain or sense of loss or sorrow at her death. Instead she welcomes it. This impresses the speaker even more and she enjoys the ride tremendously. The poet seems to be suggesting that while a life fully lived is desirable, death is the ultimate reality and need not be seen to be terrifying and frightening. The fact that in the poem 'I felt a funeral' it was precisely this erasure of the self-consciousness that terrified is interesting. The two poems seen in conjunction raise the question as to how to reconcile the supposed two divergent responses to death in the poet's psyche. Since Dickinson's poems are extremely personal and were never meant to be published it is very possible that they deal with her changing reactions to death over a period of time. This is borne out by the fact that such multiplicity of voice is found throughout her work and is indicative of a soul in communication with itself in an attempt to understand not just itself but also the world around it.

Another idea that the poem projects is the difficulty of the life itself. In contrast to death which marks the cessation of all endeavor life is defined by the 'labour' one does. It is interesting to note that the aristocratic almost decadent life that death in his guise as gentleman caller seems to live is in direct contrast to the activities they see being performed around them. Moreover these activities are being performed by individuals irrespective of age and gender. Through this the speaker seems to be suggesting that life is marked by incessant labour and raises the need for such labour. Interestingly none of the participants in these activities can appreciate the world that they are creating; it is only the two people sitting in the carriage who can do so. One can say that through this analogy Dickinson is raising a very pertinent question: why work hard and try to succeed if such constant activity deprives you of the chance of appreciating that you are creating. This can be seen in the case of the children: they are playing in the fields and the image seems to imply innocence and an instinctive

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enjoyment of the world. However, the children are playing during recess. The idea is that this play is not permanent and is the primary tasks that these children perform. 'Strove' emphasizes the labours of existence: the primary tasks of these children are not being just children; it is to prepare for a future and to work for it. The speaker uses the words 'we passed' repeatedly to inform all that she sees on the journey with death. The term highlights her relative disinterest at the repeating scenery. The idea is that instead of creating something new and appreciating life, man is involved in repetitive tasks that instead of giving meaning to his existence make it monotonous.

The tone of the poem here is relaxed and peaceful. However, the mood changes as night approaches. The weather is colder and the sense of calmness and oneness that the speaker felt with the world is disturbed: she feels cold and uncomfortable. This speaker feels this as night approaches. A couple of things happen simultaneously at this point in the poem: night comes and the sun sets; therefore in keeping with social conventions the gentleman death is honor bound to return the speaker home, i.e. return her where she belongs. The events in the poem at this point are revealing. The fact that the speaker feels cold can have several meanings; she could be feeling cold since the absence of the sun's warmth reminds her of the approaching cold winters. This in turn is representative of the fact that though the speaker finds the activities that make 'life' monotonous and repetitive, nevertheless she has not as yet reconciled herself completely to her mortality and death. Her feeling cold is, therefore, also her unease with her changing condition. Also, if the early ride were to be seen as the courting between two lovers under the watchful and approving eyes of society, then the cold that she feels after sun set can be regarded as the consummation of this love away from the eyes of society.

This image is further boune by the fact that death in his guise as gentleman take the speaker to her final, 'true' home – her grave. At this point all the images coalesce to remind the speaker that although death implies a change in status and scene it is the ultimate reality and the only way that the speaker can achieve immortality. Therefore, in the final analysis the cold that the speaker feels can be regarded as the final stirrings of unease she feels before she happily embraces death and immortality. Again the change in emotion here from the earlier poem 'I felt a funeral' is remarkable. Death is not an annihilation of the self instead it becomes the celebration of the self especially since it gives the self to exist on its own terms without having to concern itself with social concerns and norms.

For a young woman who refuses to meet people and spent a large part of her life in her own room, such a situation no doubt would be attractive. In other words if we were to compare the two poems it seems as if the poet is trying to come to terms with her own identity crises and trying to form an idea of how she sees other people in her life. Nonetheless at this point in the poem reconciliation seems to be happening. Also words like 'gossamer' 'gown' and 'tippet' 'tulle' bring the material trappings into focus and remind the speaker as well as the reader of the transition as it is happening. Thus even though the poem at this point seems sinister (considering that it is dark and cold and they are in a graveyard) the note of evil is completely absent. Instead the tone soon becomes celebratory and happy.

It is because of this reason that the last stanza of the poem is revealing. Here it becomes clear that the speaker has been dead for centuries. However, time has no meaning for her: she could have been dead for a day or for decades, it is irrelevant. What matters is that her new status allows her to relish her freedom. In fact the final

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stanza of the poem celebrates this moment of realization. It was in the graveyard that she realized that Death was more than just death; instead it was also immortality. This move toward immortality is emphasized by the words: 'surmised the Horses' Heads/ Were toward Eternity –.' The word 'eternity' followed by the dash emphasizes this sense of the forever that death brings with it. It also implies the speaker's persona trailing out into the infinite. In the final stanza therefore time loses all meaning. The activities that the speaker has seen earlier in the day then become the endeavours of man which are completely transitory and meaningless. If we were to consider the fact that for Emily Dickinson it was the mindscape that was most important then this poems reveals an important aspect of her supposed 'withdrawal' from the world. For her, her refusal to meet new people was not a refusal to live or even a sign of madness as some have suggested; instead it marks her desire to achieve fulfillment in her mental landscape. For her a life was truly lived only if the individual had a clear, unvarnished understanding of himself and this in turn was impossible without taking a cold hard look at one's own mind and soul. Seen in this light the poem under consideration implies that for the speaker, and by extension Emily Dickinson, death is not something to be terrified of, but something to love since it provides the opportunity for self-fulfillment and self-realization.

The words 'House that seemed / A Swelling of the Ground -' suggest not just the grave but their meaning goes further. For the speaker the ultimate reality is death or the eternity that it signifies. At the same time she also says that reality is that which is created in the mind and not necessarily the one that surrounds us. In other words she is staking claim to the right of the individual to create their own reality and by extension their own formulating principles of life. This image is followed by the image of the horses: 'I first surmised the Horses' Heads/Were toward Eternity'. This seems to suggest that the soul is eternal and never dies.

In light of this, the beginning of the poem can also be seen in a new light. In the beginning it was death the ultimate reality which had come to the speaker's home to take her on a journey. However, seen from the perspective of the conclusion it is apparent that the speaker was already dead when she embarked on this journey. This implies that she had already achieved immortality, the desired objective of the end of the poem, even as the poem begins. This further highlights the fact that time is irrelevant and that there is a depth in the poem that makes it interesting. This interiority brings the idea of immortality which this poem deals with into greater focus.

7.4.3 Images and Metaphors in the Poem

Death

According to Engle, this is one of Emily Dickinson's most enigmatic poems. She uses images and metaphors to explore death in novel ways. These images, however, important are also ambiguous. The first two lines capture the poem's central theme. What these lines mean is the cause of debate. According to some critics, Dickinson here is embracing death, for others death is an equal if not a supplicant in the relationship the two share. In the poem, she personifies death as a gentleman caller who is not intimidating or frightening. Instead, death is represented as a suave, sophisticated man who is conscious of the nuances of the civilized world and gives these nuances their due. It is this civility that makes him a desirable companion so much so that the speaker abandons whatever she is doing and agrees to go with him on a carriage ride with alacrity. As the carriage ride proceeds and night approaches death is presented

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as a conscientious gentleman and one who is aware of the needs and requirements of the woman accompanying him. This transforms him from a gentleman to a desirable lover and one who will satisfy his beloved. This image is fulfilled later in the poem when it is only in death's company that the speaker can embrace and enjoy eternity.

Death is more than just a gentleman caller in the poem. Another reading of the first two lines suggests that death ceases to matter if one stops being intimidated by it. In other words when the speaker stopped obsessing about her mortality and focused instead on living her life to the fullest she became free and death ceased to matter to her. She stopped rushing into an unending list of activities performed only to give a sense of meaning to her life and to stave off any sense of her mortality. Therefore, death becomes a non-reality for her and exists only 'within the time-bound finite world' and not within 'the imaginative infinity of consciousness.' What the poet is saying here is that the activities of conventional society are ordered around the principle of giving meaning to a life whose ultimate reality is death and an erasure of the self. Thus, life is predicated upon fear of its conclusion.

This is the tone in the poem 'I felt a funeral.' The poet is attempting something different here; here she is positing a possible solution to this paralyzing fear of death and the eternal silence. She suggests that it is how one orders one's life and not what one does in it that makes life meaningful. In other words she sees death not as a 'biological death' but as an opportunity to live a creative life of seclusion. According to John Greenberg, in the poem Emily Dickinson is stating that a life spent in creative activities in seclusion from the concerns of the material world is a life well lived. He argues that this is a radical statement, especially, if we consider that it is made by a woman so unlike her contemporaries. He says that her life is 'so abnormal, so unlike the life any sane young woman (including Emily) would choose that it could be compared only to death'

The children, the fields and the setting sun

These three images are central to our understanding of the poem. They signify the various stages of life from childhood to youth to old age. The children signify a time of innocence and joy. The children are playing and are unaware of the fact that life implies state of constant toil and hard work. However, a tacit acknowledgement that hard work is an integral part of being alive when it is mentioned that the children are playing not because this is what they normally do all the time, but because they have at this point of time taken a break from their studies. The idea is that even in childhood the demands of the world start imposing on the individual and start determining the way they behave. In other words these demands encroach on the individual and his desire to do what he wishes even when he is a child. Thus, the time of childhood, a supposed time of innocence is transformed into a time when one prepares for the adult world. The fields of grain symbolize toil and the fulfillment of this toil. It must be noted that even as the speaker looks at these fields of corn there seems to be a sense of detachment from it. In other words it appears as if she is a voyeur looking inside from the outside. This tone seems inexplicable considering that the speaker is very much alive and is out on a drive, albeit with death. This congruity is clarified only in the last stanza when it become clear the she has been dead for some time and finds all these activities meaningless and transitory. Thus, even though the poem assigns some meaning to these activities in the early part, by the end these are transitory

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meaningless activities which one indulges in as one waits for death which ushers in the ultimate reality: eternity. Similarly the 'setting sun' implies old age. Within the poem this image reminds the reader that soon childhood and youth give way to old age. In conventional terms old age is a marker of a well-lived life. It also signifies wisdom and maturity. The speaker, however, rejects these formulations and suggests that all the wisdom and maturity of old age is predicated on the experiences and endeavour of childhood and youth. Since she has already classified these as meaningless activities the wisdom etc. of old age is also easily dismissed by her. Taken together these images suggest that Dickenson is questioning held norms and stating claim to the artist formulating their own reality.

Through these images and the unequivocal rejection of what they stand for she seems to be suggesting that the individual has the right to determine the course of his life and need not order it according to conventional norms. This formulation is interesting since this is precisely how she herself lived her life; she refused to meet people, stayed in her room composing poems. More importantly her poems do not reflect the political, social and ideological debates of her time. It is almost as if they did not occur and even if they did she was either unaware of them or did not appreciate their significance. In the light of this poem we can look at this exclusion in another way. Dickinson did not mention contemporary events in her poetry not because she was not aware of them but because she did not think they mattered. For her it was the individual consciousness and sensibility that were of prime consideration.

In other words all the activities the children, young men and the old indulge in, and which are also shown in the poem, are meaningless because they do not originate from the spirit's desire to create. Instead they are performed as per social expectations and are predicated on the desire to be seen as successful by one's contemporaries. In light of this the presentation of the grave as the ultimate, true home is important. If all of us are to end up in the grave with death as the eternal companion then one has to live life as per one's beliefs to give it any meaning. Thus, it is how one defines a fruitful life and strives to achieve it that is important. Eternity in light of this argument assumes significance. On one hand it signifies the immortality of the soul but it also implies the supremacy of the creative spirit over material things.

George Monterio has noted that 'the children . . . do not play (as anyone would expect them to) but strive.' Engle says that the activities of childhood are 'the thrashings of professional competition that occur in the ladder-climbing stages of one's career.' Interestingly the Children strove / at Recess - in the Ring -' This suggests that the children are playing a game of 'Ring-a-ring-a-roses.' This game was originally played by children during the middle age and recited by them as 'a charm against the ravages of the plague' (Monterio). Thus, even as the children are playing a seeming innocent game within its ritualistic words are embedded the 'reminder of the mortal stakes.' Thus, death is an unseen presence all through our lives.

ACTIVITY

Conduct a survey of a group of students to find out what they think about any of the works of Emily Dickinson.

Check Your Progress

8. What does Dickinson personify in the poem *Because I could not stop for Death?*
9. What does the horses' head signify?
10. What role does death play in the poem?

Did You Know

Besides her poems, Emily Dickinson also wrote hundreds of letters to family and friends. The letters have survived and have been published for all to read. The letters contain poems, cartoons, jokes, fragments, news, gossip, and biographical information about the poet, among a lot of other things.

7.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- In Emily Dickinson's poem, *I felt a Funeral, in My Brain*, Dickinson portrays what appears to be a funeral in her mind. When one imagines a funeral; nevertheless, they generally think of it as a service for a person who has passed away.
- Even though Dickinson gives a description of the proceedings that normally take place at a funeral: people who are mourning, rituals, lifting of a box or what appears to be a coffin, there is no death of a person; there is no actual burial taking place.
- This experience of a funeral is going on in Dickinson's mind, is in fact a funeral of the death of her mind.
- In the beginning of *I felt a Funeral, in My Brain*, Dickinson starts by describing a slow death of her mind when she says, 'Mourners to and fro kept treading-treading till it seemed that sense was giving way.'
- Dickinson talks about mourners who apparently imply her thoughts and these thoughts keep coming in and going out of her mind, 'till it seemed that sense was giving way', or each and every logic was beginning to fail.
- In the next verse of *I Felt a Funeral, in My Brain,* Dickinson keeps on describing the long and drawn-out relapse of her mind when she says, 'And when they all were seated, a service like a drum-kept beating-beating till I thought my mind was going numb.' The formal procedures for the death of her mind has now started and the 'beating-beating' looks as if to stress upon this thinking that continues to devastate the remnants of her sanity.
- At the end of the funeral service, when the coffin is carried to the cemetery by the pallbearers, Dickinson's ultimate and final attempt to save her sanity is depicted in the third stanza, in the words, 'Then I heard them lift a box /And creak across my soul/With those same Boots of Lead, again,/Then space began to toll.'
- In *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,* Dickinson indicates that her mind is about to be buried, and as her mind is being buried, she hears those last thoughts of reasoning, and suddenly all thoughts are gone and the only one left is Dickinson, 'and silence, some strange race here.'
- In the final stanza of *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,* as the coffin is being lowered into the grave, Dickinson thinks aloud the final result of the death of her mind as she explains, 'And then a Plank in Reason broke,/And I dropped down, and down' The base of the coffin suddenly breaks, indicating that this 'Plank in Reason' is a level of understanding, thinking, knowing.

- In the poem, *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*, death, arrives as a gentleman suitor, who halts to take the speaker for a ride in his horse-drawn coach.
- They ride at a leisurely speed and the speaker appears to be very comfortable with the gentleman. Going through the town, the speaker comes across playing children, meadows of grain and the setting sun. It is a quite calm sight.
- As twilight falls, the speaker starts feeling very cold, because she is only wearing a thin silk shawl covering her. She was not dressed for her ad hoc date with death when she got dressed that day.
- The ride ends at her grave, marked with a small tombstone.
- In the final stanza of *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*, we come to know that the speaker's ride with death was a flashback (she was already dead centuries ago).
- However, all this seemed like yesterday when she initially felt that the horse heads pointed toward eternity, i.e., were an indication of the passage from life to death and then to the life after death.

7.6 KEY TERMS

- **Frosty:** It means unfriendly, in a way that suggests that someone does not approve of something.
- **Seminary:** It is a college where priests, ministers, or rabbis are trained.
- **Psalms:** It is a song, poem, or prayer that praises God, especially one in the Bible.
- **Trimester:** It is one of the three periods in the year during which classes are held in schools and universities.
- **Calvinistic:** It is something which is connected to a church that follows the teachings of the French Protestant, John Calvin.
- **Transcendentalism:** It is the philosophy, which emphasizes the spiritual benefits to people of periods of deep thought instead of action.

7.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Emily Dickinson had a distant relationship with her mother but shared warmer ties with her father, Edward Dickinson. Nevertheless her relationship with him often turned sour.
2. Emily was a good student, but she had to leave Mount Holyoke after a year due to ill health.
3. Emily Dickinson wrote nearly 1800 poems in her lifetime, most of which were published posthumously.
4. Dickinson's language is relatively simple but it is a set of off-rhymes and an unconventional punctuation that marks her poetry as different from her contemporaries.
5. In the poem '*Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord*' death is presented a joyful journey done on the Day of Judgment in the company of Christ. The poem '*I*

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felt a Funeral, in my Brain' carries the emotion to the other extreme. This poem deals with the anguish of death and all that it entails.

6. The breakdown of language occurs in the latter half of the poem and indicates the deterioration of the speaker's mind.
7. According to Cynthia Griffin Wolf, the funeral plays a critical role in the poem and without it the reader would be at a loss to comprehend the experience the speaker was presenting. It is only the funeral and the familiar funeral rites that Dickinson uses in the poem that enable the reader to comprehend what the speaker is saying.
8. In this poem Dickinson personifies death as a gentleman caller who takes a leisurely carriage ride with the poet to her grave. In the poem she also personifies immortality.
9. The horses' heads in the poems signify the transition from life to death to afterlife.
10. In the poem, death is a gentleman caller who is prepared to wait because his arrival is importunate.

7.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Why does Emily Dickinson's personal life receive as much attention, or even more attention, than her poetry?
2. What is the meaning of *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*?
3. Who are the mourners in the poem *I felt a Funeral, in My Brain*?
4. Which description best applies to the poem's characterization of death in *Because I could not stop for Death*?
5. Write a brief synopsis of the poem *Because I could not stop for Death.*

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss some of the themes that appear in Emily Dickinson's poetry.
2. Describe some of the reasons that Dickinson did not gain fame as a poet during her lifetime.
3. Analyse the poem, *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*?
4. Analyse the poem *Because I could not stop for Death.*
5. Give an account of the images and metaphors in *Because I could not stop for Death.*

7.9 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 8 SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Structure

8.0 Introduction
8.1 Unit Objectives
8.2 About the Novelist
8.3 *That Long Silence*
8.4 Feminism and Deshpande
  8.4.1 The Middle-Class Female Writer Protagonist
  8.4.2 Indian English and Deshpande
8.5 Summary
8.6 Key Terms
8.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
8.8 Questions and Exercises
8.9 Further Reading

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande appears to be influenced by the concepts of Judith Butler, who asserted that feminism highlights the distinction between masculine and feminine genders. Deshpande's authentic portrayal of the status of a middle class Indian wife is conveyed well in her work, *That Long Silence*, which brought her the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990.

That Long Silence documents the story of an Indian middle-class homemaker, Jaya, living in an urban setting. Jaya was born in a small township but because of her husband's professional demands they moved to Mumbai. The novel shows how Jaya's own identity is wrapped in being a wife and a mother, along with other relationships that a family revolves around. She feels she has lost her voice after living in silence for all these years.

However, in the end, Jaya realizes that the silence in her life was chosen by her and not imposed by anyone on her, not even her husband. The story does not follow a chronological pattern. It moves back and forth expanding itself gradually through the monologues taking place within in the mind of the female protagonist, Jaya. Jaya keeps pondering over the events in her life that have already taken place, that never took place, that might have happened, that definitely should have occurred. Within a span of few days, she travels across her life in her memory, pondering about the various relationships she has shared with various members of the family and with other acquaintances she has met in her life and her submerging her true identity under the veil of a dutiful wife and a socially acceptable writer.

This unit takes a critical look at the story of *That Long Silence*. It will give a better understanding of Shashi Deshpande's writings and feminist perspective.

8.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe Shashi Deshpande as a novelist
- Explain the important aspects of Shashi Deshpande's story

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- Recall the significance of *That Long Silence*
- Demonstrate a critical appreciation of *That Long Silence*

8.2 ABOUT THE NOVELIST

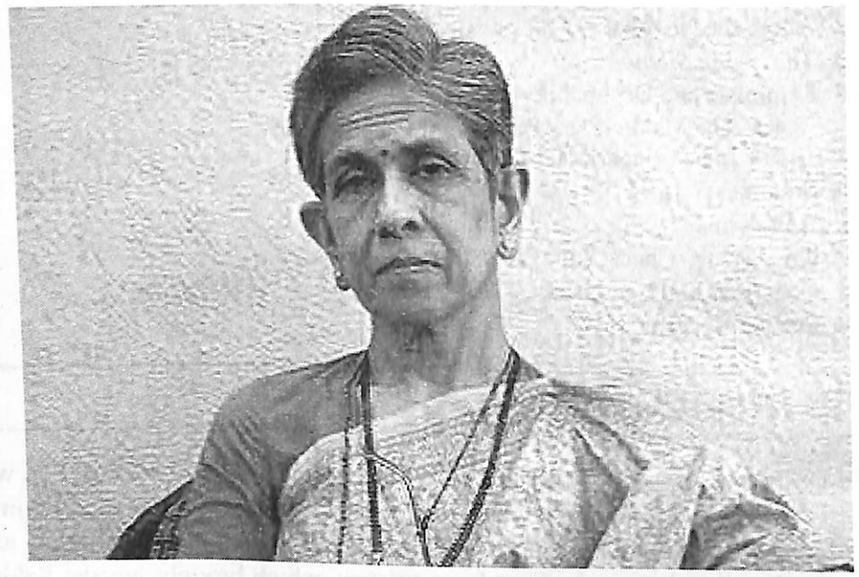


Fig. 8.1 *Shashi Deshpande*

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, to renowned Kannada dramatist and author Sriranga. She is a critically acclaimed award-winning Indian novelist. She studied Economics and Law. After marriage, she moved to Bombay (now Mumbai). While in Mumbai, she took up a course in journalism. After completing the course she took up a job as a reporter in the publication *Onlooker*.

While working as a reporter, Deshpande started writing short stories. Her first short story was published in 1970. Her short tales found their way in well circulated publications like *Femina* and *Eve's Weekly.* Her first book of short tales was released under the name *Legacy* in 1978. *The Dark Holds No Terrors,* her first novel came out in print in 1980. This work paved the way for an emerging but significant new feminist voice in the arena of Indian fiction. By bringing together the familiar bonding of men and women relationship, Deshpande discovers the Indian life as it was during those times. She highlights the changes and problems of the 1980s. Her authentic portrayal of sexuality, gender, and young-old confrontations is apparent in *Roots and Shadows* (1983); its smart, adult narrator, the reporter Indu, is a more liberated, less abused case of the contemporary Indian woman staying in urban spaces than some other protagonists that Deshpande had created. In Deshpande's view, liberation for the Indian woman is limited by conflicts of class, social approval and marital status. In fact, her most appreciated novel, *That Long Silence* (1988), blends bitter realism with personal insight, political perception with Hindu philosophy. Deshpande has furthermore written fiction for young children, and two detective books, *If I Die Today* (1982) and *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983).

She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for her work *That Long Silence* in 1990 and the Padma Shri for her contribution to literature in 2009.

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Works

Novels

- *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, 1980
- *If I Die Today*, 1982
- *Roots and Shadows*, 1983
- *Come Up and Be Dead*, 1985
- *That Long Silence*, 1988
- *The Binding Vine*, 1994
- *A Matter of Time*, 1996
- *Small Remedies*, 2000

Short Stories

- *The Legacy and Other Stories*, 1978
- *It Was Dark.* Calcutta, 1986
- *The Miracle and Other Stories*, 1986
- *It Was the Nightingale*, 1986
- *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, 1994

8.3 *THAT LONG SILENCE*

That Long Silence is about the educated middle-class women and the quest. In *That Long Silence* Deshpande explores the conflicting creative turbulence that a women writer in India constantly undergoes – what she wants to write and what is she expected to write keeping in mind her positioning in the social segment. Deshpande also highlights another significant aspect that troubles the women writers, the constant juggle to balance the tight rope walk of concealing and bridging the outside/public sphere with the inside/private world.

Dual Name

The dual name that the protagonist carries with her, Jaya and Suhasini, brings in contradiction and an identity crisis to her personality. The name Jaya, meaning the victorious one, was lovingly given to her by her father. Yet the moment her father leaves this world Jaya encounters a paradigm shift in her life — a marriage, a new name and a new identify; a new identity which makes her crippled than independent. The impact of which she gets to understand once she is transported from her familiar surroundings to a new place as turn of events rock their life. The geographical relocation to Dadar flat translates into a canvas for retrospection for Jaya. She realizes the agonizing change that has taken within her. In her engrossed state of being a dutiful wife and perfect mother she was no longer 'heady with the excitement of finding unexpected resources within herself' (187). The new surroundings after its refreshing start remind Jaya of 'the nothingness of what seemed a busy and full life'. In fact, in all these years she had distanced her own identity from herself so much that she was now only an extension of Mohan's identity. As she recounts, 'Without Mohan…I don't know what I am'(185).

The Indian middle-class sentiments and mentality does not let a woman to come out of the protective secured surrounding she is gifted with (however unwillingly).

Check Your Progress

1. Where did Jaya take up a job as a reporter?
2. What was Deshpande's first book of short stories called?
3. When was *Roots and Shadows* published?
4. When was Shashi Deshpande awarded the Padma Shri?

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The husband and his family becomes the be all and end all of the life. The course of a wife's life is directed by the ripples created in her husband's life. The wife's individual existence just ceases to exist in all manners. She exists just in relation to her family's movements. Deshpande uses a very powerful image of a train moving to show the stagnancy of Jaya's life. Jaya's life can be described like as if she was sitting in a train which was not moving. But if a moving train crosses the static train, which she is occupying, it gives a temporary deceptive feeling that her train is moving. But unfortunately she was there, fixed to her place, all along.

Deshpande's work *That Long Silence*, through rituals of daily chores, usual, mundane, and specific tales, weaves a world of collective identity. The novel discovers how pictures of nationality and nation are incorporated in the regularity of life of the people and how the nation-state with the help of an effective means of individuals' fantasy organizes them as citizen-subjects. Through this discovery the novel evolves an analysis of the patriarchal building of 'nation' and challenges the legitimization of the masculine narrative as the 'normative' nationwide discourse.

Plot and Sub-Plot

The central issue that regulates the novel is the tale of household strife. The marital life of Jaya and Mohan is under threat because of the malpractice that the husband undertakes. The narrative takes off at a moment when the everyday life of the couple has taken a different turn. They are in hiding to save Mohan from further trouble. This seclusion plays a catalytic role in Jaya's life as it instigates her to take a look at the kind of life she has been living until now. This role as a thinker leads Jaya to realize the under current that has always been present in her marital life and the way her marriage has split her individuality into various selves.

That Long Silence tries to show various aspects of Jaya's life. Jaya's monologues show her struggling between the space provided by patriarchy and the nation at large. The patriarchy is invoked by drawing the historical position of woman. According to Indian and Western thinkers, Jaya is located within the framework of the post independent, literate, upwardly mobile middle class household. And the context of the nation appears in the background of the central narrative. It highlights the re-construction of the nation. The references of steel plants, situation of the engineers, factories and strikes act as commentaries to the larger social order.

Lohanagar Steel Plant

The upwardly mobile social life of Jay and Mohan is intertwined with the advancement and development of India as can be seen through the steel plant of Lohanagar. The importance of the steel plant is not only significant for Mohan and his colleagues employed there, it also involved Jaya. Her steel factory days were entangled in the humdrum of domesticity: 'Pregnancy, baby's wails and sleeplessness. 'This somehow in a very subtle way translates Mohan and Jaya, as the male proponent of the sub-plot of advancement and its feminine victim. Jaya is a casualty because she is a housewife (not a voluntary act on part of Jaya because Mohan did not desire her to 'work'). She is uprooted from her native village (Ambegaon) and tries to adapt to the 'drab houses, dusty roads'; she furthermore has to bear with the consequences of Mohan's extra work. While his employment at the plant was tiring, which seemed fine with him, at home he preferred to have a peaceful rest in the night. So that Mohan can have a peaceful sleep Jaya always woke up the moment the child cried and took the baby to

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the kitchen. Therefore, the memories of the steel plant at Lohanagar functions differently for both of them. For Mohan, as well as for his colleagues employed with him, the plant translated into an opening to be part of the country's advancement. The professional prosperity that Mohan earned meant added burden for Jaya: of being uprooted, of anxiety as well as being confined to the function of a housewife.

Nevertheless, these various impacts are creased out from Jaya's memories because 'even to me those days seemed touched with freshness…purpose,' because, she like her husband, is engrossed in the dreams of upward mobility and material prosperity: 'It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the things we needed… Decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling first class. It seems as if irrespective of the gender, all the population is busy in creating a new universe through nation building'.

Mostly male citizens extend their labour to be used in the 'progress' of the country; the labourers are made to work extra; since the men are overworked, women of the family also end up overworking. But surprisingly, no one complains and everyone seems to be part of the scheme where each individual does his job with perfection through a voluntary approach.

The Lower Class

As contrary to her stable middle class life, Jaya observers the vulnerable life of her domestic help, Jeeja. Jeeja, along with her husband resided in a *chawl*. Jeeja's spouse had a decent employment in a mill, but as strike ensued in the mill the man became different. The husband soon turned into a drunkard and it was Jeeja's responsibility to make ends meet. She discharged her duty by getting employed as a housemaid. This understanding of Jeeja's life can take turn in three ways — Jaya can identify with familiar human pain irrespective of class difference; she can think of a bonding of gender across class in their sufferings; or she can sustain class hierarchy within the gendered structure.

It is likely to understand Jaya's inclusion of the tales of the under-privileged in her narrative as a signal of solidarity which moves beyond class and gender. In the novel one comes across a very aggressive interrogation of patriarchal buildings of nation and the methodical deterioration of women's existence even as they are established in the foundation of the nation. This devaluation is investigated keeping in mind the structures of culture and politics. Within the structure of culture, the story of tradition is accounted and in the structure of political scenario the narrative of advancement is pronounced. Thus, the fiction proposes interlink of custom and progress as the major instrument that brings into effect the dominated position of women. It is a form of colonization and domination that continues a lifetime before understanding, as it happens in case of Jaya. They are yet to start their life because they are engaged in playing the feminine function which is allotted by the society.

Yet, interestingly, the novel takes a view of generalization of womanhood. This can be traced back to the writing in the novel which evidently intends to highlight the uncalled for sufferings of the gendered creatures within the perspective of middle class world regulated by male-dominated discourse. The attempts of the work rest in its insistence on its attempts to question the silence as well as patriarchy's instruments of silencing. It is the occurrence of the lower class representation that creates problems for the attempts of the writer. A close reading will disclose the stress between the

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narrative and its idea of instilling the female protagonist within the framework of middle-class Brahminical persona by closing out the heritage of others.

Silence in the Novel

Silence plays an important role in this novel which realistically depicts a middle-class educated Indian housewife. Jaya's decision to lapse into 'that long silence' was because 'it was so much simpler to say nothing, so much less complicated' (99). Unlike her precursors who have tried to deal with the theme of silence and sufferings of Indian housewife, have got digressed towards ideological focus or melodramatic nature, Deshpande finds the perfect balance of replicating the real life as it is in the words of her books.

After her marriage and inclusion into the new home, Jaya realizes that the herculean task of carrying out responsibilities and discharging duties just makes it easier to execute if one stays quiet and let the other voices fill the self. Jaya is not the only one who has adopted silence to survive. Her mother-in-law Vimala is as mute as she is. Jeejabai, Jaya's sister-in-law is no better off. Even the helping hand who serves at her place is a victim of male suppression who also survives through silence.

In her determination to prove herself a perfect partner and mother she even silenced her creative self. Right after her marriage she gets a prize for her short story and the story also gets published. The story narrates the incommunicable state of a couple where the only way the husband is able to access his wife is through her body. The subject matter of the story only instigates Mohan to get wrong impressions and he wonders that people might presume things. Instead of Mohan's appreciation, Jaya is faced with his suspicion and dissatisfaction. His words and manner convinces Jaya that she was responsible for unknowingly doing wrong to him.

So, she 'stopped writing after that' (pg 144). Her ascent step towards fame and creativity is nipped at the bud. She learns to suppress her emotional turmoil as expressing them is 'unwomanly' as opined by Mohan. In fact, the notions of 'unwomanly' are so much internalized within Jaya that she retorts, '…no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?' (pg.147).

As a result of her insatiable desire to write, she continues writing, but this time under the veil of a pseudonym. But despite her best efforts she failed to get any of her works published because of the absence of genuine emotional feelings. But they are buried deep within Jaya and it is her fear of letting down Mohan's expectations that shifts her focus. Instead of writing the true experienced things she writes about idealized situations. Her column 'Seeta' draws the attention of audience.

But among all the silenced characters, Jaya initiates the process to break her silence. She decides to 'erase the silence' which was eclipsing the husband-wife relationship. The effort, though a baby step, indicates a new beginning and a realization that life is 'always to be made possible'.

Check Your Progress

5. Why does the protagonist have dual name?
6. What is the issue the novel revolves around?
7. How is the lower class portrayed in the story?

8.4 FEMINISM AND DESHPANDE

Deshpande, in her creations, traces liberty of the Indian woman within the framework of the Indian social and cultural dimension. She has always opposed the idea of conceiving powerful, glorified feminine champions, and has offered her woman protagonists as examples of lives which struggle to strike out a balance between

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modernity and convention. Deshpande exposes the subtle methods of domination and gender segregation operative inside the organization of the family and the patriarchal Indian society. Deshpande's feminism never disassociates the woman from her backdrop but attempts to reveal the distinct ideological components that form them. These encompass elements such as examples from myths and legends and holiness associated with rituals and ceremonies. The protagonists of Deshpande's books are progressive, educated, liberated women, approximately within the age group of 30 or 35. Their look out for liberty and individuality within matrimony is an oft repeated theme.

While investigating her books, one can identify that all her female protagonists — Indu, Saru and Jaya are portrayed existing in a state of disarray as the novel begins. Gradually as the story unfolds, they undergo a ritual of self-analysis, introspection and self-understanding. At the end, they appear as more assured, more in command of their lives, and considerably hopeful.

That Long Silence acts as the author's mouthpiece where she addresses all the married Indian women to stand up for their rights and advocates that without self realization one cannot progress. For one to be heard one has to speak and maintaining silence may not always be the right thing to do. Jaya is a representative of all those women who have the potential to bring about a change in the existing structure of society but who do not put in an effort, rather they too take on the continuing route to silence. Maintaining silence and pruning oneself to the constructed norms of 'womanliness' becomes a safe passage of survival, as Jaya recounts 'It was so much simpler to say nothing, so much less complicated'.

Toril Moi in her *Feminist Literary Theory* XIV mentions that the aim of feminist criticism has been to 'expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices'. Through Jaya's introspections after she reaches Dadar flat and Mohan's secretly away from home one night manages to foreground this aspect. In her essay 'Writing and Activism', *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (Page 25), Deshpande mentions that when she drafted her novel *That Long Silence*, she 'had no intention of writing a feminist tract'. Though later on, the work was always identified as a 'feminist novel'. Deshpande insists that she had intended to convey the story a woman, Jaya/Suhasini who after reaching a certain juncture of her life was now introspecting. She was investigating the various trajectories that she has covered and along her journey the various people she has come across – some very close, some random images of distant memories — her relationship with them and most importantly how her being female has led to or changed certain aspects of her life. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande not only displays her genius as a writer but also draws our attention towards the society we live in. She tries to explore the multi-layered complex equation that a human being shares with his/her society. She highlights the plights of the people, the hypocrisy of the institutions and strange irrationalities that govern the various structures of the society.

Roots and Shadows, underlines the sufferings that women undergo in a patriarchal society. She questions the rationale behind following certain customs and rituals, especially those which support the myth of masculine power. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande clearly states that a woman's life is not meant to serve her husband only. She is a human being with infinite possibilities and one should explore that.

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In *A Matter of Time* the woman appears as more intense and graceful than her predecessors. When others are caught in the nitty-gritty of the domesticity, she manages to set herself free. Though initially she falters but at the end she breaks free from the constraints. *Small Remedies*, her other novel, displays the intertwining approach to recollections and imitations. The narrator tries to live with a maze of interrelated recollections from the past. In fact, she undergoes the process of trying to bring back memories which not only relate to her but also to others. Deshpande's other novel *Moving On*, revolves around the narrative of a family caught in the web of intense emotions, problematic of personal space and notion of codes of conduct. Her next novel *In the Country of Deceit*, germinates from the simple concept of Devyani's love. *That Long Silence* locates the progression of a woman through a maze of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. Looking at the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not blame entirely the men for subjugation of women. She sees how both men and women find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles assigned to them by the society.

8.4.1 The Middle-Class Female Writer Protagonist

Most of the female protagonists of Deshpande's works are shown to have deeply ingrained middle-class heritage. These women, who occupy the central aspect of Deshpande's story telling, are often hybrids of two cultures — they are part of the traditional values they are brought up in as well as a product of the convent education they have received. This strange mix creates a conflict and clash within the female individuals which they try to cope with their whole life. Like most Deshpande's novels, *That Long Silence* too revolves around the theme of depicting this struggle that these individuals undergo as they try to balance their practical role and rational education they are bred with.

Deshpande's creations have taken birth from her personal experiences. She does not, at any point of time, romanticizes or downplays the challenges that protagonists face because of their class they hail from and the gender they are born into. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, wonders when her brother (Dada) explains that Mohan wanted a bride 'who can speak good English... an educated, cultured wife. (Page 90) This preciseness and clarity in Mohan leaves Jaya wondering if all men are born with that power of precision. For as far as she and girls like her with their English education and their English movies and access to Western thinkers 'it had been a vague and nebulous search' (Page 91). Which Jaya later on goes to state in even a more matter-of-fact-way, 'when I did not know that I wanted, how could I have said what more I wanted?' This is the plight of Jaya all through the novel, just like any other women of her age, with her background came across in the real world – either they do not know or even if they know they are either not allowed or they themselves consider it inappropriate to express their knowledge.

Jaya is forced to renounce her original creative force to cushion up Mohan's wounded emotions. Mohan's sole concern was 'how can you reveal us, how can you reveal our lives to the world in this way?' (Page 144). Jaya's prize winning story about a married couple had not made him angry. But it had hurt him. Instead of trying to clear the air, Jaya, like a timid voiceless creature, believes herself to be the real culprit as she has managed to bring in such mental disgrace to her husband. She decides to give up her writing hobby.

Years later when Jaya accuses Mohan that she left her 'writing' because of him, he is taken aback. He firmly states that he has discharged his role as a supportive husband who has encouraged his writer-wife in every possible way to establish herself. He has always introduced Jaya as a writer — a fact which he was proud of in fact. He had gone out of his way to put across a word for his wife's work to the editor of the *Woman's World* which carried Jaya's successful 'Seeta' column. Mohan perceived his actions as an act of support and encouragement. But underneath his actions lay the suppressed pride which he enjoyed by flaunting his trophy-wife. Having a writer-wife boosted his social status. Moreover, Jaya's 'Seeta' had a wide readership which automatically meant an added advantage for Mohan - he had an educated wife, who indulged in a respectable profession and was well-known, everything that a man of repute would want. But as Jaya rightly points out, '...To Mohan, I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist.' (Page 144)

If we see the entire episode of being a writer and being a wife from Jaya's perspective, we see a different picture. She submerged her creative instincts to shape herself 'resolutely to his desires. ' (Page 144) So if Mohan disliked a certain kind of her writing style, Jaya adapted herself to a new form which would not only be appreciated by her husband but it will also be positively appreciated by society, thus adding to her husband Mohan's reputation. Hence, the birth of the weekly column 'Seeta'. But for Jaya, this popularity of the column did not bring to her the creative fulfillment that she was in search for. This writing only brought her fame not a sense of satisfaction because deep within, her subconscious mind was aware that whatever she is putting up in writing is not her actual self. The writer of the column is only a charade. Jaya perceived the writer of 'Seeta' as someone who was parading as Jaya or as if she herself was pretending to be the woman who wrote those columns. The lady who wrote 'Seeta' displayed, 'no doubts about anything, only strong convictions'. (Page 119) Moreover, the writer 'was a liberal, without any prejudices' (Page 119), yet the real Jaya was far from any such qualities. Yet, despite all Jaya, and in turn Deshpande (the creator of Jaya) did manage to analyse and identify the problems and issues of middle class women despite moving within a restrained framework and stands on her own through the curious activity of submission and resistance to the male world.

Mukta and Jaya

There is one dialogue exchange between Jaya and Mukta which takes place as the novel approaches its concluding sections (Pages 184 to 187), wherein both the women share the agony of missing their close friend Kamat and their respective spouses. The dialogue has two facets, where one aspect is responsible for bringing out the other. As far as Mukta's life goes, her husband Arun and her friend Kamat are no longer alive. But in case of Jaya, it is a despair waiting for her husband, Mohan to arrive back. Moreover, the secret of Kamat under no circumstances was going to disturb Mukta's life, but it is not the same for Jaya, because her 'marriage is still alive'. Altogether there are 28 paragraphs with almost 111 sentences. But in this section, Mukta delivers most of the lines and most of her lines display the use of complex sentences.

Mukta, in her desire to understand the cause for Mohan's long unavailability, endeavors to connect Jaya's past association with Kamat for her present disturbance with Mohan. But, Jaya, in her attempt to avert any humiliation of disclosing the past, attempts to clarify her activity in relation to Kamat. As the dialogue between the two continues, Jaya's words turn philosophical only to conceal her bewildered state, but Mukta's approach is practical. It is furthermore intriguing to see how both of them

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use 'I don't know' and 'I don't understand', as they converse about the troubles between Jaya and Mohan. Jaya states about the real cause behind Mohan's departure in diverse context throughout the conversation.

But their rational mindset to the latter part of the conversation prominently varies due to their diverse perception of reality. Jaya's sentences reveal her inconsistent mind. While mentioning to the episode of Kamat, Jaya takes refuge in phrases of modality and other sayings like, 'quite different', 'already dead', 'untidy', 'couldn't', 'Mohan didn't know, 'never told'. Yet Mukta values words and phrases like, 'alone', 'courage', 'died', 'die', 'frightened', 'dead', 'desperate', 'helped', 'dying alone', 'lonely man' 'he knew nothing', 'chaotic', 'rotted', 'heart attack', 'outlive', 'eventualities', 'death', 'dying', 'afraid', 'being alone', 'you didn't', 'lived alone', and 'terribly lonely'.

Mukta's spouse Arun's death brought her closer to Kamat 'it was Kamat who assisted her' but eventually he died. Now she is alone, surviving along with her daughter and Mai. So she recalls the dead persons and finds herself associated with their memories and still sheds tears for the departed. Jaya, like Mukta finds herself attached to Kamat, but she struggles to free herself from his memories, as she continues to be 'Mohan's wife'.

At last Mukta said: 'What does it matter now, Jaya? Let it go', to which Jaya says, 'Mukta, why does it matter so much to you?' This example highlights how both use nearly similar words to express themselves without saying anything concrete. This conversation throws light on another significant aspect of Mukta and Jaya's life.

The conversation discloses the constrained life of Mukta. She lives a more isolated life than Jaya's. Jaya still has hope in the form of Mohan yet Mukta has none. It furthermore reveals the irony that Mukta has taken life on her stride even after all the demise and end of hope and Jaya seems miserable even with no grave individual loss. This discloses her bewildered state of existence and the complicated situation of her marriage.

8.4.2 Indian English and Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande uses a number of regional and cultural expressions to authenticate her story. Her ability to establish her story so firmly in Indian context makes her writing appear more rooted and does not give the feel of being modeled on structures of British writings. As Gurcharan Das points out (Sarang and Bharucha, ed 1994), Indian English is an independent language which is 'born under the Indian sun, a language used, like a native tongue, by the newly emergent Indian middle-class'. Deshpande explains that she writes in English because she considers it, 'neither a foreign language, nor the language of the colonizer, but the language of ... creativity' ('Language No Bar'). Even Salman Rushdie seems to echo the idea in his *Imaginary Homelands* when he opines that, 'The Children of Independent India seem not to think of English as being irredeemably tainted by its colonial provenance. They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to handle.

In *That Long Silence* Deshpande invokes a lot of variety to the Indianness of the English by decorating it with names which are from Maharashtra and Karnataka-Jaya, Chandu, Kamat, Manda and Vyas.

Even when she describes the relationship that the Characters share with each other, Deshpande does not use mere English substitute, instead she uses the Indian

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terms to express them. This creates a vibrant, multi-layered complexity that helps to re-create the middle-class Indian society that she is narrating. Hence, we do not have Uncle Chandu or Uncle Makarand rather we have 'Makarandmama' and 'Chandumama'. We also come across, 'Kakas', 'Kakis', 'Ajji', 'Vanitamami', 'Ai', 'App' and not just their translated English counterparts, uncles, aunties, grandmother, Vanita aunty, mother, father respectively. These culture oriented words fit into her narrative rather effortlessly and seamlessly bringing forth a text which is written in Indian-English and which depicts a middle-class Indian society in all its true colour without eroticizing it or downplaying its nuances. Even the English used in the novel does not seem forced or unnecessarily academic; rather it is a perfect mix of grace and convenience which helps reach across her readers without much of an effort.

ACTIVITY

Shashi Deshpande says 'The fact that we are human is much more important than our being men and women'. Explain the statement.

DID YOU KNOW

Deshpande usually has the heroine as the narrator, and employs a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique. The narrative goes back and forth in time, so the narrator can describe events with the benefit of hindsight.

8.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- *That Long Silence* is not an invented fiction. It is a fiction that takes place in the life of every upwardly mobile middle class and literate Indian woman.
- Though, the Indian women in the contemporary era are born at a period when perception regarding several things like, her rights and duties, liberty to articulate her concepts, power to use her money independently and the possibility to stand for whatever she believes in exists, yet the unhealthy 'silence' lingers in most cases.
- The central character Jaya is a highly literate middle class woman who cohabits with her spouse Mohan and their children Rahul and Rati.
- She is the representation of the ordinary Indian middle class woman who is socially aware of her privileges yet she is confined between her desire to fulfill her aspirations and the restrictions of the family.
- Jaya's dad raised up her as an independent entity, who was allowed to develop a rational mind and exercise her right like any male member, yet, this kind of upbringing of a woman is in clash with the norms of the established society that refuses to identify a woman as an independent individual.
- Jaya ponders all through the novel about her function she has discharged so long. She wonders if her life is what she always wanted, or does she exist as somebody else.
- She tries to explore her persona as a human with a mind of her own and where her strong sentiments are getting nipped off. She is an unsuccessful author and

Check Your Progress

8. State whether true or false:
   (i) Deshpande's story exposes the methods of women liberation.
   (ii) *That Long Silence* acts as the author's mouthpiece.
9. How does Deshpande bring out the Indianness in the story?
10. Fill in the blanks:
   (i) Deshpande's creations have taken birth from her____ _____.
   (ii) The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's stories are _____ women.

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someone who had been compelled to change her name to 'Suhasini' to get associated with her new identity through wedding. She gets haunted by recollections of the past.

- Mohan departs without informing due to his troubles in vocation and to overlook the position of 'two bullocks yoked together'.
- By the time the novel comes to an end, Jaya gets back to her voice and learns to balance her marital life without burying her real self under the expectations of the society.

8.6 KEY TERMS

- **Patriarchy:** It is a family, community, or society based on a social system governed by men.
- **Domestic help:** it is referred to a servant who works in somebody's house, doing the cleaning and other jobs.
- **Indianness:** These are matters relating to India.

8.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Jaya took up a job as a reporter in the publication Onlooker.
2. Deshpande's first book of short stories was called *Legacy*.
3. *Roots and Shadows* was published in 1983.
4. Shashi Deshpande was awarded the Padma Shri in 2009.
5. The dual name that the protagonist carries with her, Jaya and Suhasini, brings in contradiction and an identity crisis to her personality. The name Jaya, meaning the victorious one, was lovingly given to her by her father. Yet the moment her father leaves this world Jaya encounters a paradigm shift in her life –a marriage, a new name and a new identify; a new identity which makes her crippled than independent.
6. The central issue that regulates the novel is the tale of household strife. The marital life of Jaya and Mohan, is under threat because of the malpractice that the husband undertakes.
7. The life of the lower class is portrayed through the life of Jaya's domestic help, Jeeja. Jeeja is forced to feed her family after her husband loses his job in a mill.
8. (i) False; (ii) True
9. In That Long Silence Deshpande invokes a lot of variety to the Indianness of the English by decorating it with names which are from Maharashtra and Karnataka-Jaya, Chandu, Kamat, Manda and Vyas.
10. (i) Personal experiences; (ii) Educated

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8.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Make a list of the oppressed and deprived women, as they appear in the novel *That Long Silence.*
2. Write a short note on the importance of Lohanagar steel plant.
3. Bring out the significance of Jaya and Mukta's conversation.
4. Do you think Mohan supported the writer Jaya?
5. What were the personal problems that Tara and Nilima encountered?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on the silence in the novel *That Long Silence*.
2. How is the theme of identity crisis handled in the novel *That Long Silence*?
3. What is the significance of English used by Deshpande in her novel?
4. What is the role of feminism in Deshpande's work?
5. How does Deshpande project her female writer protagonist in the novel *That Long Silence?*

8.9 FURTHER READING

Moi Toril; *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, New York, 2002.

Butler, Judith; *Undoing Gender,* Routledge, London, 2004.

Belsey, Catherine and Jane Moore; *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and Politics of Literary Criticism*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden. 1977.

UNIT 9 ARUNDHATI ROY

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Structure

9.0 Introduction
9.1 Unit Objectives
9.2 About the Author
9.3 *The God of Small Things*
9.4 Themes in *The God of Small Things*
9.5 Summary
9.6 Key Terms
9.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
9.8 Questions and Exercises
9.9 Further Reading

9.0 INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy was born on 24 November 1961, in Shillong, to a Keralite Christian mother and a Bengali Hindu father. Her parents were separated when she was young. She grew up in Kerala and went to the Corpus Christi School that had been established by her mother. Roy left Kerala at the early age of sixteen to live alone in Delhi and fight through the ways of life for her. Later, she went on to study architecture at the highly acclaimed Delhi School of Architecture. Roy is deeply involved in social issues and has voices her opinions loudly on various international and national issues. The issues range from the Narmada Dam project to the protection of tribal communities in the country. Her latest involvement was seen by her comment on the means and work of Anna Hazare in 2011. This unit will critically assess the works of Roy and also study the theme and style of *The God of Small Things*.

9.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Evaluate Arundhati Roy as a writer and social activist
- Interpret the significant aspects of *The God of Small Things*
- Classify the various themes in *The God of Small Things*

9.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raised by her mother, a social activist, Arundhati Roy never felt the constraints of writing under any traditional format. Of a fiercely independent nature, Roy she never feared from voicing her inner voice and be tamed by the restrictive rules of the society. As the author herself claims about her writing style, 'When I write, I never re-write a sentence because for me my thought and my writing are one thing. It's like breathing, I don't re-breathe a breath... Everything I have - my intellect, my experience, my feelings have been used. If someone doesn't like it, it is like saying they don't like my gall bladder. I can't do anything about it.'

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For the God of Small Things, her first novel, Roy got accolade and criticism in equal percentage. Although she became an instant celebrity in India, charges of anti-Communism were leveled against Roy because of her portrayal of the Communist characters in the book. There were demands to remove the last chapter of the book due to its obscenity.

Roy also highlighted the political fragility of the Indian society in the book. Her subsequent writings witnessed her speaking for the Dalits and the environment.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* is her debut novel and is often considered to be autobiographical to a large extent. It draws upon and embellishes various events from her family's history. As the title of the novel suggests, Roy picks up small things from life to depict how these seemingly minor instances go a long way in shaping the behaviour, responses and thoughts of an individual. The novel is a bestseller and the rights to it were asked for across the world in twenty-one nations. *The God of Small Things* went on to win the Man Booker Prize in 1997 and it made Arundhati Roy the first Indian woman and non-expatriate to win the award.

Roy has written several books since *The God of Small Things*. Some of her famous published works are *Cost of Living* (1999), *War Talk* (2003), *The Chequebook & the Cruise Missiles* (2004), and *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (2004). She won the Lannan Foundation's Cultural Freedom Award in 2002 for her work regarding the civil societies that are adversely affected by the world's most tyrannical governments and monopolies. In November 2011, she was awarded the Norman Mailer Prize for Distinguished Writing.



Fig. 9.1 *Arundhati Roy*

9.3 THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

The novel begins *in media res* (that is, in the middle of things) with a lot of activity around. The reader discovers that he is getting to know the sights and sounds of

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Ayemenem, a small town in the southern state of Kerala in India. Almost instantly, you read about the major characters Rahel and Estha. As children, they lived together in Assam but they were separated following the divorce of their parents. The narrative describes them as 'a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities.' Rahel returns to the town of Ayemenem to meet her twin brother, Estha with whom she has a peculiar and inseparable relationship. They were inseparable to the extent that they considered themselves to be a part of a whole which could only be completed by the presence of the other. Rahel and Estha shared their experiences, dreams and memories. However, it is visible that at the time we meet them they are adults and lead separate emotional lives and do not require each other to be complete physically. On her return to Ayemenem, Rahel also meets her grand aunt, Baby Kochamma, who lives in the same house as Estha.

Once the basic setting has been introduced, the narrative moves to the funeral of the cousin of the twins, Sophie Mol. This incident, the reader discovers, is one of the central occurrences of this novel. The child had lost her life in Ayemenem (on a visit from England) by drowning. The twins had also been young at that time and were about seven years old. Sophie's parents, Margaret Kochamma and Chacko, Baby Kochamma, and the blind grandmother of the twins, Mamachi, were present at the funeral. Ammu and the twins were made to stand separately from the rest of the family and no one acknowledged their presence. Rahel was the vigilant one of the two and was keeping an eye on the 'small things' that were going on during the funeral. She believed that Sophie Mol was alive and awake during the funeral. She also noticed a number of things during the funeral like the unusual paintwork on the ceiling of the cathedral and a baby bat that had crawled up Baby Kochamma's sari and may have bit her. Rahel also heard Sophie's screams when they 'buried her alive'. Following the funeral, Estha and Rahel visited the police station with Ammu. It was not a pleasant experience and when Ammu told the officer that there had been a terrible mistake, that Velutha misbehaved with her. A couple of weeks later, Baba forced Ammu to send Estha to live with him in Calcutta.

The twins hadn't met since their separation and had spent their lives (up to this point) apart. However, Estha had to return to Ayemenem now as Baba moved to Australia and could not take his son along. It is at this point that we learn about some vital characteristics of Estha who we know walks alone in the rain. He had stopped talking as a child and could easily blend into his surroundings. He 'occupied very little space in the world'. After he graduated from school, he surprised Baba and his stepmother by joining in the housework instead of going ahead to college. However, when Rahel returned to Ayemenem, the noise of the world starts penetrating Estha's thoughts again. After the death of Ammu, Rahel too wandered from one school to another. She had often been expelled from schools as a child due to inappropriate behaviour. Rahel had also gone to architectural college in Delhi even though she never graduated out of it. It was during this time that she met Larry McCaslin who she went on to marry. She had immigrated to the United States with him though their marriage fell apart quite quickly. When Estha returned to Ayemenem, she too returned to India as seemingly that was the only relationship she could truly connect to. Roy then moves on to other sub-plots such as the story of Baby Kochamma who had fallen in love with Father Mulligan at the age of eighteen. He was a visiting monk who worked with her father, Reverend John Ipe. She had attempted to win the favour of the Irish monk by faking an interest in religion but that hadn't worked out well. She went on to study 'ornamental gardening' at the University of Rochester in New York.

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When she came back home her love for gardening was replaced by her love for watching television. However, at the point we enter the novel she is worried about Rahel and Estha coming back to Ayemenem.

We learn about the surroundings through the experiences of Rahel and Estha. The reader learns about 'Paradise Pickles & Preserves', Baby Kochamma's factory. Rahel relates that the government had banned their banana jam as it could not be placed under either the categories of jam or jelly. This characteristic of being 'unclassifiable' embodies the true identity of her family. Rahel tries to trace this weirdness back to the time of the death of Sophie Mol or even further back when India as a nation had not yet been colonized.

The second chapter begins with an incident from their combined history when they Mammachi (Rahel and Estha's grandmother) is driving the twins, Sophie Mol, Margaret Kochamma, Ammu, Chacko and Baby Kochamma to Cochin for a vacation in 1969. On another level, the reader is now given an insight into Ammu, who regrets having married Baba who she had met at the young age of eighteen at a friend's wedding reception and had married him within a few days. She went to live in Assam with him, only to discover that he was an alcoholic and their marriage failed almost as quickly as their romance. Rahel and Estha were born in 1962 during India's war with China. About a decade after this, Baba's behaviour led him into a lot of trouble and his boss, Mr. Hollick gave him an ultimatum. However, there was a catch and he decided that he could pardon Baba's laziness if Ammu was sent to provide pleasure to Mr. Hollick. Baba found the second option more profitable and tried to convince Ammu to sleep with Mr. Hollick, following which she beat him and returned to Ayemenem taking the children with her.

The narrative then shifts to Mammachi's life and how she started her business without the help of Pappachi. She was beaten almost every night by her husband and once when Chacko was home on vacation from Oxford, he threatened his father not to hurt Mammachi ever again. In his time, Pappachi had been an Imperial Entomologist in Delhi and his deepest sorrow was that the moth he had discovered had not been named after him. With the passage of time, Pappachi's misbehavior and unpleasantness increased, following which he died of a heart attack. Following these stories, the relationship between the offsprings of Ammu and Mammachi are shown. Chacko had told the twins that if they wanted to understand their family, they must visit the forbidden 'History House' on the other side of the river. Under the influence of Chacko, Rahel and Estha grew intrigued about how the past and the present were inextricably interlinked.

The reader is rudely brought back to the present as Chacko and Ammu argue on the way. We are told that Chacko is an Oxford Rhodes scholar who returned to Ayemenem after quitting his job as a lecturer at Madras Christian College and took over the reins of the pickle business. During this time, Rahel and Estha read the road signs backwards, as they can read both backwards and forward. This habit of theirs is symbolic in nature and seems to mirror the narrative style that moves backwards and forward in order to place the individual. On moving ahead, we realize that the events are actually taking place in Rahel's memory in New York. Various other issues like untouchability and Communism are also dealt with at this time under the guise of a number of incidents. As the family continues to drive, Chacko says that Ammu, Estha, and Rahel are burdens to him. Outside the car, life goes on as usual despite the uncomfortable stillness and silence in the car.

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In the following chapter, Baby Kochamma and her midget housekeeper, Kochu Maria, have ignored the running of the house that has become extremely dirty and filthy. The only activity they seem to perform is to watch television while eating nuts.

The reader is then introduced to an old coolie who used to say 'Big Man the Lantern, Small Man the Tallow Stick.' In the present, Estha comes to the house and is drenched by the rain and goes into Ammu's old room. He undresses without any shame even when Rahel watches him. He then goes on to wash his clothes in silence with acknowledging Rahel's presence around.

The fourth chapter unfolds in Cochin at a cinema called Abhilash Talkies. It is here that all the women in the family urinate in front of each other and Rahel seems to cherish this intimacy to an extent. As opposed to this, in the men's bathroom, Estha has to stand on a number of cans in order to be tall enough to be able to use the urinal.

In the theatre, Estha sings while the movie is playing and this irks the rest of the audience. To avoid further problems, Estha goes to the lobby where he annoys the 'Orangedrink Lemondrink Man' with his songs. The man lures Estha and makes him fondle his private parts in exchange for a free drink. Following this, Estha starts feeling unwell and nauseous and Ammu takes him to the ladies' bathroom. On their way back, the same 'Orangedrink Lemondrink Man' flirts with Ammu who notices that Estha doesn't seem too well.

The family leaves the theatre and in the process there is a tussle between Ammu and Rahel with Ammu's 'love for her decreasing'. This sentiment is etched in the mind of Rahel and she is never able to forget her being 'loved a little less.'

On another note, we see Chacko wondering what his daughter looked like. He reminiscences about the time before his divorce when he used to sneak into Sophie Mol's room and try and memorize what she looked like. Almost at the same time, Estha is shown to be vomiting and feeling unwell. He goes to Rahel then and they end up holding each other and dreaming of the river next to their home.

The following chapter begins with an emphasis on natural elements like the river that flows close to the house of the twins. It seems to have a history of its own. Over the years, dwellers around have bathed and eased themselves in it, while many others have ridden on boats on it. The filth that is dumped into the river has led it to stink though hotels around the water body promote the idea of the location as 'God's Own Country.' Just as the history of the protagonists is convoluted, distorted and has gaps, the history of the hotel in the area too is fragmentary and strange. The narrative moves back to the story of Rahel who meets Comrade Pillai during her wanderings around town. They chat on inconsequential issues for a while before he tells her that he knows about a scandal and death in her family. He also shows her his son, Lenin's pictures which reminds Rahel of the encounter she and Estha had with the boy at the doctor's office. The Comrade also shows Rahel a picture of herself, Estha, Sophie Mol and Lenin which reminds her of the time when it had been taken. Sophie had prepared for the photograph and made funny expressions when the picture was being taken. She had also told them it was quite likely that they were all illegitimate children.

Chapter six begins with the expectation of Sophie Mol's arrival at the Cochin airport. Ammu is shown to be helping Rahel get dressed, though the girl cannot forget that her mother 'loves her a little less' for her behaviour at the theatre. The family awaits Sophie's arrival at the airport all dressed in their fineries while Ammu tries to convince the twins that they represent India in the eyes of Sophie and should be on

their best behaviour. On their arrival, Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma are greeted by Chacko though he is uncomfortable to have them around. Sophie is described to a beautiful girl and Baby Kochamma compares her to Ariel from The Tempest though the girl fails to understand the reference. On the way back from the airport, the twins sing an English song in order to impress Sophie.

In the following chapter, Rahel rummages through Pappachi's study room while the passive Estha stands silently at the door of the room. Rahel's mission is to look for 'hidden things' and she comes across Estha's notebook that he had used as a child. Rahel mocks the mistakes that he has made in his writing and also points out that he chose to write about grim, depressing topics.

The narrative then swiftly cuts across to Ammu's last visit to the small town of Ayemenem in Kerala. Rahel was the only one around at that time and it was a difficult and testing time for her. She couldn't really understand the cause of Ammu's non-stop ranting. It was the last time that the child saw her mother and the next time she saw her was when she was being cremated as the church had refused to bury her. The death of Ammu did not affect Rahel deeply and neither did she write about t to her brother as she believed that writing or talking to him was like doing it to a part of her own body. When the narration swings back to the present, Rahel sees Estha walking out of the house for another of his walks. She then realizes that she was standing in the same spot where 'Welcome home, Our Sophie Mol' had been performed and it only leads the reader to understand how Rahel points at things that had changed immensely over the course of a few years.

The eighth chapter begins with Mammachi playing the violin and thinking about various things including Margaret Kochamma, the thought of whom makes her immensely angry. She hates Margaret as she holds her responsible for the failure of her son's marriage and also calls her 'just another whore.' Chacko, to Mammachi, was the ideal man and anything that went wrong with him was to be the opponent's fault.

On the arrival of the party, a cake with 'Welcome Home, Our Sophie Mol' is brought out and the child is greeted excitedly. The crowd seemed to be on their best behaviour, though the facade was evident. During this time, Rahel greets Velutha and the camaraderie between the two is evident to Ammu who admires Velutha for his physical attractiveness. There is a tiff with Margaret Kochamma which upsets Ammu and the reader is shown a glimpse of the abuse that Ammu faced at Pappachi's hands as a child. Ammu also warns Rahel to maintain her distance with Velutha.

Chapter nine begins with Rahel reminiscing about a day when she and her brother had taken Sophie Mol to meet Velutha. She also remembers Velutha fondly as he had treated them quite well and not let his judgment of their parents affect the way in which he treated them. She realizes that Ammu had left both her and Estha to '(spin) in the dark, with no moorings, in a place with no foundation.'

The following chapter begins with a focus on Estha who sits alone in the pickle factory while a crown has assembled at his home. He has 'Two thoughts' which are 'Anything can happen to anyone' and 'It is best to be prepared.' He goes on thinking on similar somber lines when Rahel appears. He then tells her that he would go to visit the History House, which lay abandoned and it was believed to be haunted by the ghost of Kari Saipu. Rahel decides to join him in the adventure and they try to use a boat that immediately sinks. They drag it to Velutha's hut where they meet his handicapped brother, Kuttapen, who advises them on how to fix it. In a short while, Velutha also arrives and promises to help them repair the boat. There is a strong undercurrent that suggests the relationship that Ammu and Velutha have.

The eleventh chapter is an important one as it brings the wishes and desires of Ammu into the foreground and also since by the end of the chapter, Rahel seems to be trying to understand why the family structure broke down.

Ammu fantasizes about a man pleasing her and this act is resisted by the people present around. The twins watch Ammu sleeping and believe that she is having a bad dream in her nap. They go and wake her up which angers Ammu and she tells them that she was dreaming of something good. They also see the stretch marks on her stomach which she lets them touch and pat. When Ammu can't take any more of it, she runs to the bathroom and cries for the way in which their lives had shaped up.

The next chapter focuses on the themes of family and the sanctity of art in India. Arundhati Roy raises some vital questions that remain unanswered.

Rahel goes to a temple where she sees a sleeping elephant, Kochu Thomban, a common sight in the temples in south India. She also watches the dance form of Kathakali being performed, which she greatly admires. The performers enact the story of Karna (a royal who was brought up in poverty after being betrayed by his own mother and was eventually murdered at the hands of his brother). The theme of the performance is only too apt for Rahel because the story deals with the family structure in the midst of complexities and betrayal. She can also sense Estha coming to the temple and even though they sit separately they are united within the act, somehow. The feeling that binds them is broken when Kochu Thamban breaks the coconut that Rahel had brought.

About the art form, Roy makes a distinct point stating that the revered and treasured art form has been brought down to the lowly status of a show that was put on only for tourists who couldn't anyways analyse the true worth of such a dance. The dancer according to Roy, '...hawks the only thing he owns. The stories that his body can tell. He becomes a Regional Flavour'.

The narrative in the next chapter shows Sophie Mol's point-of-view as a character. On the morning following her arrival, she gets up in the house at Ayemenem and as she watches Margaret Kochamma sleeping, she sees the framed wedding picture of her parents.

Here we are told of the story of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma who had met in England at Oxford as Chacko had been a student there with his Rhodes scholarship. Margaret had been working there while she saved up to get teacher training, later. She had amused Chacko and eventually they had become passionate lovers. Though Chacko respected Margaret's independence, he did not take care of himself and gained a tremendous amount of weight and became shabby and unkempt in his appearance. They weren't doing well even financially. Around the time that Margaret found out that she was pregnant, she met Joe who she fell in love with and asked Chacko for a divorce who could not bear the separation and came back to his motherland. Chacko's shabby and sloppy appearance and behaviour was evident even in his home even though Mammachi supported him against Pappachi irrespective of all this. Chacko kept receiving letters from Margaret who wrote about her own and Sophie's life. This process of corresponding via letters built a bond between Chacko and Margaret and when Joe suddenly died, Chacko invited them to come to India and Margaret couldn't refuse the offer. As the narrative comes back to the present, Margaret can never

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forgive herself for leaving her daughter alone in Ayemenem, while she went to Cochin with Chacko to check on their plane tickets. The look of her daughter's corpse seems to haunt her.

Roy breaks the narrative here and adds a sub-chapter here. The reader is again brought to the point of Sophie's death. For the first time, we are given a glimpse of the entire sequence of events that led up to Sophie Mol's death. On the morning of Sophie's death, the children had not got up for breakfast as Ammu had yelled at the twins on the evening before, saying, 'If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You're the millstones round my neck!' On the day before, Vellya Paapen had come to the house in a drunken condition and expressed his gratitude to Mammachi. He told her that his son, Velutha and her daughter, Ammu were having an affair, hearing which Mammachi gave him a blasting and pushed him down the stairs. Upset, Vellya offered to kill Velutha himself while Baby Kochamma was angered as she had always been jealous of Ammu. All the family members forcefully locked Ammu in a room while they sent for Velutha. Then, the narrative shifts rapidly between a few days beginning with when a fisherman had found Sophie's body in the river and then the reader hears about the incident at the police station.

A poignant scene is present when Margaret Kochamma sees Sophie's body and is shown to be so traumatized that she cannot remember anything for the few days after. She is extremely angry at the twins who were still alive and she somehow assumes that it was Estha's idea to sail on the river and before she leaves for England she slaps him. However, she does write an apology letter to him many years later which Rahel reads. The victim of the workings of this complex family structure, Velutha, is called 'The God of Small Things' by the author.

As this central chapter draws to a close, Sophie is shown to rising from her sleep and looking at the wedding picture of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma again. Roy ends her story by saying, 'Sophie Mol became a Memory, while The Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. Like a fruit in season. Every season.'

The fourteenth chapter sees Chacko visiting Comrade Pillai's house, who is not in, but he waits for him. The Comrade's mother, wife Kalyani, son Lenin, and niece Latha are all present around. When Comrade Pillai comes back, Chacko asks him to approve a new label for the pickle factory's new product, Synthetic Cooking Vinegar. The conversation then moves on to Velutha and though Comrade Pillai is not in favour of him, Chacko defends Velutha.

The reader sees another sub-chapter where Velutha is summoned by Mammachi and as soon as he comes he is yelled at and Mammachi threatens him not to come near her property, violating which show would have him killed. Velutha goes to Comrade Pillai's house for help only to be refused and insulted further.

Chapter fifteen is set at midnight and Velutha is shown to be swimming across the river to the History House after she has stripped naked. Though he is a sad and lonely figure that stands out in the moonlight, it is also a beautiful sight. At this point, the author labels him as 'The God of Loss' and also 'The God of Small Things.'

In the following chapter, the twins and Sophie are shown to be getting ready to row their boat on the river. Sophie Mol has convinced Rahel and Estha to run away with her as this was possibly the only way to make the parents even angrier. While rowing, the boat hits a log and is upturned and while the twins resurface and reach the shore safely, Sophie is nowhere to be seen. They try to look for her for a long time and when they fail in their search, they are too tired and collapse on the veranda of the History House.

Chapter seventeen begins with the silent Estha ironing his own and Rahel's clothes while the housekeeper, Kochu Maria, sleeps.

Baby Kochamma is filling in her diary with 'I love you' while thinking of Father Mulligan who had died a few years ago. Like all other characters and the progression of the narrative, Father Mulligan's life too was unconventional and he had left the church and had devoted himself to the worship of Vishnu. Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan's relationship was a complicated one as Father had not accepted her advances. However, Baby Kochamma kept the pretence of the affair up through her entries in the diary which portrayed a romantic relationship.

Moving back to Estha, the reader sees him reminiscing about the last time he had seen his mother alive and Sophie Mol's death. Through his thought process, the reader gets to know that Velutha had been accused of kidnapping and killing Sophie Mol and had been arrested. However, Comrade Pillai interpreted this as a charge falsely put due to his affiliation to the Communist party and caused disruption in the running of the pickle factory.

The following chapter opens on the day of Sophie Mol's death. The police hunt for clues and they cannot find anything to help them find Sophie Mol. However, they find the twins and Velutha sleeping on the veranda in front of the History House. Since Sophie is missing from the pack, the police are sure that the 'untouchable' Velutha must have caused some harm to her and they beat him up badly and take him with them. The twins observe two things from this incident that '...blood barely shows on a Black Man' and that 'It smells though, sicksweet, like roses on a breeze.'

The next chapter has the setting of the police station where the Inspector is shown to be giving the twins something to drink while he tells Baby Kochamma that Velutha was in a bad condition. He could die anytime soon and that since the twins were saying that they had gone to the History House with Velutha of their own free will, an innocent man would die. Rahel and Estha had also said that Sophie Mol had got lost and Velutha had nothing to do with her disappearance. The Inspector asks Baby Kochamma to prove that her accusation of Velutha's criminal activity had to be proved by her or else she herself would be accused of charging an innocent man.

The twins are engulfed in further complexities as Baby Kochamma tries to enforce the guilt of killing Sophie Mol on them. She says that since they had lost Sophie and maybe even murdered her, they would have to bear the consequences and rot in jail alone. Baby Kochamma blackmails them emotionally to the point that they give in and play along with her believing that Velutha was the criminal. Estha identifies Velutha as the offender as he had been instructed to, though all he remembers doing was replying in the affirmative to the questions of Inspector Thomas Mathew. Ending all the complexities, Velutha dies on the same night. However, Baby Kochamma is scared that her guilt will be discovered and she sends Estha to live with Baba and Ammu is also sent off.

This chapter is an example of Arundhati Roy's deep understanding of human psychology and how impressionable young minds are. The subtle psychological linings under the Inspector's behaviour, Baby Kochamma's coercion and the helplessness of the children make the reader understand the complexities of human nature.

The twentieth chapter sees the young Estha on the train leaving Ayemenem and a woman sitting next to him praising his verbal English skills. She tells her children to draw inspiration from him as he speaks English fluently. However, the landscape of Estha's mind cannot think of anything else besides the guilt of having lost the right to ever see Ammu again. Just as Ammu had, Rahel and he had also 'loved (Velutha) to death.' The immense weight of having killed Sophie Mol also remains within him. Rahel is also shown to be in agony.

The reader is brought back to the present by Rahel calling Estha, Esthapappychachen Kuttappen Peter Mon,' the name that was fondly used for him as a child. Rahel and Estha seem to complete each other both physically and emotionally and out of 'hideous grief' that they both share, they please each other. The chapter ends on a full circle as it meets the longing that Rahel had felt for Estha on the day that Sophie Mol had arrived into their lives and Ayemenem.

The last chapter of *The God of Small Things* begins with Ammu listening to the radio while everyone else in the house is fast asleep. She longs for Velutha and runs to the riverbank to meet him, though she does not find him. While he is floating on the river water, he sees Ammu and swims over to her and they consummate their love. The reader understands that there were a number of similar instances following this night till before Velutha's death. Their relationship seems to be removed from time and the shackles of pain, society and expectations. They are shown to be taking pleasure in rather 'Small Things' over things that we humans have been made to believe that matter. A little spider that ends up outliving Velutha had been named Lord Rubbish by them and it remains even though Ammu and Velutha were no longer there. Each meeting of the two ends on a note of 'Tomorrow? Tomorrow'. Arundhati Roy ends her award-winning work on the poignant note of forbidden love and the thought of '...the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much', remains with the reader.

9.4 THEMES IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

The major themes in *The God of Small Things* are as follows:

- **Small things:** In the fast-paced ever changing world of today, individuals devote too much time to the big things such as the importance of wealth and social and cultural structures that cannot be broken down. However, 'small things such as feelings, desires, promises and secrets have easily been relegated to the sidelines. Arundhati Roy constructs her novel using these 'small things' and portrays how wants, emotions and minor experiences often go a long way in shaping an individual. In the novel, characters like Baby Kochamma and Comrade Pillai strive so hard for the bigger things in life that they miss out on the human aspects that make man. The 'small things' that they want to do away with are not to be mentioned in public, only whispered and kept hidden in places like the History House. Velutha is called the God of these 'small things' since his life revolves around all these forbidden activities. He, despite being an untouchable (a 'big thing'), leads his life as he wants and has a relationship with Ammu. He enjoys the 'small things' in life.

Check Your Progress

1. Name the award that Arundhati Roy won for *The God of Small Things.*
2. Where has the novel been set by Arundhati Roy?
3. What had Baby Kochamma studied in New York?
4. Name Baby Kochamma's pickle factory.

- **Homecoming:** Even though almost all the characters live away from Ayemenem, their lives only come in full circle when they come back to their hometown. The setting of Ayemenem comes naturally to Roy as she had spent a lot of her teenage around the place. In terms of the characters, Rahel comes back to Estha and when they finally consummate their love, they are almost set free from the bindings of want and desire. Ammu too comes back to Velutha and Mammachi and when she finally leaves the place again, she meets her end. Another prominent example is Chacko who is a bright scholar studying in England, who comes back when he has lost hope n life. However, the coming of Margaret and Sophie to Ayemenem gives Chacko a new lease of life and he is finally free of the wanderings of his mind as to how his daughter looked or behaved. The author makes use of this theme to suggest that no matter how far one runs, one is never free from his roots.
- **Forbidden love:** The theme of forbidden love and scandalous relationships is clearly evident in the novel. Roy uses this tool to portray the structures that society has built in order to regulate relationships and how trying to break them often makes individuals fail. The affair of Ammu and Velutha is the foremost example of this kind of love as he being an untouchable should not have anything to do with her. When her family comes to know of it, they ensure that Velutha is severely punished, to the extent that he is tortured to death. Another form of forbidden love is evident in the relationship between Rahel and Estha who long for each other in times of emotional turmoil. Though the author does not seem to classify it as incest or in any other form, it remains a dark secret between the twins.
- **Preservation:** One of the most important themes in *The God of Small Things* is that of preservation. Through the novel, Roy stresses on the fact that time is fleeting and 'things can change in a day' and the only way to withstand this is to preserve ideas and memories. The family's business, 'Paradise Pickles & Preserves', is a symbol of the family's need and longing to the keep the secrets intact, though away from the public eye. Nothing is ever forgotten or lost in the scheme of events in the family. Both the beautiful and the ugly memories remain and at times are used for various purposes. These purposes might range from reminiscing to trying to purge one's self of them.

ACTIVITY

Make a presentation on Arundhati Roy's contribution as a social activist.

DID YOU KNOW

Arundhati Roy received great attention in 1994 when she criticized Shekhar Kapoor's film *Bandit Queen* based on Phoolan Devi. She denounced the movie calling it 'The Great Indian Rape Trick' in her film review. Furthermore, she condemned the fact that the incident was recreated without the consent of the living rape victim. Also, she charged Kapoor with misrepresenting Phoolan Devi's life and for sketching a very partial picture.

Check Your Progress

5. Who is called the God of small things?
6. What is the most important theme in *The God of Small Things*?
7. Where do the twins meet the 'Orangedrink Lemondrink man'?

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9.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The novel *The God of Small Things* is the most widely read and popular form of literature.
- Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is her debut novel and is often considered to be autobiographical to a large extent.
- As the title of the novel suggests, Roy picks up small things from life to depict how these seemingly minor instances go a long way in shaping the behaviour, responses and thoughts of an individual.
- *The God of Small Things* won the Man Booker Prize in 1997 and it made Arundhati Roy the first Indian woman and non-expatriate to win the award.
- The major themes that Roy discusses in her novel are 'small things', homecoming, forbidden love and preservation.
- The novel begins in media res (that is, in the middle of things) with a lot of activity around. The reader discovers that he is getting to know the sights and sounds of Ayemenem, a small town in the southern state of Kerala in India.
- Once the basic setting has been introduced, the narrative moves to the funeral of the cousin of the twins, Sophie Mol. This incident, the reader discovers, is one of the central occurrences of this novel.
- The second chapter begins with an incident from their combined history when they Mammachi (Rahel and Estha's grandmother) is driving the twins, Sophie Mol, Margaret Kochamma, Ammu, Chacko and Baby Kochamma to Cochin for a vacation in 1969.
- The reader is rudely brought back to the present as Chacko and Ammu argue on the way.
- Another chapter begins with an emphasis on natural elements like the river that flows close to the house of the twins. It seems to have a history of its own.
- In the following chapter, Rahel rummages through Pappachi's study room while the passive Estha stands silently at the door of the room. Rahel's mission is to look for 'hidden things' and she comes across Estha's notebook that he had used as a child.
- The eleventh chapter is an important one as it brings the wishes and desires of Ammu into the foreground and also since by the end of the chapter, Rahel seems to be trying to understand why the family structure broke down.
- Like all other characters and the progression of the narrative, Father Mulligan's life too was unconventional and he had left the church and had devoted himself to the worship of Vishnu.
- Arundhati Roy ends her award-winning work on the poignant note of forbidden love and the thought of '...the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how much', remains with the reader.

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9.6 KEY TERMS

- **Corpus Christi:** A Roman Catholic holy day which commemorates the Eucharist - a ritual in which they believe that a wafer and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ.
- ***In media res***: In medias res or medias in res (into the middle of affairs) is a Latin phrase denoting the literary and artistic narrative technique wherein the relation of a story begins either at the mid-point or at the conclusion, rather than at the beginning.
- **Homecoming:** It is the act of returning to your home after being away for a long time.

9.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Arundhati Roy won the Man Booker Prize in 1997 for *The God of Small Things*.
2. The novel has been set in Ayemenem in Kerala by Arundhati Roy.
3. Baby Kochamma had studied ornamental gardening at the University of Rochester in New York.
4. Baby Kochamma's pickle factory is called Paradise Pickles and Preserves.
5. Velutha is called the God of these 'small things'
6. One of the most important themes in *The God of Small Things* is that of preservation.
7. The twins meet the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at Abhilash Talkies in Cochin.

9.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the funeral of Sophie Mol.
2. What do you know of Baby Kochamma's life in her youth?
3. Write a short note on the preparations that the family had made for Margaret Kochamma's and Sophie Mol's arrival.
4. Who does Baby Kochamma compare Sophie's beauty to?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the relationship between Chacko and Margaret Kochamma from the past to the present.
2. Explain how 'small things' is an important theme in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

9.9 FURTHER READING

Moi Toril; *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, New York, 2002.

Butler, Judith; *Undoing Gender,* Routledge, London, 2004.

Belsey, Catherine and Jane Moore; *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and Politics of Literary Criticism*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden. 1977.

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UNIT 10 SHORT STORIES

Structure

10.0 Introduction
10.1 Unit Objectives
10.2 Mahasweta Devi
  10.2.1 *Draupadi*
  10.2.2 *Breast Giver*
10.3 Sujata Sankranti
  10.3.1 *The Warp and the Weft*
10.4 Alice Walker: *Everyday Use*
10.5 Githa Hariharan
10.6 Summary
10.7 Key Terms
10.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
10.9 Questions and Exercises
10.10 Further Reading

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Short stories are another literary form in prose. They have the same elements as that of a novel, namely, plot, style, technique, theme, characters and dialogues. Short stories can be romantic, experimental, tragic or philosophical. They can reflect modes of fantasy, realism, naturalism, or can be psychological as *The Duchess and the Jeweller* by Virginia Woolf. In terms of length, it is short and usually limits itself within 7,000–9,000 words. It is a 'prose tale' that can be read in one sitting covering the length of half an-hour to two hours and should be limited to 'a certain unique single effect' to which all the details would be subordinate. Therefore, it is evident that a short story is supposed to maintain a classical unity, namely, the unity of action.

In a short story, the focus of interest is always on the occurrence of events or on the detection of events that have happened. Sometimes they are full of adventure or mystery to charm the popular taste, while at other times there are stories of character which stress on psychological representation or moral qualities of the protagonist. For example, in Anton Chekhov's stories nothing much takes place other than a conversation between two people, a meeting or an encounter. Ernest Hemingway's classic short *story A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* captures only a curt conversation between two writers about an old man who gets drunk every day and stays on in the café until it closes. It also includes their inferences of the issue.

The short story originated in the form of anecdotes. It was in the 18th and 19th centuries that short stories became popular as an individual form of literature.

Storytelling is widely believed to have originated sometime with the advent of language itself. While this concept might seem obvious at the outset, the truth is that trying to pinpoint a time line for the origins of story is as futile as trying to identify the first words spoken by man. Stories appear in various forms—creation stories, the mythical stories talking about rituals, folk tales and fairy tales, fables and legends. The oral folklores of all traditions highlight the importance of storytelling in our collaborated perceptions, our moral values and our concepts of truth. This power to

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bring together the narrative, to give a form to our collective notion and ideas along with the world has recently interested psychologists to understand how stories impact the lives of children and how they may help to understand a specific individual's learning of language, ability to reason and capacity to perceive reality.

In this unit, we will discuss some of the short stories written by Mahasweta Devi, Sujata Sankranti, Alice Walker and Githa Hariharan.

10.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the short story *Draupadi* by Mahasweta Devi
- Understand the feminist as well as patriarchal angle to the study of *Breast Giver*
- Paraphrase the *Warp and the Weft* by Sujata Sankranti
- Assess the contents of *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker
- Summarize *The Will* by Githa Hariharan
- Interpret the story in different hues and forms in a particular socio-cultural set up of the country.
- Analyse the position of women in the post-colonial era in the traditional, as well as changing environment because of the influence of the west.

10.2 MAHASWETA DEVI

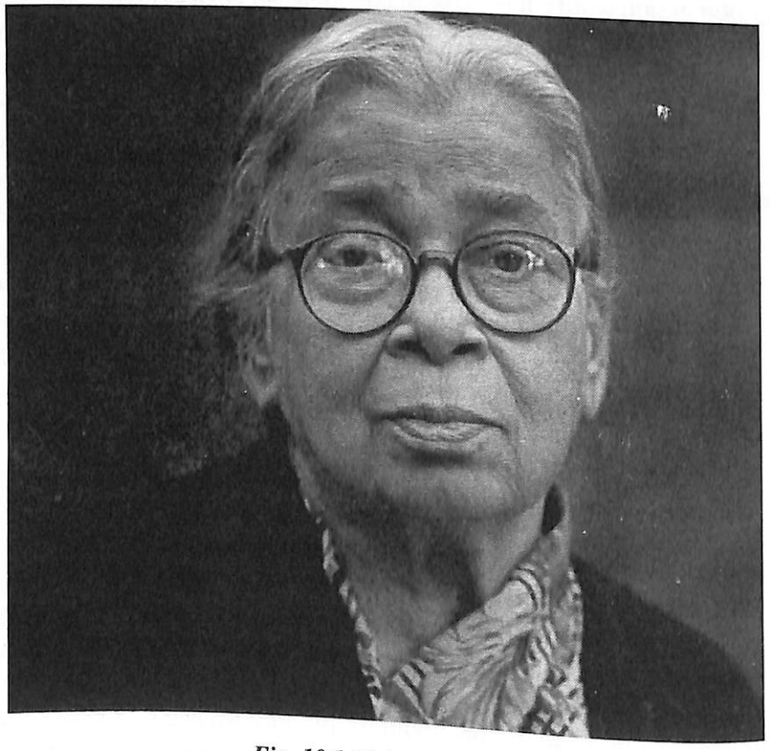


Fig. 10.1 *Mahasweta Devi*

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Mahasweta Devi was born in 1926 in Dhaka, to distinguished literary parents. Manish Ghatak, Mahasweta Devi's father, was a renowned poet and novelist. Her mother, Dharitri Devi was a social activist and writer. She started her school education in Dhaka, but after Partition, the family moved to West Bengal. She graduated in English from the Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal and completed her M. A. in English at Calcutta University. After completing her post-graduation, she began working as a teacher and journalist.

Mahasweta Devi started her writing journey at an early age and contributed to various literary magazines. Most of her early writings were short stories. Her first novel, Nati, was published in 1957. Among her masterpieces are *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa*, *Rudali*, *Bioscoper Baksho* and *Chatti Munda O Tar Tir*.

Devi writes about the lives of ordinary men and women, particularly the adivasis (tribal) like the Santhals, Lodhas, Shabars and Mundas and other topics of social and political relevance. *Hazaar Chaurasi ki Maa* has recently been filmed.

Mahasweta Devi is also an activist who is dedicated to the struggle of the tribal people in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In her elaborate Bengali fiction, she often depicts the brutal domination of tribal people and the untouchables by potent, authoritarian upper-caste landlords, lenders and corrupt government officials.

Works

- *The Queen of Jhansi* (biography, translated in English by Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta from the 1956 first edition in Bangla *Jhansir Rani*)
- *Hajar Churashir Ma*, 1975
- *Aranyer Adhikar* (*The Occupation of the Forest*), 1977
- *Agnigarbha* (*Womb of Fire*), 1978
- *Bitter Soil*, 1998
- *Choti Munda evam Tar Tir* (*Choti Munda and His Arrow*), 1980
- *Imaginary Maps* (Translated by Gayatri Spivak), 1995
- Dhowli (Short Story)
- *Dust on the Road* (Translated into English by Maitreya Ghatak)
- *Our Non-Veg Cow* (Translated from Bengali by Paramita Banerjee)
- *Bashai Tudu* (Translated into English by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak and Shamik Bandyopadhyay), 1993
- *Titu Mir*
- *Rudali*
- *Breast Stories* (Translated into English by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak), 1997
- *Of Women, Outcasts, Peasants and Rebels*, 1990
- *Ek-kori's Dream* (Translated into English by Lila Majumdar), 1976
- *The Book of the Hunter*, 2002
- *Outcast*, 2002
- *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Translated into English by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak), 1987

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- *Till Death Do Us Part*
- *Old Women*
- *Kulaputra* (Translated into Kannada by Sreemathi H.S.)
- *The Why-Why Girl* (Tulika)
- *Dakatey Kahini*

Awards

- 1979: Sahitya Akademi Award (Bengali)
- 1986: Padma Shri
- 1996: Jnanpith Award
- 1997: Ramon Magsaysay Award
- 2006: Padma Vibhushan
- 2010:Yashwantrao Chavan National Award
- 2011: Bangabibhushan
- 2012: Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement- *Sahityabrahma*

10.2.1 *Draupadi*

Draupadi is definitely one of Mahasweta Devi's most read stories, which has the distinction of being republished and has been reprinted and translated in several languages. Like most of her stories, it is set among the tribals in Bengal.

Draupadi, or Dopdi, , is a rebel, hunted down by the government in their attempt to subjugate these groups. The government uses all forces available to them, including kidnapping, murder and rape; and any tribal deaths in custody are invariably 'accidents'. But Dopdi, despite being in a vulnerable position is not cowed down. After being raped and abused continuous for days, and deprived of food and water, the story ends with a magnificent scene in the end where she faces her abusers, naked and bloody, but fiercely strong. She is in charge of herself again. Though not in the way people might have expected her to be, she challenges her abusers with a determination and zeal which was unheard or unseen of previously.

The *sena nayak* is introduced in the story as someone who is a specialist 'in combat and left-wing politics'. He is proud to have an in-depth knowledge about the tribals. His ground for understanding them lies in his concept of 'by (theoretically) being one of them'.

Draupadi depicts how a woman, especially one from the weaker sections, draws strength from her body and her inner feminine core to fight against her marginality. She defies shame associated with the body of a woman. Less of a feminist and more of a humanist, Mahashweta alleges that women should be judged from the point of view of a human and not from the point of view of gender, race, caste and class. Devi portrays the true face of feminist assertion where Draupadi uses her wholeness of mind and body to fight against her marginalized identity.

Check Your Progress

1. When and where was Mahasweta Devi born?
2. Who were Mahasweta Devi's parents?
3. Name some of Mahasweta Devi's notable novels.

The Historical Context

The year 1967 witnessed a successful peasant revolution. This rebellion germinated in the Naxalbari area located in one of the northern parts of West Bengal. This rebellion was special because of the association of peasants and intellectuals coming together for a common goal — that of overthrowing the government backed by the upper classes by force.

The success of Bengal Naxalbari Movement ignited numerous 'Naxalbari' kind of movement throughout India. The main target of this revolution was directed against the established domination of the landlords and money lender towards the landless peasants and small farm worker. Even the legislations had their dubious interest in such a set up. It must be mentioned that such a partnership between the elite intellectuals and the deprived workers had been experienced by the West previously bringing out positive results.

The Narrative

Devi's story is more appealing because it does not unnecessarily sentimentalize its characters or the plot. They are various facts produced in a detached objective perspective. Mahasweta Devi allows her characters to speak for themselves and does not add her own view into their persona. She also does not she takes authorial liberty and speaks on their behalf.

The difficult life the tribals lead and how they are always being victimized by the people from the upper crust of the society and the likes of moneylenders are portrayed clearly.

The author throws light on the odd and weird functions of charity groups and city people who sometimes are unable to associate with the problems of the masses and the tribals, or despite their good intentions simply cannot do anything concrete. The class and cultural differences are other important issues that create extreme polarities in terms of understanding and reciprocating.

Mahasweta Devi employs a number of literary devices to bring out the complexities of the character and their lives. She keeps changing the point of view of narration, supplying the readers with multiple perspectives to judge a situation. She just does not write a story to provide entertainment. A story telling activity always translates into an activism.

The story of Draupadi or Dopdi takes place between two polarities. On one side, there is law which is used and misused to its own ridicule. On the other hand, there is this unexpected collaboration between the educated and uneducated riding high on the mission of justice. There are many layers to the story and, therefore, many interpretations; each reading may reveal a different angle to a reader.

The Mythical Draupadi

The story is a moment caught between two deconstructive rules: on the one hand, a law that is fabricated with a view to its own disobedience, on the other, the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles. In order to grasp the details of their relationship and involvement, one must enter a historical micrology that no foreword can provide.

'*Draupadi*' as the name suggests is an allusion to the mythical figure of Draupadi from the epic *Mahabharata*. Draupadi of Mahabharata was a strong woman who had to accept the five Pandavas as her husbands. During one occasion, when the Pandavas are losing a game of dice with the Kauravas, Draupadi is kept as custody. Once the brothers lose the match Draupadi is 'shamed' in presence of the full court by stripping off her the sari she was wearing.

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Draupadi silently prays to the incarnate Krishna. The idea of sustaining law (dharma) materializes itself as clothing and as the king pulls at her sari, there seems to be more and more of it. She is infinitely clothed and cannot be publicly stripped. It is one of Krishna's miracles.

The sari is the symbolic representation of law, where justice is meted out to the right person. The mythical Draupadi is never publicly disrobed. But Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi, gangraped by police, refuses to be clothed by men again. In Draupadi, what is represented is an erotic object, transformed into an object of torture and revenge where the line between (hetero) sexuality and gender violence beings to blur.

Draupadi or Dopdi

Draupadi, the protagonist is a subaltern figure (she is a tribal and also a female) is victimized by the male world that surrounds her. Draupadi's gang-rape is not a result of spontaneous inability of the libido to be controlled. But it was a planned affair. The well-read and highly-posted army chief, *sena nayak*, had ordered the act to be carried out. Sena nayak, the self-declared tribal specialist, claims that he supports the struggle of the deprived from the perspective of the field hand. Yet, when *Draupadi* is identified as a field hand, sena nayak orders his brutal gang-rape idea to make Dopdi speak out the information that was required by the authority.

Draupadi is gang-raped not once, but many times by the protectors of the law. She is a rebel and hence, she has to pay the price for her non-conformance. After all the injustice inflicted on her, she is left to survive there in the night. She is not fed, she's not allowed a piece of clothing on her body and left to writhe in pain and bleed for the whole the night. As the first light of the sun hits the earth, she has to be made ready to appear before the court. Hence, she is asked to dress and clean herself up so that the sham of a court hearing can be carried out properly. But, Dopdi refuses to carry out the command. She still has the fire within her and she walks up to her abusers in her soiled body marked with blood stains because of the activities of the night before and with her tangled tresses. She announces, 'This is me. This is what you have made of me. Now, what justice are you going to give me?'

Draupadi on refusing to put on clothes that has been mutilated beyond cruelty comes with her head held high and faces the sena nayak. She spits on the white shirt of sena nayak and declares with mad rage and defiance:

> There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, counter me, counter me.. .

The above-mentioned lines reflect her pain and the stigma that she has endured over the years and whose culmination was the heinous activity that shook her existence the night before. Now, she is no longer ashamed nor is she scared, the victimization has made her stronger than before and her strength has made her powerful. So powerful, that it runs a chill through the spines of the bravest of men. As the narrative says:

> *Draupadi* pushes sena nayak and for the first time sena nayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid.

A paragraph from Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*:

> Now Dopdi spreads her arms, raises her face to the sky, turns towards the forest, and ululates with the force of her entire being. Once, twice, three times. At the third burst the birds in the trees at the outskirts of the forest awake and flap their wings. The echo of the call travels far.

Check Your Progress

4. Which community of people appears in her writings?
5. Why is Dopdi arrested?
6. Why is 1967 significant?
7. What kind of a figure is *Draupadi*?

A typical paragraph from the accompanying analysis:

> Of course, this voice of male authority also fades. Once Dopdi enters, in the final section of the story, the postscript area of lunar flux and sexual difference, she is in a place where she will finally act *for* herself in *not* 'acting', in challenging the man to (en)counter her as unrecorded or misrecorded objective historical monument. The army officer is shown as unable to ask the authoritative ontological question, What is this?

10.2.2 *Breast Giver*

Breast Giver is a part of the trilogy *Breast Stories* written by Mahasweta Devi. The thread that ties the three stories together is 'the breast'. In the second story, *Breast Giver*, the breast is a source of food and a livelihood for the protagonist as well as her family. Set in the north eastern part of India in the province of Bengal, it presents, in ironical terms, the devastating fate of the wet nurse Jashoda, who sells her breasts to feed dozens of children of a wealthy family for her family's feeding and thus, becomes a wet nurse, a professional.

Originally written as *Standaayini* in Bangla, the story has been translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the leading postcolonial critical analyst. Spivak has given elaborate foreword, analysis, and notes to the stories. Therefore, the deconstruction of *Breast Giver* cannot be ignored at all as Spivak, as a translator, has added much to the story.

Detailed Analysis

Breast Giver is set in a small village on way to a popular religious pilgrimage and the protagonist of the story is Jashoda, the wife of a local Brahmin Kanglicharan. As far as Jashoda could remember, she had been Kanglicharan's 'wife since childhood' and 'does not remember a day when there was no child in her womb'. She is a woman of great maternal beauty who represents the mythical character of Jashoda, the mother of Lord Krishna. The writer describes her as having 'the heavy breasted languid-hipped body'. An auto accident involving Jashoda's husband Kigali and a wealthy Kayasth family son leaves him crippled and Jashoda appeals to the family master for some work as her husband is no more able to feed his large family.

She is employed as a wet nurse to breastfeed the many children in the Haldar family so that wealthy wives could maintain their figures for their husbands. She has to nurse around fifty children, including her own twenty. Jashoda is paid for her services by the extended family- food for her family and herself. Abundant milk in her breasts supports her own crippled husband and many children.

Jashoda's work as a wet nurse offers a sense of satisfaction and relief not only the members of her own family, but also to the members of Haldars' family. Even the Haldars' family maid praises Jashoda: 'Joshi! You came as the Goddess! You made the air of this house change!'

But as every beginning has an inevitable end, so does Jashoda's newfound cheerfulness, which continues not for long. With the death of the mistress, Jashoda's job as a wet nurse also dies, which makes her loose her only source of livelihood. After the death of the mistress, Jashoda's accommodation in the house is no longer a possibility. One of the daughters-in-law of the mistress says to Jashoda that it is no longer possible for her to be there: '...Mother sent you food for eight years. She did what pleased her. Her children said nothing. But it's no longer possible.'

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After losing her job and not being able to find a way out of this miserable situation, Jashoda comes to terms with the idea that her life and her service to everyone is but a terrible waste. Kangicharan, her husband, has found himself a Shiva temple. After her conversation with the daughter-in-law, she goes to ask her husband, if she can cook there in the temple. He refuses, for she has not cooked for a long time in the house and he thinks that she will not be able to 'push the temple traffic'.

Troubled and with no other option left for her, she returns to Haldars' house, once again to seek refuge. She earnestly requests one of the daughters-in-law of her late mistress to allow her in the house. The situation of Jashoda's entry into Haldars' house makes it clear that while she lives in the maidservants' room in Haldars' house she will not have the respect that she once used to have. In spite of her belonging to the upper caste, Jashoda continues to be the subaltern owing to both her unfortunate situation and her being a woman. Frequent pregnancy and lactation causes Jashoda to incur breast cancer. When the eldest daughter-in-law becomes aware of Jashoda's disease, she forces her out of the house. No analytical mind is required to see the apparent maltreatment and cold heartedness of Jashoda's employers in their treatment of her. As long as she is able to provide, she is used and enjoyed. But in the end she is alone and dies a lonely and painful death. No one attends to her during her end, neither her own children, nor the fostered ones.

The story can be interpreted in various different ways, for it has various layers of meanings. And, therefore, every time a reader goes through it, it may reveal something new. The story can be looked from the social perspective as the study of social injustice and dominance. Another way to look at the story is the gender angle, which analyses the position and suffering of a woman in the patriarchal society.

The Patriarchal and Feminist Reading of the Story

Regardless of the society and culture, women face the same plain struggles when it comes to having the power of speech and being treated with equality and esteem. Patriarchy is a predominant theme throughout the text, as well as the changing role of women in society, at least in this society. The text, however, seems to be ideologically conflicting by emphasising and undermining patriarchy at different points. *Breast Giver* explores the woman in her role as a wife, a mother, a breadwinner, and as an individual. It has an essential struggle of Jashoda in all these different roles.

Overcoming the oppression of men and society to attain equality is one of the major themes in *Breast Giver.* After her husband Kangli is crippled in an accident, Jashoda has to play the role of the provider for the family. She is said to have taken 'motherhood as her profession'. When she realizes that her family is in need, she asks the mistress for a job of any nature to support her family. The mistress makes Jashoda the wet nurse for the infants of her family. Jashoda becomes the one and only wage-earner in her family, making her an empowered woman who is no more dependent on her husband. She uses her body as a profession and comes up with a way to support her family instead of just remaining the passive wife of a crippled man and doing nothing to support herself or her children. She does her work outside of her own home with only her own family's well-being in mind, as some present day women do.

Though she is the singular provider for the family, Jashoda is not free from her household tasks as a wife and mother to her own children. Although Kangli takes up the job of cooking, Jashoda has to manage both simultaneously, which speaks of the

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intricacies of many women's lives. Just because a woman works outside the home to earn a living does not mean that she cares any less for her duties in her household and family. A working woman needs to be strong for her family even though she may not be present some of the times and it is also known that women can be both fostering and powerful at the same time.

By performing her responsibilities, Jashoda also has to overcome the oppression of a predominately patriarchal society, which is an imperative ideal in feminist theory. The society in which Jashoda lives considers men in a higher esteem than women. The role of the wife here is the one that is possibly the extreme encourager of gender inequality. They are at their husbands' mercy in their role as wives because of their gender. They are considered the lesser member in the marriage unification and the one who is to be subservient to the other. Jashoda, the 'breast-giver,' is in most ways a powerful woman overcoming the oppression that womanhood can sometimes bring about.

Jashoda was full of activity in the Haldar house rearing the children, and her husband was involved in her life only while impregnating her. Both their gender roles get switched because Jashoda became the provider husband by working and bringing in the food and money, and Kangli became the wife by cooking and taking care of their children at home, which is an a typical situation in an Indian household. When Jashoda turns to Kangli, after her profession of motherhood ends at the Haldar family, they argue about their situation and Jashoda says, 'The man brings, the woman cooks and serves. My lot is inside out...Who's the cunt, you or me? Living off a wife's carcass, you call that a man'. Kangli attempts to shield himself as a man by saying, 'Their door opened for *you* because *my* legs were cut off'. Jashoda reduces Kangli's superiority of being the male in the household, which is rare in the Indian culture; therefore, this leads to Kangli abandoning her because Jashoda demeans his authority.

Since Jashoda has reversed the traditional patriarchal norms of men being the providers for the family, as well as the heads of the household, she becomes a leader and she goes to work outside the home to provide food for her family. In this way, she turns out to be equal to or greater than her husband and the other men of society. She takes on responsibilities that are usually left for the man of the house to fulfill. Jashoda and Kanglicharan have switched stereotypical 'roles' of men and women. Kanglicharan 'took charge of the cooking at home' while Jashoda went to work. This reversal of traditional roles can be attributed to Jashoda's initiative as well as her power within the family and society. She and her husband come to be equals in regards to the work done at home that is traditionally the work of a woman.

Thus, the argument that *Breast Giver* can be read as a feminist text is a solid one. The story portrays Jashoda as a strong, empowered woman who has overcome some obstacles and oppression in her life to do something worthwhile for others as well as her own family. Although the story presents some patriarchal views about the role of women, yet Jashoda plays an important part in reversing the readers' views on women and their contribution to society. Being a woman in a patriarchal society can present multi-faceted challenges, but Jashoda takes them in stride and becomes the feeder of her family.

On the one hand Jashoda tried to overcome the oppression of men in her life, on the other she fell under the oppression of another group of people: the women whose children she nurtured by giving her milk. The very plain fact that she is hired

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by them puts her to their wish and command. These women in the Haldar household treat Jashoda as a commodity rather than a human being. To them, she is just someone who provides milk to their children in exchange for food for herself and her family. Another fact that she is paid for her services in clothes and food rather than cash just advances the oppression that she is under.

Jashoda and her family are completely dependent on the employer women for their life and livelihood, but these women seem indifferent to her as a person. This becomes evident when the mistress of the family dies. Even after all the children were weaned and Jashoda's services as wet nurse were no longer required, the mistress continued to send food to Jashoda's family. But as soon as the mistress dies, the daughters-in-law stop giving that food too and Jashoda is left to look for another way to provide for her family. As would be expected, Jashoda doesn't know what to do to provide for her family because breast-feeding children is the only thing she has known for thirty years. The women have complete control over her life and means of support. Therefore, when the women have no need for Jashoda anymore, they are not ready to maintain her for and she is left to fend for herself without a single thought for her well-being or the survival of her large family.

Thus, Jashoda is oppressed by not only the man in her life, but by the women of the Haldar family as well, perhaps unintentionally. That domination can be economic, social, and psychological. She is oppressed economically as she does not receive any money for her services. She is instead given outfits, food, and shelter. She is psychologically oppressed too as they consider her a commodity rather than a human being of flesh and blood.

This also presents another angle to feminism. The very fact that the women that employ Jashoda are also playing a role in oppressing her contradicts the feminist notion of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy. The women have basically taken the place of a man or a husband and continue the oppression that Jashoda may have felt in her home. The women see Jashoda as someone who is not their equal and is just performing a service and nothing else and they exploit that service to the ultimate point where Jashoda eventually pays with her life. The women discard her as soon as they realize that they have no use for her services any longer like any other commodity at home. The women, instead of assembling together with Jashoda, turn against her and ultimately back the patriarchal set up.

Even being the sole breadwinner for her family, the very fact that Jashoda is a woman comes on the surface time and again. To earn a living for herself as well as her family, Jashoda can only make use of what she has as a woman: her body—her breasts and milk. The Haldar mistress compliments Jashoda for the amount of milk she produces and Jashoda observes that that there was 'a flood of milk' although she was between pregnancies and she did not get any special food or indulging. When the mistress offers Jashoda the job, Jashoda goes home that night and proudly tells her husband referring to her breasts, 'Look. I'm going to pull our weight with these'.

Jashoda understandably takes great pride in her body and what she is able to do with it, but the fact that her employment is a sexist one cannot be passed over. It is recognizable that only a woman can do a job such as the one Jashoda does. Women are all over again objectified and exposed to the view of only being good for certain things that men cannot do. In this way, one can add that the work is 'gendered' and the story backs the traditional gender roles. Jashoda is, in a way, the stereotypical woman, raising children though some are not her own and maintaining a home for her husband.

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She is seen as submissive in the union and nurturing in an approach that traditional gender roles upkeep.

The underlying credence that men are superior to women is also evident through the story. The only cause that Jashoda goes to work outside the home in the first place is because her husband is incapacitated and cannot continue work and provide for their family any longer. Before her husband's accident, Jashoda was at her home, giving birth to children and rearing them up, and was stuck in a traditionally female role of a housewife. She had no other use to him above and beyond bearing and raising children and retaining a home for him and their family. The traditional roles are switched, however, when Jashoda goes to work outside as a breast feeder.

Although Jashoda goes against the cultural role of her sex and goes out to work, her role as an individual in this case is sadly lacking. Jashoda does not have a strong sense of self. The other roles as a wife, a mother, and a breadwinner overshadow the individual. She works and lives for others, as is expected of her because of her gender. Jashoda is completely neglected by her family and left to support herself, once she is no longer working. Jashoda is limited in her individuality due to her social set up. Jashoda's place in the Indian social structure meant that she did not have the ability to make any choices regarding her marriage and her children. She can be considered a strong woman because of her ability to express to her husband what was on her mind, but she could not transform her situation. She is acquainted with her husband's unfaithfulness and is very upset about this, but feel the gods have placed this fate on her. The religious and social ethnicities of her culture greatly impede her individuality.

Jashoda is beleaguered and dominated because of her gender. She is an illustration of the global and historical understanding that women are the lesser sex. Their roles as wives, mothers, and breadwinners indicate their unfair treatment and expectations. Their roles as individuals conflict with the historically stereotypical views of women and with their other roles and anticipations. Subjugation and discrimination often breed lack of self-confidence and certain level of insecurity. Many women in diverse cultures and time periods struggle to be secure and pleased with themselves because of the long-standing and repeatedly socially acceptable idea that they are inferior to men. Although, Jashoda feels that she is not being treated appropriately, she accepts her role according to the social norms. Mahasweta Devi brings about powerful emotions, such as a sense of sadness and injustice in their readers and empowers her readers with a sense of responsibility to pursue to change the exploitation of women.

In her analyses of the story, Gayatri Spivak asserts that Jashoda's breasts function as an ultimate aid for both Jashoda's and Haldars' families. The production of milk for one's own children is what can be called as the use value of the milk. But when the use value increases to an extent that it becomes surplus, the idea of exchange-value come to the fore. In Jashoda's case, the exchange value of her milk is appreciated, and with healthy food and a constant sexual intercourse with her husband, it is made sure that she remains in good condition for proper lactation.

Going on these lines of analysis, Spivak introduces the idea of Marxist-feminist criticism, which offer a sexual division of the classical Marxist theory of labour into masculine productive labour and feminine reproductive labour. The idea takes its root into the age old notion of sexual difference that has traditionally disregarded the labour of a woman in a domestic space, including child birth and nurturing children, for such

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a work inside a domestic setting does not yield any use value or exchange value. According to Spivak's analysis, Jashoda challenges the Western feminism that assumes that childbearing to be an unpaid labour.

As soon as Jashoda begins to use the exchange value of her breast milk to breast feed the children of the Haldars' family, her status changes, and soon she becomes one of the most valued and respected members of the Haldars' family. She continues to play her role of an ideal Indian woman and wife, who follows her husband's command, and never dares to challenge him or blame for their financial troubles.

When Joshada is on her death bed, no one comes to visit her and see how she is doing – neither her husband or her sons, nor the grandsons of Haldars' family whom she once fed her breast milk. She dies a tragic death thinking, 'if you suckle you're a mother, all lies! Nepal and Gopal (her own sons) don't look at me, and the master's boys don't spare a peek to ask how I'm doing?'

Jashoda's story of her suffering and misery emphasizes the elitism evident in the postcolonial nationalism and also the cold attitude of the natives towards a mother.

The story, which is set in the post-colonial India, portrays a conflicting and complex portrait of Jashoda's life and highlights the ways in which the male oriented patriarchal society forces and limits a woman's life to the idea of bearing children, and also the ways in which a woman is subjugated and subjected to unfair treatments at the hands of the society. The writer, through the story of Jashoda, is trying to highlight the feminine ideal which accept the stereotypical images of women as persisting throughout the world.

The story also brings the reader's attention to ungrateful attitude of children towards their mother, both biological as well as fostered, in spite of the fact that the mother devotes her entire life to their nurturing and upbringing with just a little hope of familial affection and respect. From the viewpoint of the modern feminists, such women continue to live a repressed life while subjecting themselves to the will of the male-dominated society. In the story, Jashoda takes some pride in ceasing to be modern and following the tradition. The story's ending offers a futuristic vision to the situation of women, even if it insists on the difficulties and complexities of the transformation of the ongoing social order.

The Theme of Motherhood

The idea of motherhood is not merely the reproductive ability of a woman. It is a far more complex and composite notion, which to a large extent shapes women's social position and status. The idea of motherhood is also essential in the making of feminist aspect of Indian society. A woman enjoys a better social position and respects if she mothers sons. A woman is often discriminated as both wife and daughter, but when she attains the position of a mother, she experiences a transformation in her position, and it is this transformation that makes the idea of motherhood wishful.

Motherhood often becomes a larger than life notion, and is celebrated by various forms of popular media like films, and television. During the course of nation building and infusing the idea of national pride poets and writers have often used the idea of motherhood by associating it with the land and earth.

Devi's *Breast Giver* is a story of a woman who is trapped in her own image of motherhood that only yields surfacing and disappointment for her. The story makes an attempt to look for the idea of motherhood, while associating the notion with a

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woman's body, and its position in the patriarchal society. Jashoda is but a subject to the will of the society. She is discarded as useless once her role as a nurturing and breast feeding mother is no longer required. In a society where discrimination is norm, based on gender and race, women like Jashoda continue to suffer and live in misery, and be marginalized and suppressed. But while Jashoda is able to breast feed the children, her mothering ability is considered to be divine. The Bihari cattlemen tell Kigali: 'Your woman is the mistress of the world.'

The turning point comes in her life when Jashoda's services are no more required in the employer family, the writer continues: 'Jashoda's good fortune was her ability to bear children. All this misfortune happened to her as soon as that vanished.' Jashoda turns out to be useless for Kangli too and he goes to live at the temple and abandons her to fend for herself. As a woman she is expected to remain faithful while her husband throws her out for other women.

She has no other option but to return to her employers and beg for some work. She is given employment but now she does not enjoy that position which she had when she was the wet nurse of the children of the family. Reduced to a lowly servant in her master's house, she keeps unwell and describes the infection of her breast as, 'The sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes'. Jashoda's ailment becomes worse and she dies in a hospital to breast cancer— lone and abandoned. Mahasweta Devi sums up Jashoda's story with the line, 'When a mortal masquerades as a God here below, she is forsaken by all and she must always die alone.'

Mahasweta Devi's choice of the main character seems to be the all-encompassing theme of her story. Jashoda is the name of Krishna's mother, the mother of the world. Her heroine is also a Brahmin, the highest class in the Indian society. Devi uses the story as an indictment of Indian values and social norms. Jashoda epitomises two major ideals. First, she is Indian as she has been described as 'Jashoda is fully an Indian woman, whose unreasonable, unreasoning and unintelligent devotion to her husband and love for her children...She wants to become the earth and feed her crippled husband and helpless children with a fulsome harvest'. Second, Jashoda represents Indian culture and societal norms and the idealised intrinsic worth of a wife. She realises that 'it is as if she were Kanglicharan's wife from birth'.

The role of mother is the most governing role in Jashoda's life. Jashoda is respected to a certain extent as she gave birth to twenty children. 'Motherhood was always her way of living and keeping alive her world of countless beings. Jashoda was a mother by profession, 'professional mother' but she ends up being neglected by all her children whom she nurtured.

Jashoda has certain accepted wisdom about female behaviour and motherhood that are based on the traditional conventions. For a Brahmin Indian female, motherhood is an enviable position. She pronounces her environment as follows: 'In this city, this kingdom, the amateur beggar-pickpocket-hooker has no place' and by contrast she promptly asserts that she is 'a mother by profession, professional motherhood'. Jashoda revels in the almost goddess-like feelings of having sustained too many births and of having fostered excessively.

Though Jashoda lacks formal education as well as other skills, she is faced with the apparently insurmountable task of keeping her family fed and housed. Like many other women in her position, she finds that her one substitute is to somehow market her body, and subsequently, she sells her services as wet nurse to the Haldar

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house. Although this arrangement succeeds to sustain her family, the labour takes its toll on her body and her health.

Jashoda banks on her body, as a means of survival. She uses her body in what most people would deliberate a noble manner — motherhood and nurturing. Jashoda's breasts provide sustenance for the children of the master's household as well as her own children, but ultimately it is the disease of the cancerous breasts that brings her downfall and leads to her death.

Jashoda is the cow from which children achieve nutrients and grow. She is the spring of nutrients, she is the saviour of the higher up women who now do not have to breast feed their children and lose their figures as the children suckle away at their mothers' life force. By giving away her body and her life force, Jashoda saves her husband, saves her family and saves herself by being put into bigger troubles. Unfortunately no one bothers. Western influence is strong in her master's household and when the women go on birth-control, they no longer have any need for Jashoda to suckle their babies. Her husband caressed her often, and when she became the 'professional mother' he decided that he would become 'the professional father' by impregnating her over and over again. She gave birth to more than 20 children and suckled many more. As a result with the breast cancer, she lost the only object she had to offer.

Motherhood and Westernization

Jashoda always staunchly believed that Western occupation and control had corrupted the traditional society by infusing a new set of social and economic values. Like other traditional women, Jashoda too has filial expectations of all of her children, the ones she bore and the ones she nursed. She accepts silently that if she nurtures the brood, she will be guaranteed of a secure future surrounded by those she fed. However, the Western influence has made its mark here too. But it seems in the story that there is no longer esteem in mothering activities like nursing since the Haldar women choose not to nurse their infants so that they can maintain their figures. In the end, rather than inhabiting a place of prestige in the society, Jashoda is regarded as simply a retired labourer or an old useless machine. As she is no longer of any use to either family, therefore is discarded. The society is no longer interested in traditional admiration for motherhood. Instead, she is caught up in western perceptions of honouring what is marketable and useful, and Jashoda is eventually neither. She is the victim of a transformed social and economic order brought about by colonialism. By the end of the story, as the *Breast Giver*, Jashoda is betrayed by the very breasts that she thought would win her reverence and a protected position in society. The tradition of motherhood is corrupted by the waves of colonialism.

The Class Structure in *Breast Giver*

One very interesting angle of the story is the caste structure of the main characters. In an unconventional situation, a *Brahmin* woman goes to work in a *kayastha* household which presents the changing scenario in the post-colonial India. The story begins with Jashoda's pondering over her pecuniary crunches: scarcity, penury and the unjustifiable suffering that she could experience from her early childhood. She says, 'My aunties they lived in the woods, in the forest their home they did make…' It seems that poverty is the foremost cause why the customary reverence given to Brahmins is not conferred on Jashoda and her husband.

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The women of the Haldar household too have the same gender roles as Jashoda. The Haldar women give birth to children. Also nowhere in the story is it mentioned that they have jobs. The gender role for females in the complete story is that women are mothers. Over and above women becoming mothers, all the women's bodies in the story are for their husband's pleasure. Jashoda's breasts are used for her husband's pleasure, and the husbands of the Haldar women want their wives to maintain their figures.

Again so far as the gender inferiority is concerned, both the cases are similar. The second son of the Haldar household ponders over the idea of Jashoda suckling the children when he overhears her talk with the mistress about her condition. He says to his wife, 'I've got a divine engine in my hands! You'll breed yearly *and* keep your body.' He makes it very clear that he thought of the idea and assumes his wife will automatically trail by authoritatively telling her what she has to do. Similarly, Jashoda has unremittingly been described as a faithful wife to Kangli, and she tells her husband, 'You are husband, you are guru.' By referring to him as her guru, she instantaneously reveals that he is superior. The difference between the Haldar women and Jashoda is that the Haldar women have more freedoms than Jashoda because of their higher-class ranking; for instance, these women have the option of not rearing their children. Therefore, the Haldar women folk use their status and privileges to exploit Jashoda. She is being dominated by these women as Jashoda is a poor woman even though she is a Brahmin. She is oppressed by the class structure because the Haldar household is using a poor woman, who requires money and food, to breast feed the children so that the Haldar daughter-in-laws do not have to lose their figures. They take advantage of the simple fact that she is poor and that God chose motherhood as a profession for Jashoda. Therefore, they make it seem like it was not forced onto her by them, but it was predetermined by God. Only after they tell her about the job of rearing up their children, does the realization of the Durga, the lion-seated Goddess, appearing in her dream, becomes obvious. The culture and religion emphasize the importance of Jashoda's profession because of the appearance of the lion-seated Goddess in her dream and her profession gets more acceptability in the society. The class structure subjugated her because the wealthier Haldar family was using a poor woman to their advantage.

The times in the Haldar household, however, have been altering. The eldest daughter-in-law tells Jashoda, after the mistress's demise, 'Brahmin sister! The family is breaking up. Second and third are moving to the house in Beleghata.' In a traditional lifestyle the whole family lives together in one house like when the mistress was alive. The notion of sons leaving their parents' house is a more modern lifestyle. Since the sons and their wives are now in charge and they have a preference for a more modern lifestyle, they do not have the same gratefulness for Jashoda as the mistress had because the eldest daughter-in-law says, 'The last child was weaned, and still mother sent you food for eight years. She did what pleased her. Her children said nothing. But it's no longer possible.'

With the changed scene with the mistress's death, even though the daughter-in-law offers Jashoda a job as a maid, Jashoda's new profession does not confer on her the same importance or receive the same amount of respect as she had in her previous profession. Her destiny is perplexing because one would think that the children she nurtured would be more sympathetic towards her, especially when Jashoda begins to have warning signs of a deadly disease like cancer. The significance of class structure

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is very apparent because the sons and their wives see Jashoda as inferior to them; nevertheless, they know she is a Brahmin and are scared of the likelihood of a Brahmin dying in their house. Therefore, the dreadfulness of a Brahmin death and the fact that Jashoda reared them as children should have led to a different outcome.

Use of Myth

The name of the protagonist Jashoda is symbolic of the God Mother- Jashoda who though did not give birth to Lord Krishna, yet she nurtured Him and earned a greater reverence than even the biological mother, Devaki. The culture and religion help represent Jashoda's profession of a foster mother positively. Jashoda has a dream where the lion-seated Goddess comes to her as a midwife. At first, the interpretation of the dream is perplexing; however, when Jashoda assents to her profession at the Haldar household, people in the neighborhood, including the pilgrim guide, realize that her dream was a prophesy of her future ahead. Astrology, dreams, and spiritual influences with the gods and goddesses are taken very earnestly in the Indian culture; therefore, the lion-seated Goddess entering Jashoda's dream as a midwife helped to legitimize and to highlight the importance of Jashoda's new profession. It is referred to in the story, 'Thus even the skeptics were persuaded that the lion-seated had appeared to Jashoda as a midwife for this very reason.'

The lion-seated coming into her dream is a very important sign that shows she is not being dominated or used by others because she is a woman who can rear children, but that it was her fate picked by God. The story also mentions that 'faith in the greatness of the lion-seated was rekindled in the area and in the air of the neighbourhood blew the *electrifying* influence of goddess-glory'. In a way Jashoda helped revive the faith in the lion-seated in the whole area. She symbolized a living form and the glory of the lion-seated, and because of that 'everyone's devotion to Jashoda became so strong that at weddings, showers, naming, and sacred-threading they invited her and gave her the position of chief fruitful woman'. Her linking with the lion-seated raised her status and made her significant in the neighbourhood. Inviting Jashoda became similar to inviting the lion-seated. The maids praised her by saying, 'Joshi! You came as The Goddess! You made the air of this house change.' Even the children who were brought up on Jashoda's milk were called the 'holy children'. This helped to raise the status of the Haldar children and her own because they were understood as the ones who suckled from the holy mother.

Her outcome, however, is ironic because she was the re-embodiment of God on Earth and nobody cared for her after her occupation came to an end. The Haldar family and her own family became unable to call to their minds about her connection with the lion-seated when they no longer required her. It is interesting to make a comparison with the mythological story of Lord Ram, wherein he, too, was abandoned and sent to an exile by some of his family members. Both Lord Ram and Jashoda have parallel experiences of loneliness, and they both were reincarnations of God.

Mahasweta Devi elevates Jashoda as 'the reincarnation of God on Earth,' but Spivaka strongly argued that that final sentence is profoundly ambivalent, its value undecidable: it points to the paradox of knowledge, and to its restrictions. The 'solemn judgment of the end,' she claims, 'makes us unsure of the truth frames'. And with the end of the story, the reader too is upstaged.

Check Your Progress

8. Who is Jashoda?
9. Who translated the Bangla original of the *Breast Giver*?
10. How does *Breast Giver* explore the woman?
11. Why is it strongly argued that the *Breast Giver* can be considered a feminist text?
12. How does Mahasweta Devi's literature affect her readers?

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10.3 SUJATA SANKRANTI



Fig. 10.2 Sujata Sankranti

Sujata Sankranti is a writer based in New Delhi, India. She was born in Kerala and completed her studies in Delhi. Sankranti is currently a reader in the Department of English, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi. She published her first collection of short fiction titled '*The Warp and the Weft* and other Stories' in 2001. *In the Shadow of Legends* was her debut novel. In 1998, she won the Commonwealth Short Story Prize for her touching story *The Warp and the Weft*.

10.3.1 *The Warp and the Weft*

Following are some of the extracts from *The Warp and the Weft:*

> No strength left. Even to toss and turn. The coarse bed-covers, stiffly starched, feel prickly and strain against the wasted cage-like body. Never knew I had such an angular frame. Folds of flesh, which once sat pretty on me, hugging contours and curves, have fallen off like scales. Sleep-starved eyes move restlessly from the mouldy patch on the wall to the high ceiling to the grimy blades of the mournfully whirling fan. The night nurse, a soft-spoken young person, moving from bed to bed -- dove-like – tries to drug me to sleep. One of those morphine-induced trances! Sacrilege, to call them sleep. A jerk, a thud, cold sweat trickle down the neck. Am I falling out of my body? Back again, on vigil, fighting, braving yet another bout of pain. A muffled moan, a sob, a shrill cry – I hear my fellow sufferers. The ebb and flow, the cadence of their pain. Outside on the corridor, the heavy footsteps of the watchman mark the milestones of my night….
>
> Today is Alfonsa's birthday. Not really. Her birthday falls in June and today is only the seventh of March. But...who has the heart to utter the truth - that the little girl may not live until June? The doctors, the nurses, the ward boys, even the sweepers have willingly entered into the conspiracy. At six o'clock in the

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evening, Alfonsa's school friends are coming to the ward to celebrate her birthday. The ayah and the ward boy have been working since morning. Screens have been shifted to one side, curtains have been changed. They have even managed to retrieve a large rectangular table and a few chairs from the reception lounge. The entire ward is getting ready for the occasion.....

The soothsayer had pulled a cotton wick out of his bundle. Dipping it generously in ghee, he lit it carefully and held it at Alfonsa's head for full five minutes. With his free hand, he felt her pulse and muttered a few words. He threw the live wick into the bowl filled with a blood-red liquid -- a concoction of turmeric and lime. Alfonsa enjoyed every bit of the show; especially the sizzling sound of the flame as it fell into the bowl. With that the soothsayer had driven away all evil eyes. So, she was told. Alfonsa was relieved and happy. The Mami next door had sent the holy man to hasten her recovery. But her mother knew too well that neither the soothsayer nor the candles of Mother Superior could ever wave leukemia away.....

'Kishore was not born from my womb. You know I carry within me arid land. When the mango tree which my *saas*, my mother-in-law made me plant behind the courtyard, didn't bear fruit even after five years, I heard hushed whispers around me. Even the champak that I tended with all my love never bloomed. 'You are a *baanjh*, a barren woman,' the women silently summed me up with their contemptuous eyes. My saas of course used it as a fond name for me. Nothing will grow on her, the accursed one. Even lice would die in her hair. I have heard her telling the neighbours. But something is now growing in me after all. The cancer... isn't it?' Bhagwanti chuckled. Such pronouncements! She wouldn't spare even her own self. How could she be so brutal to herself? A shudder went through Monica....

'Forgive those wolves? Never.... They wish evil on me. They are waiting for me to die, to scavenge on my wealth.' Bhagwanti clung to her keys and her bag and screamed. '*Mare mere dushman*, let my enemies die. Bhagwanti is not going to die. I will give them the surprise of their life....'

The short story *The Warp and the Weft* is about the touching happenings in the lives of people suffering from cancer. An unnamed narrator suffering from cancer keeps pondering over her life and people associated with her and her strong desire to 'compress this moment' or 'stretch it to infinity' so that she can share some moments with her husband.

The nine-year old baby girl Alfonsa, brimming with life, is rushed to have early birthday celebration because the world suspects that she might not live for her birthday. Her teachers and close friends drop by to celebrate her birthday and wish for her. The poor parents seem to be caught in the trap of the time where they have tried from medicine to superstition to see their daughter spring back to life.

Then we have Bhagwanti, who ironically has got no luck apart from the fortune her father had left for her. That is her whole means of exerting power over the world which has wronged her and her fate which has also deceived her. Having no child of her own, bewaring a 'barren' womb, she adopts her brother's son. She sends him abroad with her money because he had wanted so. Now, during her last time he is no where around. Infact, she has not been visited by her adopted son in ten years, who is now busy looking after his biological parents, settled abroad, having married an English girl. Yet on the other hand, the son who is born to the concubine of Bhagwanti's husband visits her regularly with purely humanitarian interest as opposed to all her relative who are there for her money.

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Characters

Tina– Narrator's Pomeranian

Shankar - Narrator's son

Gopu - Narrator's son

Alfonsa - Young girl suffering from leukemia

Mamma - Alfonsa's mother

Mother Superior - Alfonsa's teacher

Preeti – Alfonsa's best friend

Manish – Alfonsa's neighborhood boy

Bhagwanti/ Badi Ma/ Masi - Another cancer patient

Lalaji - Bhagwanti's husband

Kishore – Bhagwanti's adopted son

Nandu/Vaman – Son of Lalaji's concubine

Monica - Counselor

Combating Death

The inevitable death comes in many forms. Sometimes, it is natural, which comes with old age. Sometimes, it is unexpectedly early. The narrator is herself in a dismal state. She is shocked at the way her physical beauty is dwindling. The skin, the skeleton, the sleepless eyes and the endless pain all speak of her tryst with the ultimate. The existence is painful and at times the narrator wonders, 'Am I falling out of my body?' Yet again she is out there like a solider fighting it out. She is 'Back again, on vigil, fighting, braving yet another bout of pain'.

Alfonsa, the youngest member in the doomed ward was always lively. Yet, the parents underwent the emotional and psychological pain to make the end as smooth and perfect for their only child. The child was born to them after years of prayers. It took them ten years of married life to have the baby. She was born premature. The parents fought with death to grow up the baby. Yet, it seems life was ruder to them with already having chalked out plans to take the baby away. Death as a concept or as an idea does not affect or appeal the young baby girl. She is keener on when she has to appear for her exam and what kind of cake should she have for her birthday and ask her mother to trim her nails properly. Despite being in death bed, she is not bothered by death whereas the parents are experiencing death with every passing day.

Bhagwanti is fighting death alone. She is an assertive fighter with repeatedly asking death to engulf her enemies and not her. The son, she had been crying for will never come she knows yet she will not accept the son who is near her. Death is something everyone has been wishing for her (to get their hands on her property as she claims). Whatever her life was, she is sure that her death is going to be troublesome. Her life was a struggle-filled with desires of wish fulfillment and so is her death. She announces with pride and will, '...let my enemies die. Bhagwanti is not going to die. I will give them the surprise of their life...'

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Relationships

Relationships either get stronger or show their real essence only when you have reached your death bed. The woman of the first story relates her life to the mundane activities that she was part of. Sweeping in the broom, the milkman arrives, his energetic greetings and the taste of the tasty food, the pomerian and the hisses of the pressure cooker. The nostalgia for the things known also fill her with the memories of the people whom she knew. Despite being in the hospital in her unsound state - the mother, the homemaker, the wife, the mother-in-law cannot get rid of her family worries. She still wants Shankar to reduce his chocolate consumption and continue to exercise. The newly-married Gopu and his wife should continue with their dreams and not get bogged down or bothered by the problems of her disease. But still the happy picture of the family looks slightly incomplete and there emerges her husband, the loving, doting and caring partner to her. He was carrying with him a yellow rose, something that they both adored. She notices his fragile looks and grief-stricken face yet at the same time; she cannot be just happy at the fact that he should continue living without her in this kind of a state, 'His life has to flow to the rhythm of tomorrow. The clock ticks for him. The calendar rolls for him …' A perfect couple they had been' and she would wish the world stopped at that.

Alfonsa, too has got all the love and care that she could ask for from anybody. Her birthday is rejuvenating for everyone. Life takes over the dead and dull ward that is composed of people who are on the threshold of meeting death. But with Alfonsa's birthday celebration about to take place nobody would like to remember the horrible life they are leading (not in terms of their treatment but in their existential crisis they were exposed to). The birthday was an excuse to once again celebrate what has been long left behind. Unlike the narrator who lived her life through nostalgia and times gone by, for whom the presence of her husband apart from providing support also triggers concern, his life without her, for the little girl everything was in future. Like Alfonsa asking mother superior to conduct her final exams early, what happens when she goes to school etc. The times gone by do not hold much of a meaning to her. Yet at the same time, it is she who provides life and meaning to others around her. Her mother puts up a brave front so that she can stay happy and for the mother her daughter's smile appears as a ray of hope which rationally and medically was impossible to be carried out. The other patients in the ward get going because of her. She is the life that gives hope to others in spite of the fact that her days are numbered.

On the other end of the spectrum, is Bhagwanti. She is shown to be someone who is not cared for by anyone. In fact, her sarcastic nature and stubborn attitude makes the genuine concern of others look suspicious. She probably has a valid reason to question the whole performance of her relatives coming to meet her and provide her with fruits of various kinds. Yet at the same time her cynicism doesn't seem to get aggravated when she comes across the pretty consultant, Monica. Bhagwanti expresses more faith in the stranger counselor and associate more with the happiness and grief of her fellow mates than she does to those people who are her blood relation or related to her through marriage. But what is surprising is her loyalty towards her son whom she had adopted who has long forgotten her. She still considers her alienation from her son is a result of her husband, Lalaji's hatred for him. But she is unwilling to accept that her son is at fault. Bhagwanti is sure, 'Never…I am a mother. It is Kishore who called me mother first and last. I would forgive him anything.' It's this mother's aspect which binds a barren woman with the umbilical cord of her adopted son.

Check Your Progress

13. When was *The Warp and the Weft and other Stories* published?
14. Which award did Sankranti win in 1998?
15. Who is Gopu?
16. Who is Bhagwanti?
17. Who is Bhagwanti fond of?

10.4 ALICE WALKER: *EVERYDAY USE*

Following are some of the excerpts from *Everyday Use:*

> I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house…..
>
> Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers….
>
> Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She's a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much….
>
> I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don't ask my why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can't see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passes her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face) and then I'll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better at a man's job. I used to love to milk till I was hooked in the side in '49. Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way….
>
> Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go 'Uhnnnh' again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears….
>
> We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and com bread, the greens and everything else. She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't effort to buy chairs…
>
> I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands

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hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work....

Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

Everyday Use was published early in Alice Walker's writing career, appearing in her collection *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* in 1973. The story is a first person narration by Mama, also referred to as Mrs. Johnson. It is a modern classic that tells the story of a mother and her two daughters' conflicting ideas about their identities and origin.

Characters

Mama: Mama is the narrator, who uses the first person narration to tell the story. Quite often in the story she is also referred to as Mrs. Johnson. She describes herself as a woman with big-bones, whose hands are rough, suggesting years of physical labor. She is not educated, and has live a poverty ridden life. She never was given an opportunity to break out of her rural setting. She lives with her daughter, Maggie. She has an independent and strong personality, reflected in the fact that she alone has taken care of her two daughters. She is a loving mother, who lives her life as per her own wishes. Though not literate, she has an active minds and is aware of the weaknesses of her daughters. She also understands and respects the importance of heritage, and therefore she does not allow Dee to take the family quilts.

Maggie: Maggie is shy and humble daughter and lives with Mama. While a young girl, she suffered burns in a house fire. Because of the accident she lacks the required confidence, and walks by dragging her feet. In a setting where there are other people, she often tries to dissolve into the background, and resists making eye contact. She is a kind, loyal and good natured daughter. She is submissive and does not retort. Instead of being angry and asserting her will, she willingly allows Dee to take the quilts, which had been promised to her.

Dee/Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo: Dee is the eldest daughter of Mama and elder sister to Maggie. She is educated, strong willed and highly ambitious girl. She renames herself as Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo. She respects her own wills and desires, and does not allow them to be suppressed, which also highlights her determination and ambitious character. She becomes enraged when Mama and does not allow her take the family quilts to display. She insists that Maggie and Mama do not fathom the importance of heritage, but what she fails to understand is that she is one who does not understand the meaning of heritage.

Hakim-a-barber: He is either Dee's boyfriend or husband. He goes to the dinner at Mama's place with Dee. He is a Black muslim, who is short and has waist length hair and shaggy beard. He intends to create a good first impression, which creates a little awkward situation. By giving more attention to Maggie than what she is accustomed to, he makes her feel uncomfortable.

John Thomas: John is the boy is chosen as a possible groom for Maggie.

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Synopsis

The story shows Mama waiting for Dee's (her elder daughter) arrival. Mama wonders the way Dee and Maggie will react on coming together. Maggie, because of her physical unattractiveness, scars and burn marks feels jealous of Dee. Mama imagines her reunion with Dee as a scene out of a television show where the successful girl acknowledges the role of her parents in her success or in some other melodramatic fashion as it is usually done in television shows. Mama gets nostalgic about the house fire that had ruined their house more than a decade ago. Maggie was injured in this fire. Dee watched the house crumpling down without much protest as she always despised it.

Mama was little literate. So was Maggie. But, the community people had financially helped Dee to attend a good school in Augusta. Mama is anticipating the solemnizing of Maggie and John Thomas' marriage. After which she would retire and lead a peaceful life and a life devoted to God. Mama was not appreciative of Dee's educated ideas that she tried to disseminate when she was at home.

Finally Dee arrives in a car, along with her boyfriend Hakim-a-barber. Mama is not happy to see the new man (Hakim-a-barber), nor Dee's dress. Maggie who is forcefully made to stay there by Mama so that she is too can receive Dee when Dee arrives. Maggie is uncomfortable when Hakim-a-barber tries to hug her.

Dee brings out a camera and takes a few pictures of both Mama and Maggie. She kisses Mama. Hakim-a-barber oddly manages to shake hands with Maggie. Dee informs Mama and Maggie that she has rechristened herself to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo as a protest against the oppressors whose name she was bore. To which Mama informs Dee she got her name from Aunt Dicie who was named after Grandma Dee who was her (Grandma Dee) mother's namesake. Mama takes time but finally master's her daughter's new name but keeps faltering trying to pronounce Hakim-a-barber. Hakim-a-barber responds to Mama's curiosity of whether he is related to the Muslims who live down the road in a mixed way saying that he follows a few of their doctrine but does not depend on occupations of farming or cattle rearing.

During taking one of the meals, Hakim-a-barber denies eating collard greens or pork. But Dee eats all to her heart's content. She also takes some artifacts from the house that is carved by her ancestors. Dee praises Maggie's memory. Mama wonders if Dee and Hakim-a-barber are married to each other but does not express her curiosity.

Dee insists on taking some of the family quilts which have been passed down to the family since the Civil War. But Mama informs that Maggie has already asked them to be given to her. Dee argues that Maggie is not smart enough to understand the value of these priceless artifacts so it was futile to hand over her these beautiful belongings. But, Mama says Maggie will use them regularly to which Dee says that way the quilts will be ruined. Trying to restore peace, Maggie gives the quilts to Dee. This act of Maggie makes Mama overwhelmed; and she instinctively hugs Maggie and takes the quilts away from Dee and gives back to Maggie. Before leaving with Hakim-a-barber, Dee unsuccessfully tries to explain her mother the way she is unable to understand the importance of her heritage and advises Maggie by asking her to embrace herself to the new ways of black Americans.

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Identity and Heritage

The story *Everyday Use* takes place in the backdrop of late 1960s or early 1970s. As history suggests, it was around this time when African-Americans were trying to explore their independent identities through their cultural heritage. Many changes were taking place in both political as well as social spheres. The word 'Negro' was slowly being erased out of the vocabulary. New words like Black Power, Black Nationalism and Black Pride, were filling in the new word world. In this story, Walker, through her carefully crafted characters, tries to show how both aspects of African-American heritage, 'African' as well as 'American' is important in understanding one's existence, denying or over-powering one in place of other can be harmful.

According to Mama she is 'a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands'. During winter she wears 'flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day.' She 'can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man'. She emerges as a character who is more engrossed with the practicality of life. Her being not so educated draws fact to light that she was never much impressed with the world of abstract thoughts. But her lack of formal education is not implying her inability to appreciate the lineage her ancestors have handed her down. She tells us there 'were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn ... Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece... that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War... Some of the pieces ... come from old clothes [Grandma Dee's] ...'. The quilts have a different meaning for Mama; they touch a chord within her as they help her come close to her ancestors. Apart from the quilts Mama's also is shown to have a soft corner for the dasher. When she takes the handle of the dasher in her hands, she is metaphysically touching the hands of all those who had possessed and handled it before. Her love for the dasher and the quilts reiterates her understanding of the importance of the people who made them.

In her other prominent work, *The Color Purple*, quilt fills in the memories of a dying woman about the biological mother of her adopted daughter. Elaine Showalter makes an interesting point in her essay 'Piecing and Writing. 'She says 'In contemporary writing, the quilt stands for a vanished past experience to which we have a troubled and ambivalent relationship'. Dee represents this other spectrum of the ambivalent relationship. She 'would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature,...She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time...At sixteen she had a style of her own: and she knew what style was'. She represents the Black Power movement but because of the superficial nature, she is possessed with an uncalled for pride and ignores the past full of hardships that people have overcome to reach here today. Mama observes that Dee '.. . used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice... pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand. 'Dee always considers herself to be more superior to her family. Dee's insistence on carrying things from her Mama's place which she intends to display as artifacts of decor in her home only reconfirms her superficial association with African culture (her adopting a new name) and more affinity with white American materialistic tendency. She and Hakim-a-barber are some of the many faces who were part of the Black Power struggle just as façade without any genuine concern for it.

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The scars that Maggie carries in her appearance stand for the scarred past of colored people. She is not aggressive as Dee. For Mama she 'will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe.' She thinks (as Mama narrates us) '... that 'no' is a word the world never learned to say to her [Dee]. 'Despite her lack of educational acumen and looks Maggie is sure of her heritage. She is aware of the dasher creator. "Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash.. . ,' and 'His name was Henry, but they called him Stash'. She goes on to give the quilt to Dee because she thinks she can '...'remember Grandma Dee without the quilts'. In sharp contrast appears Dee who is unsure of the history and turns blind towards the importance of its in Mama and Maggie's life. For Dee, these artifacts were mere symbols to boost her vanity. In another instance, Mama reflects 'Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she'd made from an old suit somebody gave me' only to reinforce her self-centered nature. Mama's desire to be on television show with her Dee and at the same time, mentioning about her being so full of herself at other instances highlights her concern for her daughter's contrasting nature. In a moment of epiphany Mama/Mrs. Johnson realizes that Wangero's concept of heritage is shallow and has to be abandoned. She says: '(...) something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout'. Walker in her story seems to argue people to understand and appreciate their American heritage and not just try to hide underneath the pain and sufferings the colored people have undergone. The new world cannot be made to look perfect and colorful by completely doing away with the dark sinister past.

The Narration

The story is unfolded to the readers in the first person narrative of Mama/Mrs. Johnson. The narration continues in simple present tense until Dee announces her new name (Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo). The name change also functions as a reference point for the change in time. The narrative suddenly continues in the simple past tense. This abrupt change can mean that for Mama her old Dee is no longer alive, Dee is a memory of the bygone times and Wangero is a sudden germination for whom Mrs. Johnson/Mama neither shares the sense of belonging nor she fits into Mama's scheme of time.

Alice Walker's different form of narrative creates layers of meaning. *Everyday Use* has an informal air to it. It gives access to the very innermost thoughts of Mama. There are instances when Mama speaks to the readers directly, like: 'You've no doubt seen (...)' or 'Have you ever seen a lame animal (...)'. This creates a sense of bonding between the readers for these.

Mama's narrative voice and her way of narrating provide a realistic touch to the story. Walker makes Mama the vehicle to use a language of the locality. Dee desires to take her mother's 'dasher' and the 'churn top'. The words like 'dasher' and 'churn top' not only add a colloquial flavor they also indicates the butter churning and cheese making process the folks indulge in either to feed them or to support family identifying one of the means of livelihood. The language of realism reflects in certain other examples like, Mama mentioning her husband carved benches as the family couldn't 'effort' to buy chairs. She does not use the standard sophisticated 'afford'. In

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another instance she explains the milk inside the churn as 'crabber', instead of stating that the milk has soured.

Irony

There is an irony evident in the title *Everyday Use*. The title of the story gains it importance from the different usage that the sisters have intended for the quilt, which also brings about the irony and effect of Dee's brief visit to Mama's house for dinner. To Mama and Maggie, the quilts are useful and valuable as an everyday household item, and not as an object to be savoured and respected as folk art. Dee on the other hand wants the quilts to use it as a piece of stylized home décor, in an attempt to satisfy her newfound sophistication which came with her education. Mama does not have any problem in letting the quilt go to Maggie, even if Maggie is unable to keep it as a family souvenir. She risks the physical damage of the quilt, which are valuable souvenir of their family history, at Maggie's hand in exchange of the peace that she has given the quilt to the daughter who deserved it the most.

Mama knows that Maggie is no match to Dee as far as mental acumen is concerned, but she is also aware of the fact that Maggie is more powerful than Dee, for she is versed in the art of quilting. She also realizes that possibly Maggie will destroy the quilt by suing it, but in the process of doing so she will also contribute in the making of family history for the next generation. Dee's intention is to save the quilt from physical damage, but it is apparent her understanding of things are shallow, and she is unable to understand true value of a thing. She does not really respect or understands the ancestors of her mother, and looks down on them as she looks down on her own mother. She claims that she wants to preserve the tradition by preserving the quilt, and yet accuses her mother and sister for choosing to follow traditional ways and thoughts, making the irony apparent.

Dee's primary objective of life is to break free from the chains of the past and create a life which in no ways resembles the past. This attitude of hers also underscores her disconnection with tradition and heritage. Dee, considers country life as something demeaning and condemning. And, therefore, her sudden gesture to save the heritage and turn to past is but an empty gesture. Dee convinces herself that she is earnest in what she says, but Mama, in spite of lack of education, is able to see through her shallowness. For Mama, the best way to keep the spirits of the heritage alive is to let the quilt fall in Maggie's care. The irony at play here is not bitter but moving and heartwarming: An attempt to preserve an object by not allowing it to be used every day, as it was originally intended to be is disrespectful, for it is a violation of the original intention. The only way of keeping the family heritage and history alive is to keep the object in the everyday use.

Check Your Progress

18. In which year did *Everyday Use* first come out in print?
19. Who is the writer of *Everyday Use*?
20. Who is John Thomas?

10.5 GITHA HARIHARAN



Fig. 10.3 Githa Hariharan

Githa Hariharan is an Indian English novelist, short story writes, essayist and newspaper columnist. She was born in Coimbatore and she grew up in Bombay and Manila where she studied until she moved to the United States to complete her higher education.

She made her literary debut with the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) which fetched her Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1993. A few of her novels which were published in the subsequent years include *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) and *When Dreams Travel* (1999). *In Times of Siege* (2003) is a collection of short stories. She has also published a story collection for the children, *The Winning Team* (2004). She has edited a volume of short stories, *A Southern Harvest* (1993) and co-edited *Sorry Best Friend!* (1997). The former being a story compilation in translation and the latter one was also a story collection but targeted children.

She was associated with WNET-Channel 13 as a writer and has worked as an editor with various publishing house and then, as a freelancer. She has been professor for various prestigious universities and scholar-in-residence.

Works

- *The Winning Team*, Illustrator Taposhi Ghoshal, Rupa & Co., 2004, ISBN 9788129105707
- *In Times of Siege*, Pantheon Books, 2003.
- *When Dreams Travel*, Picador, 1999.
- *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Viking, Penguin Books India.
- *The Art of Dying*, Penguin Books.
- *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Penguin Books, 1992.
- *Fugitive Histories*, Penguin Group, 2009.

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The Will: Critical Commentary

The story revolves around how the life of a lady changes after she has been a widow. The title of the story *The Will* refers to the will left behind by Raghu, which was to be executed by his lawyer after he dies. The will of Raghu was appreciated by all, it seemed to be fair and done a fair job for everyone. He had distributed his property equally among all his children and had left a letter for his wife, Sushila. Sushila was heart-broken and felt like she has lost all her powers after Raghu bade goodbye to this mortal life without much warning.

The suddenness of the event as much as the absence of the life-long partner shocked the wife. But the letter which Raghu had left behind worked as miracle for Sushila. She was no longer the poor, destitute wife. She was a different person altogether; a stronger and confident person after her husband's death. Everyone seemed surprised as she performed well. She stayed with her children alternately; tried to look after their family without being too nosy or meddlesome. Her source of energy and survival secret was securely sealed within her cupboard which contained the last letter of Raghu, which carried the deepest philosophical words that helped Sushila to feel more confident to be able to carry on her life. One day by sheer luck, the letter flies off and it had a great impact on the protagonist, Sushila. For her, it seemed that the life has come to a standstill. She starts losing her grip over life. A fact that surprised many was that she was doing fine for herself immediately after the death of her husband. Thus, her sudden aloofness and getting cocooned bothered much. Soon she became one of the poor unacceptable creatures' and not the strong person who was capable of caring. Suddenly, one day when Sushila was alone and one of her young grandchild comes to do his lesson and reads sentences 'A cheerful wife is the joy of life' and 'A good husband makes a good wife' Sushila suddenly realizes how foolish she had been. What she considered as the final memory of Raghu and was saddened to think that she has lost it in a moment of epiphany realizes that it was not the letter but his words that are more important. The words of wisdom were the ones that were precious which are still carefully kept inside Sushila. The letter was just a physical manifestation and Sushila springs back to life again.

The mysterious way Sushila had handled herself takes over the mysterious ways in which she falls ill. No one seems to have a clue what changes are taking place in her life. Her life which was so dependent on Raghu was now dependent on Raghu's last letter to her. The physical absence of the letter ruins her belief in herself. Sushila who had been always so dependent on Raghu manages to cope well without his presence just with the help of his letter. But as the story approaches, we realize that she manages to cope even without the letter. The will of the deceased husband ironically makes the protagonist much stronger as a person then she was when her husband was alive.

ACTIVITY

Research the Internet and make a list of Indian authors, who have made their mark in the literary world by writing short stories.

Check Your Progress

21. When did the *The Thousand Faces of Night* get published?
22. Who are the target audience of *The Winning Team* (2004)?
23. Who is Sushila?

DID YOU KNOW

Githa Hariharan first worked in the Public Broadcasting System in New York and then with a publishing firm as an editor in India. She currently works as a freelance editor.

10.6 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The stories discussed in this section are written by women. They also have women as their central characters.
- These characters are shown to belong to varied backgrounds, have different problems and yet at the same time they have figured out ways to overcome them.
- All the female characters/protagonists are different yet their resurrection and resolution binds them together.
- In all the short stories, the authors have defined their work by blending the creative aspect, personal involvement and artistic quality.
- They show experiments in their presentation bringing in freshness to the genre as well as trying to move beyond the established.
- The stories are not identical in structure and they also vary in length.
- Mahasweta Devi's short story named *Draupadi* is about a woman who was raped by her mentor repeatedly and it was a gang rape. She was a bonded labour and in the end, she stands against her tormentor.
- *Draupadi* is probably one of Mahasweta Devi's most famous stories and has been reprinted and translated in several collections.
- Her story, '*Breast Giver*,' is from her collection of short stories called, '*Breast Stories*.' Mahasweta Devi sketches a woman's personality as body, worker and object. In this story of a Bengali wet nurse, Devi projects the female protagonist, Jashoda, living in a 1960's India, who is forced to take up motherhood as a profession, when her husband loses his legs.
- Sujata Sankranti was born in Mavelikkara, which is a small town, in Kerala. Belonging to a family of authors, academics and artists, she was exposed to the enriching cultural heritage that was a vital constituent of her shaping years.
- The short story *The Warp and the Weft* is about the touching happenings in the lives of the people who are suffering from cancer.
- In the short story, *Everyday Use*, Alice Walker educates us about actual legacy; about its definition and about those entitled to receive it. The story focuses on two hand-stitched quilts, which are also used as symbols of true inheritance.
- Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore. She was brought up in Bombay and Manila. She received her education in these two cities and in the US.

10.7 KEY TERMS

- **Folklore:** Popular myth and beliefs relating to a particular place, activity, or group of people is called folklore.
- **Polarity:** In linguistics, it is the distinction between positive and negative forms.
- **Black power:** A movement in support of rights and political power for the black people in Africa.

10.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Mahasweta Devi was born in 1926, in Dhaka.
2. Manish Ghatak, Mahasweta Devi's father was a renowned poet and novelist. Her mother Dharitri Devi was a social activist and writer.
3. *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa*, *Rudali*, *Bioscoper Baksho* and *Chatti Munda O Tar Tir* are some of the famous novels of Mahasweta Devi.
4. Mahasweta Devi talks about the adivasi (tribal) Santhals, Lodhas, Shabars and Mundas in her novels.
5. Since Dopdi is a prominent figure in the group, her arrest would help the government to subjugate the various rebellious tribal groups that are troubling the government.
6. The year 1967 witnessed a successful peasant rebellion. This rebellion germinated in the Naxalbari area which is located in the northern part of West Bengal.
7. *Draupadi*, the protagonist, is a subaltern figure (she is a tribal and also a female) is victimized by the male world that surrounds her.
8. Joshada, the protagonist of the story Breast Gicer, is the wife of a brahmin who works as a wet nurse and breast feed the children of a kayastha family.
9. Originally written as *Standaayini* in Bangla, the story has been translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the leading postcolonial critical analyst.
10. *Breast Giver* explores the woman in her role as a wife, a mother, a breadwinner, and as an individual.
11. The argument that *Breast Giver* can be read as a feminist text is a solid one because the story portrays Jashoda as a strong, empowered woman who has overcome some obstacles and oppression in her life to do something worthwhile for others as well as her own family.
12. Mahasweta Devi brings about powerful emotions, such as a sense of sadness and injustice in their readers and empowers her readers with a sense of responsibility to pursue to change the exploitation of women.
13. The Warp and the Weft and Other Stories came out in 2001.
14. In the year 1998, Sankranti won prestigious Commonwealth Short Story Prize for her prolife story *The Warp and the Weft*.
15. Gopu is the narrator's son.
16. Bhagwanti/Badi Ma/Masi is cancer patient in the ward.
17. Bhagwanti is fond of Monica, the counselor.
18. *Everyday Use* first came out in print in 1973.
19. *Everyday Use* was written by Alice Walker.
20. John Thomas is the boy who is finalized to marry Maggie.
21. *The Thousand Faces of Night* was published in the year 1992.
22. *The Winning Team* (2004) targets children as its audience.
23. Sushila is the protagonist of the story *The Will*.

10.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write in brief what you think of *Draupadi*/Dopdi.
2. What kind of a writer is Mahashweta Devi?
3. What did you learn from Sujata Sankranti's tale?
4. Write a note on Alfonsa's character.
5. What is your understanding of the title *The Will*?
6. What is the historical context of the story *Draupadi*?
7. Do you agree with the view that religion is used as a kind of weapon of power in the story? Write with textual support.
8. Write a critical note on the western influence in the socio-cultural set up as depicted in *Breast Giver*.
9. Why does Jashoda suffer in her life?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Bring out the allegory of the mythical *Draupadi* and Dopdi.
2. *Draupadi* is about a victimized character. Do you agree?
3. What is the irony in *Everyday Use*?
4. What is the central argument in *Everyday Use*?
5. How is death represented by Sujata Sankranti?
6. How are relationships developed in Sujata Sankranti's tale?
7. Write a short note on why do you think the prescribed text can qualify as a short story?
8. Write a note on the sarcastic and mythic style of Mahasweta's writing of *Breast Giver*.
9. Write a detailed commentary on the feminist perspective of the story *Breast Giver*. Support your answer with instances from the text.