



INSTITUTE
OF DISTANCE
EDUCATION **IDE**
Rajiv Gandhi University



MAENG-508

Literatures and Gender-II

MA ENGLISH

4th Semester

Rajiv Gandhi University

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Literature and Gender II

MAENG508
IV SEMESTER



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.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Syllabi

UNIT I: Kamala Das

The Old Playhouse

UNIT II: Virginia Woolf

Mrs. Dalloway

UNIT III: Sashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

UNIT IV: Short Stories I

Draupadi Mahashweta Devi and *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker

UNIT V: Short Stories II

Sujata Sankranti's *The Wrap and Weft*

Githa Hariharan's *The Will*

UNIT 5 KAMALA DAS

- 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

UNIT 3 VIRGINIA WOOLF

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

UNIT 8 SHASHI DESHPANDE

- 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

UNIT 9 ARUNDHATI ROY

- 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

UNIT 10 SHORT STORIES

- 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

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

NOTES

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

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).

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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 Trissur district which she readily donated to the Kerala Sahitya Akademi 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 crowded 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 Akademi'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?

NOTES

*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.

NOTES

Check Your Progress

- What is the role of the flower in the vase?
- What finds an exact expression in this poem?
- What happens when couples are swallowed in narcissism?
- Where are the body and the soul entrapped?
- Why does the narrator call herself dwarf?

NOTES

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*.

5.8 FURTHER READING

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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

NOTES

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf is considered one of the earliest modern writers. From an early age she was acquainted 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

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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.

Bloomsbury Group
one's prior object
life and love,
creation and
yagnant of aesthetic
experience and
in pursuit of
knowledge
against said virtues
urgency habits,
invention of
Victorian life,
the consideration
of the public sphere
in favour of more
normal, private
entertained from
personal
but more of an
individual
leisure.

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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 to 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

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?

NOTES

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 if 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 any 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

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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 and 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

NOTES

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 like 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

NOTES

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 and 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 talk 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 writes: '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 Emily 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 shelves which contain 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'.

NOTES

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 explore 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 a 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 their unity soothes her. Their 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 as 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 protest '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.

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 her 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.

NOTES

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 of 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 ideas 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's own position as someone who is not a mother, and so by extension someone who is not nurturing and can, therefore, be destructive. On

NOTES

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 fore 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 female experience will be reflected. The reference to lesbianism needs to be considered 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.'

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's 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 the 1920s. 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:** Clarissa'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.

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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

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*.

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In parts *Mrs. Dalloway* is divided between memories of Clarissa 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 Adventure' (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 a male version of 'Flâneur' (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 aestheticizing '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

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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 crumbling 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.

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*.

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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 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.

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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

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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 buy 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

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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 oppress 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-dimensional 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?

NOTES

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 starts 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.

- 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.

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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.

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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.

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this unit is to provide a comprehensive overview of the life and work of Virginia Woolf. It will explore her role in the Bloomsbury Group, her contributions to modernist literature, and her influence on the development of the novel. The unit will also examine her personal life, her relationships with other writers, and her legacy in the world of letters.

The unit will be divided into several sections, each focusing on a different aspect of Woolf's life and work. The first section will introduce her to the student, while the subsequent sections will delve deeper into her literary and personal life.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

- Understand the historical context of Woolf's life and work.
- Identify the major themes and motifs in Woolf's novels and essays.
- Analyze Woolf's writing style and narrative techniques.
- Evaluate Woolf's contribution to modernist literature.

4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Virginia Woolf was born in 1882 in London, England. She was part of the Bloomsbury Group, a group of writers and intellectuals who were influential in the development of modernist literature. Woolf was a prolific writer, known for her novels, essays, and autobiographies.

Woolf's most famous work is *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel that explores the inner lives of its characters. She also wrote *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*. Her essays, such as *A Room of One's Own*, are also highly regarded. Woolf's writing is characterized by its stream-of-consciousness style and its focus on the subjective experience of her characters.

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

- Recall the significance of *That Long Silence*
- Demonstrate a critical appreciation of *That Long Silence*

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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.

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

NOTES**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 reconstruction 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

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 observes 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

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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

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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NOTES

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 in 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 new 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

NOTES

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.

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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

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', 'Aji', '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

NOTES

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.

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.

NOTES

- 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 identity; 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

8.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Shashi Deshpande

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.

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UNIT 9 ARUNDHATI ROY

Arundhati Roy

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

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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 voiced 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.

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.

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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 reminisces 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

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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 it 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 crowd 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 Thomban 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, '...harks 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.

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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.

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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 in 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 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.

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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'?

9.5 SUMMARY

NOTES

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. And how much', remains with the reader.

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.

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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

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

NOTES

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

NOTES

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, Chharitri 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 continuously 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, Mahasweta 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.

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

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.

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.

NOTES

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.

NOTES

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?

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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 lose 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

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.

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.

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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 Jashoda 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

house. Although this arrangement succeeds to sustain her family, the labour takes its toll on her body and her health.

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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 aunts 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 Belegkata.' 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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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, Alfonso'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 Alfonso'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. Alfonso 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. Alfonso 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 Alfonso, 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, bawaring 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 nowhere 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/Varman - 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 soldier 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...'

Relationships

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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 'Uhhnnh' 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 pigtailed 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 corn 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.

NOTES

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.

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 crumbling 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

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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.

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.

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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

another instance she explains the milk inside the churn as 'crabber', instead of stating that the milk has soured.

Irony

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There is an irony evident in the title *Everyday Use*. The title of the story gains its 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?



Fig. 10.3 Gitsha Hariharan

Gitsha 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.

NOTES

The Will: Critical Commentary**NOTES**

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 than she was when her husband was alive.

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?

ACTIVITY

Research the Internet and make a list of Indian authors, who have made their mark in the literary world by writing short stories.

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.

NOTES

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.

NOTES

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 Giver*, 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 Joshada 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*.

NOTES

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 Mahashweta'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.

10.10 FURTHER READING

NOTES

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