

MAEN103CCT

Fiction in English

for

MA English
(First Semester)

Directorate of Distance Education

Maulana Azad National Urdu University

Hyderabad-32, Telangana- India

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M.A. English

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Message

Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) was established in 1998 by an Act of the Parliament. It is a central university with NAAC accreditation and the mandate of the university is: (1) promotion of Urdu language, (2) accessibility and availability of professional and technical education in Urdu medium, (3) providing education through traditional and distance learning mode, and (4) a specific focus on women's education. These are the points that distinguish this central university from all other central universities and give it a unique feature. It has been emphasized even in the National Education Policy 2020 to achieve education in mother tongues and regional languages.

The very objective of promotion of knowledge through Urdu is meant to facilitate the accessibility of contemporary knowledge and disciplines to Urdu knowing community. For a long time, there has been a dearth of course material in Urdu. The non-availability of books in Urdu is a matter of concern and Urdu University considers it a privilege to be part of the national process of providing course material in mother tongue/home language as per the vision of NEP 2020. Further, the Urdu speaking community is at a disadvantage in gaining updated knowledge and information in emerging areas or newer knowledge in existing fields due to non-availability of reading material in Urdu. The unavailability of content related to the above domains of knowledge has created an atmosphere of apathy towards attaining knowledge that could significantly affect the intellectual abilities of the Urdu knowing community. These are the challenges that Urdu University is confronted with. The scenario of Self Learning Materials (SLM) is also not very different. The unavailability of course books in Urdu at school/college level comes under discussion at the commencement of every academic year. Since the medium of instruction of Urdu University is only Urdu and it offers almost all the courses of important disciplines, the preparation of books of all these subjects in Urdu is the most important responsibility of the University. To achieve these objectives, MANUU makes available course material in the form of Self Learning Material (SLM) to the students of Distance Learning. The same is also available for sale to anyone interested in gaining knowledge through Urdu. To further provide access to learning, eSLM in Urdu is available for free download from the University website.

I am immensely pleased that due to the hard work of the concerned faculty and full cooperation of the writers, the process of publications of books has begun on a massive scale. To facilitate the students of Distance Learning, the process of preparing and publication of Self Learning Material (SLM) is of paramount importance to the University. I believe that we will be able to meet the requirements of a large Urdu knowing community through our Self Learning Material and will fulfill the mandate of this University and justify our presence in this country.

With best wishes,

Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan

Vice Chancellor

MANUU, Hyderabad

Message

You all are well aware that Maulana Azad National Urdu University began to function from 1998 with the Directorate of Distance Education and Translation Division. Regular mode of education commenced from 2004 and various departments were established which were followed by the appointments of faculty. Self Learning Material was prepared through writing and translation with full support of competent authority.

For the past few years UGC-DEB kept emphasizing on synchronizing the syllabi of distance and regular mode to enhance the level of distance learning students. Accordingly, at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, the syllabi of distance and regular mode are synchronized by following the norms of UGC-DEB and Self Learning Materials are being prepared afresh for UG and PG courses containing 6 blocks - 24 units and 4 blocks - 16 units respectively.

Distance education system is considered highly effective and beneficial around the globe. The large number of people enrolled in it stands a witness to the same. Realizing the literacy ratio of Urdu speaking population, Maulana Azad National Urdu University implemented Distance education from its beginning. In this way, the university reached out to Urdu speaking population through distance learning method prior to regular. Initially, the study materials of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University and Indira Gandhi National Open University were borrowed. The intention was to prepare our own study materials rapidly and not to be dependent on other universities but the intent and effort could not go hand in hand. Consequently, it took plenty of time to prepare our own Self Learning Material. Eventually, the task of preparing Self Learning Material commenced systematically at war foot. We had to face numerous hindrances but never gave up. As a result, university started to publish its own study material at high speed.

Directorate of Distance Education runs fifteen courses consisting of UG, PG, B.Ed, Diploma, and certificate courses. In a short span of time, courses based on technical skills will be started. A huge network of nine regional centers (Bengaluru, Bhopal, Darbhanga, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar) and six sub-regional centers (Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jammu, Nooh, Varanasi, and Amravati) was established to facilitate the students. One hundred and forty four Learner Support Centres (LSCs) and twenty Programme Centres are run simultaneously under these regional and sub-regional centers to provide educational and administrative support to the students. DDE also utilizes ICT for its educational and administrative activities.

The admissions in all programs are done only through online mode. The soft copies of Self Learning Material for students are made available on the website of Directorate of Distance Education. In near future, the links of audio and video recordings will also be made available on the website. In addition, SMS facilities are being provided to students to have better communication. The students are informed through SMS regarding various facets of programs such as course registration, assignment, counseling, exams, etc.

Directorate of Distance Education will not only play a vital role to bring educationally and economically backward Urdu speaking population into the main stream but also in the increase of Gross Enrolment Ratio.

Prof. Mohd Razaullah Khan

Director, Directorate of Distance Education, MANUU, Hyderabad

Introduction to the Course

The M.A. English programme is designed to give a sound knowledge in English Language, Literature and Literary Theory so as to empower the prospective students for higher studies and employment apart from helping them prepare for competitive exams. It is spread over two years (four semesters) minimum duration. The objectives of the programme are as follows:

- a. to provide a sound base in English Language
- b. to provide insights into the development of English and the phonological, morphological, syntactical and stylistic aspects of language
- c. to provide knowledge in the teaching of English
- d. to explore the various literatures in English
- e. to provide exposure to the different genres, movements and periods of English literature
- f. to facilitate critical and analytical abilities
- g. to introduce literary theory and criticism
- h. to build confidence among the learners with language skills in English
- i. to enable the working target group to enhance their qualifications and
- j. To facilitate higher education in the open distance learning mode.

At the end of the two year post graduate programme in M.A. English, the learner would have mastered the theoretical knowledge of the English language and literature. The learners would be able to appreciate literatures in English, take up critical analysis, understand the different movements, periods and concepts in the study of English language and literature. The two year programme will prepare the learner for competitive examinations, for employment and for research by developing their skills apart from leading to refinement.

The course “Fiction in English” is designed to introduce you to the origin and development of the English novel, the origin and development of African American Novel and the origin and development of the Indian English novel. The novels prescribed for your study are *Wuthering Heights*, *The Outsider*, *The Bluest Eye* and *The God of Small Things*. The course is divided into four Blocks, each Block has four Units. As students of M.A. English, you should knowledge in the genre of fiction. This course will help you in understanding the origin and development of the novel and will further help you in a detailed study of four novels.

This SLM is supplemented by audio-video lessons. You may visit IMC MANUU YouTube channel <http://youtube.com/u/imcmanuu> for the complete list of AV lessons in English.

With you in your journey through the fields of English literature!

Prof. Gulfishaan Habeeb

Programme Coordinator

Fiction in English

Unit-1: Introduction to Fiction in English

Structure

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1.0 Introduction

Fiction has two sub-genres: novel and short story. The novel is the most popular literary genre of the modern age. Roughly, it can be described as a fictitious prose story of book length. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* defines it as a “fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity”. It is also described as prose fiction - an extended narrative that has a plot, a theme and portrays characters. Clara Reeve defines it as “a picture of real life and manners and of the times in which it is written”. Professor Warren states: “The novel is a fictitious narrative which contains a plot.” The word novel has been taken from the Italian *novella* (meaning a little new thing), which is a short tale in prose. We have many of such collected novels in fourteenth century Italy. The “Picaresque narrative” of Spain is another predecessor of the novel. These were basically adventure stories presenting tales about the escapades of a rogue who lives by his wits. They were collections of different episodes loosely held together by some character.

Similarly, short story rose to prominence late but established itself in the vast expanse of literature in English.

1.1 Objectives

Our primary objectives in this Unit are to:

- provide an overview of fiction in English
 - introduce important genres and types of fiction in English
 - offer a brief survey of some salient features and fiction writers
 - familiarize you with English novel, short story, and types of fiction while introducing various writers of fiction
-

1.2 Fiction in English

1.2.1 The Beginnings of the English Novel:

In England, the beginning of the novel can be traced back to the sixteenth century Elizabethan prose: Lyly's (1554-1606) *Euphues*, Sydney's (1554-86) *Arcadia* and Thomas Lodge's (1558-1625) *Rosalynde*. All these have a fictional framework and are written in prose. These prose works also have a lot of poetic elements in them. Despite that, we can consider them to be the beginnings of the novel.

Robert Greene's (1560-92) *Pandosto*, Nashe's (1567-1601) *The Unfortunate Traveller*, and Thomas Deloney's (1543-1600) *Gentle Craft* are some examples of the Elizabethan prose fiction which can be considered the precursors of the novel. More interesting is the work of Aphra Behn (1640-89) whose *Oroonoko* introduces the theme of racial conflict. This is a speedy adventurous story of the grand passion of the ideological conflict between the lofty pagan morality of the African natives and the selfish, unprincipled attitude of the European settlers. The length of this work and its style come nearer to what we call the novel. In Daniel Defoe's (1660-1731) *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, we find the first complete novel shape.

Robinson Crusoe's story is based on the experiences of Alexander Selkirk, who spent five years on an uninhabited island. In the novel, Crusoe is shipwrecked but is able to salvage

basic tools from the wreck and using his ingenuity, he is able to manufacture means of shelter and livelihood. *Robinson Crusoe* makes delightful reading for children. And in recent days, it has also been interpreted as a novel that reflects the white man's imperial design, his assumption of racial superiority over the natives.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)

After the period of infancy, the English novel took a leap in the work of the three great novelists of the eighteenth century - Richardson, Fielding and Smollett. Samuel Richardson is known for his '*Pamela or Virtue Rewarded*' and *Clarissa Harlowe*. Both the novels employ the epistolary technique, i.e. the form of letters. *Pamela* constitutes a string of letters written by Pamela, a servant girl, to her parents which express how she has to resist the advances of her master Mr. B and how he ultimately makes amends by marrying her. The novel is basically about her strength and integrity of character and her self-defence. *Clarissa Harlowe* is again a novel narrated by a girl - a day-to-day record of her harassment at the hands of her own family, who for monetary advantage want to marry her to a man she dislikes. In the hands of Richardson, the epistolary method grew into a technique that depicted a story with immediacy and ensured the reader's involvement.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754)

If Richardson explored what was later called the "sentimental novel", Fielding experimented with the burlesque fiction. The sudden discoveries, timely rescues, deathbed confessions and the people chasing one another makes his novels interesting. He experiments his method with *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* and perfects it in his best-known novel *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*. This novel is about Tom Jones, who has been brought up by Squire Allworthy, unaware that he is his sister Bridget's son. Blifil, Bridget's legitimate son, becomes his rival for the love of Sophia Western. He even discredits him in Allworthy's eyes. Finally, the plot is deftly manipulated and the novel moves towards a happy ending. It is interesting to note how similar these novels' plots are, to those of our Hindi films. Even closer to the Bollywood tradition is Fielding's *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great*, where we find an ironic glorification of delinquency, cruelty and crime in British society, written in a biographical form of satire with insights derived from Fielding's career as a jurist.

Tobias Smollett (1721-71) and Lawrence Sterne (1713-68)

Tobias Smollett was a Scotsman who chose the picaresque form of novel writing. His *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, etc are a series of separate

adventures loosely connected in the continuing life story of the hero. In the preface of one of his novels he describes the novel thus: “A novel is a large diffuse picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups and exhibited in various attitudes, for a purpose of a uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient.”

The other well-known writer of this age is Laurence Sterne who is known for *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. His first novel is the unfinished record of the eccentric Shandy family. The chief strength of this work lies in its brilliant style and remarkable characterization. *A Sentimental Journey* is a work of fiction besides containing travel sketches and random essays on old subjects.

1.2.2 Emergence of Women Novelists:

One interesting fact about the novel of the eighteenth century is the emergence of women novelists. Though women have always been writing and creating literature, for the first time in the eighteenth century, they entered the realm of public writing and publishing. And in prose fiction, they discovered a medium in which they could flourish. Probably, this was because the feminist movement was gaining momentum under the leadership of Mary Wollstonecraft and others. The question of women’s rights was being actively debated. And all this made it relatively easier for women to fight their way into the world of publishing.

Fanny Burney (1752-1840)

Fanny Burney was one of the first women novelists who were widely read. Her *Evelina* or *The History of a Young Lady’s Entry into the World* was anonymously published in 1778. Set in the epistolary style, the novel is the story of a young girl’s life and her eventual access to heiressdom. Burney is also known for her diary and letters which make interesting reading. Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), writing at a slightly later point of time was another successful novelist. She belonged to the very popular school of writers whose novels contained elements of exaggerated romance: azure-eyed heroines, haunted castles, trapdoors, bandits and ghosts. Her best work is *Mysteries of Udolpho*. It is a narrative of a young heroine confined in a gloomy castle over whom looms the shadow of an ancestor’s crime.

After the eighteenth century, the Romantic age saw the rise of a host of women novelists like Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Porter.

Jane Austen (1775-1817)

Of Jane Austen, it is said that she did for the English novel what the Lake poets did for poetry. She refined it, simplified it, and made it a reflection of the English life. But she hardly

found any encouragement during her lifetime. In fact, while her contemporaries Wordsworth and Coleridge's joint work *Lyrical Ballads* was an instant success, her best novel *Pride and Prejudice* had to wait for sixteen years before it found a publisher. The general opinion about Jane Austen is that she had a very narrow field of work. She limited herself to the household interests, the country gatherings and the only "happening" thing in her novels is matrimony. Her widely read novels, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* in a way do center themselves around these themes. But if we look at the characters closely, we find Austen trying to break out of the set mould of the feminine stereotypes. Though not radically different, her heroines within their limited scope of action show remarkable strength of character, reasoning and intelligence, which set them apart.

Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849)

Maria Edgeworth, writing around the same time, concerned herself with broader social problems. Her novels represent the plight of the Irish tenantry at the hands of the unscrupulous landlords and their oppressive deputies. She is at her best in *Ormond*, where we are introduced to the decadent Irish feudalism of the eighteenth century, the Catholic-Protestant dissension and the struggling Irish aristocrats sustained by opportunistic politics.

Sir Walter Scott and the Historical Novel (1771-1832)

Sir Walter Scott, the creator of the English historical novel, has been largely influenced by Maria Edgeworth. In his work, we find a wide range of action covering diverse fields of human interest. Some of his well-known novels are *Old Mortality*, *The Talisman*, *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Waverley*. In all of them, the locale forms an important part of the action, describing very often the life, men and action of Scotland.

1.2.3 Novelists of Victorian Age:

The novelists and the novels of the Victorian age are perhaps the most well known and representative in the history of English literature. To this group belong Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte and Thomas Hardy.

Charles Dickens (1812-70)

Dickens rose to fame with the publication of his *Pickwick Papers*. It began as an illustrated series of episodes on the lives of the members of Pickwick club. But it gradually developed into a loosely knit picaresque novel. The object of this novel was to amuse the public. But Dickens is primarily known as the exponent of the evils of child labour - a theme he superbly handled in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Some of his other well-known novels are *A Tale*

of *Two Cities*, *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House*. A powerful point in all these novels is his keen eye for character portrayal, the idiosyncrasies of habit, speech etc, which make them lifelike. Dickens' purpose was to make his novels the instrument of morality and justice. And definitely, they played a major role in exposing the social evils of Victorian England.

W.M. Thackeray (1811-63)

Another important novelist at the same time is W.M. Thackeray, well known for his novels *Henry Esmond* and *Vanity Fair*. The first novel has a historical flavour, giving us a wonderfully detailed and realistic picture of the eighteenth century, the court and camps of Queen Anne's reign. *Vanity Fair* is a comic portrayal of the social life around him, a critique of the dishonesty and crime we find all around. He calls this work "a novel without a hero". It is centred around two women; Amelia, who is a meek creature and Becky Sharp an unprincipled intriguer.

The Bronte Sisters

Among the women novelists of the period, we have the three sisters – Charlotte (1816-55), Emily (1818-48) and Anne Bronte (1820-49) who are well known for their novels *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* respectively. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, especially, are interesting for their powerful women characters around whom the novels move. Very often they have been interpreted as attempts to redefine the position of women and challenge the patriarchal order within which these heroines try to gain fulfillment and self-realization.

George Eliot (1819-80)

Many critics give George Eliot - the highest rank among the women novelists of her century. She is a preacher, a moralizer and also a deeply religious person at heart. But at the same time, she was engaged with questioning the scientific spirit of her age. In all her novels, we find the play of universal forces shaping and determining her characters. At the same time, she also tries to emphasize social laws, rules that make society better. Well known among her novels are *Adam Bede*, *Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Spanish Gypsy*. She describes her novels as depicting "psychologic realism" i.e., representing the inner struggle of a soul, and revealing the motives, impulses and hereditary influences that govern human action. In all her novels, it is the development of a soul, the slow growth or decline of moral power that interests her.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

The last of this group of eminent novelists is Thomas Hardy who, it is said, belongs more to the age that followed than to his own generation. Hardy is known for his pessimism and gloomy philosophy of life. In his novels, he shows man as an insignificant part of the cosmos struggling with forces greater than himself - sometimes against systems he cannot reach or influence and sometimes against a grim worldly force that delights in making human affairs go wrong. His early novels *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* depict idyllic love stories. *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native* and *The Woodlanders* are regarded as Hardy's masterpieces. But the last two novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are better expressions of his tragic art and his pessimism.

1.2.4 The Modern Novel: Changing Trends

The Modern novel can be traced to the beginning of what is called the "Stream of consciousness" novel - a term coined in 1890 by the American philosopher and psychologist William James, brother of novelist Henry James. He used it to describe the flow of thought within the waking human mind. It is used particularly with reference to the work of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. It represents a technique where the narrative unfolds in the flux's narration of thought and feeling within a character without resorting to chronologically sequenced description or conventional dialogue.

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

D. H. Lawrence for the first time broke open the doors of fiction, urging readers and writers to explore hitherto unseen territories. He rejected the outward form of writing and thinking, secularized Christianity and centred his novels on the theme of realization of the self and the liberation of sexuality from the dominating forms of social repression. Lawrence was a direct inheritor of the romantic prejudice against machines. In his works, thus we find a critique of industrial England that is contrasted with vivid evocations of a working countryside. Among his better-known novels are the semi autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and its successor, *Women in Love* - three of which stress a distinction between nature and anti-nature, between freedom and control, between instinct and will. Among his later day fictional experiments was *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which was published in its complete form only in 1960 after facing prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Virginia Woolf, talking of modern fiction says, “each day the mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel... if the novelists could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy in the accepted style; the future novelist will be able to convey an impression of the ‘luminous halo’ of life - this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit”. In her novels *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, the specific characterization or plot construction melts into the discontinuities, the fragmentation, and the disintegration of a larger freer reality. Basically, her novels are a depiction of women’s sensibility and sensitivity in sharp contrast with the materialism of a world dominated by men. Her novel *Mrs. Dalloway* is a detailed representation of the life of a woman character’s mind narrated through the technique of interior monologue.

James Joyce (1882-1941)

The next interesting author who figures in this category is well known in literary circles as the exponent of the stream-of-consciousness technique. With the publication of *Ulysses*, the Irish novelist James Joyce stormed into renown as “the best living prose writer” a title given to him by T. S. Eliot in 1918. His collection of twelve stories, *Dubliners*, was first rejected by publishers, but appeared finally in 1914. *Ulysses*, too, ran into legal trouble because it was pornographic but subsequently was made available around 1937. The *Dubliners* collection is based on a particular sequence. The stories show the character moving forward from being the passive feeler and observer to being the doer and maker. Later, they trace out the adolescent explorations of his personality before breaking the narrative into a series of diary entries of the potential artist ready for the flight. *Ulysses* is a narrative of three individuals- Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Bloom’s wife, Molly. The thought and action of all the three are interwoven with the diverse life of Dublin on a single day, 16 June 1904. The characters cross and recross the city, exploring and experiencing brief, transient intimacies. Underneath each of the eighteen episodes around which the novel is built lies a Homeric allusion where Bloom is a latter-day Ulysses, Stephen, his lost son Telemachus and Molly, his Penelope.

1.2.5 The Social Novel: Further Experiments

Apart from these, there was a body of social novels in the twentieth century that explored the changing society and further experimented with the form of fiction.

Henry Green (1905-73)

Some important novels by Greene are *Party Going*, *Loving* and *Living*. *Party Going* describes the four-hour delay experienced by a young and smart set of party goers and his *Loving* deals with the social problems of class-division in 20th century England. And *Living*, his most impressive achievement is a study of the common place factory life in Birmingham. In his novels, he develops a startlingly abbreviated narrative style that eliminates definite articles and adjectives and experiments with verbless sentences.

P.G. Wodehouse (1881-1975)

Wodehouse described his own method of writing as “making a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether.” In reality, however, he ignores neither the ‘real’ life nor the socio/political currents of his time. He published around 120 volumes of novels and short stories. In them he interestingly mocks at eccentricities, oddities, fads and fashions of upper class England. His art lies in telling a simple and amusing story simply and amusingly. His famous characters are Bertie Wooster and his man Jeeves, whom he introduced in the collection *The Man with Two Left Feet and Other Stories*.

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)

Another writer of renown in this period is Aldous Huxley who rose to fame with his fantasy *Brave New World*. The book is an evocation of a scientific future in which “impersonal generation will take the place of Nature’s hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows and rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower to flower.” (*Brave New World*, 1932).

George Orwell (1903-50)

George Orwell is another well-known writer of this age. His two novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* express his profound disillusionment with Soviet communism, *Animal Farm* is a novel in the form of a fable that almost sentimentalizes the working class strength and good nature (characterized by the horse Boxer) as against the pigs noted for their greed and laziness. They are also held responsible for the undoing of the revolution. *Nineteen Eighty Four* is a thinly veiled dystopian evocation of Stalin’s Russia, extremes of mechanistic oppression and totalitarian logic, supposedly influenced by Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*.

Samuel Beckett (1906-89)

Among the well-known novels of the 1950s is Samuel Beckett's trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, published in English in 1955, 1956 and 1958 respectively. All the three works are experiments with the narrative form, written as monologue, a gushing "stream of consciousness" which critic Martin Esslin quoted as representative of "The Theatre of the Absurd". Each of the narrators here contradicts himself, stumbles over the contradictions of his syntax, and reflects on what he has to say. The narrative and the form threaten to break under the strain of contradiction. The trilogy ends thus: "In silence you don't know, you must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on".

William Golding (1911-93)

William Golding's most popular novel *The Lord of the Flies*, cast as moral allegory, is not much of an experiment with form. It is set on a desert island on which a marooned party of boys from a choir hangs down the ways of civilization and regresses into dirt, barbarism and murder.

Women Novelists of the Present Age:

Some famous authors are Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Jean Rhys and Margaret Drabble. Iris Murdoch (1919-99) never wanted to be called a "woman writer." She preferred to be accepted as a writer in a man's world. This is significant, because she wrote in the first part of the twentieth century and it was not until the sixties and seventies that women felt the need to stress gender difference. She believed that good art should transcend gender difference. Murdoch in her range of novels from *The Flight from the Enchanter to the Sea* and *The Philosopher's Pupil* and through her themes and characters suggests that any attempt to impose nets, theories or artistic arrangements upon reality will fail. For reality of necessity supercedes all determining human systems of control.

Muriel Spark (1918-2006) a Catholic convert of Jewish descent conveys a passion for moral issues and their relation to fictional form. Doris Lessing falls into the category of a radical feminist. Her novel *The Golden Notebook* echoes the feminist struggle of the 60's. She says, "The Russian revolution, The Chinese revolution - they're nothing at all. The real revolution is women against men". The novel is shaped around a series of notebooks, Black, Yellow, Red and Blue kept by a woman writer, Anna Wulf, as a means to separate and analyze different aspects of her life, both private and public. But her growing perception of herself finally breaks down all such categorizations into a new pattern, an inevitable yet welcome formlessness.

Jean Rhys's (1890-1979) novels portray women determined to explore the implications of their sexuality get ultimately exploited by the society. In her well-known *Wild Sargasso Sea*, these themes are dealt with renewed intensity. She explores here the nature of loneliness, exploitation and victimization set against the Caribbean, its decaying plantations, untrimmed gardens and tropical storms.

Margaret Drabble (b.1939), writing in the early 1960s focused on the tensions and problems of a woman's existence. Her novels *A Summer Birdcage* and *The Waterfall* show the predicament of the educated heroines desiring to find fulfillment while caring for the children.

1.2.6 The Short Story and Its Evolution:

A short story can simply be defined as a story that is short. H.E. Bates, one of the most successful writers of our age, says: "The basis of almost every argument or conclusion I can make is the axiom that the short story can be anything that the author decides it shall be."

The shortest of the short stories may be only a page or two and sometimes the longest, like D. H. Lawrence's *St. Mawr*, for example, may run to over a hundred pages. Sometimes, in fact, it is impossible to draw a line between the long short story and the short novel.

H.G. Wells, another famous writer of short stories, says: "A short story is, or should be, a simple thing; it aims at producing one vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to attend closely set a limit to it. It must therefore explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue sets in."

Generally, the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century are considered to be the time when the short story developed and flourished. This was largely because of the demand for "periodicals" that appeared at this time. Many novels appeared in serial form, but most of the periodicals used short stories as the fundamental way of filling up pages and offering a ready market to the writers of the time.

Although the short story did not reach the height of popularity till the beginning of the present century, it is one of the oldest types of literature. *The Bible* and especially the "Old Testament" are full of short stories that are read repeatedly. Even older are the stories found in the *Histories* of Herodotus (480-425 B.C). Herodotus was basically a historian. But history as we know it today- a chronicle of the events as they have occurred in time - started being written only in the nineteenth century. Like other historians of his time, Herodotus was more concerned with the individuals involved than the chronicle of events. The result is that the book is a collection of

highly readable tales that make him the master of direct and simple storytelling. This in a way illustrates what Maugham had said about the art of narrative: “The desire to listen to stories appears to be as deeply rooted in the human animal as the sense of property. From the beginning of history, men have gathered round the campfire, or in a group in the marketplace, to listen to the telling of a story.”

Writers of Short Stories

It is difficult to have a survey or history of the short story. Instead, in this section we shall discuss some of the well-known short story writers and their work.

Guy de Maupassant (1850-93)

Maupassant, along with Chekhov, is among the greatest short-story writers of the world. He wrote some three hundred tales; *The Necklace* being the most famous among them. This is the story of a necklace of imitation diamonds, which a girl borrows, believing it to be real. Having lost it, she goes to desperate lengths to get enough money to repay its owner. But finally, at the end of the story, she learns that the diamonds are in fact, worthless imitations.

Maupassant’s approach is that of the naturalist writer: direct, detached and almost scientific. His stories are placed before the readers without comment or attempt at psychological depth.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49)

Poe’s stories like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget* and *The Gold Bug* show him as the father of the detective story as it developed in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. He is excellent at portraying the horrible, the psychopathic, the fantastic and the mad. These elements appealed to his romantic imagination and he incorporated them skillfully, making his tales the forerunner of the “psychological thrillers” and the “horror films” which fascinate us. In stories like *The Black Cat*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Gold-Bug*, we find Poe’s imagination at its best, splendidly creating an atmosphere of terror and suspense. After Poe there were many writers who developed this tradition of writing ghost stories and detective fiction. Some of the well-known writers are Willkie Collins (1824-89), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and M. R. James (1862-1936).

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

Kipling is one of the short story writers most Indian students are familiar with. He was born in Bombay and he spent a good part of his life in different parts of India. His writings therefore carry a lot of Indian influence, depicting Indian life and surroundings with a touch of

genius. One of his best stories is *Without Benefit of Clergy*, which is a moving tale of a young Englishman's love for a Muslim girl Ameena in India, and how it ended with the tragic death of their baby and of the girl herself. Some of his best stories are part of his collection, titled *Soldiers Three*. The stories here give a fascinating picture of Indian life under English rule at the end of the nineteenth century.

Among his stories with settings other than India are: *The Finest Story in the World* and *Wireless*. In both, Kipling uses the idea of reincarnation, which again could have been the outcome of the influence of Indian culture and religion on him.

Although Kipling was greatly influenced by India, his writings are often interpreted as being colonial in nature, illustrating the English hegemony - the ideological superiority of the White over the Indians. Yet, his stories are ranked as among the best.

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

As a short story writer, Lawrence added an additional dimension to the art of story writing. Before him, short stories were primarily plot centered, depending on action to sustain their interest. In Lawrence's stories, however, the plot is of secondary importance. What matters is the situation or atmosphere, the evocation of nature and the complex psychological depths of his characters.

The Odour of Chrysanthemums is one story that is typical of Lawrence. It is a moving story of the death of a miner in a pit accident and the bitter effect of this on his mother, wife and children. The atmosphere and the setting are those of Lawrence's own childhood - the harsh poverty - stricken colliery surroundings. *The White Stocking* is a story which illustrates his favourite ideas - sexual jealousy, the hidden conflict between the civilized and the spontaneous side of man. *The Prussian Officer, England and England* and *The Virgin and the Gypsy* are some of his other well-known stories where we find Lawrence exploring the psychological depths of man, studying the life force that expresses itself in so many known and unknown ways.

Talking of storytelling in general, Frank O'Connor wrote, "Story telling is the nearest thing one can get to the quality of a pure lyric poem. It doesn't deal with problems; it doesn't have solutions to offer; it just states the human situation", and this is what we find in the stories of Lawrence. He presents before the readers what could be called "a slice of life" with no comment or value judgment. The plot doesn't altogether disappear in his stories but remains secondary to the situation and the atmosphere.

Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)

Maugham again is a very popular short story writer who is referred to as a “cynical and detached Observer of the strange ways of the world”. His stories range from a novel like *The Letter* down to sketches of two or three pages in length, like *The Raw Material*. The varied settings and the wide variety of characters he portrays reflects his love for travel, his knowledge of places and people. He even served as an agent of British Intelligence in Russia and other places. Many of his earlier stories are based on his spy experiences. Particularly, Maugham is known for his narrative technique - telling a story in the first person.

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)

Katherine Mansfield, the next author we shall discuss here, is one of the most remarkable short story writers of her generation in England. In fact, some critics would even place her among the three or four most important short story writers of the present century. The collections of short stories that have made her famous are: *Bliss*, *The Garden Party*, *The Dove's Nest* and *Something Childish*. As in Lawrence, plot is the least important area of Mansfield's stories and very little happens in her stories. She takes some minor incident of everyday life and builds details into it. The texture of a dress, the effect of light on a tree, the colour of flowers in a vase etc go on to create the atmosphere of her stories. Frequently children appear in many of her stories and she writes of them with understanding. One such story is *The Voyage*, which is a description of a little girl, Fenella, being taken for a sea voyage with her grandmother. Fenella's mother has just died and the child is going to stay with her grandparents for a time. This simple situation, seen through a child's eyes, makes one of her best and most typical short stories.

Mansfield is also good at picturing people who are lonely, misunderstood or social misfits, like Ma Parker in *Life of Ma Parker*, Miss Brill in *Miss Brill*, William in *Marriage a la Mode* or Reggie in *Mr and Mrs Dove*.

H. E. Bates (1905-74)

H. E. Bates published his first story *The Two Sisters* in 1926. He worked as a journalist for some time and later joined the war as a squadron leader. Some of his stories like *The Purple Plain* and *The Jacaranda Tree* show his war experience. But as a writer, H.E. Bates is so varied that it is impossible to describe or categorize him. Sometimes he deals with themes of war. And in stories like *The Mower*, *Dulcima* and *The Wild Cherry Tree*, he shows a Lawrence - like power of inventing “earthy” characters, setting them in an atmosphere of emotional tension. Bates is also known for his fluent, simple style and most of all his understanding of the English

people. In fact, his stories provide us with one of the best and truest pictures of ordinary life in England.

1.2.7 Types of Fiction:

Romantic Fiction

The theme of lovers meeting, separating and finally being reunited has been enduringly popular in western literature. This idea unites diverse works ranging from the romances of Alexandrian Greece circa 2nd Century AD. the Arthurian cycles 13-15 Century AD. the Italian pastorals 14-15 Century AD. to the psychologically realist novels of the 18th and 19th centuries. Popularized through the women's magazine the circulating library and the appearance of the cheap single volume, from the mid-eighteenth century, romantic fiction (both reading and writing) has been the stronghold of women. From this beginning, the genre of romantic fiction has travelled a long way, passing through various incarnations. These have included the lurid melodramas of seduction and ruin of the 18th and 19th centuries, the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century fiction of Marie Corelli, Onida, E. M. Hull, etc. grounded in religious/patriotic/imperialist ideologies. The phenomenal novel of the Deep South and the Civil War, *Gone With The Wind*, 1936 epic popular novels and family sagas such as those by Catherine Gaskin, Danielle Steele, Colleen McCullough, Judith Krantz etc, eventually lead us to the Mills & Boon romances, the Dell and Harlequin romances which flood the market and are avidly devoured by women all over the world.

The romance has been variously described as the "formula of 'love triumphant'", "the domestic romance myth" an "affirmation(s) of the ideals of monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity" etc. A fairly comprehensive definition of romances would be "novels which deal with love rather than sex, with courage rather than cowardice, with clean living rather than crime, with questions of right conduct rather than social problems."

Like other types of popular fiction, romantic fiction also works at a formulaic level, employing certain conventions which are easily identifiable. These conventions work at every point and every level, from the plot to the sentence, from the moral and ideological to the formal and aesthetic.

The vast majority of romances are straightforward and easily definable: set in contemporary times, in places which are easily recognizable (the Australian outback, the English countryside, places in U.S.A. or Canada), with a hero and heroine who are contemporary figures. The settings may be various: the world of fashion designing, the sheep farms of Australia, the

world of big business and jet-setting executives. But there are other types of romantic fiction which are more specialized.

The Historical Romance

These may focus on a particular period, evoking its context and using it as a backdrop, without focusing on a historical character or a major event. Such are the novels of Georgette Heyer (1902-1974) who wrote love stories set in the Regency period of British history using no major historical figure as a character. Writers of other historical romances have chosen to build on the meagre personal details of the private life of historical figures, creating love stories around them - the authenticity of which is highly doubtful. These include the works of Jean Plaidy (1906-1993) who wrote about Mary: Queen of Scots, etc.

Gothic Romances

These, though still love stories, bring with them an element of the Gothic: terror, darkly disturbing atmosphere and a heightened awareness of untold horrors and brooding evil. The happy ending serves to dispel this darkness and gloom and with the declaration of love, there is a break in the evil atmosphere and goodness and light are restored. It is also interesting to note that the heroines who come into this gloom and dark are caught in a nightmare world where they are unsure of everyone, including the hero. Trust building is not possible until the end of the novel. Authors such as Mary Stewart (1916-2014) and Victoria Holt (1906-1993) specialized in Gothic Romances.

Family Sagas

Many authors of romantic fiction have not ended their tales with mutual declarations of love by one couple. Instead, they have written about the love and hate, marriage and the separation and the often almost-incestuous relationships in three generations or more of a single family. These, though still categorized as romantic fiction, do not end in marriage but use the institution of marriage as a way of commenting upon other relationships. Authors such as Catherine Cookson(1906-1998) and Judith Krantz(1928-2019) and Colleen McCullough (1937-2015) are masters at this type of romance.

Other Types

Hospital romances are yet another category among romantic fiction. Set in hospitals and nursing schools, these provide readers with additional pictures of the tender nurturing aspects of the heroine, usually a nurse, though occasionally a doctor.

Some popular romances provide the readers with travelogues - the Middle East, Africa, New Zealand, the far East - all these are explored by various authors even as the story follows the same hackneyed route. But ultimately whatever the type may be, all romantic fiction is moored in explorations of love and sexuality.

New Directions and Developments

Much of what has been discussed in the previous sections is typical of romantic fiction of an earlier day. Though still popular today, it is interesting to note that feminism has had its effect on this form of writing, too. Though most popular romances take a shot or two at feminists by mocking the attitudes of the heroine or by making the hero an out-and-out chauvinist, romances of the last decade and a half have incorporated feminist attitudes. Now the heroines do not automatically give up their careers at the end of the novel. Many novels include a negotiation regarding this before the last embrace. In the way love and marriage is portrayed also a big change has come about - the novels do not end in marriage. Sometimes the ending is left ambiguous because it is clarified that the relationship between the lead pair, though stable in the here and now, may not last forever.

Detective Fiction

Before studying other aspects of the detective story, it is essential to have some idea of what exactly we mean when we speak of the “detective story” as it is also necessary to look at the origins and early examples of the form.

Definitions of detective fiction have varied over the years. Earlier it was defined according to formulaic terms, so if a piece of fiction had all the features of a detective novel/story, it was considered to be one. Today’s, detective fiction is defined in terms of the satisfaction it gives. W. H. Auden defined it thus: “The basic formula is this: (1) a murder occurs (2) many are suspected (3) all but one suspect, (who is the murderer) are eliminated (4) the murderer is arrested or dies” – a definition which interestingly enough does not mention the detective at all. Others have defined it as a form having “an Aristotelian perfection of beginning, middle and end” of being “impeccably classical in form” of differing from other types of fiction in giving the reader “primarily an intellectual satisfaction” and even “the most moral kind of literature there is”.

Detective fiction includes not just detective stories concerned with solving “murder mysteries but also the police story, the spy story and the thriller. Indian Symons, one of the

foremost critics of detective fiction, wrote that in detective stories “interest in the nature of motives for and results of a crime are at the heart of a story”.

Though the detective story is often traced as far back as *The Bible*, these are not really detective fiction, in the sense that the solving of a puzzle is not the principal object of these books. Among the earliest precursors of detective fiction is *Calef Williams* (1794) by William Godwin – a book about a murder, its detection and the unrelenting pursuit by the murderer of the person who discovered his guilt. But the ‘father’ of the detective story is indisputably the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) in the three short stories he wrote with a detective as the ‘hero’ or protagonist “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*”, “*The Mystery of Marie Roget*” and “*The Purloined Letter*”. In these stories, Poe introduced many of the themes and forms that later detective stories would employ. Amongst these is foremost of all, the figure of the brilliant detective M. Dupin - whose brilliance is highlighted through the obtuseness of his friend who tells the story - a convention which was to become one of the main pillars of detective fiction. We find it again in Sherlock Holmes and the characters of Hercule Poirot and his friend Dr. Watson. Themes such as the locked - door mystery, the laying of false clues, the most unlikely person being the murderer etc., are all found in Poe’s stories.

In England, Wilkie Collins wrote the first English detective novel *The Moonstone* (1868), combining “great ingenuity in devising a puzzle with the ability to tell an absorbingly interesting story”. Another writer who created many of the patterns traditionally found in detective fiction was Emile Gaboriau: His detective was a police officer with an amateur as a partner.

Early examples till World War II

The detective story of the twentieth century could not have been what it was without Sherlock Holmes, the greatest of “Great Detectives”, who first appeared in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet* in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual*. Though neither *A Study...* Nor *The Sign of Four* (1890) were accounted successful for detective stories, their main character; Sherlock Holmes was a triumph from his very first appearance in print. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) the creator of Holmes borrowed some of his ideas from Poe and Gaboriau but out of the borrowings he fashioned an original that still towers over the entire range of detectives who have figured in fiction before or since. Though disparaging critics have stigmatized the Sherlock Holmes stories of being “obvious, initiative, trite...” etc., they retain their charm and are read voraciously by admirers not just for the ‘detection’ but also for the atmosphere, and of course for the character of Sherlock Holmes.

Till World War II, the detective short story enjoyed splendid success. During this period (from about 1890 to World War II) some of the greatest practitioners of the detective story were working: G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) whose Father Brown stories continue to hold the attention of readers even today; Ernest Bramah (1868-1942) who showed distinctive originality in creating the blind detective Max Carrades; E.W. Hornung (1866-1921) (who created the criminal hero, A. J. Raffles) and of course, Arthur Conan Doyle, whose short stories about Sherlock Holmes are accounted among the best of all time.

In 1920, there appeared in print Agatha Christie's first novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and with it started a flood of detective novels, many of them by the greatest writers of the form: Agatha Christie (1890-1976), Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), Ellery Queen (1905-1982), Nicholas Blake (the pseudonym of C. Day Lewis (1904-1972)) and Michael Innes (1896-1994) etc. The second quarter of the twentieth century saw many detective novelists churning out detective fiction with amazing prodigality and very little originality. This also caused writers to try and mock the form by writing detective fiction which used the conventions and codes while also mocking them. Though many of the writers of this period continued writing into the next quarter, World War - II marked a turning point in the detective fiction that was written.

Detective Fiction after World War - II

The most significant change that occurred in the world of detective fiction after World War-II was that the "Great Detective" (those in the mould of Sherlock Holmes or Christie's Hercule Poirot) disappeared, or if not, was toned down so much that he was no longer recognizable as a Holmesian figure. Other changes also occurred and the detective story after World War II bore little resemblance to that which existed prior to 1945. From being a "puzzle" it developed into a form which probed psychology and personality patterns, in which sexuality and violence were depicted, often graphically, in all of their manifestations.

Thus, in the last few decades though the detective story continues in its old form, the exciting work has come from writers such as Ruth Rendell (1930-2015), Umberto Eco (1932-2016) or Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) who bring the unfamiliar into the traditional, experimenting with times, themes and backgrounds, investigating and exploring the human personality attitudes towards society etc.

Many detective novel writers have also used the form as a vehicle to examine and comment upon society, its codes and how society, the criminal and the detective are connected. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the society portrayed in detective novels has

undergone a change from one where moral judgements were in black and white, to one where there is no clear ethical or moral system. Increasingly, the change shows a world wherein criminality and corruption are the norm and the detective, though honest and on the side of law and order, has to use the methods of the underworld to achieve the desired results.

Common Characteristics

The figure of the detective has developed considerably from its earliest representation. The earlier version of the detective possessed a keen moral sense and a razor-sharp mind besides being an ethically upstanding citizen. Though the detective of recent years is still morally upright, he is so with the addition of unsentimental toughness and a willingness to bend rules and use loopholes in the system to his own advantage. Where earlier narratives operate because of fair play and sportsmanship, more recent ones have subjected these codes to an ironic subversion.

Types within the Genre

Detective fiction is an ‘umbrella’ term having under it various types and varieties. These include the detective story for children, the thriller, the spy story, the police procedural, the Gothic and of course, the detective ‘puzzle’ narrative or the “whodunit”. Though all of them share certain features, there are also elements which vary: thus the Gothic relies on “atmosphere” to a larger extent than other detective novels, the thriller “builds up tension through crimes” which need not be murder. But which may lead towards murder, the emphasis being on “adventures”, with an element of suspense thrown in the spy-story focuses on threats to national security, professionally organized spying and works on the level of the political besides the moral and the personal.

Science Fiction and Fantasy

The two genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy begin by creating a context in which the fantastic is made plausible. In the world of Science Fiction, this is done through science and the use of technology while in the world of heroic fantasy; the elements of the fantastic arise from magic and wizardry.

Though the term “Science Fiction” (SF) is well known today it was first used in 1851 in the work of William Wilson, where he also gave a brief description of what it was: works “in which the revealed truths of science may be interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and true”.

The very term SF comprises of two parts ‘Science’ and ‘Fiction’. The science in an SF tale may be at various levels in terms of technological advances or hard science, social or human

sciences which may be called the ‘soft’ sciences. The story may be only a framework for introducing the scientific concepts to the reader or the reverse may be true where the fiction may be a melodramatic adventure fantasy with a very flimsy or far-fetched basis in science.

It can however be said that “a work belongs in the genre of science fiction if its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an “organized body of knowledge”. This “organized body of knowledge” may be ‘hard’ science, may be the social sciences, and may even be “scientific” habits of mind”.

In the century after *Frankenstein*, writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy and Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote tales that laid the foundation on which SF would develop in the twentieth century.

Fantasy

The basic motive of Fantasy as a genre is to present and consider the fantastic. Much of literature deals in the fantastic: creating a world of wonder and strangers, but not all such literature can be termed ‘Fantasy’. Fantasy is located at the point at which the writer creates a complete ‘secondary world’, one which may be adjacent to the primary world of reality but which functions according to its own laws and principles. The world of Fantasy may be peopled by talking animals, strange creatures, enchanted weapons, terrifying witches, wizards, etc. But this secondary world cannot be whimsical and arbitrary in the way it works. It has to function with consistency and logic and though its rules may not resemble the rules of the ‘real’ world, they are nonetheless seen as operating inescapably.

Fantasy has its roots in early religious systems and mythologies and epic literature. With the rise of Christianity, many of these were altered, some devalued, others had Christian elements incorporated into their earlier forms, etc. but they survived as legends, folklore and fairy tales. The tales of pre-Christian Northern Europe (The Celtic and Scandinavian) are the earliest precursors of the genre of fantasy as it is known today. *The Prose Edda*, *The Volsung Saga* and *Beowulf* are the ancestors of Fantasy.

1.3 Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the Unit, you should be able to:

- know the origin of fiction in English

- identify some novelists from different periods
 - know different types of fiction and novels
 - familiarize themselves with short fiction and its evolution
 - discuss in detail the origin of English novel, short story and various salient features of fiction in English
-

1.4 Glossary

Bildungsroman: A novel that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood

Bronte Sisters: Three English novelists—Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte and Anne Bronte—known with pseudonyms Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, Acton Bell respectively

Gothic novel: A pseudomedieval fiction having a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror

Picaresque novel: A fictional work that depicts adventures of a roguish but appealing hero from low social class

Romanticism: A movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual

Realism: A literary movement that stresses on the faithful representation of reality in works of art and literature

Satire: A humorous way of criticizing people or ideas to show that they have faults or are wrong, often using exaggeration, irony, and other devices

Sentimental novel: A novel that exploits the reader's capacity for tenderness, compassion, or sympathy to a disproportionate degree

Victorian period: The period of Queen Victoria's reign, from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901.

Wit: The ability to use words in an amusing and intelligent way

1.5 Sample Questions

1.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Sydney's *Arcadia* appeared in the year _____.
2. Ann Radcliffe is known for _____.
3. *Tristram Shandy* is a novel by _____.
4. Which novel is NOT written by Jane Austen
 - (a) *Pride and Prejudice* (b) *Sense and Sensibility*
 - (c) *The Vicar of Wakefield* (d) *Emma*
5. Who is NOT a modern novelist _____ .
 - (a) James Joyce (b) D.H. Lawrence
 - (c) Virginia Woolf (d) Horace Walpole
6. Match the following:

(A)	(B)
(a) P.G. Wodehouse	(i) <i>The Lord of the Flies</i>
(b) Aldous Huxley	(ii) <i>The Man with Two Left Feet and Other Stories</i>
(c) George Orwell	(iii) <i>Brave New World</i>
(d) William Golding	(iv) <i>Animal Farm</i>
7. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is published in the year _____.
 - (a) 1813 (b) 1919
 - (c) 1731 (d) 1819
8. Match the real name of Bronte Sisters with their penname.

(A)	(B)
(a) Currer Bell	(i) Charles Bronte
(b) Ellis Bell	(ii) Ellis Bronte
(c) Acton Bell	(iii) Anne Bronte
9. George Eliot's first published novel is _____ .
10. Name the author of short story *The Necklace*.
 - (a) Maupassant (b) Edgar Allan Poe
 - (c) Rudyard Kipling (d) Thomas Hardy

1.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a brief note on social novel.
2. Bring out the contributions of women to the English novel.
3. Discuss life and works of any two Victorian novelists.
4. Explain Science Fiction and Fantasy.

5. Romantic fiction in English. Discuss.

1.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on the origin of the English novel.
2. Discuss salient features of the Modern novel.
3. Explain the evolution of short story in English.

1.6 Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, Meyer Howard, and Geoffrey Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2014.
2. Caserio, Robert L., and Clement Hawes, eds. *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
3. Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
4. Richetti, John. *The English Novel in History 1700-1780*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
5. Trotter, David. *English Novel in History, 1895-1920*. Routledge, 2003.

Unit – 2: Life and Works of Emily Bronte

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

Structure

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2.0 Introduction

One biographer of Emily Bronte (1818 – 1848), Lyn Pykett writes: “The life of Emily Brontë is shrouded in mystery”, and she remains an “elusive and mysterious figure”, despite the efforts of her latest and most scrupulous biographer, Edward Chitham, to “unravel the myths and legends that have surrounded her life and work” (1). The life of Emily Brontë who lived just for thirty years, is no less than another novel – woven with different themes of family, childhood, adulthood, love, romance, death, creativity, etc. Her life is as gripping, revealing, interesting, complex, and affectionate as her novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and poems. Her struggle for survival, literary space and fate can be seen through her biography and works. This resulted in making Emily one of the most famous writers and her novel as one of the classic novels of all times in the history of English literature. Emily, like her sisters Charlotte and Anne, wrote a single novel that has received immense success. Although they had to struggle to write and get it

published because of patriarchal perceptions and social and literary conventions, she grappled with circumstances and got through. Fate also did not support Emily like Christopher Marlowe and she also died around the age of thirty. John Hewish writes in his preface to *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (1996), “Emily Brontë died young. Such unfulfilled prodigies present special difficulties of judgment. But difficulties arise also from the person and writer she was. Her work is introspective and is characterized by a clash between a rigid and orthodox moral background and a tendency to emotional extremes. The cryptic, private expression of her moral originality in the poems resembles [William] Blake’s” (9). Despite all the difficulties that Emily faces, she left her footprints on English literature. Studying such a genuine, inspiring, classic, and interesting personality would certainly enhance one’s ability to understand the complexities in English society, while also serving as a means to nurture creativity, and derive inspiration from everyday life.

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- introduce the Victorian society and how women writers emerged on the literary scene and in English society in particular with special reference to Emily Brontë and her two sisters Charlotte and Anne.
 - introduce a brief history of the Victorian Age (1837-1901) and how women writers emerged on literary screen not only in England but also in some of the major world languages and cultures.
 - cover a brief history of women’s writing in England and how the Brontë sisters contributed to the vast fabric of English literature.
 - provide a detailed biographical, intellectual, and literary account of Emily as one of the earliest woman novelists and as a poet.
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2.2 Life and Works of Emily Brontë

2.2.1 The Historical Background to Women’s Writing:

England has had many learned women . . . and yet where are the poetesses? ...

I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none.

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Creative writing was not considered a suitable profession or a cup of tea for women for centuries. This intellectual experiment was consciously and unconsciously dissociated from a normal vocation and discouraged for women in all cultures and traditions. The patriarchal assumptions and gender roles always perceived and projected women as mere objects of beauty and the vice president of domestic affairs. These are some of the reasons for the lack of visibility of women writers in history. If one excavates literary history, one finds remarkable female writers amidst such a discouraging environment. In ancient Greece Sappho (c. 630 – c. 570 BCE) was a well-known poetess. She was also considered as the “tenth muse” for her Hellenistic lyrical style. She was one of the earlier women writers who were somehow documented but most of her poems were lost. In Rome, Sulpicia wrote satires and poems in 1st BC in Latin. Similarly, in the early days of Islamic revival, the Arabian Peninsula witnessed the emergence of some courtly Muslim poetess. There must have been some more poetesses or women writers in history, but because of the lack of documentation awareness, they dissolved into the history of inattention. One of the notable poetesses was Al Khansa (Tumadirbint Amr Ibn al Harith ibn al-Sharid al Sulamiyah) of 7th century AD who wrote *marsia*/elegies. She was also considered a poetess of the pre-Islamic and the early Islamic time. It was a tradition in some of the Arab tribes to sing elegies on the death of a person. As she was the composer of those – she received acclaim and fame. She has also sung elegies for Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in Medina and accepted Islam. Ali Samer writes,

“In retrospect we can discern four overlapping persona types for poetesses in the Middle Ages: the grieving mother/sister/daughter (al-Khansā’, al-KhirniqbintBadr, and al-Fāri‘ahbintShaddād), the warrior-diplomat (al-Hujayjah), the princess (al-Ḥurqah, ‘Ulayyahbint al-Mahdī, and Walladahbint al-Mustakfī), and the courtesan-ascetic (‘Arīb, Shāriyah, and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawīyah). Rābi‘ah’s biography in particular projects a paradoxical persona that embodies the complementary opposites of sexuality and saintliness”. (653)

Qusmina bint Ismail around the 11th century Al-Andalus was another women writer who wrote in Arabic and believed in Judaism. The Chinese culture has similar examples too, Xue Tao (c770-832) was a poetess and a courtesan of the Tang Dynasty (618 to 907 AD). This period was

considered as the golden age for poetry in Chinese literature representing a remarkable number of poets (more than 2000), because poetry was considered as a means of knowledge and those who could read and write poetry were eligible to appear and qualify for the civil service exams. Poetry was regarded as a source of knowledge; therefore some women also took part in writing and reading. Akka Mahadevi (1130-1160 AD) was a mystic poetess from the Kannada language in India. She was considered as one of the ancient women writers coming from the Indian scenario. Similarly, many languages of the world witnessed the sparks and invisible presence of women writers. But unfortunately, only 'his-story' was documented, and 'her-story' was neglected in the literary history.

Like other cultures and languages, in English (England, Scotland, and Ireland) too, there was no visible presence of women writers till the late 17th century. This does not mean that women were not experimenting with their hands in the clay of literature. They were writing one of the best, finest, outstanding and classical texts in English literature. There was a rich and diverse tradition of writing by women writers in English starting from Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Delarivière Manly (1663-1724), Fanny Burney (1752-1840) Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797) et al. to Patricia Hall (aka Maureen O'Connor), A.S. Byatt (Dame Antonio Susan Duffy) and present-day women writers in English from different part of the world.

During the late 18th century, a fresh interest emerged in literary scholarship and some attention was paid to trace women's voices in literature and society. Interestingly, this interesting feminist literary historiography came from men such as John Duncombe and George Ballard. George Ballard published *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writing or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts, and Sciences* in 1752 and Duncombe's *Feminead* published in 1754. Mary Scott was one of the earliest gynocritics to engage in history, evolution, and evaluation of women's writings. Her *Female Advocate: A Poem Occasioned by Reading Mr. Duncombe's Feminead* (1774) tried to trace the history of flourishing women writers and it also studied how Duncombe looked at past women writers. Another important attempt to historicize and document women's writing was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792). This was one of the earliest critical treatises on women's education and rational independence. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) highlights the social and literary injustice that happened to women, how she lacks the agency of choice and economy. She uses the room as a metaphor for women's

autonomy and writes: “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”. Dale Spender’s *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986) tried to trace some important writers who were neglected before Jane Austen. Many women writers of the early writing in English wrote under disguise, pseudonyms, and anonymously because women were not easily given space in literary circles. It was also to avoid direct criticism and hide identity. Leah Orr observes,

Surveying the use of names on title pages reveals that approximately 50 percent of the fiction in the period 1660–1750 lists no author on the title page, and a further 20 percent has another tagline or pseudonym (and so is functionally anonymous). This corresponds with Raven’s finding that “over 80 percent of all new novel titles published between 1750 and 1790 were published anonymously.” {Raven “Anonymous Nvel” page 60} With so many anonymous works, eighteenth-century readers could not rely on the identification of known writers to determine whether a work claiming to be true was indeed factual. (80)

Even gaining a space in a literary circle, women’s writing was feminized and considered as loaded with feminist sensibilities, emotion, irrationality, exoticism, romance, etc. But in reality, the writings of women- explored the unexplored areas of the human psyche, society, and experiences which deserted for centuries, not yet explored or unavailable in the mainstream patriarchal imaginations and discourses. Their writing was multi-directional and more advanced, realist, and engaging these were some reasons their writing was recognized and celebrated lately and posthumously. The Brontë sisters are one of the earliest and finest examples of this claim. When Emily and her sisters also wanted to get published as authors, they had to face many difficulties from the readers, publishers, critics, and also from society. Many times writers wanted to depict the naked realities of society and life but how far society would accept those realities and that too the realities projected by the women writer who is no longer considered as capable of writing and intellectual exercise. To skip the social criticism after mirroring social realities could also be the reason women of this time wrote under pseudonyms.

Although Emily wrote a single novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) under the pseudonym Ellis Bell – it became one of the greatest works of English literature. Her writing was of excellent quality; in fact, it was beyond the creative and intellectual compass of her time.

Therefore, when she wrote her novel, it was no longer considered as her own since she was a woman. One of the critics writes:

M. Heger's initial opinion of Emily's timidity is the nature of the language which he uses to describe his sense of her qualities. His admiration for Emily's imagination, reason, argumentative skill, resilience and determination can only, it seems, be expressed in terms of a masculine language of domination. Emily Brontë repeatedly poses this problem to commentators caught in this linguistic and cultural trap. Male discourse is not simply the dominant discourse, it is also a discourse of domination in which originality, argumentative *power*, *the force* of reason, etc. are linguistically represented as masculine qualities. The woman who possesses such 'powers' is thus almost inevitably spoken of as masculine. Hence, Emily 'should have been a man', she is nicknamed 'The Major' and serves as the model for Charlotte's ambiguously named heroine Shirley (who refers to herself as 'Captain Keeldar'), and she is the stuff of which 'heroes' are made" (Pykett 15).

But there were also a handsome number of women writers who were also being criticized because of their writing within the existing framework of dominant stereotypes about women. The Victorian English novelist George Elliot(1819-1880) criticized such a notion of writing. She also criticizes those women novelists of her time in her anonymous essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists". She dislikes the writing which is loaded with sensibilities, sensuality, romance, feelings, and emotional fantasies.

The subjugation of women was common in English patriarchal society, although the Victorian Age was named after the then Queen of England Victoria. On the one hand science, modernization, and industrialization were taking place and poverty, predicaments, and exploitation of deprived classes of society continued. Women, children, and the poor were the most affected people. Amidst this, the discouraging women from literary spaces also continued. Lyn Pykett in her biography *Emily Brontë* writes, "Despite, or perhaps because of, the growing number of women writers – particularly novelists - in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many commentators still thought that writing for a living was an intrinsically unwomanly activity." She continues:

When Charlotte Brontë sent some of her poems to Robert Southey, in 1837 she was sternly reminded that 'literature cannot be the business of a woman's life,

and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it' (LL I, 155). Even in 1850, George Henry Lewes offered this 'Gender Hint to Writing Women': 'Women's proper sphere of activity is elsewhere. Are there no husbands, lovers, brothers, friends to coddle and console? Are there no stockings to darn, no purses to make, no braces to embroider? My idea of a perfect woman is one who can write but won't' (Pykett 14).

Despite this rigid and conservative male chauvinist atmosphere, writers like the Brontë sisters emerged and gained 'a room of their own'. Their writing and lives are one of the leading episodes of the struggle and existence of women writers on the shabby pages of literary history.

2.2.2 The Brontë Sisters:

In 1812, Maria Branwell (essayist) married Patrick Brunty (Irish author and teacher) who later changed his name Brunty to the Brontë. Theirs was a poor family and had five daughters, out of which only Charlotte, Emily, and Anne survived. These three sisters are known as the Brontë Sisters in English literature. They were well-known poets and novelists. Their brother was also a painter and writer. The family was torn by poverty and faced many deadly diseases, such as tuberculosis, cancer, and typhoid. Their mother died of cancer when these kids were just counting the milestone of ten years of their age. Since Maria died at an early, the children grew without a mother with a middle-aged father and her aunt. They faced many difficulties in life. "Their attitudes to their home were mixed and provide an interesting of a special example of the position of women in the early Victorian period: they combined intense attachment and pride, with tension and revolt: 'pleasure and I had never met', relates Crimsworth, in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*, 'no indulgence of hers had enervated or sated one faculty of my nature. Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time.'" (Hewish 25). Mr. Brontë was also a clergyman, which had somehow improved the family's social status. This has also affected the life of Mr. Brontë and her daughters. John Hewish observes:

The atmosphere of the sisters' upbringing and their social background was thus profoundly influenced by the last great religious movement in England and by that earlier manifestation of Puritanism, Methodism (which influenced Mr. Brontë's own early life: it was the religion of his relatives by marriage and was strong in Yorkshire). This spiritual revival was related to romanticism. (23)

After the death of Maria, their aunt looked after the children and Emily was sent to join two her sisters to Boarding school. The situation in school can be seen through the description of the Lowood School in the autobiographical novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte. Like many early English women writers, these Brontë sisters also wrote under a pseudonym; Charlotte as Currer Bell, Anne as Acton Bell, and Emily as Ellis Bell. One of the notable works Charlotte is her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). This Bildungsroman is one of the best fictional writings of English which describes the moral, social, and psychological development of Jane. Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1847) one of the best novels in English. Anne also wrote a novel, *Agnes Grey*, in the same year. And importantly, these works left a legacy of the all-time best works of English literature.

2.2.3 Emily Brontë:

Emily was born on July 30, 1818 in the village of Thornton, industrial moorland of Yorkshire 18th C. England. She was the second youngest child in her family before Anna and after Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Barnwell. The first two daughters died because of different diseases which swiped a school which they attended. When Emily was three years old, her father got a job as a curate in Howarth. The children sent to Clergy Daughter's School at Crown Bridge, which became a site of abuse and suffering, which also became the theme of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. Emily received a very less formal education. Her schooling experience was a hurting and tragic part of her life because this school took the life of her two sisters. Byron, Shelly, and Walter Scott were her favourite writers, therefore one can see the Byronian influence on some of her poems. This was the time the Brontë siblings started composing poems and stories in their imaginary land of Angria and Gondal. While studying, "Charlotte and Branwell worked together on the chronicles of Angria, while Emily and Anne collaborated in the saga's production of Gondal, a fictional island whose myths and legends were to preoccupy the two sisters throughout their lives" (Pykett 5).

Death was another dominant shadow of her family. After her mother's untimely death, her two sisters also died quite early, before the age of five. Many children in England died out of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, work hazards, and deadly diseases. Joyce Irene Whalley, author of *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, points out that "infant mortality was high [1700–1900] and the number of children surviving in any one family was usually small, [with] many infants dying before they were five years old". She expressed the gruesome reality in all levels of society that even the

most gentle and loving parent shunned the thought of the vulnerability of youth” (qtd in Rogers 42).

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were notorious for children, as we have seen in many works writers tried to depict the stark realities of childhood, predicaments, struggle, sufferings, and pain of children in growing industrial economies and life-constricting poverty. The growing demand for labor in industries forced children and females to face cruelties and exploitation in the workplace. Some of the works of this time depict the moralities and savage doctrines at schools and other conditions of children such as *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* by Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot). And of course, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is the finest example of the children of Victorian middle and lower class in society, at schools, and in families. The character of Mr. Brocklehurst represents Victorian morality, which is steeped in patriarchy. He said, “My mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young person’s before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off.”

Emily was also a teacher for some time. She taught at the Law Hill School and moved to Brussels along with Charlotte to study a foreign language. She taught at the Pension Heger School in Brussels and returned to Howarth in 1842.

2.2.4 *Wuthering Heights*: A Novel of Emily Brontë

Her only novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is one of the best and classical novels of English literature because of its gripping story, interweaving narration, gothic setting, romance, love, passion, and hate. The origin and source of this novel can be traced back to the Gondal and moorland of Yorkshire. Initially, it was not appreciated instead received “terrible reviews when first published but came to be considered one of the finest novels in the English language” (Tompkins). It has multiple narrative techniques, flashbacks, first-person point of view, symbolism, etc. It was an unconventional novel. John Hewish points out that “Emily Brontë as a novelist could hardly have been less of a realist, but her materials in *Wuthering Heights* combine regional and literary elements. The melodramatic setting of the parsonage, between the churchyard and the moorland paradigm of elemental nature, seems appropriate just at this period: it embodies the intellectual and spiritual preoccupations of the early nineteenth century” (24).

The detailed introduction to this novel along with characterizations, themes, and critical appreciation is given in proceeding units of this book. [see next units]

2.2.5 Poems of Emily Brontë:

Apart from the classical success of her only novel *Wuthering Heights*, Emily has also composed around 200 poems, plays, and essays. Her poems were somehow preserved but plays and other works set in the imaginary land of Gondal lost. C. W. Hatfield published a collection of poems by Emily Brontë in 1941 as *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*. Like stories and juvenilia, the Brontë sisters were also composing poems which were published as a collection of poems by Charlotte, Emily, and Anne under the pseudonyms *Poems of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846). Like her novel, these poems neither fetched her instant popularity nor were even recognized as poems.

As Lyn Pykett observes Emily Brontë's poems are also dramatic as her fiction. "The Gondal poems, and what little we can reconstruct of their context in the Gondal narrative, reveal Emily Brontë as a chameleon poet, creating and experimenting with a variety of dramatized situations, moods, and emotions. This is not to say that the Gondal poems are thoroughly dramatized in the manner, for example, of dramatic poems of the later Victorian poet Robert Browning"(18). Some of her poems also resemble a romantic tradition which may result from her liking of Shelly and Byron. Although the Romantic tradition was much inclusive and celebrated for breaking the conventions, the perceptions about women and their writing were reserved in the favor of patriarchy. In this age, women "inspire poetry, either as Muse or as a feminized Nature, but she does not write it, because she is excluded from the role of 'speaking subject' which is identified as male" (Pykett 18). But her poems were finding space in poetry to skip this reality of barring women, thus creating alternate selves in the literary space. Her poems were also inspiring, motivating, transcending souls, liberty, etc. Emily writes

I'm happiest when most away
I can bear my soul from its home of clay
On a windy night when the moon is bright
And the eye can wander through worlds of light -
When I am not and none beside -
Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky -
But only spirit wandering wide
Through infinite immensity.

(H 44,63) [qtd in Pykett 22]

In her poems, she cradled between reality and escape from reality and from Romanticism to Victorianism. She led a path for women, slightly bifurcating from the existing male tradition of poetry. “She steers a path between the dominant male tradition and the marginalized female tradition, between the female tradition of didactic fiction, which invoked duty to God, the family and the community, and the alternative traditions of Gothic and a poetic of the free spirit”. (35 Pykett).

Emily’s first twenty poems appeared in the collection of three sisters titled *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846). Their poems have not attracted the attention of the readers and have received two loosely written reviews. This may be because of the theme, style, and gender of the poetry which was new to the conventional readers and writers of her time. She faced multiple problems such as a lacking female English poetic tradition and writing against the conventional male-dominant poetic flow. These could be the reason for their unpopularity of poems during her lifetime. Pykett writes, “Emily Brontë’s poetry provides a very interesting case study of a particular woman in a particular time, place, and culture, trying to work within particular poetic conventions, and particular definitions of poetry” (37). Another reason could be Emily’s poems were realists as a counter-narrative to the existing romantic vision of poetry of the eighteenth century. Her poetry can also be called transition poetry between Romanticism to Victorian realism.

The poems of Emily are also lyrical and known for their originality and simplicity. Initially, Emily divided her poems into two categories Gondal poems and non-Gondal poems. The Gondal was an imaginary place for the Brontë sisters to use their creativity, feeling, and expressions. It has a literary, personal, and social significance in their lives. As Hewish points out it was “siblings’ dream-worlds” (31) and isolation from the outer Victorian world to nurture inner feelings and imaginations. This “Isolation is both vantage-point and prison”. (31) As Emily writes in one of her poems:

A little while, a little while,
The noisy crowd are barred away;
And I can sing and I can smile
A little while I’ve holiday!

There is also a dramatization of their inner life, which is further reflected in their novels. Hewish wrote Gondal is a “growth of an imagination, of a cosmos, and an idealized, yet

pessimistic conception of human relationships that was extended into *Wuthering Heights*” (31). Apart from the childhood imaginary invention, the construction of imagined Gondal is also a result of her gender being a woman. As, for women and her expressions, the Victorian society was not accommodative thus the Gondal became her a private space for her abundance of feelings, expressions, childhood and adult woman’s fantasies of the Victorian society, and creative and complex compositions. Lyn Pykett argues that, “Gender may well have played an important part in the construction of the Gondal framework. Ideas about gender have certainly played a key role in the critical debate about Gondal. On the whole, the anti-Gondalianssee Emily Brontë’s poetry about the dominant –patriarchal-literary tradition, and they emphasize and value those aspects of the poet’s work which fit most coherently into this tradition” (40). Fanny Ratchford observes that “Gondal is ‘a tightly knit epic of the free, wild, grotesque world of imagination which nourished Emily’s creative genius and brought it to its fruition’, has been taken up enthusiastically, if rather loosely, by recent feminist critics” (qtd in Pykett 41).

Emily has written few lyrical poems. Some of her known poems include ‘The Prisoner’, ‘No Coward Soul is mine’, ‘Remembrance’, ‘The Philosopher’, ‘Stars’, etc. One of the first Gondal poems by Emily is ‘What winter floods’:

What winter floods, what showers of spring
 Have drenched the grass by night and day;
 And yet, beneath that spectre ring,
 Unmoved and undiscovered lay

A mute remembrance of crime,
 Long lost, concealed, forgot for years,
 It comes at last to cancel time,
 And waken unavailing tears. (H96)

One of her famous poems is ‘No Coward Soul is mine’. This poem shows her boldness, firmness, and proud feeling of her being herself.

No coward soul is mine
 No trembler in the world’s storm-troubled sphere
 I see Heaven’s glories shine
 And Faith shines equal, arming me from Fear

O God within my breast,
Almighty ever-present deity
Life, that in me hast rest,
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee
Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears

Though earth and moon were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be
And Thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath

And what thou art may never be destroyed (Sourced from: "*Poetry Foundation*")

John Hewish also noted few poems of Emily. These are some poems which show Emily's love towards nature and hope:

There is a spot 'mid barren hills
Where winter howls and driving rain,

But if the dreary tempest chills,
There is a light that warms again.
The house is old; the trees are bare
And moonless bends the misty dome
But what on earth is half so dear,
So longed for as the hearth of home?

Her other poem also depicts the theme of escape from day to day world to her imagined world.
Rather she asks,

Shall I go there? Or shall I seek
Another clime, another sky,
Where tongues familiar music speak
In accents dear to memory?
Yes, as I mused, the naked room,
The flickering firelight died away
And from the midst of cheerless gloom
I passed to bright, unclouded day-
A little and a lone green lane
That opened on a common wide;
A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain
Of mountains circling every side . . . (qtd in Hewish 50)

Charlotte and Anna also sued to write poems. Charlotte Brontë's "The Bluebell" also reflects the Gondal as a comfort zone and exile from the real world.

The bluebell is the sweetest flower
That waves in summer air;
Its blossoms have the mightiest power
To soothe my spirit's care.
There is a spell in purple heath
Too wildly, sadly dear;
The violet has a fragrant breath,
But fragrance will not cheer.

The trees are bare; the sun is cold,

And seldom, seldom seen;
The heavens have lost their zone of gold
And earth its robe of green;

And ice upon the glancing stream
Has cast its sombre shade
And distant hills and valleys seem
In frozen mists arrayed.
The bluebell cannot charm me now
The heath has lost its bloom,
The violets in the glen below
They yield no sweet perfume.

But though I mourn the heather-bell
'Tis better far away;
I know how fast my tears would swell
To see it smile to-day; (qtd in Hewish 51-52)

Here the bluebell represents the pleasantness as to escape from the summer, which also symbolizes the Victorian outer world/society. Their poems and imaginations also serve as lullabies for their cradle between the harshness of life and the smoothness of imagination. John Hewish also asserts, "Childhood's enduring hold on adult Victorian women has seldom been more strikingly revealed, or the Brontës' ability to move from unpleasant reality to fantasy" (76). By setting their stories in childhood imagined land – Gondal and Angria the Brontë sisters wanted to escape "some restrictions of the culturally conditioned female voice (Pykett 46). Emily has created many personas in the Gondal which are part of her repressed self and extended personality. These characters, especially women like Angelica and Augusta Geraldine Almeda aka A.G.A. are powerful, assertive, and bold. In fact, AGA was her favorite heroine. She was also referred to as Rosina/Princess of Alcona.

To conclude, like Emily Dickinson, the significance and relevance of the poem of Emily Brontë were realized after a long pause in her death. Her genuine and uniqueness was beyond her time. Her style was not common. As Janet Gezari, an editor of Emily's poems in her *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems*(2007) rightly calls her as belonging to the "forerunners of high

modernism” (Janet Gezari 1). Like Emily, her poetry was also free and self-motivated. Janet further points out that, “As a writer, Emily Brontë didn’t suffer from either an anxiety of influence or an anxiety of authorship. In her poems, she succeeded in authorizing herself as the subject of her own experience, apparently without wondering whether that experience was eccentric and trivial or, contrarily, profoundly relevant to others” (1-2).

2.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the present Unit you should have an understanding of the brief history of women’s writing in English fiction in particular. You should also be familiar with Emily Bronte and her contribution to English fiction. The Unit introduced her and her fiction. While introducing her works, we also introduced you to her storytelling techniques, style of writing poetry, theme, and the significance of her imagined place (Gondal) in her life and in her literary career.

2.4 Glossary

Autobiographical Novel: An autobiographical novel contains most of the actual events, settings, biographical details as it is or similar/parallel to those of the author. Thus, the life of the main character resembles the life of the author.

Bildungsroman: Bildungsroman is derived from the German two words ‘bildung’ meaning education and ‘roman’ meaning novel. It focuses on a formative development of the protagonist/s’ psychological, moral and physical development. The character keeps on gaining varied experiences and grows towards maturity or as a mature person.

Feminism and Womanism: Feminism is a social and political movement to champion women’s rights, equality, and justice. It also aims to dismantle the gendered roles and stereotypes in society. But in 1983, an American writer and scholar Alice Walker distanced from feminism and coined womanism. She argues that feminism is being racialized and black women are not considered as women, thus their issues remained untouched and discussed under this category. The rights of women mean the rights of only white women. The colored women’s concerns and issues were neglected in white feminist scholarship. Although she comes up with this term

concerning black women, it has broader relevance to cover all women. It is a social framework to focus on womanhood and women's inclusive discourse and development.

Gothic novel: A Gothic novel is written with the themes of horror, romance, death, and ghosts. It also covers the mysterious or supernatural elements with the setting in dark – abandoned exotic and grotesque places.

Gynocriticism: Gynocriticism is a literary term coined by feminist thinker Elaine Showalter in 1979. She used this term to study women's writing critically, focusing on women as a writer. "Gynocriticism established the historical study of women writers as a legitimate field of academic inquiry and developed to encompass a broad range of methodologies of reading women's writing" (Source: *Willy Online*)

Juvenilia: A juvenilia is a literary form of children. It is written by children between the age of ten to eighteen while dealing with the issues of their age, conflicts, and developments. It is also written by modern writers dealing with the issue of teens. Some of the best-known modern fictions of this category are *The Silver Chair* by C.S. Lewis and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

Stream of Consciousness novel: Streams of consciousness novels are those which have eponymous narrative techniques. It is a modern way of storytelling in a novel. It was initially championed by novelists like D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, et al. These kinds of novels deal with the physical and mental activities of the character(s) and mostly unveil the inner workings of the consciousness and subconscious drives of the characters.

2.5 Sample Questions

2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The collection of poems titled *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846) is written by _____.
(a) Emily Brontë (b) Charlotte Brontë
(c) Anne Brontë (d) All of the above
2. How many Emily's poems included in the collection *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (1846)
(a) 20 (b) 10

- (c) 50 (d) 200
3. The Gondal is _____.
- (a) Located in South London
 (b) Located in Ireland
 (c) Imaginary place
 (d) A character in the novel of Emily
4. Match the correct pairs:
- | | | |
|------|--------------|-------------------|
| i. | Currer Bell | a. Emily |
| ii. | Acton Bell | b. Charlotte |
| iii. | Ellis Bell | c. Anne |
| iv. | George Eliot | d. Mary Ann Evans |
- (a) i – a, ii – b, iii – c, iv – d
 (b) i – b, ii – c, iii – a, iv – d
 (c) i – c, ii – b, iii – a, iv – d
 (d) i – d, ii – c, iii – b, iv – a
5. Emily was born in _____.
- (a) 1819 (b) 1818
 (c) 1820 (d) 1821
6. Emily Brontë died of _____
- (a) Cholera (b) Cancer
 (c) Depression (d) Tuberculosis
7. Which of the following is not a poem written by Emily Brontë
- (a) The Prisoner (b) No Coward Soul is mine
 (c) The Philosopher (d) The Bluebell
8. *Jane Eyre* is written by
- (a) Currer Bell (b) Acton Bell
 (c) Ellis Bell (d) All of the above
9. Which of the following critics says that the Gondal is a dream-world of the Brontë siblings?
- (a) Janet Gezari (b) Lyn Pykett
 (c) John Hewish (d) Leah Orr
10. Which of the following works is not written by women writers:

- (a) *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writing or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts, and Sciences* 1752
- (b) *Female Advocate: A Poem Occasioned by Reading Mr. Duncombe's Feminead* (1774)
- (c) *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792)
- (d) *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986)

2.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What are the characteristic features of Emily Brontë's poetry?
2. Who were the contributors to the Gondal?
3. Write briefly about literary work produced by Emily's family.
4. Why was women's writing not recognized for centuries?
5. Who was the sister of Emily Brontë and discuss why she was famous in English literature?

2.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Briefly sketch the social and literary atmosphere for women writers and their emergence on the literary scene?
2. What is the role and significance of Gondal in the life of Emily Brontë?
3. What are the factors that influenced and encouraged Emily's creativity at childhood?

2.6 Suggested Readings

1. Arthur Pollard, ed., *The Victorians*. Peter Bedrick Books, 1987.
2. Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England*, Penguin; 3rd Revised edition, 2000.
3. David Daiches, *A Critical History Of English Literature - Volume I, II, III, & IV* Supernova Publishers; 1st edition 2011.
4. Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë—(Women Writers)* Macmillan Education Limited. 1989.
5. Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890*, Routledge, 1994.

Unit - 3: *Wuthering Heights*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Objectives

3.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Background, Plot, Characters

3.2.1 Background

3.2.2 Plot

3.2.3 Characters

3.3 Learning Outcomes

3.4 Glossary

3.5 Sample Questions

3.6 Suggested Readings

3.0 Introduction

Wuthering Heights (1847) is considered an important novel for its highly imaginative literary expression which solely rests on revenge and romantic love. Emily Bronte wrote this novel under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. *Wuthering Heights* narrates the story of two families of the landed aristocracy living on the West Yorkshire moors. Besides the novelist's thematic concerns, it also vividly presents the accurate portrayal of life that offers glimpses of history. The novel's literary merit in its lyrical prose, distinct structure, style, and narrative technique made uproar among the literary circles of the era to be counted among a few canonical texts.

The novel is known for its rich and complex structure. It presents two generations of characters and narrators that control the unravelling events of the novel. During the initial publication of *Wuthering Heights*, many readers found themselves confused, and considered reading challenging because of an improbable plot that enacted passionate characters in a remote landscape. The readers of the era were not familiar with this sort of literary expression. Many critics and readers considered it has exciting, powerful, and unique creation despite its unconventionality. The principal protagonists are infused with a strong sense of realism.

***Wuthering Heights* is Centred on three Most Important Aspects:**

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is structurally considered as a Gothic novel. In her childhood, the gothic novel as a genre was celebrated like never before; because of that, Emily was heavily influenced by Gothic novels tradition. She wrote *Wuthering Heights* by employing gothic elements prevalent in her time. She created a creepy environment, supernatural scenes, uncanny plots and wild and dark characters in *Wuthering Heights* to create a magnum opus of her own.

Wuthering Heights is famously known for the celebrated fictional couples it had portrayed in the fiction of all times. The couple Heathcliff and Catherine are compared with Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. While the love of Romeo and Juliet is separated by society, Heathcliff and Catherine's passionate nature is responsible for the failure of their union. It is this aspect of representation that attracted the readers to *Wuthering Heights*.

The novel's framing device is one of the experimentative techniques used by the novelist to tell a story. It is a narrative involving a story within a story by two narrators, namely Mr. Lockwood and Mrs. Nelly Dean, to offer the outsider and the insider perspectives of *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange.

3.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to read and understand the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte
- to critically evaluate the text from various thematic concerns of the novel
- to acquaint you with the literary background
- to evaluate the narrative strategies used by the novelist
- to provide the details of historical and literary landscapes of the 19th century England

3.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Background, Plot, Characters

3.2.1 Background

Wuthering Heights, the only novel by Emily Bronte, was published in 1847. She published this novel under the pen name Ellis Bell. She confined her life to the village of Haworth, Yorkshire, till her last breath. Her passion for Yorkshire and its landscape takes a literary expression in the novel *Wuthering Heights*. The novel was written and published in the Victorian period that did not accept the harsh realities and violent characters in the literary representation. But subsequent audiences accepted the unsavoury aspects of human life in literature. Charlotte Bronte was the first person to praise the novel publicly. She became the foremost critic by writing a preface and introduction to the second edition of the novel in 1850 after the death of Emily Bronte. This preface brought popularity to *Wuthering Heights* by the end of 20th century.

While commenting about the novel's merit, Charlotte wrote about the advisability of creating characters, especially of Heathcliff. She stated, "I scarcely think it is [advisable]." With a comment of this sort, Charlotte probably wanted to appeal to the Victorian readers to accept and respect *Wuthering Heights* by avoiding an unconvincing part within the text. Despite all the difficulties it had to face in the 19th century, *Wuthering Heights* is considered an important contemporary novel for varied reasons. The accurate and realistic portrayal of life in the novel provides a glimpse of history, condition of women, class and society even after two centuries.

As many critics have opined, *Wuthering Heights* is not just a sentimental romance novel. It is a novel made up of human subjects and human emotions. By creating the genuine characters with realistic events, Emily Bronte makes the novel a presentation of life, an essay on love, and a glimpse at relationships. Because of such pristine emotions and feelings communicated through the central characters - Heathcliff and Catherine and the supporting characters - the contemporary readers still relate to the emotions and feelings of the characters. Bronte, with her style, word choice and imagery, makes her readers feel *Wuthering Heights* is a poem disguised as prose.

Reading the novel attracts the reader to the distinct structure and style of Bronte. Significantly, *Wuthering Heights* is about the ordered pairs: two families, two pairs of children and two generations. The distinct visible pair is that of the two households: Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. One can make out the similarity that exists between nature and the characters of the two places. Wuthering Heights appears wild with windy moors and the inhabitants too possess the same characteristics, while as Thrushcross Grange and its inhabitants look the opposite with the calm and orderly parks.

The narrative too, is primarily told from the paired point of view. Mr. Lockwood builds the initial story, narrating the beginning and ending chapters. Nelly Dean, being an important narrator, relates most of the action from the outsider's point of view. The isolated setting of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is essential for Bronte's combination of realism and the gothic symbolism.

3.2.2 Plot

Wuthering Heights is a novel in 34 chapters. Emily Bronte has dexterously created this classic with a frame narrative technique and content. Although it was not liked by the Victorian audience after its publication, the novel attracted an audience of its own over the past few centuries. The novel is structurally centred on two families throughout the text. Mr. Lockwood, as a second-hand narrator, mediates between Nelly Dean and the reader to present the story astoundingly. Nelly, as the main narrator, provides the minute details of the two families as an insider to add more authenticity to the story. *Wuthering Heights*, written in the frame narrative technique, offers a glimpse of two households as a story within a story.

At the outset of the novel, Lockwood, a new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, arrives at Wuthering Heights to pay a visit to his landlord, Heathcliff. In this visit, Mr. Lockwood is strangely attracted to Mr. Heathcliff, the landlord of Thrushcross Grange and his curiosity to know more about the house at Wuthering Heights prompts him to pay a second visit the next day. During the second visit, he meets other mysterious occupants of Wuthering Heights and before taking leave, he is attacked by dogs. Lockwood was put up for the night in an unused childhood room of Catherine Earnshaw and endures a ghostly intervention overnight. Lockwood later on vows never to bother his neighbours again.

Lockwood, after reviving himself in the evening, engages his housekeeper at the Grange Nelly Dean to tell him about the inhabitants at Wuthering Heights. Nelly Dean, having served the Earnshaws for many years, recounts a complicated story of two families, the Lintons and the Earnshaws. Mrs. Dean narrates the history of the family of Earnshaws and recounts the incident from the past. Mr. Earnshaw, a gentleman and the owner of Wuthering Heights, had two children, Hindley and Catherine. Later, he brings home an orphan named Heathcliff to be raised as his own child. As the father and sister became fonder of the youngster, it grew jealousy in Hindley. Noticing the growing hatred of Hindley towards Heathcliff and to avoid further strife, Earnshaw sends Hindley away to college. The strong bond between Catherine and Heathcliff becomes intense as they left to roam around the countryside. The tranquil time of Wuthering Heights

changed drastically with the death of Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley returns to Heights with his new wife and assumes the charge of the master in the house. Still bitter with hatred, Hindley Earnshaw banishes Heathcliff from the family and forces him to stop his education to work as a servant. Despite all the difficulty, Catherine and Heathcliff manage to sneak away to roam on the moor. In one of such excursions, they both grow interests in the Lintons and spy on the Linton family at Thrushcross Grange. While they are spying on the Linton family, the watchdog bites Catherine's leg. She is attended by the Lintons while Heathcliff is sent home in disgrace.

After spending five weeks with the Linton family in Thrushcross Grange, Catherine returns home. She is now a refined "lady" with a vast change in her appearance and manners. During her stay at the Linton's palace, she became close to Edgar. She was enticed by Edgar's wealth and handsome features. Heathcliff, on the other hand, has grown more ragged and dirty. Still, Catherine's feelings for Heathcliff are far more passionate.

At this juncture, Nelly Dean interrupts her story; Lockwood insists her to narrate it with minute details and requests not to leave out any details.

Nelly Dean continues the story of the Earnshaw family. In the following summer, Hindley's wife Frances Earnshaw gives birth to a baby boy. As she was sickly and consumptive, she passes away within a year. Later, Hareton was raised by Nelly Dean. Hindley grieving the passing away of his wife addicts to alcoholism.

Catherine on the other hand, attempts to balance the relationship with Heathcliff and Linton Children. It became very difficult for her to handle the relations as neither side like the other. At this moment, Catherine quarrels with Edgar, paradoxically they become more intimate thereafter.

Catherine looking for advice, reveals to Nelly that Edgar has proposed to her for marriage. She has accepted the proposal, even though she loves Heathcliff. Given the social situation, Catherine cannot marry Heathcliff. She believes that marrying Edgar would secure Heathcliff's future. Heathcliff overhears the conversation of Nelly and Catherine, except for her declaration of love for him. Heathcliff, with the feeling of rejection, leaves the Heights. Devastated by the absence and loss of Heathcliff, Catherine becomes seriously ill. For the next three years, Catherine doesn't hear any word from Heathcliff, and she marries Edgar. Here ends the first part of Mrs. Dean's story.

After four weeks of prolonged illness because of his walk in the snow, Lockwood approaches Nelly Dean to continue the story. When she starts the story again, Edgar and

Catherine's joys of the marriage end with the return of Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights. He is now a transformed, well-mannered man. He is tall and muscular now; the changes are visible in his appearance. Overjoyed by his presence, Catherine insists Edgar accept him into the family. But Edgar is jealous of her feelings for Heathcliff. Edgar's sister, Isabella, becomes infatuated with Heathcliff and accuses her sister-in-law of dominating him. Meanwhile, Heathcliff stays at Wuthering Heights with Hindley Earnshaw, who, even after knowing the danger, has included Heathcliff in the card games, hoping to win some money from him.

On his next visit to Linton's, Heathcliff meets Isabella and kisses her in the garden. Catherine is upset and quarrels with Heathcliff, and the entire scene becomes violent with Edgar and Heathcliff. Edgar orders him not to come to the house again. Catherine, being so upset, locks herself in her room. But then Nelly Dean enters Catherine's room, where she finds her feverish with restlessness. Taking advantage of the illness of Catherine, Isabella elopes with Heathcliff to escape the sight of the family members. Nelly Dean could make out her absence in the house but told no one, as the family was already in pain. Catherine begins to slowly recover after the long illness. Meanwhile, Heathcliff and Catherine return to Wuthering Heights. Apparently, now Isabella realised the cruelty and evil nature of Heathcliff.

Though Isabella's brother does not want any communication between the two families, Nelly Dean often visits Wuthering Heights to see Isabella. Heathcliff desires to see Catherine, and he always wants her to miss him. He says to Nelly Dean that Edgar can never love Catherine as passionately as he does and indicates that he would kill Edgar if she didn't miss him. Nelly finally understands his threat and agrees to carry a letter. Having altered physically and mentally by the illness, Catherine is withdrawn and restless. Heathcliff, soon after seeing her, can make out the signs of untimely death. She complains of having broken her heart, and she wishes they would never be parted. She gives birth to a premature infant, young Catherine and dies. Heathcliff, who has been waiting in the garden vigilant, knew about the death of Catherine much before being announced by Nelly Dean. He begs Catherine to haunt him, not to leave him alone in this world.

Isabella informs of the violent fight between Hindley and Heathcliff. She escapes from the Heights and five months later gives birth to Linton in the south of London. Hindley now turned 27, dies. It is informed that Heathcliff owns Wuthering Heights and Earnshaw's son Hareton is penniless and completely dependent on Heathcliff for everything. Twelve years later,

Cathy is now grown up and she confines herself to home and never goes far from the Grange. Isabella, nearing death calls Edgar and hands over her son Linton to him.

Edgar returns home with his nephew Linton who is pale, delicate, sickly and quite moody. Cathy decides to take care of him. However, Heathcliff demands Edgar to return his son immediately. The next day, Nelly takes Linton to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff decides never to harm him as he is the only source to inherit the Linton's land. Meanwhile, Cathy wanted to help Linton recover from his prolonged illness. However, Heathcliff demands her to visit him too often, intending to let them fall in love with one another to acquire the Linton's land.

On the next visit Heathcliff devises a plan to kidnap young Cathy and not to release her until she marries Linton. The devastating incident of Cathy's kidnap makes Edgar's health deteriorate. The locked up Nelly was released at this moment to attend to dying Edgar.

Cathy also manages to escape from Wuthering Heights to attend to her father in his last hours. Edgar breathes his last. The evening after the funeral, Heathcliff demands Cathy to return. In the meantime, Heathcliff is haunted by Catherine; he can feel her spirit, he is tormented, and Catherine refuses to show herself to him. A very short time after this incident, young Linton dies; Cathy is forced to live in the Heights. Heathcliff now owns the property at Heights and Granges. The chapter concludes with Nelly Dean's story.

Lockwood, after recovering from a long illness, rides to Wuthering Heights and tells Heathcliff that he doesn't wish to stay any longer on the Grange at the end of this year. He also notices the unchanged environs of Heights and the members of the household. Now, Catherine has found a new soulmate in Hareton, Heathcliff, over the years, has grown anxious and troubled. Lockwood notices the drastic changes in the mental and physical attitude of Heathcliff.

After eight months, in September, Mr. Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights to pay off his accounts. He learns Heathcliff has been dead for three months now. Nelly describes Cathy and Hareton friendship, which has developed at the time of Heathcliff's alienation from the family. Nelly continues the tale and elaborates on how Heathcliff's behaviour changed on the verge of his death. Heathcliff was tormented by the presence of Catherine; he felt Catherine's presence in young Cathy, Hareton and whatever he saw.

Heathcliff turns anxious, he stops eating and sleeping; he is seen restlessly roaming around the countryside and home. Finally, Nelly discovers Heathcliff dead on Catherine's bed. As he wished, he was buried next to the grave of Catherine. Back home, young Catherine and Hareton decide to marry in the next year and move to Thrushcross Grange to begin a new life.

3.2.3 Characters

Catherine Earnshaw:

She is considered one of the finest characters of *Wuthering Heights*. She is the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw. She is known throughout the novel as a beautiful, passionate and destructive heroine. She grows up with Heathcliff, an adopted child whom Mr. Earnshaw brings home from Liverpool. Under the tyrannical rule of her elder brother, during their orphaned adolescence, their friendship strengthened. Catherine falls in love with Heathcliff so intensely that she claims they are the same person. She finds her soulmate in the brooding, dark Heathcliff but chooses to marry a much weaker man that destroys their happiness.

However, because of her desire for social advancement, dominance and impulsion, Cathy is motivated to marry gentle, pampered Edgar Linton. She is torn between her wild passion and social ambition, which results in misery to both the men who love her. She grows weak and emotional when the rejected Heathcliff leaves the Heights. Upon his return a year later to the Heights, Catherine arouses uncontrollable jealousy in her husband. Following violent arguments, Cathy embraces her own end through rage and hunger. Catherine dies in childbirth; the presence of her spirit figuratively and literally haunts the rest of the novel. Farmers claim to see her ghost in the moors and Heathcliff is tortured by her memory. The narrator, Mr. Lockwood, encounters the frightening dream figure. Cathy's tragedy repetitively haunts till the last in the life of her daughter.

Heathcliff:

He is an orphan boy brought to *Wuthering Heights* by Mr. Earnshaw. He is considered one of the most passionate and revengeful heroes. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley abuses Heathcliff and treats him as a servant. His impoverished adolescence makes him ill-tempered. He is Catherine's spiritual and physical equal. However, when she accepts Edgar Linton's attention, he leaves the Heights. After a gap of one year, he returns rich and educated, his arrival destroys the steadiness of Cathy's marriage. His revengeful act is evident when he elopes with Isabella Linton to destroy her brother Edgar. Back in *Wuthering Heights*, he lures Hindley into gambling to hold the rights of *Wuthering Heights*. Further, he takes out his revenge on Hindley, Catherine and their respective children. He is a powerful, fierce and cruel man. He attains fortune and extraordinary powers to acquire *Thrushcross Grange* and *Wuthering Heights*. He is seen as a weak man at the end of the novel as the memory of Catherine keeps haunting him.

His thirst for revenge is sensed only when he nears his own death, a last reunion with his ghostly beloved.

Lockwood:

Lockwood's narration forms the frame narrative strategy used by the novelist. He is considered the second-hand narrator of the novel. *Wuthering Heights* involves a major part of the story recorded in his diary. The story that he heard from Nelly was recorded as a diary entry when he was Heathcliff's tenant. He acts as an intermediary between the reader and Nelly. Lockwood is a young gentleman from a more domesticated region of England. He rents the old Linton estate from Heathcliff and grows his curiosity towards the landlord. He is seen throughout the novel as a passive listener, confining to his bed with a cold. His role as an outsider and attempts at gaining the inside information affects the plot directly.

Nelly Dean:

Nelly Dean is the chief narrator of *Wuthering Heights*. As a housekeeper of the household, she is deeply involved in narrating the account of events that occurred at *Wuthering Heights* to Mr. Lockwood. She is a compassionate, intelligent and sensible woman. She is a strong local woman whose nature contrasts with the passions of her subjects in the story. She grew up in the Earnshaw household alongside Hindley and Catherine. She served as Catherine's maid in her marriage. She is a critical observer who narrates the occurrences of the Heights with minute details. After Cathy's death, she assumes the additional charge as the nursemaid of Young Catherine. She is the main narrator of the novel; she has got potent feelings for her characters in the story that complicates the narration. She was also a witness to the ghostly and strange death of Heathcliff.

Edgar Linton:

Edgar Linton is an ideal gentleman. He is a soft character controlled completely by his wife, Cathy. Catherine describes him as "rich," "handsome," "cheerful," and "pleasant to be with." His gentlemanly attitude proves useless when he clashes with Heathcliff. The gentle, fearful nature of Edgar contrasts with the passions of vengeful Heathcliff. He is a character who suffers from the illness and rages of his wife. When Catherine dies, he isolates and devotes his life to his daughter. Heathcliff kidnaps his adolescent daughter Catherine to destroy his happiness; this devastating incident leaves Edgar in grief to accept his death.

Isabella Linton:

Isabella is the younger sister of Edgar Linton. She falls in love with Heathcliff and despite Edgar's prohibitions, marries him. She is a selfish and irresponsible young woman. For her, Heathcliff is a romantic character. Having fallen in love with Heathcliff, she ignores Cathy's serious illness and ruins her life. After realising the cruelty of Heathcliff, she prepares to counter him with her viciousness and escapes from Heights during Cathy's funeral. She moves to the South and gives birth to a son. She dies twelve years later. Heathcliff never reciprocates the feelings and treats her as a tool to avenge the Linton family.

Hindley Earnshaw:

Hindley Earnshaw is Cathy's brother and Mr. Earnshaw's son. He is jealous of Heathcliff. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, he tries to ruin him and treats Heathcliff like a servant. He reduces Heathcliff to a very miserable condition by terminating his education and forcing him to work in the fields. He falls into bad ways after the death of Catherine. When Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights as a rich, educated man, Hindley takes him as a master to satisfy his greed for gambling. Hindley loses everything he had. After the death of his wife Frances after giving birth to Hareton, Hindley leads a violent drunken existence under the rule of Heathcliff.

Catherine Linton:

Catherine Linton is regarded as the heroine of the second part of the novel. She is the daughter of Edgar Linton and Catherine. She manifests the gentleness of Edgar and the arrogance of Catherine. Her gentleness and arrogance are felt as a devoted daughter in her childhood and enforced residence at Heights, respectively. She was kidnapped by Heathcliff when she was sixteen to marry his dying son, Linton Heathcliff. The incident also had a profound effect on the death of Edgar. After the death of Linton Heathcliff, her miserable life at Heights begins, which is a sort of parallel to Catherine's under a tyrannical brother. She is soon widowed and orphaned with no inheritance. Later, she discovers a new love in rough and illiterate cousin Hareton. After marrying Hareton at the end of the story, she becomes Catherine Earnshaw.

Hareton Earnshaw

Hareton Earnshaw is the son of Hindley Earnshaw and nephew of Catherine. His mother, Frances Earnshaw, dies soon after giving him birth. Later, his father Hindley lapses into alcoholism, Hareton grows up unloved and angry. After Hindley's death, Heathcliff takes his responsibility and raises him as an illiterate servant, just as Hindley had done to Heathcliff. Thus,

Heathcliff uses Hareton to avenge Hindley. One can make a parallel between the downtrodden Hareton and sullen young Heathcliff. Upon the arrival of Catherine Linton to Heights, ill-tempered and illiterate Hareton's desire to improve himself was brought to the fore. Before Heathcliff can destroy that reunion, he dies a ghastly death. Hareton marries young Catherine, and Wuthering Heights is returned to the rightful heir of the second generation's authentic hero and heroine.

Linton Heathcliff:

Linton Heathcliff is the sickly son of Heathcliff and Isabella. He is raised for twelve years by his mother in London and meets his father Heathcliff when he is thirteen years old when he was taken to Heights after her death. He is weak and constantly ill. He is looked like a product of an unhappy union of Heathcliff and Isabella. He helps his father Heathcliff in kidnapping young Catherine and marries against her will, which shows his fear for Heathcliff. Heathcliff always despised him and treated him derisively. Heathcliff used Linton as a tool to take control over Thrushcross Grange.

3.3 Learning Outcomes

After reading this Unit, you are expected to learn about the overall analysis of *Wuthering Heights*. While reading the Unit, you should understand the social issues of the time, especially concerned with patriarchal power and brutality. The text exhibits the subordination of women and the injustice of inheritance law prevalent in the Victorian period.

You are expected to understand the narrative strategy used by the novelist to narrate the story of Wuthering Heights, wherein the novelist uses a trial frame narrative strategy. The frame narrative is a literary technique that serves as a companion piece to a story within a story. The two-narrative point of view of Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean provides insights about the two households of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange from insider and outsider perspectives. You are expected to uncover the hidden elements of gender, class and race through close analysis of the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*.

3.4 Glossary

Pseudonym: A fictitious name, especially one used by an author.

Canonical: The works of a particular author or artist that are recognized as genuine.

Realism: An artistic or literary movement or style characterized by the representation of people or things as they actually are.

Inheritance: A thing that is inherited ((of money, property, or a title) received as an heir at the death of the previous holder.

Gothic: Often deal with something dark, and sometimes evil and satanic portents. These symbols may have been adapted from various cultures, such as the Germanic, Pagan, Christian, and Celtic symbols.

Frame Narrative: A literary narrative strategy to tell a story within a story.

Patriarchy: A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.

Supernatural: (Of a manifestation or event) attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.

Magnum Opus: A work of art, music, or literature that is regarded as the most important or best work that an artist, composer, or writer has produced.

Pristine: In its original condition; unspoilt.

3.5 Sample Questions

3.5.1 Objective Questions:

- Earnshaw found Heathcliff in _____.
(a) Boston (b) London
(c) Gimmerton (d) Liverpool
- How is Heathcliff related to Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw?
(a) He is an adopted orphan. (b) He is their son.
(c) He is caught on their land. (d) He is their nephew.
- What happens while Catherine is recovering from her illness?
(a) Edgar flees from his home. (b) Isabella gives birth.
(c) Heathcliff and Isabella elope. (d) Hindley kills Hareton.
- How many chapters are there in the Wuthering Heights?
(a) 54 (b) 24
(c) 34 (d) 21

5. To which Shakespearean character does Lockwood compare himself when he is accused of stealing?

- (a) Macbeth (b) King Lear
(c) Richard (d) Antonio

6. The main narrators of *Wuthering Heights* are_____.

- (a) Catherine and Heathcliff (b) Mr. Lockwood and Nelly
(c) Mr. Earnshaw and Catherine (d) Hindley and Edgar

7. Who is Linton Heathcliff's mother?

- (a) Cathy Linton (b) Nelly Dean
(c) Isabella (d) Zillah

8. How long has Ellen Dean lived at Thrushcross Grange?

- (a) 10 years (b) 18 years
(c) 15 years (d) 16 years

9. What happens to Cathy the first time she goes to Thrushcross Grange?

- (a) She catches a cold (b) She cuts her arm on a shard of broken glass
(c) She falls down a rocky hill (d) A dog bites her

10. Who took care of Heathcliff when he had measles as a child?

- (a) Nelly Dean (b) Cathy Earnshaw
(c) Hindley Earnshaw (d) Mr. Earnshaw

3.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the theme of Love and Hate in *Wuthering Heights*.
2. How would you describe Heathcliff?
3. Discuss the narrative strategy employed in *Wuthering Heights*?
4. Describe Hareton Earnshaw as a boy.
5. How is the bitterness and hatred in the story finally overcome?

3.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Comment on the significance of the novel's dream sequences?
2. Discuss the role of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Is he a protagonist or an antagonist?
3. Comment on the representation of Gender and power in Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*?

3.6 Suggested Readings

1. Allott, Miriam, editor. *Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights: A Casebook*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1970.
2. Bronte, Emily. *Bloom's Reviews: Wuthering Heights*. Edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 1997.
3. ---. *Wuthering Heights*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
4. Chitham, Edward. *A Life of Emily Bronte*. Blackwell, 1992.

Unit – 4: *Wuthering Heights*: Themes, Narrative Technique, and Critical Appreciation

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

Structure

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Objectives

4.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes, Narrative Technique, and Critical Appreciation

4.2.1 The Historical Background to Novel

4.2.2 *Wuthering Heights* as a Novel

4.2.3 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes

4.2.4 *Wuthering Heights*: Narrative Technique

4.2.5 *Wuthering Heights*: Critical Appreciation

4.3 Learning Outcomes

4.4 Glossary

4.5 Sample Questions

4.6 Suggested Readings

4.0 Introduction

The importance and creative genius of Emily Bronte (1818-1848) attracts the readers across time and age even after two centuries. The interesting themes, plot, gripping and captivating narrative of her only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) always intrigue students of literature. This is one of the best classical novels of English literature such as *Great Expectations* (1862) by Fielding, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, etc. Although this novel did not receive wide popularity in its initial days because of its unexpected content in Victorian English society and as it was written by a woman writer. The novel started getting popular posthumously. It was after the introduction and preface by Charlotte Bronte, Emily's sister, the novel started receiving the attention of the Victorian readers. It depicts the actual picture of society, the growing industrialization and importance of England on the colonial world map that led to the

massive human mobility from rural to urban areas. The development projects, townships, industries required a labor force from the rural areas. The upper classes continued to prosper, whereas the middle class maintained morality and the lower class faced poverty. The class consciousness continued to exist during the Victorian time, as is reflected in the treatment of Heathcliff by Catherine and Hindley in this novel and Catherine's rejection of Heathcliff. Under the rule of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) the social and religious values become more important. The novel tried to capture dominant themes of this era. The novel is known for its vivid picture of industrial Victorian society which was, on the one hand, reigning and gaining world power, and it was also suffering from the perils of industrialization, poverty, disease, exploitation of workers, children, and women. Besides these themes, the novel has organized multi-layer and modern narrative techniques, themes, and settings. It is full of passion and set on the Yorkshire moors.

4.1 Objectives

The objectives of the Unit are to:

- introduce the major themes, narrative technique and critical appreciation of this novel
 - enhance your critical ability while enjoying reading this novel
 - give historical background and show how Emily emerged as a creative writer
 - generate critical thinking in you to apply existing theories, concepts, and develop self-thinking while studying any text
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4.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes, Narrative Technique, and Critical Appreciation

4.2.1 The Historical Background to the Novel:

The Bronte family was a family of God-gifted, creative geniuses. Emily's family members were comprised of artists and writers. Emily Bronte was born on 30th July 1818 as the fifth child out of six children of the Bronte family in a village of Thornton, near the west of Bradford in Yorkshire. Maria and Elizabeth were eldest to her but died early. Her brother named

Patrick Branwell was a painter and a writer. Her father and mother were writers too. Charlotte and Anne were her younger sisters who contributed with her in poetry and other imaginative writings set in their imaginary counties/islands of Angria and Gondal under pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Like Christopher Marlow, Emily also died quite early of tuberculosis in December 1848. Emily and her siblings grew a uniquely creative style through their childhood stories that they composed in the Angria and Gondal, the imagined places of the Bronte children like that of R.K. Narayan's Malgudi and Thomas Hardy's Wessex. But importantly, very few elements are drawn from Emily's life in this novel, unlike her sister Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Like the setting of the desolate existence of the Bronte family in Howarth, Yorkshire becomes the moor site and their orphan life remains dominant in *Wuthering Heights*.

4.2.2 *Wuthering Heights*: Themes

Wuthering Heights is loaded with various themes of the Victorian era and yet it can be read and interpreted through the lens of contemporary critical approaches such as formalism, historicism, feminism, psychoanalysis, etc. It engages in the theme of love, revenge, industrialization, child predicaments, bildungsroman, patriarchy, middle-class morality, class structure, etc. Her personal life did not much influence her novel, at least. The novel is loaded with multiple themes. Hilda Spear observes, "It is about love and jealousy and revenge, about loss and desire; it is about selfishness and self-willedness, about cruelty, violence, and fear, about the evils of drunkenness, about the bringing up of children and education; it is about books and religion, about freedom and subjugation, about untamed nature and the conventions of society, about happiness and misery, about alienation, about sickness and death; it is about the strange and the supernatural, about the homely and the familiar; and finally, it is about a spiritual accord which defies separation and death to achieve reconciliation in a life beyond the grave" (37). The novel opens with a terrifying and mysterious scene with a bloody nightmare of Lockwood. He sees a nightmare while sleeping – he also sees the ghostly child who was trying to terrify him. We see the references to death and ghost in other chapters too.

Love is another important and dominant theme throughout this novel, along with revenge. Heathcliff was "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child" whom Mr. Earnshaw picked up from the streets of Liverpool, a "gipsy brat" (Chapter 4). Although he was cleaned and dressed like a wealthy child and loved by Mr. Earnshaw, he was never accepted by the children in *Wuthering Heights*. He was always maltreated by his supposed siblings, Catherine and Hindley. Heathcliff was nurtured as a blood son of Mr. Earnshaw when Hindley was sent to college to study. But the

sky of sorrow falls on Heathcliff when Mr. Earnshaw died. Hindley returned to the Wuthering Heights as a head of the family and Heathcliff was reduced to merely a servant deprived of education and other privileges and sent to work on the farm. He was also banned from Wuthering Heights. Catherine has a soft corner for Heathcliff and his love for her is inviolable. Heathcliff was a hope and comfort for her, but it all broke when he heard Catherine say she was interested in marrying Edgar Linton for social prominence and marrying Heathcliff would be against the social standard of her time. He acquires a Victorian standard – ‘a self-made man’ and a fortune but meanwhile Catherine married Edgar Linton. He intends to take revenge on Hindley, Catherine, and Linton and their children Hareton and young Catherine and ultimately acquire both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Catherine and Hindley die unexpectedly but the revenge of Heathcliff continues on their children. He mistreats Hareton, son of Hindley, by upbringing him as an illiterate. But there seems to be growing care and love between Hareton and Heathcliff in later part. Heathcliff warned Hareton not to love the younger Catherine, daughter of Catherine, whom Heathcliff loved. Because he was afraid that she will also leave Hareton as elder Catherine ditched Heathcliff. Despite that, they continue to love each other, rejecting the wishes and hurting the sentiments of Hareton was becoming difficult for Heathcliff because “for Heathcliff, Hareton becomes an alter ego, a second self” (Hilda 36). Heathcliff says that Hareton is “a personification of my youth, not a human being ... [his] aspect was the ghost of my immortal love, of my wild endeavors to hold my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish” (Chapter 33). Hilda Spear further writes “To destroy Hareton’s hopes was like destroying his own. In the love of the two younger people, he finds a kind of vicarious fulfillment which seems to bring him closer to Catherine”. (36).

Victorian England was class conscious which was reflected in the treatment of the children of Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley and Catherine, more obviously in Catherine’s decision to marry Edgar Linton, who was also the owner of Thrushcross Grange. Having estate, servant and lineage was a dominant social factor in categorizing individuals and their decisions. Although we might see the natural responses and behaviour of the characters (The Earnshaw, Catherine, Heathcliff, and Hindley) in Wuthering Heights which were later altered by other factors such as revenge, class, greed, and love, and the character of the Thrushcross Grange represents the culture, civility, reputation, and social status.

The supernatural is yet another of the interesting themes that make this novel outstanding. Hilda writes that there are scattered references of supernatural elements such as “magically

devil ... a herd of possessed swine” (Chapter 1) “ministering angel beneficent fairy .. . good fairy .. . devil’s name .. . Black Art .. modelled in wax and clay .. little witch. . . ghost ... cursing” (Chapter 2). In the nightmare of Lockwood, he sees the ghost. There are also references to Fairy Tales. Catherine sees her face staring at her. Heathcliff also had a ghostly encounter with the spirit of Catherine. She also haunted Lockwood in his narration. Nelly describes how the people near Wuthering Heights also witness that how Heathcliff is haunting the heights and moors. These elements also contribute to the gothic setting and construction of the story.

4.2.3 *Wuthering Heights*: Narrative Technique

The novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is narrated predominantly by two narrators in the first person point of view, i.e. the visitor cum tenant of Thrushcross Grange, John Lockwood, and the caretaker for Wuthering Heights, Nelly Dean. There are also multilayered narratives from other major characters. Lockwood’s narration plays an important role in introducing the background, locals, the nineteenth-century English society, and introducing major characters. His narration was like an old personal diary with sophistication and literary style of narrative language – noting or telling the story in back and forth – unconventional flashback manners. Foreshadowing is another important technique of narration that Emily used throughout the novel to engage the reader and create suspense. Foreshadowing gives a hint and leaves the reader to explore that hint in the latter part of the novel/story. Although they narrated the story of both Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, here comes the question of the reliability of the narration. Did Lockwood narrate whatever Nelly told him or did he omit something which he may not have liked, perhaps? Or did Nelly tell everything as it is? This leads to the unreliability of the narrator. But overall, the readers enjoy the story of *Wuthering Heights*.

4.2.4 *Wuthering Heights*: Critical Appreciation

Wuthering Heights is one of the more popular novels of English literature for centuries because of its story, style, and society. The human nature reflected in the character’s behaviour shows the society of that time. Love, revenge, and class consciousness are three dominant themes that lead to the ebb and flow in the story. Although Heathcliff was brought up with the Earnshaw’s children and Catherine loved him so much, it was her concern for social class that affected her decision to marry Heathcliff and subsequently, she married the owner of Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff receives some sympathy, but is an anti-hero in this novel. He received sympathy because of his being an orphan and from humble background at the beginning of this novel, but the continuous shadow of failure generated a monster in him in the latter part.

The unclear origin of Heathcliff creates further suspense in the novel – is he really an orphan or gypsy or is Mr. Earnshaw his father? This also led some critics to accuse this novel of incestuous recklessness while addressing the Heathcliff and Catherine relation because they could be half siblings.

Gothic elements such as gothic architecture, moor side, ghost, spirit, blood, etc. contributed to the classical and more engaging part of this novel. This novel can be read through the formalist approach where the themes, characterization, metaphor, narrative style, and structure become more important rather than looking for historical context or autobiographical details – as disseminated by the formalist critics during the 1920s. There are also elements of Freudian tripartite psychoanalysis in the characters, for instance if Catherine represents Id, Heathcliff is Ego and Edgar represents Super-ego in *Wuthering Heights*. The feminist reading of this novel is also possible as Emily Bronte as one of the ancient women writers has to face a lot of difficulties to be established as a writer or write a fiction which was considered as men-centric domain. She along with her two sisters had to change name and publish novels and poems.

4.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit you should be able to critically describe the novel, the major themes, narrative techniques, and critical appreciation. You should be able to discuss how love, revenge, gothic elements, social class, etc. dominate the story. You should be able to critically appreciate the novel and be aware of the application of various theories and approaches to this novel such as feminism, psychoanalysis, and formalism.

4.4 Glossary

First-person point of view:

The first-person point of view/first-person narration is a technique of storytelling in the first person, such as using “I” or “we” or “us” as the narrator of the event or incident of the story. For example, the novel is with the narrator Lockwood who says, “1801. - I have just returned from a visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbor that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a

beautiful country!” In this, the narrator “I” [Lockwood] is a first-person storyteller. In this technique, the first-person narrator could be a protagonist, re-teller of the story, observer, witness, peripheral character, etc.

Gothic Novel:

Gothic novels are famous for their gothic architecture, mystery, terror, imaginations, supernatural elements, setting, and environment. It was quite popular during the time of the eighteenth century.

4.5 Sample Questions

4.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The first line of the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte begins with _____.
 - (a) Month
 - (b) Year
 - (c) Day
 - (d) Time
2. Who tells the story of a strange denizen place of Heathcliff which becomes the first part of the novel *Wuthering Heights*?
 - (a) Heathcliff
 - (b) Nelly Dean
 - (c) Lockwood
 - (d) Earnshaw
3. Which of the following character is not an orphan?
 - (a) Dorothea Brooke (*Middlemarch*)
 - (b) Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*)
 - (c) Joseph Andrews (*Joseph Andrews*)
 - (d) Pip (*Great Expectations*)
4. Why did Catherine like Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*?
 - (a) Because Heathcliff was a colored orphan, and she did not believe in racism as her brother
 - (b) Because she likes his boldness, independent nature and enjoys his company even in times of grief.

- (c) Her brother Hindley used to mistreat him and Heathcliff had revenge for Hindley.
- (d) Because Mr. Earnshaw instructed her to fall in love with Heathcliff
5. Which of the following is not the theme of *Wuthering Heights*?
- (a) Love (b) Revenge
- (c) Class (d) Homosexuality
6. Heathcliff inherited Wuthering Heights by lending money to drunkard Hindley and also inherited Thrushcross Grange by marrying Isabella now he is after the property and obsessed with the money of elder Catherine in such a way that he started_____.
- (a) Plotting against her
- (b) Torturing her
- (c) Speaking to her ghost
- (d) Speaking to the ghost of Earnshaw
7. Who said these lines to whom? “Mr. Lockwood, your new tenant, sir. I do myself the honor of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation of Thrushcross Grange: I heard yesterday you had had some thoughts—”
- (a) Nelly Dean to Heathcliff
- (b) Lockwood to Heathcliff
- (c) Heathcliff to readers
- (d) Nelly dean to reader
8. Heathcliff, a notorious hero of the *Wuthering Heights* dies of _____.
- (a) Immense greed
- (b) Immense emotional distress
- (c) Fear of the ghost
- (d) Severe physical illness
9. Match the correct pair from *Wuthering Heights*:
- Edger – Catharine – Younger Catherine
- Isabella – Heathcliff – Linton
- Hindley - Frances Earnshaw – _____? _____
- (a) Nelly Dean
- (b) Joseph

(c) Hareton

(d) Zillah

10. The narrative stories of *Wuthering Heights* are not in chronological order. They are scattered and moving in between the past and present. What technique did the novelist apply while narrating this novel?

(a) Monologues

(b) Cliffhanger

(c) Foreshadowing

(d) Flashback

4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Who is John Lockwood?

2. What is foreshadowing in the narrative technique?

3. Briefly sketch the character of Heathcliff.

4. Discuss the major settings in *Wuthering Heights* where novel takes place?

5. Illustrate the revenge theme in *Wuthering Heights*?

4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the major themes in *Wuthering Heights*?

2. What are the narrative techniques Emily Bronte applied in *Wuthering Heights*?

3. What is a gothic novel? Illustrate this with some examples from *Wuthering Heights*?

4.6 Suggested Readings

1. Arthur Pollard, ed., *The Victorians*. Peter Bedrick Books, 1987.

2. Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England*, Penguin; 3rd Revised edition, 2000.

3. David Daiches, *A Critical History Of English Literature - Volume I, II, III, & IV* Supernova Publishers; 1st edition 2011.

4. Pykett, Lyn. *Women Writers: Emily Bronte*. Macmillan Education Limited. 1989.

Unit – 5: Origin and Development of the English Novel

Structure

- 5.0** Introduction
- 5.1** Objectives
- 5.2** Origin and Development of the English Novel
 - 5.2.1** Precursors to the English Novel
 - 5.2.2** Definition and Origin of the English Novel
 - 5.2.3** Rise of the English Novel in 18th Century
 - 5.2.4** Four Wheels of the English Novel
 - 5.2.5** Popular Genres of the English Novel
- 5.3** Learning Outcomes
- 5.4** Glossary
- 5.5** Sample Questions
- 5.6** Suggested Readings

5.0 Introduction

The word ‘Novel’ means something new as against the other established genres of literature like poetry, epic or drama. Essentially, it means the narration of a long story in prose. Though the art of storytelling and narration was much in vogue ever since civilization began, the novel as a form of literature, reached its pinnacle stage in the 18th century. The novel soon became the most sought and popularly read form of literature. Indeed, it was not until the 18th century that people began to read and write the sort of books we now call “Novels.” By about 1770, the reading of novels had become a fashion- almost a ‘mania’ with ‘upper class’ women. The Novel had become what cinema became in the 1920s and 1930s: a gateway into the world of pleasant dreams.

5.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to read and understand the definition and development of English Novel.
- to appreciate and enjoy the various genres of English Novels.
- to understand the factors which facilitated the Rise of Novels in the 18th century
- to acquaint the reader with the Pioneers of English Novel.
- to develop an aesthetic sense among the readers of Novel.
- to enhance love of reading and understanding novel as a genre of literature.

5.2 Origin and Development of the English Novel

5.2.1 Precursors to the English Novel:

The term Novel is derived from the Latin term word ‘Novellus’. Though the English novel gained popularity in the Eighteenth Century, it was practiced way back since 612 BC, when world’s oldest literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was written. It is an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia inscribed on tablet form describing adventures of Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, of the Third Dynasty of Ur (c. 2100 BC).

The next popular work in this form of literature is Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* (1485) which marks the beginning of the novel in England. It is a sort of compilation of the various tales of the legendary King Arthur as their hero.

Another great work before the Elizabethan era in which we find the traces of the modern novel is Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). However, it owes its inspiration to Plato’s *Republic* (375 BC), the Greek philosopher’s dream of an ideal state. The book also marks the shift in English thought. It is an epoch-making work which has been variously praised as a masterpiece of English Humanism.

Medieval romance gradually died out, and about the middle of the 16th century its place was gradually taken by Italian prose tales or *novelle*. These tales were *novelle* (miniature) not merely in name but also in their nature. Boccaccio’s (1313-1375) collection short stories in his *Decameron* is an example of *novelle*.

Check your Progress:

1. Which book marks the beginning of the novel in England?
2. Which book inspired Thomas More to write *Utopia*?
3. Which work is based on the legend of Arthur?

5.2.2 Definition and Origin of the English Novel:

The story-telling instinct is primordial to all mankind. The first stories were told by the wandering singers, bards or minstrels. During the middle Ages, the story-tellers carried tales to all parts of the Europe which is still into practice.

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, a novel is "a story long enough to fill a complete book, in which the characters and events are usually imaginary". Novel as literature started as a collection of short stories which later gained popularity. Prose which was ordinarily spoken and accepted was the most preferred style of language for novel writing.

Stories were first written in the late middle-ages and the early modern age. They were either romances or allegories. Allegories helped common man to understand the truth from the Bible or any other religious book. There were other kinds of stories that circulated in England, chiefly the story of King Arthur, a legendary British leader who led the defense of Britain against Saxon invaders in the late 5th and early 6th centuries, and his Knights at the Round Table. These were stories which were part of the local English culture and about each knight at King Arthur's court. Even the story of the Legend of Troy which we get from Homer's *Iliad* (8th century BC) is given to us in various versions. *Iliad* gives us many heroes like Achilles, Hector, Ulysses or Agamemnon. It gives us a bunch of stories which were in circulation in the European Continent, which one can connect them with in England to King Arthur, and in France to Charlemagne. The French romances during the 12th Century, as popularized through Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* through the 15th-century Middle English prose, deals with chivalry, knighthood and honor with the grand epic genre. On a similar note, we find Geoffrey Chaucer writing the '*Tale of Melibeus*' and the '*Parson's Tale*' in prose form during the 14 century. Later, Boccaccio also produced some prose works. His "prose tales of amorous adventure, *The Decameron*" is well-known. Hence, Italy is considered as home of the novel form. *Don Quixote*, a Spanish novel by Miguel de Cervantes, was originally published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615 and this is seen as central

to the rise of the novel in England. It came to England in translation during the Elizabethan Age when the genre of drama dominated.

5.2.3 Rise of the English Novel in the Elizabethan Age:

The invention of the printing press by William Caxton in the year 1476 helped people to publish and circulate stories. We have three writers of prominence in the Elizabethan Age. They are Thomas Delanie, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Nash. Thomas Delanie and Thomas Dekker told realistic stories. Their characters were chiefly from middle class or lower middle class. Thomas Nash's *The Unfortunate Traveler* (1594) is one of the most popular texts of the period. It is an account of a person who goes travelling on the continent and all the adventures he encounters during his travelling.

Later Sir Philip Sidney in *Arcadia* (1593) gave to prose some kind of formal order of verse. The other two significant developments were the founding of the Royal Society and *The Authorized Version of the Bible* in 1611, authored by King James. It gave the Englishmen a 'prose style of writing' which was distinct to English prose for many centuries to follow.

Later on, theatre dominated the literary sphere and Shakespeare, through his mixing of tragedy and comedy, introduced a similar strain in the traditional English drama. Then comes Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: Or The History of the Royal Slave* (1688) which is a major work of importance. John Bunyan's novel *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is allegorical in nature about a pilgrim who is making his way to the city of God; the trials and the tribulations and the troubles that he encounters as he goes to heaven forms the story. Throughout his journey, he meets people who are realistic. This literary jewel has contributed to the rise of novel in English Literature.

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) perfected the English prose as a vehicle for the novel. These are the earliest versions of the novel. *Robinson Crusoe* is crucial because it tells us a story in prose about one man who during his travel gets stranded on an island, and describes his life on that island; how he is rescued and how he comes back. This novel along with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is considered by some a foundational text for post-colonial critics and post-colonial writers. Robinson thinks that the island is an uninhabited island. He meets the natives there and dominates over them. He makes that island his own and gets one native servant and names him as Friday. This as an earliest novel that changed the way the novel as a genre was perceived during this time for its form and content. Many noteworthy novels came into abundance on similar topic and fashion.

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* are also representative of the times.

Gulliver's Travels is a novel which tells the story of Lemuel Gulliver who goes travelling and visits four places - A Voyage to Lilliput; A Voyage to Brobdingnag; A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbudrib and Japan and A Voyage to the Land of the Houyhnhnm. He gives an account of how society is like and how it is different from the English culture. The novel is satirical of English society and the English human being. This novel is also promoted as a children's book. In these two novels, Defoe and Swift have exemplified how imagination can become a major part of a novel. They used prose as a vehicle to convey the truths in the life.

Reasons to make a novel a popular genre of literature during the 18th Century: Many factors contributed to the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century which made it a popular form of literature. Some of the major influencing factors are a) Industrial Revolution b) Literacy and c) Decline of Drama. It was in this century that reading novel became a matter of status and fashion. It was an ideal form to express and project the middle-class ideas, sense and sensibilities of those times. This age is also known for the characters like Sir Roger De Coverley, Sir Andrew Freeport, Will Honeycomb, all created and crafted by Addison and Steele.

Many critics are of the opinion that the 18th century was the golden period of the novel. This age witnessed great advancement and experimentation in narration, plot, characterization, genres and so on.

a) The industrial revolution helped in establishing more publishing houses. Books were published at cheaper rates and were first time affordable for middle-class people. Even newspapers and magazines were easily accessible. Some novels appeared in magazines. Hasan (2015) observes, the industrial revolution "paved the way to the rise of the middle-class people." Major writers selected characters from such a section of the society with whom the readers could relate to.

b) Literacy rate increased, which was another major reason for the rise of the novel. Many people started reading and visiting public libraries. Readers were coming to terms with the reality of life. The hardships of day-to-day life made them more realistic. The characters, too were portrayed in such a way that the readers used to emulate them. Major novelists like Richardson, Fielding and Daniel Defoe depicted characters naturally.

c) Reading public was no more dreamers. They were idealistic and had given up reading romances which were left only for the royal or elite class of the society.

d) The decline of drama paved the way for the flowering of the modern novel in the 18th century. Many writers and readers switched to the novel. It was a remarkable shift from performance to reading.

e) Periodicals also contributed to the popularity of English Novel. The ‘prose’ style adopted by Addison and Steele affected the novels of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.

As Ian Watt observes, novels and periodical essays: “Encouraged the rapid, in-attentive, almost unconscious kind of reading habit. It also further promoted reading culture in England.”

5.2.4 Four Wheels of the English Novel:

In the 18th Century, the genre of English novel reached its height especially, because of the Four Writers i.e., Samuel Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne produced novels in abundance.

Samuel Richardson is considered as the “Father of English Novel”, who accidentally became a novelist at the age of 50 (fifty). He is revered for his two major works: *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. His first novel, *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) became an instant hit. Richardson became popular overnight, who has left an indelible mark in the History of English literature and novels in particular. He introduced ‘epistolary form of novel’ as a literary device. This type of novel is written as a series of letters for communication. This also ensured the development of character and the readers get an insight into the characters through these letters. It stands out from other novels because in this novel there is no third person narration. Narration can also be done through letters in which Pamela (eponymous) writes letters to her parents. She writes 7 volumes of letters to her parents in which she defends her beauty against her master Mr. B, who is determined to seduce her.

The novel ‘Pamela’ is studied as a sentimental novel, as it deals with the everyday life by sentiments but also as character study. It also enjoys as the first novel of feminine character i.e., *Pamela*. For this reason, Richardson is also called as the first modern novelist of the 18th Century as his emphasis was on character development.

The novel is in two parts and is a story of Pamela who is 15 years old. She is the narrator of the story. She works for a rich man known as Mr. B. He is a rich man and a prodigal son who has a habit of seducing women repeatedly. Pamela doesn’t give up her virtue and she does not even reveal the advancements of Mr. B towards her, with others except with Mrs. Jervis through letters. Mr. B gets so impressed by her virtue that he offers her a serious marriage proposal. Hence, it is subtitled as *Virtue Rewarded*.

Richardson's next novel 'Clarissa' (1748) is the longest novel in English literature. In Indian English Literature **Vikram Seth's** *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is considered as the longest novel. It is included among the 100 best novels in English Literature by the English daily newspaper, *The Guardian*. This novel is also an epistolary novel, but this novel has a tragic end. In this novel *Clarissa* is just 18 years old. In this novel too there is a male character named Mr. H, whose name is also not revealed like Mr. B. It is believed that these stories are real and hence the real names are not revealed. Clarissa too goes through lots of hardships to prove her virtue. She shares her feelings and anxieties with her friends Anne Howe, Robert Lovelace and John Belford through letters.

Henry Fielding is known for his two novels, *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). Both these novels have the essentials of the picaresque element and the bildungsroman. A picaresque novel follows the character of a picaro or a rogue and his various adventures. So, it is a kind of episodic expressions and eventually he comes to a happy ending where he succeeds or he is able to achieve some kind of happiness in life. The Bildungsroman novel shows us how a child from a young person grows up into an adult and growing up in a society that seems to be against him, but eventually is integrated into that society. So both novels of Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* feature this young hero who attends this trajectory and eventually becomes a respectable member of the society. His novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742) is considered as the first full-length novel in English literature.

Tom Jones (1749) by **Henry Fielding** is a classic English novel that captures the spirit of its age and whose famous characters represent Augustan society in all its loquacious, turbulent, comic variety.

Tobias Smollett introduced some new elements in the English novel. He deals with the lives, incidents and adventures of the sea and sailors. His first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), deals with the adventures of Rodrick, who is the author himself. Almost all his novels deal with the adventures of the sea and sailors and are mostly autobiographical.

Laurence Sterne is considered as the fourth wheel of the carriage of the novel genre. His two novels are *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1767) and *The Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). He employed a non-linear narrative technique unlike his contemporaries. In his novels, we find no definite plot, neither beginning nor middle nor an end.

Such a technique is named as the ‘Stream of Consciousness’, which was further promoted by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in the 20 century.

Miss Fanny Burney (1752-1842), the first of the women novelists, is an important figure in the history of English novel. She wrote four novels: *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *Camilla* and *The Wanderer*, but her fame rests mainly on the first two.

After the death of these four writers, there was hardly any English novel spanning 40 years. Other than **Goldsmith’s** *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), one rarely finds any novel of substance. *The Vicar of Wakefield* by **Oliver Goldsmith** is considered as one of the best novels of the eighteenth century. Its plot is straightforward, if occasionally inconsistent; the characters are human and appealing, and humor and melancholy are expertly blended. Goldsmith has told the story directly via the main character. In this work, Goldsmith paints the picture of English domestic life for the first time. It is also distinctive because it paints a charming and idealized picture of English country life. It is even more attractive because of the mix of laughter and pathos.

After the sentimental novel, the picaresque novel and the epistolary novel, the Gothic novel emerged in the late 18th century. The **Gothic novel** is also popularly known as the novel of terror, where the novelist employed supernatural elements like the appearance of ghosts, dungeons and tombs.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797) wrote *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) which falls under the category of the Gothic novel. Walpole gave to the Gothic romance the elements on which it was to thrive for a generation to come—a hero sullied by unmentionable crimes, several persecuted heroines, a castle with secret passages and haunted rooms, and a plentiful sprinkling of supernatural terrors.

Mrs. Anne Radcliffe (1764-1832) was the most popular of horror fiction writers. She wrote five elaborate romances of which the most famous are *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). Her stories have well-constructed plots which contain medievalism, a lively but undisciplined imagination, and a skillful faculty of depicting wild scenery. She could successfully create an atmosphere of suspense and dread. What distinguishes her as a novelist is the fact that she rationally uses the supernatural machinery in her fiction.

William Beckford (1760-1844) wrote *The History of the Caliph Vathek* (1786), which deals with the mysteries of oriental necromancy. Satire mingles with sensation in his novels. **Matthew Lewis** (1775-1818) wrote *The Monk* (1796), which is the crudest terror novel. **Miss**

Clara Reeve (1729-1807) is remembered for *Old English Baron* (1778) which is a Gothic story. **Charles Maturin** is remembered for *The Fatal Revenge* (1807) and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) published in four volumes. All the texts are the examples of Gothic Novel.

Mary Shelley's (1797-1851) *Frankenstein* (1818) is the only horror fiction which is still famous. It is the story of the ravages of artificial monster equivalent to the modern robot. It may be considered the first work of science fiction and the last one of the horror schools. Thus, at the close of the nineteenth century, we find the three types of fiction: first, the realistic novel which deals with social life and manners; second, the romance which represented the purely emotional interest in nature and the past; and finally, the humanitarian novel, which seriously undertook to right the wrongs sustained by the individual at the hands of society. These three types, according to Moody and Lovett, "...have defined three schools – the realists, the romanticists and the social novelists, which have continued, with innumerable cross divisions, until the present time". **Emily Bronte's** (1818-1848) only novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is the most popular novel of this genre.

The other two prominent writers in the Romantic Movement are Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. **Sir Walter Scott** (1771-1832) is popularly known for writing historical novels. Scott's treatment of history is not accurate, but he takes liberties with facts and it alters them. His anachronisms are numerous. Some of his popular novels are: *Ivanhoe* (1820), *The Betrothed* (1825), *The Talisman* (1825), *The Siege of Malta* (1831) and so on.

Jane Austen (1775-1817) a prolific writer, is acclaimed as a social novelist. Her novels might be called 'novels of manners' as her novels are pictures of everyday existence. Her noteworthy novels are *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816). Jane Austen presents the characters and dialogues from the real world of the time. She represents the society as social groups which are formed to resolve the matrimonial complexities. The presentation of the society as parties, shopping, and dances are full of humor and irony. Jane Austen is the product of the transitional period which intervenes between the ideal of the 18th Century and the 19th Century. On the whole, she belongs more to the 19th century than the 18th century.

Other women novelists have also contributed to the rise of English novel and they are Mary Edgeworth (1768-1849), Susan Ferrier (1782-1854), and Mary Rusel Mitford (1787–1855).

Other Prominent Writers:

Thomas Love Peacock's (1785-1866) reputation rests almost exclusively on the merits of his seven novels, which are *Headlong Hall* (1815), *Melincourt* (1817), *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), *Maid Marian* (1822), *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), *Crotchet Castle* (1831), *Gryll Grange* (1861) in which he criticized the romanticists. Most of his works are ironic. He wrote satirical novels, each with the same basic setting: characters discussing and criticizing the philosophical opinions of the day. Peacock's novels record the intellectual, social, economic, literary discussions and battles of early 19th- century England. His novels can be in one sense called as "conversational novels", and many of the characters who take part in the various conversations were modeled after the leading personalities of Peacock's Day. His novel *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) stands apart as a Gothic and Romance novella with added satire.

English Novel in the 19th Century:

The 18th century and the Victorian Age can be considered as ages of novel. It was in these two ages that great master pieces of novels were produced in abundance. The 19th century is popularly known as the Victorian Age. This age is divided into two parts i.e., The Early Victorians and The Later Victorians. Advancement in science, technology and in novel form is quite evident during the age. Novelists like **Dickens, Meredith, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, the Bronte Sisters, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce** have occupied a prominent place in the English novel during the Victorian Age.

Early Victorians:

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is famous for his novels which are mostly autobiographical and can be studied as novels of social realism. He is considered as the pioneer of realism in the 19th Century. He exposes the evil sides of the Industrial Revolution and the exploitation of children in his semi-autobiographical novels like *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861) through the most memorable characters named David Copperfield and Pip respectively. Of the two, Pip has left an indelible mark on the minds of the readers. Dickens' other novels which expose the double standards and the materialistic life are - *The Bleak House* (1852), *Hard Times* (1854) and *The Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

The Victorian Age was dominated by the women novelists, of whom Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell, the Bronte Sisters - Emily, Charlotte and Anne and George Eliot are prominent ones. The Bronte Sisters have carved a niche for themselves in English literature. Charlotte Bronte is the eldest of the famed Bronte sisters who survived into adulthood, one of the most powerfully

insightful writers of the early nineteenth century. She was the foremost romantic novelist along with her sisters Emily and Anne Bronte. Her first novel, *The Professor* (1857) found no publisher and only appeared in 1857 after her death. Her magnum opus *Jane Eyre* (1817) was written under the pseudonym Currer Bell. She revealed her identity only after it was acclaimed by the readers. This was because of the notion that women writers were not accepted well during the Victorian Period. Charlotte portrayed the women in Victorian England as a representation of her own life through the content of *Jane Eyre*.

Emily Bronte was the most prominent of the three sisters. She was the model of *Shirley* (1849), the heroine of her sister's novel. Her one novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is referred to as one of the best novels in the Gothic genre. The novel focuses on the mysterious or supernatural elements and takes place in dark, sometimes exotic settings. The novel is also unique for dual narrators, for which it is rightly called "narrative within the narrative" frame, which dominates the novel. Lockwood's narration begins in the first three chapters, and the rest is by Nelly Dean, who is a servant in the mansion.

Anne Bronte who wrote under the pseudonym Acton Bell, penned *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) are much inferior to those written by her sisters, for she lacks nearly all their powers and intensions.

Mary Ann Evans wrote under the pen name **George Eliot** (1819-1880). She is one of the leading writers of the Victorian Age. Her popular novels are *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1872), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Most of her novels reflect realistic and vivid portrayal of the provincial life of England.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865): She is one of those novelists who has effectively used the novel as an instrument of social reform. Her popular novels are *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848), *Cranford* (1853) and *North and South* (1865). In her first novel *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848), she pricks the conscience of industrial England through her depiction and analysis of the working class. In *North and South* (1865), she deals with the relationship of workers and masters, strengthened Lady Gaskell's status as a leader in social fiction. She is also known as a biographer of her friend Charlotte Bronte. Gaskell was a vibrant, unfamiliar voice to the genre of industrial fiction.

W. M. Thackeray (1811-1863) was born in Calcutta. His father was an Indian Civil Servant. His notable works are: *Catherine: A Story* (1839), *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1847), *The History of Pendennis* (1848), *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), *The Virginians*

(1859). He criticizes the Newgate School of Crime Fiction exemplified by Lytton and Ainsworth. He also criticizes Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. The title of his novel *Vanity Fair* is taken from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. His novels are mainly satirical.

The Later Victorians:

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928): The first notable novelist of the Later Victorians is Thomas Hardy. His novels are the works of a poet. He considered poetry to be his true vocation in life, but wrote novels because he believed that writing novels was a profitable business and the only way open for him to make his living. Hardy is popularly known as a Regional Novelist. His novels settings take place in the region in England called Wessex. He is a Victorian realist in the tradition of George Eliot. He was influenced, both in his novels and in his poetry, by the Romantics and English Romanticism, especially of William Wordsworth. His novels are *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Hand of Ethelbert* (1876), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), *A Laodician, or The Castle of the De Stanceys* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1881), *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, *A Pure Woman* (1891), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *The Well-Beloved* (1897).

Some other Novelists of this Age:

Charles Reade (1814-1884) is known for his masterpiece, *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), which is a historical romance. Victorian critics hailed this work as the greatest historical novel ever written.

Wilkie Collins a good friend of Charles Dickens is another popular novelist who catered to the needs of the readers of this age. The Victorian readers were fed up with the novels of social reforms and propaganda novels. Collins' purpose in novel was welcome by this reader class as his purpose was to "make'em laugh, make'em cry; make'em wait." Collins's works were classified at the time as "sensation novels," a genre seen nowadays as the precursor to detective and suspense fiction. He also wrote on the plight of women and on the social and domestic issues of his time. His other important novels are *The Woman in White* (1871) and *Armadale* (1866).

Anthony Trollope: He is rated highly among the novelists of the Victorian Age. He is conspicuously free from the most characteristic Victorian faults. His works are: *The Warden* (1855), *Barchester Tower* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1859), and *The Last Chronicle of Barcel* (1867).

Charles Kingsley is a novelist of second rank. *Westward Ho* (1855) is the most important novels written by him. **Benjamin Disraeli's** chief novels are *Vivian Gray* (1826), *The Voyage of Captain Popomilla* (1828), *Ixion in Heaven* (1832), *The Infernal Marriage* (1834), *Conningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847).

George Meredith is a great psychological novelist of the Victorian age. He is the founder of a psychological novel. He opposed realism and the realistic school of novelists who aimed at the reproduction of life with scrupulous minuteness and fidelity. His major novel is *The Egoist* (1879).

20th Century Novel: Trends in 20th Century Novel

The one thing which stands out prominently in the history of the English novel, is its immense popularity at the turn of the 19th Century. It eclipsed both poetry and drama; it is the only literary form which has competed successfully with the radio and cinema and it is in this genre that work of the greatest merit is being produced.

A prominent feature of the modern English novel is its immense variety and complexity. Novels are being written practically on all possible themes and subjects. There are the traditionalists like H.G.Wells, Arnold Bennett and Galsworthy. On the other hand, there are innovators, like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Biographical novels, regional novels, satirical novels, sea novels, detective novels, war-novels and novels of humor continued to flood the market and the list is not exhaustive.

The Modern novel is realistic. It deals with all the facts of contemporary life, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant, the beautiful as well as the ugly, and does not present merely a one-sided view of life. Some of the early realist novelists are Samuel Butler and Joseph Conrad.

Samuel Butler was the most original and brilliant thinkers of the 19th Century. The fame of Samuel Butler rests chiefly on the three novels - *Erewhon* (1872) and its sequel *Erewhon Revisited*. *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) is his best-known work.

The novels of **H G Wells** such as *Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) deals with scientific subjects in an imaginatively. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times.

Joseph Conrad is a curious phenomenon in the history of the English novel. His best novels are *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim: A Tale* (1900), *Nostramo - A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). His novel *Heart of Darkness* is discussed widely as a foundational text of colonialism because it discusses

the impact of colonialism in Africa. Conrad breaks the narrative conventions of the Victorian novel, adopting a novel style which connects it with the modernist narrative. He combines the values of the Victorian period and the Modern period as well.

Somerset Maugham is one of the prominent novelists and short story writers of the 20th century. *Of Human Bondage* (1915) is his masterpiece.

The novels of **E M Forster** are *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *A Passage to India* (1924) and *Maurice* (1971). His novel *A Passage to India* is studied through the lens of India in the later days of the British Raj.

D H Lawrence is one of the most controversial in the history of the modern English novel. He has been excessively praised as well as excessively abused. His pre-occupation with sex has resulted in his being condemned. His novels like *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) were proscribed on the grounds of immorality and his *Sons and Lovers* (1913) was condemned.

The novels of Aldous Huxley are satirically the disillusionment and frustration with contemporary social life. His popular novel *The Brave New World* (1932) satirizes a scientific Utopia in which everything is controlled by science.

The Stream of Consciousness and other Women Novelists:

This form of novel is the peculiar product of the 20th century. The rise of this art form on the eve of the World War I marks an epoch in the history of the English novel. This novel is also called the novel of subjectivity or the psychological novel.

The phrase "stream of consciousness" was first used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the chaotic flow of impressions and sensations through the human consciousness. The prominent practitioners were Dorothy Richardson in England, James Joyce in Ireland, and Proust in France. Virginia Woolf imparted the required form and discipline and made it popular.

James Joyce is the chief exponent of the Stream of consciousness. His novel *Ulysses* (1922) is the finest example of the use of this technique, which forms the Modern Novel form. His other noteworthy works are *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939).

Mrs. Virginia Woolf is another exponent of who has contributed to this school. She adopted the stream of consciousness in her third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922). Her maturity in the field of fiction is seen in her other novels which followed like *Mrs.*

Dalloway (1925). *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) represent the novel of subjectivity.

Dorothy Richardson is known for her one novel, *Pointed Roofs* (1915) which projects feminine psychology diligently. She endeavored to give both the subjective and objective biography of a character in the novel.

Katherine Mansfield has mainly contributed five volumes of short stories in her lifetime. In her short stories, she has tried to project the challenges and contrasting human emotions. *The Prelude* (1918), *At the Bay* (1922), *The Fly* (1922), *The Garden Party* (1922) represents at its best the subtle psychological art of Katherine.

Elizabeth Bowen is a close follower of Virginia Woolf. Her reputation rests on her two novels *Last September* (1929) and *The Heat of the Day* (1948).

English Novels (Post World Wars):

The English novel after World War II continues to be as prolific and vigorous as ever before. Some distinguished writers of this period are Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, C P Snow, Ivy Compton- Burnett, and Evelyn Waugh, Lawrence Durrell, Iris Murdoch, William Goldwin, Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson and Philip Toynbee and several others.

Graham Greene's popular novels are: *The Man Within* (1929), *The Man of Action* (1930), *Rumor at Nightfall* (1931), *Stamboul Train* (1932), *It's a Battlefield* (1934), *England Made Me* (1935), *The Power and Glory* (1940), and so on.

Evelyn Waugh is both humorous and a serious novelist whose fame rests on a few novels like *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Black Mischief* (1932), *A Handful of Dust* (1937), *Put out More Flags* (1942), and *The Loved One* (1948).

Ivy Compton Burnett's novels are essentially domestic in nature and her characters are developed round the tightness of family structure. Some of her prominent novels are *Dolores* (1911) and *A Heritage and its History* (1959).

Anthony Powell's first novel *Afternoon Men*, published in 1938, was a satire directed against the chic world of fashion and the arts, somewhat in the manner of Evelyn Waugh.

Check your Progress

1. Write a note on the rise of the novel in the 18th century.
2. What were the causes of popularity of novel genre in the Victorian period?

5.3 Learning Outcomes

After gaining information about the origin and development of the English novel, you are expected to have gained knowledge about the genre of novel. You should be able to appreciate the prescribed novels from the knowledge gained in this Unit. You should be able to compare and contrast different periods in the development of the novel as a genre.

5.4 Glossary

Genre: A style or category of art, music, or literature.

Picaresque: Relating to an episodic style of fiction dealing with the adventures of a rough and dishonest but appealing hero.

Bildungsroman: A novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education.

Epistolary: In the form of letters.

Gothic: Something that is characterized by mystery, horror, and gloom.

5.5 Sample Questions

5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *Utopia* was written by _____.
(a) Cervantes (b) Machiavelli
(c) Poliziano (d) Thomas More
2. Who translated the *New Testament* into German for the first time?
(a) Poliziano (b) Cervantes
(c) Martin Luther (d) Alexander VI

3. The 18th century work *Tom Jones* was written by _____.
 (a) Samuel Johnson (b) Henry Fielding
 (c) John Donne (d) Tobias Smollett
4. Whose great *Dictionary*, published in 1755, included more than 114,000 quotations?
 (a) William Hogarth (b) Jonathan Swift
 (c) Samuel Johnson (d) Ben Jonson
5. Who is commonly known as ‘Pip’ in *Great Expectations*?
 (a) Philip Pirrip (b) Filip Pirip
 (c) Philip Pip (d) Philips Pill
6. *Vanity Fair* is a novel by _____.
 (a) Jane Austen (b) Charles Dickens
 (c) W. M. Thackeray (d) Thomas Hardy
7. Which of the following is the first novel of D. H. Lawrence?
 (a) *The White Peacock* (b) *The Trespasser*
 (c) *Sons and Lovers* (d) *Women in Love*
8. Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is a _____.
 (a) Picaresque novel (b) Gothic novel
 (c) Domestic novel (d) Historical novel
9. The Bronte sisters wrote during the _____ period.
 (a) Regency (b) Restoration
 (c) Romantic (d) Victorian
10. Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* takes place over what period of time?
 (a) A week (b) 24 hours
 (c) A lifetime (d) 6 months

5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the origin of the English novel.
2. Write a note on the ‘Four Wheels of English Novel.’
3. Who are the prominent women novelists of the Victorian Age?
4. Discuss the contribution of Bronte sisters to the English Novel.
5. What is stream of consciousness? Mention few prominent practitioners of this genre.

5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Trace the development of the novel as a literary form in England.

2. What were the reasons for the rise of the English novel in the 18th century?
 3. Write a note on experimentation in English novel and its role in the development of the English novel.
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5.6 Suggested Readings

1. Eagleton, Terry. (2012). “*What is a novel?*” *The English Novel: An Introduction*.UK: Blackwell.
2. Hale, Dorothy J. (Ed). (2006). *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. UK: Blackwell.
3. MacKay, M. (2011). *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel*. UK: CUP.

Unit – 6: Life and Works of Albert Camus

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Life and Works of Albert Camus
 - 6.2.1 Albert Camus as a Writer
 - 6.2.2 Illustrious Works of Albert Camus
 - 6.2.3 Artistic Style of Albert Camus
 - 6.2.4 Albert Camus and Sense of Absurdity
 - 6.2.5 Albert Camus as a Journalist
 - 6.2.6 Conclusion
- 6.3 Learning Outcomes
- 6.4 Glossary
- 6.5 Sample Questions
- 6.6 Suggested Readings

6.0 Introduction

Albert Camus, one of the most important and renowned literary figures of the 20th century, was born on 7th of November 1913 in Algeria. He was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He was born and brought up in a working-class poor family. He never saw or met his father as he was killed in 1914 on the battlefield during the initial phase of World War I. His mother was an illiterate and half deaf but Camus cherished her company throughout his life. His connection with his mother was very exceptional and very close, not only in his childhood rather throughout his life. He and his brother Lucien had to live in an extended family, along with his uncle in a very modest house in a working district of Algeria. Against all odd environment and humble background, he studied and got the degree of graduation from the University of Algiers in 1935.

He joined the communist party and was thrown out of it in 1937. In the closing phase of 1935, he along with a youthful group had created and directed a theater student group with the name “Théâtre Du Travail” (Labor Theater). It was meant and intended to bring entertainment

through the presentation of the world's most renowned plays at an affordable price to the poor class people of Algiers. Later on, after his conflict and breakup with the communist party in 1937, the name of this theater group was changed and it was named as "Théâtre del' Équipe" (Team Theater).

Since the age of 17, he suffered from tuberculosis which affected his health and impacted his life till his death. He came from a very modest and poor background. In order to support himself, he had to do odd jobs in his life. He started by working as a court reporter and investigating journalist in a local paper named "Alger Republican" but because of his efforts and skills he was soon promoted as Editor-in-Chief.

Camus' progressive political and anti-colonial doctrine is projected through his essays and newspaper as an Editor-in-Chief. His newspaper was censored at the start of the World War II by the Conservative Government. Due to several local, financial, and social restraints he migrated to Paris in 1940. Paris proved a fortunate arena for the young intellectual and aspiring writer. In 1940, Albert Camus married Francine Faure, who was a pianist and a mathematician. She gave birth to twins to Camus in 1945. In the same year, Albert Camus started working with Paris Soir Magazine. In 1949, he had a severe attack of tuberculosis and he lived in isolation for about two years. In 1950, Albert Camus devoted his efforts for the work of human rights and justice. He had a strong voice against violence, oppression, and injustice. He was also against capital punishment.

Though he married and settled in Paris, he was never able to forget his origin and he always felt himself as an outsider and alien in Paris. But he had to console himself at a place which opened the door for his future success and a place of never-ending exile. In Paris, he started, completed and submitted his most famous works to a renowned publishing house "Gallimard." The names of these publications were *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*) and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*).

Albert Camus became Editor-in-Chief of "Combat," a newspaper which soon became one of the most read dailies of Paris. However, his favorite and most cherished place and activity was and remained throughout his life as an artist.

Although, *L'Étranger*, his first novel turned out to be a major success as a writer and novelist, his second novel *La Peste* (*The Plague*), published in 1947, took his literary, artistic, and novelist flair to international horizon and the book became the global best seller. With an international repute and success as a novelist, he was able to establish himself as one of the most

illustrious French writer and artist. Despite the success, fame, and literary repute he was never satisfied and felt comfortable in a city where he seemed himself as an outsider. He published his book length essay titled “*L’ Hommerévolté*” (*The Rebel*) in 1951, which is based on his philosophical notions. It was rejected by the left wing and faced severe criticism from Sartre.

6.1 Objectives

After going through the Unit, you will be able to:

- know the circumstances in which Albert Camus lived and grew up.
 - understand Camus’ stature as a novelist, playwright, and essay writer.
 - comprehend the literary style of Camus.
 - realize the concept of absurdity and the reasons for absurdity in the writings of Camus.
 - know the contribution of Albert Camus as a journalist.
-

6.2 Life and Works of Albert Camus

6.2.1 Albert Camus as a Writer:

The role and persona of Albert Camus as a writer was wide ranging. He was a gifted and multi-talented writer who wrote novels, dramas, short stories, and essays. Besides being an accomplished journalist, he also worked as an editor- and editor-in-chief, reporter, book reviewer, and an article and editorial writer, par excellence. His articles and editorials during war time had evoked “most vigorous expression of their own feelings” of the readers. Other than fictional and journalistic contribution he had also shown philosophical understanding through the publication of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. After his death, his works were read and discussed by scholars of various fields such as politicians, theologians, philosophers, analysts, journalists, and writers. He was not a mere writer but also had the insight to see the coming time and he wrote what came into existence after his death. *The First Man* which was his unpublished and unfinished work was highly autobiographical and personal.

Albert Camus’ writings, especially novels are the stories of ideas, morals, and ideological issues and psychological portrayal of characters. He was an ardent opponent of oppression and

evil that was spread by German or other oppressors. But being physically hampered by tuberculosis, he had only words to fight against evil and injustice and he did it with great dignity and authority throughout his life as a writer.

Albert Camus had spent his childhood in Algeria and its setting remained as a background in all of his fictional work except for the setting of *The Plague*, which is staged purely in a European setting. In the novel, the local inhabitants are seen moving here and there marking their appearance, but Arab Algerians are totally absent and it seems that plague had struck only the European and not the Arab Algerians. Another significant aspect of his writing was that he was a man of his time and a loyal and ardent supporter of his people, although he had to face exile from his native land. Another important aspect of his writing was his vocalization against violence. It can be seen in his speech at the occasion of the Nobel Prize when he stated, "I must also denounce a terrorism which is exercised blindly, in the streets of Algiers for example, and which some day could strike my mother or my family. I believe in justice, but I shall defend my mother above justice."

The first phase of Camus's writing can be termed as absurd as he was the first as far as the novelists of the absurd are concerned. Despite being a non-religious person, he had moral and ethical codes to project through his writing. He was of the view that life itself is absurd as there is no justification of existence of evil in the world and why bad things happen to nice and reformed people.

The second phase can be termed as the period of revolt. The concept that life is absurd and not meant to be lived was replaced with the concept that man should work and overcome the absurdity of life. In this regard, *The Plague* is a masterpiece which gave a lesson of optimism and the need to find out the meaning of existence and fight against evil and oppression.

In the last and the third phase of his writing, the concept of love, which can be seen in *The Fall* and *the First Man* is predominant.

6.2.2 Famous Works of Albert Camus:

Albert Camus lived and worked as a writer, artist, and journalist in a period of great turmoil. It was a period when two World Wars took place, colonialism was at peak and two noteworthy countries i.e. India and Algeria were engaged in liberation struggle. He was born in Algeria that was a colony of France and it got liberation after the death of Albert Camus. This turmoil had dominant influence on the life and works of the writer. He lost his father in First World War when he was merely one year old and he developed hatred against oppression,

injustice, and violence all over the world. Perhaps it was due to this turmoil, or the deafness of his mother and his illness or due to the collapse of his marriage that he developed the notion that universe acts in an irrational and absurd way as stated by Kimberly “The absurd, for Camus, has two sources: the universe and the death. The first is the notion that absurdity lies in the chaos and irrationality of the universe.”

Some of his well-known works are *The Stranger* (1942), which is perhaps the best known of his novels. It is a story of Meursault who was a strange and reserved person living in Algeria, the native place of Camus. He was passing his life purposelessly and finally committed a murder. Due to this very theme and essence, it can be labeled as one of the best absurd and existential piece of writings by the author. Another significant work of Albert Camus was *The Plague* (1947), which depicted a plague that had engulfed an entire city in Algiers. The novel was more about the crisis rather than about the illness being brought by plague. He tried his best to explore the reality of life, clash between life and death, wishes and suffering and how human beings are in dilemma, to get hold of their own fate. One of the most famous essays by Albert Camus was *The Myth of Sisyphus* was published in 1942. It outlined the idea of about absurdity and existentialism as held by Camus. He was of the view in this essay that human had to live keeping in mind that they can do nothing to avert their ultimate fate.

The Fall (1956), another influential piece of fiction, was completed and published by Camus prior to his death. It narrated the story of the life of a lawyer. It was written as monologues that delineated the successes and failures of the life of the lawyer, Jean-Baptiste Clemens. *The Rebel* (1951) is another important essay about rebellious people. In this essay, the writer tried to explore the reason why people become a rebel instead of accepting the set standard of that very society. He further investigated the impact of being a rebel in the modern era. As conclusion, he drew the idea that people did so because they are looking for some significant meaning in life. The last unfinished work which was published much later after his death and created a stir in the literary world was *The First Man* (1994). It was set in Algeria and was highly autobiographical.

Apart from novels, plays, and essays Camus also published a collection of short stories titled *Exile and the Kingdom* (1957). Each story in the collection depicts a scenario before the protagonist is an image of lawlessness and his response towards the situation. The most unnoticeable and neglected part of Camus ‘creativity was the theater or the plays that he had written, enacted or produced. Although his ultimate crush or love was that of theater, it was not

noticed as much as it could be. Through his plays and theater he had given vent to its feelings and emotions.

6.2.3 Artistic Style of Albert Camus:

Albert Camus was a master of depiction through plain blunt writing especially while in his first novel. His diction is simple and direct. His expression was more of a spoken language than of written. Due to these traits, his first novel has occupied its special place among foreign language learners even after many decades.

He was very much precise and particular in his manner of narration and presentation. He was not in favor of using figurative language in his writing rather he used simple, straightforward, and everyday diction. He was blunt and outspoken, which was depicted through characters in his works. He believed in the technique of character detachment in the portrayal of his narrators. The utilization of simple, plain and to the point sentences reflected the logical processing of the narrators in his works. Despite the fact that he utilized simple and plain diction his timing and accuracy was matchless throughout his career as a fiction writer, dramatist, and journalist. His language and style were simple, but there was a complexity in the thought process of his characters.

His description was always engaging and absorbing. Diversity in using sentences and expressions was a key and it can be noticed through the narrator of *The Plague*. In order to depict a conversation he had used rich imagery especially for introducing a relatively a minor character named Raoul, “Again, the friend slowly moved his equine head up and down, without ceasing to munch the tomato and pimento he was shoveling into his mouth.” His choice of words and sentence structure was always on the spot and appropriate to the context and the situation in which these were used.

6.2.4 Albert Camus and Sense of Absurdity:

Like Beckett, Albert Camus was often regarded as a writer who followed the doctrine of existentialism and the absurd school of thought. It is important to point that despite being existential and absurd, he maintained his uniqueness of being an anti-totalitarian. Though he is considered as an absurd and existentialist writer, he was always in search of meaning in life, reasons for living and some sort of morality. He was greatly inspired by the work of Blaise Pascal. The first cycle was based on absurdity, the second was that of revolt against injustice and oppression, and the third cycle was that of existential love.

We are well aware that life since childhood had not treated Albert Camus well and that had been imprinted in his mind and hence projected through his work. He was not a mere academic philosopher rather he had seen life from diverse and tough angles. When Albert Camus could not find solace in life the sense of value and meaning in his life was lost. It was the point when the sense of absurdity and meaninglessness in life originated. It could be found in his works such as *The Stranger*, which was published in 1942 and *The Plague* that was published in 1947. There was an explicit message and thought in these novels that life makes no sense as much remained unanswered due to his untimely and sudden demise, which itself shows the absurdity of life.

According to Camus, absurdity will diminish and go away if we have the power to resist and revolt against the odds. If the suicidal feelings are disdained and shunned away, then the absurdity will also go away and the desire to live itself indicates the meaning of life. Through the existence of absurdity finally, he found and extracted three different layers which he called “my revolt, my freedom and my passion.” It was the point when the sense of absurdness in Camus’ life ended and anti-absurdness came into his life as he valued life and preferred to live. Since then, he came with the notion that if we rebel, we exist. He revolted and fought against violence, injustice, inequality, and oppression. He asserted “The logic of the rebel is to want to serve justice so as not to add to the injustice of the human condition, to insist on plain language so as not to increase the universal falsehood, and to wager, despite human misery, for happiness.” (248, *The Rebel*).

6.2.5 Albert Camus as a Journalist:

Albert Camus started his odd jobs as a journalist in order to feed and support himself financially. At the age of 25, he was taken as a staff member of a daily named “Alger Republican” which was founded in 1938. He contributed as a reporter, book reviewer and editor of the daily until it was reincarnated as “Le Soir republican” in 1941 due to political pressure. In 1943, after the successful publication of *The Outsider* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he attained a repute of well-known French writer and hence was able to join “Combat”, the French daily. He attained the position of Editor-in-Chief in the said daily when it was regularly published after the liberation of French in 1944. Since then for the next four years, he wrote numerous articles on moral and political affects of the post war scenario.

Through “Combat” as a medium, he contributed significantly to the French Resistance in the war of liberation. The most difficult thing that bothered him as a journalist was the issue of

violence. The year 1941, was the period when after liberation, the French punished those who supported the German in the war, which pushed France into a state of civil war. Initially, through “*Combat*” he supported the revolutionary justice, but when the issue of execution, beheading, and imprisonment took place in now and then, he distanced himself from such justice. He was an ardent supporter of anti-violence and did not approve of death penalty. As a journalist, he had contributed significant essays. His journalistic skills and experience had contributed to developing his skills, persona, and significance as a fiction writer.

He used his journalistic exposure to express his view on contemporary issues especially, that of political importance. While talking about his exposure and career as a journalist, de Gramont said, “Journalism suited Camus far better than party activism. As a journalist, he could stand aside and help guide politics from an objective viewpoint. He could rally to the aid of the average man and the weaker members of society, so often disenfranchised by the indifference and stupidity of politicians and the greed of the privileged.” So, he kept neutrality as a journalist and did not become a mouthpiece of any party or favor any group. He was a consistent advocate of non-violence in resolving the conflicts and he also used the medium of press and journalism to show his hatred of and dislike for capital punishment. Because of these views and his healthy contribution in journalism that he was able to build up an intellectual public discourse on various issues of national and international importance. Camus himself while talking about the aim of being a journalist in true sense was of the view that “it is the job of a journalist, who is better informed than the public, to indicate the extent to which news is based on sources he knows to be dubious.”

Albert Camus used journalism to articulate “political and moral commentary on the news” on the contemporary issue of being an informed observer and reporter. He used *Combat* to be vocalized regarding Algeria and that of Arabs Algerian, he warned the French authorities to restrain themselves from being racial and oppressor but his views were neglected that resulted in the liberation of Algeria though after the death of Albert, but the freedom movement got started even when he was alive. He also used *Combat* as a medium to be a part of French resistance when German invaded French. Hence, *Combat* under the editorship of Camus acted as a mouthpiece of liberation and he used it as a medium to raise the “public persona of optimism.” Thus, his contribution in shaping the new emerging French nation and society was unforgettable though he did not participate as a soldier. To him, a creation of sensible discourse is a best mean

to attain the goal of what Albert Camus called “from resistance to revolution” in a newly emerged state.

At the end, it is sad to note that Albert Camus did not live long enough to see that enlightened and modified society that he wished and aspired for throughout his political and journalistic career. He was in favor of a rational, democratic and enlightened society to be emerged from war-torn and affected nation once the liberation of France was done. Albert Camus, being an active and vocalized journalist practically proved that “the free press had an essential role to play in all democracies.” Through that medium he crafted a healthy and sensible discourse, instigated the conflict to be resolved by non-violence acts, condemned the injustice and oppression in the world and the formation of modernized and enlightened society that was perhaps the most significant role that the press and journalism of Albert Camus’ time did when society was severely hit by war and violence.

6.2.6 Conclusion:

Albert Camus was one of the most influential writers, playwrights, novelists, and essayists of the 20th century. Later on, due to his political view-point which was against the ruling elite, Camus had to live in exile in France. He was there when France was invaded by Germans. He joined the resistance movement, especially through his editorials in *Combat* where he was editor-in-chief. He initially joined the Communist Party but later on he left it and joined Algerian People’s Party. He was against the colonialism of French and was an advocate of individual rights of the people. After his exile he joined the anarchist movement and when France was invaded by Germany, he joined the resistance movement in France. He was very active against communism and oppression. He was very outspoken and vocalized as a politician and as a journalist. He was among the very few journalists who openly denounced and criticized the American dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Apart from being active in politics and journalism, he contributed a great deal to fiction and theater. The most important contribution of Albert Camus in literature was the introduction of absurdism and existential school of thought, though he rejected that label and ranked himself a moralist rather.

Albert Camus was an influential novelist, playwright, essayist and journalist. He was also a philosopher and the founder of the school of absurd and existentialism, though he never ranked himself among the absurdists. He also wrote short stories and enacted several plays. His contribution to theater, though unnoticed yet had a significant part as far as his stature as an artist is concerned. In addition, he had translated the writings of American, Spanish, and Russian

writers. Few of the writers whose works were translated and adopted by him are Lope Vega, Fyodor Dostoevsky, William Faulkner, Pedro Calderon de la Barca, and James Thurber.

6.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the Unit, you are expected to:

- know the biography of Albert Camus in brief.
 - have some understanding about the important works of Camus.
 - comprehend the artistic style of the writer.
 - know the achievements of Camus as a writer.
 - understand absurdism and existentialism in the writings of Camus.
 - appreciate the contribution of the writer in the field of journalism.
-

6.4 Glossary

Communist: A person related to a political ideology or philosophy advocating holding the production of resources collectively

Tuberculosis: An infectious disease, mainly infecting lungs

Morphine: A pain medication of opiate family

Sartre: Jean-Paul Sartre was a 20th century French playwright, novelist, literary critic, political activist, and biographer

Nobel Prize: According to Alfred Nobel's will of 1895, the Nobel Prize is given to those who have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind the previous year.

Absurdity: Meaninglessness, Irrationality

Anti-Totalitarian: Against the system of government where people have no social, financial, and political authority and the state wields absolute control on every aspect.

6.5 Sample Questions

6.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Albert Camus was born in Algeria in _____.
(a) 1931 (b) 1913
(c) 1813 (d) 2000
2. The name of the theatre student group directed by Camus was _____.
(a) Labor Theater (c) Absurd Theater
(c) Globe Theater (d) Elite Theater
3. *The Plague*, a novel by Camus was published in _____.
(a) 1937 (b) 1947
(c) 2007 (d) 2017
4. In which year was Camus' book-length essay titled *The Rebel* published?
(a) 1930 (b) 1951
(c) 1960 (d) 1970
5. In which year did Albert Camus receive the Nobel Prize for Literature?
(a) 1960 (b) 2010
(c) 1957 (d) 2000
6. Which was an unpublished work by Camus?
(a) *The Stranger* (b) *The Rebel*
(c) *The Plague* (d) *The First Man*
7. The character Meursault appears in which novel of Camus?
(a) *The Rebel* (b) *The Stranger*
(c) *The Plague* (d) *The First Man*
8. The collection of short stories titled *Exile and the Kingdom* by Camus was published in which year?
(a) 1937 (b) 1947
(c) 1957 (d) 1967
9. In which year World War I started?
(a) 1939 (b) 1914
(c) 1945 (d) 1918

10. Which of the following is a novel by Camus? does the character Jean- Baptiste Clemens appear?

- (a) *The Plague* (b) *The Myth of Sisyphus*
(c) (a), (b) and (d) (d) *The Stranger*

6.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss in brief the childhood of Albert Camus.
2. Albert Camus persistently denies being an existentialist. Comment.
3. What were the achievements of Camus as a writer?
4. How can you say Camus was against violence?
5. Discuss in brief the important works of Camus.

6.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on Albert Camus as a writer of absurd literature.
2. Describe the contribution of Camus as a journalist.
3. Discuss in detail the artistic style of Camus.

6.6 Suggested Readings

1. Bellos. D. (2004). *Introduction to Albert Camus, Selected Fiction and Essays*. London: Everyman's Press, Millennium Library.
2. Bronner, S. E. (2009). *Camus: Portrait of a moralist*. University of Chicago Press.
3. Gloag, O. (2020). *Albert Camus: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
4. Herbert, A. L., (1979). *Albert Camus. A Biography*. Garden City, N.Y, Doubleday, 1979.
5. Zaretsky, R. D. (2011). *Albert Camus: Elements of a Life*. Cornell University Press.

Unit – 7: *The Outsider*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

7.0 Introduction

7.1 Objectives

7.2 *The Outsider*: Background, Plot, Characters

7.2.1 Background

7.2.1.1 Imperialism

7.2.1.2 Absurdism

7.2.1.3 Existentialism

7.2.1.4 World War II

7.2.2 Plot

7.2.3 Characters

7.2.3.1 Meursault

7.2.3.2 Marie, Raymond, Salamono, Celeste

7.2.3.3 Minor Characters

7.3 Learning Outcomes

7.4 Glossary

7.5 Sample Questions

7.6 Suggested Readings

7.0 Introduction

In the previous Unit, you studied the life and works of Albert Camus. In this Unit you will study *The Outsider* a novella written by him. *The Outsider* is the British translation of Albert Camus's French novella *L'Étranger*. The English translation in the US is termed *The Stranger*. *L'Étranger* was first published in 1942 during the period of the Second World War. The first English translation was published in 1946. *The Outsider* is set in Algiers, which was occupied by the French at the time the novella was published. Camus like most of his contemporaries did not approve of the French occupation of Algiers. Apart from being a powerful philosophical work, the novella presents elements of absurdism and existentialism. It is a depiction of the sense of meaninglessness of life that was predominant during the period of World War II.

Check your Progress

1. What is the original title of *The Outsider*?

2. Where is the novel set?

3. What does *The Outsider* depict?

7.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to familiarize you with the background to the novella
- to explain the concepts of absurdism and existentialism
- to understand the plot
- to study the characterization.

7.2 *The Outsider*: Background, Plot, Characters

Albert Camus's novella *The Outsider* or *The Stranger* is a philosophical work depicting the life of a young man, Meursault from the time his mother dies to the time he is decapitated. The outsider in the novella is the narrator himself who is also the protagonist. It is indeed strange that a person is treated as an outsider because he fails to fit into the parameters laid down by society. Society expects a person to weep on the death of a near one and because Meursault does not shed a tear on the death of his mother, he is considered an outsider.

The economic crisis during the World War II and the resultant unemployment and low wages are also important for a study of this novella. Meursault does not earn enough to take care of his ailing mother in her old age. So he sends her to The Home for Aged Persons at Marengo, which was 50 miles away from where he lived in Algiers. This act of sending his mother to an

old age home three years before her death and the fact that he did not cry at his mother's funeral are taken as deciding factors during his trial later on in the novella.

The novella traces Meursault's life and every circumstance in his life adds meaning to his eventual fate and to the whole sense of meaninglessness of his life. The long descriptive passages; the imagery especially of the hot sun bearing down upon him; his impulsive action of shooting the Arab; his relationship with Marie and his friendship with Raymond's as also the role of Salamono and his dog all provide insights to the reader in unravelling the character of Meursault. You will read more about the character of Meursault in a later section of this Unit. You will also read in detail about the plot of *The Outsider* a little later in this Unit. Let us now study the background to *The Outsider*.

Check your Progress

1. Who is the central character?

2. Name two characters mentioned in this section.

3. What do you know about Meursault and his mother?

7.2.1 Background:

As you were told at the beginning of this Unit, *The Outsider* is a novella set in Algiers and was published in 1942 around the time of the World War II. This is significant as it reveals to the readers the background to the novella. The World War II started in 1939 and ended in 1945. During the long drawn out war, several nations suffered setbacks and the affected population faced threats that were unknown before. The uncertainty during the period of War; the breakdown of the family as a unit due to drafting; and increasing unemployment often led to a sense of meaninglessness in life. This sense of meaninglessness is also reflected in *The Outsider* as we told you earlier. To further understand the background of *The Outsider*, you need to know about the French occupation of Algiers against the backdrop of imperialism; and the concepts of absurdism and existentialism. Let us look at each one of these now.

Check your Progress

1. What is the period of World War II? _____.
2. Which nation occupied Algiers? _____.

7.2.1.1 Imperialism:

Imperialism is a term that refers to the extension of the power of one nation over another. The imperialist nation extends its political power over the dominated nation and takes away its sovereign rights of absolute rule over itself. The imperialist nation further controls the dominated nation by imposing its own laws and taxes. As different from colonialism, it does not seek gaining control over the native population or by settlement of colonies. Instead, it is a power-game, the survival of the strongest. In the nineteenth century and during the World War I and World War II, the powerful nations were imperialistic and expanded their power over the weaker nations. The tussle for power led to the Wars. The imperialist nations gained access and control over the economic resources to increase their own wealth. Imperialism also entangled nations and forced them into conflict directly or indirectly based on the imperial power controlling them.

7.2.1.2 Absurdism:

The theory of the absurd or absurdism is an essential aspect of literature around the Second World War. Albert Camus is often credited with having been the originator of absurdism, mainly because of the influence of Nietzsche. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both can be considered forerunners to the theory of the absurd. Albert Camus' *The Outsider* and his *Myth of Sisyphus* are generally considered seminal works in the study of the absurd. Samuel Beckett popularised the theatre of the absurd and Martin Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* is a major contribution to the study of absurdism. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a good example of an absurd play.

Absurdism believes in the absurdity or meaninglessness of life. Life has no purpose; it is mere existence and this existence beyond the comprehension of man. Finding no purpose or meaning in life, the characters in absurdist literature feel isolated. The sense of isolation and alienation runs deep in literature of the absurd. Life holds no truth. Life is nothingness. The absurdity lies in the search for nothingness in nothingness and eventually finding nothing. Man finds himself lost in this world, as he has no roots in religion or philosophy. So instead of a hero, we have an antihero. Meursault in *The Outsider* is an antihero. In later works, we find the antihero in Beckett, Pinter, Osborne, and Albee. Meursault, in the tradition of absurdism is a

person who has no hope, who lives in the moment, has no desire for a better life, and who considers death a finality. For more information on the literature of the absurd, you may read M.H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* and *The Continuum Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory* edited by Julian Wolfreys. You may also read this <https://medium.com/strawm-n/albert-camus-the-absurd-b7b0e367a967>

Check your Progress

1. What is the literature of the absurd?

2. Who wrote *The Theatre of the Absurd*?

7.2.1.3 Existentialism:

You must also be familiar with the philosophy of existentialism to understand the background of *The Outsider* in particular and to the works of Albert Camus in general. As a movement in literary philosophy, existentialism finds its roots in the works of Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrick Nietzsche. Jean-Paul Sartre made extensive and conscious use of existentialism in his works. It is predominantly used in literary works of the 1940s and 1950s. Some famous existentialists are Heidegger, Beauvoir, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Ionesco and Kafka among others including Camus. Albert Camus rejected the term existentialism for his thought as projected in his writings and was comfortable with the term “absurd” for his writings.

Now let us understand what existentialism is. It is the philosophy that believes in the freedom of man. The subjective is more important than the objective. It does not believe in any inherent meaning of life. It is left to the freedom of the individual to find meaning. Man exists before his existence is given a meaning or purpose. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger attempts to answer the great existential question: “What is being?” According to his existential philosophy, man is precast into his “relationships” and his “surroundings.” His relationship with others in his surroundings is a constituent of his world. The individual being carves a world of their own existence and in this attempt, the individual often fails. Life is considered nothingness, emptiness and the only way forward is death. In this uncertain world, the only thing that is certain is death. In the case of Meursault too, we find the blend of the absurd and the existential. His world is constituted of his relationships in his surroundings. He tries to carve out his own life

and fails. There is nothing in his life, he is filled with emptiness and the only way out for him is death.

7.2.1.4 World War II:

As you may be aware, the World War II caused the greatest loss of life in human history. It involved almost all parts of the world in the conflict. The two warring sides were termed the Axis and the Allies. The major nations on the Axis side were Germany, Italy and Japan. The Allies consisted of major nations such as France, UK, US and the USSR. The major leaders during the World War II or the Second World War were Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Roosevelt, and Churchill. The immediate cause of the War was the accession of Poland by Germany under a secret treaty with USSR, where both nations decided to divide Poland between them. Poland had a treaty with France for mutual defence. So when Germany attacked Poland, France launched an attack on Germany. Very soon because of treaties among different nations, several nations got actively involved in the War. The War proved to be the bloodiest and affected human lives and economy of nations. The socio-political impact of the War had far-reaching effects. It caused trauma, anxiety, and depression apart from instilling a deep sense of alienation among the people across the world. Unemployment raised, cost of living increased and wages were often meagre for a decent living. There was a prevalent sense of uncertainty. All this is reflected in the literature of the period. Albert Camus's *The Outsider* is considered a representative work of the World War II. Let us now look at the Plot of *The Outsider*. You may read the complete text here <http://www.macobo.com/essays/epdf/CAMUS,%20Albert%20-%20The%20Stranger.pdf>

Check your Progress

1. Name the major world leaders during WW II.

2. Who were the Allies?

7.2.2 Plot:

The plot is divided into two parts. Part One is further divided into six chapters and it covers a period of less than a month while the second part covers a period of about one year and is further divided into five chapters. The plot of *The Outsider* revolves round the central character Monsieur Meursault. He is a young man with a modest income from a private job.

When the story opens, the reader is informed that his mother died. The narrator is in doubt whether she died that day or the day before. He is informed about the death of his mother through a letter from the warden of The Home for Aged People. The opening lines of the *The Outsider* are quoted below:

Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday.

The very casual and matter-of-fact opening enables the reader a glimpse into the character of Meursault. It also sets the tone of the novella. The first person narrative style (you will read more about this in the next unit) bonds the reader and the narrator and builds sympathy for the central character that just lost his mother. The opening paragraph also unravels the plot. Meursault had sent his ailing old mother to the old age home because he could not afford to maintain her. He had felt that she would be more comfortable and taken good care of in the old age home. Meursault's intention is seemingly to provide a decent and comfortable life to his mother, which he could not. So he opts for the old age home in her interest. However, in the later part of the story this is held against him during the trial.

Meursault leaves to attend his mother's funeral. He finds everyone being sympathetic to him. At the Home for Aged People, Meursault declines to look at his mother's face for no particular reason. He sits in vigil sipping coffee and smoking a cigarette when it is offered to him. He even dozes off now and then during the vigil. He is not overcome by emotion at any point in the novella for his mother's passing away. The gatekeeper of the Home, the Warden and Thomas Perez, his mother's "fiance" and her close companion at the Home are characters whom we encounter again at the trial.

Returning from his mother's funeral, Meursault comes in contact with Marie, a former employee at his office. The flirtatious meeting ends with their going to a comedy film the next day. When Marie hears that his mother died a day before, she is startled but still goes ahead with the movie plan. Soon, the two develop a romantic relationship. We also learn about Meursault's neighbour Raymond Sintes, his Arab girl friend, her brother and his Arab friends; and another neighbour, Salamono and his dog. We are also introduced, in the course of the dark and poignant tragic story, to Celeste, Meursault's friend and to Masson, Raymond's friend.

One day Raymond approaches Meursault and requests him to draft a letter to his Arab girlfriend, whom he suspects of cheating him. The letter is meant to trap her into meeting him

one last time. As expected, the girl arrives and a fight starts between them. Hearing sounds of assault, a neighbour calls in the police. Later, on Raymond's request, Meursault testifies in favour of Raymond. The girlfriend and her brother hold a grudge against Raymond and plan to attack him for revenge.

In the meantime, we learn about another neighbour, Salamono and his dog. He ill treats his dog, swears at it and kicks and drags it. Most neighbours feel offended by Salamono's cruelty to his dog. Meursault also tries to speak for the dog but Salamono continues with its harsh treatment. One day, the dog is lost and Salamono becomes very distressed. He cannot imagine life without his dog. He had taken it in soon after his wife's death and the dog helped beat loneliness and was his companion. Salamono's yearning for his dog, despite him being cruel to it, is in sharp contrast to Meursault, who has no feelings for his mother on her death.

The novella presents scenes at the beach where Meursault enjoys being in water with Marie. Once, Raymond takes Marie and Meursault to Masson's place. Masson, as you know was a friend of Raymond. He lived with his wife near the beach. The Arabs start following Raymond for revenge. Raymond, in anticipation of the attack had a revolver ready with him. Meursault on an impulse takes away the revolver from Raymond and keeps it with himself. At the beach, they are attacked by the Arabs and Raymond receives a cut on his hand and mouth. Masson and Meursault help him back to his home. Meursault returns to the beach and when he comes across the Arab who had inflicted wounds on Raymond, he finds the sun bearing down heavily upon him and once again, on an impulse, he takes out the revolver and shoots the Arab dead.

The story shifts to the scene where Meursault is arrested. He has already confessed to his crime. However, the legal process is long-drawn out. Though his case was a simple one as a onetime case with no prior history of criminal wrongdoing, and he had already confessed, the prosecution turned it into an obnoxious case worthy of decapitation, the highest form of punishment. During the trial and during his period in jail, Meursault increasingly becomes a stranger, an outsider to himself. As the trial proceeds, we find meaning being created out of meaninglessness which leaves Meursault at a complete loss of hope. His meaningless actions are alleged to be loaded with meaning and are held against him during the trial. Meursault's not crying on his mother's death, his writing a letter on behalf of Raymond, his carrying Raymond's revolver with him to the beach, his firing shots at the Arab, even the pause between his first and second shots are found loaded with meaning while Meursault knows he had no meaning or intention behind those actions. Eventually, Meursault is condemned to death by decapitation.

The plot depicts the alienation of Meursault not only from society but also from himself. Meursault rejects meaning in life. He does not wish to be judged in religious meaning or otherwise. The absurdity of life is depicted from the opening line to the closing line. Meursault can make no sense of anything. The only thing that seems final is death.

Throughout the plot, the sun as a symbol plays a significant role. It is depicted as oppressive and most actions in the story can be blamed on the sun. The sea, in contrast, is a symbol of happiness. All periods of joy in Meursault's life are around the sea. However, it is sadness which fills Meursault's life. The sense of meaninglessness runs deep in the life of Meursault and through the plot.

Check your Progress

1. What is plot?

2. Who is the narrator?

7.2.3 Characters:

In the previous section, you studied the plot of *The Outsider*. In the course of reading about the plot, you also came across some characters in the novella. You also learned that Meursault is the central character and that he is the narrator. Other than Meursault, you also came across other characters such as Marie, Raymond and others. Albert Camus delineates the characters with an eye for detail. There are no characters in the novella who do not add to the plot or meaning. Even the presence of the dog is significant in the story. As a writer of fiction, Camus excels at characterization. His characters are rounded. Even the typical characters like the defence lawyer and the Prosecutor are not reduced to types. Let us now look at the different characters in detail.

7.2.3.1 Meursault:

Monsieur Meursault is the narrator and the protagonist. He is a young man of few words who prefers to live by himself. He has no attachments in life and leads a detached life. He has few friends and even with these friends he spends very little time. He prefers to live life by the day without any expectations of life. He has no motivation in life and leads a mundane life. Even his prison life and life after being sentenced to death are insignificant. There is very little action and though he commits murder, even the act of murder is told in a matter-of-fact manner.

Meursault is honest in his feelings. He prefers to speak his mind rather than to say things to please others. When he does attempt to be social in his conversation, he fails miserably. For example, while applying for leave to attend his mother's funeral, he tells his employer: "Sorry, sir, but it's not my fault, you know." He does realize he should not have said this. But this gives the reader an insight into his character. Meursault is a person who acts on his instincts. He is a natural: he does not feign his emotions and there is no duplicity of character. Meursault himself explains his behaviour thus: "For the present, it's almost as if Mother weren't really dead. The funeral will bring it home to me; put an official seal on it, so to speak..." Similarly, when the door keeper was unscrewing the coffin so that Meursault could look at his mother, he told him "not to trouble." He tells the reader: "I realized then that I shouldn't have said "No," and it made me rather embarrassed." This impulsiveness is childlike and reflects his innocence but in the second part of the story, his impulsiveness is considered a negative trait during the trial.

Meursault also emerges as an absurd character but this absurdity is due to the prevalent times. As discussed in the background, the World War II had a deep impact on life. The sense of absurdity, meaninglessness and the identity crisis are a result of the War. When Meursault goes to the movie with Marie and when they choose to watch a comedy movie immediately after his mother's funeral, it has nothing to do with his being disrespectful to his mother's memory. We have to study it in the perspective that for him his mother is still alive. As pointed out earlier, for him it was "as if Mother weren't really dead." To find meaning where none exists, as is done during the trial, is a reflection of the absurdity of life.

Meursault is a good human being: he is a good son, a good lover, a good friend but not in the terms laid down by society. He sent his mother to the Home because she needed constant care and he could not afford it. It was his concern for his mother's well-being. His visits become few and far in between for as he says, in a matter of fact manner: "...I seldom went to see her. [...] it would have meant losing my Sunday _ not to mention the trouble of going to the bus, getting my ticket, and spending two hours on the journey each way." He is being honest with himself and his emotions. He does not put on the pretense of love for his mother. He does not claim any religious feelings either. What he says about his mother is equally true about him. He says: "So far as I knew my mother though not a professed atheist had never given a thought to religion in her life." During the trial and in prison, we find how the judge and the chaplain make efforts to make Meursault "religious."

Meursault had known Marie from his office. They get on well and develop a romantic relationship. Though not deeply in love, Meursault enjoys spending time with Marie. The best moments of his life are in water, at the beach with Marie. She uplifts his spirits and brings joy in his life. We find that Meursault is not inclined to be in a commitment with her. The only time, he wished they should be married was at the trial.

As a friend, we find Meursault being good with Celeste, whom he considers his friend. With Raymond, he becomes friends on his request but without giving it much thought. In the case of Salamono, he is friendly to the extent of not chiding him for being cruel to his dog and helping him with tips to find his dog when it is lost. He also has kind and genuine words for his dog and this gives solace to Salamono. Meursault could have made Salamono guilty on his treatment of the dog but he refrains from doing so. He is too sophisticated to hurt his feelings. So we can say that Meursault is genuine with his friends and his girl, Marie.

Meursault's interaction with his lawyer and his role during the trial also reveal insights into his personality. Meursault does not hide the fact that he shot the Arab dead. He is ready to face trial and expects his honesty to be recognized. As he himself says, his "physical condition at any given moment influenced [his] feelings." This is the most apt way to describe his actions throughout the novella. He was tired and drowsy from the journey, so he agreed to have coffee with milk when offered by the doorkeeper. That was also the reason why he fell asleep during the vigil. The sun bearing down on him made him shoot the Arab. And there are several other such incidents where his physical condition influenced his feelings.

During the trial, Meursault feels handicapped that he cannot speak for himself. He is taken aback by the testimonies of the funeral. His callousness in drinking cafe au lait, in smoking during vigil, in falling asleep during vigil and in not crying on his mother's death are treated as monstrosities. In truth, he was only being a free man not dictated by the conventions of society or religion. It was during his time in prison that he found his "habit of thinking like a free man" "irksome."

He is a person who exists, who lives without giving much thought to why or how. He lives in the moment, has no future plans and is not excited about anything, not even when he is offered a position in Paris. He has a voice of his own; he wants his voice to be heard but remains unsure whether he should speak up or not. Even during the trial, he struggles to remain silent on the advice of his lawyer. He knows he can defend himself better but his thoughts remain unspoken: only the readers are aware of what he wants to say. This is also the dilemma that is

ubiquitous in the literature of the absurd. To say or not to say makes the character a spectator in the drama of his own life.

Meursault is a victim of chance. His tragedy is the tragic circumstances surrounding him over which he has no control. None of his actions are premeditated: they are spontaneous and impulsive. He acts on the spur of the moment but his spontaneity becomes his undoing. He agrees to be Raymond's friend for no real purpose. He simply has no counter argument to reject Raymond's offer of friendship. When Raymond asks him to write a letter to his Arab girlfriend, he pens it without giving it much thought. He agrees to speak for Raymond at the police station when requested by Raymond. He takes the revolver away from Raymond, not with the intention of shooting the Arabs but to avoid trouble. As fate would have it, he himself lands in trouble for not only carrying the revolver but also for using it to shoot the Arab dead. He just happened by chance to go back to the beach; by chance he finds the Arab and by chance he shoots him. None of these actions were premeditated.

Thus, we can say that the character of Meursault represents the absurd. There is futility and hopelessness in his actions. He gives up all hope in the quest to find meaning in his actions. The others find a meaning behind his actions but he finds none. His tragedy is the reflection of the tragic circumstances in life that the modern man found himself in during the War years. Not only Meursault, but even the reader cannot make any sense of his life and actions. His circumstances are not unusual for him. In being himself, in being honest with his emotions and in allowing life to be what it is, Meursault emerges a tragic anti-hero who is an outsider to the others around him and the outsider to himself. In the life filled with meaninglessness, Meursault has only one certainty, the certainty of death.

Check your Progress

1. Name two friends of Meursault.

2. Describe Meursault using two adjectives.

7.2.3.2 Marie, Raymond, Salamono, Celeste:

In the above section, while discussing the character of Meursault, you also learned about some other characters. Let us now study the other characters who revolve round the character of

Meursault. The one character in the novella who brings happiness in the life of Meursault is Marie. As you know, she used to work in his office and Meursault later has a chance meeting with her the day after his mother's funeral. Marie is a foil to Meursault. She is full of life and mirth. She enjoys life unlike Meursault. However, in her company, especially when they are at the beach, Meursault also enjoys himself and the time spent with her. Whether it is dining together, or watching a movie in one another's company, or swimming together, or just relaxing in one another's company, it is the best phase of Meursault's life. Marie accepts Meursault for what he is and enjoys his company. She loves Meursault and hopes to be married to him but Meursault is unsure of his love and has no plans to be married. The role of Marie is important in the plot because during the trial, the prosecution charges Meursault with being inhuman because he had drinks with Marie and watched a comic movie with her the day after his mother died. Marie is a witness during the trial and though she tries her best to speak for Meursault, her testimony is held against him and she has to face the ignominy of narrating the intimate details of her relationship with Meursault.

Raymond also faces ignominy during the trial, when he is publicly accused of being a pimp and encouraging prostitution. And because of his association with Meursault is made out to be an immoral person. The major reason Meursault land in trouble is because of Raymond. In his half-hearted consent to be friends with Raymond, Meursault invites his own misfortune. Raymond, however, remains loyal to Meursault and testifies in court in favour of Meursault. Despite his best efforts, he fails to convince the prosecution of Meursault's non-involvement.

Raymond has trusted Meursault. He believes in him and continues his friendship with him. He introduces Meursault to his friend Masson (you will read about him in the next section) and his wife. He takes Meursault and Marie with him to the beach. He tries to flirt with Marie but she remains faithful to Meursault. Meursault is aware of Raymond's leanings toward Marie but he does not let it bother him. Raymond's promiscuous lifestyle casts a shadow on Meursault during the trial.

Salamono apparently does not have a great role in the story but his character is important in understanding Meursault. Salamono is always mentioned and discussed only in terms of his pet dog. Salamono's cruelty toward his dog, his swearing and his ill-treatment of the dog upset Meursault and the reader alike. When Salamono's dog is lost, he is helpless. He feels he has no purpose left in life. His dog was his only companion and he misses the dog badly. This makes us understand Meursault in more ways than one. Despite his cruelty and professed hatred of his dog,

Salamono feels the pain of losing his dog. Meursault is never cruel and has no hatred for anyone, yet is branded cruel and full of hate for having shot the Arab dead. He feels remorse as Salamono does. No one blames Salamono for his lost dog or for his treatment of the dog. On the other hand, Meursault is blamed for his treatment of his mother, even though he was never harsh or cruel to her. Salamono grieves for his lost dog and he is inconsolable. Meursault, on the other hand, has lost his mother but feels no pain or grief. So we can say that Salamono and his dog are part of the story to bring out the absurd element.

Celeste is another friend of Meursault. They have been friends for a long time and Meursault often spends time in his company at his restaurant. Celeste is there to comfort him when he hears the news of Meursault's mother's death. He helps him with the arrangements for the journey. He is a kind-hearted person who cares for Meursault. He also is a witness for Meursault during the trial but his testimony goes in vain. If a person is known by the friends he keeps, then Meursault can be known by his friendship with Celeste. Celeste is friend in the real sense of the word but Raymond approaches Meursault for friendship only when he needed his help. Meursault likes being Celeste and like him, he is kind hearted and gentle.

Apart from these characters, there are some minor characters in the novella who play some role in the plot. Let us now look at the minor characters in *The Outsider*.

Check your Progress

1. Who is Marie?

2. Is Salamono a good person?

7.2.3.3 Minor Characters:

The Warden at the Home where Meursault's mother passed away, the Door Keeper, Thomas Perez (called his mother's fiance by the inmates of the Home), Raymond's Arab girlfriend, her brother and his friend, Raymond's friend Masson and his wife, the defence lawyer, the Magistrate, the Prosecutor, the Judge and the Chaplain are the minor characters in the novella. Everyone connected with the Home finds Meursault responsible for his mother's sad state of affairs and finds him callous for being himself and not crying on his mother's death. The

testimonies of the Warden, the Door Keeper and Thomas Perez go against Meursault. Much is made out of his visit to the Home for his mother's funeral.

The Arabs serve the dual purpose of highlighting the issues of the Arabs as a result of the occupation of Algiers by France to serve imperialistic purposes and of the murder case in which Meursault is indicted. It is by chance that Meursault agrees to write the letter to Raymond's Arab girlfriend on his behalf. Meursault's handwriting serves to indict him of conspiracy. Meursault and Marie happen to be with Raymond by chance when the Arabs start following Raymond. Meursault shoots the Arab not out of enmity or revenge. He has no meaning in the murder, just as he has no meaning in most of his actions. Though he shoots on an impulse with no intention to kill, the case of murder builds up against him to such an extent that it is termed a monstrosity and a premeditated crime as a result of his criminal background, though he had none. The sense of meaninglessness and absurdity reach a climax when the Prosecutor triumphantly declares Meursault is responsible not only for the murder of the Arab but also the parricide case that had come to court for final judgement along with his case. The Defence Lawyer appears to play a half hearted role but he is handicapped by his own client, Meursault who is too innocent and straightforward for a court case. In the words of Meursault: "My lawyer [...] struck me as feeble to the point of being ridiculous." The Magistrate and the Chaplain in their ways, try to veer Meursault toward religion and God. Meursault is neither an atheist nor an agnostic, yet he made out to be a person who doomed as he does not believe in God or religion in a way that others do.

Check your Progress

1. Name two minor characters.

2. Is Meursault an atheist?

7.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to appreciate *The Outsider* as literature of the absurd. You should be able to know the background to the novella and the concepts of imperialism, absurdism, existentialism and the impact of the World War II. You should have

learned the plot and the characterization in the novella. You should be in a position to understand the place of *The Outsider* in the genre of fiction.

7.4 Glossary

Novella: A work of fiction of smaller length than a novel but of greater length than a short story.

Protagonist: The central character, one around whom the plot revolves

Anti-hero: Central character in a work of fiction who has certain weaknesses and lacks the qualities of a hero

Atheist: One who does not believe in God

Agnostic: One who doubts the existence of God

7.5 Sample Questions

7.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *The Outsider* is a novella set in _____ and was published in the year _____.
2. Kierkegaard and _____ both can be considered forerunners to the theory of the absurd.
3. The two warring sides during the World War II were termed the _____ and the _____.
4. Raymond approaches _____ and requests him to draft a letter to his Arab girlfriend whom he suspects of cheating him.
5. Returning from his mother's funeral, Meursault comes in contact with _____, a former employee at his office.
6. Once Raymond takes Marie and _____ to Masson's place.
7. Who is the narrator of *The Outsider*?
8. _____ is a victim of chance.
9. Who is the outsider in *The Outsider*?
10. Who are the two characters who try to convince Meursault to believe in God and religion?

7.5.2 Short Answer Questions

1. Write a brief note on Existentialism.
2. Explain the role of Salamono and his dog.

3. Describe the opening lines of *The Outsider*.
4. Discuss the sun as a symbol in *The Outsider*.
5. Examine in brief the ending of the novella, *The Outsider*.

7.5.3 Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss Albert Camus' *The Outsider* as fiction of the absurd.
 2. Critically examine the plot in *The Outsider*.
 3. Comment on the characterization in *The Outsider* with specific reference to Meursault and any three other characters.
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7.6 Suggested Readings

1. Bennett, Michael Y. *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*. Cambridge UP, 2015.
2. Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. English translation of the original text *L'Etranger*: <http://www.macobo.com/essays/epdf/CAMUS,%20Albert%20-%20The%20Stranger.pdf>
3. Hughes, Edward J., Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*. Cambridge UP, 2007.

Unit– 8: *The Outsider*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

8.0 Introduction

8.1 Objectives

8.2 *The Outsider*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

8.2.1 *The Outsider*: Major Thematic Concerns

8.2.1.1 The Absurd

8.2.1.2 The Binary of Rationality/Irrationality

8.2.1.3 Decay, Mortality, and the meaninglessness of Human Life

8.2.1.4 The Significance of the Physical World

8.2.1.5 Observation and the Endless search for Purpose and Meaning

8.2.1.6 Poverty and the Working-class Sentiment

8.2.1.7 Religion, Secularism and Existentialism

8.2.1.8 Chance and Interchangeability

8.2.1.9 Silence, Passiveness and Indifference

8.2.1.10 Relationships

8.2.2 Language and Narration

8.2.3 Critical Appreciation

8.2.3.1 Jean Paul Sartre's Observations on *The Outsider*

8.2.3.2 *The Outsider* or *The Stranger*?

8.2.3.3 Cultural Adaptations

8.2.4 Camus' Legacies

8.3 Learning Outcomes

8.4 Glossary

8.5 Sample Questions

8.6 Suggested Readings

8.0 Introduction

Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) was read as a reference point of the most significant trend in the 1940s' French thought. It was the feeling that man was trapped in a strange universe, and that he had to protest against the artificiality of existing social systems and against his metaphysical

condition. In his preface to the English translation, Cyril Connolly described Meursault as ‘a negative and destructive force’, although he rightly pointed out that Meursault was ‘profoundly in love with life.’ After existentialism had swept Europe and the West, *The Outsider* was more widely read, both within and outside France. It became such an important part of western culture because it embodied a way of thinking and feeling which was and is still relevant. Another reason the novel is so successful is its narration and language. The background, publication and success of *The Outsider* have already been discussed in the preceding sections. In order to understand the thematic, narrative and linguistic aspects of the novel, one has to deal with the modern trends of Existentialism and the Absurd.

However, the success of the novel brings readers’ attention to a few other aspects that have been little thought about. First, Camus has stated many times that his novel is not an existentialist, in the sense of Jean Paul Sartre’s concept of existentialism. Second, Meursault was perceived by the West to be a hero rather than an anti-hero. The third was the manner in which the colonial question was conveniently forgotten, because Meursault was regarded as a universal figure rather than a pied-noir. Camus’ narrative style and use of language helped to foster more optimistic interpretations of his novels and readers looked at his prior work for the philosophical and universal values Camus addressed in them. Indeed, *The Outsider* does not have any clear ancestors in French fiction, which led Sartre and many others to wonder if Camus had not been influenced by the American novel.

This Unit will briefly discuss the major thematic concerns, narrative techniques of the novel along with an examination of a few critical observations made by some critics and writers of the time. The Unit takes up a careful analysis of the novel’s major thematic aspects, providing additional information to its analysis. The biographical sketch of Camus and the conflicting historical context of his life and works discussed in the previous units may be taken into serious consideration to understand the thematic aspects of the work. This Unit also discusses some key critical observations about Camus. The perspectives on Camus’ complex relationship with Algeria and its troubled history can add to the readers’ understanding of the linguistics of the work.

8.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to examine the major thematic preoccupations of *The Outsider*
- to analyse the narrative techniques and devices employed
- to close read the narrative structure and language of the novel.
- to look into, specifically, the Absurd and Existential storyline in the thematic design
- to discuss the ‘Treatment of the Arab’ as a significant theme
- to bring key critical observations on Camus and *The Outsider*
- to discuss Camus’ cultural legacy.

8.2 *The Outsider*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

8.2.1 *The Outsider*: Major Thematic Concerns

Absurdity, alienation, irrationality, and mortality are among the most important themes in *The Outsider* (1942). Meursault is the Outsider or Stranger, a young shipping clerk living in Algiers in the 1940s, when it was still a French colony. Meursault’s life was dull and void, and he had little pleasure in living. He believes that the world is an absurd place without reason and that his actions, including the murder of the Arab man, mean nothing. Meursault’s beliefs reflect Camus’ existential philosophy.

8.2.1.1 The Absurd:

In *The Outsider*, Camus creates a narrative that expresses his key concept, absurdity. This concept seemed to refer directly to the historical period in which the book was originally published. At the same time, the novel stood not just as a response to the horrors of expansive wars but as a vision of the timeless struggle of individuals making their way through life. More specifically, the absurd idea is that people live in a universe that is meaningless, despite of an intense human desire for meaning for existence. In Camus’s view, individuals must come to recognize that this is the situation; with this recognition, people can then move to a new state, happy, despite the grim realities of the situation.

In *The Outsider*, the world of the protagonist expresses the vision of the absurdity put forward by Camus. The protagonist, Meursault, constantly asserts that things do not matter, not only to him personally, but to the entire world. In short, while people around him think that the world is guided by a natural logic, Meursault does not see things that way. It is this perspective that leads him to say, for example, that working in Paris or getting married really has no significance. The confrontation between Meursault's viewpoint and that of almost all the others takes place when he is arrested and judged. Since Meursault shows no remorse for killing the Arab and has no proper explanation for why he did it in the first place, much less why he fired so many shots, the prosecutor and others piece together their own conclusion. They insist on a logical explanation, even if their logic may be imperfect or untrue. Their faulty thinking leads them to believe that Meursault has no morals and deserves the greatest punishment possible, the death penalty. Ironically, while Meursault kills the Arab and is seen as despicable, society kills Meursault and feels this is the proper response. A similar twist, in terms of violence, occurs earlier in the novel when the police come to Raymond's door because he is beating his girlfriend, and the police, in turn, slap Raymond for his behaviour. Meursault is pushed near his breaking point when he is condemned to death and the chaplain at the jail tries to turn him to God. Meursault insists he will not become a believer, though. After his outburst with the priest, Meursault realizes that the world is indifferent but, despite this conclusion, he has been happy and will continue to be. While Camus presented his absurdist perspective in *The Outsider*, he explains it more directly in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." Sisyphus is condemned to the intense labour of pushing an enormous stone up a hill. When he finally is able to reach the top, the stone naturally rolls back down again, and the process must begin again. Despite the recurring cycle of unending labour, he is subjected to, for Camus, Sisyphus is happy in his labour; there is pleasure in the struggle. Camus imported this absurdist perspective to his famous play *Caligula*, too, which he worked on when he was writing *Sisyphus and Stranger*. In yet another of his renowned novel *The Plague*, Camus also assumes an absurdist viewpoint and the work is more about the individual facing the world's indifference. In *The Plague*, when sickness strikes, all of humanity is vulnerable and must face the world's indifference. Rather than humanity becoming ruthless, though, people recognize that their friends and families are of utmost importance, and they help other individuals in need as well. After the threat has passed, though, people return to their previous self-centred state. Camus was not a writer invested in happy endings.

Check your Progress

1. Briefly explain Camus' vision of Absurdity as projected in the novel.

2. Mention Camus' other significant works which takes up his concept of Existentialism and the Absurd.

8.2.1.2 The Binary of Rationality/ Irrationality:

Though *The Outsider* is a work of fiction, it contains a strong resonance of Camus's philosophical notion of the Irrational and absurdity. In most of his essays, Camus states that individual lives and human existence, in general, have no sense or rational order. However, because people have trouble accepting this concept, they are constantly trying to identify or create a rational structure and meaning in their lives. The term "absurdity" refers to humanity's vain attempt to find a rational order where there is none.

Although Camus makes no explicit reference to the concept of the 'irrational' in the novel - *The Outsider*, the conflict between rational and the irrational work simultaneously in the novel throughout. Neither the outside world where Meursault lives nor the inside world of his thoughts and attitudes possesses a rational order. Meursault has no discernible rationale or reason for his actions, such as his decision to marry Marie and his decision to kill the Arab. Society, nonetheless, attempts to fabricate or impose rational explanations for Meursault's irrational actions. The idea that things sometimes happen for no reason and that these events sometimes make no sense is disturbing and a threat to society. The second part of the novel represents society's attempt at creating a rational order. Both the prosecutor and Meursault's lawyer explain Meursault's crime based on logic, reason and the concept of cause and effect. However, these explanations have no basis in fact and serve only as attempts to defuse the frightening notion that the universe is irrational. The entire trial is thus an example of absurdity, an example of humanity's futile attempt to impose rationality on an irrational world.

8.2.1.3 Decay, Mortality and the Meaninglessness of Human Life

A second major element of Camus's absurd philosophy is the idea that human life has no redeeming significance or purpose. Camus contends that the only thing certain about life is the inevitability of death, and, because all humans will eventually encounter death, all lives are

equally meaningless. Meursault gradually moved toward this realization throughout the novel, but he did not fully grasp it until after his argument with the chaplain in the final chapter. Meursault realises that just as he is indifferent to much of the universe, the universe is indifferent to him. Like everyone else, Meursault was born, will die and will no longer be important. Paradoxically, it is only after Meursault reaches this apparently gloomy realization that he can achieve happiness. When he fully comes to terms with the inevitability of death, he understands it does not matter whether he dies by execution or lives to die a natural death at an old age. This understanding allows Meursault to put aside his fantasies of evading execution by filing an appeal. He realizes that these illusory expectations, which had previously preoccupied his mind, would only create within him a false feeling that death is avoidable. Meursault sees his expectation of a sustained life as a burden. His liberation from this false hope means he is free to live life for what it is, and to make the most of his remaining days.

The distinct characters in *The Outsider* hold widely varying attitudes toward decay and death. Salamano loves his decaying, scab-covered dog and he values its companionship, even though most people find it disgusting. Meursault did not express a great deal of emotion following his mother's death, but the society in which he lived believed that he should be afflicted by grief. While Meursault was content to believe that physical death represented the complete and ultimate end of life, while the chaplain clung to the idea of the afterlife. An important part of the development of Meursault's character in the novel is his contact with his own attitudes towards death. At the end of the novel, he has finally embraced the idea that death is imminent and death is the only truth about human life, and he is able to accept the reality of his impending execution without despair.

Check your Progress

1. How does Meursault accept the idea of mortality?

2. Name two characters mentioned in this section.

8.2.1.4 The Significance of the Physical World:

The Outsider shows Meursault to be interested far more in the physical aspects of the world around him than in its social or emotional aspects. This focus on the outer world stems

from the novel's assertion that there is no greater sense or order than human life. Throughout *The Outsider*, Meursault's attention focuses on his own body, his physical relationship with Marie, time, and other physical elements of his environment. For example, the heat of the funeral procession hurts Meursault much more than the thought of burying his mother. The sun on the beach torments Meursault, and during his trial, Meursault even identifies his own suffering under the sun as the reason for killing the Arab. The style of Meursault's narration also reflects his interest in the physical. Though he offers terse, plain descriptions when glossing over emotional or social situations, his descriptions become vivid and ornate when he discusses topics such as nature, the weather and other aspects of the outer world.

8.2.1.5 Observation and the Endless search for Purpose and Meaning

Throughout the novel, there are instances of characters watching Meursault, or of his watching them. This motif recalls several components of Camus's philosophy of the Absurd and Existentialism. The constant watching or observing in *The Outsider* suggests humanity's endless search for a purpose and emphasizes the importance of the tangible, visible details of the physical world in a universe where there is no greater meaning. When Meursault stares at people in the street from his balcony, he does it passively, absorbing details but not judging what he sees. By contrast, the people in the courtroom observe Meursault as part of the process of judgment and condemnation. In the courtroom, we learn that many of Meursault's previous actions were monitored without his knowledge. The Arabs observe Raymond and his friends with implicit antagonism as they march toward the bus. Raymond's neighbours are the spectators of his argument with his mistress and the police officer, watching with uneasiness or petty curiosity. At times, watching or observing is a mysterious activity, such as when Meursault watches the woman at Celeste's, and later when she watches him in court. The novel's moments of watching and observation reflect humanity's endless search for meaning, which Camus found absurd.

8.2.1.6 Poverty and the working-class Sentiment

Poverty as an unjust social condition had its impact on Camus's life and his works. His family belonged to the poorer segment of the working class and most of his relatives were labourers or artisans. He could only attend secondary school and university because he received scholarships, and he did not have to read Marx to appreciate the importance of the class. As a student, and later on, he supported himself by teaching or by tedious clerical work. When he travelled, he had to eat in the cheapest restaurants and purchase excursion tickets that could not be used on the most convenient trains. This is mirrored in his books as well. He has moments of

tearful sentimentality when he depicts Salamano's dog in *The Outsider* or the figure of Grand in *The Plague*. But more frequently, his working-class background inspires him with a caustic view of the universe: jobs are hard work rather than careers, while ideals are hypocrisy or veiled forms of oppression. *The Outsider* is a critique of all these and it strips the legal system and the French state of their legitimacy. Yet working-class life was also a source of happiness to Camus. He loved Algiers Street life: the boasting of boys and the unashamed sexuality of girls. In *The Outsider*, Marie is very much the working-class woman in her enjoyment of her own body. Moreover, Honesty, loyalty and pride were values that were lived rather than imposed. From his working-class upbringing, Camus learned to be similarly suspicious of ideals, to be sceptical of reason and introspection, and to believe that the coherent self and the coherent work of art were fabrications. With it came the realization that life should be lived rather than dreamed or reflected. Man existed, so existentialism maintained, among or against others in a brutal adventure, to which he must by his actions give meaning.

Check your Progress:

1. How does the novel synthesize the working-class sentiment with existentialism?

2. Briefly examine the theme of poverty in the novel

3. How does binary of the rational and the irrational blur in the novel?

8.2.1.7 Religion, Secularism, and Existentialism:

Similarly, *The Outsider*, which may be read in the context of existentialism. From Meursault's point of view, the world is meaningless, and it continually rejects the attempts of other characters to make sense of the human. He rejects religious and secular efforts aimed at finding meaning. From the director at the old people's Home who arranges a religious funeral for his mother Madame Meursault to the examining magistrate who tries to guide Meursault towards Christian faith to the Chaplain who lectures Meursault about repentance and the afterlife, Meursault is often advised to embrace religion and place his faith in a divine world beyond this

one. Meursault, however, is a staunch atheist and insists that he believes only in this life and this physical experience.

Efforts to engage Meursault in secular structures of meaning are equally futile. When Meursault's boss offered him a job in Paris, he expected Meursault to take advantage of career development opportunities. Meursault, however, lacked any ambition and turned down the offer of the boss without considering it. As a student, Meursault recalls, "I had lots of ambitions...But when I had to give up my studies, I learned quickly that none of it really mattered". When Marie asked Meursault if he would marry her, she expected that he would take the institution of marriage seriously. Yet Meursault is indifferent to this, he thinks "it meant nothing" to love a person, and accepts to marry Marie simply because she wants to marry her. Though he grows fond of her, he doesn't cultivate any attachment to her more meaningful than superficial attraction. Throughout his trial, Meursault is equally bemused by the meaninglessness of the justice system and finds its attempts to impose rational, meaningful structure on his actions ridiculous. He considers the guilty verdict he eventually receives entirely arbitrary and describes its "certainty" as "arrogant."

Meursault's steadfast nihilism frustrates those who attempt to convert him to their ways of thinking and they often feel Meursault's point of view as a threat to their ideas."Do you want my life to be meaningless?" the examining magistrate bellows when Meursault refuses to accept his faith in God. The prosecutor passionately describes "the emptiness of a man's heart" as "an abyss threatening to swallow up society," casting Meursault as a threat to social order. This tension between Meursault's sense of life's meaninglessness and other characters' persistent efforts to impose structures of meaning shows neither faith nor secularism can bring meaning to one's life. Meursault life is existential, which holds the concept that the world is absurd and that looking for order or meaning of any kind is a futile endeavour. Humans must embrace the world's absolute indifference to human life. He spurns the notion of essential meaning and realizes that death is a leveling agent which brings equal possibilities.

8.2.1.8 Chance and Interchangeability:

Meursault considers all experiences of human life interchangeable, arbitrary, absurd, and essentially meaningless. "One life was as good as another," he told his boss, explaining his lack of interest in the opportunity to move to Paris. For him, it is only a matter of chance that events precede as they do. His thoughts on the beach steps as he decides whether to return to Masson's bungalow or to go back down to the beach could summarize his attitude towards every life

choice: “to stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing.” His attitude is highly ironic as his choice to go back down to the beach leads to the murder that changes his life dramatically. Similarly, Meursault is thoroughly convinced of the arbitrariness of the events during his imprisonment and trial. Meursault’s primary contention with the judicial procedure is its certainty, its unwillingness to embrace chance. After being convicted, Meursault believes the verdict might as well have been the opposite, as all the factors that led to it were entirely arbitrary. He fantasizes about a new form of capital punishment which would leave the condemned a chance for hope and eliminate the unyielding certainty of death by guillotine.

Likewise, Meursault treats human relationships as incidental arrangements, believing that any person could replace any other person in a relationship without making a difference. He tells Marie that he would marry any other women with whom he had the same relationship he has with her. He kills the Arab for no personal motive and the man could have been anybody. Thus, though “The Outsider” of the title refers primarily to Meursault’s own estrangement from society, it also refers to the man Meursault kills, by chance, a stranger or an outsider whom the novel never names. Contemplating his own death, Meursault reminds himself that it doesn’t matter when one dies, since other men and women will naturally go on living far into the future.

However, none of the people around Meursault views events as fluid and interchangeable. Throughout the trial, the prosecutor repeatedly portrays Meursault’s murder as a premeditated crime, connected to Meursault’s prior behaviour. The prosecutor’s determination to prove the deliberate malice of Meursault’s actions reaches its highest pitch when his closing argument equates Meursault’s disengagement and indifference at his mother’s funeral to the act of another criminal who murdered his own father.

Check your Progress

1. How does the novel address the themes of secularism and faith?

2. Briefly examine Meursault’s nihilistic views about life.

3. How does the novel perceive the interchangeability of human life?

8.2.1.9 Silence, Passiveness, and Indifference

The novel opens with Meursault's indifference at his mother's funeral and the consternation it provokes among the surrounding people. This dynamic returns much more strongly to the trial, where the story of Meursault's insensitivity towards his mother's death proves to be what ultimately turns the jury against him. The surprise and consternation of the people at the beginning of the novel implied that they judged Meursault based on his indifference. The court scene in the latter half of the novel makes these judgements explicit. Meursault is equally indifferent towards his marital life and his wife Marie, who of all the characters shows him the most warmth. Although he loves her and appreciates her company, he is indifferent to her essential being and does not love her as a unique individual. When Marie asks Meursault if he wants to marry her, he tells her it makes no difference to him and that they could if she wanted to. In prison later on, he fantasizes about other women without imagining Marie specifically. Conversely, when Marie ceases to write to him, it is possible to imagine that she could have taken a new man or been dead.

Meursault's emotional indifference contributed to his overall passive attitude. Lacking goals and desires of his own, Meursault rarely seems to care how events turn out and acts simply to satisfy his immediate physical needs, allowing his life to flow by as it will. His passive observation of people from the balcony in chapter 2 provides a pattern to his philosophy of life. He watches others doing nothing. Even the crucial act of his murder is described in passive terms, "the trigger gave." As the prosecutor elaborates, Meursault's passive indifference threatens society because it can't be assimilated into social life. Social life is premised on care for relationships, careers, friendships, family. Thus, Meursault himself is the stranger or outsider to the social fabric of his world.

Meursault begins and ends the novel in a supreme state of indifference, yet his indifference at the novel's end is achieved after enduring the gruelling frustration he experiences in prison. His indifference at the beginning of the novel seemed like dull apathy, and his indifference at the end seems to be a kind of enlightenment. He embraces indifference as an active choice, opening himself to the indifference of the world itself. The English translations of the novel differ critically in characterizing this broader indifference. The first translation by Stuart Gilbert translates, "I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe," while the second by Joseph Laredo translates, "I laid my heart open to the gentle indifference of the universe." Matthew Ward's most recent translation reads, "I opened myself to the gentle

indifference of the world.” Yet, despite their differences, each of these translations translates the indifference of the world as benign, as something to embrace and be “happy” among, rather than something to despise and fear.

8.2.1.10 Relationships

Throughout the novel, Meursault remains unable to experience deep, complex relationships with the people in his life. All of his relationships from the filial relationship he had with his mother to his friendship with Raymond to his romantic and marital relationship with Marie are passionless, and determined much more by incidental, superficial impressions than by deep-felt emotional bonds. His casual, carefree and indifferent attitude towards those relationships allows him to treat people in his life according to his own desires, feeling no sense of duty to them. Once he no longer has anything to talk with his mother about, he sends her off to an old age Home and is puzzled to hear his neighbours disapprove of the decision. At his mother’s vigil, he drinks coffee and smokes, as usual; not feeling obliged to act differently out of respect.

Although attached to Marie, Meursault does not feel bound to her as a unique individual and freely admits that he is not in love with her. Though he helps Raymond by writing the letter to his mistress and by testifying to her infidelity at the police station, Meursault does not feel these actions to be any sort of burden on himself and performs them in a spirit of indifference. Ironically, Meursault’s murder could be viewed as a huge sacrifice made for the well-being of his friend Raymond, who has a problem with the Arab. Yet the Arab’s connection with Raymond is, according to Meursault, entirely incidental and Meursault shoots the Arab without even thinking about Raymond.

Meursault’s cool detachment from relationships is juxtaposed by several passionate bonds between other characters, including the tender warmth between Thomas Perez and Madame Meursault, the volatile resentment between Raymond and his mistress, and the excruciating love-hate relationship between Salamano and his dog. Though Meursault remains just as unattached to others at the novel’s end as he was at the start, he glimpses the possibility of a deeper connection to others several times in the second part of the novel. The first occurs after Celeste’s testimony on the witness stand when Meursault feels for “the first time in my life I...wanted to kiss a man.” The second occurs in the final chapter when Meursault realizes “why at the end of her life, Maman had taken a ‘fiancé.’” In the novel’s last sentence, Meursault feels that even his estrangement from society can be capable of giving companionship, thinking that

“to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate.”

Check your Progress

1. Bring out the ways in which the novel explores the theme of the relationship.

2. Discuss Meursault’s personality with special reference to his silence and indifference to people and situations.

8.2.2 Language and Narration:

Two different languages are juxtaposed as the narrator, an unidentified ‘I’, reads a text sent by ‘the Home’. The telegram employs a euphemism, ‘passed away, and ends with a purely formal greeting. It informs the reader of the event of his mother’s death while concealing the significance of that death. It is also a command that the narrator obeys as he leaves to attend the funeral. The narrator-reader does not accept the authority of the telegram without criticism.” It means nothing,” he says; the language is inadequate. In portraying the narrator as a reader, *The Outsider* is indicating to us, his readers, how we should approach it: we should beware of the pitfalls and commands it contains. As for the narrator’s own language, it is less formal. It also conceals the reality of death, leaving open the question whether the character-narrator is disturbed or not. But this language broadcasts its own inadequacy by the use of phrases like ‘perhaps’ and ‘I don’t know’.

This enables us to define the connection between the language of the telegram and that of the narrator. The former is authoritative, sure of itself and closed to outside intervention; it does not tell us when the mother died, but it informs us that it was itself composed ‘today.’ However, the latter is aware of an imprecision which it seeks unsuccessfully to correct. The two are in conflict and, although the narrator-character obeys the telegram, the narrator-reader fights back by turning it into a text written by him. The telegram is ‘the quintessence of writing’ because it imposes abstract, arbitrary categories on the flux of human experience. Certainly, the written language is an instrument of oppression in *The Outsider*. The narrator, whom we discover to be a French-Algerian called Meursault, helps bring about the murder of an Arab by writing a letter to

his sister. Moreover, Camus emphasizes that this is written by omitting the content of the letter, but describing the tools that Meursault uses to compose it: the 'squared paper,' the 'small red wooden penholder' and the 'ink-pot with purple ink' (54). However, the use of language and the distinction made between written and spoken are slightly ambiguous. For instance, in the second half of the novel the language of oppression is the rhetoric of the courtroom, a language that seeks to manipulate feelings rather than to reason. This is the spoken language associated with a privileged social class and the power structures of the society. In the novel, the language of the streets of Algiers can, where it occurs, be an instrument of oppression. The incident where Raymond beats up the Arab man is presented not by the narrator, but by Raymond, who uses slangy French. What is significant is that it is the longest conversation in French in the book.

If the written/spoken categories are too simple, it remains true that there is a language of authority that is associated with the warden of the home, Meursault's boss and the law courts, and hence with the state and with economic and political power. However, there is no working-class discourse that offers an instantaneous release from them. In the courtroom, the characters who belong to working-class like Marie and Celeste are enmeshed in the language of authority and unable to make themselves understood. But, even if the court laughs at them because they cannot express themselves, the reader knows it is their inability to use language that is the mark of their honesty.

Similarly, the note of dissidence in the narrator's language comes from its wariness. The conflict between the languages of authority and dissidence is present in the first half of the book and dominates the second half. There, the true nature of the language of authority is revealed at the end of the second part. In Chapter 4, Meursault tells the readers in a mocking tone that the judge 'said in a bizarre way that my head would be cut off in a public place in the name of the French people (*Outsider*164). The pompous mention of 'the French people' is characteristic of what one might also call the language of the guillotine. These are not the only two languages and narrative styles of *The Outsider*. The last chapter of the second Part is written differently: one half of it as a rigorous intellectual meditation and the other half as a cry of revolt. There is an instance of partially non-verbal language; it is the outburst of the Arab woman whom Raymond beats. One cannot resist drawing the comparison with the primal scream. Another pattern of language used in the novel is Meursault's monologue in prison. It is portrayed as a stream of consciousness that allows him to cling to a kind of identity, which is fluid and schizophrenic. The

authoritarian, pretentious, and totalitarian language of the courtroom is contrasted through the partially non-verbal patterns of narrative modes brilliantly employed by Camus in the novel.

Silence is presented as another pattern of language used in the novel. Silence is a form of resistance and protest. Certain social groups are forced to remain silent, which is therefore associated with oppression; the Arabs barely speak and their silence is an expression of authenticity in the novel. Meursault, the character has been frequently silent and when questioned by the magistrate, he responds that ‘the truth is I never have much to say. So, I keep quiet’ (104). Here again, his taciturnity during his trial is presented as a protest against the language of the jurists. While the narrator of a novel can hardly remain silent and while narrating his own story, he makes his readers feel that silence contains authenticity. Meursault does so in the first paragraph by the brevity of his sentences and by the lack of subordinate clauses that imply causality and hierarchy. Not surprisingly, Roland Barthes concluded that the language of “*The Outsider* exists as a silence.”

To explain the use of the lyrical or poetic language, one might refer to Jean-Paul Sartre’s discussion of the relationship between poetry and prose. Sartre says that “the language of poetry rises upon the ruins of prose (*Situations* 86).” Conscious that his first language could not explain the world properly, Meursault decided to strive for a flood of images. Conversely, it could be argued that the poetic language to which Meursault resorts to describe the world can defend itself against Meursault’s distrust of habitual language. For instance, in the novel, Part 1, Chapter 2, depicts his joy of a day at the beach with Marie: “I had all the sky in my eyes and it was blue and golden (*Outsider*34).” Man and the universe merge briefly and with ecstasy. Another example is the passage where the sounds and body sensations invade and catch the consciousness of the narrator. After the decisive evening when he writes Raymond’s letter, Meursault stands in the darkness and it is explained thus: “The building was calm and from the depths of the stairwell raised a dark, dank breath. I heard nothing but the throb of my blood which was booming in my ears. (*Outsider* 55).”

Check your Progress

1. Comment on Camus’ use of language in the novel

2. Briefly explain the purpose of the poetic or lyrical language pattern employed.

8.2.3 Critical Appreciation:

A critical appreciation of Camus' *The Outsider* is a complex process since the critical reception of the novel itself was diverse and conflicting. In the 'Afterword' of the 1955 edition of the novel, Camus himself wrote: "A long time ago, I summed up *The Outsider* in a sentence which I realize is extremely paradoxical. In our society, any man who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral is liable to be condemned to death." Critics opened serious discussions on Camus' art of fiction writing, the political implications of the novel, his profound humanism, and the untranslatable narrative of *The Outsider* and other related topics.

8.2.3.1 Jean Paul Sartre's Observations on *The Outsider*:

In his article "An Explication of *The Stranger*" Jean Paul Sartre points out the unexplainable nature of the novel. For this, Sartre also draws on Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." Sartre says the central idea conceived and executed in *The Stranger* can be seen explained in the essay by Camus. According to Camus' *Notebooks*, his essay on Sisyphus was completed first in 1941. Sartre, in his explanation points out that there are a lot of questions answered in Camus' essay, especially to the accusation that *The Stranger* is less a novel because of its unconventionality. Sartre also says that Camus must have compelled to make a philosophical translation of his fictional message conveyed in the novel.

Sartre notes *The Stranger* was met with a sudden reception. This work was unique and difficult to understand due to its gratuitousness, ambiguity and inexplicable nature. Rather than trying to prove anything, Sartre puts his emphasis on the novel anti-hero Meursault who reacts to his mother's death indifferently by going swimming, starting a futile affair, seeing a film. He killed the Arab on account of the sun and the heat. Meursault declared the day before his execution that he was glad to hope that a great crowd would welcome him with cries of hatred on the scaffold. Sartre considers Meursault "an innocent man" for whom moral categories do not apply. He is a man whose absurdity is, in Sartre's opinion, both a state of fact and a state of lucidity. The absurd man is the one who may inevitably draw conclusions from a basic absurdity. Sartre defines this fundamental absurd as the gap between the eternal condition of beings and the finitude of human existence. In other words, this is the divide between mind and body.

8.2.3.2 *The Outsider* or *The Stranger*?

In the previous we discussed the two titles of this novella. The exact title for the English translation of the 1942 classic by Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*, is not that self-evident. The choice

of a title is one of the most important decisions a literary translator has to make and it is difficult to summarize an author's work in a new language. The French term *étranger* can mean a foreign national, an alienated outsider or an alien traveller. Here the issue is, why has the novel always been referred to in two titles in its English translation? The available answer is simple: *The Stranger* is the title in American editions, and *The Outsider* in British editions. The British were more excited about translating Camus than the Americans. Cyril Connolly, a magazine editor and influential literary critic, sees the Algerian tale of Camus as a new trend for fiction. Connolly brought *The Outsider* to the attention of the British publisher Jamie Hamilton right away. After buying the British rights from Gallimard in February 1945, Hamilton and the American editor Blanche Knopf decided to release the English translation of the book. Hamilton decided on the translator, Stuart Gilbert. Gilbert was a friend of James Joyce and had a good background in the translation of novels such as Andre Malraux's *Man's Fate*. Although Gilbert titled the translation *The Stranger*, British publisher Hamilton decided to switch the title to *The Outsider*. It was because in 1945 a rival British publisher Hutchinson's published the English translation of a Polish novel (Maria Kuncewiczowa's *Cudzoziemka*) that they unfortunately called *The Stranger*. Hamilton wrote to Knopf in New York, advising him of the modification. But Knopf, who had finished typing and printing the translation maintained the original title, *The Stranger*. Readers have not noticed the discretion that underlies both titles. It was purely accidental, and for years, no one could convincingly explain why Camus's *L'Étranger* is sometimes *The Stranger* and sometimes *The Outsider*. However, it must be admitted that the titles resonate differently, giving rise to conflicting political interpretations.

8.2.3.3 Cultural Adaptations:

Camus' contributions to literature are of greater significance in the realm of culture too. The major cultural interpretations and the cinematographic adaptations on Camus tended to treat his works with much more seriousness. An example is the pop band *The Cure*, whose first hit single, titled 'Killing an Arab', was an anthem for segments of the early 1980s European youth. However, although the song is a brief summary of the central scene in *The Stranger*, it also reflects and amplifies the indifference to Arab life and culture already implicit in the novel. The death of the Arab serves as a pretext, an event that leads to existential reflections important to Western audiences. What is almost casually implied as obvious in both the song and the novel is that there are things of much greater import than the killing of an Arab. The outrage in the novel is not that Meursault killed an Arab, but rather that he was sentenced to death for not mourning

his mother. The pop song brutally magnifies this outrage expressed in the novel. The changing political landscape and the globalization of *The Cure*'s success led the group to modify the lyrics and change the title to 'Kissing an Arab'.

In the Cultural arena of French Republic, Camus is indeed a secular saint. He embodies its ideal. The ability to read stories in a colonial setting that conceals the oppression of indigenous people. Most 19th-century French writers either revel in colonialism or are anguished by it; Camus displays indifference to it in his two most famous novels, *The Outsider* and *The Plague*. He represses the colonial unconscious and this repression explains much of his lasting appeal. In 2013, the Algerian journalist, novelist, and chronicler Kamel Daoud wrote *The Meursault Investigation*, a daring and original sequel to Camus's *The Outsider*. In terms of structure, Daoud's novel resembles *The Fall* more than *The Stranger*, as it is a long monologue disguised as a dialogue between two men. The main character, Haroun, is none other than the brother of the Arab man Meursault murdered. The novel begins by challenging the unilateral European vision in the original novel. We learn about the man killed by Meursault, who was named Moussa, and about the grief of Moussa's family, provoked not only by the event itself but by Camus's and French society's utter lack of interest in them and their side of the story. In turn, we discover that Haroun himself killed a young white man seemingly at random—a crime for which he is arrested. However, *The Meursault Investigation* is not a work of denunciation, for we soon realize that the book is also homage to *The Outsider*.

Indeed, many themes and passages of Daoud's novel are singularly 'Camusian'. For example, Daoud challenges the one-party Algerian state in a passage in which Moussa, after being arrested, is harangued by an officer of the FLN who brandishes in front of him the new Algerian flag, just as the prosecutor did with a crucifix in front of Meursault in *The Outsider*. Both Daoud and Camus confront a set of cultural values associated with what they see as alienating regimes, be it the French Republic or the newly independent Algerian state. Daoud's novel is thus both a critique of Camus's colonial bias and a celebration of his ruthless critique of other aspects of French society and culture. Another example of a different kind of Camus renewal is *Yazgi (Fate)*, a 2001 Turkish cinematic adaptation of *The Outsider* directed by Zeki Demirkubuz. In *Fate*, Meursault is called Musa. After the murders two men, Musa is accused, convicted, and eventually exonerated for another murder he did not commit. The movie is set in Turkey, at a geographical and cultural crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, an

environment which frees the story from the weight of colonialism. In this setting, where race is a non-factor, Musa's indifference is perhaps even more devastating.

Demirkubuz transforms into art the deep social alienation produced by a world ruled by family values, work, and the fatherland, just as Camus did in *The Outsider* with Christian values, office life, and social climbing. Camus lives on Perhaps what makes Camus an extraordinary writer, one whose works millions across continents were and are able to relate to and identify with, is paradoxically his modest background. Unlike the majority of acclaimed French novelists, Camus came from a very poor family; before he became famous, money and how to earn enough to live comfortably were a constant source of worry. *The Outsider*, Camus's most famous work, reflects this background. Camus heralded a new kind of hero(anti-hero) in French fiction. Camus's greatest talent—his ability to translate a new set of rules, a new social reality, and a new way of life into art—is best illustrated by his notion of *bonheur*, a special relationship with nature.

Crucially, Camus's concept and experience of the absurd heighten the significance of *bonheur* and as such they are inseparable. Another of his distinctive talent was to transpose a new social reality of the world around him into his works with *bonheur*. His conception of nature, as a crucial and precious source of sustenance in an otherwise hostile world, resonates intensely with readers because it corresponds to how many live their lives now. Camus is an extraordinary writer because he was able to capture the daily, ordinary moments of his own and his readers' lives and transform them into art. But he was also caught between colony and metropolis and his works at the same time reflect his colonial upbringing with all the shortcomings this entails, notably regarding the lack of meaningful Algerian characters in his novels and plays. This tension between generosity and indifference powers his works and recognizing it is an indispensable tool to assess his oeuvre. This tension has also made him the literary embodiment of the contemporary cultural and political contradictions of Western powers, the enlightenment at once oppressive and liberating, idolized by some and attacked by others. Camus is too relevant a writer in the contemporary world.

8.2.4 Camus' Legacies:

In 1957, Camus won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was not yet 44 years old and was the second youngest Nobel Laureate since Rudyard Kipling. Camus's response to this was interesting that he said the André Malraux, his role model and mentor, deserved the Nobel Prize more than he did. The year 1957 was a year of intense turmoil for Camus, since it was the year of

the war of Algerian independence was raging. The Nobel Prize created a huge uproar and became a worldwide controversy. Camus died only two years later in a car crash. He might have said that his death had no meaning, though it does offer a glimpse of his personal life. The crash occurred on the way from his countryside house, in Lour Marin in the south of France, to Paris. Before leaving for Paris, Camus wrote many letters. The various aspects of these letters part later gave rise to many publications, including a book-length account of his last days, which spans fifteen years and includes nearly 900 letters, notes, and telegrams.

In 1960 and in the following days, all that mattered was that Camus had died and this was a national tragedy. The question of his legacy immediately arose. Some of his writings were secured by the authorities and later decided not to publish immediately on order of Malraux, including his close friends the poet René Char, Jean Grenier, and the novelist Louis Guilloux, as they believed it could be politically inflammatory amid the Algerian civil war. It has to be mentioned that it was only after his untimely demise that he became not a famous writer, but a cultural phenomenon. His popularity reached a new level, beginning with the fall of the Soviet Union. His works have been translated into numerous languages and *The Outsider* is a mainstay in the academic and literary sphere across the Western world. Several of his novels and short stories have been adapted into films, his plays are staged around the world, and there are graphic novel adaptations of his works. Countless scholarly publications and research have been done on Camus' oeuvre.

The Outsider is the direct inspiration for a pop song and an Algerian writer penned an entire novel as its sequel to the novel. Camus' philosophical notions, expressed through his works inspired many to quote, discuss, and use them as great lessons of life. One possible answer to Camus's current popularity is that the deep and abstract quality of Camus's thought makes it transferable. His writings subscribe to any particular belief system. Camus cannot be reduced into an ideology. Camus's perceptions led to misunderstandings, too. "The Rebel," is one of the striking misreading of Camus's works. Camus has been described as a humanist, an anarchist, an anti-communist, a social-democrat, a colonialist, even an anti-colonialist.

Today it is not only Camus's ideas and various commitments that make him prone to so many interpretations, but also his popularity. Camus has been claimed across the political spectrum, not only by mainstream political parties, but also by radical Arab intellectuals and French anarchists. French anarchists are particularly insistent on depicting Camus as one of theirs. The Iraqi poet Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayyati publicly praised Camus as a supporter of

revolution. Camus was portrayed as a revolutionary by Arab intellectuals and French anarchist groups in the 1950s and early 1960s. Camus serves as a useful stand-in for humanism. Camus refused to openly choose between France and Algeria. His compromise position in part explains why he is popular with Western leaders, who have intervened militarily and economically in the affairs of former colonies while simultaneously invoking humanitarianism and democracy as a justification. Essentially, this is Camus's contradiction. For many, he is the incarnation of the resolution of an impossible synthesis between enlightenment and colonial oppression. This is also why he is such an important figure in the Western world: he is the idealized vision of France's and Europe's colonial past and neo-colonial present. Eventually, some say Camus took the side of colonialism. But this does not match with Camus' with the popular vision of Camus as a concerned humanist rising above political concerns and preoccupations. Yet this contradiction between humanism and colonialism was present in many of his works from his earliest days, with varying degrees of intensity.

Check your Progress

1. Write a brief note on the significance of the cultural adaptations of *The Outsider*
2. Comment upon Albert Camus as a Nobel Laureate

8.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- demonstrate a critical conscience of Albert Camus' existential philosophy.
- write critical essays, studies and projects on Camus' works.
- identify Camus' contribution to world literature
- compare and debate the themes and stylistic features of Camus's works with other writers.
- discuss and relate the use of language and characterization with contexts.

8.4 Glossary

Existentialism: A philosophical movement often associated with the notions of human existence, meaninglessness of life, death, and freedom. The major exponents are Jean Paul Sartre, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Albert Camus, and Simon de Beauvoir.

Roland Barthes: A Twentieth century French literary theorist and semiotician. He is associated with the schools of theory, such as post-structuralism, deconstruction, and Semiotics.

Andre Malraux: A Twentieth century French novelist, critic and a contemporary of Albert Camus. *Man's Fate* (1933) was a famous novel by Malraux. He enthusiastically praised Camus' *The Outsider* for its powerful ideas and persuasive narrative technique.

The Myth of Sisyphus: A philosophical and acclaimed essay by Camus, published in 1942. It is in this essay Camus introduces his philosophy of the Absurd and Existentialism.

The Cure: The pop band which released the adapted pop song version of *The Outsider*. The title of the album was 'Killing the Arab'

Camusian: A term which refers to 'of or pertaining to Albert Camus'

Bonheur: This refers to Camus' conception of nature. It expresses a new way of life and a new social reality, which is a significant source of sustenance in a strange and hostile world. This concept is best illustrated in Camus' theory of the Absurd.

"The Rebel": A remarkable book-length essay by Camus. It is a passionate and philosophical work about politics, rebellion and revolution.

Jean Paul Sartre: A leading twentieth century French philosopher, novelist and playwright. He is a chief exponent of Existentialism.

8.5 Sample Questions

8.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *The Outsider* opens with the sentence _____:
 - (a) 'Mother died today'
 - (b) 'I received a telegram'
 - (c) 'She had been ill for a very long time'

2. *Yazgi (Fate)* is a 2001 Turkish cinematic adaptation of *The Outsider*. Who is the director?
 - (a) Luchino Visconti
 - (b) Federico Fellini
 - (c) ZekiDemirkubuz
3. Which pop band released the 1979 hit single “Killing an Arab”?
 - (a) The Cure
 - (b) The Smiths
 - (c) Depeche Mode
4. The major theme of the novel is based on the philosophy of _____.
 - (a) Nihilism
 - (b) Existentialism
 - (c) Idealism
5. What is the essay that primarily discusses Camus’s concept of existentialism?
 - (a) The Rebel
 - (b) The Myth of Sisyphus
 - (c) A Happy Death
6. When did Albert Camus receive the Nobel Prize?
 - (a) 1957
 - (b) 1956
 - (c) 1952
7. Who wrote the novel *The Meursault Investigation*?
 - (a) Jean Paul Sartre
 - (b) Roland Barthes
 - (c) Kamel Daoud
8. What is the title of the pop song based on *The Outsider*?
 - (a) Killing the Arab
 - (b) Execution in France
 - (c) An Arab murder
9. What is Camus’s notion of ‘Bonheur’?
 - (a) A special relation to nature
 - (b) Existential crisis
 - (c) The meaninglessness of life

10. Who translated *The Outsider* into English first?

- (a) Hamilton
- (b) Gilbert
- (c) Smith

8.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a note on the theme of indifference in *The Outsider*
2. Briefly examine the legacy of Albert Camus.
3. Comment upon the significance of the cultural adaptations of *The Outsider*.
4. Examine the existential storyline in *The Outsider*.
5. Discuss the significance of the physical world as projected in the novel through Meursault's perception.

8.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the narrative structure and language of *The Outsider*.
2. Analyse Camus's Philosophy of Absurd as a significant thematic preoccupation in the novel.
3. Examine the major thematic concerns in *The Outsider*.

8.6 Suggested Readings

1. Camus, Albert, and Sandra Smith. *The Outsider*. UK ed., Penguin Classic, 2013.
2. *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Spectrum, 1969. Carroll, David. *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice*. Columbia University Press, 2008.
3. Thody, Philip. *Albert Camus: A Study of His Work*. 1st Edition, Hamish Hamilton, 2021.

Unit - 9: Origin and Development of the American Novel

Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
 - 9.1 Objectives
 - 9.2 Origin and Development of the American Novel
 - 9.2.1 The American Novel: Origins
 - 9.2.2 19th Century American Novel
 - 9.2.3 20th Century American Novel
 - 9.2.4 Contemporary Novel
 - 9.3 Learning Outcomes
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 - 9.5 Sample Questions
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9.0 Introduction

The novel appeared late in the first decades of 19th century in America. In the colonial period, those who had the skill to write served the cause of religion or politics. A few wrote verse, but hardly anyone attempted fiction. Surprisingly, within a hundred years the American novel became independent of the British novel. After World War I, the American novel excelled in the British novel, a fact conceded by the British novelists themselves.

9.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- describe American fiction
- provide a short historical account of its origin and development
- discuss the major trends in American fiction
- indicate the contributions of major American novelists

9.2 Origin and Development of the American Novel

9.2.1 The American Novel: Origins

There is a controversy about what should be considered an American novel. Does it mean the first novel written by an American or does it mean the first novel written on typical American themes? Both these are unsatisfactory explanations. Perhaps, it is more appropriate to confer the status of the first American novel on a work of fiction which deals with a characteristic American theme and technique. However, until almost the mid-nineteenth century, there is hardly any novel which qualifies as an American novel if we apply this definition. But a large number of novels were written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The early novels are William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and Susannah and Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794). This sentimental fiction is based on Samuel Richardson's novels such as *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48). Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) has been described as the first American novelist. He published five novels including *Wieland*, *Edgar Huntly* and *Ormond* between 1799 and 1801, and won the praise of British writers like Shelley, Keats and Scott. Among the Americans, Cooper, Poe and Hawthorne exalted him. Brown's fiction may be described as mood novels with loose plots. James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851) wrote thirty-three novels, most of which betray a lack of craftsmanship and haste. Yet Cooper's novels were popular in America and Europe. How do we account for his popularity? These novels deal with romance of various types, of the sea, of the frontier, and of the forest. Americans looked upon the novels of Cooper as an epic of the frontier. His novels are novels of adventure, of action at sea, or in the wilderness. Americans loved adventure and action.

When we move from Cooper to Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), we see a different kind of artist at work. He was influenced by the Gothic novel of terror; he was a romantic but not a transcendentalist. The Calvinistic tenet of damnation fascinated him. He was interested in a study of the impact of an awareness of sin on the human soul. This interest made him to take up moral themes and analyse neuroses and fixations. He also considered the impact of the environment on individuals. These are, as you know, very contemporary themes even today. Hawthorne uses symbolism and allegory to communicate the moral significance of his stories. His settings have a supernatural aura. His symbols have multiple meanings. *The Scarlet Letter*,

which is the title of his famous novel, is a superb example of different meanings in a single symbol. The letter A in scarlet which Hester Prynne wears is at once a symbol of adultery and of her pride. It is a token of her defiance of the bigotry of the community. The novel deals with the consequence of sin, of an adulterous relationship between Arthur Dimmesdale, the minister, and Hester Prynne, a married woman. The sinners suffer. Theirs is a sin of passionate true love. But Roger Chillingworth's (Hester's husband) calculated and relentless pursuit of vengeance is a greater sin. In Hawthorne's words, he has "violated, in cold blood the sanctity of the human heart." Melville said that Hawthorne depicted the "great power of blackness." In the decade, 1850-60, Hawthorne published his most important work: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *Marble Faun* (1860). He wrote several short stories. He called himself a romancer rather than a novelist. In his view, the novel aims at a minute fidelity to the possible and the probable. A romance gives certain freedom to the writer. In a romance, the author can "retouch the photo" and add the supernatural events. The entire work is conceived as a poem in a romance. Hawthorne was not quite successful in maintaining this difference in his fiction.

A contemporary of Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) wrote her famous novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. It was immensely popular. She dealt with the most dangerous issue of the time, namely, slavery. It was translated into many languages. Abraham Lincoln said with some exaggeration that this novel brought about the Civil War. Mrs. Stowe's knowledge of slavery and the laws in different states in the south was not accurate. But she had intuition which is the quality of a romance. The novel has a double plot or two journeys: in one, the slaves escape to freedom in Canada; in the second, Tom goes to the South and becomes a martyr. Tom's life falls into three phases. In Kentucky, he lives with his first owners. In the second, his new masters treat him well. In the last phase, he is tortured by Simon Legree. Mrs. Stowe presents a charitable picture of the problem of slavery; she does not blame the South alone. Mrs. Stowe's great success eclipsed Herman Melville, who had to wait to get recognition as America's greatest novelist. By coincidence, Melville's and America's greatest novel, *Moby Dick*, was published in the same year as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Realism:

A new phase in the development of the American novel started with Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and Henry James. They inaugurated the Age of Realism and represented several facets of realism. Let us first try to understand what realism is before we consider the

work of these three novelists. Broadly, it is an accurate representation of actual life in the literature. It includes both the selection of themes and the manner of presenting them. It developed somewhat as a reaction to the Romantic Movement. It is an attempt to record the ordinary experiences of daily life. The novel form was found to be particularly suitable for realistic expression. Some of the more important features of realism are: 1) Depiction of middle-class life; 2) Focus on ordinary rather than unusual events; 3) An objective presentation of facts; 4) Absence of didactic comments; 5) Stress on phonographic and photographic reality; 6) Absence of improbabilities; 7) Treatment of money as a strong driving force in the modern world; 8) Novel as a critique of society.

William Dean Howells (1837-1920), one of the exponents of realism, defined it as “nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.” His novels such as *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), *A Modern Instance* (1882), and others depict the attractive side of American life. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is the study of a self-made businessman. Although he was shrewd in business, he was awkward in social behaviour. The ‘rise’ of Silas Lapham is not a success in business, nor is it an improvement in his social status, but a growth in his moral stature. He refuses to cheat for personal gain, goes bankrupt by remaining honest. The achievement of **Mark Twain** is far greater. He was America’s greatest humorist. Most people took his writings to be funny. But he was serious and became a pessimist towards the end of his life. His most important novels are boys’ books, but only apparently so. **Henry James** (1843-1916) is more sophisticated in the choice of his themes and in the development of his technique. His fictional canvas is much wider than that of either Howells or Twain. He invented the novel of Cosmopolitanism. While his predecessors, Cooper, Melville and Hawthorne were concerned with adventures in the wilderness or on the seas or the warping of the soul by Puritanism, James sought to study the moral and psychological problems faced by Americans in Europe. The picture is that of an American innocent confronting a complex, cultured and corrupt European civilization. James’s models were Balzac, George Eliot and Nathaniel Hawthorne. He anticipated Proust and Joyce in a fictional structure. He admired Turgenev. James’s novels are usually put into three phases. In the beginning, he dealt with the international theme. *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) belongs to this phase. In the second phase, novels written under the influence of French naturalism such as *The Bostonians* (1886) were published. In the third phase novels such as *The Ambassadors* (1909) were written. He returned to the international theme in his last phase. James’s novels are located in New York, London, Paris and Rome. His characters are

international elite. The world which James portrayed with great skill may not be seen today, but James has secured a permanent place in literature by virtue of his penetrating psychological analyses of character and by his attempts to elevate the novel to a respectable art-form. Edith Wharton (1862-1937) wrote in the manner of James. *The Age of Innocence* (1920) which depicts the New York society of the 1870s is her best novel. *Ethan Frome* (1911), another famous novel deals with three wasted lives.

Naturalism

In the last decades of the century, a group of American writers were influenced by naturalism, which was found in Emile Zola's novels. Among these are Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser. Let us try to understand the term "Naturalism." It started in the late nineteenth century. It is found mostly in fiction and drama. It may be described as a heightened form of realism, which we discussed earlier. The main difference between realism and naturalism is that realism is more a matter of the technique of presentation whereas naturalism is a set of philosophical beliefs. It has its roots in biological and deterministic ideas based on Darwin's theories. According to "naturalism" man is an animal, a complex one. He is also influenced by heredity and the environment. Man's environment is conditioned by social and economic factors. He is almost powerless against these forces. In naturalistic writing, man is reduced to his material components. So there is a frank discussion of sex and hunger. They aim at a dispassionate (or scientific) documentation of 'a slice of life.' a phrase used by Zola. They wish to "tell everything" and to "experiment" with characters as in a laboratory. They tried to explain human behaviour in terms of heredity and environment.

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) attacked romantic idealism and attempted to depict fighting a hostile world alone. He saw human beings as victims of the environment and heredity. *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), a novel about the Civil War, is at least partly a study of the impact of environment in shaping the behaviour of Henry Fleming. **Frank Norris** (1870-1902) was the foremost exponent of literary naturalism in America. *McTeague* (1899) exposes greed and inhumanity. *The Octopus* (1901) also deals with the insatiable greed of railroad owners and growers of wheat. Norris portrays the lives of individuals who are in the grip of heredity and environment. He viewed fiction as a better medium of truth than painting, poetry, or music. It enabled him to reach the truth by piercing the "tissues and wrappings of flesh, down deep into the red, living heart of things." **Theodore Dreiser** (1871-1945) is considered the greatest practitioner of naturalism in American fiction. His novels document a mass of details of human

experience. In the portrayal of characters like Sister Carrie, he exploded the American myth that success depended on hard work and virtue. Dreiser invented the term, “Chemis,” by which he meant the inner urges which subjugate the human will. *Sister Carrie* (1900) is the story of a country girl who was driven by the ambition to possess things which were beyond her reach. She yearns for love, wealth and fame. She gets all this but loses her virtue. Charles Drouet, a travelling salesman, George Hurstwood, manager of a fashionable bar, and Robert Ames, a cultured young man, figure in her life as she climbs the ladder of fame. In the end, she remains dissatisfied in spite of her material success. *Sister Carrie* dealt with illicit sexual relations, which were taboo when it was published in 1900. Dreiser’s other novels like *An American Tragedy* (1925) also show man as a powerless victim in the grip of heredity and environment.

The Problem Novels

Another trend in American fiction is the “problem novels.” They are allied with naturalistic fiction. They were popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Upton Sinclair (1878-1968) a socialist reformer and a propaganda novelist, wrote a series of novels which are exposés of American business and industry. *The Jungle* (1906) exposes the meat industry. *King Coal* (1917) and *Oil* (1927) are also in the same vein.

A new trend called muck-raking emerged and a variant of it is the sardonic realism of **Sinclair Lewis** (1885-1951) in novels like *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922). In the first of these, he introduced the American small town to Europe. *Babbitt* portrays an American businessman, a perfect conformist. He is a typical salesman in a business-oriented civilization. The salesman becomes a recurring figure in American literature. One well-known example is Arthur Miller’s play, *Death of a Salesman*. In another novel, *Arrowsmith* (1925), Lewis exposed the malpractices of the medical profession. The picture one gets in this novel is that the entire country is focused on money-making, dishonesty, and quackery. Lewis’s novels underscore that material success does not necessarily bring happiness. Contemporaries of Sinclair Lewis were busy looking at American life from other angles and presenting their perceptions in fiction. For instance, **Sherwood Anderson**’s (1876-1941) *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) deals with isolation and its sequel, alienation, in American life. The characters are “grotesques”; they fail because they are unable to communicate. The stories in Anderson’s book are diverse; the isolated lives of different characters present a pattern of the underlying sadness of human life. He revolted against industrialized civilization and favoured a natural way of life. His influence not only on his contemporaries like Ernest Hemingway, but on succeeding generations of novelists is wide-

spread. **Scott Fitzgerald** is called the spokesman of the Jazz Age. His novels like *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934) give us a picture of that age. The characters in *Gatsby* pursue pleasure without bothering about the consequences. *Gatsby* symbolises America enslaved in Fitzgerald's own words, in "the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty." He is duped by material success. Fitzgerald was fascinated with the very rich and that was the undoing of his characters and himself. *Tender is the Night* testifies to the consequences of living with the very rich.

Women Novelists

It is time to consider the work of some American women writers. Carson McCullers writes of isolation and its tragic consequences. Her characters are grotesque. Eudora's *Welty Delta Wedding* (1946) is a single novel by a short story writer. Katherine Anne Porter is a successful story writer who wrote two connected stories in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939).

Southern Novelists

The Southern novelists, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and William Styron, have been spokesmen of the South. In Tate's (1899) single novel, *The Fathers* (1938), an old man narrates the events around the start of the Civil War. It portrays the collapse of the Southern feudal structure, Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946) is a political novel, depicting the career of Huey Long, the Governor of Louisiana. Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951) traces the change of fortunes of a fashionable family. It is more of an American story than a limited Southern one.

African American Novelists

The African American's privations have been voiced by white writers like Mark Twain and William Faulkner. They have been also been narrated by their own kind, thus adding credibility. Richard Wright's (1908-1960) *Native Son* (1940) tells the story of a slum resident who becomes a victim of his environment. William Faulkner and Ralph Ellison have also addressed African American issues in their novels. We shall discuss them later.

Experimental Novel

The experimental novel was pioneered by John Dos Passos. His trilogy, U.S.A. starting with *The 42nd Parallel* (1930) and *1919* (1932), and ending with *The Big Money* (1936) is a serial novel; here the USA is the hero, the villain and the victim. He calls his technique "Newsreel." It contains newspaper headlines, advertisements, etc. Then there is "The Camera Eye" which is the novelist's commentary on the events in the form of a stream of consciousness.

James T. Farrell (1904) an admirer of Dreiser, wrote a trilogy, *Studs Lonigan* (1932-35), on the Chicago Slums. John Steinbeck (1902) wrote several novels on the migrant workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) stand above the rest of his fiction. It documents the sufferings of migrant workers just as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* documents the iniquities suffered by the Blacks. Thomas Wolfe's (1900-1938) *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) depicts a hero seeking a home that eludes him. The hero's journeys take him across many cities and make him interact with different people. That is an absorbing story of America as Wolfe observed it. Saul Bellow achieved critical acclaim, but we shall consider his work later on. Nathaniel West's (1904-1940) *The Day of the Locust* (1939) depicts the boredom suffered by the Mid-western retired people who migrate to Los Angeles in search of glamour, but end in boredom, self-pity, agony and hate.

Other Trends

The other trends in American fiction are:

1. The war novel attempted by Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) on the Civil War, by E.E Cummings, *The Enormous Room* (1922), by Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) on World War I, by Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) on World War II.
2. The historical romance produced by General Lew Wallace (*Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, 1880). Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) deals with the Civil War, which became the greatest best-selling novel.
3. The superior type of Westerns such as Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1940).

We shall consider the work of other important novelists of recent times later.

The novel in America is just about two hundred years old. But it has achieved an eminent position in world fiction. Its contribution to themes and techniques is remarkable. Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Henry James and their novels are among the greatest in world literature. Henry James tried to enhance the status of the novel as an art-form.

9.2.2 19th Century American Novel:

The American novel grew in stature in the nineteenth century. Some of the novels published in this century received international acclaim. Two novelists who became famous are Herman Melville and Mark Twain. The American novels which may be considered on par with the greatest works of fiction are Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Once, Somerset Maugham, a British novelist, was asked by a

publisher to name the greatest American novel. He was unable to decide between these two. These novels are not only great but they reflect American values and culture. Therefore, it is worthwhile exploring these novels, though precisely.

Moby Dick

Melville's *Moby Dick* is a very unusual novel. It does not fit into the ordinary definition of a novel either in its theme or its treatment. It is a compendium of several narrative modes. Its setting is vast: all the oceans on earth. It is perhaps the greatest novel with the sea as its setting. There are no women among the scores of characters. But the characters represent almost every race and religion in the world. It is a story of adventure with an exciting chase and a great fight on the high seas. It is a story of a relentless pursuit of revenge. There is mystery and terror as in a Gothic story. Elijah and Fedallah issue warnings and prophesy about the impending catastrophe. It is a novel about whaling; it can be called a treatise on the subject, especially because of the cytological chapters embedded in the novel. These chapters provide the necessary background to the reader and prepare him for the bloody battle between man and whale.

The novel's theme is difficult to grasp. However, there are a few clues to its meaning in the novel. One clue is Father Mapple's sermon in chapter IX. The sermon was delivered just before the start of Captain Ahab's voyage. The message of this sermon is: "If we obey God, we must disobey ourselves, and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists." Father Mapple urges the shipmates: "Sin not, but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah." The second clue to the meaning of this novel appears in chapters 41 and 42. In chapter 41, Ishmael tells us what the White Whale means to Ahab. In the next chapter he explains what the whale means to himself: "All evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in *Moby Dick*." No wonder, Captain Ahab was "intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge." In the very next chapter, Ishmael says: "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright." The idea in this sentence is at the core of the whole novel.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn:

The second novel for our study in this unit is Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This novel is ostensibly a sequel to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Both these are supposed to be "boys' books". This term is rather ambiguous. It may mean books written for the enjoyment of boys. Another possible meaning is that these books deal with the adventures of boys. It may be a boys' book with the first meaning, but it is meant for adults. The book hits

American society as no other American book does. It attacks a number of institutions, customs and culture in a devastating manner. It attacks the institution of slavery; it attacks organized religion; it attacks romantic fiction; it attacks sentimentalism; it exposes mob psychology. It is not surprising that one of America's greatest novels was banned from public libraries and schools on the plea that it would corrupt the youth by setting up Huck Finn as a role model. The criticism of American society in the novel is ingeniously embedded in the events which Huck Finn witnesses. He describes the incidents as he saw and understood them; he reports the conversations of several characters as he heard them. It is through the eyes and ears of an almost illiterate, backwoods boy, a teenager, that Mark Twain tells the story. Huck is the author's persona. He admires what he observes and experiences, but the reader knows the novelist's intentions. *Huckleberry Finn* is an attempt to write an anti-sentimental novel. Mark Twain is also critical of the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott and of James Fennimore Cooper.

Huckleberry Finn is perhaps the most humorous novel in American literature. At any rate, Mark Twain is recognized as the greatest humorist America has produced. The kind of humour that we notice in this novel is known as "deadpan" humour. Mark Twain's language stresses the concrete and shuns the abstract. That way, he makes a direct, immediate impact on the reader. There are several dialects in the novel. Mark Twain belonged to a school of novelists who introduced "realism" and opposed "romanticism" in fiction. Realism demands use of language which is in vogue. Since Huck is barely literate, his vocabulary and sentence patterns are quite limited. The black people in *Huckleberry Finn*, notably Jim, speak the Missouri negro dialect; an extreme form of the South-Western dialect is used for Mrs. Hotchkiss (chapter 41) and the gossiping neighbours at the Phelps farm; the "Pike county dialect" is used for Huck, Tom, Pap, Aunt Sally and others. Realism extends to the choice of incidents and characters as well. Both these are common and taken from everyday life as it was in Mark Twain's time.

Let us consider the structure of the novel. It has certain picaresque elements. Huck and Jim travel down the Mississippi, presenting us a cross-section of American society. Huck lies, but his lies are harmless. Neither Huck nor Jim is a picaro (or rogue). The king and the duke qualify as picaroes but these two are incidental characters. The novel is not a picaresque novel like *Don Quixote* or *Tom Jones*. The hero in a typical picaresque novel is callous and amoral. Neither Huck nor Jim is callous and amoral. In fact, Huck goes out of his way to help those like the king and the duke who cheated him. Jim is too noble and dignified to be called a picaro. Moreover, Huck and Jim are not aimless loafers. They are strongly motivated to obtain freedom.

Huck seeks freedom from a drunken and tyrannical father; Jim seeks freedom from his white masters. Huck wants to light out for the territory to escape the “civilizing” influence of Aunt Sally. From this point of view, the novel is one of escape. It also provides escape to the reader through its humour.

The setting of the novel is also significant. Much of the action takes place during the voyage down the river. The River has such a central role in the novel that it can be called a character. The river has its moods: tranquil, stormy, floods, foggy. The river has hazards also: pirates, steam-boats crashing on rafts, etc. The river provides a contrast to the land. Whenever Huck goes ashore on his long journey, he encounters cheating, hypocrisy, violence or cruelty. Life on the shore is devoid of humanity, love, or sympathy. By contrast, life on the raft (or on the river) is peaceful and happy. Mark Twain maintains this contrast to drive home the point that the raft is a paradise, at least until the king and the duke invades it.

The great humorist that Mark Twain was, he became increasingly disillusioned and a pessimist, almost a misanthrope, towards the end of his life. His pessimistic vision found full expression in *What is Man* (1906) and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916). But the seeds of his pessimism may be noticed by discerning readers even in *Huckleberry Finn*. The novel is undoubtedly an attack on slavery; it is also an attack on the culture (of the South) which allowed and continued slavery. More than these, the novel is an expose of ‘the damned human race’, but in subdued and subtle tones. The inhumanity of man to other men is a sad commentary on the condition of mankind. Wasn’t Mark Twain justified in calling it “the damned human race?”

9.2.3 20th Century American Novel:

This section deals with the two great novelists: Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) and William Faulkner (1897-1962). Both of them made their mark between the two World Wars. Both of them were near contemporaries. Both of them won the Nobel Prize, Faulkner in 1949 and Hemingway in 1954. Both of them made unique contributions to the American novel. Hemingway fashioned a distinctive style of his own, which became a model for several other writers. Faulkner developed an involved narrative method using the stream-of-consciousness technique. Hemingway emerged as the spokesman of the “lost generation” while Faulkner became the narrator of the “saga” of the decadent post-Civil War society in the South.

We have chosen **Hemingway’s** *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) for discussion. It is a novel in which his major concerns and stylistic achievement are displayed at their best. It is quintessential Hemingway, in theme, characterization, technique, and style.

The setting of *The Sun Also Rises* is Paris and Pamplona and other places in Spain. The time is after World War I. The characters are mostly American and British expatriates. The main characters in the novel are personally and grievously affected by World War I. Jake Barnes is an American journalist who was wounded in a strange fashion; he is a sexual cripple. He is the narrator of the novel. He is desperately in love with Brett Ashley and yet he could not fulfil his desire. Brett's fiancé died in the war due to dysentery. Although she is engaged to Mike Campbell, she is promiscuous and runs off with several people like Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero. To add to Jake's agony, he becomes an accomplice in arranging her affairs with other men.

The war has literally unmanned Jake Barnes, as it did many more. Europe has become a wasteland which was depicted poignantly in T.S.Eliot's famous poem, *The Waste Land*. Hemingway's novel was also written against the same backdrop as a sterile Europe. Alienation, a recurring theme in American literature, is an important theme in this novel also. The trauma of a violent, mechanized war alienated people from their society and environment. Jake is alienated because of his war wound. Although he puts on a brave face, he is filled with despair and deep disappointment. In the privacy of his hotel room when he is alone, he has nervous breakdowns. We have already spoken of Brett's loss. She is unable to marry the man she loves, Jake Barnes. Her fiancé is alienated because he cannot manage money.

The characters live by a code to be able to survive and maintain some dignity. The traditional ethical values have crumbled in the war; such values are also rejected by the post-war generation. Their code has emerged from the demands of their situation. This has become famous in the fiction of Hemingway. This code is a touchstone of one's character in a crisis when moral choices are involved. The Hemingway code is a set of a few principles which are well understood by an in-group. They form a secret society and those who belong to this society instinctively recognize one another immediately. The discussion of the code of conduct raises the question of morality. Hemingway is depicting a situation, one which prevailed in post-war Europe. It is a situation which is full of despair. How can one come to terms with a harsh and hopeless world? Hemingway's characters seek to escape the trauma by a deliberate cultivation of a sensuous life. Eating, drinking and sex are part of that way of life. They also resort to ritual activities to forget the harsh world outside. Bullfighting is one such act of ritual. There are other forms of ritual like fishing.

Another important contribution of Hemingway is his innovative style. He found out through his personal participation in World War I that the high-sounding rhetoric to win popular support for the war was empty. There was a wide gap between the ground realities of fighting and the idealism mouthed by the political masters. He distrusted the old rhetoric which no longer carried conviction. He deliberately fashioned a new style and a new rhetoric to make a dent in minds saturated with false propaganda.

The novel's structure is cyclical. It is divided into three books. In Book I, the characters are introduced. In Book II, they witness the bullfight and the fiesta at Pamplona and two of them go to Burguete for fishing. Brett goes off with Romero. Book III comes back to the starting point. Brett and Jake, who love one another so much are together alone, but are unable to consummate their love.

The title of the novel comes from the epigraph, which in turn comes from Ecclesiastes in the *Bible*: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose." This passage stresses the circularity of all actions in the universe and the lack of any new thing under the sun. The circular motions of the sun underscore the circular structure of this novel.

William Faulkner's *Light in August* published in 1932, deals with the problems of the South after its defeat in the Civil War. It is a complex novel where the theme, the structure, the style and the technique are all complex. This complexity at different levels makes it a difficult novel to understand. But it is a rewarding experience to study the novel to understand the American South. Things have not changed much since the Civil War or the publication of this novel seventy years ago. So it has a contemporary relevance.

The main event in *Light in August* is the accidental murder of a white woman named Joanna Burden by Joe Christmas, a man believed to have mixed (white and negro) blood. After the murder, the house was set on fire accidentally by Lucas Burch. The murder takes place on a Friday in August 1929. After the murder, Joe Christmas escapes from the scene and wanders on foot through the countryside. Later, he is pursued and killed. Lena is unwed, but pregnant through Lucas Burch. She is in search of Lucas and narrowly misses meeting him. However, another man, Byron Bunch meets her and falls in love with her. Lena's child is born. Lena and Byron Bunch leave together. The novel starts with Lena travelling towards Jefferson. The implied conclusion is that evil is dead, and good is victorious. Lena's return journey provides a cyclical and symmetrical ending to the novel.

There are two opposite forces, that of good and of evil, in the novel. Lena Grove (who is introduced at the beginning of the novel) symbolizes virtues, health, light, and affirmation, broadly the forces of good. Joe Christmas stands for the forces of evil, which include alienation, perversion, hatred, sterility, and death. In Faulkner's presentation, the evil forces, their vengeful pursuits, and bigotry get more space than the affirmative forces. However, the novel begins and ends with the fountain of affirmation that is Lena Grove. Thus, the forces of affirmation are shown at prominent places, making up for the length of coverage.

Faulkner is not against religion, but only against rigid and fanatic pursuit of religion. He uses several Christian symbols in the novel to enrich the meaning. Joe Christmas has the same initials as Jesus Christ. Joe got his name because he was abandoned at the orphanage on a Christmas Day. The coincidence invests the event with spiritual significance. Joe's own life has some ironic parallels with Jesus' life. But these parallels suggest the opposites of Jesus' virtues and good deeds. Lucas betrays Joe like Judas for money. Joe's wanderings in his early life and his journey in the last seven days towards his cruel death are suggestive of events in Christ's life. But Joe is not a redeemer. His death does not save any soul. Joe cannot redeem the South from its rigid religion. He becomes a scapegoat who suffers torment.

The title is ambiguous and can be interpreted in several ways. One meaning of the word is that some burden or weight is removed, making someone or something light. If this is the intended meaning, Lena appears in the first chapter in an advanced state of pregnancy. In the last chapter, after ten days she is unburdened, her child is born. The lightening takes place in August. Hence the title, Light in August. The second meaning of the word light is "enlightenment," or the dawning of wisdom. Gail Hightower's enlightenment regarding certain realities also occurs in August 1929.

Check your Progress:

1. What is the most distinct feature of Mark Twain's writing style?

2. Which novel is considered the magnum opus of Herman Melville?

3. Who popularized naturalism?

9.2.4 Contemporary Novel:

The Post-War Novel

The War brought dislocation, both physical and psychological. Post-war life and values in the United States were different from pre-war life and values. A large middle class grew after World War II. So the problems of this class rather than those of businessmen and industrialists as in the past, became the subject matter of fiction. The middle class is under pressure. It is driven to despair, even to nihilism. The new situation throws up new problems and provides fresh themes for fiction. These are drug addiction, sex, and violent crime.

War also induced a desire for aggression, for power and for control. Such a mental stage leads to a search for escape through drugs. The relation between the drug addict and the drug pusher is one of a dependent and a controller. Drugs were used extensively during the war to kill pain and reduce physical suffering. Not surprisingly, drug addiction became a theme in American fiction. The drug addict is a new character in Nelson Algren's and William Burroughs' novels.

He is an oppressed man who expresses himself by his dependence on drugs. He commits violence on himself. The "noble sufferer," a heroic type of the past, is replaced by the man who wilfully inflicts suffering on himself. The disorder of an individual mind, rather of a society, becomes a theme for post-war fiction. The theme of drug addiction is significantly used by William Burroughs and Robert Stone.

William Burroughs uses drug addiction as a metaphor for other types of addiction such as addiction to power, to cruelty, to sex. His novel, *Naked Lunch* (1959) is an example. In another novel, *Nova Express* (1964), the power play is extended to outer space, where one star preys on another and becomes brighter, leaving the second one dimmer. The novelist aptly summarises the situation: "First it's symbiosis, then parasitism." Burroughs' fictional world is dominated by the "wild boys," those who are drug-addicts or drug-pushers. It is governed by the law of the junkie jungle which states: "steal from him before he steals from you." This is the principle underlying power-politics in the world.

In **Robert Stone's** *Dog Soldiers* (1974), a Marine becomes a drug-peddler, who dies as at the hands of a policeman who shot him and stole his heroin. As Josephine Hendin puts it: "Heroin is the symbol of a corrupt society: it is peace, currency, and poison. It stands for American destructiveness, greed, and vulnerability." In another novel, *A Hall of Mirrors* (1966), Stone depicts exploitation and vindictiveness. The political system in the South is symbolized by

Rheinhardt, who has a compulsive urge to become a powerful boss. He oppresses others. He is also a drug-addict who feels nothing and who cares for nothing including the girl who adores him. In Stone's fiction, those who care, simply do not survive. Drugs are the metaphor for the corruption in the American society. If it is not heroin, marijuana, or alcohol, it might be other metaphorical forms of drugs. A phony preacher makes money by preaching Christianity while Rheinhardt himself becomes rich as an announcer on a racist radio. Drugs are seen as palliatives for anger. Drugs, their necessity, addiction to them, and pushing them, had become a way of life in America. They became powerful tools for gaining power at different levels of society. In Burroughs' novels, drugs may keep a person away from violence. In Stone's novels, they are a protective shield for selfish people.

Another innovation in themes is the adaptation of an **old myth** to the modern context. **John Gardner's** *Grendel* (1971) tells the story of Beowulf from the monster's point of view. There is a clash between Grendel, an alienated monster, who would like to believe in civilized order and King Hrothgar, who boasts of a magnificent palace as his great achievement. Grendel destroys the palace and all that belongs to the King. His bitterness and loneliness have not diminished. Grendel expresses a doubt about the hero being a killer. The experimental novel usually presents an argument over what is good and what is evil. Violence in the contemporary world drives people either to drugs or to detachment.

Another contemporary theme is **passivity**. If one cannot win, one avoids such a situation. **Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.**, points out the futility of human endeavour. Setting his science fiction, *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), against the vast spaces of the universe, he illustrates how trivial human life and achievement are. In this novel, a Tralfamadorian machine is stranded on a satellite for want of a spare part for his spaceship. He cannot continue his intergalactic voyages to deliver a message to all the planets. Vonnegut shows that the passage of civilizations on our planet was hindering the Tralfamadorian plan to fetch that crucial part. The message that Salo wishes to deliver to all the planets is a dot. This dot stands for "Greetings" in Salo's language. Vonnegut suggests in this science fiction that the inhabitants of earth suffer and strive for a mere dot; that is for nothing. He does not see any hope for earthlings. In *Cat's Cradle* (1963) three unhappy children are bequeathed ice-9 by their scientist-father. This last discovery of the scientist has the potential to solidify water or blood. The paternal legacy of ice-9 brings them the hope of happiness and control over the world. They want to be happy which is a legitimate and normal desire. But their simple desire for happiness destroys the world. Vonnegut's novels propose to

offset helplessness in life by resignation and passive acceptance. In *Slaughterhouse - Five or the Children's Crusade* (1969), the novelist juxtaposes science fiction and realism. This novel is based on Dresden fire-bombing in 1945 during which the prisoners of war (Pows) including the author save themselves by hiding far below the earth's surface. In his fiction also, the characters survive by hiding beneath the surface. For instance, Billy Pilgrim, the hero of this novel, hides at the bottom of the swimming pool. That is a way of escaping violence on the surface. This blending of personal danger and public tragedy enables Vonnegut to improvise a defence strategy against suffering. Detachment and meaninglessness reduce the pain of suffering.

The traditional American values of hard work and perseverance are no longer important in the fiction of passivity. **Richard Brautigan** in *Revenge of the Lawn* (1971) cautions ordinary people from aspiring too high. Sheer hard work would not get them far if they do not have rich parents and powerful connections. Brautigan attempts to drive away the anxiety of the disillusioned by erasing such things as status, wealth and ambition.

The contemporary novelists use art as a theme, not for escape as in the past, but as a survival tool. The artist too has many masks. He too invents strategies for survival. In **John Barth's** novel, *The End of the Road* (1958), the central figure, Homer, stands for contemporary man. He is without any aim, as he is without any feeling. When he finishes his college, he goes to the bus station with twenty dollars. But he is unable to decide his destination. He has no motivation to go anywhere or to do anything. He ceases to exist: "I was without a character, without a personality: There was no ego; no I." The doctor who attends on an immobilized Homer tries his favourite "Mythotherapy." He believes that Homer cannot exist; he can be a parody of another. The doctor advises him to play roles and put on masks because the ego is also a mask. The doctor wants to transform life into drama, and making people aware of fiction if they fail in life. The implication is that for the doctor, people are not human beings capable of personal emotions and attachments. They can be storytellers, actors, performers without any feeling, without any involvement. Tell a story, play a role, put on a mask - these are all the same activities without personal involvement. The idea that life is an isolated episode rather than a logical narrative is brought out in Barth's novel, *The Floating Opera* (1956). If you stand on a river bank and watch a floating opera, you can see only the small bit enacted at the spot where you stand. Life, in Barth's scheme of things, is fragmented, episodic. Such a fractured life will hardly have a coherent meaning. If life is fragmented, Barth's characters are bundles of ideas, roles and terms. The extension of this is that the world itself comprises of many fragments.

Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian immigrant, **revolts against history**, against the past. He alludes to the past literature, not like Joyce or Eliot to enrich his meaning but to substitute it. *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) deals with incest between brother and sister, who are mirror images. The artist is a narcissist who loves his own image. Art or literature is the artist's defence against the external world. One of Nabokov's novels is entitled *Look at the Harlequins* (1974). One character in this book likens everything in the world to harlequins: "Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are situations and sums. Put two things together - jokes, images - and you get a triple harlequin. Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!" Obsession is an important running theme in Nabokov's fiction. This is brought out clearly in *Lolita* (1958).

Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977) focuses on the analogy between **politics** and nightmare. It deals with the events of the Eisenhower era and moves from New York to Washington, D.C. to California, and back again to New York's Times Square. The trial and conviction of the Rosenbergs for passing U.S. atomic secrets to the Russians was the hot topic then. Real-life politicians like Richard Nixon, who was then Vice-President, are portrayed in the novel. It depicts American vindictiveness at its worst. A variation on the theme of politics may be found in **E.L. Doctrow's** *The Book of Daniel* (1971). It also touches on the theme of spying for Russia. Daniel Lewin's parents, Jewish Communists, were executed for passing on atomic secrets to the enemy. The son attempts to find out the facts and his own relation to the U.S. The novelist re-creates the national mood of anger against the U.S. government in the 1960s with consummate skill.

Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963) is a record of the impact of technology on moulding the lives of Americans. Benny Profane is the messiah "machine" in this novel. In the strange fictional world, beer is supplied through taps which are shaped like large breasts made of foam rubber. Profane is interested in a woman who will be a self-contained machine. As a person living in a technology-conditioned world, Profane says: "Any problems with her you could look up in a maintenance manual. Remove and replace was all." *V.* is that kind of autoerotic machine. She cannot feel anything, so she conquers her vulnerability. Men like Profane control their destructiveness through their passivity. In another novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Pynchon a war-torn world, where the lid on violence is taken off. There is a free-for-all and no control is effective. The questions which crave for answers are: "Why does destructive ambition control the world? Why does insane anger propel life?" The novel is also a satire on the expertise of

scientists and psychologists. *Gravity's Rainbow* is described as “a novel of sexual and political aggression.”

Women's Voices in Novel:

Joyce Carol Oates (1938-) is a prolific writer. She depicts how the lives of ordinary people are filled with fear and derangement. Her characters are factory hands, school children, businessmen, teachers, and preachers. Theirs is a middle-class world. This world is filled with houses, barbeques in the backyard, shopping centres, drive-in restaurants, cars, and television. She uses sudden horrors and grotesque experience. It is a new kind of Gothic in which we have not ghosts but haunted lives, not ruined castles, but ruined cities. Oates views the contemporary situation as grotesque and Gothic. Because terror, horror and fear abound in her work, she has been nick-named “The Dark Lady of American Letters.” She communicates a vision of urban America as a swirling, nightmarish world of obsessions, neurotic fears and grotesque brutality.” Oates's characters are eccentric. Sometimes they are rebels, at other times, puppets. These people are not like those who achieve fame, money, and success having been driven to those goals. Mered Dawe in her novel, *Do With Me What You Will* (1973), is a victim. He is arrested, assaulted, declared insane and driven to madness. But the society shown here is a machine which causes madness. In *Expensive People* (1968) and *Do With Me What You Will*, the characters are powerful. Ironically, their wives elope with other men; their children rebel against them, their powers weaken with advancing age. They look for an alternative reality. That reality may be a world “where nothing is human... a hard, vivid world emptied of people and therefore permanent.” Alienation, like the one described above, pushes one to madness. Joyce Carol Oates is among women writers who, according to Elizabeth Janeway, “are splitting open the atom to show us the mechanism inside. It is not a mechanism special to women. Understanding it enlarges our knowledge of psychological causation: another contribution to universality.”

Let us now turn to the black woman writer **Toni Morrison**. Black women writers depict poignantly the stresses and strains of living in what Elizabeth Janeway calls “a madness-inducing society.” Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) records scenes from an underground where the inhabitants suffer from poverty and confused social demands. The fragmented form of the book reflects the fragmentation of life. That is so for every single individual. Blacks may go mad while aspiring for white standards of living. A black woman feels safe working in a white woman's house. Her work is valued; people treat her with respect. She seems to prefer the white

child (whom she baby-sits) to her own child. Toni Morrison depicts this difficult situation where white standards and aims are presented to the blacks as very attractive.

Jewish Novelists:

The Jewish contribution to American fiction is immense. It is also distinguished by the fact that two Jewish writers, Saul Bellow and Isaac Bashevis Singer, received the Nobel Prize. The schlemiel (the inefficient, bungling man) represents the Jew to himself in Jewish fiction. He is found in most Jewish works. His is a story of lost opportunities. **Bernard Malamud** (1914-1986) uses the schlemiel in his fiction. This type of man is isolated; he is an orphan; he is a writer; he is a drifter. He wants to shake off his past and search for a fresh life. When he finds a new way of life, it is not happy or attractive because of physical restrictions. His dreams about the future turn out to be nightmares of the past. Suffering “makes good people better” is a prevalent belief. Malamud’s hero is in a ghetto wherever he may live. Somehow, he is unable to break off his past. He learns to be a liberal. Frank Apline (in *The Assistant* 1957), belongs to this category. Malamud’s characters are expected to learn cooperation and humility, qualities which are no longer of practical benefit. His novel, *The Assistant*, is described as “a grocery-store idyl” with pain on every side. But it is a very successful novel. Malamud achieves a dramatic effect through “implication, compression, and suggestion.” He narrates the stories of poor and suffering Jews with understanding. Such characters have become representatives of all mankind. There is suffering and loneliness in his fiction but he affirms that the human spirit can overcome all that.

Saul Bellow (1915-2005) is an outstanding novelist in the US. In many of his novels, the marginal, alienated man is presented. He suffers on account of his own inadequacies and also by those imposed by society. His first novel, *The Dangling Man* (1944), contains several of his major themes. The title itself is symbolic of the position of the central character in his fiction. His second novel, *The Victim*, (1947) stresses a frequent theme of Jewish writing: The Jew saw himself as a victim. The third novel, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), is in the picaresque mode. Also, like several other American novels, it deals with the “adventures” of his hero. His other important novels are *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson the Rain King* (1958), *Herzog* (1964) and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1976). Except Henry James, Saul Bellow is unique among American novelists to describe the complexities and mores of city life. Three of Bellow’s novels, *Seize the Day*, *Herzog*, and *Humboldt’s Gift* may be described as novels of manners. Mark Shechner classifies Bellow’s novels into two kinds:

- 1) Depressive novels. (Examples: *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *Seize the Day*, *Mr Sammler's Planet*)
- 2) Expansive novels. (Examples: *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Herzog*, *Humboldt's Gift*).

Bellow lived in Chicago which provides the setting for his novel on Augie March. Bellow's descriptions of Chicago are similar to Dickens's London or Joyce's Dublin. Such cities have an impact on their citizens by shaping their attitudes and conferring on them a collective identity.

Norman Mailer (1923-2007) is one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. His novel, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) is his first and most successful novel. He was a rifleman in World War II. This military experience is used in this novel. His second novel, *Barbary Shore* (1951), depicts the constraints of political radicalism. Somewhat like Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*, he questions such abstractions as honour, virtue, and order in the modern world. *The Deer Park* (1955) marks a departure. Here, Mailer is concerned with self rather than society, the inner world of dreams and fantasy rather than the outer world of action. In this novel, he shows Hollywood as a symbol of American society. He satirises the debauchery and sterility of Hollywood life. His later novels, such as *The Armies of the Night* (1968), portray a world filled with chaos, violence, and irrationality.

Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* is the best war novel based on World War II. The language in it may not sound polite to the prudish, but that only adds a realistic foil to the novel. Men on the battlefield use such slang and vulgar expressions. Another way of looking at this novel is, as Mark Schechner says, to consider it as a study in power at two levels:

- 1) the irrational brutality of organised destruction
- 2) the sexual ferocity of the masculine contest

Also, Mailer's novel is a book on destruction slaughter of the enemies. In his later novels also the military is Mailer's favourite metaphor, which stands for organized, national violence and collective repression. It is a senseless violence without courage, grace, or independent judgement.

Black Fiction: Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin

Although Richard Wright's *Native Son* and James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* are adjudged very good novels by African American writers, Ellison's (1914-1983) *Invisible Man* (1952) is considered being superior in several respects. It is not simply a novel written by a Negro about Negroes. It has a much larger scope: it is deemed to be a novel on mankind and not any particular race. Ellison's creative power and narrative skill are praiseworthy.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* is an established classic of modern American literature without any racial or regional labels. Like the Southern white novelists Faulkner and R.P Warren, he howls and rages with laughter. He presents through fiction “the direct impression” of the world of man. He gives an absorbing account of Black experience in a white society. Harlem comes alive in the novel with its racy speech, street riots, etc. The pent-up anger of the Black Nationalist and the ride of Mr. Norton to the countryside with the horrifying tale of Jim True blood and the riot in the Negro bar add realistic touches to the narrative. The novel records accurately the manners, idioms and styles of Black life in the South as well as in the North.

James Baldwin is another important black novelist. He is Wright's successor: he is the “native son” who is the heir to black American fiction. Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), an autobiographical novel about his youth, was published a year after *Invisible Man*. Baldwin's themes in his novels are homosexuality, inter-racial love, and racial conflict. Baldwin became increasingly disillusioned with the United States and wrote several protests and angry novels. In his writings, both fiction and essays, he warned white America of the explosions to come. Similarly, he told black America that excessive racial hatred would be self-destructive. He sought to give a wider meaning to Henry James's famous phrase, “complex fate,” by saying that the lives of the whites and the blacks in America are closely tied up in the twentieth century.

9.3 Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this Unit, you should be able to:

- understand American fiction and how it originated
- have a brief account of origin and development of American novel
- discuss major trends and themes in American fiction
- provide a summary of the contributions of major American novelists

9.4 Glossary

Calvinistic: Of John Calvin and his theology

Harlem: A prominent Black neighbourhood, long had known African-American culture, Renaissance and personalities like Malcolm X and James Baldwin.

Jazz Age: A period in the 1920s and 1930s in which jazz music and dance styles became popular across the United States.

Myth: A widely held but false belief or idea; a folklore genre consisting of narratives that play a fundamental role in a society.

Naturalism: A movement in literature and visual arts in late 19th- and early 20th-century that was inspired by adaptation of the principles and methods of natural science, especially the Darwinian view of nature, to literature and art.

Realism: In arts, an attempt to represent subject matter truthfully, without artificiality and avoiding speculative fiction and supernatural elements.

Schlemiel: A Yiddish term meaning “incompetent person” or “fool”. It is a common archetype in Jewish humour.

9.5 Sample Questions

9.5.1 Objective Questions:

Answer the following in one sentence each:

1. Charlotte Temple is published in the year _____.
2. Who wrote *The Scarlet Letter*?
3. Herman Melville’s magnum opus novel is _____.
4. *The Sun Also Rises* is written by _____.
5. Who wrote *The Bluest Eye* in 1970?
6. Name the autobiographical novel of James Baldwin.
7. Who is nick-named ‘The Dark Lady of American Letters’?
8. A white woman named _____ is murdered in Faulkner’s *Light in August*.
9. Stowe’s *Uncle Tom & Cabin* is published in the year _____.
10. Norman Mailer is known for _____.
 - (a) War novel
 - (b) Romantic novel
 - (c) Gothic novel
 - (d) Picaresque novel

9.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss important features of American realism.
2. What do you understand about naturalism? Explain.
3. Discuss ‘problem novel’ with reference to American fiction.
4. Explain in brief the works of Saul Bellow.
5. Write a brief note on African American writers.

9.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on the nineteenth century American novel.
 2. Bring out salient features of contemporary American novel.
 3. Compare and analyse the works of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.
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9.6 Suggested Readings

1. Barnard, Rita. “Modern American Fiction.” *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (2005): 39-67.
2. Fisher, Philip. *Hard facts: Setting and form in the American novel*. Oxford University Press, 1986.
3. Hilfer, Tony. *American fiction since 1940*. Routledge, 2014.
4. Lee, Brian. *American Fiction 1865-1940*. Routledge, 2017.

Unit - 10: Life and Works of Toni Morrison

Structure

10.0 Introduction

10.1 Objectives

10.2 Life and Works of Toni Morrison

10.2.1 Childhood and Early Life

10.2.2 Adult Life, Marriage and Literary Career

10.2.3 Toni Morrison's Works

10.2.3.1 *The Bluest Eye*

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10.2.3.3 *Song of Solomon*

10.2.3.4 *Beloved*

10.2.4 Awards and Recognition

10.2.5 Final Years and Death

10.3 Learning Outcomes

10.4 Glossary

10.5 Sample Questions

10.6 Suggested Readings

10.0 Introduction

Toni Morrison is the first woman of African-American descent to win a Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. She is a critically acclaimed writer who focused attention on the issues of African-American identity through the hitherto unexplored intersectional lenses of gender and race. Her novels confront us with the uncomfortable truth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, initiating decades of inhuman dislocation and disintegration of Africans from their native land to an unknown alien country. With the complex interplay of memory, trauma, stories, myths, legends, supernatural elements and oral folk tradition, Morrison weaves intricate narratives of loss and recovery. Her novels centre on the issues of racial alienation, racial hierarchies within the community, disempowerment, childhood traumas, the impossibility of assimilation and restoring pride in the lost legacy. The individual's unity and harmony with the family, community and the nation are integral to one's rediscovery of self. As Morrison's protagonists

undertake the physical and emotional journey of self-affirmation, the past reappears through complex narrative, inviting readers to be part of the consciousness of the African-American identity. Rejecting stereotypes in favour of a nuanced self, Toni Morrison's life and work is a testimony to her single-minded pursuit and commitment towards her community. Her novels are an exposition of a humanity that was denied for a long time.

Along with Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Emanuel, Jamaica Kincaid and many more, Toni Morrison is credited with giving a new direction and force to the already burgeoning African-American literature by celebrating its myths, stories, legends, music like jazz and blues and the black heritage.

10.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to familiarize you with the literary career of Toni Morrison.
- to understand Toni Morrison as an African American Writer.
- to appreciate Toni Morrison's literary contribution to the African American Literature.
- to analyse Toni Morrison's novels and their predominant themes.
- to examine Toni Morrison as a novelist and her distinct story telling technique.
- to underscore the international awards and recognition bestowed on Toni Morrison for charting and mapping a new genre of African American literature.

10.2 Life and Works of Toni Morrison

10.2.1 Childhood and Early Life:

Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. She was named as Chloe Anthony Wofford at her birth and was the second eldest daughter. Morrison's father, George Wafford was originally from Georgia. He migrated to the North along with many more during the Great Depression to support his family. He did multiple odd jobs like washing car, working at construction sites and a welding to support his family amidst the growing unemployment and poverty of the Great Depression. Morrison's mother, Ella Ramah Willis was a strong, confident

and a fearless woman. She was also from South, Alabama and moved to North in hope of better prospects. She once took little Morrison to the theatre to watch Superman in the White folks' section and then later advocated others to do the same. Acutely aware of the 'inhuman' condition of the Blacks, Ramah Watford wrote a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt complained about the poor quality and bugs infested free ration. Apart from raising four children and the household chores, she had to work at various places to make the ends meet. She worked at American Stove Works and later as a custodian at Lorain Public School and was also active in the choir of many church groups. Known for her singing, Ella Ramah was actively involved in her children's education.

Morrison's early life was beset with poverty as she recounts an abhorrent incident when the family could not pay the house rent; the landlord asked them to leave. George had nowhere to go and thus refused. The landlord, out of anger set the house on fire with the entire family inside including Morrison. Fortunately, no one was harmed but this incident played a crucial role in shaping young Morrison's personality. As a young girl after school, Morrison worked as a housecleaner for a white family. When young Morrison faced the racist slurs at the White family, her father reminded her that her sense of self cannot be determined by others.

Morrison describes the marriages in her family as "comrade" showing the equality between the sexes. Recalling the significance of storytelling, black lore, myths and rituals of black culture in her formative years, Morrison reminisces her childhood in one of the interviews (given to Nellie McKay, published in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.24, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), pp.413-429, University of Wisconsin Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208128>) as:

But in terms of storytelling, I remember it more as a shared activity between the men and women in my family. There was a comradeship between men and women in the marriages of my grandparents, and of my mother and father. The business of storytelling was a shared activity between them, and people of both genders participate in it at a very early age. This was true with my grandfather and grandmother, as well as with my father and mother, and with my uncles and aunts. There were no conflicts of gender in that area, at the level at which such are in vogue these days. My mother and my father did not fight about who was supposed to do what. Each confronted whatever crisis there was (415-416).

Morrison's maternal grandparents, John Solomon Willis and Ardelia, migrated from South in Greenville, Alabama and relocated to Kentucky. Ardelia started the train journey alone

with just 18 dollars while Solomon remains hidden in the train to escape the people who would have not allowed him to travel because he owed them money. John Willis worked as a coal miner in Kentucky. Disillusioned and disappointed, John Willis moved again to Lorain, Ohio and settled there with his family. Willis family, despite the hardships for the African-American realized the importance of education for social mobility. Morrison's grandfather, John Willis educated himself in the absence of regular school and narrated stories to Ellah Ramah, Morrison's mother. Morrison recollects those stories told by her mother in her novel *Songs of Solomon* (1977). Aging and forgetful, Solomon would sometime lose his way and then young Morrison would find him and bring him home. During his last days, young Morrison would sit beside him reading the bible. Reading, storytelling, folklore, myths and interpreting dreams was a rich creative canvas on which little Morrison mapped her childhood. As a big close-knit family, Morrison learnt the value of being together in the face of adversity. Undoubtedly, her family stories and memories remain palpable in her novels.

Morrison's paternal grandparents died before she could spend time with them. The lynching of three African-American men compelled the Wofford family to move from Cartersville, Georgia to Lorain. The grave injustice and open brutality of impunity by White people made George Wofford hopeless and suspicious of every White person. However, Ramah Willis Wofford was not to be bullied woman. She never hesitated to register her protest against injustice. Morrison often talks about her mother's fierce and feisty spirit as seminal to the development of her thoughts and beliefs as an African-American woman.

Morrison was the only African-American student at Hawthorne Elementary School. She was well groomed and mature beyond her years. She was the only student who knew how to read before joining the school. As a studious and diligent student, she helped many students to read because most of them were immigrants and had difficulty in learning English. Morrison was an excellent and hardworking student. During her school days, she worked at Lorain Public Library, which soon became her favourite place. Surrounded by books and intellectual conversations with the librarian, Morrison developed keen interest in the classics, which she later pursued in her university education. The novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky shaped her intellectual life while still in school. Morrison graduated from Loraine High School with honours to nobody's surprise.

Despite excelling throughout her school years, it was not easy for Morrison to join the college. Morrison became the first person in her family to complete college. Her mother worked as ladies' room attendant to pay for her university's fees and continued to do odd jobs to support

her university education. Morrison graduated from Howard University in Washington D.C. in 1949. She majored in English and also minored in Classics. After her graduation, Morrison joined Cornell University in New York and completed her Master's degree with her thesis on suicide as a literary construct in the fiction of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf in 1955. Although her experience in the University was full of racism and class consciousness, Morrison made the best use of her university education. She explored her university days by engaging in various societies and groups. She joined the African-American Sorority, and Alpha Kappa Alpha. She was also active in the theatre group called Howard University Players. She travelled with the group to the South and performed plays but did not witness the racial violence which constituted her memories.

It was here that she famously changed her name from Chloe to Toni because she found that her name was always mispronounced. She took the name Anthony on her baptism (becoming a Roman Catholic at the age of 12) which was shortened to Toni. A decision she is known to have regretted later in her life as she felt that she has been writing in "other person's name."

Morrison upon completing her Master's degree, joined as a university professor at Texas Southern University. Here Morrison began a nuanced and complex understanding of African-American identity. She spent two years at Texas University and joined Howard University at Washington D.C. in 1957 where she taught till 1965.

As a child Morrison never dreamt of being a writer. She wanted to be a dancer like Maria Tallchief, a Native American ballerina. She started writing much later in her life and after the publication of her first novel, she realized her true calling and never looked back.

Check your Progress

1. How would you describe Toni Morrison's childhood?

2. What was so unique about Toni Morrison's joining university life?

2. How did Toni Morrison spend her days in the university?

10.2.2 Adult Life, Marriage, and Literary Career:

Toni Morrison married Harold Morrison in 1958, who was a Jamaican architect. She met him at Howard University, where she taught as an instructor. She guided many famous poets and writers as a faculty including big names like Andrew Young, Claude Brown, and Stokely Carmichael. Toni Morrison took her husband's name and from thereupon came to be known as Toni Morrison. Her time at Howard was filled with the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. Morrison joined the writers' group and wrote her first draft, which would be eventually published as her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. Her marriage with Harold was not happy and did not last very long. Although Morrison has not publicly discussed her marriage but she did attribute the failure of her marriage to cultural differences. In one of the interviews given to Collette Dowling of *The New York Times*, she reveals, "Women in Jamaica are very subservient in their marriages...they never challenge their husbands, I was a constant nuisance to mine. He didn't need me making judgments about him, which I did a lot." Morrison ended her unhappy marriage in 1964. Harold Morrison returned to Jamaica with his architectural business and Toni Morrison went to her parent's home in Lorain, Ohio.

Toni Morrison gave birth to two sons within a short span of their marriage. Harold Ford was born in 1961 and Kevin Slade was born after her divorce in 1965 in Lorain. She single-handedly raised her children while working full time at the same time. Morrison's long and fruitful career as an editor began when she joined as a book editor at Random House in Syracuse, New York. After years of hard work, Morrison was promoted to a senior editor post and sent to New York City. She was the first African-American woman to hold that post at Random House. Her writing career took an upward swing after that and she never looked back. While at Random House, she nurtured many African-American writers who were instrumental in shaping the African-American literature. Writers like Toni Cade Bambara, Henry Dumas, Michelle Cliff and Angela Davis.

Toni Morrison's literary career was launched with the publication of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. Along with many other African-American writers like Alice Walker, Gayle Jones and Shirley Ann Williams, Toni Morrison became a leading voice of the African-American Literary Renaissance of the 1960s. *The Bluest Eye* was critically acclaimed for projecting the story of a Black woman. As a bildungsroman, the novel charts the story of a young black marginalised girl called Pecola Breedlove's descent into insanity. Unloved and uncared, Pecola's desire to have blue eyes became her only way to escape her ugliness. The publication of

the first novel and its critical success established Morrison's reputation as a critic and scholar of African-American literature and culture. She wrote numerous book reviews, including an essay in *The New York Times Magazine* on African-American Women criticizing the Women's Liberation Movement as primarily steered by white women and thus failed to include the plight of African-American women.

Her language was praised and described as 'poetic'. Morrison maintains that her writing style is deeply ingrained in the African American oral storytelling tradition where writing is akin to conversation moving back and forth. With the oral quality of her writing, Morrison consciously developed a unique facet of African-American narrative technique. She calls her writing as "participatory reading" where the reader is involved in the process instead of being a detached and distant observer.

Despite good reviews and relative success, Morrison was yet not a full-time novelist. She accepted a teaching position at the State University of New York as visiting Professor in 1971 along with her regular editing. In 1973, Morrison published her second novel called *Sula*. The novel explored the themes of good, evil and friendship. It is the story of two friends Nel and Sula who are stark opposite of each other. Nel is conservative and traditional but Sula is a rebel. Sula refused to conform to the norms of the society and lived her life on her own terms and condition. Plunging into hitherto unexplored themes like friendship between women, Morrison gives new insights into Black women sisterhood, enriching the concept of womanism as propounded by Alice Walker. Morrison dedicated *Sula* to her sons, whom she raised alone juggling with her work and writing. Morrison was praised for creating interesting characters in *Sula*. Many critics and reviewers commented on Morrison's expertise in a nuanced portrayal of evil and negative characters. *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award.

Morrison was the brainchild of the project of a scrapbook called *The Black Book*, presenting three hundred years of African-American history. The history of Black people was not written by any novelists or scholars but by common people and their lived realities. Morrison worked closely with collectors of African-American memorabilia. This included newspaper clippings, song lyrics, advertisements, photographs and slave narratives. The book also showcased dramas and its interpretation, voodoo recipes, and ways to counter black magic. The grand project of the history of Black people exploring Black Aesthetic was published in 1974.

With her third novel, *Song of Solomon* in 1977, Morrison now became a formidable African American novelist. *Song of Solomon* traces the legacy and heritage of African American

culture and identity. It tells the story of Macon Dead Jr. who is fondly called Milkman because he has been nursed by his mother for a usually long period. Milkman's journey to his past brings out African-American history, especially the story of his great grandfather Solomon, who escaped slavery. The novel has deep personal connections. Morrison not only used incidents and memories of her own childhood but also struggled in between after the death of her father. She is believed to have said that her father's death made writing both difficult and easy for her. She explains it as:

I remember being filled with melancholy. I was sitting at my desk; my children were in the room. Suddenly, I got this incredible feeling of exhilaration and serenity at same time. I think because I was so depressed, my defences were down, I wasn't fighting anything. And it was like a gate that opened in me. I began to envision the things in the book. I started writing and writing—I think I wrote 30 pages that night.(10)

(Paula Giddings, "The Triumphant Song of Toni Morrison," *Encore American & Worldwide News* December 12, 1977, p. 30.)

Written after her father's death, *Song of Solomon* bears a single word dedication "Daddy." *Song of Solomon* became the first book to appear in the Book of the Month Club and Toni Morrison was the first African-American writer to be such honoured. The book also won the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction in 1977 and was Morrison's first novel to achieve commercial success as it instantly became a bestseller. She bought a new house in upstate New York on the Hudson River. Her children Ford and Slade also shifted to the new house. The new house had a private dock on the river that Morrison used to write her future novels. The Success of *Song of Solomon* pushed Morrison to become a full-time novelist and editing work became secondary.

Morrison's fourth novel, *Tar Baby* was published in 1981. It is based on the African-American folklore of Brer Rabbit and Tar baby. It was a New York bestseller list for several weeks. Morrison actively promoted the book by doing tours and giving interviews. The story of Jadine as a tar baby remains inconclusive. Morrison's clever interplay of a widely known folk story only proves her to be a skilled craftsman. Extending her literary canvas, she now began to write plays. New York State Writers Institute at SUNY-Albany commissioned her to write plays. This led to the publication of her first play *Dreaming Emmett*, which was based on the true story of Emmett Till. Till was an African-American fourteen-year-old boy who was brutally murdered

by a group of white men. The play *Dreaming Emmett* was performed to celebrate the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, birthday on January 4th, 1986.

Morrison's next novel, *Beloved* her magnum opus was about slavery. It was published in 1987 and was inspired by an article published in *The American Baptist* in 1856. The article discussed the story of Margaret Garner, a slave who tried to escape from the clutches of slavery. Under the Fugitive Slave Bill, Slave hunters were deputed to catch the runaway slaves. Garner was also caught by the slave hunters but before she was trapped again, she killed one of her three children. Garner later revealed that she killed her children because she preferred them to die in one blow rather than dying every day as slaves. Morrison discovered Garner's story while researching for *The Black Book*. Morrison dedicated the book to "Sixty Million and More" being the number of Africans who died during their journey on the slave ships. *Beloved* is about the story of Sethe, who escapes slavery with her children like Garner only this time, Civil war has ended and slaves were freed. The story moves back and forth in time. Morrison uses a supernatural element and the reincarnated Beloved becomes a reservoir of memories of unnamed Black African who died on the way to the plantations. *Beloved* is hailed as Morrison's 'masterpiece' by *Newsweek* and was compared to the books written on the Holocaust (the execution and termination of Jews in Nazi Germany in the concentration camps). Margaret Atwood praised *Beloved* as Toni Morrison's "triumph." Toni Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1988 for *Beloved*.

Morrison also became the first African American writer to be appointed as Robert F. Goheen Chair at the Princeton University in 1988. Her third novel, *Jazz* was based on the photographs taken by James Van Der Zee titled *The Harlem Book of the Dead* where a young girl is shot dead by her jealous boyfriend. *Jazz* was followed by *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, which is a compilation of lectures given by Morrison at Harvard University in 1990. In her essays, Morrison re-examines the famous novels to expose the racial abuse and exploitation. She used the racial perspective in questioning the portrayal of Black characters in the works of famous writers like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Morrison's next essay entitled as "Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality" was published in 1992 with 18 essays on sexual harassment charges levelled by Anita Hill (who was a University of Oklahoma law professor) on Thomas Clarence and his appointment in the Supreme Court.

Morrison's novel *Paradise* completes the trilogy that begins with *Beloved* and *Jazz*. The novel *Paradise* came out in 1997 and instantly occupied the pride of place in Oprah's Book Club Section. *Paradise* accounts for the histories of two towns Ruby and Convent and is situated in antebellum South. It recounts the brutal violence and clashes between the two towns; each wants to create its own version of Paradise. The novel received mixed reviews. In 2003, Morrison published *Love* in which she experimented with a new writing technique in exploring the relationship of many women with a single man. Unrestricted in time and space, Morrison in her characteristic style, employs supernatural elements in the novel.

Mercy came out in 2008 and was instantly declared as a "10 best books of 2008" of the *New York Times Book Review*. In the novel, Morrison looks at the history of the slave trade. Imbued with biblical references, *Mercy* traces the story of multiple characters that are uprooted from their environment and struggle to find new meaning to their identity beset with diseases and dangers. *Home* came out in 2012 and was Morrison's tenth novel. It tells the story of an African-American veteran of the Korean War. The novel received excellent reviews and was described as 'brutal and beautiful.' Morrison's last novel *God Help the Child* came in 2015. It is a story of Lula Ann Bride Well who is punished for her very dark skin. She is called as blue black-skinned. The confessional account of the narrative adds poignancy to Bride Well's story.

Morrison's illustrious literary career reached its apogee when she was awarded a Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. Toni Morrison became the first Black woman to be bestowed with the highest prize in literature. She was described in her Nobel Prize citation as the one "whom in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality.

Check your Progress

1. What is the theme of Morrison's novel, *Sula*?

3. Briefly describe the use of folklore and myths in Morrison's works.

4. Why is *Beloved* considered as Toni Morrison's magnum opus?

10.2.3 Toni Morrison's Works:

Toni Morrison's literary oeuvre spans through decades, exploring multitude facets of African-American identity. She wrote eight successful novels namely: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998) and *Love* (2003). Morrison wrote many children's book with her son Slade Morrison which includes *The Aunt or the Grasshopper* (2003), *The Book of Mean People* (2002), *The Big Box* (1999), *The Mirror or the Glass* (2007), *The Lion or the Mouse* (2003), *The Poppy or the Snake* (2004), Her essays (non-fiction) include *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality* (1992), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), *Birth of a Nationhood: Gaze, Script and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case* (1997), *The Black Book* (edited by Morrison, 1997) and *The House that Race Built: Original Essays on Black Americans and Politics in America Today* (1998).

This section is devoted to a detailed study of some of Toni Morrison's famous novels that established Morrison as a formidable voice in mapping African-American literature.

10.2.3.1 *The Bluest Eye*:

The Bluest Eye was Morrison's first novel. It was published in 1970. The novel grapples with the questions of identity raised by many African-American women during that time. It rejects the cultural stereotypes and racial hierarchies within the African American community. By giving first person an account of their experiences, Morrison is able to develop deep insights into their lives. The novel traces the lives of two primary characters namely Pecola Breedlove and Claudia Mac Teer. Pecola Breedlove is an African-American young woman, who is alienated from the society and finds no love or support in her dysfunctional family. Claudia MacTeer is also an African-American girl who undergoes similar experiences of marginalisation and invisibilities but unlike Pecola her family supports and faiths in her, helps her to survive social oppression.

Through the stories of Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer, Morrison represents the realities of many African-American women at that time. As a bildungsroman, the novel traces the growth and development of these two girls from their childhood to womanhood. Being African-American girls, Pecola and Claudia's formative years are beset with humiliation and systematic disregard and denial of their self-worth. The novel also explores the horrifying prevalence of incest in the community. Morrison uses the cliché narrative of Dick and Jane to

contrast with the real stories of Pecola and Claudia. Dick and Jane becomes a pivot against which the African-American characters evaluate their existence and identity. The Dick and Jane narrative serves to make the differences in the lives of African-American characters appear more brutal and jarring. Claudia becomes the primary lens through which the story of Pecola unfolds and which gradually enriches Claudia's understanding of the life and events for the African-American women. The novel begins with Claudia's quest into Pecola's tragic life, where horrid details of her childhood experience of neglect and denial by her own family which eventually culminates in her rape by her father.

The novel is divided into four sections named after the four seasons, namely Autumn, Winter, Summer and Spring. The first chapter 'Autumn' begins with Claudia Mac Teer's life and family. Claudia's mother is Mrs Mac Teer, who is constantly busy in providing for her family. Claudia recollects her mother's irritation, only to realise later that it was indicative of her love and concern. Mac Teers are forced to have a paying guest, Mr Henry in their house to make their ends meet. Mr Henry and the girls, Claudia and Frieda become good friends and begin to spend time together. The sections also talk about their neighbour Rosemary Villanucci, whom the girls envied. The sections also break the cultural stereotypes in the narrative of Claudia. She destroys the white doll in order to find what's inside her while Pecola and Frieda are obsessed with white dolls. Claudia's inability to understand why Pecola and Frieda idolise and adore white child star Shirley Temple shows her rooted self and acceptance of her identity. Claudia instead enjoys simple, more instinctual pleasures like playing violin, eating peaches in the garden and smelling violets.

As Claudia refuses to confirm to the norms, she is able to forge her own distinct identity. She also rebels against the nightly bath routine of cleanliness, which she finds unnecessary. Gradually, Claudia matures and learns to accept the norms and conformity to the expectations and realities of being an African-American woman. She accepts the white dolls and loves Shirley Temple. The transition of Pecola Breedlove at Claudia's house from girlhood to womanhood evokes much interest and curiosity in Claudia and Frieda. Pecola is told that she is ready to have a baby but she is filled with doubts about her undesirable body. The section also focuses on the Breedlove family and their life. Their house which is a store converted into a two-bedroom apartment is described with everything ugly and unpleasant not just by others but also by themselves. Pecola's brother, Sammy Breedlove tries to escape and run away from the surrounding ugliness. Pecola on the other hand, is conditioned into believing the ugliness as her

only reality. Her self-hatred and intense longing to become invisible is the reflection of the way she has been raised in the family by the Breedloves. Pecola's desire to have deep blue eyes like that of Shirley Temple is the negation of self. Blue eyes are the symbol of White beauty and Pecola's desire to be loved and accepted can be fulfilled only by acquiring that. When the shopkeeper abstains from touching her while tending the change, Pecola takes refuge in the candy and imagines her to be the desirable girl on the candy wrapper.

The next section 'Winter' begins with Claudia's narration. She describes her father as loving and protective of the family in stark contrast to the Breedloves. This section introduces another character called Maureen Peal, who is light-skinned, green eyed and belongs to upper middle class. Everybody loves her because of her appearance. Pecola and Maureen represent two opposite sides of African-American experience of acceptability and Claudia lies somewhere in between as she has experienced both rejection and acceptance. Claudia 's perspective is thus more nuanced as she questions the superficial, physical appearance as determining factor of one's place in the society. In one of the incidents in the novel, all four girls Maureen, Claudia, Pecola and Frieda are chased and taunted by the boys. The boys single out Pecola for her intense black skin colour by making fun of her, calling her names and suggesting sexually inappropriate behaviour of her father. In the story of Geraldine, Morrison critiques the concept of assimilation, where the individual identity is completely effaced. Geraldine is an African-American woman who is obsessed with her physical appearance. For Geraldine, her physical looks are more valuable than her family. Her son, Junior plays mischief on Pecola by making his cat attack her on the face. Bruised and hurt, Pecola gets no sympathy from Geraldine who despises Pecola because of her dark looks and blames her for everything. Pecola becomes the reality from which Geraldine is trying to escape but it is the reality which will always haunt her.

The third section is ironically called 'Spring' because there is no such revival of happiness as associated with the arrival of spring. The chapter Spring in fact shows the doom and gloom that awaits the African-American women. In this section, Frieda is molested by Mr Henry. While the Mac Teers throws Mr Henry out but the mental trauma of being sexually assaulted leaves Frieda confused and torn apart. Frieda is scared of being ruined as a result of molestation. In another incident, Pecola was beaten by her mother Pauline for an accident. The blueberry pie has fallen on the floor by mistake. Pauline's maternal instinct could not overpower her anger and hatred for Pecola. Pauline's story reveals that as a child she had been neglected due to an accident which resulted in a limp. She took recourse in cleaning the house, which becomes her

favourite past time. She marries Cholly but the marriage remains an unhappy one. Cholly escapes into alcohol and Pauline tries to be like movie star. She gets obsessed with her appearances by trying to imitate the icons of beauty. Ignoring her own home and family, Pauline devotes all her energy and time in cleaning other's houses. Abandoned at birth by his mother due to some mental deficiency, Cholly is raised by her aunt Jenny. Cholly's sexual act with Darlene in the woods is converted into a sexual spectacle when they are forced to copulate in front of the hunters. The incident psychologically fractures Cholly. He translates his frustration into violence. He rapes Darlene and towards the end of the section, Cholly rapes Pecola. Morrison describes Pecola's rape from Cholly's standpoint. Unable to express his paternal love and care for Pecola, Cholly uses the only emotion he knew and rapes her. Another character, Soaphead Church is paedophile and psychic. He feels that he is superior because of his relatively light skin. He is distraught after the failure of his marriage. He tried different odd jobs and finally settles as a fortune teller. In Lorrain, Pecola innocently asks Soaphead for a pair of blue eyes.

The last section of the novel is called 'Summer'. In this section, Claudia discovers Pecola's truth and Pecola's gradual descent into madness. Pecola's alter ego creates a set of dialogues where Pecola is convinced that she has blue eyes but is also fearful that her eyes are not blue enough. She longs for love, compassion and care. Claudia concludes the novel with the tragic plight of Pecola which is the systemic failure of the community and the society at large, exacerbated by the dysfunctional and violent family. The broken domestic bonds in the family shatters and irreversibly damage the life of Pecola and many others like her. Pecola remains mute and voiceless in the novel. Her story is primarily told by Claudia. Pecola's silent suffering and psychological fragmentation are suggestive of her rootlessness. Without any anchor for support, she exists in the liminal space where she is neither accepted by Whites nor Black. The novel *The Bluest Eye* depicts the coming of age of African-American female protagonist in a society where they are despised and coerced to forgo their real self in the mad pursuit of unattainable standards of perfection and beauty set by another culture. As young girls, Claudia, Pecola, Frieda, and Pauline childhood experiences determine their fate and destiny.

10.2.3.2 *Sula*:

Morrison's *Sula* is her second novel published in 1973 is a story of two friends Sula Peace and Nel Wright. Sula Peace is raised in the family where there is no male member. After the death of Sula's father, the house is managed and controlled by Sula's mother, Hannah Peace and her grandmother Eva Peace. Living with strong women without any male interference, Sula

grows up to be a confident and strong woman who refuses to conform to the norms of the society. In contrast, Nel Wright is a daughter of Helene and Wiley Wright. Nel is raised in a perfectly ordered house and develops a feeling of lack and inadequacy, which in turn necessitated to be fulfilled by someone else. Nel dreams of a handsome man to rescue her and complete her. Sula dreams of a lover with whom she rides the horse. The passivity of Nel is contrasted with the agency of Sula, which reflects their decisions of adult life. The two girls become best friends sharing their thoughts and fantasies as they grow into adolescence. Sula cuts off the tip of her finger in one of the episodes to scare a gang of boys. Her passion and energy make her a rebel and an outcast in her own town. They dig a deep hole into the earth and fill it with debris which has been interpreted by many as the affirmation of their emerging sexuality. The accidental killing of Chicken Little becomes the turning point of the novel. Sula and Nel played a prank on Chicken Little. Sula accidentally let go off Chicken little hand and he fell into the river, drowns and dies. His death is kept a secret between the girls and Shadrack who witnesses the act also promises to keep it a secret. On reaching adulthood, Nel who thinks of herself to be morally superior, chooses the traditional path of getting married and settled. Sula on the other hand, chooses a more unconventional path of travelling, going to the college and exploring the cities. Sula's unconventional way of living makes her an embodiment of evil. Sula returns Bottom after ten years, where she is shunned as she is looked down upon as negative and sinful. Sula's promiscuity is unacceptable to the community.

Sula sleeps with Jade, Nel's husband ending their friendship. For Sula, Jade is just another thing to be shared with friends. Nel blames Sula for her sufferings. Nel Clings to her grief like a 'gray fur' and refuses to move on. Sula sees life as constant movement and status as hell. Sula is completely ostracised by the society at Bottom, rumours about her affair with Whites also do round. All calamities in the town are blamed on her morally corrupt presence. Her family chides her for her iniquitous life. Unashamed and unafraid, Sula continues to live her fearless life rejecting the only role available to women at that time that is, of a wife and a mother. Amidst this, Sula also falls in love with Albert Jacks and when he leaves her, she becomes sick and eventually dies. Sula questions Nel about her conviction that she is morally superior to her. Nel is unable to explain but begins to think about the question more deeply. She realises that Sula has been a scapegoat, personifying all that the community fears and wishes to escape. Nel visits the grave of Sula and comes to an understanding that it has been the loss of her friendship with Sula that has hurt her most and not the relationship with jade. The novel concludes with

Nel validating Sula's concerns as she realises that her friendship with Sula was more important than being self-righteous and wearing the halo of moral superiority. As Nel liberates herself from the narrow barriers of judgement, she reclaims and rediscovers her latent love and loss for her friend Sula.

10.2.3.3 *Song of Solomon*:

Song of Solomon is Toni Morrison's third published novel. It came out in 1977 and has been the winner of the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award in 1978. It is Morrison's first novel to have a male protagonist which admittedly Morrison found challenging but also seminal to her identity as a novelist.

Song of Solomon is a saga of African-American identity premised on numerous sources, including biblical stories, myths and African folklore. The central narrative of the story revolves around the coming-of-age journey of 'Milkman' Milkman's quest for the search of treasure takes him to the history of African-American people. The journey transforms him from his selfish hunt for treasure towards embracing his identity and history. Milkman's unity with his past matures his present as he realizes his collective responsibility for a harmonious existence.

The story begins with the suicide of Robert Smith, who is an insurance agent of the town. Robert Smith has posted about his public suicide for everyone to witness. Robert's suicide from the roof of Mercy Hospital and Ruth Dead's delivery of Macon Dead (who would be known as Milkman) happens almost at the same time. As Ruth rushes into labour due to the commotion and Milkman is born the next morning. Living in an unhappy and unsatisfied marriage where Ruth is always bullied and harassed, she shifts all her love and care into feeding her little boy. Breastfeeding becomes a source of comfort and affirmation of her existence, away from the abuse of her husband, Mr Macon. Ruth's helper, Friddie who stays with her is amazed at Ruth's obsessive breastfeeding way beyond the usual age and she christens the boy's name as Milkman. Milkman's father Macon Dead Jr is a wealthy man, who cares only about money and his possessions. He has no love and compassion for anyone, neither for his family nor for his tenants. Macon's sister Pilates is unlike her brother. She lives in the same town and makes her own living by selling wine. Pilates has no navel signifying her independent existence. She lives in one room without electricity with her daughter Reba and granddaughter, Hagar. Much to the consternation of Macon, Milkman goes to her aunt Pilates and develops a strong bond with the family. Pilates informs about the family history and the death of Macon Sr. which left Macon Jr. and herself orphaned and alone. Pilates with her supernatural powers reveals that her father often comes and

visits her. Macon is displeased with Milkman's growing affection and intimacy with his aunt Pilates. Milkman is also attracted to Pilate's daughter Hagar, an affair that ends disastrously. As Milkman grows his deformity becomes more visible. His one leg being bigger than the other troubles him a lot. He spends all his time on his physical appearance and disguising his deformity at the same time. Milkman also wants to stand apart and distinct from his father. His emphasis on being different is sadly focused only on the external appearance with very little soul searching.

In one incident, the relationship between father and son worsens when Milkman hits Macon in order to protect his mother, Ruth. Macon justifies his anger by relating his anguish over Ruth's unnatural relationship with his father. Later in the novel, Ruth tells the truth that she loved her father, as he was the only one who loved and cared for her. Macon, on the other hand wanted to kill Milkman even before he was born. Milkman ends his love affair with Hagar, leaving her emotionally distraught and also begins to distance with his only best friend Guitar. Guitar who began to reflect deeply on the African-American reality, especially the racial violence joins an organization called Seven Days. The terror organization Seven Days is based on retributive justice, which is committed only on a Sunday. With the belief of an eye for an eye, Seven Days avenges the death of Black men that goes unpunished. Guitar's growing concern about the community makes Milkman realize his inertia and aimlessness. He is led by his father to steal the green sack full of money. Reluctantly, Milkman steals the green sack and is surprised to find only rocks and bones in it. Pilates rescues Milkman who has been caught by the police, while Macon continues to incite him to find the gold.

Milkman begins his journey and reaches his ancestral town called Shalimar where he meets Circe, who recounts his family history. Morrison does not clarify whether Circe is a ghost or a real person. Milkman learns that his grandfather's name was Jake before they were mistakenly called dead by the drunken Yankees. Milkman also discovers that his grandfather's body after his gruesome murder was hidden in the cave. Travelling with other men in the woods, Milkman realizes that his name and money are useless in the new place. The visit to the town is instrumental in the growth and development of Milkman. He miraculously loses his limp and is able to connect with the people independently on his self-merit and worth. Like an initiation ritual, Milkman learns some very important lessons of life and returns home a matured, connected and rooted man. Milkman is more empathetic towards his father as he could rationalize his behaviour and his mother's deep personal loss and pain. He also regrets his unfair

treatment of Hagar and her tragic demise. Through Susan Byrd, he learns about the legend of his great grandfather, Solomon, who could fly. Towards the end, Milkman sings the family song on the accidental death of Pilates in an encounter with guitar. His singing of the lineal song is a symbolic reaffirmation of self.

The novel demonstrates through the journey of Milkman that reconnecting with the ancestral past and mapping the lost legacy is integral in developing a cohesive self. Milkman was lost, self-centred, without love and understanding. His maturation into a balanced self with responsibility and accountability was channelized through his union with his family legacy. Toni Morrison raises crucial concern about the African-American enslaved identity which has been uprooted and dislocated from its historic roots due to slave trade. Thus, the reconnection with the past is fundamental to the formation of an individual identity. Morrison's use of biblical references is in part the rejection of the western ideology that fails to validate the African-American existence. Macon's decision to call his daughter Pilates stems out of his desperation and disappointment with Christ because his wife died during the childbirth. In naming his daughter Pilates after the biblical Pontius Pilate who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Macon rejects the western Christian worldview, which fails to empathize with their realities. The title *Song of Solomon* although refers to the Bible. Morrison adapts it to depict African-American experience of enslavement and the subsequent loss of African-American culture, customs and legacy. Morrison also rejects Macon's material pursuit in an effort to assimilate on one hand and Guitar's violent retributive nationalistic ideology on the other. Milkman towards the end is able to strike a balance by reclaiming his past as part of his identity.

10.2.3.4 *Beloved*:

Toni Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved* published in 1987 after *Tar Baby*, catapulted her instantly into international fame. Winner of Pulitzer Prize along with many more, *Beloved* traces the existential crisis faced by the African-American enslaved community in the absence of basic human freedom and dignity. The novel explores the lasting and dehumanizing impact of slavery on the African-American people long after it was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation. The horrifying memories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse continue to haunt and impair their lives. *Beloved* explores the psychological journey of its characters by taking the readers into the inner recess of their minds and exposing their fractured consciousness due to generations of violence, loss and disintegration of self.

The genesis of the novel can be traced to the story of Margaret Garner, who made the headlines by running away from her slavery in Kentucky in 1856. As a result of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, slaves escaped from their masters could be captured and restored to their rightful owners. In order to escape the slave hunters, Margaret Garner tried to kill all her children but succeeded in killing one of them. She believed death to be a better option than being enslaved. Her trial captured the national imagination and also pushed for abolition of slavery. Beloved, the eponymous character represents the fragmented psyche of the African-American lives. It tells the story of Sethe and Paul D, who struggle to liberate from the manacles forged by the memory of slavery filled with emasculating and humiliating experiences.

The novel begins with the house at 124 Bluestone Road, around which the narrative revolves. The readers are informed that the house is haunted by a spirit which has driven Sethe's sons Buglar and Howard away. Estranged and disconnected from the community, Sethe and Denver lives alone in the house. Sethe carries the horrific memories of the sexual bestiality by the Nephews who suckled at her breast and beat her at the same time while she was pregnant. Halle, Sethe's husband ashamed at his inability to intervene and save his wife from the brutal sexual assault, descends deep into insanity and is never seen. Halle remains a mystery in the novel.

The arrival of Paul D brings the memories of days when Sethe and Paul D were slaves at Sweet Home. Paul D and Sethe rekindle their old passion and consummate their relationship. Denver is curious to know more about her mother's escape from the Sweet Home, the stories that shape and fill up Denver's imagination. Paul D serves to establish the lost ties with the community, which have made Sethe and Denver isolated from everyone. As Beloved arrives at the 124 Bluestone Road with no surname, Denver is convinced that she is her dead elder sister. Beloved is also the only word Sethe is able to engrave on her dead daughter's grave in exchange of sex. Sethe believes that Beloved has escaped from her enslavement by a White man. Beloved, Sethe and Denver establish deep familial bonds where Sethe shares all her stories of childhood and Sweet Home. Denver gets emotionally attached with Beloved as they spend more and more time together, dancing in the attic and sharing stories. Paul D, who has been initially suspicious of her, also gets under her influence and control. Beloved's seduction of Paul D brings back all his hidden memories of pain and turmoil at Sweet Home. As Paul D decides to take control of his life, he finds a perfect companion in Sethe with whom he wishes to have a family. Stamp Paid is a former slave who was called Joshua has now changed his name into Stamp Paid

because he feels he has paid the price of his freedom. He has helped Sethe and her children in her flight to freedom and is privy to Sethe's secret of killing her own daughter. Stamp Paid unravels the well concealed secret to Paul D about Sethe killing of her daughter during her flight from slavery. When confronted, Sethe is unashamed and least regretful about her decision and openly admits life as slavery to be worse than death and as a mother, she chose a better life for her daughter.

When Sethe listens to Beloved, humming a song that she used to sing while putting her children to sleep is convinced that Beloved is her dead daughter. Sethe is completely consumed and drained by Beloved. She is physically and emotionally devoted to her, who leaves her weak and emaciated. Denver realises that Sethe is more vulnerable in her love, care and concern towards Beloved and not vice versa as she previously imagined. Towards the end, as women approach the haunted house and its inhabitants with prayers to cast away the spirit. Beloved emerges as pregnant, dark and naked. She disappears into the forest and is never seen or heard again. Sethe has descended into insanity as old memories of the school teacher who brutally tried to recapture her after her escape resurfaces. She takes Edward Bodwin to be the school teacher and tries to attack him to save his daughters.

The non-linear narrative of the novel emphasizes the role of memory in the formation of self. The structural fragmentation mirrors the fractures and broken sense of self and being. Although Sethe flees from the physical slavery but the circumstances trap her into self-inflicted mental slavery from which she is unable to liberate herself. The slavery perpetuated by guilt and responsibility for her past actions, her over maternal instincts deranges Sethe as she begins to lose grip with the real world.

Towards the end, Beloved vanishes and is forgotten. No one knows her traces as she exists in the luminal space between dreams and reality. Paul D visits the ailing Sethe and consoles and comforts her. The novel ends with Paul D affirming to Sethe that she is most important, thereby forgiving the past in order to create a new future. Sethe has identified herself entirely as a mother forgoing other aspects of her being. Thus, the novel ends with the ray of hope amid the dark and gloomy shadow of Beloved.

10.2.4 Awards and Recognition:

The long and fulfilling literary career of Toni Morrison is interspersed with numerous awards, accolades and Prizes for her literary work and contribution to the society at large. Undoubtedly, Toni Morrison became a leading voice in the burgeoning African-American

literature. Apart from being the first Black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993 after stellar success of her novel *Beloved*, she was selected to receive the Matrix Award for Communication in 1970.

The prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 was awarded to Morrison for her novel *Song of Solomon*. American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award was also awarded to Morrison in 1977 in recognition of her contribution to promote and foster American literature. Morrison's critically acclaimed novel *Beloved* was showered with numerous awards namely; Robert F Kennedy Book Award, Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award, American Book Award, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, Frederic Gershom Melcher in 1988.

The long list of the awards for the novel *Beloved* also included the coveted Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1988. Many African American writers and scholars wrote a letter of protest in *The New York Times Book Review* because despite the thunderous success of the novel *Beloved*, it failed to win the National Book Award or the National Book Critics Circle Award. While Morrison expresses her gratitude for the support by the African-American writers, she did not think very highly of awards. She has famously stated "My rank in terms of writing is of no interest to me," (*Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 1992).

In 1993, Morrison was awarded Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the Ministry of Culture (Paris) for her contribution in the field of art. In 1995, Morrison was felicitated by her alma mater, Howard University, with the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in the presence of a huge gathering. She was also the recipient of the National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

Morrison has acquired international repute and fame for her outstanding work. In expanding the understanding of humanities, Morrison was awarded the National Humanities Award in 2000 for her notable contribution in the African American literature. In 2002, she was listed in one of 100 Greatest African American, a list prepared by Prof. MolefiKete Asante. Poised at number 67, Toni Morrison was placed way ahead of Rosa Parks and Oprah Winfrey. Morrison not only had a successful career as a novelist but throughout her writing and editing work, she continued to teach at various universities. The long list of Honorary Doctorate awarded by prestigious universities to Morrison is a testimony to her active and devoted career as an academician and a novelist par excellence. She was honored with the Honorary Doctorate degree by Harvard University in 1989, Oxford University in 2005, University of Pennsylvania in

1988, Gustavus Adolphus College in 1997, Rutgers University and University of Geneva in 2011. Morrison was awarded with Norman Mailer Prize in 2009 celebrating her work. In 2013, Vanderbilt University endowed her with The Nicholas Chancellor's Medal in and Princeton University with an Honorary Doctorate of Literature.

The Legion of Honour, the highest French order of merit, was bestowed on Morrison in 2009. The Presidential Medal of Freedom was awarded to Morrison for her distinguished work and contribution to the society. Awarded by the President, it is one of the highest civilian awards. National Book Critic circle awarded her IvonSandr of Lifetime Achievement award in 2014. She was also honoured with the Thomas Jefferson medal by the American Philosophical Society. She is also inducted in the historic National Women's Hall of Fame in 2020 for the lasting impact of her work in the field of African American literature and most importantly, African American Women. 'Toni Morrison Day' day is also celebrated in Ohio on her birthday, i.e. February 18.

Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1993. The Nobel Prize Citation described Morrison as "whom in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality." Morrison's Nobel Prize acceptance speech begins with a story, "Once upon a time there was an old woman, Blind but wise". The speech that begins with the story of old, blind and wise women soon delves into the significance of language and its usage. She explains that oppressive language is violent and it restricts knowledge. She calls for the rejection of such language with the 'racist plunder'. Morrison exclaims "Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas". Morrison highlights the significance of language as "we die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives."

Check your Progress

1. List the various literary awards conferred on Toni Morrison.

2. What made Morrison figure in the 100 Greatest African American list?

3. When was Morrison awarded the Nobel Prize?

10.2.5 Final Years and Death:

Morrison died on 5th August 2019. She was 88 years old and her death was confirmed by her publisher, Alfred. K.Knopf. Her brief illness and complications due to pneumonia have been reported to be the cause of her death. Morrison passed away at New York’s Montefiore Medical Centre in the Bronx. Oprah Winfrey, Angela Davis and Michael Ondaatje along with many more literary figures and leaders attended her memorial services. She is survived by her son Harold and three grandchildren.

In one of her interviews with NPR’s Fresh Air in 2015, Morrison describes writing as a healing process where she is freed of her pain. Morrison believed writing to be her best, “where nobody tells me what to do; it’s where my imagination is fecund and I am really at my best. Nothing matters in the world or in my body or anywhere when I’m writing”.

Overcoming her death through her works, the legacy of Toni Morrison perpetuates. US President Barack Obama hailed her a “national treasure”. He extolled her as “Toni Morrison’s prose brings us that kind of moral and emotional intensity that few writers ever attempt”.

As a person who is never known to mince words, Morrison remained active and aligned to her cause till the very end of her life. She criticised President Donald Trump in her article “Mourning for Whiteness” in 2016 for keeping the white supremacy alive by stoking it for vote politics. ‘Imagine – Toni Morrison Remembers’ is a documentary film directed by Jill Nicholls featuring Toni Morrison, who freely and fearlessly discusses her life, challenges, opportunities and success.

Lorain, Ohio, which is the hometown of Toni Morrison, passed a resolution to celebrate February 18th as Toni Morrison Day for the generations to be inspired by her poetic and incandescent prose in humanizing the African-American community.

10.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit you should be well-informed about the life and works of Toni Morrison. You should be able to comprehend the significance of African-American Literature. You should be familiar with Toni Morrison’s literary work and famous novels as part of American literature. You should have been sensitized to the racial crimes and the plight of African American community. You should be able to critically examine the intersection of race and gender in the violence and crimes against Black African-American women. You should be

able to appreciate and absorb the alternate narrative of African-American legacy instead of merely the Eurocentric discourse.

10.4 Glossary

Abolition: Refers to the Movement in the USA to bring an end to legalized slavery. Slavery was being resisted by protest, suicides, escape and revolt. American Anti-Slavery society was formed in 1833; it included many former slaves who consistently campaigned against slavery. John Brown and Frederick Douglass was the prominent Abolitionist. It finally led to the Emancipation Proclamation.

African- American Literary Renaissance: Refers to the growing number of African-American writers writing in 1970 and 1980 along with the rise of Black Feminism in 1960. Writers like Alice Walker, Barbara, and Toni Morrison were instrumental in re-articulating the Black woman experiences.

Black Aesthetic: Refers to the Black Arts Movement and its artistic exploration in reclaiming the meaning of blackness. It employs art to underscore social, economic and political problems faced by the African American community.

Blues: Refers to the unique African American Art form used to communicate their stories and experiences and is an integral part of Black Arts Movement.

Civil Rights Movement: Refers to the movement by the African American community to achieve equality and citizenship. In order to achieve integration, the movement fought against racist and segregationist laws and practices like the Jim Crow segregation.

Dick and Jane reader: Refers to a series of books to supplement young children's reading ability. They first appeared in 1930 and were widely used in the schools. Toni Morrison uses Dick and Jane Readers in her novel *The Bluest Eye* to question the standards of family against the dysfunctional, violent and abusive families in the African -American Community.

Emancipation Proclamation: Refers to the official decree by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 to put an end to the slavery. Emancipation Proclamation freed African American from slavery, yet their condition remained largely the same.

Great Depression: Refers to the large-scale migration after the First World War between 1910 and 1940 of African American people from the southern region of the United States to the

northern part in a hope for a better life and employment. As an important historical and cultural event, this vast movement of African American people led to the Harlem Renaissance.

Fugitive Slave Law: Refers to 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which empowered the slave owners to reclaim and recapture the slaves who managed to escape from the captivity. The Act also allowed the use of force and violence against those who helped the slaves to escape.

Harlem Renaissance: Refers to the increasing number of African American population in Harlem, which soon became a culture epicentre of African- American art, music, literature, films, and theatre.

Jazz: Refers to the unique music form of African American with African rhythms combined with European music. The merit of Jazz lies in its improvisation and it became a medium of expressing African -American Jazz features in many of Morrison’s novels like *The Bluest Eye* and *Love*.

Slave narrative: Refers to the first-person account of African American life as Slaves. The Slave narrative became a seminal historical document recording the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of the slaves. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Nat Turner’s slave narrative are few of the most famous slave narratives.

Womanism: Refers to Alice Walker’s concept of Feminism, which she found inadequate and limited as it failed to explore and incorporate the experiences of Black women. Alice Walker’s famous explanation of Womanism, “Womanism is to Feminism and Purple is to Lavender”.

10.5 Sample Questions

10.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Where was Toni Morrison born?
 - (a) Lorain, Ohio
 - (b) Harlem
 - (c) Nigeria
 - (d) Michigan
2. When was Toni Morrison awarded the Nobel Prize?
 - (a) 2003
 - (b) 1993
 - (c) 1997
 - (d) 2000
3. Milkman is a character in which one of the Morrison’s novels
 - (a) *The Bluest Eye*
 - (b) *Sula*

- (c) *Love* (d) *Song of Solomon*
4. Which one of them is a **FALSE** statement?
- (a) Toni Morrison had an unhappy marriage.
 (b) Toni Morrison was the first Black woman to win a Nobel Prize.
 (c) Toni Morrison changed her name.
 (d) Toni Morrison coined the word Womanism.
5. Which one of the novels is hailed as Toni Morrison's magnum opus?
- (a) *The Bluest Eye* (b) *Beloved*
 (c) *Song of Solomon* (d) *Paradise*
6. Toni Morrison in her early career worked as a _____.
- (a) Librarian (b) Dancer
 (c) Editor (d) Singer
7. Which of the themes are predominant in Morrison's novels?
- (a) Poverty and unemployment (b) Racial alienation, dislocation and loneliness
 (c) Trauma, Memory and Self-affirmation (d) Both b and c
8. How does Morrison describe her mother?
- (a) Meek and scared (b) Active, talented and unafraid
 (c) Sad and depressed (d) none of the above
9. Toni Morrison Day is celebrated every year on _____.
- (a) 20th February (b) 5th August
 (c) 18th February (d) 7th July
10. Which one of the novels of Morrison has a male protagonist?
- (a) *Sula* (b) *The Bluest Eye*
 (c) *Beloved* (d) *Song of Solomon*

10.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. How did Toni Morrison spend her childhood?
2. What was Morrison's experience in school and university?
3. Whom did Morrison marry and how was her married life?
4. Write a note on Milkman as depicted by Morrison.
5. In what ways Morrison's career as editor at Random house helped her as a novelist.

10.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss Toni Morrison's contribution to African-American literature.
 2. Critically analyse the dominant themes of Toni Morrison's literary work.
 3. Explain the dehumanizing aspect of slavery in the choice made by Sethe in the novel *Beloved*.
-

10.6 Suggested Readings

1. Heinze, Denise. *The Dilemma of 'Double Consciousness': Toni Morrison's Novels*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
2. Hove, Thomas B. "Toni Morrison." In *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, edited by Hans Bertensand Joseph Natoli, 254–260. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002.

Unit – 11: *The Bluest Eye*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

11.0 Introduction

11.1 Objectives

11.2 *The Bluest Eye*: Background, Plot, Characters

11.2.1 Background to *The Bluest Eye*

11.2.2 Plot and Structure

11.2.3 Major Characters and their Role in the Novel

11.3 Learning Outcomes

11.4 Glossary

11.5 Sample Questions

11.6 Suggested Readings

11.0 Introduction

In the American literary landscape, Toni Morrison occupies a representative position in questioning the issue of marginalization and subjugation of the African American community. Ever since the publication of her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, she has been a forerunner in the expression of Black aesthetic and representation. Her writing gives voice to the unheard silences of her community. It is not just an expression of protest and activism but also a space to articulate the representation of the Afro American community.

11.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to understand the genesis of the novel
- to study the structural construction of the novel
- to have an overview of the characters
- to understand colour as symbol and extended metaphor on racism

11.2 *The Bluest Eye: Background, Plot, Character*

11.2.1 Background to *The Bluest Eye*:

Published in the year 1970, the genesis of the novel dates back to the author's experience during her childhood days. This idea was conceptualized almost twenty years prior to its publication. It all began when she met a girl during her schooldays who longed for blue eyes. This longing for the blue eyes by the young black girl gave Morrison the reason to write back twenty years later in order to contest the larger constriction of racism implied in the society. It got further impetus with the maxim "black is beautiful" in the assertion of the marginalized identity. From a short story written in 1965, it developed into an extended narrative on a construct of what is beautiful and ugly. To some extent it made a strong intervention on demonization of Blackness in American imagination and its literary spaces.

The novel, to some extent, has traces of autobiography as it integrates the author's experience in the fictional narrative. But more importantly, it projects the larger question of an American notion of success and competitiveness as seen in the title with the expression bluest.

The novel is positioned in Morrison's hometown located in Loraine, Ohio. The story is set in the 1940-41, following the Great Depression. The novel is about a young African American girl named Pecola Breedlove. This is truly a special story in the sense that it is distinct from many other works in the American literature or African American literature that are directly associated with the bequest of slavery and its horrors of deep-rooted racism that trailed. In an interview in 2004, Morrison talked about her inspirations behind this novel. She said that around the mid-1960s "most of what was being published by Black men [was] very powerful, aggressive, revolutionary fiction or non-fiction." Such writings "had a very positive, racially uplifting rhetoric." She felt that Black male authors came out with views like "Black is beautiful" and used expressions like "Black queen." This got her worried about the fact that society would forget that "[Black] wasn't always beautiful," and in *The Bluest Eye*, she decided to reiterate her readers about "how hurtful a certain kind of internecine racism is." Originally Morrison had this idea for the novel around 20 years before its actual publication. In Howard University, she conceptualized the idea in an undergraduate creative writing workshop. She then wrote a short story about a young Black girl who yearned for blue eyes. The story was partly true as it was

constructed on a conversation with an old friend who sought blue eyes. Morrison noticed, “Implicit in her desire was racial self-loathing.” It made her wonder that how at such a young age her friend has internalized the racist beauty standards enforced by the society. Morrison’s short story became a novel in 1965, and between 1965 and 1969, she made it into an elaborate study of culturally created standards of beauty and ugliness. In a way Morrison anticipated that Blackness is demonized in the American culture, while emphasizing on the outcomes of internalized racism. Through the characters like Geraldine, Polly, Pecola, and others, she tries to reveal that how even the utmost understated forms of racism—especially when it is coming from inside the Black community—can be very damaging and can destruct one’s self-worth and self-esteem.

Interestingly, *The Bluest Eye* does not deal directly with the questions of gender and race, it rather lingers on such issues and leaves a haunting sense of the psychological trauma from the mental and physical abuses by both – the white employers and their own family and the resulting feelings of brokenness and black self-hatred. In this novel almost all the main characters who are African American are obsessed with the socially enforced relentless notions of beauty, especially white beauty, general sanitation, and cleanliness, to such extreme that they are disconnected with themselves and have acquired a dreadful predisposition to develop the feelings of self-loathing and take them out on the other members of their family or the surrounding black community. Toni Morrison has offered many such examples of this through the perspective of shifting narration of events, actions and revelations that are directed towards tremendous complexities in the characters. She tries to engage her readers in a discourse about how these characters and even the readers can overcome these deterrents and have a positive relationship with self and society. Despite being questioned extensively after its publication, the novel holds an important position in the realm of American classics. It vividly exposes the experiences of the post-depression era. At the same time, it interrogates the notion of beauty and social recognition associated with white while depicting Pecola, the eleven year old protagonist who becomes the voice of the oppressed in the novel.

Morrison came to write at a point of time when there were various forms of representation in America. The 1960s saw the rise of Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, Black Nationalism and Black Arts Movement. This had a huge impact on the way in which Morrison explored her narrative spaces to represent issues on race, identity, and gender. Consequently, her novel explores the larger terrain of historical and political background. This is similarly seen in other marginal writings that emerged during the same period.

11.2.2 Plot and Structure:

The oral tradition has an integral position in Afro-American Writing. In an interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison says that “Black people have a story, and that story has to be heard. There was an articulated literature before the print. These were griots. They memorized it and heard it. It is important that there is a sound in my book, that you can hear it. So, I am inclined not to use adverbs, not because I am trying to write a play but because I am trying to give the dialogue a certain sound.” (Morrison “Interviews” 427). The novel makes an interface with memory, past and orality to bring back the rich tradition of Black voice and space which remained discounted in the mainstream discourses.

As the novel recounts the experiences of the child narrator, it incorporates a non-chronological mode. Moreover, the manner in which the author voices racialized identities further delves into experiences, experimentation and a certain innovation in keeping alive the child narrator.

Consequently, the form of this novel revolves around the shattered dreams of the child narrator. Morrison employs both the first person and third person omniscient narrator. This keeps the temporal structure of the novel. The frequent shift in perspective enables the author to infuse the resistance inflicted on the subordinate class/community. The shifting point of view enables the author to comment on the continued impact of racism on her characters.

Interestingly, Morrison does not adhere only to the experiences of the Pecola, the child narrator but extends to other characters both from the adult and the child world. This extension not only breaks the narrative unity of the novel but also incorporates other sub-plots which further highlight their racist identity.

The novel is divided into four sections based on the seasons. The chapters are further included in each section and are based on the texts of Dick and Jane reader. The three versions of this text are enclosed in the narrative, which is marked by grammatical and syntactical distinction.

The three versions not only depict the different lifestyles in the novel but also contextualize the novel. The first section entitled ‘Autumn’ is narrated by Claudia. She introduces Pecola and explains her being with the Mac Teers. This section also refers to the friendship between Pecola, Claudia and Freida.

The second section entitled “Winter” comprises two short narratives. The former is narrated by Claudia and recounts the protagonist’s strong interest with the light skin Black girl

Maureen Peal. The latter narrative is extended by the third person omniscient narrator and focuses on Geraldine and Louis Junior. The third section is the longest with four vignettes and is titled as Spring. It has reflections from Pecola, Polly, Cholly and Pauline. It gives a penetrating account on relationship, migration, poverty, ignorance that plagiary the black community. The last section entitled “Summer” begins after Pecola has lost her mental balance. Pecola’s premature pregnancy, the child’s death and her fixation with the “blue eye” are recorded at the end of the novel.

The story of *The Bluest Eye* is set in Ohio, Lorain. The narration of the novel revolves around four characters: Claudia MacTeer, who is a nine-year-old black girl, Frieda, Claudia MacTeer’s ten-year-old sister, Mr. Henry, who is a lodger and Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl. Pecola’s home was set on fire by her own father. Her father Cholly was not mentally stable. He was a drunkard and he also used to sexually abuse Pecola. Her mother Pauline hated Pecola because of her black skin colour. Pecola was a sensitive, quiet, submissive girl. There was neither money nor love and respect towards each other in her house. Pecola grew up in poverty, her parents were abusive and they did not love her.

The novel is narrated by Claudia MacTeer. Claudia is Pecola’s foster sister and also proves to be her well-wisher and an understanding friend. Claudia is a mature and compassionate girl. Claudia’s character is an incomplete juxtaposition to Pecola’s character. Claudia is a strong independent girl whereas Pecola is a naive girl. In the first chapter of *The Bluest Eye*, the readers get to know that Claudia ruins her dolls to show her aversion towards the whites on the other hand, Pecola is seen to be yearning for blue eyes. Claudia’s upbringing was done under the strong protection of loving parents whose love and encouragement helped Claudia to be confident and love herself.

Through the characters of Dick and Jane, Toni Morrison depicts a happy white family, which is completely different from Pecola’s family. To add seriousness and intensity to Pecola’s narration, Morrison constantly repeats a few of the words and phrases to represent Pecola’s plight and struggle.

The Bluest Eye makes an attempt to understand through flashbacks the early years of Pecola’s life with her parents and her parents’ struggle to survive in a White Anglo Saxon Protestant Community being African Americans. Pecola’s mother serves an affluent white family as a domestic help .The two sisters, Claudia and Frieda are the only characters in the novel who care for Pecola and her childhood. In this act of selflessness and hope, they also spend up the

money they were saving for long to purchase a bicycle for themselves and they buy the seeds of marigold. Unfortunately, the seeds did not flourish and Pecola's child does not survive.

Pecola was extremely disturbed; her rape by her father and later on, her child's premature death had completely shaken her. In her delusional reverie, Pecola believes that she has been granted the blue eyes that she had desired for a long. Being in a state of the trauma, she fails to understand that everyone around her was being sympathetic to her because she was being raped by her own father not because she was granted the blue eyes. Claudia feels sorry for Pecola as she realises that Pecola has been used as a scapegoat by the entire community.

Through the various means of escape and withdrawal into the empty notions of whiteness, Morrison establishes that how this is a detrimental system to work through after so many years of staying as a despondent and being objectified. The plot of *The Bluest Eye* does not focus on events of explicit racism or any other such African American questions in order to talk about the ghastly narrative of slavery and race, instead the book presents readers with a far more complex and eventually a much deeper representation of the effects of racism through the focus on the way self-contempt plagues the black characters. The narrator's account of how the Breedlove family was ugly states that - "You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious and all-knowing master had given each one of them a cloak of ugliness to wear and they had each accepted it without question". Here Morrison is trying to express the feelings of low self-esteem, which is the outcome of years of insults and mockery and is still spreading and is subsequently resulting in an inert ugliness which is unceasingly felt, if not visibly seen. However, it is not only one family that suffers from this sense of separation triggered by black self-loathing, but also the whole community; and the Breedlove family, while is at the centre of the story, is just one story in the lot of many similar ones. By presenting detrimentally destructive characters who abhor themselves because of what they are relentlessly told they are, which emphasizes racism and the inherent social hierarchy, Morrison tries to work through what this self-contempt is, where it comes from, and how it has a disturbing impact on the lives of people who, while substantially physically free, are still bound by the society that wants to keep them detesting themselves.

The structure of the novel addresses both black girlhood and white lifestyle standards to bring the discourse on racism in more concrete terms.

Dr. Jan Furman states that after reading *The Bluest Eye* the readers need to understand the imprinting aspects that play an essential role in forming and shaping the identities of young black girls who suffer a lot in the initial years of their lives because being young, delicate and sensitive they do not understand a lot many things. Here one could think of an incident from the book where Pecola goes to a shop to buy candies and the shopkeeper looks at her with disgust while giving her the candies he is being too careful not to touch Pecola's hand at all.

Sushmita Roy believes that *The Bluest Eye* is about a world that is based on European beauty ideals which produces a yearning for being white and being beautiful in Blacks who were oppressed because of their black skin colour. Pecola's desire to have blue eyes has a very negative impact on her personality and identity. This desire ruins her childhood and she becomes a victim of self-doubt and low self-esteem.

The novels by Dick and Jane were very famous at the time when Morrison was writing this novel. That is why there are a lot of their references in the novel. They promote the idea of a nuclear family and the importance of education for children. Morrison depicts a society where the children were physically and sexually abused in contrast to the society presented in Dick and Jane because most of the black children suffered the way Pecola had suffered.

According to Debra Werrlein, the references to Dick and Jane in *The Bluest Eye* depicts a picture of an ideal perfect family where people are happy and satisfied but Morrison's family does not give the readers a picture of a happy family. Debra further comments that the novel was set in the background of post-WWII, where a lot of consideration was paid to raise children in a particular way as they would be playing an important role in changing the future. Dick and Jane's family was considered an ideal family by the Americans. Their parents were strong, kind and loved their children the kind of love that Pecola never felt in her life. Her parents neither loved her nor loved each other.

Being blacks, her parents were oppressed and subjugated by the whites, which had a very negative impact on their identities, people were not kind to them because of this reason they also fail to show kindness to their people particularly to their own child. Pecola's father's unkind, violent behaviour is a proof that he too had a difficult and disturbing childhood. His father never accepted him and his mother also disowned him when he was only four years old. He was further traumatized in his adulthood when his first sexual experience became a nightmare for him as he was being watched by the two white men at that time, which made him uncomfortable and observed his lovemaking act with disgust and scorn. All such disturbing events make him a

violently abusive man who beats his wife and ends raping his own daughter. He fails to show his love to his daughter, his act of raping his daughter can be considered his way of loving her.

These small narratives within the novel look more like impressions. The entire sequence of events is marked by a varied experience of social elements of the black people. The question of 'look' 'permeates in the text and is firmly grounded in the character of Pecola who is reduced to an object. The narrative moves away from Pecola and embodies the characters reflecting the gross victimization of the community as seen through the parents, neighbours, and friends. The story does not confine to Pecola but explores the way in which Pecola is persecuted by the larger community and society.

11.2.3 Major Characters and their Role in the Novel:

Toni Morrison gives a vivid picture of her female characters to depict the issue of both racism and sexism in the novel. To begin with, Pecola is the most important character. She is depicted as voiceless, in the longer narrative. This is precisely on account of the distance from her parents which had a huge scar on her mental, emotional and psychological attributes. She is presented with a fractured existence, which parallels the life of most black women in poverty: Pecola is a young girl with a very sensitive heart. She is constantly subjected to mental, physical, and sexual abuse and her absurdity and insanity towards the end of the novel is her only way to escape the world where she is repeatedly called and felt ugly and unhappy because of her poor family and the culturally imposed beauty and social standards of that time. This makes her believe that having blue eyes would make her beautiful and she will be accepted by all.

Characters like Cholly and Pauline recounting through flash back sequences. Having been abandoned by his parents after birth, Cholly becomes a person who is not sensing to human values and in conditional with frustration, violence and bitterness. Pauline is also someone who suffers from a lack of human connection despite belonging to a large family.

Morrison engages in the larger construction of how a black is made to struggle and exist. Pecola's non-acceptance in both the white and black community further heightens the issue of mental trauma and existence. The narrative in that sense projects the larger spaces of binary oppositions like black/white, male/female, good/evil, sexual/pure, rich/poor. These are the structural hierarchies through which racism operates. MacTeer is the main narrator of the novel. She is nine years old and is the foster sister to Pecola. Interestingly, she shares a great bonding with Pecola despite their foster association. Probably it is also the reason why she turns out to be more independent and wise in her disposition. She almost resembles like a foil to Pecola as seen

in the manner in which she detests the white dolls and destroys them as depicted in the first chapter. This strength in her comes from the way in which she was raised in a protected home that gave her the much-needed strength and conviction.

The character of Geraldine depicts an example of interracial discrimination. She considers herself superior to other blacks and civilized though she herself is black. She also claims that her husband does not satisfy her sexual needs and that is why she gets a cat. Her constant attention towards the cat makes her son hate the cat, as he was being neglected by his mother.

Maureen's character is similar to that of Geraldine's character. Maureen is of Pecola's age. She is a half-blood African American girl who has a light skin tone and green eyes. She also considers herself superior to other black girls because of her lighter skin tone and green eyes. Claudia and Frieda do not approve of Maureen's attitude they laugh at her and call her "Meringue Pie."

Elihue Whitcomb was commonly known as Soaphead Church. He used to claim to be a reader, advisor, religious preacher and interpreter of dreams. He was a light-skinned West Indian preacher, who could not do much in preaching. He was so proud of himself that he hated any type of human touch and considered himself a misanthrope. He leads a life of denial and fails to challenge his homosexuality. He enjoys the touch of young little girls and calls their touch seductive. Though he hates other human beings, he helps them to solve their problems. For example, if a girl comes to him and tells him that she wants to have blue eyes. He does not directly tell her in a straightforward manner that it was impossible. Instead he asks her to feed the dog that belonged to his landlord. He tells her that if the dog reacts; her wish for the blue eyes will be fulfilled and secretly he gives poison to the dog dies and Pecola also comes to the realization that she cannot have blue eyes.

Sam Breedlove is Pecola's brother. He is elder to her and mostly he was called Sammy. Sammy was Cholly and Pauline's only son, his character is not described in a major capacity in the novel. He too is affected by the tension among his parents, there is bitterness and anger in him and the only option he finds is fleeing away from his family.

Aunt Jimmy is Cholly's great aunt; she was the one who had raised him when he was abandoned by his parents in his childhood. She had died unexpectedly when Cholly was still a young child.

The question of displacement holds a vantage point in the narrative. Toni Morrison probably is trying to interrogate the black community's dislocation with their land and history. To some extent, the experience of characters like Pecola, Claudine Soap heard Church projects the pervasive trauma of dislocation. This is further reflected in the psyche of the characters and opens the space for psychological realism in the novel. The manner in which the deterioration of the mental balance of Pecola is experienced by Freida and Claudia also has a damaging consequence on them. The disintegration in the personality and the way in which some of the characters attain maturation also signify the underlying effects of trauma in their lives and on their psyche. The way in which the western construct of beauty is created has its manifestation on the black women's psychological oppression.

The characters in the novel are divided selves caught between the shadow of blackness and acceptance of beauty determined by American standards. Through this Morrison very clearly reflects the way Blackness is erased from their existence. Therefore, the need to voice for blackness and feminist concerns becomes an important mode of representation in Afro-American Writing.

11.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to understand the novel in terms of content and form. You should be able to understand the plot and characterization in *The Bluest Eye*. You should also be aware of the discourse on black aesthetic as well as the question of beauty attributed to colour and the consequence of racial superiority

11.4 Glossary

Racism: Prejudice, discrimination, antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior

Subjugation: The action bringing someone or something under domination or control

Harridan: A strict, bossy old woman

Slovenliness: The quality of being untidy in dress or appearance

Chagrin: Distress or embarrassment at having failed or humiliated

Stultifying: To cause loss of enthusiasm and initiative especially as a result of tedious or restrictive routine

11.5 Sample Questions

11.5.1 Objective Questions:

- Which of the characters does Mrs. MacTeer say is a “ruined” woman?
 - Miss Delia Jones
 - Miss Julia
 - Maginot Line
 - Miss Forrester
- Claudia says of the girls who come from places like Mobile and Aiken that they study “teacher education to instruct black children in _____.”
 - Science”
 - Religion”
 - Mathematics”
 - Obedience”
- Geraldine lives with her family next to the playground of what school, according to the narrator in Part III?
 - George Washington Irving School
 - Benjamin Franklin School
 - Washington Irving School
 - Abraham Lincoln School
- What name was Soaphead Church born with?
 - Anderson Williams Buford
 - James McAnderson
 - Elihue Micah Whitcomb
 - William Smith.
- Where did Cholly Breedlove’s father live after he left town, when Cholly was born?
 - Denver, Colorado
 - Chicago, Illinois
 - Macon, Georgia
 - Cleveland, Ohio
- Where was Toni Morrison teaching when she began writing *The Bluest Eye* in a writing group?
 - Brown University
 - Yale University
 - Stanford University
 - Howard University
- Where does Pecola say Poland is going to take her to see the Loop in Part IV?
 - Elyria
 - Chicago
 - Cleveland
 - Meridian

8. Where did Pauline Williams's family move after World War I for the mines and millwork?
- (a) Kentucky (b) New Hampshire
(c) Ohio (d) South Carolina
9. Who calls Mrs. MacTeer and tells her that Claudia, Pecola and Frieda are "playing nasty?"
- (a) Miss Dunion (b) Paula Williams
(c) Ada Williams (d) Rosemary
10. Pecola's idealization for white beauty is illustrated in the novel through her love of the movie star _____.
- (a) Shirley Temple (b) Marilyn Monroe
(c) Vanessa Redgrave (d) Betty Grable

11.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Critically evaluate any one character and show how she/he has been hurt by racism in the society?
2. Comment on the title of the novel.
3. What indication do we have of Pecola's actual looks, outside of her low self-perception?
4. How does the depiction of Cholly or Pauline change over the course of the narrative? How does your idea of them change?
5. What is the role of Claudia in the novel?

11.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Comment on the plot and characterization in the novel, *The Bluest Eye*.
2. Critically examine *The Bluest Eye* as a representative African American Novel.
3. Discuss the mother-daughter relationship in the novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

11.6 Suggested Readings

1. Douglas, Christopher. "What the Bluest Eye Knows about Them: Culture, Race, Identity," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 78 (March 2006): 141–168.
2. Kuenz, Jane. "The Bluest Eye: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity," *African American Review* 27, no. 3 (1993): 421.
3. Mayo, James "Morrison's The Bluest Eye," *Explicator* 60, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 231-234.
4. Moses, Cat. "The Blues Aesthetic in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye," *African American Review* 33, no4 (Winter1999): 623–638.

Unit-12: *The Bluest Eye*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

12.0 Introduction

12.1 Objectives

12.2 *The Bluest Eye*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

12.2.1 Theme of Racism

12.2.2 Colour as Metaphor

12.2.3 Narrative Technique

12.2.4 Critical Appreciation

12.3 Learning Outcomes

12.4 Glossary

12.5 Sample Questions

12.6 Suggested Readings

12.0 Introduction

Toni Morrison occupies a very distinct position in African American Writing. She has been a forerunner in exercising the cause of the black community. Both as a creative writer and as critic, her domains of intervention go beyond white/black to focus on the celebration of black aesthetic. In that sense, she is a voice that champions the cause of marginalization and victimization of Afro-American community. All her literary creations give voice and space to the unheard silences of her community. Her writing occupies a crucial space in the larger discourse on marginal literatures of the world.

12.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- understand the underlying themes in the novel

- study the narrative technique in the novel
- attempt a critical appreciation of the novel

12.2 *The Bluest Eye*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

12.2.1 Theme of Racism:

Racism is a belief in being superior to the people who belong to different races, which ultimately results in discrimination and prejudice against those people. Although it was practiced a lot in the 19th century, its victims still have not forgotten the injustice done to their forefathers by the whites. Martin Luther King junior an African American played a very important role in eradicating the discrimination and injustice against the blacks by the whites. On 28th August 1963, he addressed an interracial assembly and spoke about the plight of his people. He stated that “but one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land” (Junior 31).

The African American writers also played a crucial role in speaking against their oppression through their writings. The American writer Toni Morrison, as you already read, is one such novelist who used writing as a medium to speak for her people through her writings. She gave voice to the voiceless sufferers of racial discrimination. Her novel *The Bluest Eye* deals with the theme of racial discrimination. The story of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is based on a real-life incident. Morrison had once met an eleven-year-old girl and they both had discussed the existence of God. In their discussion, Morrison had accepted the existence of God whereas the little girl did not agree with Morrison. She was a black girl and she had requested God to give her blue eyes and God had not listened to her prayer. She had prayed for two years but her prayer remained unheard. This incident inspired her to start writing *The Bluest Eye* in 1965. It was the same time when the Black is Beautiful movement was at its peak.

In *The Bluest Eyes*, Morrison tried to make her people believe that they were beautiful and they did not need to pray for blue eyes or a fair face. The characters of the novel belong to the African-American family; through these characters Morrison beautifully articulates the need

for such a movement, which was needed then to boost the morale of her people particularly the women. K. Missy Denn writes about *The Bluest Eye* that the novel critically questions “racism’s damaging effects on the black community at large and black families” (27). About the novel Morrison writes: “I focused, therefore on something so grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of a society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female” (Morrison 68).

Through Pecola Breedlove’s character, Morrison brings to the readers’ attention the fact that they were oppressed to such an extent that this young girl thought to look like them and have blue eyes so that the white people will consider her existence and will not torture her based on her skin colour. In the novel, Morrison writes that “each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time” (Morrison, 35). Pecola is the protagonist and the youngest character in the novel and she is the one who suffers a lot. She is not only abused by the Whites but her mother Pauline Breedlove Pecola also does not love her because of her black skin colour. Pecola feels devastated that her mother loves the daughters of her white employer more than her daughter. Her mother hated her dark skin color, dark eyes, and woolly hair. Pecola never received motherly affection from her mother.

This leads Pecola to hate the white children around her and hate herself too for not being beautiful. Here, one needs to pay attention that this racial discrimination had doubly marginalized and oppressed this young girl. She was not loved by the white people and she also did not get her mother’s love. When Pecola prays for the blue eyes, she escapes from the reality and starts thinking that the solution of her all problem lies in her getting the blue eyes, “if she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say “why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola, we mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (Morrison, 34). Pecola thinks that being white is being beautiful and being beautiful is everything.

Racial discrimination within people of the same race is one of the important themes of *The Bluest Eye*. The blacks were not only mistreated by the whites but by the blacks also who had a slighter light skin shade. Morrison tells about this discrimination using the character of Geraldine Black woman (light-skinned), she does not allow her son Young Junior to play with Pecola. She teaches her son to stay away from Pecola and other black children to an extent that he too starts thinking that he is superior to them and develops hatred towards Pecola and other

children. One day he invites Pecola to his home to show her something. Poor Pecola, not being aware of his wicked deeds, trusts him and goes inside his house. As soon as Pecola enters the house, he throws a big black cat at her, laughs mischievously and shouts at Pecola asserting her superiority that, “you can’t get out. You’re my prisoner” (Morrison, 89).

When his mother Geraldine finds Pecola in her house, she also scolds Pecola and uses harsh words that penetrate directly into Pecola’s heart. He shouts at Pecola: “Shut up!” Hair uncombed dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. They were everywhere. They slept six in a bed, all their pee mixing in the night as they wet their beds, each in his candy-and-potato-chip dream. “Get out,” she said, her voice quiet. “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house.” (Morrison, 90). Morrison suggests that this racial discrimination had damaged their roots; they did not understand the value of being compassionate because the people who were superior to them were not kind to them. That became the reason that they also could not show kindness and love to the people who were darker than them.

Even though the slavery system has been abolished still in the present time also these people often become the victim of racial discrimination in one way or the other. Toni Morrison and other black writers through their writings insist on preserving their Black cultural heritage and being proud of their black identity. Black writers echo their sincerity by narrating their painful experiences.

Noted postcolonial critic Bill Ashcroft has engaged in the discussion of race with respect to not only the colonial period but postcolonial as well. According to him:

Race continues to be relevant in post-colonial theory for two reasons: first, because it is so central to the growing power of imperial discourse during the nineteenth century, and second, because it remains a central and unavoidable fact of modern society that race is used as the dominant category of daily discriminations and prejudice. (Ashcroft,207).

This is also applicable to all the marginal writing that have come up in post 1960’s. African American writing is no exception.

Racism permeates the entire text of *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison looks at this aspect both within the black community as well as its engagement in the larger white writings. In her phenomenal essay “Playing in the Dark” she has substantially talked about Africanism. She has also spoken for the need to address blackness as

strong metaphor of existence and expression. In this novel too, she examines the issue of racial superiority as seen through the characters and her fixation with blue eyes. The colour debate was an important racist debate which gets extended in Afro-American Writing.

This is the issue which she raises across the novel. The author strongly asserts the voice of a demoralized black looking towards white concept of beauty in order to be accepted. The author vividly captures the same in the following sentence:

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, longtime. (Morrison, 35)

As you are aware, the novel is about a young girl Pecola who desires to have white skin, blond hair and blue eyes against her dark complexion in order to subvert the dominant view of beauty that gives consideration to only those who are white. This quest for an ideal self of a black woman further deepens the internalized racism in American society.

12.2.2 Color as Metaphor:

In the essay “Black Matters” Morrison talks about the need to express through the black gaze. What she wants is to assert the voice of the black on its own terms in order to subvert the dominant white discourse. Here, through characters like Pecola, Morrison exposes the racial supremacy which denounces the black on the issue of colour. The fixation with blue eyes is a mode through which the author investigates the deep-seated racism prevalent in American society. Pecola is made to believe that she is ugly. Her continuous attempt to act like the white does not give her either respect or recognition. She is caught in the two worlds and is driven mad. The transformation of Pecola is reflective of the psychological impasse in her life.

The colour metaphor is overtly seen in the following:

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, longtime (Morrison, 35).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison examines the construct of the black identity and the boundaries set by the white people for the blacks. Morrison writes about how Black people fight and yearn for their identity. Pecola believes that she is subjected to the atrocities and cruelty of

white people because of her black skin color. She becomes a victim of low self-esteem and questions her existence “long hour she sat looking at the mirror trying to discover the secret of the ugliness” (Morrison 54), Pecola finally concludes that “I am ugly and miserable” (Morrison 05). Identity formation and identity assertion have always been a huge problem for black people because their identity and existence were defined and controlled by the white masters. They were reluctant to take pride in their black identity and their cultural heritage because for the whites, they were the ugliest of all and deserved to serve the white masters. The white masters “designate people of African descent as Negro—the name that marked them as slaves—or black, which describes them physically but deprives them of cultural identity” (Neal 52). Their existence did not matter to anyone and they were considered inferior in each aspect. They were not even appreciated for the services they provided to the white masters being their slaves.

The fact that most of the black characters in the novel fail to understand their value is due to the reason that their lives are governed by the white masters around them. They dream to get accepted by the white society. Being black, they were tortured and oppressed to such an extent that they forgot that they could be proud of their cultural heritage but they remained dependent on the validation of their existence by the white people only. The desire to be accepted by mainstream society can be justified but Morrison through her characters promotes her black culture. By using her characters, she problematizes this concept and considers it going away from their black cultural heritage. She does not want her people to get acceptance in the white world by rejecting or refusing their own culture. In the process of getting accepted by the white society, the black people in *The Bluest Eye* end up hurting the other black people. By using the female voice as a narrator in the novel that was silenced by the white patriarchal world, she was able to speak the unspeakable.

12.2.3 Narrative Technique:

The Bluest Eye is a marvellous narrative of great emotional, cultural, and historical intensity. The passages are rich with many allusions to western history, media, literature, and religion. Morrison’s prose is highly experimental; it is poetic and haunting and distinctly characteristic of the writing style that became the hallmark of her later works. Some 20 years after its publication, Morrison, while talking about the experience of writing of her first novel in a 1993 afterword to *The Bluest Eye*, described her prose as “race-specific yet race-free,” she thought of it as a product of a desire to be “free of racial hierarchy and triumphalism.” In her words:

The novel tried to hit the raw nerve of racial self-contempt, expose it, and then soothe it not with narcotics but with language that replicated the agency I discovered in my first experience of beauty. Because that moment was so racially infused...the struggle was for writing that was indisputably black.

The form of this novel was in a way pioneering, where Morrison constructed a “shattered world” to balance Pecola’s experiences. She kept on changing narrators and crucial themes within and between the four sections. There is a constant shift in the narration between first person and third-person omniscient. Even though the events of the novel are, as Morrison wrote, “Held together by seasons in child time,” they are described generally non-chronologically.

The temporal structure of the novel and the frequent shifts in perception are crucial to understand Morrison’s effort to visualize a fluid model of subjectivity—a model she created with a hope to propose a kind of resistance to an overriding white culture. By shifting the focus, Morrison very efficiently evades dehumanizing the black characters “who trashed Pecola and contributed to her collapse.” She rather accentuates the systemic nature of the problem. She describes that the racial issues of a distant and not-so-distant past continue to disturb her characters in the present, thereby elucidating, if not justifying, their actions.

There are many voices of narration and through these voices it is progressively exposed that this unceasing sense of self-denigration is not because of poverty or hardship, but because of a socially rooted cyclical propensity of white culture to endorse its own superiority and dominance. Most of the black characters in the novel and particularly those who suffer the worst by the end, including the two women members of the Breedlove family, deeply internalize the powerful images of white superiority. These social endorsements of white superiority act as the “mysterious and all-knowing master” that disseminates desolation in the black community. Here white is seen as the only entity worth believing, looking, worshiping, and respecting and this is heart breaking for the black characters in the novel, especially for those who are poor and totally incapable to live up to the edifying images of white perfection. We see that Pauline is just as a much of a prey of these notions of white dominance as her daughter is although to somewhat less catastrophic ends. Like the other black female characters in the novel who try to refute themselves an identity separate from white society and race matters, Pauline avidly consumes these messages in culture through the film. For Pauline, the narrator says that “She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen” (122).

Undoubtedly, the images on the silver screen are those of white actors Clark Gable, Jean Harlow and Pauline. Pauline tries to make herself look like Harlow but she was heartbroken, despite of her best efforts at imitating her hair and elegance, her tooth suddenly falls out. It makes her realize that she is not a beautiful white woman and starts hating her oneself even more. She starts fantasizing about an imaginary world where “Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world and never introduced it to her storefront, or to her children. Then she bent toward respectability...” (129). Her self-loathing is enacted on her children and this cycle of violence and self-loathing is further prolonged and is demonstrated in situations such as when Pauline chooses to comfort her employer’s white child, who calls her by her name, even when her own children cannot, rather than comforting burned Pecola. Through these incidents, Morrison is showing the readers the roots of where these issues of black inferiority in the mind of African Americans stems from and how, because of frustration with being incapable to live up to such forced ideals, hatred is born and is perpetuated like clockwork on husbands and children.

The Bluest Eye disrupts the extensive practice of writing narratives that deliberate on the adversities of war and depression in the 1940s and brings forth an exclusive and untold perspective in the American historical fiction. Morrison persistently writes stories that challenge the “American mainstream ideology” by concentrating on the realities of African-American life at the time. In a way, *The Bluest Eye* serves as a counter narrative, a way of the telling the accounts of people whose stories are hardly ever told and are intentionally concealed or unseen. Morrison once said, “My job becomes how to rip that veil drawn over proceedings too terrible to relate. The exercise is also critical for any person, who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were on its topic.”

Morrison uses point of view, flashback and memory techniques in the novel. These are interchanged for keeping the temporal structure of the novel. The novel also uses the pattern of seasons as part of the division in the novel as well as to keep the space time and psychological realism. The novel has the child narrator as well as the omniscient narrator that chronicles the different experiences of the characters. There are varied shades of colour metaphor both as mode of representation as well as in keeping the discourse on racism inflicted on the black community. The novel also incorporates the three versions of the Dick and Jane. In the preface to the book, she clearly outlines this in the following manner:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is

the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy (Morrison, 1999, p.1-2).

12.2.4 Critical Appreciation:

The novel makes an important intervention on the debate in internalized racism. It posits the various dimensions in which skin colour and physical features marked subjugation and victimization. Through Pecola, the author maps the repeated racism on the black community. She becomes the mouthpiece for the victimization perpetrated on the blacks. Morrison is speaking not only for the cause of black people but also questioning the manner in which colonialist oppressive tendencies tend to deny the black people, the much-needed respect and self-identity. In her words:

The novel tried to hit the raw nerve of racial self-contempt, expose it, then soothe it not with narcotics but with language that replicated the agency I discovered in my first experience of beauty. Because that moment was so racially infused...the struggle was for writing that was indisputably black (Afterword, *The Bluest Eye*, 1993).

Jerome Bump in his article “Racism and Appearance in *The Bluest Eye*: A Template for an Ethical Emotive Criticism,” elucidates how the novel proposes that physical beauty is a virtue deeply rooted in the society. He asserts that the novel exposes the notion that the outside appearance of people eventually reflects their actual character and personality. This notion clouds people’s judgement and they act upon internal prejudice. These prejudices are exhibited throughout the novel, particularly through the exploitation and mistreatment of Pecola by her family, friends and the larger community.

Literary critic Lynn Scott contends that the persistent images of whiteness in *The Bluest Eye* help in the representation of society’s general perception of beauty, which finally proves to have detrimentally destructive outcomes for many of the characters in the novel. Scott describes that in the novel, superiority, power, and virtue are essentially connected with beauty, which is intrinsic in whiteness. She further proclaims that white beauty standards are disseminated by visual images in the media like films as well as the general attitude of Pecola’s family.

With these, we can also associate the themes of slavery, history, religion, media and culture, shame, breakage and separation. These themes move like strong undercurrents throughout the novel. The then present slavery and its history has traumatized and scarred the lives of people like Cholly and Pauline. The belief in an all-powerful God and then the resulting

heart wrenching turn of events, the effects and affects of popular media and culturally endorsed images of an ideal and 'beautiful' American family creates a confusing world for the main black characters as they fail to achieve any of this. This failure results in the feelings of shame, which is consuming them from the inside and which causes the further breakage and separation of not only their families but also their selves.

The novel didn't receive much critical attention when first published. Although it was listed on many university reading lists in black-studies departments, which gave it an additional recognition. Morrison was appreciated for her treatment of difficult themes. Well-known critic Haskell Frankel observed that, "Given a scene that demands a writer's best, Morrison responds with control and talent. "The first major extremely positive review in *The New York Times* in November 1970 contributed remarkably to the success of the novel. Ruby Dee, an African American critic stated, "Toni Morrison has not written a story really, but a series of painfully accurate impressions." Morrison was also applauded for her extensive coverage and expression of emotion in the novel, largely encompassing from Pecola Breedlove's silent descent into madness, to Cholly Breedlove's skewed mentalities.

Some critics also picked up on Morrison's limitations as a first-time published author. It was observed that the language of her novel was made intentionally simpler for the reader to grasp. They were also uncertain about Morrison's portrayal of the black woman as an object in society rather than a human. The most thorough examination of the novel began with a feminist critique. There were also some remarkable differences between African American critics who tried to identify more with the characters of the novel and Euro-American critics who often only focused on the actual writing and technique of the novel.

In classrooms, educators too disagreed over the issue of its appropriateness for the young readers (children). Shekema Silveri, an African-American educator and founder of the IFE Academy of Teaching & Technology, argued: "Teaching novels like *The Bluest Eye* helps us break down barriers with students. After reading the book, I had a student who said that she is the product of incest. And I've had a student who said that she was molested by her uncle. Books allow us to help them heal in ways that we as educators couldn't help them heal on our own." In an interview, American Library Association (ALA) editor Robert P. Doyle also approved of the power of novels like *The Bluest Eye* to bring out positive changes within schools. He said, "The book community realized that [they] have not only an opportunity, but a responsibility to engage

the American public in a conversation about the First Amendment as it relates to books and literature.”

With time, more reviews, analyses and critical appreciations were written praising Morrison’s writing of the “colonization of the mind,” her critique of white versus black beauty standards, and even began to examine her use of simplistic language, accepting it as a stylistic choice rather than a drawback of the novel. *Cleveland Review of Books* highly appreciated her novel, stating that the people alive in our time have “more in common with Toni Morrison than Aristotle.” In spite of countless initial controversies and innumerable bans on the novel, Toni Morrison was, in due course, recognized for her immense contributions to literature when she received the Nobel Prize in 1993, over 20 years following the actual publication of the novel.

12.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to understand the thematic concerns in the novel. You should also be familiar with the narrative techniques and critical understanding of the novel in the larger paradigm of racism, sexism and classicism.

12.4 Glossary

Atrocity: Cruel act involving physical violence

Black Identity: Referred to people of African descent in the United States

Racial Discrimination: Difference exercised on the basis of the colour of skin

Internalized racism: Internalized oppression based on racial difference

12.5 Sample Questions

12.5.1 Objective Questions:

a) State whether the following is true/false:

1. Pecola Breedlove and her family are described as “relentlessly and aggressively ugly”.

2. Cholly Breedlove's life begins as dismally as it ends.
3. Maureen Peal, a "high yellow dream child", is the new girl in school.
4. Henry Washington briefly lives with the MacTeer family.
5. Soap head Church comes from a family that prides itself on its black ancestry.

b) Fill in the blanks

1. Toni Morrison's original name is _____.
2. Morrison's first book *The Bluest Eye* was published in _____.
3. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* is a work of _____.
4. Louis, Jr. is a little boy, and the son of _____.
5. The second section of the novel is set in _____ season.

12.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Examine the role of seasons in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.
2. Colour is an important symbol in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Elucidate.
3. Discuss the role of flashback in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.
4. Write a short note on the psychological mindset of the characters in *The Bluest Eye*.
5. Construct of black identity in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.

12.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Critically examine the issue of internalized racism in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.
2. Discuss the theme of self-identity and representation in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.
3. Evaluate the silences depicted in the novel and analyse with the larger discourse on subjugation and victimization in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.

12.6 Suggested Readings

1. Klotman, R.P. (1979). Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple sensibility in *The bluest eye*. *Black American Literature Forum*, 13(4), 123-125.
2. Miner, M. M. (1985). Lady no longer sings the blues: Rape, madness, and silence in *The Bluest Eye*. In P. Majorie & J.S.Hortense (Eds.), *Conjuring: Black women, fiction and literarytradition* (pp.91-176).Bloomington: Indiana UP.
3. Russel, S. 'It's Ok to say Ok', *An Interview Essay: Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*, Ed. Nelliey, Boston: Y.Mcka, 1988,36.

Unit – 13: Origin and Development of the Indian English Novel

Structure

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13.2.4 Rise of the Novel in India

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13.0 Introduction

In this Unit on “Origin and Development of Indian English Novel,” we will first discuss the emergence of English language on the Indian soil and the reasons underlying its emergence along with its necessity. After this, you will come to know how the Indian English literature began, its nature and scope and the various names that it received during all these years. Further, we will talk about the genre novel, its various aspects, characteristics and types of novels. After a brief historical survey of the genre in the Indian context, we will discuss its rise, development and some of the important writers both male and female.

13.1 Objectives

The foremost objective of this module is to introduce you to the genre of fiction, its origin and development on the Indian soil. Further, it will also introduce you to some of the major fiction writers who contributed to the novel and the possibility of sustenance of this language in such land.

13.2 Origin and Development of Indian English Novel

13.2.1 Rise of English Language in India:

East India Company came to India primarily for the purpose of trade and commerce. However, circumstances on the ground were such that after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the Company began to rule Bengal and later Buxar. With this, the Company’s rule began from Benares to Calcutta. Furthermore, the Mughal emperor made the Company its divan of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This enabled the Company to manage the finances of the Mughal Empire in these appointed places under the Treaty of Allahabad. With this event began the official rule of the Company in the country. It is during this period that some officials of the Company began to take an interest in its past, religions, cultures and so on and so forth, in order to understand and know the culture of the land. Later on, the British government wanted its officials to learn the languages of inhabitants in order to communicate with its subjects. For this purpose during 1800,

there began to be printed numerous English language dictionaries, grammar books, teaching aids, translations, literary books and all other things, started appearing in written format. Though there were books in the English language earlier to facilitate in learning the language and for the English readers in general, however, this new approach paved the way for the growth and development of this foreign language in the land of many languages.

However, the introduction of English as a medium of instruction led to a debate. People from both the sides, rulers and the natives, were debating about it. It went on almost for more than forty years. Raja Rammohan took up the advocacy of English education for Indians against the likes of orientalists like Horace H. Wilson (who wrote a book on Kalidasa in Sanskrit). In 1835, during the controversy between Anglicists and Orientalists, the matter was resolved when Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minutes on Education' very famously said that "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."¹ Thus, all the arguments, discussions and debates were sealed by Macaulay's *Minute* and it made the English language part of Indian education system.

13.2.1.1 Beginning of Indian English Literature:

Things seldom happen the way we expect them or at least how we imagine they would happen in a chronological pattern. It happened in the case with English language in India. Literature began much before the language became part of our education system officially. The seeds of English literature on Indian soil were sown by the native speakers. Britishers who were serving in India or outside India and their writings were based on Indian themes.

Initially, it is the poetry that dominated from 1880s and continued till more than a hundred years. Among the Indians, it was Henry Vivian Derozio, who shares his Indian and Portuguese ancestry and laid the foundation of poetry and thereby began the journey of English literature on Indian soil. He was an English teacher at Hindu college, Calcutta. He instilled in the minds of his young students the love for English language and literature. Thus, during this time he was the torchbearer of the language and literature. Though he was considered as an Anglo-Indian but he considered himself Indian and it reflected in his poetry as well.

Nevertheless, natives also began to express themselves in the language specifically in the form of poetry. The poets were like Kashiprasad Ghose, Govind Chunder Dutt, Rajnarain Dutt,

¹ Macaulay's Minute on Education, February 2, 1835
<http://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/Article/Macaulay-Minutes.pdf>

and M. M. Dutt. Like any other writer of literature that draws its inspiration from other well-known writer, Indian writers were also influenced by British writers. The probable reasons could be: they were unknown or new to the language, its expressions and other techniques of the language as well as literature and traditions. Due to this reason, one may see the influence of Romantic poets in their works and their poetry was majorly based on the themes of nature. Like in the poetry of Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, M.M Dutt and many others. However, it was Toru Dutt's father Govind Dutt who was very much inspired by the Romantics more specifically by the writings of Wordsworth. In Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, one finds the influence of Shelley. Derozio and M. M. Dutt were interested in Byron and Scott like many other poets.

Gradually, there began the influence of Victorian poetry in the writings of Anglo-Indian poets. One can also say that initially, Indian English poetry had the influence of both the Romantics and Victorian specifically the lyric and lyrical narrative poetry began to be seen in Toru Dutt. "A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" by Aru and Toru Dutt was published in 1875. Toru Dutt's "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan" was published in 1882 followed by R.C. Dutt's "Lays of Ancient India" and his renderings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that were published in 1894, Manmohan Ghose's "Love Songs and Elegies" (1898) and Sri Aurobindo's "Songs to Myrtilla" (1895) and Sarojini Naidu's "The Golden Threshold" (1905). These were some of the prominent works that echo sentiments of the Romantic and Victorian sensibilities.

The influence of the Romantics, Victorians and even of Dryden and Pope was seen in the next quarter but the three poets Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu were influenced by the decadence poetry and its reflection was seen in their works. It was because these poets have spent their considerable time in England specifically when this form of poetry was in vogue.

However, the poets gradually found their own voice and it began to reflect in their works like Sarojini Naidu. In her works, she began to showcase the Indian themes. Sri Aurobindo's poetry also had the influence of western poets. In one of his letters he says: "The influences I spoke of were of course influences only such as every poet undergoes before he has entirely found himself."² Nevertheless, he broke the shackles of influence and began to write poetry with a fresh zeal.

² Sri Aurobindo Ghose. "Part 2. On His Own and Others' Poetry Section 1. On His Poetry and Poetic Method Early Poetic Influences" from Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Poetry and Art. https://www.sri-aurobindo.in/workings/sa/37_27/0230_e.htm

This period, the last quarter of the nineteenth century is considered to be the golden period of Anglo-Indian poetry. They are the ones who initiated this process of writing or to say the formation of a new literature. However, it began as a foreign literature but it was accommodated and embraced by the prolific and eminent writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Romesh Chander Dutt, Aurobindo and the unforgettable Rabindranath Tagore. All these poets made the Indian Writing in English possible.

13.2.1.2 Issue Pertaining to the Nomenclature:

The name of this literature has been defined variously in different time periods like Indo-Anglian literature, Indian Writing in English, Indo-English literature. Apart from this, it was also called Anglo-Indian literature, literature in the Indian languages translated into English and also original compositions by Indians in English.

The confusion and perhaps not paying attention to its name has also led to the creation of so many names like E.F Oaten in his *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908) included the poetry of Henry Lois Vivian Derozio. The term Anglo refers to “A white English speaking British....” So a British living in India is considered as Anglo-Indian. This confusion may be because of his mixed ancestry. However, literary historian and others perhaps considered him as an Anglo-Indian but he considered himself Indian. Nevertheless, Oaten once again seems to have not noticed that he has included Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose’s name in his essay on Anglo-Indian literature in the Cambridge History of English Literature. In the essay, he has also included the names of the Anglo-Indian writers like F.W. Bain and F. A. Steel.

It was not only the foreign scholars who did not pay attention to the name of the literature but also the Indian scholars like Bhupal Singh, whose *A Survey of Anglo-Indian fiction* (1934) included both the Indian and non-Indian writers. Similarly, V.K. Gokak’s *English in India: Its Present and Future*, which came in 1964 went ahead and included the works written in English but also the one that got translated into English from the regional languages. This shows that they were paying attention to the Indian themes or they might have left the job of deciding the name of the literature on others. In the same manner K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar also included the translated works of Tagore into English in his work *History of Indian Creative Writing in English*. H.M. Williams did a survey titled “Indo-Anglican Literature 1800-1970: A Survey” (1976) wherein he excluded the translated works. John B. Alphonso Karkala, in his work *Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1970 wherein he used the term Indo-

English literature. By this name he meant the literature which is produced by Indians in English. (Quoted in M.K. Naik, page. 9-10)

Today, we understand and know that the name of the literature should include the authors of Indian origin who have penned or pen their thoughts in English creatively. We know that neither the name Anglo-Indian literature nor the translated works from the regional literature should be part of it. It is majorly due to the fact that themes alone cannot decide the inclusion of an author into the literary history but his ancestry or belongingness is the important thing that decides the inclusivity. With such a strong bond, one will be able to have a sense, feeling, and expression of Indianness in his/her writings. Thus, the writers like Kipling, Forster, F.W Bain, Sir Edwin Arnold, F.A. Steel, John Masters, Paul Scott, and M. M. Kaye and so on cannot become the part of Indian literary history as they share a different national identity and ancestry. Now, the issue of translated works is that they are originally written in regional languages but not in the English language; if they had been trans-created by the writers themselves into English then those works can become the part of Indian English writing. (M.K. Naik, P.no. 10)

According to M.K. Naik:

However, since literature is not a science, there will always be a no man's land in which all attempts at strict definition are in danger of getting lost in a haze. Thus, there are exceptional cases like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. The former, born of a Sri Lankan Tamil father and an English mother was neither an Indian citizen nor did he live in India; and yet the entire orientation of his thought is so unmistakably Indian that it is impossible not to consider him an Indian English writer. As for Jhabvala, she is virtually an international phenomenon. Born of Polish parents in Germany, she received her education in English, married an Indian, lived in India for more than twenty years, and has written in English. This daughter-in-law of India (though a rebellious one, in her later work) shows such close familiarity and deep understanding of Indian social life (especially in her earlier work) that she has rightly found a place in the history of Indian English literature. On the other hand, V.S. Naipaul Indian ancestry is indisputable, but he is so much of an outsider when he writes about India and the Indian and so much of an insider while dealing with Caribbean life and character, that there can be no two opinions on his rightful inclusion in the history of West Indian writing... (M.K. Naik, page. 10)

Thus, it is evident that Indian English literature cannot become part of English literature or the English writers cannot become part of Indian literary history just because of their ancestry or the theme on which they write. They need to have a sense and feeling of Indianness in their writings. One will be able to decide and make a distinction and understand this argument only when he/she reads both the writers and compares their writings. Further, the literature also cannot be defined or named as commonwealth literature as the name Commonwealth indicates the political connotation. Apart from this, Anglo or Anglian there are many names or prefixes added to the literary writings like Indo-Anglian literature, Indo-English literature, Indian Writing in English and Indian English literature. Nevertheless, the matter is resolved by the Sahitya Akademi which made a decision to call this body of literature as 'Indian English Literature'. According to M.K. Naik this name indicates two major points: the first is that this body of literature belongs to the vast ocean of literature which is called Indian literature. The second important thing, it indicates that the language gradually became native as the writers began to express their thoughts, feelings and native Indian culture.

Before moving to trace the history of novel in Indian English literature, it is pertinent to know and define a novel, what are the major characteristics of a novel, and the types of novel in brief.

13.2.1.3 What is a Novel?

The Novel is well defined by many but the exact description of the form in a calculated manner could be found in the words below....

“It is only novels in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties the liveliest effusions of wit and humor are conveyed to the world in the well-chosen language.”

(Jane Austen)

Novel is a work of fiction in a long narrative form. It is written in prose. The term novel comes from the Italian word 'novella' meaning "new" and later 'Novella Storia' meaning 'new story'. The difference between a short story and a novel is the length of a story, number of characters apart from this they share the entire remaining characteristic like story line or plot, setting, characters, climax, conflict, dialogues, resolution. Nevertheless, it is not necessary that a good and successful novel should have all these characteristics but it should meet the basic criteria to fall in to the category of novel.

Novel is a modern art of fiction which came after print. Hence, it is the byproduct of print. It became popular among the masses not only because it's a long narrative form that can help in killing time and more importantly, people began to relate or associate or identify themselves with the characters or stories. Further, the prose form of narrative also helped in making it a popular genre among the readers.

The genre commenced in the 17th century initially in English and French. Initially, it did not get much attention but it flourished in the 18th century. With the increase in readership, the writers began to get paid handsomely and enjoyed freedom provided by their patrons. This helped them to experiment in their styles.

13.2.2 Aspects of Novel:

There are various features of a novel without which it does not stand. It is the most loved and universal form of narrating a story about some event or person set in a specific time and place along with a subtle approach to the character's consciousness. This makes us understand that a novel has some of the basic elements that hook the interest of a reader in order to make the story interesting, lively and realistic. This means a novel has some hidden aspects but a writer cannot be very conscious of those aspects while writing a story. He / She just write although some writers do make a conscious effort to follow principles. It is the critics, scholars and readers who identify and look for them in a piece of fiction. It is also important to know that these features of a novel are a significant part of a novel. One can just discuss these features but one cannot categorise a novel based on those features. More importantly, one reads a novel to appreciate and enjoy it. Therefore, it is futile to disclose the integrity of a novel which will result in nothing specifically rewarding. A reader should not overdo it nevertheless when one likes a novel; one will surely discuss or like some of its features like characters, theme, plot and so on. However, one needs to be aware of these features in order to understand and appreciate a novel in a better manner. Apart from that, in order to analyse a novel one needs to take all these features into consideration. Thus, it is pertinent for a reader as well as for a scholar to know the aspects of novel which is made popular among readers of novel by E. M. Forster through his series of lectures later published as a book entitled *Aspects of the Novel* published in 1927. The seven aspects he offers for discussion in a novel are story, people, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythm. According to Mr Graham Greene, Time is "that dark backward and abysm that is the novelist's abiding problem". Much of what we have in the name analysis of the Indian English novel has been guided by this book of Forster. A realistic approach towards the novel as

a form of story writing is in Andre Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, which is a novel about a novelist who is writing a novel.

13.2.2.1 Theme:

Theme is nothing but the major idea of a novel. Every novel consists of a theme or there can be various themes in a piece of writing. Theme is a major issue or an argument upon which the whole narrative is based. Once again, it is important to note here that a writer does not take the theme and writes rather she/he takes an idea and expands it into a story, put some characters, and add some plot, characters, style, and technique.

13.2.2.2 Plot:

Plot is a sequence of events which has beginning, middle and end. It moves with the help of characters, action and events. A novel can have plot and sub-plot and both of them remain part of the main story. They run together and are interconnected with a story. For example take the novel *Binding Vine* (1992) by Shashi Deshpande. The story is about Urmi and how she copes with the loss of her daughter. It also narrates the story of Mira and Kalpana. The issues of all these characters are brought under the theme of relationship and death. One can see that here plot in a story moves with the help of the characters or their actions.

13.2.2.3 Characterization:

Characters are the individuals in a piece of writing. They have moral, emotional, natural mood which is given by the writer. It is revealed through their actions like how they react, act, learn from their situations, and change is nothing but the art of characterization. If a character leaves a huge impact and remains in our memory for a longer time then it is the effect of the characterization. In other words, such characters are called memorable characters like the character from *Train to Pakistan* Jugga or Bakha from the novel *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand. Actually, these are the characters imprinted in our memories very strongly. It is also pertinent to discuss here different types of characters like that of flat, round, protagonist, foil, dynamic, stock and antagonist. It is important to know that a story reveals its different characters and their personality traits gradually as the story moves further.

13.2.2.4 Point of View:

There are various methods through which a writer narrates a story and the method is called a point of view. It is a method in which a story is narrated or told. It shows the perspective through which the author reveals her/his characters, hide their action or events. When a character narrates his story, it is called first person narration. In this case, the narration begins

with 'I'. The reader can understand the story told by the first-person narrator. The narrator narrates his/her experiences. The third person narration tells the story from an omniscient point of view. The narrator knows everything that is taking place or happening in the story and he controls the narration, thoughts, actions and motives.

13.2.2.5 Place / Setting:

It is important to know that a story takes place in a proper place like a village or district, city, house, country and so on. The writer tries to give the feel of the cultural, social, political, economic situation through a place. Place is a larger context whereas, setting is very specific which includes ambience, characters, mood and time. Once the place is introduced then the writer cannot move its story out of that place. For instance, in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai's novel, there are Indian characters from abroad. So, here the society is English (situated in London) but it's a story about Indian characters and their actions and reactions. Thus, the writer here cannot go out of this place. Place helps in determining the setting whereas time helps in structuring the events. Thus, a writer cannot ignore the place and time in a story. However, it is not necessary for the writer to talk about the place but the background information gives the reader enough clues to understand a place. For example, in *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande, the writer has not described the city in detail but it is mentioned twice. Similarly, who can forget R.K Narayan's Malgudi which appears to be somewhere in Mysore. The place or setting is used differently in different novels. Like in *Delhi* a novel by Khushwant Singh wherein the place Delhi is the location and protagonist of the novel. In this novel, it has a very significant role to play. Similarly, in R.K. Narayan's Malgudi, the writer wants to give importance to the culture and tradition which comes from the place, which could be a fictional town in Ramanathapuram. Another example of place could be the Gothic novels wherein a place creates an ambience of fear and darkness.

13.2.2.6 Time:

In a narrative, time can be of two types: one is psychological and the other is the actual or clock time. The clock time is used to specify the hours, days, weeks, months and years. These two times do not have any relation with each other like psychological time is different from the actual clock time. Psychological time is related to an individual character of a novel. It has nothing to do with the outside world. Initially, writers used to prefer the clock time. For instance if a novel begins with the protagonist's childhood then it moves towards teenage, adulthood the way it happens in the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. With the

use of new techniques and experiments with the characters and time or to reveal the inner psyche of a character stream of consciousness technique was used by the writers. The technique presents the psychological time rather than the actual time, by isolating certain events and immersive flash-backs, building solidity and depth. In this psychological time a character moves back and forth in the past and returns to presents or can go to future situation mentally. Another technique to use the psychological time frame is flash-back, fantasies and dreams. It is done in order to know, present and understand the inner psyche of a character. For example, in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande are the good examples of psychological time.

13.2.2.7 Narration or Dramatization:

To narrate is to tell. Tell in a way that makes the listeners or readers to feel the story in a manner that as if they can see everything happening in front of their eyes. Narration means to narrate (tell) whereas, dramatization means to show a story moving in an action or dialogue. Narration seems to have something to do with orality or traditional form of storytelling, whereas dramatization indicates towards the action or characters performing in front of the audiences or readers. When one talks about orality, it indicates the tradition of storytelling, which is filled with morality or didactic tone. Dramatization does not try to be didactic rather it shows. It is also true that readers are interested in knowing not in morality. However, both the acts of storytelling are significant, hence writers tend to adopt both the methods.

13.2.2.8 Style:

Every individual has a style like the style of speaking, writing and so on. Style is nothing but a manner in which an individual performs a particular task that makes him/her distinct from others. Like any other individual, writers too have their style of writing. It is because of their style of narration that one writer is different from the other. How do we identify this? It is through their method of narration or storytelling, usage of language, expression, diction, choice of words, structure of sentence, usage of figurative language and so on and so forth. It is because the characters, their actions, thoughts, situations, events are revealed through the usage of language. It is also important for a writer to be realistic as much as possible in terms of giving words or language to a particular character. If a writer is projecting a rural character, he/she cannot give him a language with which a character cannot relate or identify her/him. Language should suit the character and its behaviour and represent the class, region and so on, from where one has come. Generally, Indian English writers have to face this problem specifically those who

represent or whose stories are mostly based on the rural areas, have characters from rural background like farmers, workers and the likes. In this situation, a writer has to use the expression of their culture and use language as it is generally used by such people. This is in order to give a realistic sense to a character. There is no doubt during such contexts English has to leave its original garb and adopt the cultural expressions and become more native. One can find such language in R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand's oeuvre, for which Anand coined the term 'Pigeon' English.

13.2.3 Types of Novels:

There are different aspects to a novel as we have seen above. Apart from this, there are various types of novels. Initially, the prose style gave birth to this genre and gradually writers began to experiment with their style of writing and themes and so on. This gradually led to the development of various forms of novels. Some of these types of novels could be enlisted as below.

13.2.3.1 Picaresque Novel:

The term 'picaresque' comes from the Spanish word *Picaro* which means 'rouge'. This type of novel focuses on the adventures of a single male or female character. The characters are adventurous in nature and hence they keep moving from one place to another place. The protagonist of the novel travels to different places due to this reason, the plot of the novel does not stick to one issue. It remains episodic in nature. The following are the examples of picaresque novel. *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* are the examples of picaresque novel.

13.2.3.2 Gothic Novel:

The moment we hear or see the word 'Gothic', it reminds us of dark buildings, horror stories and so on. The word Gothic comes from 'Goths' a word used with reference to Germanic tribe. However, there is no connection between the tribe and the genre of fiction. The stories generally set in the medieval Gothic Architectural buildings, castles and so on. This type of novels deals with supernatural elements which scare or create an atmosphere of suspense and fear. This form of novel was first written and popularized by Horace Walpole, who wrote *The Castle of Otranto*, a Gothic Story in 1765. Gradually other writers began to take an interest in it like and Mrs. Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and so on.

13.2.3.3 Epistolary Novel:

The novel wherein the story moves further through the exchange of letters between the characters is known as epistolary novel. The word 'Epistle' means letter. This genre of fiction was made popular by Samuel Richardson, who wrote *Pamela* in 1740 and *Clarissa* in 1747. Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, published in 1778 is another example of this genre of storytelling.

13.2.3.4 Psychological Novel:

It is a genre of fiction wherein a writer gives importance to the inner thoughts or thought process of the protagonist. To reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of a character, the writer uses the technique which is called stream of consciousness as it is seen in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf another best example of this form of novel is *Ulysses* by James Joyce published in 1922. Among the Indian writers Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, and Shashi Deshpande have explored this technique.

13.2.3.5 Historical Novel:

This is another and most important form of novel wherein the setting, not all but some of the characters and events are taken from history. These features make the novel set in a historical time with some historical characters and incidents from real life situations that have already passed. Sir Walter Scott is the exponent of this form of novel in his famous work *Ivanhoe* published in 1819. Among the Indian writers, *The Devil's Wind* (1972) by Manohar Malgonkar, *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* (1976) by Bhagwan S. Gidwani, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire* are some of the best example of this form of fiction.

13.2.3.6 Regional Novel:

Regional novels are set in a specific geographical area either real or fictional. However, the writer has so far utilized or created a fictional setting for their stories to take place. The most important writer of this form of writing is Thomas Hardy, who presented the Wessex in many of his novels and among the Indian writers R.K. Narayan, has done the magic by setting his novels in Malgudi.

The above mentioned novels or forms of novels were some of the examples from the large number of forms or sub-forms of literary writings. One can see that the novels in different forms have developed due to various reasons and in different times by different authors. Apart from those above mentioned novels, we also have Diasporic novels which were explored by the writers living away from their homelands but writing about their home country like Meena

Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others.

Similarly, there are writers who have written on post-colonial themes and issues, postmodernism, realism, socialism, feminist writings and many others. All these writings or forms of writings have emerged in different time period due to various reasons and movements. However, one cannot categorise a literary piece in a watertight compartment because a work of art touches on various dimensions in a single stroke. For example, the novel *The River of Fire* by Qurratulain Hyder cannot only be called a work of fiction based on partition. She has also used various historical characters, settings, incidents from history in her novel. Apart from that, it is a trans-creation of her work *Aag ka Darya*. It is the work of scholars and critiques to dissect all the elements of a literary work and analyse it but for writers it is their creative work of fiction. They do not begin writing nor approach their work the way critics do. They try beginning with a single idea and bring it into a literary form. Nevertheless, such understanding and approach is significant to understand the writer's art of writing and forte.

13.2.4 Rise of Novel in India:

Basic purpose of a novel is to narrate a story. The tradition of storytelling exists in India since ancient times. The sources of these stories are the Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, Jataka Tales, Vetala Panchavinshati and Katha-Sarit-Sagara and so on. These stories like in any other ancient culture existed in the oral form and it was narrated in a frame narrative technique wherein the main story is connected with the other stories or it creates setting and mood and then the other stories are narrated. In this manner, the stories hold the attention of the listeners. Further, there is no dearth of other genres of literature in Indian culture like there are other genres of literature existed from a very long time like drama and poetry. However, novel as a genre of literature is a modern development and distinct from other forms of literature as well as genres.

The first novel of Indian literature is *Travels of Dean Mahomet*, which was published in 1794. Dean Mahomed was an Indian Muslim Bengali but the history or the rise of fiction in Indian English writing does not actually count his work perhaps because it falls under the genre of Travel writing and in epistolary form or perhaps he went to Ireland and settled in a foreign land. Probably due to this reason, the rise or history of novel in India begins with the work of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* published in the year 1864. Samaresh C. Sanyal opines that in the later nineteenth century the novel as a literary genre was taken into the

umbrella of the Bengal literary tradition and then began the outpouring of the writings in novel form. K.R.S. Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English* says,

Novels have been, and are being published in a dozen Indian languages, and also in English; and the reciprocal influence between the novels in English and the novel in the regional languages has been rather more intimate and purposive than such an influence in the fields of poetry or drama. And this has, of course, been facilitated by the comparative ease with which a novel can be translated from one to another of the many languages current in the country.

However, before delving into this scenario it is important to know that initially it is not the Indian writers but mostly the British were the practitioner of the literature in English. If one keenly observes the fact then one can say that it could be because the people were not familiar with the language that they can easily express their emotions or culture in it. It was only the elite small pockets of Indians who were exposed to the language and the foreign culture. There is no doubt that later came a wave of literary exponents but in the beginning, it were only the British writers like George Orwell, Rudyard Kipling and Jim Corbett who laid the foundation and it was further developed by other British writers. Further, the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt, Raja Rao, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and the like shaped the literature on this soil.

13.2.4.1 Male Writers:

The pre-independence Indian English fiction has been shaped by the contributions made by the pioneers of Bengali literature namely Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore. The popular novels by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) include *Kopalkunda*, *Durgeshnandini*, *Krishankanta's Will*, *The Two Rings* and *Rajmohan's Wife*. Most of his novels are based on themes of social life which he delineated with realism. His historical novels representing ideas of patriotism and revolution provided an impetus to many other Indian English novelists. R.C. Dutt (1848-1909) wrote six novels in Bengali; four were historical novels called *Banga Bijeta* (Conqueror of Bengal), *Madhavi Kankan* (Bracelet of Flowers), *Rajput Jiban Sandhya* (Evening of Rajput Life) and *Maharashtra-Jivan Prabhat* (Dawn of Maharashtran Life). The first two novels deal with the conquest of Bengal by the emperor Akbar. The third novel tells the heroic stories of Rana Pratap Singh and the fourth one depicts Shivaji's leadership and the rise of Maratha rule. All of these four novels were published in 1879. Dutt also wrote two social novels; *Samaj* (1885) and *Sangsar* (1893). The first one is based on the

theme of widow remarriage and the second novel deals with the issue of inter-caste marriage. Most of his novels introduced the theme of social reformation.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is a major presence when one thinks of Bengal and its culture; a paramount figure in Indian English literature. A collection of poems, *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), secured for him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. He excelled in various genres of art and culture and became renowned as a poet, dramatist, novelist, composer, actor, singer, editor of the Bengali literary journal (*Sadhana*). He wrote eight novels and four novellas among them *Chaturanga*, *Shesher Kobita*, *Chare Adhyay* and *Noukadubi*. Some of his famous novels that were rendered into English include *The Wreck* (1921), *Gora* (1923) and *Home and the World* (1919). Many of his works are the inspiration for filmmakers. Some hundred films have been made, out of which more than half in Bengali are based on Tagore's works, making him one of the most adapted writers of all time.

The period of the freedom struggle and the influence of Gandhi were responsible for the growth and development of the novel in its early stage. S. Jogendra Singh's *Nasrin* (1915), *The Love of Kusuma* (1910) by Bal Krishna, Sorabji Cornelia's *Love and Life beyond the Purdah* (1901) and *Sun Babies* (1910) and *Between the Twilights: Being Studies of India Women by one of themselves* (1908) are some of the famous works based on the theme of national awakening and political consciousness. The various momentous events of the Gandhian era like the boycott of the Simon Commission, the boycott of foreign goods, the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, Civil Disobedience Movement, Dandi March, Quit India Movement and many others forms of Gandhian movement are represented in many of the novels written during this period of the freedom struggle. Many writers of this period were influenced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who voiced against the injustice done towards the under-privileged, the marginalized and the suppressed. According to Amarnath Prasad, the works dealing with the theme of either Gandhi or the contemporary freedom struggle are Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), K.S. Venkatramani's *Kandan the Patriot* (1932), D.F. Karaka's *We never Die* (1944), Amir Ali's *Conflict* (1947), Venu Chitale's *In Transit* (1950), K.A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955), R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1956), Nayantara Sehgal's *A Time to be Happy* (1955) and K. Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961).

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was one of the most prolific writers of the period who is best known as a social realist and a humanist. His vision of a humanist and a reformist is seen in his novel named *Untouchable* (1935) which gave him immense popularity. His other humanistic

novels *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves And A Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* in 1945. Anand has also written seven collections of short stories – *The Child and other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkness and other stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and other stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). His other works include *Indian fairy Tales* (1961), *The Old woman and the Cow* (1960). It was followed by *The Road* (1963) and *The Death of Hero* (1964). *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face*, *The Confession Of A Lover* and *The Bubble* are his autobiographical novels.

R.K. Narayan is considered as one of the pioneers of regional novel in India. Most of his novels are based on the fictional place called Malgudi, which he created in his imagination. Some of his autobiographical works include *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1936) and *The English Teacher*. The novels placed on the locale of Malgudi are *The Dark Room* (1938), *Mr. Sampath* (1952), *The Financial Expert* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1977), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) and *The World of Nagraj* (1990). Narayan's novels display his comic vision of life where his characters show a journey towards experience from innocence and they continue their journey until they are content with wisdom. The language that Narayan adopts in his works is simple and lucid but his command over the language is remarkable. The Times Literary Supplement comments on Narayan's style,

His humour is woven into the texture of his prose. It never erupts in a detachable epigram or joke. He did his best to inject the spirit and tempo of Tamilian idiom into English speech in a natural and unaffected manner. In spite of the raciness and simplicity, Narayan's style is rich in evocativeness and suggestiveness.

Raja Rao is one of the renowned novelists of the pre-independence era, whose work has an influence of Gandhian movements. His works include *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Policeman and The Rose* (1978). He was much influenced by Gandhi's philosophy and this is evident in his two works namely *Kanthapura* and *The Cow of the Barricades*, where Mahatma Gandhi never appears physically but his presence is felt everywhere. He received the Sahitya Academy Award for *The Serpent and the Rope*. He was also honored

with the Padma Bhushan for his literary achievements. His works show a combination of eastern and western exposure. He was inspired by James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Valmiki and Vedvyasa.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is another important writer but of post-independence India. He has written novels based on social issues like *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow From Ladakh* (1967) and *A Dream In Hawaii* (1975). He has also explored the genre of short stories specifically that were based on of psychological interest. He received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1967 for his work, *Shadow From Ladakh*.

Khushwant Singh, another significant writer of post-Independence India and the recipient of Padma Bhushan award in 1974. He was a journalist who has served as an editor of *Yojana* (1951-1953), *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (1969-1979), *The National Herald* (1978-1979), *New Delhi* (1979-1980), and *The Hindustan Times* (1980-1983). He wrote four novels *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* (1959), *Delhi* (1989) and *The Company Of Women* (2000). He also wrote two collection of short stories called *The Mark of Vishnu* (1950) and *A Bribe for the Sahib* (1967). He got the Grove Press Award for *Train to Pakistan*. The novel deals with the issue of partition and it reflects the human brutality and at the same time love and compassion. However, it is one of the significant novels on the partition of India that shows horrifying images of the Partition of India. *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* is about a Sikh family of pre-Independent era whereas *Delhi* and *The Company of Women* deals with sex and lust.

Manohar Malgonkar, another significant writer who has served in Indian Army at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His work includes *Distant Drums* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *Spy in Amber* (1971), *The Devil's Wind* (1972) and *Shalimar* (1978). He has explored various themes and issues like life of princes, experiences of military life, and political upheaval during the partition of the country, the Sepoy Mutiny and so on and so forth. He wrote two collections of short stories named *A Toast in Warm Wine* and *Bombay Beware*.

Chaman Nahal a significant writer of post-Independent India who wrote important works like, *My True Faces* (1973), *Azadi* (1975), *Into Another Dawn* (1977), *The English Queen* (1979), *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981) and also a collection of short stories titled *The Weird Dance* (1965). *My True Faces* is about broken marriage; *Into Another Dawn* talks about the encounter between East and West. *Azadi* is based on the partition of India and *The Crown*

and the Loincloth is about Gandhian philosophy. His skills as a writer are seen in his work *The English Queen*.

Salman Rushdie, a name that every literature student is aware of to a degree. He is a novelist of global importance not only due to his writings but also for controversial issues. His forte is historical fantasy and magic-realism. His novel *Grimivis* (1975) deals with politics and history. *Midnight Children* (1981) is all about history and magic-realism. He won the Booker of Bookers Prize for it. *Shame* (1983) is all about the creation of Pakistan after partition whereas his *Satanic Verses* (1988) is considered as a controversial novel as it hurts the sentiments of Muslims. Due to this reason, the novel was banned. Apart from these widely known works of fiction, he has also contributed *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), *In Good Faith* (1990), *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism* (1981-1991), *East-West* (1994), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001), *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction* (2002) and *Shalimar The Clown* (2005).

Amitav Ghosh worked as a journalist in the Indian Express and an eminent writer of post-Independent India. He debuted with *The Circle of Reason* (1982), a novel that deals with the issue of terrorism and covers two cities of Calcutta and Bombay and then it moves around the Persian Gulf to North Africa. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is one of his significant novels is about family in Kolkata and Dhaka and their relationship with a British family. This novel brought him recognition as a writer and he won the Sahitya Academy Award for it. His *In an Antique Land* (1992) deals with anthropological and historical surveys and alongside, he has used imaginative ability. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) is science fiction and it was popular because of his innovative work. This work brought him the Arthur C. Clarke Award, a prestigious award given by Britain for best science fiction.

So far, we have covered all the male novelists of pre and post-Independent times. There are large numbers of female writers who have also shaped the Indian literature in English and whose invaluable contributions always deserve mention. They have explored various themes and issues which are informed by their femininity that no one else can do. However, by that it does not mean that they were only talking about women's issues or their concerns and so on. No one can limit their boundaries or compartmentalize the writers based on their gender as they have also explored various other issues and themes with equal ease.

13.2.4.2 Female Writers:

When one talks about women writing in Indian English literature then the first name that comes to our minds is of **Toru Dutt**. She is primarily known as a poet but has also written two novels. Her first novel was *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) in English and the second was in French called *le journal de mademoiselle d'Arvers* (1879). However, both the novels published posthumously. Therefore, one cannot be sure about the chronology as we do not know which novel she intended to publish first. Moreover, her novels one is in French that cannot be for the Indian English readers and the second is about a European protagonist in European setting. Therefore, how much one can count her works to be in Indian English writing is an issue or maybe she does not fall into the category of the earliest women fiction writers. Nevertheless, after this comes **Raj Laxmi Devi/Debi**, who wrote at a time when pre-Independent India was struggling not only to achieve freedom from colonial master but also free their communities and women from age-old meaningless traditions. She wrote *The Hindu Wife* in (1876). However, one should not get carried away by the name. It is a **pseudonym of Sir William Jones** who wrote this novel. Thus, one cannot count this novel as well³ or the writer. **Cornelia Sorabji** was a Parsee woman who was a social reformist, lawyer and she was the first woman to graduate from Bombay University and also to go to England from India. She was the first woman to practice law in Britain. She wrote *Love and Life behind the Purdah* (1901), a collection of short stories.

Next comes **Kamala Markandaya**, a post-independent prolific writer whose writings were focused on social and political issues. Her works include *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *Two Virgins* and *The Golden Honey*. **Attia Hosain** was a journalist, broadcaster, novelist and short story writer. Her first work of fiction was in the genre of a short story. She wrote a collection of short stories called *Phoenix Fled* in 1953. It was followed by her only novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, which was published in 1961. His works dealt with gender, class struggle, patriarchy and partition.

Every writer has a forte of exploring themes and issues in a different manner. **Ruth P. Jhabvala** is a writer who does not make or represent her characters' mistakes and stupidities seriously. She is interested in presenting them in a humorous manner. She has written *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder*

³ Susmita Roye. *Mothering India: Women's Fiction in English Shaping Cultural History (1890–1947)*

(1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1972), *Heat and Dust* (1975) and *My Nine Lives: Chapters on a Possible Past* (2004). She has also explored the genre of short stories and wrote *An Experience of India* (1967), *Like Bird, Like Fishes* (1963) and *A Stronger Climate* (1963).

Nayantara Sehgal has always been interested in representing the political aspects of life of the country and its effect on its citizens. The following are some of her novels *Time To Be Happy* (1957), *The Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A New Situation in New Delhi* (1977) and *Rich Like Us* (1985). **Anita Desai** is one of the prolific writers whose interest lies in probing mental or psychological issues of her characters. She focuses on trauma and pain. The following are some of her novels: *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1963), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea* (1982) and *The Zigzag way* (2004).

Shashi Deshpande, one of the most prolific writers; she includes women's issues, their psyche, identity, patriarchy and so on in her works. Her work includes *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) for this she received the Thirumati Rangmal Award, *That Long Silence* (1988), won her the Sahitya Academy Award, and her other works are *The Binding Vine* (1992), *The Match Of Time* (1999), *Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004). **Arundhati Roy** is a writer and social activist who is known for her much acclaimed novel *The God of Small Things*. It is a story about a family living in Ayemenem town in Kerala. This work brought her Booker Prize in 1997. **Shobha De's** works deal with the themes like marginalisation of women and women's empowerment. Her work includes *Socialite Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Sisters* (1992), *Strange Obsession* (1992), *Sultry Boys* (1994) and *Snapshots* (1995).

Apart from the above-mentioned writers, there are various other writers both male and female like Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Pankaj Mishra, Chetan Bhagat, Jhumpa Lahiri, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Aravind Adiga, Chitra Banerjee Divakurni, Dominique Lapierre, William Dalrymple who have achieved international acclaim and some of them are diasporic writers.

13.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should have an idea about the various aspects of the novel right from its beginning in India like the rise of English in India. Further, you should understand the issues related to the naming the literature and various significant points related to it.

You should be aware of the various forms of novels like picaresque novel, gothic novel, and historical novel. You should have an idea about the rise of the Novel in India.

Overall, after reading this Unit, you should have gained a brief idea about the origin and development of the novel in India.

13.4 Glossary

Novel: A long fictional story which is neither completely unrealistic nor realistic. It has both the aspects to it to some degree.

Tradition: Passing down of rituals, customs, beliefs and practices from one generation to another generation

Fiction: Something which is not true and made up

Short Story: Short story is a short piece of prose fiction that deals with a single incident or event.

Partition literature: The writings based on the historical division of British India into two parts, India and Pakistan that took place in 1947 and in which, while migrating from this side to other side and vice versa lakhs of innocent citizens of both sides died.

Diaspora: Diaspora is a group of people who belong or whose ancestors belong to some other country but now they live in another or foreign land which is culturally or linguistically is not of their or of their ancestors.

Diasporic Writings: Writings emerged from the people who have migrated and settled in a foreign land due to economic or any other reason is called diasporic writings. The themes of their works include cultural identity, ethnicity, homeland, displacement, feeling of loss and alienation.

13.5 Sample Questions

13.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Who wrote the Hindu Wife?

- (a) Raj Laxmi Debi (b) Sir William Jones
(c) Henry James (d) Unknown author

2. Who wrote the novel *Sunlight on the Broken Column*?

- (a) Anita Desai (b) Kiran Desai
(c) Attia Hosain (d) Zakir Hussain

3. Who is the writer of Bianca?

- (a) Toru Dutt (b) Nargis Dutt
(c) Govin Chunder Dutt (d) Aru Dutt

4. Arundhati Roy's novel set in a village called?

- (a) Ayemenem (b) Malgudi
(c) Chittoor (d) Mysore

5. *Storm in Chandigarh* and *Rich Like Us* written by

- (a) Nayantara Sehgal (b) Anita Desai
(c) Shashi Deshpande (d) Ismat Chughtai

6. *That Long Silence* (1988) brought her the Sahitya Academy Award. Who is this author?

- (a) Mulk Raj Anand (b) R.K Narayan
(c) Shashi Desh Pande (d) Nayantara Sehgal

7. Name the novels of Kamala Markandaya

- (a) *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1963)
(b) *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901)
(c) *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966)
(d) *Strange Obsession* (1992) and *Sultry Boys* (1994)

8. *The Shadow Lines* and *In An Antique Land* published in the year

- (a) (1988) and (1992) (b) (1995) and (2000)
(c) (1992) (2000) (d) (2000) and (2012)

9. Which of Amitav Ghosh's novel brought him the Arthur C. Clarke Award, a prestigious award given by Britain for best science fiction

- (a) *The Calcutta Chromosome* (b) *The Shadow Lines*

(c) *In An Antique Land*

(d) *The Glass Palace*

10. Which of the following is the K.A. Abbas's work?

(a) *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1956) (b) *Kanthapura* (1938)

(c) *Untouchable* (1935)

(d) *Inquailab* (1955)

13.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What do you understand by the term Anglo-Indian writing?
2. Name some of the poets of pre-Independence India?
3. Name the Indian writers/poets who were influenced by the Romantic and Victorian writers/poets.
4. Name the author and her works who wrote a French novel and an English novel.
5. Name any three post-independence Indian novel writers

13.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the works of fiction that deal with the Gandhi / Gandhian philosophy /freedom struggle.
2. Define novel and discuss different types of novels?
3. Discuss the various characteristics of novel.

13.6 Suggested Readings

1. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. New Delhi: Permanent Block, 2003
2. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985: rpt. 1995.
3. M. K. Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1982.
4. M. K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan. *Indian English Literature. 1980-2000, A Survey*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001.

Unit – 14: Life and Works of Arundhati Roy

Structure

14.0 Introduction

14.1 Objectives

14.2 Life and Works of Arundhati Roy

14.2.1 Notable Works of Arundhati Roy

14.2.2 Arundhati Roy's Achievements

14.2.3 Arundhati Roy's Political Activism & Voice of Justice

14.2.4 Artistic Style & Stature of Arundhati Roy

14.2.5 Themes in Arundhati Roy's Works

14.2.6 Arundhati Roy as an Indian Feminist

14.2.7 Let Us Sum Up

14.3 Learning Outcomes

14.4 Glossary

14.5 Sample Questions

14.6 Suggested Readings

14.0 Introduction

Arundhati Roy was born in Kerala, a southern state of India on the 24th of November 1961. Her father was a Hindu by birth and a tea planter, while her mother was a Christian by religion and a teacher by profession. In addition, she was a social activist and this passion was inherited by Arundhati Roy from her mother. Her mother left her husband (who was an alcoholic) in West Bengal and brought Arundhati and her brother to Kerala. Corpus Christi was the name of the school where Roy started her education. This school was founded by Arundhati Roy's mother in Ayemenem town. It was an informal school and hence Roy developed skills and perception that was different from the formal schools of India. From the very beginning, she dreamed of being a writer. She was liberal and independent right from her childhood and she left her home to live on her own when she was merely sixteen. For seven years, she sold empty bottles of beer to earn her living. During that time, she studied the affects of Christianity, Hinduism, Marxism, and Islam on India's social and cultural fabric. This developed and

reformed her thinking and beliefs, which are depicted and demonstrated through her fictional work. Soon, she was fed up with poverty and hunger-stricken life, and decided to join the Delhi School of Architecture.

While in Delhi, she met her first husband Gerard Da Cunha. When they got married, they decided to do something different rather than pursuing their degrees. They went to Goa, and there they sold cakes to tourists for almost seven months. But soon, she got tired of this life pattern and her marriage lasted four years. Later, she found a job as a production designer in the National Institute of Urban Affairs, where she met her second husband, Pradeep Krishen who was a film-maker. She was given a scholarship to study the monuments of Italy at this time in her life. In Italy, she became aware of her writing skills. On her return to India, she planned to write a screenplay for a TV serial. Though this plan collapsed, she continued to write. Her first novel *The God of Small Things* was her first and most significant success. It soon got her universal recognition and fame. It was published in 1997 and was translated into 16 major languages. She won the “Booker Prize” for this novel and she was the first Indian to have won this award.

14.1 Objectives

This Unit is written for the readers and learners who are interested in learning about Arundhati Roy and her literary contribution. Specifically, it is meant to achieve the following learning objectives:

- to make you familiar with the life events of Arundhati Roy such as her autobiography, education and personal life.
- to make you aware of different forms of literary and non-literary works of Arundhati Roy.
- to make you comprehend different political and social issues Arundhati Roy has depicted in her non-fictional essays.
- to make you differentiate between Arundhati Roy’s fictional and non-fictional writing.
- to enable you to draw a distinction between diverse layers of subject matter and themes in her work.

14.2 Life and Works of Arundhati Roy

14.2.1 Notable Works of Arundhati Roy:

Arundhati Roy is a well-known Indian literary and creative figure who has published fiction and non-fiction in English on political, social and religious issues. In addition, she has also acted in an award-winning movie, “Massey Sahib,” in which she performs the role of a village girl. Her first novel, *The God of Small Things* is a semi-autobiographical novel that depicts her childhood experiences in Ayemenem, a town in Kerala.

In her works, in general, and in her masterpiece *The God of Small Things*, she projects the marginalized people in Indian society. In her first novel, she presents the social norms, cultural imbalance, and gender marginalization from the perspective of Ayemenem. Social norms, injustice, caste system, and marginalization of women in men’s hands are some of her key areas of focus. She has projected women ill-treated by men, and their resistance against men, norms, and society.. *The Caste of Living* is her first work, which is non-fictional and it consists of two essays. In this, she talked about some very important burning issues of the country like an atom bomb, construction of dams, and irrigation. She openly questions why the government is interested in making and testing bombs when millions of people in India are living in absolute poverty.

War Talk is another volume consisting of six political essays dealing with globalization and military affairs. Here, she discusses the threat that is always between India and Pakistan concerning atomic war. She also discusses its impact on the mental and psychological health of the people who constantly remain under stress and tension. Her resistance movement can be seen from yet another volume of political essays, *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* which consists of 14 political articles. In these articles, she tries to deconstruct the notions of globalization, terrorism, imperialism, brutality, injustice, and neo-liberal capitalistic insights. She again criticizes Americans who have not learned any lesson from Vietnam and have indulged in the Iraq and Afghan war in the name of the so-called “War-against terrorism.” Last but not the least is her most awaited second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which came after 20 years of gap. It is also a story that revolves around women’s struggle and the struggle of architects. She has also projected other types of struggles like the struggle of orphans, Muslims, and addicts in her second novel.

Arundhati Roy's works include, *The God of Small Things* (1997), *The End of Imagination* (1998), *The Cost of Living: The Greater Common Good*, *Power Politics* (2001), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), *War Talk* (2003), *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* (2003), *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire: A Collection of Speeches and Essays* (2004), *Come September* (2004), *Public Power in the Age of Empire* (2004), *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile: Conversations with Arundhati Roy* (2004), *The Hanging of Afzal Guru and the Strange Case of the Attack on the Indian Parliament* (2006), *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy* (2009), *The Shape of the Beast: Conversations with Arundhati Roy* (2009), *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (2011), *Walking with the Comrades* (2011), *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014), *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017).

14.2.2 Arundhati Roy's Achievements:

Arundhati Roy wrote two novels and numerous texts regarding the themes of politics and social issues. Her very first novel, *The God of Small Things*, establishes her as a creative and unmatched literary writer of India. She has also done works on film and social areas. Due to her creative abilities she has been bestowed with numerous awards and attributes. The first notable award she received is the national award she won in 1988 for a screenplay. The name of the play was *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*. She has written scripts of dramas and movies. In 1992, she wrote the screenplay for a film *Electric Moon* which was awarded the best feature film in English in the 40th National Film Award. As you already know, in 1997, *The God of Small Things* brought her international fame and repute. She won the Booker Prize for this novel becoming the first Indian to win this award. The novel was about her childhood experiences, which were deeply embedded in the political, national, and cultural fabric of Kerala. It is also worth noting that her first novel is acknowledged as one of The New York Times' Notable Books of the year 1997.

In addition to her literary, dramatic, and film-related contributions, she has also written about social and religious issues. She acts as a symbol of resilience and courage, presenting an aura of hope though steeped in a male-dominated and conservative society. She writes about religious violence and for social justice. She acted as a social activist who wrote about human rights and worked for it. In order to honor her integrity in these matters, she has been awarded Sydney Peace Prize in 2004 for her "commitment to the global cause of peace with justice." In 2003, she was awarded with Lannan Prize for Cultural Freedom. Sahitya Akademi Award was also received by Arundhati Roy in 2006 from the Indian Academy of Letters. Her long-awaited

second novel came out in 2017 after 20 years with the title *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. It also made its way as a member of 2017 Booker Prize long list (among other 12 works by different writers) and was shortlisted for National Book Critics Circle Award for the year 2017. Due to her creative and unmatched literary, political and social taste that is displayed in all the formats of writing, she has been awarded with St. Louis Literary Award in the United States.

14.2.3 Arundhati Roy as a Political Activist & the Voice of Justice:

Arundhati Roy writes about current political and environmental issues and hence there are controversies surrounding her. She is also an active voice for human rights and justice leading to conflicting opinion. She openly supported the naxal insurgency and met with severe criticism. Her conflicts and issues are not merely limited to India or within India; she has earned international controversy because of her active voice against perceived injustice. She raises her concern and voice to include Afghan women in the peace process between the United States and the Taliban. In *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* which is a political article she analyzes the attack on the World Trade Center. In her view, “World Trade Center and Pentagon are symbols of America’s economic and military dominance, not symbols of American freedom.”

14.2.4 Artistic Style & Stature of Arundhati Roy:

Arundhati Roy talked about her artistic nature in an interview: “Much of my non-fiction writing is an argument, but fiction is where you create a universe through which you invite a reader to walk. It is much more complex. For me, it is the most satisfying thing. When I write fiction, I feel like I am using all my skills; it delights me the most.” Her first and significant success was her first novel, which was translated into 16 major languages in almost 21 countries but her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published after two decades, has exceeded her earlier fame and welcome. It has been translated into 50 major languages of the world, including Urdu and Hindi. It is titled “*Aapar Khusi ka Gharana*” in Hindi and “*Bepanah Shadmani Ki Mumlikat*” in Urdu.

About the response she received to her novel, Roy says: “The response was far beyond my expectation. For me, it has been years of experimenting with a form of novel, and which I knew was complex and cannot be consumed in one read.” As far as her stylistic and artistic tone with regard to her second novel is concerned, it is far more complex than her first one. It requires more reading and attention to comprehend the abstract ideas. She has been often praised for her lyrical language that was profusely used in her writing especially in fictional narration. In her first novel, *The God of Small Things* she has utilized simple and lively language, rhetorical

devices, fluctuating narrative, magical Realism, fresh imagery, allegory, symbol, complex narrative techniques, fantasy, rapid shift, sharp honesty of emotions, sensitive poetical style, sparkling symbolism, similes, intonation, linguistic inventiveness and fantasy that contributed towards her literary style and artistic stature at the same time.

Caroline Moore, while talking about Arundhati Roy and her style, is of the view that it presents an “exuberance as well as a freshness and unembarrassed immediacy which are rare in good fiction from this (India) country.” A journalist from India Today calls Arundhati Roy as “Princess of Prose”. Jason Cowley, in addition, terms her the one who “fulfills the highest demand of the art of fiction: To see the world not conventionally or habitually, but as if for the first time.” Mohit Kumar Roy (1999) sums up her artistic stature and fictional style, especially with regard to *The God of Small Things* thus: “The words are made to break free of the world’s recognized meaning and absolutes into a contemporary world of fresh usage and implications so that the full resonance of suggestions in the language is realized. The kind of liberty that Roy takes with spellings, syntax and sentence patterns reflect a feminine sensibility that characterizes and at the same time authenticates the discourse.”

14.2.5 Themes in Arundhati Roys’ Works:

General post-colonial perspective has been depicted in *The God of Small Things*, but the post-colonial political perspective of Indian politics has been depicted in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. In *The God of Small Things*, there is an exploitation of India and Indian people through the hand of the imperial regime, but in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, we see how Indian political leaders let down numerous people or groups and how Indians oppress themselves. She also pointed out the corruption and ulterior motives of all the stakeholders, i.e. Indians, army and local people of Kashmir. Inequalities in the social fabric are another key theme in both the novels of Arundhati Roy. People are divided into race and caste, keeping in view the social status they have. Exploitation is a central theme in both the novels. In both of her novels, resilience and hope are intertwined. Resilience is a sign of hope in these works. Women have been projected as resilient in *The God of Small Things*, which indicates that despite all the marginalization, they are certain of their place in society.

Identity, gender-based polarity, and social division go hand in hand in her works. People are divided among touchable and untouchable men and women and even transgenders in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Apart from social, gender and political division and issues in Indian society, religious issues are yet another critical element behind the issues embedded in the

Indian social fabric. The element of violence in post-independence India is due to the religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, as depicted in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The concept of inferiority and superiority is embedded as a subject matter in *The God of Small Things* in terms of race, language, culture, and the social fabric of societal norms. Apart from the recurrent themes, she has written about other issues as well in her non-fictional works. In her essays, the subject-matter revolves round political, social and environmental themes. Globalization is also a theme in her essays. She has talked about human rights, social justice, a friendly environment, and the issue of terrorism boldly and bluntly. As an Indian, she has projected the concept of Indian feminism in a male-dominated society through resilient and independent women. Most of her subject matter involves conflict, controversies, and untoward situations, but she has the will to present that which she deems right.

14.2.6 Arundhati Roy as an Indian Feminist:

Apart from being active socially and politically, Arundhati Roy has also voiced a strong voice against the degradation of women at the hands of men in general and by society and societal norms in particular. She represents the woman's voice through her fictional writing. On the one hand, she shows the marginalization of women in the male dominated society. On the other, she has projected a voice of resilience and rebellion through her female characters in *The God of Small Things*. Ammu, the most famous among takes her own decisions and exercises her own will. She marries a person of her liking, leaves him when he presented her before his boss and develops an illicit relationship outside marriage with a person who belongs to an untouchable class. All these acts are against the set norms of society.

Other female characters too have challenged the dominance of male as well as the set norms of the society. Margaret and Rahel have done the same as far as their personal and married life is concerned, but their resilience and rebellious nature are not as significant as that of Ammu. Similarly, in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the novelist presents how nature had been transformed to embark on gender-based issues. Arundhati Roy has projected that nature and women have been utilized as a means to serve men to accomplish their motives in the present world. Women have been exploited and oppressed in manifold ways. Arundhati Roy has projected the concept of Indian Feminism through the resilience being put by the women characters in her novels. She has projected her characters who have fought against male dominance and societal norms. They are the symbol of change as far as the wave of feminism in India is concerned.

14.2.7 Let Us Sum Up:

Arundhati Roy is a famous writer of India who writes in English. She got worldwide fame and reputation through her first novel, *The God of Small Things*. Apart from her fictional works, she has written non-fictional works on the subject of environment, politics, human rights, feminism, and social issues. She published many volumes of essays apart from her two famous novels, i.e. *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. She has won the Booker Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the St. Louis Literary Award for her literary work; the Sydney Peace Prize and the Lannan Prize for her political and social activism; and the National Award and the Best Feature Film Award in English for her contribution to cinema and film.

14.3 Learning Outcomes

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- have a comprehensive idea about the life events of Arundhati Roy.
 - comprehend different political and social issues Arundhati Roy depicted in her writing.
 - make a distinction among Arundhati Roy's fictional and non-fictional writing.
 - understand the literary and critical contribution of Arundhati Roy.
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14.4 Glossary

Charles Dickens: Charles John Huffam Dickens was a novelist and social critic of the Victorian era.

William Faulkner: William Cuthbert Faulkner was an American novelist and short story writer of the 20th century.

Monopoly: Control

Stagger: Stumble, Walk unsteadily

Imperialism: The policy of forcefully extending a nation's authority by territorial gain or by the establishment of economic and political dominance over other nations.

Capitalist: A socio-economic system based on private ownership of resources or capital.

Resilience: Flexibility for survival against odds

Sydney Peace Prize: It is awarded by the Sydney Peace Foundation, a non-profit organization associated with the University of Sydney.

Booker Prize: It is a literary prize awarded each year for the best novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland.

National Book Critics Circle Award: It is given for the finest books published in English in six categories: Fiction, Nonfiction, Biography, Autobiography, Poetry, and Criticism.

14.5 Sample Questions

14.5.1 Objective Questions:

- Arundhati Roy was born in the year _____.
(a) 1960 (b) 1961
(c) 1962 (d) 1963
- Arundhati Roy's father was a _____.
(a) Music director (b) Indian film maker
(c) Tea planter (d) Actor and writer
- Arundhati Roy's mother was a _____.
(a) Hindu by origin (b) Christian by religion
(c) Indian Muslim (d) Jewish by birth
- Corpus Christi was the school where Arundhati Roy got her early education. It was founded by _____.
(a) Indian Government (b) British colonial regime
(c) Arundhati Roy's mother (d) none of these
- Arundhati Roy met her husband Gerard Da Cunha _____.
(a) During her visit to Italy (b) During her stay in India after returning from Italy
(c) at Delhi School of Architecture (d) on a beach abroad
- Which of her works won the Booker Prize?
(a) *The God of Small Things* (b) *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*
(c) *The Holy Name of Liberty* (d) *Power Politics*
- For her political insights depicted in her political essays she was given the award of _____.

- (a) Booker Prize (b) Sydney Peace Prize
(c) Nobel Prize (d) Best writer

8. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* came out after the wait of _____

- (a) 10 years (b) 15 years
(c) 20 years (d) 25 years

9. Who calls Arundhati Roy the “Princess of Prose”?

- (a) Literary critics (b) Her critics
(c) Journalist of India Today (d) Her friends

10. *Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* consisted of

- (a) 10 political articles (b) 12 political articles
(c) 14 political articles (d) 16 political articles

14.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Why is Arundhati Roy called a “Princess of Prose”?
2. When was *The God of Small Things* written and what is it about?
3. Give brief information about the major non-fictional works of Arundhati Roy.
4. Why was Arundhati Roy awarded the Sydney Peace Prize?
5. Discuss the Indian feminist approach with respect to Arundhati Roy’s novels.

14.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the major themes in Arundhati Roy’s novels? Discuss.
2. Examine the contribution of Arundhati Roy.
3. How does the fiction and non-fiction of Arundhati Roy correlates with her personal life and her philosophy of life?

14.6 Suggested Readings

1. Baneth-Nouailhetas, Emilienne. "Committed Writing, Committed Writer?" *Globalizing Dissent: Essays on Arundhati Roy*. Eds. Ranjan Ghosh and Antonia Navarro-Tejero. New York and London: Routledge, 2009.
2. Nayar, Pramod K. "Indian Writing in English as Celebrity." *Indian Writing in English and the Global Literary Market*. Eds. Om Prakash Dwivedi and Lisa Lau. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
3. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1997.

Unit – 15: *The God of Small Things*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

15.0 Introduction

15.1 Objectives

15.2 *The God of Small Things*: Background, Plot, Characters

15.2.1 Historical Background

15.2.2 Setting and Structure of the Plot

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15.0 Introduction

The God of Small Things is a famous novel written by an Indian writer, Arundhati Roy. The novel is written in a semi autobiographical form. In this novel, Arundhati Roy has inscribed her childhood memories and her experiences. The novel is set in her maternal town named Ayemenem, which is in Kerala. The story of the novel revolves around the twins Rahel and Estha. The twins remained isolated from each other for about 23 years. In the course of the story, their mother's love affair and forbidden relation with her lover is revealed by the narrator. Her lover is murdered afterwards. Side by side, the reunion of both Rahel and Estha is narrated. The description of the events is mostly in the past narration. It is also narrated how their separation and isolation took place.

The story takes place in two weeks of 1969 and one day of 1993. Roy utilizes small things to project and achieve big things. It is set in Ayemenem and using flash-back, foreshadow,

and present narration in a non-sequential manner, the novelist frequently takes the reader back and forth during the course of reading the novel. Apart from the main plot, Arundhati Roy very artistically has depicted several serious and notable social and political issues of the time.

The caste system, though banned in 1950 in India, is embedded in society and hence it makes its appearance time and again in the novel. The notion of untouchability makes its appearance very critical in the narration of the main event. The rise of the communist party in the state of Kerala and its consequences on the landlords is also mentioned through its impact on family being depicted in the major episode of the novel. The concept of love as a social norm is also imperative in the society. *The God of Small Things* throws light on Marxist and communist ideologies. The rise of lower class and fall of upper class is the key concept behind these ideologies and this is what is apparent in the novel. It is also significant to note that Arundhati Roy believes in a political ideology and she practices the same about class politics. She has written numerous articles on the said topic and also was awarded Sydney Peace Prize in the year of 2004 for her contribution to the same.

Apart from these major issues in the novel, there are many things in the novel that most of the readers find relatable. Almost in the life of everybody, there are certain things that each one wants to undo in life. Most of the readers often wonder why bad things happen in their life. Almost everyone has some kind of fear. Death is something that is unavoidable as far as human beings are concerned. Love, hatred, revenge, tragedy, and difficult financial situation are not something that is merely limited to the characters of the novel *The God of Small Things*. The readers find it easy to relate to these. At the heart of everything in the novel is how the death of Sophie Mol has affected the lives of Rahel, Estha and other members of the family.

15.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- present the historical and social background of the novel.
- understand the setting and plot of the novel.
- appreciate Arundhati Roy's art of characterization.
- identify the important characters in the novel.
- comprehend the novel in its semi autobiographical form.

15.2 *The God of Small Things*: Background, Plot, Characters

15.2.1 Historical Background:

As we told you earlier, the novel *The God of Small Things* is set in the maternal town of the novelist Arundhati Roy, situated in Kerala. It is highly autobiographical in tone as well as in setting. It is also imperative that Marxist ideology spread in Kerala soon after India got liberated from the colonial British rule in 1947. In 1967 the Naxalite group split off from the communist political party and the mainstream politics. This also led to a social unrest and discomfort among the worker and labor groups, which led to a labor movement. The initial setting and tone of the novel *The God of Small Things* is influenced by this movement. Though untouchability was banned, caste structures prevailed and impacted life as presented in the novel through the characters. In addition, the Syrian Christians of Kerala are also among the characters presented in the novel.

The setting of the novel is in a small town Ayemenem situated in Kerala state on the western coast of India. The novelist was born and brought up there in a small village which is named akin to the fictional name she used in the novel. Kerala is popular among tourists and is popularly called a tropical paradise. It is also famous for animals like the elephant, palm, and coconut trees. It is also enriched with fruits, vegetables, and flowers. In addition, numerous rivers flow through this state. Its beaches and mountains captured the attention of the people and were perhaps one of the reasons behind choosing it for the background setting for the novel.

Roy has amply and aptly described the lush green landscapes of Kerala in the novel. It is also a state with the highest rate of literacy rate in the country and people enjoy a better standard of living. In addition, it is the first state in India where the communist party formed government in 1957. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was the leader of the party at that time and is mentioned by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* numerous times. Although, many reforms were introduced in the state by the communist party under his leadership but later on there were violent protests and there are hints of that violence in the novel by Roy. After that, the party was divided into two poles as Marxist and Marxist Leninist.

The Naxalite movement remained prone to violence. References to the Naxalite are also found in the novel, *The God of Small Things*. In addition to the political background, a study of

the socio-religious background helps in an understanding of the novel. there was a Under the caste system, society was divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. This classification was based on the social role assigned with each group. In the novel there are still hints of the caste system where marriage is possible within ones own caste. Refusing to accept food and drink from other class of people is also exposed in the novel. In addition, to this, untouchability is also presented in this novel.

Apart from the historical context and caste system, cultural aspects of life in Kerala are also found in the novel. Kathakali is a dance performance of dramatic nature that was derived from rituals being performed at holy temples. In this dance performance, richly adorned and decorated male members in particular costume performed their singing, dancing and drumming skills. They also performed and played Cymbals. As a custom, such performances began at sunset and continued till sunrise. Actors in Kathakali were fully aware of the demands and expectations of their audience and hence they performed accordingly. In Kathakali, drumming was a signal that the actors were about to come and that performance was going to start. It was also deemed to be the call to actors to come on stage.

Actors are the movers who are deemed to be moving from earthly world towards the world of gods. They seem to be praying before gods even when they were out of sight from the stage and audience. Then the singers join the drummer in order to inspire and capture the attention of the audience. As soon as the curtain falls, action begins and it begins to unfold the main course hour-after-hour till the dawn. The action culminates with the death of the evil character. At the culminating movement, the audience also joins in singing and dancing along with eating and drinking as a celebration of the victory of good over evil. This is a conventional ritual that is portrayed by Arundhati Roy in this novel.

15.2.2 Setting and Structure of the Plot:

The return of Ammu to Ayemenem with her twins Rahel and Estha is the **beginning** of the tale. The return of Margaret and Sophie to Ayemenem after the death of Joe, Ammu's illicit love affair with Velutha, Ammu being locked up in the room, Velutha being charged, twins and Sophie's attempt to cross the river constitute the **rising action**. The drowning of Sophie in the river during the attempt to cross the river and reach History House forms the **climax** of the plot. **Falling action** is seen in Velutha's death after he is caught by the police and brutally beaten to death. It also consists of Ammu being thrown away from the house and Estha being sent to his father away from the house and native town. The **resolution** of the plot consists of the return of

twins Rahel and Estha to Ayemenem after 23 years of separation. They fall in love with each other and become united in love.

The narration of *The God of Small Things* is not a linear narration as the incidents move backward and forward in a non-sequential manner. At times, it takes the readers into the past happening and then suddenly jumps back to the present state of affairs. In between, foreshadows of the future are also depicted. For that diverse viewpoints have been kept in mind by Arundhati Roy, sometime childish and at other times mature. This is how the mental process works in human life. Past events have consequences in present that foreshadow future happenings in the immediate present. In the story of human life, paths are not in linear direction and sometimes not even. Rather, they twist in non-linear and uneven fashion. Similarly, the disorientation of mind in reaction to those happenings is also not in line with pre-defined reaction. Further, the concept of reality can also alter its meaning from childhood to adulthood.

In order to understand the main course of action in the true sense, it is imperative to keep in mind that there are two major time frames that have been employed by Arundhati Roy in the novel; one is present and the second one is past. The past time revolves round the year 1969 and the present time is 1992, a gap of 23 years. The whole story unfolds within this time period. At the time of separation, the twins were only seven years old and after going through many tragedies their reunion takes place after 23 years. They are the lone survivors of the family and both are together at their family house in Ayemenem.

15.2.3 Plot Summary:

The events in the novel *The God of Small Things* are depicted in a fragmentary and scattered manner. These are flashbacks and moving forth in between 1969 and 1993. The story revolves around a well-off landowning Syrian Christian family in a small town of Kerala. Most of the story takes place in 1969. And the main event revolves around twins Rahel and Estha, who live with their mother Ammu, their uncle Chacko and their grandmother named Mammachi. Before 1969 in flashback it was revealed that their grandmother Mammachi was married to Pappachi, who was an imperial entomologist. In 1969, Pappachi died and his wife Mammachi became blind. Meanwhile, Chacko went to Oxford and married an English woman there. Her name was Margaret. They had a daughter whose name was Sophie Mol. Later on, Margaret left Chacko and married yet another man, Joe.

Ammu married a man Baba as she tried to escape from the village but her husband turned out to be a bad alcoholic. Then twins were born to them. After their birth, they got separated.

Ammu returned to Ayemenem. In the meanwhile, the Communist party was gaining popularity in Kerala and was posing a threat to the landlords. The family used to live in the neighborhood of untouchables who were deemed inferior. Then again action shifted when Sophie Mol comes to visit Ayemenem. Joe died in the meantime and Chacko invited his former wife Margaret to visit Ayemenem during holidays.

As the story unfolds several incidents are presented. At one point, Baby Kochamma went to police and lodged a false complaint that Velutha tried to rape Ammu. He had also tried to kidnap the children, Rahel and Estha. After the complaint, six policemen came over, caught Velutha and beat him ruthlessly in front of both Rahel and Estha. Meanwhile, Matthew came to know about the innocence of Velutha and he threatened Baby Kochamma. She got terrified and in order to save Ammu; she charged that Velutha had killed Sophie. Velutha dies that night in jail and at the funeral of Sophie Mol, Baby Kochamma tries to convince Chacko to send Ammu out of the house. And at the same time, Ammu was forced to return Estha to Baba. And then the twins were separated from each other for the next 23 years. From that incident on, Estha gave up speaking to anybody altogether. When he turned 31 years of age, Baba brought him back to Ayemenem.

Ammu died when Rahel was only 11 years old. Later on, she married an American. During this period, Rahel lived in Boston but she got divorced. After the divorce, she returned to Ayemenem as she came to know that Estha was back in the town. In this way, the reunion of the twins took place in 1993 after 23 years. Baby Kochamma and her cook spent that entire day in watching TV. The house and inhabitants were in tatters and a mess. History House had become a five-star hotel then.

15.2.4 Return of Rahel and the Car Trip:

The novel opens in the current timeline. We come to know that Rahel has just come back from Boston to Ayemenem after a long time. She is 31 years of age now. It is the season of monsoon. She recollects her memories in a series of flash-back: showing their birth taking place, then their visit to History House, drowning of her cousin and separation from Estha. As Estha was sent to live with his father, the family had fallen apart and the only survivor was Baby Kochamma who was 83 year old. Estha is also there, back from his father's house but he doesn't speak now. He spends all the day in long walks. Rahel's life was also disrupted after getting separated from her brother. The life of Baby Kochamma is also disrupted. At this point, the opening chapter of the novel comes to an end.

Further, the action shifts towards the past. It is about the car ride that took place way back in 1969. It is narrated that the twins along with their mother, uncle and grandmother are traveling in a car towards Cochin. That trip is to take part in *The Sound of Music*. They spend the night over there and then travel towards the airport and pick Sophie and her mother. Then the novelist gives the description about the appearance and different incidents that took place in the life of various characters. The most significant event that is explored is the marriage of Ammu and the birth of twins. Her husband was an alcoholic, she leaves him and returns to her native town Ayemenem. After this event, she says that her life is over. No one in the family is happy the way, she has approached these events especially Baby Kochamma. The car they are riding is a symbol of their prestige, standing and class. Details about their business and parents are also revealed in this part of the narrative. Velutha's character, which later plays a significant role in the story, is also introduced here elaborately.

After that, the action yet again returns to the present time and it takes place in the house of Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma and her cook remain busy in watching TV all the daylong in a filthy house. Rahel watches and observes Estha. She wishes to reconstruct the old childhood connection. Then the trip of the family to the theater is depicted. Chacko drops the family at the show and goes to see the logging. The movie that is being shown has not impressed or captured the attention of the family as they had already seen it. In this chapter Chacko's marriage and his divorce and the death of his ex-wife Margaret's husband is described. In addition, the current family business and its state under communist power and authority are also painted by Arundhati Roy.

After returning to the past and describing certain details, the story again shifts to the present time. Rahel is seen walking and thinking about how her native village Ayemenem has changed over the period of time. During her walk, she comes across a communist leader named Pillai. As they catch up, Rahel recollects her visit to the doctor. In their conversation, Pillai takes out an old photograph in which she is shown along with her brother Estha and Cousin Sophie before her death. It takes the action once again to the past. During that visit, everybody was dressed flamboyantly. When the children met initially, they were not very friendly with each other. Especially Ammu was unhappy with the twins but later on as the children met each other; they became friendly with each other. Then again the action shifts to present time. Rahel is shown trying to approach her brother and childhood memories in a different way.

15.2.5 Present, Past, and Future of the Family:

The narrative of the story again returns to present time. The celebration and amazing welcome are given to Sophie and her mother Margaret when they arrive at Ayemenem. Food is prepared and music is played to welcome them. In the meanwhile, Rahel is becoming fond of her favorite friend Velutha. Eventually, they get into a relationship but are caught. Then, the narration shifts to Rahel is sitting in the garden and thinking about her future. She also remembers the days of her closeness with her brother Estha and her cousin Sophie before her death. She can see at present only her brother Estha, who is in the room but he is unresponsive. She remembers how the family has gone through the tragedy.

First of all, she remembers her cousin Sophie who was drowned during their visit to History House and then the death of her mother Ammu. Because of the events that took place in the past, Estha is unable to speak with anybody. He does not even respond to the love and care shown by his sister Rahel. He only spends his days in walking around. As Rahel sits in the garden, thinking about the past, present and future of the family, she hears the music of Kathakali and in order to change her mood she decides to go there to the temple. After this narration, again the story shifts to the past when Rahel had planned to hide herself along with her brother Estha in an abandoned house across the river. The name of the house was History House. She makes a plan to sneak during an afternoon nap as her mother fell asleep. So she along with her brother and cousin sneaked away. But when they come to know that the boat is not in a condition to be used to cross the river, they decide to come back before their mother wakes up.

After this part, the narrative goes back to current time as Rahel is shown to arrive at the nearby temple to watch the Kathakali performance. All the details of the performance are depicted again. Rahel finds a close similarity between the tale of Kathakali and her family story. Meanwhile, Estha also comes there and they witness the entire performance silently until they come back by dawn. After that, the narration is again turned towards the past when Sophie and her mother is shown sleeping in Chacko's room. Sophie is not sleeping; she is only lying beside her mother and watching her. Then, she comes with the photograph of her mother's wedding with Chacko. Here it is revealed to her how they got married and how her mother left her mother for another man, Joe. After his death, she is again back to the Ayemenem. As both Chacko and Margaret are in close contact because of their daughter Sophie, another tragic scene of the family is described as the dead body of Sophie is shown floating on the water during her sneak with her cousins towards History House.

It is made known to the readers that in the morning the dead body of Sophie was found. Ammu is locked in her room after her illicit relation with Velutha is revealed. Rahel and Estha are missing. The father of Velutha came one day to reveal Ammu's relation with his son. After hearing the event, two things are done. One, Ammu is locked and Baby Kochamma begins plotting how to prevent the family honor. It is made easy, when Sophie is found dead. After his body is found, Baby Kochamma goes to police and claims that Velutha has raped Ammu and tried to kidnap the children. And in the aftermath, he has killed Sophie. In the meanwhile, when Chacko and Margaret come back home after checking the airline ticket arrangement, they find the lifeless body of their daughter. The section ends with the note that death of Sophie is actually the death of family business. Due to sorrow and grief, Chacko is unable to look after the factory and run it effectively. In order to pay the bills, their family land is sold and Chacko is shown shifting to Canada.

15.2.6 Betrayal, Legacy, and End of Everything:

The narrative then is shifted towards the betrayal of Velutha by his own father. Velutha is shown to be in a city to arrange for the parts needed to fix the factory machine when he is told by a factory worker to go into the house to see Mammachi. When he goes directly to the house, she encounters him in a bad temper and anger. She even spits at him and threatens to kill him if he does not leave forever. Finding himself helpless, he decides to take help from Comrade Pillai. So, he visits his house but he straight away refuses to get into the matter. After his refusal, Velutha swims across the river and reaches into History House. In the meantime, Rahel, Estha and Sophie sail a boat to reach the same place. On the way, the boat overturned and Sophie is lost forever while the twins are able to reach the History House.

Once again, the narration comes back to the present time as Estha is seen sitting in his room on a rainy day. Baby Kochamma is in her own room while her cook is busy in watching TV. Baby Kochamma hears the sounds of both Rahel and Estha as they return home after seeing the performance at the temple. On that very night, Rahel comes to Estha's room when Baby Kochamma is asleep. Seeing Rahel, Estha remembers the day when he had to leave her and his mother. He also remembers the brutal beating that Velutha received from the police officer at History House. When the twins were found, the officer was sure that the entire tale of kidnapping was not true. After the investigation at the police station and keeping in view the figure of History House, it is revealed that the story or version of Baby Kochamma is not based on the actual tale.

Once the police officer is sure of the matter, he calls Baby Kochamma and informs her that he is going to initiate criminal proceedings against her for leveling false allegations. When Ammu comes to know of the entire tale, she tries to set things in the right direction by visiting the police station. However, Chacko throws Ammu out of the house and sends Estha to his father; away from his native home and town.

15.2.7 Art of Characterization:

The first thing that Arundhati Roy has employed in order to discern among different characters is the dressing sense and style. It is very much obvious in case of Sophie Mol and Rahel when they come in contact for the first time. When she steps out, the first thing that is made known to the readers is the way she is carrying herself. It is depicted by a novelist as, “She walked down the runway, the smell of London in her hair. Yellow bottoms of bells flapped backwards around her ankles. Long hair floated out from under her straw hat”. It is a typical dressing of London clothes in which her hips are clearly indicated though she was a kid yet. On the other hand, the dressing of Rahel is typical of Ayemenem town as is described by Arundhati Roy as, “In her stiff lace dress and her fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo, Rahel looked like an Airport Fairy with appalling taste”.

The difference of dressing sense and style is much obvious from the comment of Rahel’s brother as he depicts the clothing of Rahel as, “Estha – with some basis, it must be admitted – said that Rahel looked stupid in her Airport Frock. Rahel slapped him, and he slapped her back.” It is also indicative of the culture and social setups from where the characters come. Other than dressing, names are also very important. The names of the characters are not merely meant for identification, it is also meant for what they are and what they represent. The first name that we come across is Baby Kochamma, whose actual name is Navomi Ipe. But everybody calls her Baby keeping in view her age and persona as aunt. The very name Baby indicates how childish and immature she is.

Mol was not the part of Sophie’s name. It just indicates her as a little kid. As we are aware that she dies at a tender age and she will always be remembered as a child hence Mol is affixed with her name which has a significant role in defining her persona with respect to her role in the novel. The concept of names even gets more interesting when it comes to nicknames being given to Rahel and Estha. Estha is described in the novel as, “Elvis the Pelvis Nun” and Rahel as, “Ambassador S. Insect.” These names indicate the sweet and loveable nature of the characters. The twins are deprived of surname or family name and this affected their identity and

legitimacy. Throughout the novel, the twins are addressed as Rahel and Estha without their family name. They are playing their role in silence as having no significant role. It is also made known to the readers that at the end of the novel, they are left with no legacy as they are useless and mean nothing to the world in which they live for decades. It appears that they came to this world only to suffer and nothing valuable or worth mentioning happens to them.

Lastly, the physical appearance of the character is deemed important. The narrator focuses and gives due attention to the physical description of the characters. Sophie Mol has appeared to be glamorous the way she is dressed up. In addition, her physical features are also a sort of temptation for attention as far as her cousin Rahel and Estha are concerned.

15.2.8 Protagonists of the Novel:

Rahel and Estha are the protagonists of the novel *The God of Small Things*. We get to know the story through the eyes of Rahel as she is more involved in the events. She is more active and has much to do with the way events unfold. As far as the personas of both the heroes are concerned, they are in harmony and balance. Rahel is more active while her brother Estha is quieter and more serious by nature. Estha is more refined and a better person as compared to his sister Rahel. In addition, unlike her brother she always wants to be in the world of imagination and far away from the world of reality. .

The nature of concerns and fears both have are also different. Rahel is anxious and concerned about whether her mother still loves her or not. On the other hand, the concerns of Estha are more serious and have far-reaching consequences than Rahel's. Rahel tries to hide herself but Estha is always ready to face the reality. In spite of all these differences in nature, character and insight, the connection and bond between them is very strong, which continues even after a separation of 23 years. We come to know that Rahel comes from Boston after her divorce merely because she has come to know that Estha is back at Ayemenem.

Rahel:

Being a child and a twin, she has a very close and loving relation with her brother Estha. This connection is as strong as is depicted in the novel that they are termed as "me". The language and telephonic intimacy were unique to each other, which only they can understand and comprehend. She is very sentimental and sensitive and easily gets hurt by little things in life. She is also very fond of her mother with whom she shares a close emotional bond.

Estha:

Same is the case with Rahel's brother Estha, who has a very intimate and close relationship with his sister Rahel. The bond means more than anything else to him. He can communicate with his sister on mutual terms without speaking. They live in their own unique world. Most of his family members deem him as a practical and less talkative man. His life is more tragic as compared to his sister. He is forced to live with his father away from his mother, sister, home and town. All these things lead him to be a man who remains invisible and quiet and has no interest in anybody or anything. He lives in himself. When the reunion with his sister is set, his inner stillness is again disturbed and he again becomes close and intimate with his sister.

Ammu:

As a young girl and as an adult, Ammu appears to be deprived of having a happy and contented life she deserves. Her parents had an unhappy marriage and they moved towards Ayemenem where she is brought up.. That is why she always wishes to escape and during her visit to Calcutta to attend a marriage ceremony, she finds the man of her choice and marries him. But her choice seems to be inappropriate as Baba, her husband turned out to be an alcoholic and they could not have a happy relationship. She again comes back to Ayemenem but this time with twins. After that, she becomes even more frustrated than before and when she finds Velutha, she is attracted towards him. That attraction results in 13 blissful nights with the untouchable Velutha. These blissful nights eventually turn out to be dreadful and culminated in the deaths of so many people and unhappiness, which ruins everything towards the end. She herself dies in at the age of 31.

Velutha:

Another significant character in the novel is Velutha who is presented as an untouchable who enjoys lots of privileges because of his close association with the landlord family, Ipe. When he was a only 11 years old, he became famous for his inherent abilities and skills. That is why he is sent to school and also to a German carpenter to polish his skills. He was a young, confident and skillful person. But the fate takes a twist and he is entrapped by Ammu in an illicit and forbidden love affair. Ammu is saved in order to protect the family name but he is forced to die a wretched death in the jail.

Baby Kochamma:

She is the daughter of a Syrian Christian priest. When she was 18, she fell in love with the friend of her father, an Irish monk. His name was Father Mulligan. As she was full of youth

and beauty, she captures the attention of the young monk but nothing comes out of it. She even converted to a Catholic school of thought and joined a convent to be in close contact with her love. This plan also collapses and she was unable to catch her love. Out of discomfort, she leaves convent and goes to America. She gets a diploma in Ornamental Gardening and comes back to Ayemenem. But the flame of love is still burning in her heart. After her return, she spent almost 50 years in gardening as her hobby. Although she is 83 years old, she is a vain woman. She is still in love with Father Mulligan even after his death.

Sophie Mol:

Sophie is the daughter of Chacko and Margaret. She lived only for seven years before she drowned while crossing a river in a boat with her cousins Rahel and Estha. But the impact she leaves on the family continues to affect the lives of all the members of Ipe family. She only appears when she comes to Ayemenem. She was dressed in a glamorous dress when she first appears in the novel. She is always seen as wearing yellow bell-bottom pant. She has a “go-go” bag that she always carried with her. She has dark hair while the color of her eyes is light. She is half English and half Indian. T

Baba:

Baba is yet another character who makes appearance in the novel. He is the father of Rahel and Estha. He is an abusive choice of Ammu who leaves her when the twins are born to her. Although Estha is left with his drunken father, there is no considerable relation between them. When Estha was with him, he stopped talking and became unresponsive to others and things around him. He was a person when drunk could not control his sense and mind. His wife Ammu left him forever when he went on to offer her to his boss in order to save his job of security. His father was a well-off man who gave his son and bride a fancy wedding. His father died before the birth of twins.

Chacko:

Chacko is the husband of Margaret and father of Sophie and brother of Ammu. In his youth, he was lucky enough to have all the love and attention of the family but later on he has faced difficult circumstances. The collapse of marriage burdened him as also the separation from his daughter, and after her death his pain is manifold. He deems himself to be a scholar and a man of high esteem but he only manages his mother’s factory as a form of livelihood.

Margaret Kochamma:

Margaret Kochamma is the former wife of Chacko and mother of Sophie Mol who died at the age of seven. Margaret was British and was a waitress in a hotel when she met Chacko who was studying at Oxford. Both fell in love with each other and got married. This was also the ultimate wish of her parents. But soon after the marriage, she realized that Chacko is not the right person to live with. During her pregnancy, she fell in love with another man Joe and after the birth of Sophie, her only daughter, she got divorced from Chacko. Later when Joe dies, she again comes back to live in Ayemenem and she is welcomed warmly by the family at the airport. But she was not aware of the fact that this decision of spending holidays will be what she will always regret.

Kochu Maria, Thomas Matthew and K.N.M. Pillai:

Kochu Maria another figure in the novel used to live with Baby Kochamma in her house in Ayemenem. Although she is a cook and maid but she has been spoiled to the extent that she spends the entire day just watching TV with Baby Kochamma.

Thomas Matthew is the Police Inspector who leads the investigation against Velutha on the charges leveled against him by Baby Kochamma. During the investigation, he comes to know that Baby Kochamma was misleading him and the police about the charges levied against Velutha. However, he protects the name of the family as well as the police and lets an innocent Velutha die in the jail only because he was an untouchable.

K.N.M. Pillai is a communist political leader who too makes his appearance in the novel. He has a printing press.. He is a man with political ambitions. Although he gets lots of labeling work for printing from Chacko, the latter makes him look like a villain in the eyes of the factory workers.

There are numerous other characters who take part in the narration and events of the novel in one way or the other. These include Joe, Mammachi, Reverend Ipe, Aleyooty Ammachi, Father Mulligan, Miss Mitten, Torch man, Taxi driver, nurse, Kari Saipu, Comrade Pillai's, Patriarch of Antioch, VellyaPaapen, Latha, Lenin, Kuttappen, Kottayam, Kalyani, Chella, AdoorBasi, Dr. Verghese Verghese, and Mr. Hollickand others.

15.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the Unit you should be able to:

- understand the background of the novel.
 - appreciate the characterization skills of the author.
 - understand the different types of characters in the novel.
 - comprehend the socio-political background to the novel.
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15.4 Glossary

Booker Prize: A literary prize awarded each year for the best novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland.

Communism: A theory or system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

Imperative: something that is very important, essential or necessary

Marxism: The socialist and communist theory of the followers of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: a radical, revolutionary political philosophy that aims to capture state power, introduce a dictatorship of the proletariat, and then progress to communism.

Naxalite: A name given to several Maoist-oriented and militant insurgent and separatist groups that have operated intermittently in India since the mid-1960s.

Entomologist: A scientist who studies insects.

Flamboyantly: Gaudily, Ostentatiously, Colourfully

Culminate: Conclude, End

15.5 Sample Questions

15.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *The God of Small Things* is a/an _____

(a) Biographical novel

(b) Gothic novel

- (c) Semi autobiographical novel (d) Epistolary novel
2. The novel *The God of Small Things* was published in _____.
- (a) 1979 (b) 1997
(c) 1897 (d) 2007
3. For how many years did Rahel and Estha remain isolated from each other?
- (a) 13 years (b) 30 years
(c) 23 years (d) 15 years
4. In which year did *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy receive Booker Prize?
- (a) 1999 (b) 2007
(c) 2010 (d) 1997
5. Arundhati Roy received Sydney Peace Prize in the year _____.
- (a) 2004 (b) 1904
(c) 2008 (d) 2010
6. Which of the following is not a character in *The God of Small Things*?
- (a) Rahel (b) Baby
(c) Velutha (d) Aziz
7. Who was the mother of Estha and Rahel?
- (a) Margaret (b) Ammu
(c) Baby Kochamma (d) Sophie
8. What did Baby Kochamma study in college?
- (a) English Literature (b) Marxism
(c) Architecture (d) Ornamental Gardening
9. How old was Sophie Mol when she died?
- (a) 9 (b) 7
(c) 11 (d) 8
10. What film does the family go to watch in Cochin?
- (a) The latest hit from Bollywood
(b) The Sherlock Holmes Movie
(c) James Bond Movie
(d) The Sound of Music

15.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss *The God of Small Things* as a political text.

2. Describe the significance of the name Baby Kochamma.
3. Give a brief character sketch of Ammu.
4. Comment of 'the evils come out of evil' with special reference to *The God of Small Things*.
5. Discuss *The God of Small Things* as a semi autobiographical novel.

15.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Comment on Arundhati Roy's art of characterization.
 2. Discuss in detail the relationship between Estha and Rahel.
 3. Comment of the setting and plot structure of the novel.
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15.6 Suggested Readings

1. Balvannanadhan, Aida. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2007.
2. Bhatt, Indira; Indira Nityanandam. *Explorations: Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999.
3. Dodiya, Jaydipsingh; Joya Chakravarty. *The Critical Studies of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999.
4. Pathak, R.S. *The Fictional World of Arundhati Roy*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2001.
5. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. India: IndiaInk, 1997

Unit – 16: *The God of Small Things*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

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16.0 Introduction

The novel *The God of Small Things* is more about family than anything else. In the novel, various relationships are described and portrayed. The bond between a brother and a sister, a wife and a husband, an uncle and a nephew or niece, and grandparents and their grandchildren is inextricably linked to the central action of the plot in the novel. It is also crucial to know how the family is held together and how it gets disintegrated. Things were once so linked that they appeared to be one, yet all was lost and destroyed in the end. In all circumstances, however petrifying, unconditional allegiance to the family values and its name is viewed as necessary by each and every member of the family. Compulsory affiliation with the family and its name is regarded as essential by every member of the family in any situation. One has to love and respect others even when the person is suffering in personal life. The obligation of family has to be fulfilled many times unconditionally and sometimes at the cost of putting one self in harm.

16.1 Objectives

After going through the Unit, you will be able to:

- know the themes and the narrative technique
- realize the present and past embedded in the novel
- evaluate the actions of the characters and their unexpected consequences
- comprehend the literary devices used in the novel.
- critically appreciate the novel.

16.2 *The God of Small Things*: Themes, Narrative Techniques, Critical Appreciation

16.2.1 Themes:

16.2.1.1 Society and Class System:

Apart from the family's norms and traditions, everyone is also bound to follow the norms and conditions that society imposes on him or her. Society and its formation are based on class and status, which in the novel is stratified by the caste system. Though untouchability is banned, it has many features that are unfortunately embedded in the social fabric of the society, and it is reflected through the plight of Velutha. Velutha is punished heavily and beaten to death merely because he belonged to the untouchable caste. Despite lack of proof in the investigation that failed to support the baseless charges of Baby Kochamma, an innocent man is hopelessly made to die to save the honour of the family and of Ammu. Both the characters, Ammu and Velutha, are engaged in a relationship, but only the untouchable is punished. By this depiction, Roy exposes the double standards of the society when it comes to justice.

16.2.1.2 Embedded Past and Present:

After going through the novel, the readers come to know that it is not in linear or in an orderly fashion. The action moves between the present and the past abruptly. Sometimes, it takes us back to 1969 and suddenly jumps back to 1992. The moving back and forward are the two important terms and techniques that the novelist has employed in narrating the events. The novel's events are narrated through a series of memories, prior events, and flash-backs. Dexterously Arundhati Roy has put together the fragmented pieces from the lives of characters, both from the past and present, to project their anticipated future. The past cannot be separated from the present and the future. The events of the past have consequences on the present and future. Ammu chooses a bad husband, and the result is a divorce. Margaret did the same, and it had resulted in similar consequences. Ammu's relationship and illicit bonding with Velutha caused Velutha's death and her children too did the same in the end.

16.2.1.3 Guilt, Blame, and Penalty:

Guilt, blame, and punishment are yet other recurrent themes in the novel. Numerous tragic and horrible scenes happen in the course of the novel. As many as three divorces occur, which represent a social and familial catastrophe. Estha is molested, Sophie is drowned, and Velutha is beaten to death. All these events are really tragic in nature and lead towards a collapse of the family and hence everything in the novel appears to be beyond the control of the characters. Events keep happening as if they are pre-destined to happen. Certain things come into our lives due to the certain wrongdoing by us at some point of time as retribution. Nevertheless, we find consolation in blaming others for these acts, ignoring all that was enacted by the self. For example, when Sophie drowns, her mother blames Estha for the act. Chacko, her father, blamed

Ammu for the drowning of his daughter. In addition, the bad choices of Ammu, Margaret, and Rahel led to divorce in their respective lives. The wrong act committed by Ammu by having an illicit relationship results in the deaths of Sophie and Velutha. Thus, the narrative has a series of such wrong choices, blames, tragedies, penalties and finally never ending guilt in the lives of characters.

16.2.1.4 Fear and Danger:

Fear and associated danger are yet other recurrent themes in *The God of Small Things*. All the characters face either fear or face unforeseen dangers at certain point in their lives. The danger is so potent that everything is ruined at the end of the event. When Estha is molested, he is afraid of the consequences. Rahel fears that her mother loves her no more. The fear of both leads them to plan an escape to History House. Sophie Mol, who was their cousin, feared that she might be asked about the whereabouts of the twins, so she planned to go with them. The fears of all three characters culminate in the death of Sophie, in the form of drowning. After the episode of Ammu and Velutha, Baby Kochamma fears the consequences of defamation or stigma on the family name. She further fears of Ammu's reaction, so she is locked up in a room. Furthermore, the fears of Baby Kochamma led her to file a fake and misleading case against Velutha. Margaret fears about the future with a lazy and sluggish husband and leaves him, but even then, she is left alone and desolate at the end. Despite all the characters' efforts in the novel, they have faced the same consequences and outcomes that they tried to avert.

16.2.1.5 Sense of Identity:

The sense of belongingness and identity is essential and is a crucial idea in the novel. In the course of events being narrated, members of the family are in search of identity and belongingness. The most significant part of identity is associated with Rahel and Estha, who share an equivalent identity. They are born twins, and they are together deemed as a whole. They are physically two, but their feelings and emotions are similar to a significant degree. They love and care for each other until they are seven years old. When they are separated from each other, Estha becomes quiet and unresponsive, while Rahel faces tragic events in her life that include her mother's demise and a divorce from her husband in Boston. Ammu's wrongdoing with Velutha is being hidden as their name and identity should not be defamed. Family is very important to them as a source of belongingness and identity, and they are willing to risk everything for it. That is why Baby Kochamma goes to the extreme end to save the name of the family. The police

officer too let her go ahead with her plan, even though he had become aware that the case was baseless and Velutha was innocent.

16.2.1.6 Death and Destruction:

Death and destruction are some other key ideas in the novel. Right from the beginning till the end, death and destruction are linked with the events in the novel. First of all, we have the death of Sophie when she drowned. Joe, the second husband of Margaret, also dies in the course of the novel. If he had not died, perhaps Margaret and Sophie would not have come to Ayemenem, and the destruction of the family might have been averted. Ammu's love affair resulted in the brutal and remorseful death of Velutha, who belongs to the untouchable caste. Finally, the death of Ammu also incites sympathy and remorse among readers. The deaths of these characters are closely associated with the destruction and suffering of their families. At the end of the novel, death and destruction lead to the end and destruction of everything. At the end, the Ipe family, as well as its belongingness and identity, are completely destroyed.

16.2.1.7 Romance and Sexuality:

One of the most important themes that frequently appears in the novel is romantic love and physical relations. The chief example of this sort of romance and relationship is that of Ammu and Velutha, who spend as many as two weeks together. It has tragic consequences as Sophie and Velutha lose their lives soon after their relationship gets exposed. Ammu's twins repeat the same act after twenty- three years. Rahel and Estha had been very close to each other since childhood, but they were separated at the age of seven. They meet after twenty-three years, and we come to know at the end of the novel that their reunion and intimacy resulted in a forbidden and illicit relationship.

16.2.1 Narrative Techniques and Literary Devices:

In order to explore diverse themes such as class strife, political and cultural dynamics of Indian history and tradition, forbidden love, betrayal, and tragic representation of various characters, Roy has used numerous narrative tools and techniques in her novel *The God of Small Things*. These tools assist her in narrating and depicting the events the way she wishes to project them. The chief narrative techniques that she has employed are the utilization of various literary as well as linguistic techniques. The use of appropriate phrases, apt punctuation, and diction are suited for the narration. In addition, she has deployed similes, metaphors, de-familiarization, irony, repetitive phrases, epigrams, wit, and flashbacks in the narrative. Although the novel is in prose, she employs poetic techniques such as rhythm, alliteration, internal rhyme, and assonance.

16.2.2.1 Third Person Narrator:

The first and foremost thing that is clear about the narrative technique of Arundhati Roy is the use of a third-person narrator. The story is not narrated by any of the characters in the novel, but rather it is told by someone who is at a distance. The third person narrator develops the story through bits and pieces of information supplied with during the course of narration. The narrator only provides a little information about the characters. Lots of information is missing about the characters who are involved in the events of the story. For example, we have no specific hints about Baby Kochamma's diaries. We are also unaware of the private fears and apprehensions of Estha. In addition, Arundhati Roy has utilized a free indirect discourse technique in which a limited number of characters take part in actual events while others stay outside the main narration. Though the story revolves round Rahel and Estha, the narrator has managed multiple points of view and experiences, which have been juxtaposed into multiple sub-plots.

16.2.2.2 Use of Alliteration:

Arundhati Roy makes constant use of alliteration in the novel, which gives it a poetic touch on the one hand and enriches her language and narrative mechanism on the other. In addition, the use of alliteration is not mere decoration to enhance her language or style; it has a purpose in *The God of Small Things*. For example: it is narrated in the novel: "They knew the slippery stone steps (thirteen) before the slimy mud began" (p. 203). Here, the use of "slippery stone steps" has a musical and rhythmic quality. In addition, it signifies the fact that both Rahel and Estha are aware of the secrets that are associated with the river and its nearby area. Very artfully, Arundhati Roy has connected three words with association and connection to give a wider image.

She connects stones and steps and gives them the concept that these are slippery. It gives depth and music simultaneously, which catches the attention of the sensory and thematic senses of the readers and critics. Another instance of alliteration is "Finger-colored fingers fought the ferns" (p. 202). Here the "f" sound is repeated, which indicates Arundhati Roy's experience as a writer and her command over the language. In order to probe more richness and depth as far as the use of alliteration is concerned; another example can be quoted as a part of the narrative technique: "She was hemmed in by humid hips..." (P.139). Here, the sole purpose of Arundhati Roy is to create music and rhythm; otherwise, there is very little relevance as far as "humid hips"

are concerned. So, at times, she has sacrificed the concept and meaning for the sake of music, charm, and rhythm in her language and expression.

16.2.2.4 Use of Irony and Metaphors:

Arundhati Roy is a master of dehumanizing metaphors in her novel, *The God of Small Things*. Rahel is shown excited like a mosquito on a leash. On the other hand, the pale day moon has been depicted as having as big a belly as a beer drinker. In tune with irony, a similar application is employed aptly by Roy when she narrates, “‘Congratulations,’ Chacko said,’ spoken like a true bourgeoisie” (p. 61). The irony is that in this comment, Ammu has been depicted as bourgeoisie by Chacko, but when we analyze his own character, it is a typical character of an upper-class person who is boastful of everything that is there in Ayemenem. He claims that whatever you have is also mine and that whatever I have is solely mine. Mammachi is described as a lazy figure in the novel when she is described as, “‘She’s the sleeping partner” (p. 102). However, the irony is that she is the one who started the factory from zero, and now she has been characterized as the sleeping partner. Situational irony can also be seen in character relationships. With the passage of time, the relationship evolves. Throughout the narrative, Rahel and Estha are close as sisters and brothers, but they transform into lovers towards the conclusion.

16.2.2.5 Use of Symbolism:

Arundhati Roy has also utilized symbols in her novel that enrich her narrative tools and add depth and meaning. The most significant symbol that we come across in the novel is the moth of Pappachi. He discovered it when he was a chief entomologist, and he deemed it a new species, but later it was found that it was not actually a new species. Even though he discovered it, it was not named after Pappachi. At this, he deems it the greatest failure and withdraws from life. According to the narrator, this is obvious throughout the lives of each and every member of the family. It started with the rage and domestic abuse of Pappachi and culminated as a symbol of fear, anger, and happiness in the life of Rahel in particular and in the lives of other members in general. Whenever she sees herself surrounded by problems, she deems them as “unusually dense dorsal tufts”, and when there is some peace, she thinks that the moth is away for a while, if not forever.

The following symbol that Arundhati Roy has employed is that of the Ipe family factory that was situated next to the house. It is named the Paradise Pickle, and the pickle is a symbol of preservation. Pickling fruits and vegetables are symbolic of preserving them for a long time in order to use them later. Similarly, on the other hand, the Ipe family is trying to preserve their past,

especially with respect to the rift divide between landlords and workers in the past with death of Sophie Mol, as well as the distinction between acceptable or mingle-worthy versus untouchable or outcaste. Banana jam that is prepared in a pickle factory is also suggestive of a symbol, as it is illegal to sell. It was because it could be categorized as either a jelly or jam. Rahel tries to connect all these episodes to her family life and suffering, which ultimately leads to complete destruction and collapse towards the end.

The subsequent symbolic use of Rahel's toy watch, which she always liked to wear in her childhood and which shows the same time whenever she casts a glance at it. Actually, it is symbolic of time and its value and significance as far as the novel is concerned. The first image in this regard is at the time when it does not work the way we expect or want it to. In the lives of all the members in general and in case of Rahel and Estha in particular, a few moments have encompassed and changed the entire outlook of their lives. Just a single moment destroys the life of Sophie as well. Velutha's life is also taken away in a short span of time. The marriages of Rahel, Ammu, Chacko, and Margaret also lasted for a short span of time. On the other hand, during the separation of Rahel and Estha, there were 23 years, and we know nothing of what they did during that period. It seems as if time froze during that period.

16.2.2.7 Autobiographical Tone:

The novel has a clear autobiographical tone. Like Ammu and Baba and Margaret and Chacko, the parents of Arundhati Roy were also divorced when she was only two years of age. So, divorce serves an exact point of departure for her and her characters, but the tragedy is also shared between them at a tender age. Rahel, Estha, and Sophie had to face separation of their parents at a tender age, and Arundhati Roy faced it at the age of two years. Rahel and Estha had to shift with their mother: Arundhati Roy also had to shift with her mother. Like Rahel, Arundhati Roy also has had a brother. Ammu, along with her kids, lives in a small town, Ayemenem, which is situated in Kerala. Likewise, Arundhati Roy also moved with her mother and brother to Kerala after the divorce of her parents. So, the setting, as well as the events of the novel, are much the same as it was in the personal life of the novelist.

16.2.3 Critical Appreciation:

16.2.3.1 Genre:

The God of Small Things is a family drama of a fictional nature. The readers come across the tragedy that takes place in the lives of the characters, especially Rahel and Estha and their mother. This becomes evident when Sophie Mol dies; the reaction of the entire family shows that

the entire family is involved in the matter. Not only were they involved in that case, but it has had tremendous consequences as far as the effect of her death with respect to her family is concerned. It was also evident when the entire family went to greet Margaret and Sophie Mol at the airport. When Ammu has an illicit affair with Velutha, the entire family feels concerned and tries to save the family's name. In addition, the elders' actions have consequences for their kids and other family members. In addition, it has literary relevance as well. The novelist has dealt with the psyche of the characters who are involved in the story.

16.2.3.2 Significance of Title:

The title of the novel is significant as it represents *The God of Small Things*, the book. It has multiple perspectives as far as diverse characters are concerned. For Ammu, it is to form an attachment to Velutha, whom she loves a lot, in spite of the fact that he belongs to the untouchable class. She is well aware of the fact that she will never be able to get him, but as he was like God to her, she goes to every length to keep him as her loved one. Even in her dreams, she has Velutha in her arms. When she wakes up from her dream, she has her kids around her, and she is sure they are aware of the entire tale. "She knew who he was—the God of Loss, the God of Small Things. Of course, she did" (P.71). As far as the small things in the title are concerned, they are also related to the same love affair. Both Ammu and Velutha are aware that big things cannot materialize in real life and most importantly in their relationships, so they are satisfied with the small things right now. Instead of having each other as legally secured partners, they were satisfied with temporary and physical relations outside of marriage. "Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively, they stuck to the small things. The big things never lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So, they stuck to the small things" (68). In addition, it is important to note that small things are significant as far as the events of the story are concerned. These small things contribute to big things in the lives of the characters. Small things have major consequences in the lives of characters, as is seen in case of Sophie Mol, Rahel, and Estha in particular.

16.2.3.3 Setting:

The novel is set in a small town called Ayemenem, which is situated in Kerala. Apart from the spatial place, the temporal setting shifts between past and present time. There is a flashback time and again during the narration. At times, it is set in the past, and in the next moment, it comes to the present. The time is 1969 in the past and 1992 in the present time. The major part of the novel is set in 1969, which was a time of change and acceptance of communism,

especially in Kerala. But there are characters who do not embrace and adopt the change, like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi in the novel. On the other hand, there are Rahel and Estha, who accept social rules and change. Rahel likes Velutha holding a communist flag. The relationship between Ammu, Chacko, and Velutha with respect to change was a bit complex. They were restrained with social completion on one hand and ready to rebel against them on the other hand.

Chacko declares himself as a follower of Marxism, whereas Ammu and Velutha have forbidden relations. But when the setting is set at the present time in 1992, the entire scene and environment of Ayemenem are totally different. There is peace everywhere, and there is no conflict or tension either on political grounds or among different groups based on the caste system. What happens in the past is what is lived only in memories and in the past. Baby Kochamma and her cook remain busy watching TV all day long. Baby Kochamma's garden has turned into a paradise of weeds and moss. The river which was unstoppable when Sophie Mol drowned in it has become very calm and silent. It is the depiction of peace that is followed by the trauma of the past and the tragic events that took place in the past.

16.2.3.4 Tone:

As the story of the novel takes place between 1969 and 1992, so the tone of the novel is a combination of childhood and maturity. But in no way is it specified that childhood is associated with fun and adulthood is linked with the maturity of language and tone. As the story shifts between the past and present, so does the tone of the novel. At times, the tone and language are like a song, music, and rhythmic, but at other times, it has symbolic meaning and depth in tone and expression. In between music and rhythmic tones, there are serious consequences for such tones. We come to know that twins meet after a long separation at the age of thirty one. But on the other hand, Ammu, their mother, dies at the age of thirty one. But here, the rhyme is dark and it is narrated by the narrator as "Not Old. Not Young. But at viable die-able age". Likewise, the rhythmic tone used to describe Sophie Mol is also tragic in tone rather than producing music, such as, "special child-sized coffin," and "Satin lined. Brass handle shined". Hence, the tone and the characters are a mixture of both maturity and childhood. But kids remain no more kids even at the age of seven in the novel.

16.2.3.5 Multiple Perspectives:

One of the most amazing things about the novel, *The God of Small Things* is the narration or perspective that shifts from one to another character. It takes into consideration the story of

each character and its personal history that is relevant within the tale. The narration of the events is so inter-animating that the story seems to be each character's story, but it does not, however, mean that each character is the protagonist. The major perspective is given through the point of view of Rahel in the novel. Very artistically, Roy has attached a back story to each character, which is significant in order to comprehend his or her present state. The second important aspect with regard to Roy's style is that of a non-linear narrative, which means there is no sequential order among events. It jumps between the past and present. Flashbacks play a key role in this regard. The affiliation of the back story is yet another tool that has assisted Arundhati Roy in connecting the past and present.

16.2.3.6 Plot Analysis:

The plot of the novel can be analyzed by keeping in mind the various stages that present the sequential order of the events. It is much different from the order of the events that are there in the actual plot of the novel. The first phase can be termed the anticipated phase, in which the protagonists Rahel and Estha are stuck in a car on their way to the airport to meet Margaret and Sophie Mol. It was a hot day, and they wanted to get out of the car and watch some movies that would fill their anticipation, hopes, and aspirations. What is going on does not match their aspirations. It is followed by a dream phase as they set out to see a movie. *The Sound of Music* is always a relishing activity for both the kids in their childhood. They have seen it numerous times, and they love it. They have all the songs from the movie in their hearts. Rahel wants to preserve all the melody and sweetness it has to keep it going in the future in her mind and heart. This was perhaps the last thing she and other family members had with respect to joy and happiness.

Then comes the frustration phase; things change a great deal without any alarm and warning in this phase. Estha is molested in the movie theatre. Rahel misbehaves with her mother, and she has a fear that she will no longer love her. Everybody is focused on Sophie. The bad experiences have turned things wrong for both the protagonists. Fear and apprehension begin to mount in their minds, which will come true to some extent in the future. It is followed by the most violent stage of the novel, which can be called the nightmare phase. Here, the illicit relationship between Ammu and Velutha is revealed. Velutha is caught by the police. He is charged with rape and kidnapping. Sophie Mol drowned in an attempt to cross the river and reach History House with her cousins Rahel and Estha. Velutha is beaten so severely and brutally by the police that he dies in jail. Baby Kochamma locks Ammu in the house so that she could not go out to see or meet Velutha anymore.

After this we reach the very last stage or phase, which is aptly termed as the death or destruction phase. In this stage, the entire events of the tragic sort have culminated. Here we are informed that Ammu is locked up, Estha is sent to live with his father Baba, and Velutha dies in police custody. Estha felt guilty at his death because he had condemned him on the order of Baby Kochamma. At his death, Estha feels ashamed and guilty for what he has done to him. Ammu also dies. These events are related to death. But the destruction that these events bring about is far deeper than mere physical death. The family loses the good name and fame. Kids lose their innocence and childhood. Loved ones are separated from each other. Estha and Rahel are separated from each other, which continues for the next twenty three years. Rahel was also separated from Ammu, even though they were living in the same town of Ayemenem.

16.2.3.7 Character Analysis:

The major characters in the novel belong to the same family and apparently have a loving bond, but that is not always the case. We lack the spirit of sacrifice for fellow members of the family. When it comes to sacrificing themselves for others, they become selfish and live for themselves instead of others or their family. It becomes much more evident in the case of Ammu, who does not care for either her children or the honor of the family when she spends thirteen nights in illegitimate relationship with Velutha. Her thinking and physical desire are more important to her than her family. Ammu also hurts her children numerous times, not only through her behaviour but also through her words. It is also evident from the attitude of Rahel when she speaks to her mother in an abusive manner. So the attitude and detestation that they learn from their mother is used against her. Instead of loving her kids unconditionally, she has done things and uttered words that are not in line with the standard of decency.

Most of the characters in the novel are drawn from life: they represent the times and the place but they are also individual characters at the same time. The familial setting against the socio-political background is used to present realistic characters who play their part in the plot. As the novel is semi autobiographical, we can find the autobiographical element in the portrayal of character too.

16.2.3.8 Thematic Analysis:

The God of Small Things is a novel that centers around a pair of twins. It narrates various events that take place in their lives, especially at a tender age. The story is so compelling that it captivates both readers and critics. Innocence is lost in the novel in two layers. At first stage, when things are poisoned by the relationship between Ammu and Velutha, they are further

compounded by the relationship that later on is constructed between Rahel and Estha. In case of the second layer, the innocence of the twins is neglected by the other characters in the novel, primarily by their own mother and family members.

The novel's most important concept is "small things." "Small things" have great significance in the lives of individuals. Small things have great and far-reaching consequences in the lives of the participants in the novel. In addition, a few hours or moments can change the entire perception of things. This is true as far as the novel *The God of Small Things* is concerned. Ammu and Velutha spent two blissful weeks together, but soon after that, they faced the greatest tragedies of their lives. Velutha is brutally tortured and put to death. Ammu is locked and is separated from her twins. Sophie Mol and her cousins go on a boat to reach History House, but Sophie Mol gets lost on the way. The twins are separated and it lasts twenty three years.

16.2.3.9 Loss of Innocence:

The protagonists of the novel, Rahel and Estha, start as innocent young children but they remain children or innocent no more. Incidents in their lives and the passage of time both snatch their innocence before time. At the young age of seven, they had to face separation from their mother, cousin, and above all from each other. One is sent to live with the drunkard father. The other is sent to live away from mother, father and brother and she suffers even worse, though at a different level from her brother. The sense of death, guilt, and shame they faced during the early childhood remains with them even after twenty three long years. They witnessed the death of Velutha, Ammu, and Sophie. They deem themselves responsible for the untimely death of their cousin Sophie Mol, who drowned when she was with them in the boat. The memories and the scene of her death haunt them throughout their lives. Their innocence is marred by the tragedies they face in their lives.

16.3 Learning Outcomes

On completion of the Unit, you are expected to have learned the themes in the novel, the narrative technique employed by the author and the use of various literary devices in the novel.

16.4 Glossary

Fabric: Structure, Framework

Embedded: Fixed, Implanted, Rooted

Abruptly: Suddenly, Rapidly, Quickly

Dwindle: Reduce, Decrease, Decline

Catastrophe: Calamity, Disaster, Ruin

Bourgeoisie: Middle class

Entomologist: A scientist who studies insects

Dorsal: Posterior, Hindmost and Back

16.5 Sample Questions

16.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Who is the author of *The God of Small Things*?
 - (a) Mahesh Dattani
 - (b) Arundhati Roy
 - (c) Meenakshi Mukherjee
 - (d) Vikram Seth
2. The novel *The God of Small Things* is set in _____.
 - (a) Punjab
 - (b) Delhi
 - (c) Tamil Nadu
 - (d) Ayemenem
3. Who is the protagonist in *The God of Small Things*?
 - (a) Rahel and Estha
 - (b) Baby
 - (c) Ammu
 - (d) Sophie Mol
4. Which of the following is a character in *The God of Small Things*?
 - (a) Velutha
 - (b) Jasper
 - (c) Elizabeth Bennet
 - (d) Shylock
5. Who was locked up in the house in *The God of Small Things*?
 - (a) Velutha
 - (b) Rahel
 - (c) Estha
 - (d) Ammu
6. What is the main reason behind the destruction of family in *The God of Small Things*?
 - (a) Family dispute
 - (b) Illicit relationship

- (c) Earthquake (d) Flood
7. Which of the following characters was beaten to death in *The God of Small Things*?
- (a) Sophie Mol (b) Ammu
(c) Velutha (d) Baby Kochamma
8. Which of the characters is drowned in water in the novel?
- (a) Chacko (b) Baby Kochamma
(c) Estha (d) Sophie Mol
9. After a long separation, at what age do the twins Rahel and Estha meet?
- (a) 35 years (b) 31 years
(c) 40 years (d) 25 years
10. Mention the in which the story takes place in *The God of Small Things*.
- (a) 1969 and 1992 (b) 1889 and 1900
(c) 2000 and 2010 (d) 1909 and 1950

16.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the character of Velutha in *The God of Small Things*.
2. Write a short note on plot construction in the novel.
3. Comment on the title *The God of Small Things*.
4. Discuss the role played by Baby Kochamma in the novel.
5. Explain the theme of loss of innocence in the novel.

16.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Comment on the themes in *The God of Small Things*.
2. Discuss the narrative technique used in *The God of Small Things*.
3. Attempt a critical appreciation of *The God of Small Things*.

16.6 Suggested Readings

1. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002.
2. Roy, Amitabh. *The God of Small Things: A Novel of Social Commitment*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2005.
3. Sibi, K J. A Perspective Study of the Silenced Class in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Bilaspur: Evince Pub Publishing, 2019.
4. Surendran, K.V. *The God of Small Things: A Saga of Lost Dreams*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2000.

MAULANA AZAD NATIONAL URDU UNIVERSITY

Master of Arts

M.A (MAEN103CCT) I SEMESTER EXAMINATION (December 2022)

Paper : Fiction in English

Time: 3 hours

Max. Marks 70 marks

Note: This question paper consists of three parts:

Part-A, Part-B and Part-C. Number of words to answer each question is only indicative. Attempt all parts.

Part-A contains **10** compulsory questions of multiple choice/fill in the blank/very short answer type question. Answer all questions. Each question carries **1** mark.

(10x1=10 marks)

Part-B contains **08** questions of which students are supposed to answer **05** questions. Answer each question in approximately 200 words. Each question carries **06** marks.

(5x6=30 marks)

Part-C contains **05** questions of which students are supposed to answer **03** question. Answer each question in approximately 500 words. Each question carries **10** marks.

(3x10=30 marks)

Part-A

Question: 1

i. Name the author of short story *The Necklace*.

- (a) Maupassant (b) Edgar Allan Poe
(c) Rudyard Kipling (d) Thomas Hardy

ii. The collection of poems titled *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846) is written by

_____.

- (a) Emily Brontë (b) Charlotte Brontë
(c) Anne Brontë (d) All of the above

iii. How many chapters are there in the *Wuthering Heights*?

- (a) 54 (b) 24
(c) 34 (d) 21

iv. The first line of the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte begins with _____.

- (a) Month (b) Year
(c) Day (d) Time

v. Who translated the *New Testament* into German for the first time?

- (a) Poliziano (b) Cervantes
(c) Martin Luther (d) Alexander VI

vi. Albert Camus was born in Algeria in _____.

- (a) 1931 (b) 1913
(c) 1813 (d) 2000

vii. *The Outsider* opens with the sentence _____:

- (a) 'Mother died today'
(b) 'I received a telegram'

- (c) 'She had been ill for a very long time'
(d) 'Call me Ishmael'
- viii. Which one of the novels is hailed as Toni Morrison's magnum opus?
(a) *The Bluest Eye* (b) *Beloved*
(c) *Song of Solomon* (d) *Paradise*
- ix. Toni Morrison's original name is _____.
- x. Who wrote the novel *Sunlight on the Broken Column*?
(a) Anita Desai (b) Kiran Desai
(c) Attia Hosain (d) Zakir Hussain

Part-B

2. Explain Science Fiction and Fantasy.
3. Why was women's writing not recognized for centuries?
4. Discuss the theme of Love and Hate in *Wuthering Heights*.
5. Briefly sketch the character of Heathcliff.
6. Discuss the origin of the English novel.
7. What were the achievements of Camus as a writer?
8. Write a brief note on Existentialism.
9. Discuss 'problem novel' with reference to American fiction.

Part-C

10. Discuss salient features of the Modern novel.
11. What are the narrative techniques Emily Bronte applied in *Wuthering Heights*?
12. What were the reasons for the rise of the English novel in the 18th century?
13. Describe the contribution of Camus as a journalist.
14. Critically examine the plot in *The Outsider*.

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