

MAEN202CCT

Drama in English

M.A. English
(Second Semester)

Centre for Distance and Online Education
Maulana Azad National Urdu University
Hyderabad-32, Telangana - India

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for

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Vice Chancellor
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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

Message

In the present era, distance education is recognized as a very effective and useful mode of education all over the world and a large number of people are benefiting from this mode of education. Maulana Azad National Urdu University also introduced the distance learning mode since its establishment in view of the educational needs of the Urdu speaking population. Maulana Azad National Urdu University started in 1998 with the Directorate of Distance Education and the regular programmes commenced from 2004, and subsequently various departments have been established.

The UGC has played a vital role in efficiently regulating the education system in the country. Various programs running under Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode at CDOE are approved by UGC-DEB. The UGC-DEB has emphasized on synchronizing the syllabi of distance and regular mode to enhance the level of distance learning students. Since Maulana Azad National Urdu University is a dual mode university catering to both distance and traditional mode of learning, to achieve its goal in line with the UGC-DEB guidelines, Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) was introduced and Self Learning Materials are being prepared afresh for UG and PG programmes containing 6 blocks with 24 units and 4 blocks with 16 units respectively.

The Directorate of Distance Education offers a total of seventeen (17) programmes comprising of UG, PG, B.Ed., Diploma, and Certificate programmes. Along with this, programmes based on technical skills are also being 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. Apart from this, an extension centre has also been established in Vijayawada. More than one hundred and sixty 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. The Directorate of Distance Education makes full use of ICT in its educational and administrative activities, and offers admission to all its programs through online mode only.

The soft copies of Self Learning Material (SLM) for students are made available on the website of the Directorate of Distance Education and the links of audio and video recordings are also made available on the website. In addition, facilities of E-mail and WhatsApp groups are being provided to the students through which the learners are informed about various aspects of the program such as course registration, assignments, counselling, examinations, etc. In addition to regular counseling, additional remedial online counseling is being provided from the last two years to improve the academic standards of the students.

It is expected that the Directorate of Distance Education will play a vital role to bring educationally and economically backward population into the mainstream of contemporary education. In near future, changes will be made in various programmes under the New Education Policy (NEP-2020) in view of the educational needs and it is hoped that this will help in making the Open and Distance Learning system more efficient and effective.

Prof. Mohd. Razaullah Khan

Director, Centre for Distance and Online 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 “Drama in English” aims to familiarize the Learners to the genre of drama, its origin. and development. It also introduces them to English, America, and Indian drama. The course is divided into four Blocks, each Block has four Units. The plays prescribed for your study are *King Lear*, *A Doll’s House*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Lights Out*.

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

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

Prof. Gulfishaan Habeeb

Programme Coordinator

Drama in English

Unit-1: Origin and Development of the English Drama

Structure

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1.2.1 Origin of the English Drama

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1.0 Introduction

The origin of the drama is deeply rooted in the religious tendencies of humans. The ancient Greek and Roman drama was based on rituals. The *Bible* was written in Latin, and it was difficult for the common people to understand its meaning. Therefore, the clergy tried to find an easy medium to transfer the teachings of the *Bible* to the common people. They adopted new methods of demonstration and acting. The stories of the *Gospel* were explained through the living pictures and the actors acted the story in a dumb show. Initially, English plays depicted religious stories and were performed in the churches. Thus, English theatre is the outcome of religion.

1.1 Objectives

Dear Learners, the objectives of this Unit are to:

- acquaint you with the origin and development of English drama up to the modern time
- make you understand the origin and development of English drama from Mystery and Miracle plays to the modern drama
- inform you about the growth of English drama during the Elizabethan period, the Restoration period, the eighteenth-century period, the Victorian period and the twentieth-century period
- explain the characteristics of the 20th century English drama.

1.2 Origin and Development of the English Drama

1.2.1 Origin of the English Drama

1.2.1.1 Miracle and Mystery Plays:

A Miracle play is a dramatization of an event or legend from the life of a saint or martyr. It was developed in 14th and 15th century. Miracle plays were mainly based on the biblical events such as disobedience of Adam and Eve, Noah and the great flood, Abraham and Isaac and events in the life of Christ. Mystery plays are based on the events taken from the Holy Scriptures. The festivals like Christmas and Easter were celebrated with the performance of these events in which priests, chorus and actors would take part. The stories of the Bible were presented through Miracle and Mystery plays. It was a form of worship and could be regarded as the beginning of medieval drama. Initially, these performances were controlled by the church. In the following period, the control was shifted to the Town Council. It is rightly said that Miracle play contained the seeds of both serious and comic drama which flourished in England during the 16th and 17th centuries.

1.2.1.2 Morality Plays:

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Morality play emerged as another form of drama. The Morality play was larger than the Miracle play. It was divided into acts and scenes as in the Senecan tradition. It was enacted by professional actors. The Morality play had direct connection with the Elizabethan plays. The Miracle plays changed focus from Biblical stories to personified abstractions like Life, Death, Repentance, Goodness, Love, Greed and such virtues and vices. These human emotions are shown as struggling to gain supremacy over the human soul. These

subjects were popular among religious preachers. There are references of Morality plays in the 14th and 15th century. The first Morality play, *The Castle of Perseverance*, was written around 1425. Moral truth is presented through these plays in a new and effective manner. The play, *Everyman* is one of the examples of the Morality play.

1.2.1.3 Interlude:

The Interlude is a type of Morality play equally allegorical in content with realistic and comic elements. It is a short play having a set of scenes, real characters, usually the humble rank, citizens and friars. There was an absence of allegorical figures and there was much broad farcical humour, good songs and there were set scenes. The interludes were dramatized at feasts and entertainments which supplied amusement for court and nobility. In other words, it could be considered an advancement upon the Morality play. The Interlude is a brief comedy. The most popular writer of Interludes was John Heywood who wrote *The Four P's* in doggerel verse describing a lying match between a Pedlar, a Palmer and a Pardoner. *The Four Elements*, *The World and the Child*, *Thersites* and *The Play of the Weather* are the other famous interludes before the drama proper in the sixteenth century.

At this time, classicism began to exercise its influence on the emerging English drama, which can be evident in Udall's play *Ralph Roister Doister* appeared in 1553. It is an adaptation from the Roman playwright Plautus's play *Miles Gloriosus*. The next play of this kind, *Gammer Gurton's Needle* was written by William Stevenson in 1562.

1.2.2 Development of English Drama:

1.2.2.1 Beginning of Elizabethan Theatre:

The beginning of the Elizabethan theatre is found in the wandering performers who moved from castle to castle and town to town. The nobles of England maintained troupes of players. Thus, the Elizabethan Acting Troupes came into existence. The opening of theatre in London and The Red Lion in Whitechapel in 1567 by John Brayne is regarded as the beginning of early modern English drama. John Brayne and his brother-in-law James Burbage built a theatre known as The Theatre at Shoreditch. The Red Lion was a receiving house for touring companies, whereas The Theatre accepted long-term engagements. The public theatres had circular arenas, a stage was set at one end of the open courtyard and the auditorium was open to the sky. The private theatres were enclosed halls with the stage lightened by candles or torches. The first theatre was built in London by James Burbage in 1576 which was located outside the city jurisdiction. The Globe, later owned by Shakespeare and Hemminge, was a model for several theatres.

1.2.2.2 First Regular Comedies:

Nicholas Udall (1505-1556) took steps to write a regular English comedy on classical lines. He wrote *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553), a play written for his boys to act. Another comedy was Gammer Gurton's *Needle* (1566) acted at Cambridge University and written in blank verse. Thomas Ingeland's *The Disobedient Child* was printed in 1560. George Gascoigne's *The Glass of Government* (1575) and *Supposes* (1566) are notable works. *Damon and Pythias* by Richard Edward was presented before Queen Elizabeth in 1564.

1.2.2.3 First Regular Tragedies:

The beginning of regular tragedy holds a very interesting connection with the previous forms of writing. The first two plays *Lamentable Tragedy of Cambises* by Thomas Preston and *Appius and Virginia* by John Webster. *Gorboduc* is the first regular tragedy in English written in blank verse, performed in 1564. The first three acts were written by Thomas Norton and the next two by Thomas Sackville. *The Misfortune of Arthur* (1587) by Thomas Hughes deals with the theme of love.

1.2.2.4 University Wits:

The group of the writers from Oxford and Cambridge known as 'University Wits' are contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare. It included the writers like John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Green, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nash, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe.

John Lyly (1554-1606): Lyly is commonly considered the leader of the 'University Wits'. He selected classical themes and stories for his plays. His famous plays are *A Most Excellent Comedy of Alexander and Diogenes* (1584), *Sapho and Phao* (1584), *Gallathea* (1588), *The Man in the Moon* (1588), *Midas* (1589), *Mother Bombie* (1590), *Love's Metamorphosis* (1590), and *Woman in the Moon* (1597).

George Peele (1557-1596): George Peele has widened the range of English drama by writing a romantic tragedy, a chronicle history and romantic literary satire. His work consists of *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581), *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594), *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward I*, *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe*, and *The Old Wives Tales* (1595).

Robert Greene (1558-1592): Greene was well known for the art of plot construction. He wrote *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1587), *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589), and *The Scottish History of James IV* (1594).

Thomas Lodge (1558-1625): Thomas Lodge's *The Wound of Civil War* contains power over lyric and a charm in his fiction.

Thomas Nash (1558-1625): Nash was pamphleteer and story writer. He tried his hand at drama. He collaborated with Marston in his *Dido* and in *The Isle of Dogs*.

Thomas Kyd (1558-1594): Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1585) occupied important place in the development of English tragedy. The play is Senecan, adopted to popular requirement. Kyd breathed it into passion of fine blank verse.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593): Marlowe had distinguished scholarly career at the university. He became popular after publication of his first play *Tamburlaine* (1587). His other plays are *Dr. Faustus* (1587), *The Jew of Malta* (1592), *Edward II* (1593). *The Tragedy of Dido*, *The Queen of Carthage* (1594), *The Massacre of Paris* (1596).

1.2.2.5 The Restoration Drama:

After Elizabethan period, the English drama suffered but the Restoration period opened a new avenue for it. The playwrights of this period did not imitate the Elizabethan comedy and tragedy as a model. There was a complete break from the Elizabethan tradition in drama. Etherege and Congreve wrote the Comedy of Manners which reflects aristocratic life and political changes. The Restoration dramatists also promoted Heroic Tragedy based on the heroic convention derived from French. The heroic tragedies had epic themes, and the protagonists were superhuman beings.

Comedy of Manners:

The comedy of manners was developed during the Age of Dryden or the Restoration period. It was influenced by the French dramatist Moliere and the Spanish dramatist Calderon. The following playwrights contributed to the development of this genre:

Sir George Etherege (1635-1691) wrote three comedies: *The Comical Revenge* or *Love in a Tub* (1664), *She Would If She Could* (1688), *The Man of Mode* or *Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), and some light verse.

William Wycherley (1640-1715) came to England from France at the Restoration period. He wrote four plays such as *Love in a Wood* (1671), *The Gentlemen Dancing-Master* (1671), *Country Wife* (1673) and *The Plain Dealer* (1674).

William Congreve (1670-1729) is the master of the comedy of manners. He wrote all his plays before he was thirty. His first play is *Old Bachelor* (1693), a perfect piece of comic portraiture for a young man of twenty-three. Two years after the presentation of *The Double Dealer*, he wrote his next plays *Love for Love* in 1695. Congreve's last comedy is *The Way of the World*.

Sir John Vanbrugh's (1664-1726) three best comedies are: *The Relapse* (1696), *The Provoked Wife* (1697), and *Confederacy* (1705). These plays deal with happy marriages. He brought comedy down from the higher level to the lower depths of farce.

George Farquhar (1678-1707) wrote *Love in a Battle*, *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux Stratagem*. The last one is his best play and deals with the problem of unhappy marriage.

Thomas Shadwell (1642 -1692) wrote many plays, the best of which were *Epsom Wells*, *True Widow*, *The Sullen Lovers*, *The Squire of Alsatia*, *Bury Fair* and *Squire of Alsatia*. He imitated closely Jonson's comedy of humours. His style lacks literary grace, but his plots are usually well-constructed.

The Heroic Tragedy:

During the Restoration period, several playwrights contributed to the development of the heroic tragedy. The following playwrights contributed to the development of heroic tragedy:

John Dryden (1631-1700) stands as the leader of the heroic tragedy. Between 1664 and 1677, he wrote five plays *The Indian Emperor*, *Tyrannic Love*, *Conquest of Granada* (two parts), *Aurangzeb*. All of these plays have heroes of superhuman ability endowed with super human ideals. The heroines of these plays are faithful, fair and supreme beautiful. Thomas Otway's (1651-1685) first play, *Alcibiades*, was produced in 1675. It was followed by *Don Carlos* (1676), *The Orphan* (1680) and his masterpiece, *Venice Preserved* (1682). The Language of his plays is less exaggerated than the usual heroic plays. Nathaniel Lee (1653-92) wrote many tragedies, of which the prominent are *Nero* (1674) *Sophonisha* (1675), *The Rival Queen* (1677), and *Mithridates* (1673). His plays are usual tale of mishaps, miseries and drunkenness. Elkanah Settle (1648-1724) achieved popularity with a Heroic play, *The Empress of Morocco* (1673). This play has all the faults and defects of the heroic tragedy. John Crowne (1640-1703) wrote *Caligula* (1698), *Thyestes* (1681), *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685). Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) was made Poet Laureate in 1715. His best-known plays are *Tamerlane* (1702), *The Fair Penitent* (1703), and *Jane Shore*.

1.2.2.6 Eighteenth Century Drama:

During the eighteenth-century drama gradually declined and a few dramatists made remarkable contribution to the development of English drama. Goldsmith and Sheridan were the two prominent playwrights who enriched drama by their plays.

The Eighteenth-Century Tragedy:

During the eighteenth century, the pattern of tragedy was a little different from the style adopted by the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. Tragedies of this period were without the

emotional force, fire, the moving intensity and the pathetic appeal which we had seen in the tragedies of the Elizabethan dramatists. There were three kinds of tragedies such as classical tragedy, romantic tragedy and domestic tragedy.

The first type of tragedy developed during this age was classical tragedy. Addison, the essayist, produced *Cato* in 1713. It is written in blank verse. The second type of tragedy developed during this age was Romantic tragedy. Nicholas Rowe, poet laureate and editor of Shakespeare, produced *The Fair Penitent* which attracted some popular attention. Another tragedy that Rowe wrote was *Fane Shore*. It is written in imitation of Shakespeare's style. The third type of tragedy developed during this age was the Domestic tragedy. It was written in prose. Lillo was the main proponent of the domestic tragedy and his tragedy *London Merchant* or *The History of George Barnwell* (1731) gave a domestic tragedy with an apprentice for the hero. Moore's *Gamester* is another domestic tragedy based on gambling.

Other forms of Drama:

Pantomime

During the eighteenth-century, pantomime became popular. Rich, who was manager first of the theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields and later at Covent Garden, found pantomime very profitable and produced several pantomimes which attracted popular attention. They were puppet-shows which delighted the public.

Opera

Opera in Italian style was also cultivated during this age. By far the best of the ballad-operas was Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728). Besides the political interest, Gay's *Opera* had many humorous scenes pretty songs, rollicking gaiety and clever dialogues. Another good ballad-opera was *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737) by Henry Carey.

Burlesque

Burlesque is a kind of satirical play in which the spirit of true comedy is presented in a satirical manner. During the eighteenth-century, writers excelled in writing burlesque. Carey wrote *The Tragedy of Chronohotonthologos* (1734), Henry Fielding produced several burlesque plays notably *The Tragedy of Tragedies* or *The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) and *Pasquin* (1736) *Tom Thumb* of Fielding was a great success. It abounds in rollicking fun and it paved the way for Sheridan's *The Critic*.

Farce

Farce is a low type of comedy, replete with ludicrous situations; deficient in plot-construction and sober characters. One of the best farces of this century was Towoley's *High Life Below Stairs* (1759), in which some servants, in their master's absence, act their master's part. The most prolific writers of the farcical comedy were Samuel Foote (1720-1777) and George Colman "the Elder" (1732-1794). Foote's best work is *The Author* which is a satire on servile and wicked publishers who dupe them. His other works are *The Englishman in Paris* (1753), *The Minor* (1760) and *The Liar* (1762). His *Polly Honnycombe* (1760) is a light farce, based round a sentimental novel reading heroine. *The Jealous Wife* (1761) was suggested by Tom Jones.

Sentimental Comedy:

The sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century was a reaction against the comedy of manners. The comedy of manners was characterized by light-hearted fun, obscenity and trenchant dialogues. In this comedy, laughter and humour were completely driven out and in place of comedy which was rich in humour, pathos and pathetic situations were introduced. The playwrights who contributed to the development of sentimental comedy are as follows:

Colley Cibber (1671-1757) wrote two sentimental comedies *Love's Last Shift* and *Provoked Husband*. Mrs. Centlivre (1667-1723) followed Mrs. Aphra Behn as a practitioner of the Comedy of Intrigue. She claims her position among the writers of the sentimental comedy. Her best plays are *The Busybody*, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* and *The Gamester*. Richard Steele (1672-1729) was perhaps the greatest figure among the writers of the Sentimental Comedy. He wrote three sentimental comedies viz. *Lying Lover* (1703), *Tender Husband* (1705) and *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). In these plays, we have the tone of morality, kindness and pathos. Hugh Kelly (1739-1777) carried on the Sentimental Comedy after the middle of the century. Kelly's *False Delicacy* was an enormous success. His brother John Kelly produced *The Married Philosopher*, which introduced sentimentalism by adapting in English a French sentimental work. Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) wrote about thirty plays, some of which are tragedies. He is very fond of emphasizing the moral tone in his plays. In his most typical work are *The Brothers*, *The West Indian* and *The Fashionable Lover*, we have the best of the sentimental comedy. Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809) was the chief writer of the Sentimental Comedy at the end of the century. His popular work is *The Road to Ruin* (1791).

The Comedy of Humour:

The comedy of humour which Goldsmith and Sheridan cultivated in the eighteenth century was a reaction against the sentimental comedy of Cibber, Steele, Kelly and Cumberland. Let us now look at the contribution of Fielding, Goldsmith and Sheridan to the development of the comedy of humour.

Henry Fielding (1707-54) wrote comedy and farce. He made clever adaptations of *Molier's L'Avare* (The Miser) and *Le Medecinmalgre 'lui* (The Mock Doctor). But it was in parody and political satire that he obtained his most personal success. He achieved success in his *Tragedy of Tragedies* or *The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) and *Pasquin* (1736), and *The Historical Register for the Year* (1736-37).

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74) revived the comedy of humour of the Elizabethan Age and gave a hard blow to the sentimental comedy. Goldsmith's great objection to the sentimental comedy was that it was more like a tragedy than a comedy. Goldsmith's first play was *The Good-Natured Man* produced in 1768. *The Good-Natured Man*, despite introducing laughter and humour, remained for the most part a failure. The next play, *She Stoops to Conquer* or *The Mistakes of a Night*, was produced in 1771. This play marks a departure from the first play and practically introduces the reign of humour in comedy.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's (1751-1816) plays are written in the mood of satirical observation of life. The main plays of Sheridan are *Rivals*, *St. Patrick's Day*, *The Scheming Lieutenant*, *The Duenna*, *A Trip to Scarborough*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic* or, *A Tragedy Rehearsed*. All these works of Sheridan are not of equal importance; his best-known works are *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna* and *The Critic*.

1.2.2.7 The Victorian Drama:

The Victorian age was one of the most remarkable periods in the history of English literature. The literature of the Victorian age was correlated to the social and the political life of the age. A few literary artists of the age struck the note of revolt against the materialistic tendencies of the age. The playwrights who contributed to the development of drama during this period are:

The Victorian Dramatists:

The Victorian period is regarded as the period of novel but there are certain playwrights who tried their hands in the formation of drama some of the contributors among them are as follows:

Major Contributors:

Alfred Tennyson wrote a poetic play *Queen Mary*. It is a historical play and has Mary Tudor for its heroine. It is a blank verse play dealing with conflict between Rome and Lutheranism. The next plays *The Promise of May* speaks about the injurious influence of secularism. The material of *The Cup* is borrowed from Plutarch and does not deserve any special mention. *The Falcon* is indebted to Boccaccio and is a lovely idyll. Tennyson's last play *The Foresters* is a woodland masque and deals with the legends of Robin Hood.

Robert Browning is popularly known as the poet of dramatic monologue. His dramatic contribution could not impress the audience as compared to other playwrights. *Strafford* is Browning's earliest drama. The historical tragedy deals with the career and death of Strafford. *King Victor and King Charles* is a blank verse play, based on Alfieri's life of Victor Amedee II. The next play *The Return of the Druses* is a tragedy in blank verse, in which Browning sought to exhibit the most wild and passionate love. *A Blot in the Scutcheon* is a play, influenced by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. *Colombe's Birthday* is one of the pleasant plays of Browning. *Luria* is a play that has distinct echoes from *Othello*. *A Soul's Tragedy* is Browning's masterpiece, and according to Lounsbury, it unites consistency of plot with clearness of expression and truth of life.

Matthew Arnold wrote only one play, *Merope*, which is the most complete reproduction in English, in the form of convention of Sophoclean tragedy. The poetry of the drama is unmistakable.

Other Contributors of the Victorian Drama:

Swinburne is one of the Victorian dramatists who wrote several plays. Towards the end of the Victorian period a new literary genre known as problem play came into being. Pinero, Jones and Roberston wrote problem plays in prose. Henrik Ibsen began his literary career as a writer of poetic drama. Poetic drama had fallen on evil days. But the Irish poets sought to revive poetic drama. W. B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and Lady Gregory felt that poetic drama was closely associated with their national culture. The establishment of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin marks the beginning of a new movement in drama.

1.2.2.8 The Twentieth Century English Drama:

In the twentieth century new trends were introduced in drama. The dramatists were at ease in producing once again comedies of manners. Drama was revived in the beginning of twentieth century. In the course of six decades, the English drama had witnessed many trends and currents. Let us study them one by one.

New Trends in the Twentieth Century Drama:

Realism

Realism is the most significant and outstanding quality of modern drama. The dramatists of early years of the twentieth century were interested in naturalism and realism and it was their endeavour to deal with real problems of life in a realistic technique in their plays. It was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who popularized realism in modern drama. He dealt with the problems of real life in a realistic manner in his plays. His example was followed by Robertson, Jones, Pinero, Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw in their plays. In the dramas of these realists, we get glimpses of real life, with all its warts and sordid ugliness. They deal with problems of marriage, justice, law, administration and strife between capital and labour and use the theatre as a means for bringing about reforms in the conditions of society prevailing in their days.

Drama of Ideas

Modern drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The stage is employed by dramatists to give expression to certain ideas which they seek to propagate in society. The modern drama dealing with the problems of life has become far more intellectual than ever it was in the history of drama before the present age.

Romanticism

Romanticism, which had been very dear to Elizabethan dramatists found its way modern drama, and it was mainly due to Sir J.M. Barrie's effort that the new wave of romanticism swept over modern drama for some years of the twentieth century. Barrie made excursions into the world of romance, fantasy, magic and super-naturalism in his plays *Mary Rose*, *Peter Pan*, *A Kiss for Cinderella*, *Admirable Crichton* and *Dear Brutus*.

Poetic Plays

Another reaction to realism and naturalism in drama was evinced in the popularization of poetic plays by a host of dramatists T. S. Eliot, Stephen Phillips, J.E. Flecker, John Drinkwater, John Masefield, W.B. Yeats, and Christopher Fry. They have made poetic plays a force to reckon to within modern drama.

Historical and Biographical Plays:

Another trend is found in modern drama that is in the direction of using history and biography for dramatic treatment. Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *St. Joan* are historical plays of great importance. Ervine wrote *The Lady of Belmont* and popularized the old historical characters in Shakespeare's plays. John Drinkwater penned four historical plays: *Abraham Lincoln*

(1918), *Mary Stuart* (1921-22), *Oliver Cromwell* (1922) and *Robert Lee* (1923). In each one of these plays there is a central dominating personality standing on a higher pedestal over the multiplicity of individually delineated characters. Clifford Bax wrote several historical plays, the chief of them being *Mr. Pepys* (1930), *Socrates* (1930), *The Venetian* (1936). Bax's effective treatment of character, his skilful wielding of material, and his delicate sense of style give prime distinction to his work.

Biography has been skilfully used in two prominent plays of our times. *Barrets of Wimpole Street* by Rudolf Bezier and *The Lady with a Lamp* by Reginald Berkley. In the former play biographical details about Robert Browning and Mrs. Elizabeth Barret Browning form the texture of the play, while the latter play deals with the life and achievement of Florence Nightingale.

The Irish Movement

A new trend in modern drama was introduced by the Irish dramatists who brought about the Celtic Revival in literature. In the hands of the Irish dramatists like W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, Leanox Robinson, T. C. Murray and Edward Martyn, drama ceased to be realistic in character, and became an expression of the hopes and aspirations of the Irish people from remote days to their own times.

Impressionism

Impressionism constitutes another important feature of modern drama. In the impressionistic plays of W. B. Yeats, the main effort is in the direction of recreating the experience of the artist and his impressions about reality, rather than in presenting reality as it is. Impressionistic drama of the modern age seeks to suggest the impressions on the artist rather than to make an explicit statement about the objective characteristics of things or events.

Expressionism

Expressionism is another important feature of modern drama. It marks an extreme reaction against naturalism. The movement which had started early in Germany made its way in English drama, and several modern dramatists like Sean O'Casey, C.K. Munro, H.F. Rubinstein, J.B. Priestley, Elmer Rice and Eugene O'Neill have made experiments in the expressionistic tendency in modern drama.

The Comedy of Manners

There is a revival of the comedy of manners in modern dramatic literature. Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, and Somerset Maugham have done much to revive the comedy of wit in our days. The drama after the Second World War has not exhibited a love for comedy, and the social

conditions of the period after the war are not very favourable for the blossoming of the artificial comedy of the Restoration age.

The Theatre of the Absurd:

The Theatre of the Absurd is a term derived from Albert Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), and clear and lucid thought about absurdist drama is found in Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). It is a term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950s who did not regard themselves as a school but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of the man in the universe. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus defined the absurd as the tension which emerges from man's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which steadfastly refuses to evidence either. Most notable among them were Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. The lesser figures of this school of drama are Robert Pignat, N. F. Simpson, Edward Albee, Fernando Arrabal and Gunter Grass.

Samuel Beckett(1906- 1989)was an Irish dramatist and novelist, but he long lived in Paris and wrote both in French and English with ease and facility. He used a deliberately formless language to present the meaningless void of experience as encountered by his characters. In fiction he scored success by *Murphy*, *Molloy* and *Watt* and in drama his masterpiece is *Waiting for Godot* (1953).

Eugene Ionesco(1909-1994)was a Rumanian-born dramatist who wrote in French. He is leading figure in the Theatre of the Absurd. He dealt with such subjects as the breakdown of language, the proliferation of objects and the absurd vulnerability of man, threatened from both outside and inside. His famous plays are *The Lesson*, *The Chairs*, *The Victims of Duty*, *How to Get Rid of It*, *The Killer*, *Rhinoceros*, *Exit the King* and *The Bald Prima Donna*.

Arthur Adamov(1908–1970)was a Russian-born dramatist who lived in France and wrote in French. He expressed his deep sense of alienation in his autobiographical volume *L'Avew* (1938-43). His famous plays are *La Paradie* (1945), *L'Invasion*, *Professor Taranne*, *Le Ping-pong*, *Paolo Paoli* (1957) and *Printemps '71* (1962).

Jean Genet(1910-1986)was a famous French novelist, dramatist, and poet. Among his well-known plays are *Deathwatch*, *The Maids*, *The Balcony*, *The Blacks* and *The Screens*. Genet has been classified both as a dramatist of the Absurd and as a follower of Art and in his ritualistic Theatre of Cruelty.

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) was an English dramatist whose works are allied to the Theatre of the Absurd. He wrote several famous plays such as *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Servant*, *The Home Coming*, *Landscape*, *Silence*, and *Old Times*.

Edward Albee (1928-2016) was an American playwright. His early one-act plays are brilliant absurdist analyses of contemporary social and psychological tensions. His popular works are *The Zoo Story* (1958), *The Sandbox* (1959), *Fam and Yam* (1960) and the finest, *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1960), on the hysterical nature of Southern sexuality and politics. This dislocations and rituals of the theatre of the absurd are used in his first full-length play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). His next play *Tiny Alice* (1964) is a psychological fantasy of sexual and manipulation in a high camp manner. *Box-Mao-Box* (1968) is probably his most impressive work so far.

Expressionism in Modern Drama:

Certain dramatists of America, Europe and England made new experiments in producing plays not dealing with external realism but with the inner life of the characters. Expressionism in drama is just an experiment in presenting the inner life of the characters in a psychological way. The prominent dramatists of the 'Expressionistic school' are O'Casey, Priestley, Munro, Rubinstein and Elmer Rice. We will briefly deal with the works of these dramatists of the 'Expressionist School'.

Sean O'Casey (1884-1964) was an Irish dramatist. He was a worthy successor of Synge, interested in the presentation of Irish life, not the Irish life of the Aran Islands, but the life of slums of Dublin bringing out all the sordidness and drunkenness of the Irish men and women. His first play *The Shadow of a Gunman* brings out the slum tenements of Dublin. It reveals the bloodiness of the Anglo-Irish war of 1920. The next play *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) is a political play dealing with the execution of a young man by his Republican comrades. *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) also deals with the cruel and brutal folly of civil war. *The Silver Tassie* combines the naturalistic and Expressionistic methods. The other plays of O'Casey are *Within the Gates* (1933), *The Star Turns Red* (1940), *Purple Dust* (1940), *Red Rose for the* (1946), *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1946), and *Cockadoodle Dandy* (1949). The plays of O'Casey are about Irish life, and the tragedy and comedy of this life is well brought out in dialogues, which are vivid, racy and rhythmical. The characters of O'Casey are weak. They are crude and pitiable.

C. K. Munro tried to imitate German Expressionism in his play *Rumour* (1924). It deals with the origin of war and modern international jealousies. It is a significant play of the expressionistic school.

Reginald Berkeley's (1890-1935) play *The White Chateau* (1927) is in style of Munro's *Rumour*. It has power, dignity and distinction. His other plays are *The Quest of Elizabeth*, *Mango Island*, and *The World's End*.

H. F. Rubinstein made experiments in the style and manner of Berkeley. His famous play *The House* (1926) deals with a building having vital entity and power. His next play Isabel's *Eleven* (1927) expresses something new in dramatic form.

J. B. Priestley (1894-1984) was a playwright who attempted to break the conventions of naturalistic drama. He authored more than thirty plays. He produced comedy, farce, domestic drama and expressionistic plays. His famous Expressionistic play is *Johnson over Jordan*. It reads like a morality play. The other plays of Priestley are *Time and the Conways* (1937), *Dangerous Corner* (1932), *Music at Night* (1938), *I Have Been Here Before* (1937), *Laburnum Grove* (1933), *The Long Mirror* (1940), *They Come to a City* (1943), *Desert Highway* (1943), *Home is Tomorrow* (1948).

1.3 Learning Outcomes

Dear students in this Unit, we have come across the origin and development of English drama up to the Twentieth Century English Drama. We have focused on the Beginning of the Elizabethan Theatre and the contribution made by the University Wits to the growth of English drama. In the course of the chapter, an attempt has been made to consider the Restoration drama and the Eighteenth-Century drama. The Unit further records the Victorian drama and its major contributors. The unit also covers Twentieth century English drama along with new trends, theatre of absurd and expressionism.

1.4 Glossary

Ritual: a religious ceremony consisting of a series of actions.

Gospel: the teaching or revelation of Christ.

Martyr: a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs.

Chorus: a large organized group of singers

Realism: factual presentation

Cultivate: to nourish, to promote

Farcical: unwise or humorous

Absurd: silly or unwise

Legend: a story of unknown authorship

Strife: strike

Expression: act of showing one's feelings

Tendency: belief or intention

Aspiration: something that you hope to achieve

1.5 Sample Questions

1.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The origin of drama is deeply rooted in _____ of humans.
a) human tendencies b) historical tendencies c) religious tendencies d) tendencies
2. Who performed Mystery plays?
a) Priests b) chorus c) actors d) all the above
3. What is interlude?
a) A brief comedy b) a brief tragedy c) both 'a' and 'b'
4. Who wrote the play *Ralph Roister Doister*?
a) Richard Edward b) Nicholas Udall c) George Gascoigne d) none of the above
5. Who among the following is a University Wit?
a) George Peele b) Robert Greene c) Thomas Lodge d) All the above

True or False

1. George Peele was a university wit dramatist._____.
2. *The Unfortunate Traveller* was written by Thomas Nash_____.
3. *Doctor Faustus* is a play Shakespeare_____.
4. Othello is a play by Shakespeare_____.
5. Thomas Kyd wrote *Spanish Tragedy*_____.

1.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What is a mystery play?

2. What is a miracle play?
3. What is a morality play?
4. What is comedy of manners?
5. What is the heroic tragedy?

1.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on the Restoration drama.
2. Who are the major contributors of the Victorian drama?
3. What are the characteristics of the twentieth century drama?

1.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Edward Albert, (1979). *History of English Literature*. Oxford: OUP.
- Mundra, J. N. & Mundra, S. C (1992). *A History of English Literature*. Vol. I, II, III Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot.

Unit-2: Life and Works of William Shakespeare

Structure

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Life and Works of William Shakespeare

2.2.1 The Historical Background

2.2.2 Shakespeare's Plays

2.2.3 The First Folio

2.2.4 Categories of Plays

2.2.5 Poems and Sonnets of William Shakespeare

2.2.6 Types of Sonnets

2.3 Learning Outcomes

2.4 Glossary

2.5 Sample Questions

2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 Introduction

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts"

- William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

The most influential and world-famous English dramatist, actor, and poet William Shakespeare, who is also known as the Bard of Avon or 'the Bard', was born to an English family of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23rd April 1564. His writing is loaded with comedy, tragedy, philosophy, and most importantly diverse hues of human nature and behaviour. Some of the famous quotes from his works are known and applicable to all ages, such as "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5), "To be, or not to be: that is the question" (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1), "More in sorrow than in anger", "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions" (*Hamlet*) and "I am no orator, as Brutus is, But (as you know me all) a plain blunt man. I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech to stir men's blood" (*Julius Caesar*). Such quotes also demonstrate philosophical depth in his writing. Jane

Armstrong's book, *Arden Dictionary of Shakespeare Quotations* (1999) scrupulously theme-wise compiled and documented quotations of Shakespeare.

Sometimes, most beginners and new learners of English literature might wonder why one needs to study William Shakespeare, especially the students from non-English speaking countries. But one should be aware of the fact that good writer and a good writing belong to everyone and everywhere. Such writers and their writings not only help us to understand the society of their respective time and place but also help us to enrich our understanding of creative works, use of language, stylistics, the art of articulation, dialogue writing, human nature, etc. Similarly, the study of William Shakespeare also facilitates us to understand the development of the English language, literature, society, and polity of 16th century England. It also teaches us about Shakespeare's extraordinary and innovative dialogues, rhetoric, story writing style, diverse construction of characters, powerful quotes, and their universal appeals. These are the reasons that Shakespeare is studied not only in English-speaking countries but also non-English speaking countries in the world even centuries after his death.

2.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to introduce you to William Shakespeare, one of the best and most notable English writers of all times, who has been translated into almost all the major languages and taught and prescribed in almost all languages and countries in the world. It aims to provide a brief biographical detail of the writer and his career as a playwright and poet. It gives a bird's eye view of his works, their characteristics, and his style of writing to you as a beginner of English literature. The unit is also designed to introduce the creativity and imaginative power of Shakespeare and his thematic and stylistic engagement as a writer through his works.

2.2 Life and Works of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is one of the most read, studied, influential and renowned writers across all ages, cultures, countries, and languages. Although there is no exact date of his birth noted or documented, most scholars consider that he was probably born on 23rd April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He did not receive any university or higher education unlike his contemporary dramatists (University Wits: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nash, John Lily, Robert

Green, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Kyd, who studied at Oxford and Cambridge universities), except that he attended King's New School where he learned basic Greek and Latin. This is one of the reasons why some scholars suspect the calibre and ability of Shakespeare as a writer capable of writing such meticulous plays and sonnets. This often leads to suspecting the authorship of Shakespeare's works. One of the important parts of his genuineness and originality was his personal touch on his works, as he himself was one of the best actors on the stage of his time. His firsthand experiences on the stage along with his profound creativity resulted in the unmatched quality of his plays. This also gave him the space to edit or modify the plays while doing rehearsals on stage according to the demands of the situation. He had profound psychological maturity of human nature, poetic imagination, and cohesion of dramatic elements, which separated him from his educated rivals.

William Shakespeare was the eldest son of Mary Arden and John Shakespeare. At the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than him and already had children from a previous marriage. The newlywed couple had three children from their marriage. Shakespeare disappeared for a couple of years from public life, and we do not have much detailed evidence about this time which is called "Shakespeare's Lost Years". There are various stories about his early life and these lost years. And perhaps there is a possibility of another question, did he really lose his six-seven years or spend these years in becoming what he is today? Murray Roston in his *Sixteenth-Century English Literature* (1982) writes, "The next seven years in his life are blank and have given rise to much speculation. He may have been a schoolmaster, a soldier, a lawyer's clerk, an apprenticed actor; and there is nothing but guesswork to rely upon" (178). It is said that Shakespeare worked as a schoolteacher in a country. It is also said that Shakespeare also worked at minding horses of the theatre patrons in London, which subsequently introduced him to the world of plays and actors. Later he started appearing in the London Theatre and started to establish himself as a good actor and playwright despite the criticism from his rival actors, playwrights, and critics. Robert Greene used to make fun of and criticize Shakespeare because he was trying to overtake the University-educated playwrights, the University Wits. Murray Roston notes: "By 1592, the year of Greene's attack, he must already have been established in London as a rising actor and playwright, particularly as Greene parodied there a line taken from one of his early plays, which readers, it was assumed, would easily recognize. Greene's attack was professional, not personal, and it is significant that in an age of venomous backbiting and

professional jealousies, not a single comment has been preserved from that era which was aimed maliciously at Shakespeare as a man.”

Shakespeare gained economic prosperity too and purchased a huge house in London. His theatre group received acclaim in London and was given royal status in the reign of King James I. This company later came to be known as the King’s Men. Shakespeare wrote plays for performances that were not documented initially. From 1594 with *Titus Andronicus*, his plays started getting documented and published. By the time of his death, there were eighteen of his plays published in the *quarto edition*. Two of his long poems were also published during his lifetime. After the bubonic plague, he was less active in theatre life. In his later life, he also collaborated on some of his plays with other dramatists. "Shakespeare then collaborated with George Peele on *Titus Andronicus*, with either Thomas Nashe or Thomas Kyd on *Henry VI*, with Thomas Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, and with George Wilkins on *Pericles*. He later passed the baton of principal dramatist for the King’s Men to John Fletcher by collaborating with the younger playwright on *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the lost *Cardenio*” (Eric Rasmussen). He died on 23 April 1616 and, was buried in the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church with the following epitaph on the grave:

“Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear,
to dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones”

2.2.1 The Historical Background

William Shakespeare belongs to the Elizabethan Age (1558 - 1603) which is also known as the golden/renaissance age in English history because of the most powerful and vibrant reign of Queen Elizabeth I, discoveries, innovations, and revival of the classics. This period was also marked by industrial advancements, empirical superiority, intellectual thinking, adventures and glory, nationalism, education, the revival of Greek and other classical literature, course richness, and the making of distinct English culture and literature. The English drama took a fresh breath before the arrival of Shakespeare on the stage through the University Wits such as, “Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Lodge; the generation educated at Oxford and Cambridge universities, who used their poetry to make theatre breathe new life into classical models, and brought a new audience to the issues and conflicts which the stage could dramatize” (Carter and McRae). The plays of the 1550s and 1660s hold distinct categories

of comedy and tragedy inspired and influenced by Latin sources. The comedies are borrowed and designed from the works of Terence and Plautus, whereas the tragedies are “largely from Seneca, with echoes from Greek antecedents in both cases. The medieval miracle and mystery play, and the kind of court 'interludes' played for the monarch, also contributed to the development of Renaissance drama. Its broad humour, its use of ballad, poetry, dance, and music, and its tendency towards allegory and symbolism flow from this native English source. Thus, although drama went through rapid changes in the period, its historical credentials were rich and varied as indeed were its range and impact. It was an age when the need for a social demonstration of English nationalism and Protestantism climaxed in the public arena of a diverse and energetic theatre. This was the golden age of English drama” (Carter et al 63).

2.2.2 Shakespeare’s Plays

Shakespeare not only helps us to understand the 16th century Elizabethan English society (1558-1603) but also the general human nature and behaviour, which makes the reading of Shakespeare relevant even in contemporary times. If one looks at the earliest works of Shakespeare, they are mostly rooted in English history and dynasties. It was a time when England started to reign in all corners of the world and the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588) marked the superiority of the English race over others. Shakespeare has also written some works based on Roman history, mostly documented in Plutarch’s *Lives*, such as *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus* (1605-1608) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607). His English history plays borrowed from Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (*Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Cymbeline*). Shakespeare, like other writers of this time, started glorifying the English tradition, culture, history, and manners. He tried “to trace the human elements behind this conquest of power” (Carter et al.). Apart from history, most Shakespearean plays like *Henry VI* (1589-92), *Richard II* (1595), *Henry V* (1599), etc. depict the hero-worship of man – as a hero, king, and the finest creation. In *Hamlet*, a monologue of Prince Hamlet also portrays the same theme of man, “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving; how express and admirable! In action; how like an angel, in apprehension; how like a god!” Hero worship and the idealization of man were some of the main characteristics of the renaissance age. Another soliloquy in *Hamlet* where Shakespeare tries to define a man is given below:

“What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time,
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more”.

Roland Carter observes: “Generally called the history plays, these works are on one level, a glorification of the nation and its past, but, on another level, they examine the qualities which make a man a hero, a leader, and a king. This is a process not of hero-worship; but of humanizing the hero. The king is brought close to his people.” Apart from this, many English writers like Joseph Conrad, Shakespeare, Alfred Tennyson etc. are criticized by postcolonial scholars for having a colonial orientation in their writings, dwelling on the English superiority and European zeal for explorations.

However, Shakespeare's works try to cover a wide range of themes of individualism, history, morals, universalism, social, power, love, death, etc. His works also provide insights into the moral and philosophical issues of his time. Ronald Carter and John McRae point out:

Time and again, aspects of human vulnerability are exposed, examined, and exploited for their theatrical possibilities. Love in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the same subject, in a comic vein, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*; the theme of revenge and family duty in *Hamlet*; jealousy in *Othello*; sexual corruption and the bounds of justice in *Measure for Measure*; misanthropy, or rejection of the world, in *Timon of Athens*; family rejection and madness in *King Lear*; the power of money and the vulnerability of the minority in *The Merchant of Venice*; the healing effects of the passage of time, and hope in the new generation, in the late plays – with a final return to historical pageantry in *Henry VIII*, the monarch with whose Reformation it all began.

The language of his plays is the language of common people. Shakespearean English is free from Latinized Medieval English. He used modern English by distancing it from medieval English. “The theatre permitted him to create characters who embody the themes directly, and who speak to the audience in a language that is recognizably the same as they speak. From kings to ordinary soldiers; from young lovers to old bawds, Shakespeare's characters speak modern English” (Cater et al.).

2.2.3 The First Folio (1623)

William Shakespeare's plays were written for performance rather than publication, thus, received huge popularity among theatre goers. This is also the reason why for a long time his plays were not collected and published. Out of 37 plays, only 17 were printed in Shakespeare's lifetime, and the remaining were not documented. John Heminges and Henry Condell not only preserved

the undocumented remaining plays, but also published them after his death in a volume: *Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*; which is commonly known as *The First Folio* (1623). It contained 36 plays out of 37 that Shakespeare wrote, which were mostly performed in the Globe Theater of London. *The First Folio* becomes important because it tries to preserve almost half of the plays of Shakespeare, which include *Julius Caesar*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, etc., which were not printed earlier. The plays of Shakespeare, starting from the First Folio went under various editions, sophistication, and structural modifications.

2.2.4 Categories of Plays:

The First Folio tries to categorize Shakespeare's plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories. The history plays can further be divided into Roman and English history plays.

Tragedies	Comedies	Histories
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	<i>Henry IV, Part 1</i>
<i>Coriolanus</i>	<i>As You Like It</i>	<i>Henry IV, Part 2</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Cardenio--A lost play.</i>	<i>Henry V</i>
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	<i>Henry VI, Part 1</i>
<i>King Lear</i>	<i>Cymbeline</i>	<i>Henry VI, Part 2</i>
<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Love's Labor's Lost</i>	<i>Henry VI, Part 3</i>
<i>Othello</i>	<i>Love's Labor's Won--A lost play</i>	<i>Henry VIII</i>
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	<i>Measure for Measure</i>	<i>King John</i>
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	<i>Richard II</i>
<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	<i>Richard III</i>
	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	
	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	
	<i>Pericles</i>	
	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	
	<i>The Tempest</i>	
	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	
	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	
	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	
	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>	
	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	

The moment one talks of Shakespeare, the four main tragedies, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, appear to our mind. *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* were also included in this category of tragedy. Some other plays are also called tragedies because of the tragic elements in those plays. These tragedies have some elements of the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. As Aristotle mentions in his *Poetics*, "A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself;

in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” Shakespeare’s tragedies have a tragic hero who suffers from a tragic flaw or *hamartia*, supernatural elements, greed, fate/fortune, revenge, etc.

Shakespeare's comedies were as much popular as his tragedies. His comedies also had some serious elements, including tragedy; therefore, some scholars further categorized his plays as; “tragicomedy”. Most of his comedies have a 'happy ending' with a platonic union into a marriage. These comedies depict the struggle of young lovers to meet their love by overcoming certain obstacles, reunification, smart servants, use of pun, interwoven plots, disguises, pastoral images, etc.

Some scholars of Shakespeare did not find this categorization adequate thus, they further divided these plays into problem plays, tragicomedy plays, romance plays, lost plays, etc. The romance plays of Shakespeare first seems to appear in the work of Edward Dowden (*Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* 1875), wherein he used the term "romances" in Shakespeare's works such as *Princes*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. These plays also include tragic and comic elements, along with courtly and pastoral scenes. Some scholars try to distinguish between “romance plays” and “tragicomedy plays” by highlighting only tragic and comedy elements – the plays which are neither tragedy nor comedy, such as *Princes*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

The Shakespearean critic F.S. Boas in his work *Shakespeare and his Predecessors* (1896), introduces the term “problem plays” to refer to plays with ambiguous tone, social problems, and tragicomic material in plays like *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Plays like *The Winter's Tale*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Merchant of Venice* are also counted under this category. Problem plays were initially associated with the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen.

Shakespeare’s history plays, as discussed above, borrowed material from Plutarch’s *Lives* and Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. The role of a female character in his plays was also performed by the male actors. His plays are coloured with Elizabethan masculinity and patriarchal dominance. In her *Gender on Shakespeare’s Stage: A Brief History*, Lucas Garcia observes that:

The tradition of men portraying women on public stages dates back to the theatre of the Ancient Greeks, and is present in several other theatrical traditions from around the world. The reasons for the development of these

traditions, which were to endure to various degrees for thousands of years, are intricately connected to how concepts of gender and sex were understood, and specifically the role of women in society. Ancient Greek women, like many women of Shakespeare's England, did not have the right to vote or own property, and were expected to remain at home and rear children.

2.2.5 Poems and Sonnets of William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was best known for his drama but in the early 1600s, with the bubonic plague breaking out in England, many theaters were closed to avoid public gatherings. London's Globe Theatre, which was for a long time was associated with William Shakespeare, was also closed down. In the wake of this outbreak, the demand for Shakespeare's Sonnets, including his other poems increased, especially *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *A Lover's Complaint*. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. A sonnet is a form of English poetry, consisting of fourteen lines, written in iambic pentameter, mostly on the theme of love. It is derived from the Italian word; "sonetto" meaning; 'a little song'. Shakespeare wrote the finest sonnets, which also set an ideal pattern for this form of English poetry.

2.2.6 Types of Sonnets

- Petrarchan
- Shakespearean

The Petrarchan sonnet is one of the classical forms of love poems and derives its name from Italian master poet Francesco Petrarca, anglicized as Petrarch (1304 – 1374). It was he who developed the Italian sonnet. These sonnets are written in two stanzas, 'octave' (eight lines) and 'sestet' (six lines), with the rhyme *scheme abba, abba* and *cdecde* or *cdccdc*. It was Sir Thomas Wyatt, politician cum lyric poet of the 16th century who introduced this pattern of poetry into English. He introduced Petrarch's sonnet along with his sonnets to English readers.

Shakespeare championed this style of sonnets which later become known as the English/Shakespearean sonnets. He distanced himself from the Petrarchan style. His sonnets comprise three quatrains and a concluding couplet with *abab, cdcd, efef,* and *gg* as the rhyme scheme. The couplet at the end plays an important role in giving the gist of the poem, like in most of the *gazals*. Shakespeare's sonnets 1-126 are addressed to "Fair Youth" and from 127-152 are addressed to "the Dark Lady". Hannah Crawforth, in her article "An introduction to Shakespeare's Sonnets" writes:

The poetic persona who speaks through the sequence is not Shakespeare himself. While many readers of the poems have traced a love triangle between the ‘poet’ and two figures often called the ‘Young Man’ and the ‘Dark Lady’, the Sonnets themselves resist straightforward narrative. The poems seem to play with the reader in this regard, tempting us with hints of the kind of love story that underpinned other popular poetic sequences of the time, or the plot of a Shakespearean comedy.

Here are two sonnets of Shakespeare for your reference:

<p><i>Sonnet 144</i></p> <p>“Two loves I have of comfort and despair, Which like two spirits do suggest me still: The better angel is a man right fair, The worser spirit a woman colored ill. To win me soon to hell, my female evil, Tempteth my better angel from my side, And would corrupt my saint to be a devil, Wooing his purity with her foul pride. And whether that my angel be turned fiend, Suspect I may, yet not directly tell; But being both from me, both to each friend, I guess one angel in another’s hell: Yet this shall I ne’er know, but live in doubt, Till my bad angel fire my good one out”.</p>	<p><i>Sonnet 116</i></p> <p>“Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments, love is not love Which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends with the remover to remove. O no, it is an ever-fixed mark That looks on tempests and is never shaken; It is the star to every wand’ring bark, Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken. Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle’s compass come, Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom: If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved”.</p>
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2.3 Learning Outcomes

The specific unit tried to introduce you to a brief account of the life and work of one of the best English playwrights and poets (sonneteers) William Shakespeare. It highlighted the historical background of the political, cultural and literary life of 16th Century England and the emergence

of Shakespeare and his writing. It also tried to cover his writing style, poetry, sonnets, and plays. So at the end of this Unit, you should have gained a background to the study of Shakespeare.

2.4 Glossary

Hamartia: Aristotle in his *Poetics*, discusses *hamartia* (a tragic error) in the life of the main character in the tragedy, which leads him to tragic destiny. The central protagonist is caught in such a situation which leads him to make an error in a judgment/action, which further leads to his fall. It is an integral part of a tragic character. The character must not be completely good or bad so that audience will have some pity on him.

Anagnorisis: It is a moment in a tragedy where the main character discovers or recognizes the actual situation. Aristotle tried to identify the tragic character's realization of his true nature/identity. He writes, anagnorisis is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune".

Peripetia: It is a reversal of fortune or circumstances in a tragedy. It is the most important element in the tragedy for a sudden change in a dramatic mood/plot. It is contrary to the audience's expectations.

Catharsis: As Aristotle points out, *catharsis* is a purgation (purification) of emotions of pity and fear, which was created among the audiences during the play, especially during the tragedy.

University Wits: The University Wits are the educated group of writers especially the English dramatists of 16th Century England who studied at Oxford and Cambridge universities. These dramatists tried to use innovative techniques in plays. The group includes Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene, Thomas Nash, Thomas Lodge and John Lyly.

2.5 Sample Questions

2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Shakespeare's Roman plays are based on _____.
2. Sonnet is a poetic form which derives its meaning from the Italian word ____ which means; "little song".
3. Shakespeare's English history plays borrowed its ingredients from _____ .
4. Which of the following great dramatist is not a university wit?

(a) Christopher Marlowe (b) William Shakespeare (c) Thomas Kyd (d) Robert Green.

5. How many sonnets did Shakespeare write?
6. Whom did Shakespeare address his sonnets to?
7. Which of Aristotle's works defines the theory of tragedy?
8. What is the rhyme scheme of Petrarch's sonnets?
9. When was *The First Folio* published?
10. Which of his contemporary dramatists criticized Shakespeare?

2.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Which are the major Shakespearean tragedies?
2. What are the different categories of Shakespearean plays?
3. Why is the First Folio important?
4. What are the different types of Sonnets?
5. What is the difference between Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets?

2.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What are the basic characteristics of Shakespearean tragedies and comedies?
2. What is a sonnet? Elaborate on characteristics of Shakespearean sonnets.
3. Briefly sketch the biographical account of William Shakespeare.

2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Callaghan, Dymphna. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Carter, Ronald and John Mcrae. *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland* (Third Edition). Routledge. 2017.
- Roston, Murray. *Sixteenth Century English Literature* Macmillan History Of Literature, Macmillan. 1982.
- Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford. Clarendon.
- Smith, Emma. *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Unit-3: *King Lear*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Objectives

3.2 *King Lear*: Background, Plot, Characters

3.2.1 William Shakespeare: A brief introduction

3.2.2 Shakespearean Tragedy

3.2.3 Background

3.2.4 Plot

3.2.5 Character Analysis

3.2.6 Conclusion

3.3 Learning Outcomes

3.4 Glossary

3.5 Sample Questions

3.6 Suggested Learning Resources

3.0 Introduction

King Lear is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare on the legendary Lear of Britain. King Lear surrenders his power and land to two of his favourite daughters. He becomes penniless, mad and a forbidden root of political conspiracies. Earlier well-known performances of any form of Shakespeare's drama were on the Day of St. Stephen in 1606. The play was frequently modified after the English Restoration for the spectators who detested its dull and discouraging tone, however, since the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's unique drama has been viewed as one of his incomparable accomplishments. Both the title character and the supporting characters have been in demand for proficient entertainers, and the play has been broadly embraced.

The battle for power comprises a root justification behind struggle in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, wherein an eminent family deceives their relatives for power and request. Turbulent occasions of the post-Medieval rule are seen through the crystal of desire, disloyalty, infidelity, and untrustworthiness. A short outline of the plot, characters, and main themes of the play gives adequate proof to discuss and debate that Shakespeare targets empowering the readers to ignore the mission for power for family bonds.

3.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- understand the background to *King Lear*
- understand the greatness of Shakespeare
- learn about the characters in the play
- become familiar with tragedy
- become familiar with the plot in *King Lear*.

3.2 *King Lear*: Background, Plot, Characters

William Shakespeare composed the tragedy *King Lear* who was one of the proficient English writers. He wrote some of the most famous plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*. The tragedy of *King Lear* portrays the devastating downfall of Lear and his daughters. This was brought about by the inability of the King to understand the true affection of his youngest daughter and surrendering himself to the materialistic and greedy adoration towards his reckless daughters. The beginning of the play is with the choice of the Britain King to give up the power and divide the kingdom among his three daughters. The king declares that the biggest part of his kingdom will be for the daughter who loves him the most.

Cordelia remains convinced by her father's choice and doesn't change the actual nature of her love and affection towards her father. Nevertheless, Goneril and Regan devise to show false affection to influence the King. Ultimately, the King disclaims Cordelia and gives in all his property to the two elder daughters. The King of France proposes his intention to marry Cordelia hesitantly even after knowing her reality which she admits. Goneril and Regan prove to be dishonest when they receive the powers to rule the kingdom and thereupon the downfall of the empire begins. One of the loyal servants overhears the conspiracy to kill their father. For the moment, Cordelia has upraised a military to protect her father and the empire from her shrewd and crafty sisters.

On the other hand, along with her father, Cordelia was conquered and arrested in their empire. The haughty and arrogant sisters plan to kill Cordelia and she was hanged to death on the order of Goneril and Regan. The King grieves on the demise of his daughter and dies by falling on

Cordelia. In the previous occurrences, the evil and mischievous monarchs face challenges in their destinies of murder due to greediness.

King Lear is an old king who hastily chooses to split his kingdom between his three girls Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. Goneril and Regan make embellished flattering of adoration for Lear, however, Cordelia prefers not to compliment her father. She is excluded and given in wedding to the King of France without patronage. Lear at the same time distributes his empire merely between Goneril and Regan. He is thrown out of the empire in the mid of the furious storm with just the Fool as his companion.

Goneril and her husband Albany plan to encourage Edmund, an illegitimate son of Gloucester, to betray his father. Edgar disguises himself as Tom of Bedlam, a madman, saves Gloucester. On the other hand, Lear becomes mad with rage and grief who leads to Cordelia at Dover in the French armed force camp. After an inner struggle over Edmund's love, Goneril harms Regan, then ends her own life. The French are defeated by the English armed forces under Edmund and Goneril's husband Albany. Lear and Cordelia are caught, and Cordelia is sentenced to death on the order of Edmund. Further, Edgar injures Edmund severely apologizing for the late confession. Lear, in the end, feels broken by melancholy and dies with Cordelia's dead body in his arms.

3.2.1 William Shakespeare: A brief introduction

William Shakespeare was born on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was a famous and well-known English poet, playwright, and actor. Shakespeare is certainly known as the best playwright in the English language and a pre-distinguished screenwriter all over the world. He is also titled the Bard of Avon and called England's national screenwriter. He penned 38 plays, 154 pieces of sonnets, two long narrative poems, etc. enormous conversion and translation of his plays have been done in living languages and are frequently performed compared to other plays.

a. Marriage and Profession:

Shakespeare got married to Lady Anne Hathaway at the age of 18 years. Susanna and twins Hamlet and Judith were their three children. The realities of his life after his marriage could not become common and he is remembered to have focused intensely on London making and acting in his plays. Shakespeare began his fruitful profession between the period of 1585 and 1592 in London as an actor, playwright, and was associated as a partner to an acting group known as *King's Men* which was earlier considered to be *The Lord Chamberlain's Men*.

b. Retirement and death

Shakespeare took his retirement in 1613, at 49 years old, and died after three years of his retirement. Not many accounts of Shakespeare's personal life could survive. At the age of 52, Shakespeare died on 23rd April 1616, in the very month of making his will. Shakespeare handed over most of his enormous estate to his elder daughter in his will.

c. His works

Shakespeare produced most of his famous works between 1589 and 1613. Initially, he wrote comedies and histories and then composed tragedies in his later life. These works were considered as the variety and the best work delivered. He began writing mostly tragedies till 1608. The best of his tragedies that are known as the finest works in English literature include *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *King Lear*. The plays of Shakespeare leave a benchmark in today's world of works and are frequently examined, acted, and re-evaluated in various scenarios throughout the world.

3.2.2 Shakespearean Tragedy

The best and greatest tragedies of Shakespeare are *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* *Macbeth*. Of these, the first play *Hamlet* is a play of revenge, after the way of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the second *Othello* is a domestic tragedy after the 'Spanish Tragedy' of Thomas Kyd, and *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are the third and fourth historical chronicles with varieties. All are based upon a distinctive strategy and plan, for instance, characterization and plot.

a. Single and High-Status Hero Figure:

However, there are many characters, the tragedies of Shakespeare are finally about one character i.e., the conqueror whose treasures are its actual subject and theme. Different characters, however, adequately fascinating in themselves, help fairly to give the connections in the account of his destiny. None of the four biggest tragedies has a love for its theme. Their theme is relative, disrespect and revenge, desire and distrust, jealousy and ungratefulness, aim and interest. The tragic hero of Shakespeare is certainly not a normal human. He is not a superman though, his position or power raise him over different characters in the play, and what befalls him is of public significance. Hamlet is the ruler of Denmark, Lear is the king of Britain, and Macbeth and Othello are the great warriors.

b. The Protagonist's Tragic Weakness:

Shakespeare's tragic protagonist is a man of numerous noble features however with one mistake that reasons his destruction. Hamlet has the retainer's, trooper's, researcher's eye, weapon,

tongue yet he experiences indecisiveness that reasons his end. Othello is an 'honourable and bold commander', yet he is a slave to envy. Macbeth is an amazing brother, loaded with the milk of human benevolence, but he is influenced with dark and profound desires and passion which lead him to his ruin. Lear is 'each inch a lord' however his brutal attitude and indecisiveness evidenced his downfall. As a result, the tragic or serious fault in their characters causes their end.

c. Destiny and Character:

The characters in Greek tragedy are the sufferers of merciless fate. Their destruction is announced in advance, and they can't get away from it. This notion is very divergent in the tragedies of Shakespeare since his tragic characters bring their destiny down on themselves by certain blunders of their own, from some inherent weakness in their temperament. They get on such consequences by which their destruction is ultimately assured. That consequence is perhaps engaged by two impacts outside their ability to control - the impact of the supernatural and the play of chance. The decision for each situation is that it stays with the hero of the drama who can oppose these impacts if he so selects and subsequently, his personality includes his destiny.

3.2.3 Background

As per Ben Jonson's statement, Shakespeare was a mastermind and genius and was not of one specific era but rather "forever". His literary works let us know that Shakespeare was an undaunted maverick who looked in his life for modesty and tranquility.

During the Elizabethan Renaissance, *King Lear* brings up his tragic background from various types of tragedies that were inescapable. Even though the classification of *King Lear* is a narrative tragedy which is a type of play that draws from the 16th century assets of English historical archives like Holinshed etc. Shakespeare rehearses elements of Classical tragedy and the Morality Play which are also known as Senecan tragedy.

Shakespeare's pure realism of art proficiently reveals the disorder and sickness of King Lear's world. King Lear appears to be an old ruler, at the beginning of the play and likely misused his power. A comparable strong ruler, by the ambiguity of predetermination, is associated with an accepting and submissive psycho, playing in obscurity, helplessly appearing to the rages of the components. This sort of hardship of Lear is partly his foolishness and vanity and fairly because of the hypocrisy, absence of gratefulness, and treachery of his "pelican daughters."

In the beginning phases of King Lear's tragedy, it seemed right to decide and divide the kingdom because of his old age. As a ruler, a father and an intellectual this was his genuine decision as per his status and prestige. But his assessment by expressing assumptions are a long way from

authenticity and not comprehending the settings and people nearby him. Lear expects to be that “father loves their children and that therefore children love their fathers.” Furthermore, he accepts that children remain honest and straightforward in expressing their feelings wholeheartedly. Similarly, fathers are allowed to express their love for their children. He has confidence that love can be rewarded as measurable things. These wrong suspicions make him desolate, fanatical, and self-absorbed.

Lear could not comprehend the real essence of his two daughters in this manner. The downfall of the king’s power and success to the chasm of agonizing, disheartening experiences with his predetermination. King Lear in rule and mental soundness is certainly by all accounts solely connected with pride and vanity. The ruler seems to be blind to the deaths and commits senseless faults that end up with his defeat, as well as other virtuous characters, are also ruined and destroyed.

3.2.4 Plot

The play *King Lear* starts with the decision made by the king to divide his kingdom into three equal parts among his three daughters. Knowing this, Goneril and Regan, the elder daughters become hypocrites and starts flattering their father, the king. Cordelia, the youngest daughter decides not to flatter or deceive her father and stay without any power in the kingdom. So, Lear settles with the choice of Cordelia’s decision and divides the empire into two equal parts to Goneril and Regan. Soon, the new powers banish the king, throwing him out as an exile. Cordelia marries a French King and surrenders to a commitment to attack Britain with a plan to save her father. Despite the earlier unreasonable treatment of Lear, Cordelia stays faithful to him, proceeding to deal with the previous king.

The second plot outlines the fears of an illegitimate son of Gloucester, Edmund. In expulsion, Edmund thrives on obtaining power even in an unlawful way, deciding to line up with Goneril and Regan to defeat Cordelia. When Goneril feels jealous of Edmund’s love for her sister that destroys the planning. However, the planning self-destructs when Goneril becomes envious of Edmund’s heartfelt affections for her sister. Envy propels Goneril to kill the sister and compelled her to die later. Noticing anarchy in the previous empire, Lear becomes mad and dies in the arms of his youngest daughter Cordelia.

The king commands all his court for the meet and declares his decision of dividing the kingdom among the three daughters ‘shake all cares and business from our state, /Conferring them on more youthful years’. The method adopted by the king to give away the part of the empire to

each daughter was that every daughter had to express her immense love for their father. By knowing this reason, the two elder daughters start flattering but the youngest and the truly loved daughter refuses to flatter and says: 'I love your highness / According to my bond, no more nor less.' Listening to Cordelia, Lear becomes furious and repudiates her and divides away Cordelia's portion of the kingdom between the spouses of her sisters. Though Kent tries to convince Lear out of devotion to that he is not doing justice to Cordelia, he was expelled out of the kingdom without knowing his intention.

a. External and Internal Conflict: - All Shakespeare's tragedies disregard the Classical Unities and consequently they have a Romantic Structure since he was composing in the Romantic Elizabethan Age. In Shakespearean tragedy, the vicious and striking activity on the stage has its partner in the internal clash in the hero's psyche and at last, he suffers defeat both apparently and deeply. The demonstration of this internal struggle is a difficult obligation for the most proficient artist. Along these lines, the demands it makes on the tragic artist are as difficult to take in the past. A Soliloquy is made to reveal the thoughts or feelings of the character. The main difficulty of the new and modern tragic artists is to accomplish the necessary consistency of character.

b. Plot Construction: - The tragic plot, like the comic, is made up of three sections: Exposition, Conflict, and Crisis followed by Catastrophe. The Exposition clarifies the circumstance with which the play opens, the Conflict fosters the primary subject and the Crisis shows the protagonist in his last stage moving to Catastrophe.

King Lear tries to stay away from future conflicts and hence decides to divide his empire among his three daughters. Knowing the plan of the father, the two elder daughters respond according to Lear's wish by flattering, however, Cordelia avoids being fraudulent. Being furious, Lear expels Cordelia, and she marries the king of France. When Kent tries to tell Lear that he is taking the wrong decision he is also expelled out of the kingdom.

Edmund, the illegitimate son of Gloucester, could not accomplish his brother's property by exiling him. Edmund plots to convince his father that Edgar is planning against him and later persuades his brother to run away from his father's anger. Edgar disguises as a hysterical traveller, Poor Tom, to prevent himself from imprisonment and he is taken into the administration of Cornwall.

Lear starts to visit Goneril and Regan, followed by Kent in disguise. Lear brings Goneril's agent Oswald to his provision when Kent attacks him. Goneril quarrels with her father, who gives her royal residence to go to Regan's. Kent quarrels again with Oswald and is imprisoned by Regan,

who supports her sister's plan. Goneril and Regan advise Lear to excuse them and thereafter the total of his followers. Lear abandons the palace in anger, a wild storm joined solely by his Fool and Kent. Lear speaks the storm and then meets his advisor, Poor Tom.

Gloucester discusses with his son Edmund, his intention to help Lear and send him to Dover. Cordelia and a French force were waiting for Lear at Dover. However, Gloucester has been informed by Edmund that Gloucester is blamed for being a betrayer, gets shocked and feels dejected. Cornwall on the other hand gets killed by a soldier in a fight. Poor Tom and Edgar's father who is blind move on to the journey to Dover and there Gloucester finds Lear.

Act III begins with Albany and Goneril, showing love to Edmund who is, in turn, has contact with Regan. A letter is passed through Oswald from Goneril to Edmund which acknowledges Gloucester, but he is killed by Edgar before he can hurt him. On the other hand, Cordelia's army finds Lear and they are imprisoned by the soldiers of Edmund who orders to kill them.

Goneril and Regan start fighting with each other and try to express their love and affection to Edmund. Edgar in disguise seems to battle when Albany challenges Edmund. Goneril commits suicide when her husband comes to know about her infidelity but before that, she poisons and ends Regan's life. Edgar unveils himself after Edmund is severely injured. An order is passed to stop the execution of Lear and Cordelia, but it was too late to save them. Lear dies of a heart attack carrying Cordelia's dead body in his hands. In the end, Albany hands over the entire kingdom to Kent and Edgar and leaves the empire. Edgar takes up the charge whereas Kent wishes to move on like his king in life.

3.2.5 Character Analysis

King Lear

The king of Britain plays a significant role of the hero in the story. Throughout the tenet, everybody remained committed and follows his commands. As soon as the king passes his power to his daughters based on flattering, the horrible situation changes the whole ambience of the kingdom. Being the smart ruler, Lear commits a disastrous fault, picking the flattering of the more experienced daughters over the honesty of Cordelia, the most youthful. Eventually, Lear understands his imperfections, stating: "When we are born, we cry that we have come to this great stage of fools" (Shakespeare 190). Ultimately this acknowledgement of Lear doesn't protect him from folly and death.

The Youngest Daughter - Cordelia

Shakespeare's character Cordelia is described as an illustration of ideals and delicacy. The most loved and the youngest daughter of King Lear does not appreciate flattering for the sake of getting the power of the kingdom from her father. Lear takes away Cordelia's royal status, but she still stays faithful to him, paying little attention to her father's partiality. From Cordelia's expressions, Shakespeare expresses beautiful lines for all children: "Obey you, love you, and most honour you. Half my love with him, half my care and duty" (9). Children should keep up the admiration for their parents always following the essence of reality.

The Two Elder Daughters: Goneril and Regan

Dissimilar to Cordelia, the two elder sisters possess different characteristics of dishonesty and harshness. Goneril, the most flattering daughter of Lear, uses cajolery to fool him for the transfer of the status of his kingdom. She flatters saying: "Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter; Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty" (9). King's liberal nature does not stop her from offending her father and removing him later. The second daughter, Regan, uses a similar way as Goneril to acquire expertise in the empire.

King of France

The King of France visits England to persuade Lear's unmarried daughter, Cordelia. At the point when Lear abruptly repudiates the last daughter, he chooses to marry her, regardless of any dowry. Later, impressed by her love and affection towards her father, he invades England to restore Lear to his throne. Though he understands that he left a few issues unattended in France, and returns over the Channel to manage them, leaving Cordelia to lead his armies against the British powers.

Duke of Cornwall

Lear's elder daughter Regan's husband is the Duke of Cornwall. When Lear divides his kingdom, he leads half of the empire. He is an aggressive, short-tempered man, who will not be mistreated and whom Lear doesn't like too. He encourages Edmund and names him Earl of Gloucester in his father's place the instant Edmund tells him of Gloucester's secret letter, without holding on to see if the letter's matter is valid or not. Cornwall would rather avoid his brother by marrying Albany, nor concur with him strategically, however, he needs his support to manage the French attack. A magnificent questioner, well on top of his significant other, he is rapidly capable with her assistance to compel Gloucester to concede his sentiments about their activities. He is awful to the point of taking Goneril's idea about Gloucester's eye, and culling them out, however

in the battle with the worker who objects he gets a human injury. He is all around matched to Regan. However, he tries to control himself for some time when talking to a servant of Lear's, his perseverance has apparent boundaries, and he has no uncertainties about setting the man in the prison. He generally permits his wife to deal with the King, and supports her completely, ordering Gloucester to lock the doors of his home against Lear. When Gloucester tries to beg for Lear, Cornwall takes over his house officially.

Cornwall generally tries to avoid Albany, nor he corresponds with him politically, however, he needs his support to manage the French conquest. A magnificent interrogator, well-tuned up with his wife, he is easily capable to make Gloucester confess his emotions about his activities. He is unkind enough to take the idea of Goneril about Gloucester's eyes and remove them out, however in the battle with the servant who objects he gets a deadly injury. He is coordinated by Regan.

Duke of Albany

Albany is the husband of Goneril (Lear's eldest daughter). He becomes the ruler of half of the kingdom as Lear declares the power of England when he repudiates his youngest daughter, Cordelia.

He is a gentle and modest man, hated by his better half and ready to allow her to lead most things. He has hidden strengths of harmony and a backbone that creates throughout the play. He dislikes his brother-in-law Cornwall. He is completely perplexed with regards to why Lear enters in a fury and demands going out of his house, but due to his wife's assurances unable to think that the King is wholly to blame in that situation. Later it validates his fears, and he makes his opinion on Goneril and her sister much unadorned. Goneril thinks of her husband Albany, as a deep-rooted moaner rather than a man of action. On being described Edmund's dealings with his wife and sister-in-law, Albany plans to be freed of him, releasing all the soldiers of Edmund and promising to battle Edmund if the mysterious defender does not act. He doesn't wish to govern the land and recommends that Edgar and Kent rule whenever everything is ended up.

Earl of Kent

The Earl of Kent is an elderly person who has served Lear loyally for a long time and is one of his most faithful subjects and companions. He knows the regal family well and has the proportion of its individuals. His devotion is of the most valiant kind: where others may believe blind dutifulness to be the importance of trustworthiness, Kent asserts when he sees Lear acting such that will do him good. He is frightened at the King's treatment of Cordelia and confronts Lear

with what he thinks of the King directly, despite all dangers. When he is expelled for this, he again shows the level of his devotion, without fear of death by disguising himself to help his master rather than follow the orders to live in banishment.

Under the name Caius, speaking in a different accent from his normal one, he becomes Lear's servant, as whom he continually provokes the servants of Lear's daughters, thereby pushing things so far that Lear cannot help but see how far he has fallen. Losing sight of Lear when the latter rushes out into the storm, Kent sends news to Cordelia of the state of things and goes to seek the King. He soon realizes that Lear has completely lost his mind and goes to the French camp to inform them of this and help them find him. He comes across Gloucester and Edgar just as his blinded fellow Earl dies and is overcome with grief at the combination of this and Lear's tragedy, to the extent that Edgar fears for his life. His loyalty and pity for Lear lead him to beg the others to not attempt to save the King's life, though the deaths of Lear and Cordelia leave him so stricken that he is convinced it is time for him to die, as ever following and serving his King.

Earl of Gloucester

The Earl of Gloucester is an old, white-bearded courtier of Lear. Loyal but slightly pathetic, he is credulous, superstitious, loving, and not very intelligent. An aristocrat, faithful to King Lear whose rank, earl, is underneath that of a duke. Gloucester is an adulterer, having fathered an illegitimate child, Edmund. His destiny is in numerous ways parallel to that of Lear: he misinterprets which of his daughters to trust. He seems powerless and incapable in the early actions when he can't keep Lear from being turned out of his own house, however, he later exhibits that he is also fortified for extraordinary bravery.

Edgar

Edgar is a legitimate son of Gloucester. Edgar assumes various roles, beginning as a gullible fool easily deceived by his brother. He carries himself in a disguise as a fool beggar to help Lear and Gloucester. Finally, performing as a shielded warrior to avenge the betrayal of his brother. Edgar's affinity for disguises and farces makes it hard to portray him effectively.

Edmund

Edmund is Gloucester's younger illegitimate son. Edmund hates his status as an illegitimate and orders to usurp the title of Gloucester and possessions from Edgar. He is a difficult character, following all his actions and creating destruction upon all the characters.

Curan

Curan is a friend of Edmund, who has heard rumours that Albany and Cornwall are quarreling and tries to verify them.

Oswald

Oswald is the steward of Goneril, an arrogant man, ready to obey his mistress' orders to treat Lear and his men with no respect. This leads to his quarreling with the disguised Kent, who treats Oswald with even less respect than the steward does the King. Goneril sends him with a message to Regan warning her of Lear's temper. On arrival, he is insulted to the point of a fight by Kent despite his acting in a perfectly polite manner. Completely, a man of Goneril, he grows worried when Albany appears to be tending more to Lear than to his wife. As an opportunist, he accepts to carry a letter for Regan to Edmund, and pledges to kill Gloucester should he come across him on his way. Finding Gloucester, he is delighted but has to find the disguised Edgar and is beaten. Dying, he begs Edgar to bury him and bring the letters to Edmund, thereby setting the latter up for his fall. He finds that his death comes far too soon.

Old Man

The **Old Man** has been a retainer of the Earl of Gloucester all his life, over eighty years. He helps to guide Gloucester away from his house, and tries to remain with him, but is thrown away. When Gloucester decides to be guided by the mad beggar they come across and asks the Old Man to bring Tom some clothes, he pledges to bring the very best he has. He is a deeply loyal man and is desperate to help Gloucester any way he can.

Doctor

A **Doctor** ministers to Lear when he is found and brought to Cordelia's tent. He wakes him with music and encourages Cordelia to be present so that he will wake up gently. He recommends not speaking of the time of madness to Lear, to avoid the risk of a recurrence.

Fool

The **Fool** is Lear's jester. The one person in court who can speak the truth to Lear without needing to fear too much, he still hides his criticisms in riddles, paradoxes, and puns, and is threatened with whipping for coming too close to the mark. Others at court, especially Goneril and Regan, simply find him insolent and disapprove mightily of his presence, especially when he follows Lear to their houses. After Kent, he is the first to learn how much the King has diminished himself, a theme he harps on constantly. He is depressed when Cordelia is banished and needles the King on the subject. A singer, he begins to sing more and more often with enigmatic songs

after Cordelia's departure. Still, he is loyal, and follows Lear into the storm, trying to get the King to take shelter. He is the first one Lear takes pity on other than himself. Sheltering in the hovel with the disguised Edgar, the Fool finds himself one of three madmen on stage, the real, the pretend, and the professional (himself). As Kent begins to lead Lear towards Dover, the Fool vanishes.

3.2.6 Conclusion

The strife of Lear's territory with the pure authenticity of his speciality was skilfully exposed by Shakespeare which exposes confusion, disorder, and havoc. Lear seems to be an old ruler at the beginning of the play but later misuses his power and position which brings his downfall.

The dispossession is due to his foolishness and egoism of Lear which is due to hypocrisy, ingratitude, and disloyalty of his "Pelican daughter." The other factors besides these which moves the tragedy such as division of empire on a wrong hypothesis ill-behaviour of the daughter for the king Lear.

The ethical visual impairment of the central character of King Lear possesses some different aspects which upgrade the tragedy like detachment of empire on a misleading thought, the dissatisfied demeanour of King Lear's daughters. The two deceptive and greedy daughters, Goneril and Regan, after taking their actual share, still waiting to gain more share. Later when Lear visits her daughters' palaces, instead of taking care of their father, they exile their father. Therefore, it shows the disloyalty and thankless approach of the elder daughters of King Lear.

3.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to understand that the play is about power and authority: the way the individuals acquire it and then lose it for the sake of land, money, power and mind's ability. You should be aware of the background, plot and characterization in the Shakespearean tragedy, *King Lear*.

3.4 Glossary

Knave: a tricky deceitful fellow

Compliment: an expression of esteem, respect, affection, or admiration

Conspiracy: a plan made by at least two individuals to accomplish something unsafe or unlawful

Quarto: it is the configuration of a book or leaflet delivered from full sheets printed with eight pages of text, four aside, then, collapsed two times to create four leaves. The leaves are then managed along the folds to create eight book pages. Each printed page presents as one-fourth size of the full sheet.

Spectators: one who looks on or watches; audience

Turbulent: causing unrest, violence, or disturbance

Infidelity: the truth of engaging oneself with somebody other than a partner, husband or wife in a romantic or sexual relationship

Flatter: to praise excessively especially from motives of self-interest

Disguise: to furnish with a false appearance or an assumed

Shrewd: marked by clever discerning awareness

repudiates: to reject as untrue or unjust

hypocrisy: the behaviour of people who do things that they tell other people not to do

treachery: violation of allegiance or faith and confidence

egoism: a moral assumption that respects particular circumstances as the support of moral value.

3.5 Sample Questions

3.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. King Lear wanted to divide his kingdom into _____ parts.
 - a. One
 - b. Five
 - c. Three
2. Who was the youngest daughter of King Lear?
 - a. Cordelia
 - b. Regan
 - c. Goneril
3. Who requested the king to change his mind?
 - a. the Duke of Albany
 - b. the Earl of Kent
 - c. the Duke of Burgundy
4. Why did the king declare that Cordelia is no longer his daughter?
 - a. because she never obeyed her father
 - b. because the king thought she didn't love him enough
 - c. because she was greedy and wanted to have the entire property of his father

Answer the following questions in one sentence:

1. What is the reason Lear enquires about the love of his daughters for him?
2. How was Cordelia's response not like the responses her sisters give?
3. Why did the Duke of Burgundy refuse to marry Cordelia?
4. Why did Edmund tell Edgar to run away?
5. Who leads the English army? Who won the battle?
6. Who was the eldest daughter of King Lear?

3.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Do you find any difference in character between Goneril and Regan?
2. What does the old King Lear plan to do with his kingdom?
3. Why does Kent wish to serve King Lear?
4. Why does Edgar fool his father at Dover in King Lear?
5. How does Lear change when he regains his sanity?

3.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. How many main characters die by the end of the tragedy, and what are the reasons behind their deaths?
2. What role do women play in King Lear?
3. Discuss the character sketch of Gloucester in King Lear.

3.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Greenblatt, Stephen, Gen. Ed. *The Norton Shakespeare* (based on The Oxford Edition). New York And London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997.
- Ioppolo, Grace. *William Shakespeare's King Lear: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- "King Lear - Laurence Olivier and John Hurt - Shakespeare - 1983 ." YouTube, Shakespeare Network, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pdn07wgUrno>.

Unit-4: *King Lear*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Objectives

4.2 *King Lear*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

4.2.1 Themes

4.2.1.1 Introduction to the Literary Devices

4.2.1.2 Major Themes in *King Lear*

4.2.2 Narrative Technique

4.2.2.1 Structure

4.2.2.2 Literary Devices

4.2.2.3 Dramatic Settings

4.2.3 Critical Appreciation

4.2.4 Conclusion

4.3 Learning Outcomes

4.4 Glossary

4.5 Sample Questions

4.6 Suggested Learning Resources

4.0 Introduction

In the previous Unit, you examined the background, plot, and characters of William Shakespeare's well-known tragedy *King Lear*. This Unit will provide themes, narrative techniques, and critical appreciation. The theme is the central idea of the tragedy. After noticing the entire act, it is recognizable that the action can be anecdotal. The idea of the theme practices the various types of narration or lessons learned by the characters. This tragedy offers a lesson to the readers that how greediness and indecisiveness may lead to destruction and how the dishonest decision results in the end. The thematic ideas could be liberal love or disdain, or genuine companionship and such model is the tragedy *King Lear* which is centered on brutality and wrong decision-making that forces the king and his daughter to self-destruction.

While the dialogues and music are the distinctive parts of the drama, the visual component manages the scenes, costumes, and effects employed in it. The visual component of drama, also known as the spectacle, delivers a visual allure for the stage arrangement. The costumes and cosmetics should suit the characters. The special effects employed in a play ought to complement the piece or character of the story that is being featured.

The structure of the play, use of imagery and comparison, and stage presentation play significant roles in the elements of drama. The whole structure of the play depends on the way it is dramatized. Images and symbols are often used to give clues of the incidents going to occur in the story in the future. They balance the other elements in the story and make it more compelling. The use of comparisons also adds to the emotional component of a play. It may be in the form of different colours, different scenery, with the interlude of silence followed by that of action and sound or a variation in the pace of the drama.

The performance of a story cannot be called successful unless there is feedback or response from the audience to it. There may be a scope of improvisations through the constructive criticism presented by the characters. A generous appreciation certainly encourages the dramatists to accomplish great work.

4.1 Objective

The objectives of this Unit are:

- to explore the different themes in *King Lear*, a tragedy
- to identify the social and political interpretation of Shakespeare
- to understand the various narrative techniques used in tragedy
- to comprehend the different types of plots
- to attempt a critical appreciation of the play

4.2 *King Lear*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

4.2.1 Themes

4.2.1.1 Introduction to the Literary Devices:

The theme is a literary device that refers to the main and deeper meaning of a write-up. Authors speak on the themes of their work and keep them open for interpretation for the readers.

Readers develop a deeper understanding of the work done and try to analyse it beyond the literary work in their perception. The theme provides and creates a critical literary work experience for the readers.

Themes are meant for the perception and interpretation of the reader. The readers may find minor and major themes in the works of literature that the writer may not intend to convey. Therefore, the theme allows the works to revisit and analyse in eternity by different readers at once or by a single reader in a different time frame.

4.2.2 Major Themes in *King Lear*:

1. **Old Age:** Age plays a vital role in the tragedy of King Lear. The king represents old age and wants to get flattered by his daughters. The two elder daughters plot against him and leave him in the storm. The youngest daughter, Cordelia, truly loves her father but the king disowns her for not flattering him. Apart from being aged, the treachery of Goneril and Regan brings the king to the downfall as well as makes him mad. On the other hand, Edmund also waits for his father's death to leave his empire for him. The ageing process reveals that the youth became reckless to replace the parents with their greed and voracity at the time when they should look after their parents.
2. **Family Relations:** Ancestral loyalty is another major theme in *King Lear*. Through the family relationships between King Lear and his daughters, and Gloucester and his sons, the nature of loyalty and infidelity are uncovered. The treacherous daughters make their father mad whereas the youngest to whom he disdained for less flattery, helps her father till death. Similarly, Edmund weaves conspiracies to win legitimacy but Edgar (Gloucester's real son) comes to his rescue.
3. **Insanity:** King Lear's madness and insanity are shown through the people who have already suffered mistreatment at the hands of their loved ones. The king becomes insane when he sees his two elder daughters deceived him, who flattered him at first and claimed to love him. In the same way, the Fool indicates to him that the illogicality of his judgments has charged him dearly.
4. **Order and its Results:** Order is another significant theme in *King Lear*. The empire of the king is in excellent arrangement when he rules it righteously. But when he divides his kingdom between the flatterers and leaves the supporter Cordelia, turmoil supervenes. The Fool criticizes this disorder in his comment. Then he reproaches him for allowing his kingdom in the hands of dogs and bringing about trouble in the order.

Shakespeare tries to express the notion that power is not always held in the hands of those who justify it for their asset and honesty.

5. **Fidelity and Loyalty:** The testing of loyalty to Lear was in the shape of flattery when King Lear commands his daughters to express him their love to which, there was response from the hypocrites whereas the earnest one, Cordelia, only displays the true love. Goneril and Regan place the cards on the table when the time comes by banishing the king from his estate. While the faithful one still leads her life for her father. Likewise, few other characters also prove their fidelity and loyalty to the king by presenting him his mistakes such as the Fool.
6. **Justice:** The notion of justice in the play is related to the penalty where the king does not give his loyal daughter, Cordelia when she could not flatter him. Though he downpours admiration on his deceitful daughters and divides his kingdom between them, considering his third daughter partially. Whereas, Gloucester has instigated jealousy and vengeful feelings in Edmund by treating him unjustly even though he is an illegitimate son.
7. **Pretension and Reality:** The tragedy also displays the themes of pretension and reality; both are often misleading as well as hostile. Pretension can be observed in Goneril and Regan while the reality is seen in the honesty of Cordelia. Edmund perceives another side of reality by rejecting to admit it.
8. **Humanity and Kindness:** These themes are presented in the play through the deed King Lear gets from his daughters. While the first and second daughter lacks kindness and compassion, the Fool exhibits humanity and kindness towards the king. Cordelia is kind and concerned as she comes back to defend her father. The king is sympathetic towards Edgar who disguises himself as a beggar. Edgar presents kindness towards his father and King Lear.
9. **Attributes:** King Lear present attributes in the shape of the storm that examines not only human beings but also nature. The changing weather and climatic conditions show human nature during good and bad times.
10. **Brutality and Violence:** The images of brutality and violence have been used in the play to enrich the passion of sensing portrayed by the special characters of a Revival tragedy. In the very brutal Scythian as his family then recognizes Cordelia as his loving daughter. When Lear, gets angry with her eldest daughter Goneril, he curses her using

effective imagery expressing anger, rage, and brutality. He calls to the Goddess of Nature to condense Goneril sterile and childless so that no child can take up her kingdom and carry on the generation. Similar brutal imagery is uttered by Lear when, speaking to Regan, he calls upon lightning to burn and scorch the eyes of Goneril thus: 'dart you blinding flames into her scornful eyes' (II, iv. 186).

4.2.2 Narrative Technique

Like other tragedies, *King Lear* also exhibits the Shakespearean strategy of showing different complex features like greatness, parody, and tragedy. A scope of styles has been utilized to show different passionate conditions of individuals which include misfortunes, hardships, and torments just like anger. Indeed, even the discourse of *King Lear* observes change all through the play, as he speaks with assurance and confidence in the initial segment. However, when his flatterers betray him, his speech displays brutality. Though the consideration of the Fool in the play brings comic components, making the milieu a little relaxed when contrasted with the underlying stages where it becomes accused of feelings.

4.2.2.1 Structure:

King Lear is a five-act tragedy by Shakespeare. The maximum number of Elizabethan theatres follow the structure of five-act.

Act I: This act is the description of the problem and introduction to the main characters of the play. The Act displays the dispute between Cordelia and Lear, between Goneril, Regan and Lear, and also between Gloucester and Edgar. The characters such as Goneril, Regan and Edmund present beguiling and deceptive and on the contrary, Cordelia and Edgar represent prodigious characters. The other main characters merely give their introduction in this act.

Act II: This is the act where the difficulties begin. The shame and conflicts increase and heighten. The downfall of Lear recoils and Lear and his daughter's relationship are unveiled and exposed. Furthermore, the conspiracies that surround Goneril, Regan and Edmund are exposed.

Act III: This act is the climax of the play. The climax is the occurrence of important things or the disaster that happens in the act. Storm plays a vital role in the climax of *King Lear* where the king has been shown lost and his dialogues show that he is lost psychologically also. The level of destruction is exposed to a great extent when the wicked Regan and Cornwall gouge out Gloucester's eyes.

Act IV: This act is called the Falling Action. Edgar with his father Gloucester reunites, though Gloucester remains unconfirmed about Edgar being his child. Cordelia returns to Lear who overcomes his rage at her. The destruction of the conspirators such as Edgar kills Oswald and Cornwall's death is unveiled in this act. The tragedy overwhelms the play, and the Act develops to support the hero.

Act V: This is the conclusion of the play. This Act provides the solution to the problems and the death of Lear, the hero of the play. A few main characters such as Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Lear, and Cordelia die by the end of the story. Only Edgar lives and restores peace in the empire.

4.2.2.2 Literary Devices:

Hamartia of Lear is changed to *peripeteia* which is a sudden reversal of fortune. Then moves to Lear's *anagnorisis* and redemption, that is, he recognizes and discovers the true identity of his daughters. The development of the tragic hero, Lear, is slow. His brilliance is hindered and recommended in the last acts of the play. The audience responds to the demise of the legend as catharsis. The tragedy inculcates the importance of humanity, the desire to be away from such horrifying situations and the moral to understand they may happen to anyone.

Gloucester's subplot is a significant feature of the play. The parallel connections of family discord, rage, and the wrong decision of Gloucester reflect the central plot of Lear. The subtleness of the subplot offers the realities of the main plot, improving and establishing the fervent reaction exhilarated in the spectators. Shakespeare's plays are the opposite of that of the playwrights of old Greece. Reinforcing to strengthen the Act, the old Greece playwrights avoids subplots supposed to be the Unity of Action.

The play covers a prolonged time frame due to a variety of settings and the development of characters. The play speeds up the emotions of assurance in Act IV with the use of short scenes and different regions. The unity of time and place can be noticed in the offset of Shakespeare's plays compared to the old playwrights' preference.

A maximum number of deaths occur in Act V shocking the audience of the tragedy. Though such shocking tragedies are prevalent in Greece most of the playwrights avoid showing the deaths on the stages and in front of the audience. A few critics acknowledge that this reluctance begins from the origin of tragedy in tradition. They convey that the

presentation of death on stage or before the audience would pollute the situation, but Shakespearean tragedy expresses no such restrictions.

4.2.2.2 Dramatic Setting:

The setting of the tragedy *King Lear* is a set of series of dominant statements, actions of violence, the downfall of Lear, fake battles with swords, imprisonment of Kent, the horrible gouging out of eyes of Gloucester and finally the battle between two brothers Edmund and Edgar.

Music

Music and sound effects play a vital role in the play. The shame that Lear faces, and the loss of his majestic power in the past, his presence is separated by appearance. After the downfall of Lear, he could not manage to overcome this disrespect and an audio device 'storm' is used as a tool of pathetic fallacy associated with Lear throughout Act III. The music of the storm indicates Lear's inner struggle, for instance, when he fights to understand his emotional change in situations and drops into melancholy, and when he understands his action and their results.

Lighting

The building of thoughts and ideas are usually symbolized by lighting, as night is signified by the light carried by the actors, especially in the scenes of the storm. Symbolically, it shows when evaluated that Britain is in 'darkness' as Goneril and Regan take away the power from their father, King Lear.

Asides

In the play *King Lear*, the use of asides is important. Asides uncover characters' actual goals/contemplations, as the degree of strategy turns out to be increasingly confusing. The asides help the audience in exploring the difference between truth and fraudulence and offer understanding into characters' motivations.

Costume

Edgar and Kent, as they take on an alternate character used costume to reflect the disguise, giving a reasonable clarification concerning how Gloucester and Lear could not recognize such known faces from their families. The costume is utilized as a symbol in the play. For instance, 'Lear, fantastically dressed with wildflowers.'

The costume highlights the madness of Lear and connects the king to nature which is the reconnection with nature that helps Lear with attaining the right understanding. Props

execute a significant role, for example, the love letter from Goneril to Edmund and a fake letter prepared by Edmund to convince Gloucester for the injustice done to Edgar becomes the reason for their deaths. The pieta scene is used in Act V which is the most influential instance of performance for example, 'Re-enter Lear, with Cordelia dead in his arms.' The dead bodies of Edmund, Goneril and Regan in this last scene have been abruptly engaged and all the attention is given to Cordelia so that the audience can share the suffering of Lear.

Language

Shakespeare sets Lear's Language according to his tragic situation. During Act I, Shakespeare gave Lear a dialogue to express himself as a true king where he uses 'royal we' with full pride. Lear speaks in a particular pronoun. When he struggles to realize his defeat, his speech changes to questions and exclamation marks.

Besides blank verse, Shakespeare uses prose style for various explanations in *King Lear*. In Act I, this style is used for rude arguments as Kent and Gloucester attempt to examine Edmund. The prose style is also employed at the end of Act I, when the two wicked daughters Goneril and Regan talk about their plan to seize the power of their father, Lear. In Act III, Shakespeare changes his style from verse to prose to highlight Lear's psychological disorder. Further, Shakespeare moves back and forth with verse and prose style in different sections and explanations in Act III for Lear's mental disturbance. On the other hand, the two characters, The Fool and Poor Tom are given dialogues on account of their poverty as well as to reflect their apparent feeble intelligence and disguise.

Redundancy is used to heighten the inclination towards the emotions being conveyed. For instance, when Lear gets annoyed towards the husbands of the daughters and he states:

'I'll put in proof;
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!'
When Regan and Goneril humiliate the king with their disobedience:
'You think I'll weep;
No, I'll not weep:
I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
Or ere I'll weep.'

Else his despair on the partiality done by him to his loved daughter

Cordelia:

‘And my poor fool is hang’d! ...

... Thou’lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never!’

Many other such illustrations of metaphors can be observed in this tragedy.

Animal Imagery

Often, animals are used to indicate the features of Goneril and Regan in the play. For example, Lear himself calls them ‘Pelican daughters,’ relating Goneril to a wolf and a vulture and representing her as ‘Deserted kite!’ Kent symbolizes them with ‘dog-hearted daughters’ of Lear, and Albany denotes as ‘Tigers, not daughters.’ Snake is symbolized to show the wickedness and dishonesty of Goneril and Regan. Albany denotes Goneril as a ‘gilded serpent,’ which was once used by Lear that she is ‘most serpent-like.’ Edmund also classifies Goneril and Regan as ‘the adder,’ the venomous snake.

Religious imagery

The gods like Jupiter, Fortune, Apollo, and Phoebus are denoted to furnish the conflict of the divinities, ‘As flies to wanton boys, are we to th’ gods. They kill us for their sport,’ used to evaluate the weakness of Gloucester when compared to the gods’ power which shows his stress level as he sustains that persistence is impulsive. But Cordelia has faith that the honest people could have the provision of divine supremacy stating, ‘O you kind gods, Cure this great breach in his abused nature!’

Soliloquy

Shakespeare involves soliloquy as a significant literary device in his plays. Most Shakespearean tragedies surround soliloquy since they offer a way for the dramatist to reveal a character’s internal feelings. The soliloquy needs that the character should believe that he is distant from everyone in front of the audience, as he expresses what he is thinking to serve the audience. King Lear covers eleven soliloquies, with Edmund and Edgar using this device to explain their conspiracies and reasons to the audience. A soliloquy is a unique device compared to monologue, where a character utters loudly his thoughts in the presence of the other characters. Similarly, Shakespeare frequently uses the aside, wherein the character speaks to the audience but that cannot be heard by other characters. For instance, Goneril employs an aside to disclose that she has poisoned Regan.

Double Plot

Another significant literary device employed in this play is the double plot. *King Lear* is the only tragedy to use two same plots and function in a parallel fashion. The two plots are finely intertwined, offering parallel endings. Shakespeare creates tragic situations that result when the law of man is given superiority over the law of nature. The double plot emphasizes the law of nature as an important aspect of both plots. The double plot shows the absence of natural law is detrimental and all the good characters in the play cannot be saved from the ravages of evil and dictatorship. Shakespeare uses the double plot throughout the play. The loyalty of Kent to King Lear is parallel to the loyalty of Oswald to Goneril. Cornwall's and Albany's opposite ambitions and thoughts are represented in a parallel mode. Cornwall has the ambition to achieve the kingdom with no interest in the well-being of the kingdom whereas Albany has no ambition except to preserve the kingdom and save the life of Lear.

The second set of the double plot is shown through the characters France and Burgundy whose reaction to the loss of dowry of Cordelia varies in extreme means. Burgundy wants to marry Cordelia only for the sake of money, land, and rank whereas France has no greed for Cordelia's material possessions. Shakespeare wrote this play in blank verse, employing iambic pentameter. The literary term iambic pentameter is defined as the meter and stress of play placed on each syllable. Several poets of the Renaissance used iambic pentameter in which each line comprises ten syllables, with each pair of syllables. Both have accented syllables and unaccented syllables. The irregular stresses construct a rhythm that adds to the beauty of the language of the play.

4.2.3 Critical Appreciation

Shakespearean tragedy contains components of the light-hearted element, intended to give a kind of therapy, an opportunity for the audience to "catch its breath." But for this situation, no entertainment mitigates the pressure as Lear plays out the dramatization that his choice has gotten rolling. Characters, who in different misfortunes, may contain comedic components - like the Fool - are far eliminated from satire. The Fool's motivation is to make Lear snicker, yet all things being equal, he works to a great extent as a Greek Chorus, remarking on the activity and bringing up to Lear nuances of his conduct and risks that he faces. Be that as it may, his sympathy, touched with mockery, is rarely interesting.

Shakespeare provides several elements in his tragedies such as comic relief, catharsis, a chance for the audience to "catch its breath". But in *King Lear*, there is no such element of

comic relief that eases the strain as Lear plays out the dramatization that his decision has advanced continuing. The characters of other tragedies contain comic elements like the Fool – which is taken out from parody. The purpose of the Fool is to make Lear laugh, but he works generally as a Greek Chorus, making a remark on the action and specifying to Lear nuances of his behaviour and perils that he faces. But his kindness tinged with sarcasm is rarely comical.

In one of the scenes, Gloucester is at his utmost dismal state. His calm and kind nature move to the reality of diligence which Gloucester cannot tolerate that pain and dies. Taking him to Dover, stating: 'who's bending head/Looks fearfully in the confined deep.' Critically the perception of the world is encouraged and supported, and Gloucester has a clear revelation of the creation. After getting blind he could see the real world and he has a clear understanding rather than when he had a vision, 'I stumbled when I saw.' Gloucester feel Gods as brutal rulers controlling human destiny, 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods;/They kill us for their sport.' The pain and melancholy make him a sensible personality. Gloucester is oblivious that he has been blessed what he had wished for, 'might I live to see thee in my touch (Edmund).' The wrong decision once taken by Gloucester remains much more intellectual, if not perfect. This reveals an elusive theme that serves throughout the play. The great characters, who are rich appear to have mystified and confused judgment, but with the downfall of their possession and wealth, the truth is revealed both allegorically and literally.

This is correct for Lear, Gloucester, and Edgar. Perhaps, this is to suggest that possession and money are the factors responsible for the downfall and destruction of a man. It is at the point at which they lose their surfaces that they can recognize the truth about things. Gloucester's misfortunes have left him with only reality; something that would be very significant to most. Gloucester requires the 'superfluous and lust-dieted man', 'to undo excess,' to see.

Critics might oppose that Lear is impractical and insane from the beginning of the play exclusively because he surrendered power and split his realm, or because he did not have vision enough to understand that Goneril and Regan were simply pretending love. In Lear's first dialogue during the storm, the language structure is scattered with the exclamation, implying that Lear is shouting in a basic tone to the components; however ready to get everything he might want earlier, he is no more a ruler, and he has not understood it.

Similarly, a significant number of his sentences are long containing numerous commas. Both the exclamations and commas present a picture of a man shouting boisterously, persistently, barely stopping to slowly breathe in, like some hysterical crazy person, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!... cataracts and hurricanes, spout till you have drenched...” (III, ii, 1 – 3). In the first words of the scene, Lear delivers a picture of a violent circumstance, rolling winds, a drenching rainstorm, and a regular pandemonium. The way that Lear, a civilized, yet aged king, drenched and howled at the components shows that he is mad. Lear alone faces the violent storm and proceeds to request the heavenly elements, “Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world, crack nature’s molds, all germens spill at once,” (III, ii, 7 – 8) which is beneath king’s dignity.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare creatively used the meticulous elements of the play that represented monologues and soliloquy. The representation of speeches by characters in the play addresses self as a problem of commitment instead of monologues. The settlement in *King Lear* occurs when an actor speaks to himself in the presence of other characters. He speaks without caring about the other characters hearing his speech, no matter the speaker fails to express or heard by them his speech.

4.2.4 Conclusion

The narration of Shakespeare in the tragedy *King Lear* presents the tale of a family who believes that power is more important than love and affection, respect and admiration, humanity and kindness. The mischievous nature of humanity such as jealousy, greediness, disloyalty and insanity are the major themes of the play. Shakespeare encourages the readers to acknowledge the insights of virtue, morality and honesty rather than plunging into a superficial desire of lust and power through this play.

The dramatic structure of *King Lear* mirrors the importance of Shakespeare, regardless of whether he explains on a particular point or variety of themes, or whether he expounds on a specific time or for the ages, lastly, whether he writes on a particular gathering or about people in general. Shakespeare’s incredible craftsmanship is ageless and addresses universality in the human condition. Shakespeare's eminence, thus, lies in the allure for his constant pertinence, and his ability to address generation to come. Subsequently, the double-plot structure in *King Lear* reveals that Shakespeare's twisting and creative way to deal with the topic, manifests administrative consciousness leaving an explanation to the audience.

There are various beliefs among the critics regarding the impact of the presentation of the sub-plot in this play. From certain perspectives, the subplot disrupts the unity of structure of the play and weakens the dramatic impact of the *King Lear* story by diverting the attention of the audience to the characters and events of the subplot. Shakespeare has interlinked the primary plot and the sub-plot by keeping the solidarity of the entire play indispensable; and they express the view that the emotional impact of the main plot is built up by the sub-plot, rather than weakened by it.

4.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the Unit you should have learned:

- Shakespeare as a poet, playwright, and actor during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages of British theatre
- to explore the reasons for the dissolution of the family, friendship, and personality
- understand the difference between truthful speech and flattery
- understand the double-plot theme within the play
- suggest the suffering of Lear far from being the unique fate of a tragic hero
- know the literary devices used in the tragedy *King Lear* to express the loss, deprivation, anger, and misery.

4.4 Glossary

Complement: something that completes or fills up

Eternity: infinite or unending

Flattery: a pleasing statement or action used as a means of gently persuading someone to do something

Voracity: the condition or quality of being eager or greedy

Insanity: the state of being seriously mentally ill; madness

Treacherous: guilty of or involving betrayal or deception

Fidelity: faithfulness to a person demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support

Hypocrisy: acting as if one is morally superior to others

Instigate: provoke someone to do something bad

Disguise: to be in a different appearance to hide one's identity

Scythian: an ancient nomadic people living in the region of Scythia

Beguiling: charming or enchanting often in a deceptive way

Catharsis: the process of releasing or providing relief from strong or repressed emotions

4.5 Sample Questions

4.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Regan dies because _____.
 - a. Cordelia drowns her
 - b. Kent stabs her
 - c. Goneril poisons her
2. In the end, _____ becomes the king of England.
 - a. Kent
 - b. Edmund
 - c. Albany
3. The name of Goneril's head servant was _____.
 - a. Oswald
 - b. Oscar
 - c. Orion
4. _____ is the name of the beggar that Edgar invents while he is in disguise.
 - a. Sad Sam
 - b. Poor Tom
 - c. Lone Ryan
5. _____ safety does Lear pray for during the thunderstorm.
 - a. The Fool's
 - b. The poor
 - c. Cordelia's

One line questions:

1. Who was King Lear _____?
2. Name the youngest daughter of king Lear _____.
3. Name the eldest daughter of King Lear _____.
4. Whom is King Lear married to _____.
5. King Lear had in all _____ daughters.

4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the theme of brutality and violence in *King Lear*.
2. Why Cordelia is not admirable entirely?
3. What is Edmund's attitude towards Regan and Goneril?
4. Write a note on the theme of madness in the play.
5. What do you understand by the term double plot used in the play?

4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. “King Lear is a play about the humiliating and critical struggles of powers.”
Elaborate.
2. Assess the significance of fidelity and loyalty as a theme in the play.
3. Evaluate the narrative techniques used by Shakespeare in the tragedy *King Lear*.

4.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books/Penguin Putnam Inc., 1998.
- Danson, Lawrence, Ed. *On King Lear*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Evans, G. Blakemore, Et al., Eds. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- Greenblatt, Stephen, Gen. Ed. *The Norton Shakespeare* (Based on the Oxford Edition). New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997.
- Ioppolo, Grace. *William Shakespeare’s King Lear: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- “KING LEAR by William Shakespeare - FULL AudioBook.” YouTube, Greatest AudioBooks, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDjI0i9E4iI>.

Unit-5: Introduction to Modern English Drama

Structure:

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction to Modern English Drama

5.2.1 History of Modern English Drama

5.2.2 The Earlier Phase

5.2.3 The Middle Phase

5.2.4 The Later Phase

5.2.5 Let Us Sum Up

5.3 Learning Outcomes

5.4 Glossary

5.5 Sample Questions

5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

5.0 Introduction

Drama is a genre of literature. It is one of the finest literary frameworks of compositions, directed to engage, educate and advise people. The term “drama” is derived from a Greek word, which signifies “action.” Its verb meaning is “to do” or “to act”. Its origin intends for the cultural and artistic necessity of the immediate era, and not as a social or moral altering tool.

Drama is an occidental originated form of literature and is alternatively referred to as “play”. In contradiction to classical plays, presently dramas are used to represent the actualities of contemporary times and somehow aid humans towards social modifications and reforms. It is ‘true’ representation of life on stage, certainly interpreted from reality. The recognition and comprehension of these broken realities are the foremost and crucial steps; and a play as a literary mode befits the role aptly. Undoubtedly, the storyline of the plays can be the direct enactment of the realities or can be the fictitious representation of the same.

Further, a dramatist is the one who gets an opportunity, to be the most creative yet salient agent of social, moral and intellectual rebuilding and modification as well, towards a more agreeable and equitable future.

5.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- familiarize you with the origin and development of Modern English Drama
- appreciate some major Modern English dramatists in the historical context

5.2 Introduction to Modern English Drama

The drama began in Greek, approximately in the second half of 5th century BC. Dramas were started as festive performances or competitions that tend to be held on streets, celebrating Dionysus or Bacchus, the god of wine and fertility. It used to be a part of grand event held not only for the royals, but for the common people of the province. Later, it shifted its locale all over Europe, and finally reached England in a bit modified form. Hence, the recognition of supplementary development and acclamation belongs to cultural, artistic and social inclinations of England. The dramas that we see in contemporary times, was never an outcome of sudden revelation.

The dramas of Greek culture were predominantly divided into two genres— tragedy and comedy. The two masks, laughing one; and other, the crying one respectively, were associated with the symbolic representation of these distinctive thematic forms of dramas. They were the reference to the two ancient Greek muses—Thalia, the Muse of comedy, and Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy. The tragedies were mostly written in poetic forms and were staged by a chorus and maximum of four characters. The chorus used to be a group who tend to interpret or comment upon everything happening in the play including the pause in between acts. The famed works like *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles and *Electra* by Euripides, were some of the important Greek dramas who have their influence even today as well. The Greek dramas had much basic form of plot structure composition, which could be split into a beginning, middle and an end. These divisions were alternatively called as the protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe respectively. Dramas were directed based on three unities—time, place and action. The list of most notable Greek dramatists whose works have survived till today, includes Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Menander. The acclamation of oldest outliving drama goes to Aeschylus' historical tragedy, *The Persians*.

In the following times, the territories of Greek got seized by the Roman empire as it expanded more and more, during the early 6th century BC. Among the rich economic and cultural

treasuries of Greek, the artistic worth of dramas baffled Romans. It aided the extensive growth of dramas into the more refined and sophisticated genres, incomparable to any other. The Roman society witnessed Greek dramas, which later got exposed to West across Europe and reached England. We can see the Five-Act structures in Roman dramas similar to the drama compositions of later periods. Not much distinguished from earlier Greek trends, Romans also tend to use dramas a mode of splendid celebrations or gladiatorial fights, for the amusement of subjects of state and royals as well. The roman period gave us two famous Comedy dramatists, Titus Maccius Plautus and Publius Terentius. The mimes also developed during this period and could be seen as a third form of dramas, which were often claimed to be obscene. But most recognized dramas of this period belong to the class of Senecan dramas written by Lucius Annaeus Seneca.

The conquering of northern Gaul by the Romans was the mode of unrestricted exposure of Britain and Mediterranean regions. Consequently, the products, traditions, and cultural and literary treasures reached to Britain easily. It was something that influenced the upcoming future of dramas. Accordingly, the medieval drama turned precisely towards the Christianity and Churches. Medieval dramas too were of three types—Mystery, and Miracle and Morality Plays. Mystery Plays were initially performed in Latin in the interiors of the church and were the dramatization of biblical stories. Later, its execution shifted to the steps of the churches and were oriented towards the language of common people. Second, Miracle Plays were inspired by the lives of saints and their miraculous accomplishments. Lastly, Morality Plays were the allegoric representations of human virtues and vices, personified as character in the plays and portrayed by the group of actors.

The echoes of alterations and progress could be seen in the literature of Renaissance period. It is the age of enlightenment and advancement, the age of disintegration with past chaos and disparities. Thus, human grabbed its position in the centre of the literary compositions as a hero rather than being a victim; the dramatist alters the trend of human to be a helpless creature in the hands of God or a pawn in the conflict between good and evil or heaven and hell. The five-act structure got revived in this period. The significant position of playwrights like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe is known to the world from the ages. The Work, *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall is the earliest outlasting English comedy.

From 1642 to 1660, all the theatres in London were closed by an act of Parliament during the puritan rule in England. But in 1660, the comeback of Charles II lead to the re-opening of theatres with two prominent changes—women were now prohibited on the stage, and curtain were used.

The drama lost its worth for quite some time in front of other literary genres. It got institutionalized again after the later Victorian period. The Modern era of Drama began with the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who brought realism to the stage through his plays dealing with the social commentary. Around this time, the dramatists abandoned the five-act structure and experimented with three and four-act plays. George Bernard Shaw became noteworthy modern British dramatists of the twentieth century. There is no clear demarcation between the modern and postmodern drams; it is more of an extension. The postmodern plays flourished in Europe in the mid of 20th century and concentrated on the failure of absolute truth. Postmodern theatre primarily raised questions rather than trying to give answers. Some new forms of play formations appeared as well, like theatre of the absurd. The major dramatists who followed the legacy of these new formed techniques are Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet.

5.2.1 History of Modern English Drama

Literature has served the philosophical and artistic needs of humans from an extended period. It is the mode of human expressions of their ideas, necessities, desires and hopes. It has aided the society to accept the differences, and to pave down the path towards a change. Undoubtedly, it is an integral feature of a society to change with the progressing time periods. And these changes refer towards the refinement and restyling of culture, art or social inclinations. The change is inevitable and so is its repercussions. The society's literary taste kept on changing with the advancement of literature and culture. All the distinctive time periods witnessed popularization of different literary genres. With the rise of one, there would always be a decline of another. With the decline of dramas after Renaissance age, the advancement of novel as a literary genre started. In Romantic age, poetry tightly held its position on the top of literary stairs.

In the later times of Victorian period, aftermath of industrial revolution and other struggles against the social inequalities, a slight shift in literary genres started once again. The Victorian period witnessed many struggles, evident in the literature of the contemporary writers. The literary works were more focused on the factual evidence of the social repressions in different sections of the society. The triumphs of suppressed sections of the population as numerous reforms got initiated steadily, resulting into reshaping of the literature once again. The end of Victorian Period could be marked as the spot, which lead to the popularization of Drama in literature over again. But this time, drama was more reason oriented instead of being directed towards moral pleasures.

There is no explicit demarcation in time introducing the beginning of drama. But the keen understanding of the literary and cultural trends confers us a faint timeline. It emanated from the

dynamic visions of writers around the time of the second industrial revolution from 1870 to 1920. It was a chaotic time dealing with the decline of stable social classes, the outset of professionalism, and a sense of urban alienation and disconnectedness. It prospered as a self-attentive break from a traditional artistic form, moving towards the naturalistic and realistic concepts in Europe. Plays are the imitation of real life on stage, as it is lived in the real world. Thus, playwrights use some devices to accomplish the portrayal as valid as possible, and to determine the nature of the work quickly. Such devices are called as Dramatic conventions. These are some specific frameworks, familiar to both audience and actors wherein they *prima facie* can make out the nature of play being a tragedy or comedy. The modern and postmodern dramas smashed the trend of constructing plays with Three Unities and led to the substitution of fate with human choices or free will. They also mocked the melodramas or well-constructed dramas highlighting the form rather than action, illustrating life and the world as unorganized and failed. The major dramatic conventions that we witnessed in modern times are—prologue, epilogue, soliloquy and comic relief.

5.2.2 The Earlier Phase

The Modern English Drama could be studied comparatively by exploring the thematic demarcation of the genre into three phases. The first phase is marked by the notability of a Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen, and the plays of writers like G.B. Shaw, John Galsworthy etc. There were numerous writers who followed the dramatic conventions and characteristic formations, predominant in Ibsen's works. And this salient trend was termed as Ibsenism. But there were some notable playwrights like T. W. Robertson and Sir William S. Gilbert, who toiled diligently towards the future of dramas, earlier to Ibsenism. T. W. Robertson could be considered as one of the transitional dramatists and was known for his romantic comedies. He actively aided the adaptation of realism in the writer's interests, away from the lavish, unnatural and melodramatic. He, alongside other writers, commenced 'renovation' of the theatre. It refers to a project aimed to modernize the technical infrastructure for the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Krakow. The equipment was purchased for the literary and cultural activities intended to be performed in summer holidays, and many stage tools got replaced like lighting, sound systems and multimedia equipment.

Similarly, Sir William S. Gilbert wrote farces, comedies and pantomimes, using Robertson's realism and his own cynicism. It was a pure amusing turmoil of situation and reasoning. Prior to 1865, chiefly realistic kind of acting had surfaced in the London theatres. But the issue was the deficiency of playwrights for the actors of the new school. The goal of Robertson

was to configure naturalism in tone, thoughts and situation, and the creation of the best illusions of modern life on stage with no duplicity in plot or motif.

In early phase, the dramas were revolving around realism. And then, with slight change, their interests started inclining towards naturalism. They endeavoured to deal with the real problems of life, rather than imaginative longings for the pleasures of literature. Ibsen primarily dealt with and popularized the realistic movement in Modern drama. His technique of realism was furthered by the writers like John Galsworthy and G. B. Shaw in their plays.

The works of Ibsen supported the English criticism of the middle-class society. Drama rejects the use of any kind of curtains in between the performance on stage and the real life. It cleverly concocts the situations, representing the actual scenarios with utmost truth. Ibsen was discovered by Edmund Gosse, who wrote several essays with goal bring Ibsen into the notice. Even another writer, Arthur Henry Jones in 1884, got associated for the bowdlerised perversion of *A Doll's House*. This play is about the failure of a marriage, between Nora and Torvald Helmer, as a result of some major revelation. Nora was a housewife, but she starts working secretly to pay off a loan out illegally in order to save Torvald's life. Ibsen received many awards during his life. On Ibsen's 100th death anniversary, the Norwegian government celebrated the Ibsen year. It was a day of celebrating Ibsen and his works around the globe. A mini-series was started by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation on Ibsen's childhood and youth in 2006. There are numerous prizes in the name of Ibsen like the International Ibsen Award, the Norwegian Ibsen Award and the Ibsen Centennial Commemoration Award.

George Bernard Shaw wrote *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1891; it was an extended version of lectures given in the previous years. Simultaneously, the organization of the Independent Theatre in London started releasing a current of serious and realistic drama, just like the Theatre Libre in Paris. However, the English theatre selected the social plays of Ibsen rather than his symbolic dramas, as it best suited the current sociological interest of the audience. The Problem Plays also branched out from the modern drama, which explored the issues concerning marriage, justice, and struggle between the bourgeoisie and working class. It was the period of emerging social reforms and refining. Plays were the medium to duplicate the immediate realities on stage; hence, theatre became the mode of exhibiting those alterations. One of the best examples of Problem Play is Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. It was an experiment with formative and technique. Some of the other most important works by Ibsen are *When We Dead Awake*, *Peer Gynt*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Pillars of the society*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the people* etc.

The new aspects of modern drama formulated by an important writer, George Bernard Shaw, practically swayed the Modern English theatre. He initially experimented and wrote five novels along with many critical articles as an art critic. But became well-known by his *The Saturday Review*, which discussed the drama as an exemplary mode for propagation of his ideas. His famous work, *Arms and the Man*, is a comedy of anti-romance. It portrays the most prevalent illusory notions of heroism and love in real world. It also deals with the futility of war and frankly represents with the hypocrisies of human nature. The popularity of Shaw was at stake owing to misinterpretation of his views on World War I. The people believed him to be against the England's participation in the war, but in actual, he only sought to disagree with the official justification of the country's entrance into the war. Some prominent works by Shaw are *Man and Superman*, *Pygmalion*, *Saint Joan*, *Candida*, etc. He was awarded with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1952.

The famous dramatist, John Galsworthy, was ironically remembered till today because of just one of his works of fiction rather the plays. He wrote quite a few novels, before he began *The Forsyte Saga*; it was the time when Granville-Barker also produced his first play, *The Silver Box*. Through this play, Galsworthy attacked the society for the hypocritical treatment of two men, based on wealth and class, both guilty of the same crime. He restrained himself from getting indulged in providing solutions to the serious problem. It indicated his inability and about his failure to take strong and significant stand against social inequities. In his views, the situations that diminish human happiness, particularly of poor and ill-fated, will get changed if society start developing and growing in true sense. Modern drama also witnessed the revival of the Comedy of Manners.

5.2.3 The Middle Phase

The middle phase of Modernist English drama includes the dramas written under the Irish movement, by the influential writers like W. B. Yeats, J. B. Priestly and more. All the literature written under this movement, specifically dramas, has the spirit of nationalism in it. Also, it was the starting point of *repertory movement* in England and Ireland. The goal of this movement was to entice an audience for new drama forms—the drama of ideas and the problem plays. The repertory companies had been initiated in most of place of these countries. It intends to encourage the writing of realistic problem plays in the advanced tradition. And the most significant occurrence was the formation of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin.

The dramatists like Yeats and J. M. Synge grasped drama as an agent of sentiments, and remarkable photographic actuality of social life; and indulged their writings in the folklore about the peasantry of Ireland. Socio-political history had influenced the development of literary genres substantially. The end of World War I left behind nothing more than pessimism, pain and detached individualistic approach of humans. To reflect such pessimism of real life in the writings, dramatists started using some new techniques of modern experiments such as expressionism, surrealism, Dadaism etc.

Modern period has watched the positive progression of society towards realism, away from the utmost materialism and mechanization. Likewise, Expressionism as a technique emerged as a response against the materialism and unreal thrust of naturalism. It focused on the subjective emotions of individuals rather than objectivity of their engagement and reactions against the social cruelties. The important writers who used expressionism extensively are Eugene O'Neill, August Strindberg, and Frank Wedekind. It is a movement that convey the sentiments and thoughts of the people rather than the objects and occurrences. Sean O'Casey, a writer from penurious background who lived in the slums of Dublin, wrote about his direct experience of life distinctively in his early plays. In his work, *Juno and the Peacock*, he positioned a woman as a chief character, and there was a sense of maturity in this text.

In literature and art, the Surrealism is a bridge between reality and imagination. It tends to overcome the contradictions of conscious and subconscious, by formulating most unreal and bizarre stories. It is a movement that shows the objective effects of materialism on the mind of the author and his works. The impressionistic drama discusses the impressions on the artist instead of giving a definite statement about the elemental features of things or objects. The Dadaism movement refers to the form of artistic anarchy, which fought against the social, political and cultural trends of that time. The paradoxical nature of Dadaism deals with the things that are anti-art or anti-establishment.

The writer, J. B. Priestley, jotted down more than thirty plays. His first play was the *Dangerous Corner*. He accomplished great fame for the width of his range—comedy, farce, morality and social criticism. The major theme of his works was the significance of time in his plays – *Time and the Conways*, *I have Been Here Before*, and *An Inspector Calls*.

The prominent writer of his times, Eugene O'Neill, wrote his first play in 1913, and was acknowledged as a talented writer very soon as he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1920. His former approach was inclined towards the realism, but soon he gave up this idea after *Anna Christie*. This

work dealt with the theme of the redemption of a prostitute. He used dramatic conventions like asides and soliloquies in some texts, like *Strange Interlude*. He initiated the reuse of chorus and the heavily stylized dialogues and speeches. His expressions were often obscure, which would put his audience under varied dilemmas concerning understanding. He was by far the best writer to use 'expressionist drama' appropriately, that was less focused on the society and more towards the man. His famous plays were *The Emperor Jones*, *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Hairy Ape*, *A Long Day's Journey into the Night*, etc.

5.2.4 The Final Phase

T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry were the highlights in the final phase of Modern English drama. Based on the Elizabethan and Jacobian form of drama, their works were poetic in nature. Using history and biography as dramatic technique was another trend in the Modern English like *Abraham Lincoln* by John Drink Water and Mary Stuart. While Shaw and Galsworthy turned dramatists after becoming novelists; T. S. Eliot, the most contributing author to modern drama, began as a poet. Even if we forget all his poetical works, *The Wasteland*, which is considered an important document of the age, will be remembered for its impact on the post-war generation. In other words, Eliot reminds us of Galsworthy whose *The Forsyte Saga* will keep him immortal even if all his plays find place in the British museum. Eliot wrote seven dramas – *Sweeney Agonistes*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Confidential Clerk*, *The Elder Statesman*. These plays contain, the best dramatic poetry after the Elizabethan plays and indicate author's emotional growth, but they fail to contain the essential qualities of drama. Dramatic elements are discernible in *Murder in the Cathedral*, often called as Eliot's best drama. In the moving speeches of the Chorus of the women of Canterbury, there is confrontation between the Church and the State, where Becket suffers from an inner conflict. Along with T.S. Eliot, Stephen Phillips, John Drink Water, Yeats, etc., too practiced the writing of poetic and realistic plays.

Modern literature discussed the subject of identity, which has been more flexible and stable in pre-modern literature. It valued interior feelings, thoughts or idea, over the external choice of actions. Hence it favoured the essentiality over extrinsic persona; the most befitting example of which would be 'The stream of consciousness'. 'Stream of consciousness' is a form of narration where a character's point of view is presented by narrating the character's thoughts in an interior monologue. The term was originally used by William James in his work on psychology to describe the continuous flow of thoughts in the conscious or waking mind, but May Sinclair first used it in

her review of Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*. Modern authors who used it include Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and many others. Modern Drama can be considered as drama of ideas rather than action. Modern dramatists use this stage to express the ideas they wish to propagate in the society.

Despite being realists, these 20th century dramatists brought in Romanticism within their modernistic plays. The efforts of Sir J. M. Barrie's initiated this new trend in Modern Drama for considerable period. Barrie kept distance from the actuality of life and made expedition into the world of Romance. Other prominent writers of this phase were Christopher Fry and Sir Terence Rattigan. The time of mid-1950's was the period of dominance of Bertolt Brecht, who was famous for his use of music and songs, his society-oriented communism, and his assertion on the alienation of the audience and the actor from the character.

After Brecht, we will see the appreciable influence of Samuel Beckett on English Drama. Samuel Becket wrote *Waiting for Godot* in French, which was translated in English in 1954. The plotline of play is static and evidently uses incoherent language to brief the paranoid society and mankind about their gullible actions of sacrificing and giving away natural freedom. The Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty eventually led to the Theatre of Absurd, the most crucial form of drama in contemporary times. The trends of modernism declined alongside the World War II, and the era of post-modernism continued it alongside reacting against it in the form of Theatre of the absurd. The writers, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet and Eugene Ionesco are the lamp bearers of Absurd Drama. Later, the founding of English Stage Company at the Royal Court theatre led English plays to a new path. Presently, as termed as the best foreign plays, it also motivated the new regional writers and new ideas.

The modern drama deals with the elements of rejection of Literary conventions, sense of unification, self-centred or unified identity and the truth as ultimate objective. It has the pathos for pessimism and existential crisis. A character mostly represents a particular class or background. It is criticism of the chaotic life or society. In the early 20th century, many writers took their significant role as a dramatist, precisely as a serious matter and penned down many great works that are noteworthy even today. This new and keen interest of writers later gave birth to many new techniques in literature, which was never been seen earlier. This could be marked as the re-initiation of drama in modern times.

5.2.5 Let Us Sum Up

A drama is a complex interwoven web of multiple elements, which results in an appealing piece of art. The primary list of the elements knotted together includes—Plot, Characters, Dialogues, Theme, etc. The characters are the mode of the passive portrayal of the dramatist's artistic visions, literal aspirations, and the tone of dialogic expressions. But the attainment of play actively depends on the continual engagement of the characters, spectacle, and plot with the uninterrupted notice of the audience. The drama in the modern period did outgrow the juvenile and crude form; it was mature and absolute. The development of the genre of drama was indeed multi-dimensional and extensive. It is intriguing to view the altered purposes of the drama, from being a mode of celebration to a tool of social cognizance and reforms. The objectives of dramas were always society or spectator oriented. In present times also, the goals of drama limit itself to the purpose of extensively expanded human minds and to showcase the images of actual sense of freedom in human lives. Every phase that drama has gone through shows us the distinctive possibility in which we can grow. The Greek drama amused humans through tragedies, but the plays of renaissance provided pleasures of comedy and romances. Most importantly, the drama in modern times told realities to the spectators without a tint of artificiality. It unquestionably motivates us to realize, feel, and then to tackle the issues in great urgency.

5.3 Learning Outcomes

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

- know about the origin of Drama in English
- trace the development of Modern English Drama
- critique varied dramatic texts based on their themes, techniques, and diction
- identify certain research gaps for their futuristic endeavour

5.4 Glossary

Pantomime: Plays emphasizing on the moral dilemmas and victory of good over evil

Melodrama: A dramatic work in which a character experiences a lot of danger in order to appeal to the feelings.

Exposition: Refers to background information of the plot, characters and setting

Avant-garde: An experimental, progressive and unconventional work with respect to art, culture, or society.

Pathos: Qualities that evoke sorrow or pity

Soliloquy: When a character speaks his or her own thoughts loudly in a play.

5.5 Sample Question

5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which of the following got a Nobel Prize in Literature?
 - a. Antonin Artaud
 - b. Henrik Ibsen
 - c. Eugene O’Neill
 - d. August Strindberg
2. Henrik Ibsen wrote _____.
 - a. *When We Dead Awaken*
 - b. *Endgame*
 - c. *The Maid*
 - d. *The Trial*
3. Which of the following is not a playwright of the Modern period?
 - a. G. B. Shaw
 - b. Henrik Ibsen
 - c. Ben Johnson
 - d. Eugen O’Neill
4. Which of the following is/are the playwright of the theatre of absurd?
 - a. Samuel Beckett
 - b. Jean-Paul Sartre
 - c. Arthur Adamov
 - d. All the above
5. Who amongst the following wrote *The Iceman Cometh*?
 - a. Neil Simon
 - b. Samuel Beckett
 - c. Eugene O’Neill
 - d. Eugene Ionesco

Answer the following questions

6. *Gorboduc* is a classical tragedy by_____.
7. Who wrote *Ferrex and Perrex*?_____.

8. Modern period is believed to have started from_____.
9. T.S Eliot belonged to which period_____.
10. Shakespeare belongs to which period_____.

5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Draw characteristic differences between classical and Modern English plays.
2. What do you mean by modern drama?
3. Explain in brief how modern drama is different from postmodern drama.
4. Discuss the position of modern English drama in English literature.
5. Comment on the major dramatists of modern English drama.

5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the shifts in dramatic trends from romantic to modern time.
2. Examine the contribution of some prominent playwrights of the modern English period.
3. Explain the meaning of dramatic conventions. Explain with examples.

5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Szondi, Peter. *Theory of the Modern Drama*. University of Minnesota, USA, 1987.
- Chothia, Jean. *English Drama of the Early Modern Period 1890-1940*. Routledge, 2014.
- Wynne, Arnold. *The Growth of English Drama*. Prabhat Prakashan, New Delhi, 2017.
- Dorney, Kate. *The Changing Language of Modern English Drama 1945-2005*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Unit-6: Life and Works of Henrik Ibsen

Structure

6.0 Introduction

6.1 Objectives

6.2 Henrik Ibsen

6.2.1 Family and Childhood

6.2.2 His Life at Grimstad

6.2.3 Death of Henrik Ibsen

6.2.4 Literary Influence of his Childhood

6.2.5 Works of Henrik Ibsen

6.2.6 Ibsen as a Theatre Director

6.3 Learning Outcomes

6.4 Glossary

6.5 Sample Questions

6.6 Suggested Learning Resources

6.0 Introduction

In this Unit, you will learn about the life and works of Henrik Ibsen, and about his development as a playwright. Besides all these issues, it shall throw light upon the career of Henrik Ibsen as a playwright, and as a theatre director. It shall enable you to understand the other units which are associated with the works of Henrik Ibsen. This chapter shall lead a student to understand the works of Henrik Ibsen through the comprehension of the background of his life. It shall also enable you to make a critical analysis of all his works. You are encouraged to read and understand the play prescribed in the syllabus.

6.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- lead you toward an understanding of the life of the Henrik Ibsen
- make you aware of the literary influence and development of playwright
- let you know about the early and later plays of Henrik Ibsen

- lead you to a proper comprehension of the play
- enable you to comprehend the other unit related to the same topic.

6.2 Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Ibsen's full name was Henrik Johan Ibsen. He was born on March 20, 1828, in a prosperous port town of Skien, from the side of southern Norway. As we see, the early years of Ibsen were quite fair and joyous. Henrik was born in an affluent family. He was the son of a wealthy merchant Knud Plesner Ibsen (1797-1877) and Marichen Cornelia Martine Altenburg (1799-1869). Ibsen's parents were from a rich background and belonged to the county's elite. His ancestors also belonged to the business class; they were merchants and shipowners in large cities. His father was a general merchant and was highly respected in the society. In his later life, Henrik wrote that "my parents were members on both the sides of the most respected families in Skien."

"Henrik Ibsen was baptized at home in the Lutheran State Church membership of which was mandatory on 28 March and the baptism was confirmed in Christian's Church on 19 June." He was nearly seven years old, when the misfortune befell upon the family, his father's businesses collapsed and the whole family went into bankruptcy. As a result, he sank into querulous penury. In 1835, the Ibsen family was forced to sell their house Altenburggarden, and the whole family along with Henrik moved to their summer house, which was located at Venstop, an outskirts of the city. Instead of the fall drop in their business, Ibsen family was still living a life of affluence and were having their tie-ups with aristocratic class of the society. But the misfortunes of the family didn't end up here. Meanwhile, Ibsen aged 15, moved to Grimstad, "a hamlet of some 800 persons, 70 miles (110 km)." Henrik Ibsen supporting himself after being an apothecary's apprentice. In his tenure of apprenticeship, he studied during nights to get the admission in the university. It was during this period that Henrik wrote some of his early plays in his leisure time. The description of his life and works at Grimstad is discussed later under another sub-topic.

6.2.1 Family and Childhood

At the time of Ibsen's birth, for centuries Skien had been considered one of the Norway's most significant and internationally oriented cities. Skien was considered highly developed among the other parts of Denmark and was famous for seafaring. It was known as a centre of seafaring, and was also known for timber exports, and early industrialization had made an influential affect upon the overall growth of Skien at that time.

Henrik Ibsen's parents were not related to each other by blood, but they had been reared as social first cousins. As earlier described, his father's name was Knud Plesner Ibsen, who along with the ship captain and Merchant Henrich Johan (1765-1797) died at sea. At this time, Henrik was a newly born baby, and his mother Johanne Plesner (1770-1874) married captain Ole Paus (1766-1855). They had been from the class of effluence and had lived a highly accomplished life of rich legacy. Unfortunately, Henrik was around seven when his father's fortunes took a turn for the worse and their businesses got collapsed. In 1835, the family sold their Altenburggarden and shifted to their stately summer house Venstop which was situated outside the city. As described earlier, that Ibsen's family was relatively rich, they had servants and were associated with other members of the Skien elite. The tradition of lavish lifestyle and parties continued. They were the close neighbours of Ulrich Frederik Cudrio and his family, who were also forced to sell their city house due to losses in businesses and shifted to Venstop. Ulrich was the mayor of Skien and a former ship owner, but their condition got more deteriorated, and Henrik left his home and shifted to Grimstad and his family moved to a townhouse at Snipetorp whose proprietor was Knud Ibsen's half-brother and former apprentice Christopher, who had established himself as an independent merchant of Skien in 1836 and his hard work and consistent efforts had landed him into a leading shipowner of the city. But unfortunately, Knud's businesses and all other professional sources came to an end. Knud himself became dependent on his successful younger half-brother. Among all, the influence of these circumstances can be observed in the works of Henrik Ibsen.

Some critics are also of the view that many of his characters and themes which he displayed in his plays are based on the experiences in the family and upbringing. As described earlier, the financial condition of his family turned turtle with the collapse of his father's businesses. While the themes of his plays often deal with financial issues, moral difficulties and personal downfall, in a broader perspective, all these themes were, associated with the life and society in which he happened to live. In fact, Ibsen himself confirms that his characters are modelled upon his own family. Moreover, this biographical naïve is hovering upon the plays of Ibsen and his personal experience from where he has painted the walls, as we also see that Henrik Ibsen has himself mentioned in his unfinished autobiography: "In my childhood, Skien was an extremely joyful and festive town, quite the opposite of what it would later become. Many highly cultured, prosperous families at that time lived partly in the city itself, partly on large farms in the area. Close or more remote kinship connected most of these families amongst themselves, and balls, dinner parties, and musical soirees, came one after another in rapid succession both during winters and summers.

(...) Visits from strangers were almost a constant occurrence at our spacious farmhouse and especially around Christmas time and the market days, our townhouse was full, and the table was set from morning to nightfall.”

6.2.2 Life at Grimstad

When poverty struck the family, Henrik Ibsen was forced to leave the school at the age of fifteen. He then moved to a small town called Grimstad where he became apprentice to a pharmacist. While working as an apprentice pharmacist, he started studying during nights to get admission in the university, and in his leisure time, he took some interest in writing plays. Enduring this period Ibsen came into the contact of Else Sophie Jensdatter Birkedelen and had a son, who was named Hans Jacob Hendrichsen Birkdalen, and his responsibility came upon the shoulders of Ibsen, who paid for the upbringing of the boy until he was fourteen, although Ibsen never happened to see Hans Jacob. At this time, Ibsen was 18 years old, and he went to Christiania, now named Oslo, with the aim to qualify his matriculation at the university. Later, he gave up the idea because he failed in his early attempts to get-admission in the university. He decided to commit himself to the writing without any formal orientation for it. While in Grimstad, Henrik Ibsen wrote his first play, which was a tragedy Genre known as *Catiline* (1850). This play was published under the pseudonym “Brynjolf Bjarme”, when he was only 22 years old, but due to some reasons, this play was not staged. Later, he happened to write one more play, named *The Burial Mount* (1850), which received a little attention. Instead of these two consecutives unsuccessful attempts, Ibsen remained firm and determined to write plays and to become a playwright. Although he continued writing the plays which remained unsuccessful, he didn’t feel like giving up this writing profession. Ibsen’s early inspiration, up to the writing of *Peer Gynt*, was most apparently the Norwegian author Henrik Wergeland and the folk tales of Norwegian writer Peter Christen. They had been the most acclaimed writers of the Norwegian writing scenario, and as a contemporary, Ibsen was influenced a lot and its effect had lasted upon his mind for a much longer time which helped Ibsen create some of the master literary pieces for the arena of his literary career as a playwright.

6.2.3 Death of Henrik Ibsen

We can assume that after experiencing the toughest phase in his life, Ibsen lived prosperously in his later stage of life, and as per the records, he died after surviving from a series of strokes he suffered in March 1900, and finally succumbed to a major stroke on 23 May 1906. After his death, his fame and popularity were celebrated by the Norwegian people at different intervals. He is regarded as one of the most influential playwrights of Norway. On his 100th death

anniversary in 2006, the year was commemorated as “Ibsen Year”, in Norway and in other countries. As a tribute to Henrik Ibsen, the organization named Home Building Company Selvaag opened “*Peer Gynt Sculpture Park*” in Oslo. Henrik Ibsen has received an international acclaim posthumously because of the dramatic representation of *Peer Gynt* as public accomplishment scene by scene in his honour. Thereupon, its global acclamation was highly acknowledged when Eno’s adaptation of *Peer Gynt*, which was later titled as *Gnit*, had its world premiere at the 37th Humana Festival of New America Plays in March 2013. On May 23rd, 2006, the Ibsen Museum in Oslo re-opened to the public. It is that House where Henrik Ibsen had spent his last eleven years. The museum was reopened with its original decorations and colour restored which, indeed, represents the characteristic marks of all of his works and contribution in the field of literature and drama.

Check your progress:

1. What did Henrik Ibsen write about his parents and family?
2. Why did Ibsen’s family sell their house?
3. What was Ibsen intending to qualify while working as an apprentice pharmacist in Grimstad?

6.2.4 The Influence of Ibsen’s Childhood on his Literary Career

The course of Henrik Ibsen’s life was not so smooth and luxurious as his family background was due to the economic downfall of his family and the bankruptcy which befell his family business. But this was the recourse of his overall journey into which he had deeply drawn himself as a boy and as a son of the family. The course of his upbringing went rough with lots of ups and downs. He had seen much of his class, and as a family the struggle of being into what socially was called ‘rich’ family. But to maintain the social panorama of life in the society made an impression upon his mind which turns into the reflection of his plays. We see that a modern reader, who has read Ibsen as a subject, may be able to assess deeply that many of Ibsen’s characters are based upon his family. His themes often deal with the financial issues, and the personal and moral conflicts reflect the dark secrets of the society. As per the sources, Henrik Ibsen had himself confirmed that he modelled and named his characters in his play after his family. However, “Have criticizes the uncritical use of Ibsen’s dramas as biographical sources and the ‘naïve’ readings of them as reflections of his family members.”

Thus, the literary influence and the culture of Ibsen's social life were later shaped into the scenic representation of his plays. In his plays, we come across the struggle of living a class of life and maintaining the standard norms of life as per the protocols of society. As a reader, one can see the inner picture of this influence reflected in his dramas. His characters and their situations are a depiction of his personal life—indeed the first-hand experience of his real life. In fact, most of his works are known as realistic works which are based on the real-life characters. His works are more realistic than the presentation of a fictional life and persona. The overall expression of his works is the reflection of his social life he had lived.

6.2.5 Works of Henrik Ibsen

The outcome of Ibsen's experience of studying for the admission in university was his first play, *Catilina* (1850; *Catiline*). Ibsen had studied a Latin text, which influenced him to write a play. *Catilina* as a play didn't go well on the stage. It embodies various themes like a rebellious hero, his destructive mistress and much more. But as we know that theatre was in the blood of Ibsen, and it was his love of theatre that made him a theatre-director and playwright at *Berger*. This was a position in which he was directed to write plays for the theatre throughout the year. Henrik Ibsen was only 23 years old, when he got this opportunity to work as Theatre Director. Although it was a wonderful opportunity for Ibsen, unfortunately, it brought him various problems for which he was ill equipped to handle.

Ibsen as a dramatist had not been well into writing and representing the dramatic essence at *Berger* and then at the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania. Enduring the period of 1857 to 1862, he tried to make a palatable display of his dramatic performance out of his incongruous ingredients. Out of tasking himself into drama, which his audience had rejected initially, he handed himself in directing the plays as well. He was highly engrossed in becoming a director but failed to achieve the length of practical success and badly failed to use his stage wisdom from the retrospections of his learning. It was at his adult stage that he learned the art of being an effective writer. At this stage he had already moved to Christiania and married Suzanne Thoresen in 1858.

Moreover, we see the signs of new spiritual energy in two of the last plays of Ibsen which he wrote for the Norwegian stage, and these were *Kjaerlighedens Komedie* (1862; *Love's Comedy*). This was a satire on *romantic illusions* which went violently unpopular on the stage, people disliked it. It also displayed a significant theme of anti-idealism, which later became a theme of Henrik Ibsen's major works. Next to this was *Kongsemnerne* (1863). In English, it was named as *Pretenders*. This play shows a mysterious authority of inner self which makes a man a

man, a king, or a great playwright. This play fortunately turns out to be a national drama, after which Ibsen started grasping up the art of dramatic essence in his plays, but the bad luck was still hovering upon the head of Ibsen. Before it would be recognised, the theatre in Christiania went bankrupt and Ibsen's career as stage writer ended. It was, unknowingly, an inception for Ibsen's career as playwright which he thought to become without any intention to gain the public regard. Without any care for public recognition, he did write for himself, and at this stage, he decided to travel abroad for the further course of his life, where he applied for a small state grant, which he luckily received and left Norway for Italy in 1864.

After travelling to Italy, he stayed abroad mainly for 27 years, especially in Rome, Dresden, and Munich, and during this period, he also made several visits to Norway between 1874 to 1885. The reason behind these visits was his "small mindedness" which he summarised that his homeland had left a very bitter taste in his mouth. Another significant achievement in Ibsen's literary career can be found in his semi-dramatic poem *Brand* which came in the limelight with its introduction; it was long and written in fragments. The central figure of this poem is a rural pastor, Brand who talks about religion so honestly that it transcends through all the universal things in the world which includes humanity, love and a man's devotion towards God. In this poem, the phrase which appears as "All or nothing", is the basis of the poem, that is, Brand's God demands of him all or nothing and Brand makes that same demand of others. Moreover, Ibsen depicts him as a moral hero and monster. He also depicts the condition of his anguished heart, as what his moral program demands he inflicts on his family. In order to adhere to his beliefs, he goes forward sacrificing his mother, son, and wife. As per the sources that in the last scene of the poem, Brand is being shown to stand alone before God, where we see that a "voice thunders from an avalanche which crushes the pastor physically."

After the tremendous success of *Brand*, another masterpiece, *Peer Gynt* (1867) came into the formation, this drama was written in rhymed couplets representing "antithetical view" of human nature. *Peer Gynt* is a hero, who is full of wishes and creativity, he is described as self-centred opportunist, an aimless man and completely unethical but this protagonist is lovable and a "beloved rascal". The play *Peer Gynt* had been written in a subtle and wild poetic style. It has a mockery tone in its thematic style, which surpassed *Brand* in its name and fame. Both the protagonists appeared as "interdependent and antithetical", painted through different roles in most of Ibsen's classic works, as we have Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in Cervantes who appeared in literary history as universal archetypes and unforgettable individuals. This helped Henrik Ibsen

to win in the world of competition as a dramatist and emerge successful. He stayed to create a future out of it and started writing as a full-fledged writer. Then came the spate of works with highly imbibed characteristics and literary style. He wrote a historical drama with a philosophical insight on the Roman Emperor, “Julian the Apostate”, which was originally titled as *Kejser Og Galilaeer*, and in English, spelled as *Emperor and Galilean*. The play was long and discursive for the stage and had a moderate appeal to the audience.

After the play, *Emperor and Galilean*, Henrik Ibsen wrote many small plays which too had moderate appeal on the audience, among which the modern satire, *De Unges Forbund* appeared in 1869, which was translated as *The League of Youth*. Moreover, Ibsen wrote many preliminary plays, till the publication of *A Doll's House*, originally written as *Et dukkehjem* (1879). With the publication of *A Doll's House* Ibsen achieved great recognition as a dramatist with tremendous success of this play and its global acclamation, which brought him name and fame as a playwright.

As a play, *A Doll's House* represents everyone else in the presentation of its characters, with an ordinary family, whose dwellers are Torvald Helmer, a bank manager by profession and his wife—main protagonist of the story, Helmer Nora. Apart from these two characters, there is an appearance of their three children as well. While the story advances, we come across the characterisation of Torvald who seems to be dominant male head of the family, and in the opposite of his role, his wife, an irresponsible and uncaring, who always takes his comments lightly, to flatter him. With the development in the plot, the story adds some spices to the drama, when an outsider appears in the scene and starts threatening Nora to expose the fraud, she had done to reclaim the health of her husband. It was the story of a common household in the Norwegian society—a middle-class life. At the end of the story, when Nora's secret got revealed to her husband, Torvald's reaction makes her realise that she was living a wrong life; he repudiated her and banned her to be a mother of his children for the sake of his social reputation. Although the audience felt that the play had an unpleasant ending and was not too common like any other play, it was more often considered as self-play reflecting the concern of knowing oneself, as Nora slams the door behind upon the dominancy of Torvald, leaves her family and children to find her real self.

After the global acclamation of *A Doll's House*, Ibsen's next break through was *Gengangere* which appeared in 1881, known as *Ghosts* in English language. It's a play which created more unpleasant appearance in the perspective of its themes. Underneath the text, the hidden and ugly truth of the society is covered up which is based on the venereal disease, revealing

the theme of play. Besides, there is the lecherous captain Alving who shall not get rest even in his grave. His ghost remains undone with the salvation, and thereafter in the advancement of the play. His widowed wife ~~who~~ confines herself in the memory of her husband, while his son goes mad due to syphilis, and his illegitimate daughter finds herself in the brothel. The central theme of the play was syphilis, which in its contamination had covered all the members, and this ~~had~~ landed Ibsen among the notorious dramatists of that time.

Afterwards, we have some more plays of Ibsen, which include *An Enemy of the People* (1882), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886). These plays did not influence the audience of Ibsen, as mentioned by the critics. However, his career as a playwright did not come to an end with the play *Rosmersholm*, but it was also a turning point for his career because after *Rosmerholm*, Ibsen turned himself toward more self-analytic and symbolic mode of writing, which was apparently different from his earlier productions, and thus, emerged as a successful playwright. The later plays of his literary career are *Freun Fra Havet* (1888), in English, *The Lady from the Sea* and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), another master piece which attained global reputation for him as a playwright.

As per the sources, “*Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder* are imbued with demonic and totally destructive female portrayal. Notably another personality in these later plays of Ibsen is an Aging artist, who is openly aware of his failing powers. At last, these later plays of Ibsen had a thorough representation of the autobiographical nuances, and certain confessional elements which had close affinity with the personal life of Henrik Ibsen, which resulted in his return to Norway in 1891. He featured the young women with the perforation of certain perplexities in his major plays. He continuously wrote plays until a brain stroke in 1900 crumpled him to be bedridden for half of the decade, following which he died in Christiania in 1906.

6.2.6 Ibsen as a Theatre Director

Henrik Ibsen started his career as a theatre director before he landed in the play writing. Initially he spent many years working as theatre director at Det Norske Theatre (Bergen). He tirelessly worked and became a part of at least 145 plays as a writer, director and producer. Enduring this time, he wrote several plays which made an unremarkable appearance in the public. Despite his failure as a playwright, he attained practical experience at the Norwegian Theatre, which simultaneously proved helpful for him during the later stage of his writing career as a playwright. He intended to return to Christiania in 1858 to achieve the position of “Creative

Director” of the Christiania Theatre. It was here that he met with Suzannah Thoresen and married her on 18 June 1858. The couple had the only child Sigurd born on 23 December 1859. Both faced a very difficult phase of financial constraints due to which Ibsen developed disenchanted sense for life in Norway. Though his inability of dealing with the things professionally as theatre director failed him to be an influential and successful director, he happened to be the dramatist who, after many unsuccessful attempts, had finally entered the category of the great dramatists. In 1864, he left Christiania after a thorough experience of failures and went to Sorrento in Italy in self-imposed exile. He spent the next 27 years in Italy and Germany and visited Norway only a few times.

6.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be acquainted with the background information of the writer. You should also be able to read any of the works of Henrik Ibsen and discuss them. This analysis of the background of the author—his career and life—including his works, should have enlightened you for the study of the work(s) prescribed in the syllabus.

6.4 Glossary

Biography: (Noun): the story of someone’s life or an account of someone’s life written by someone else

Collapsed: (Verb; past tense of collapse): sudden fall of someone and something

Apprenticeship: (Noun): a position of something to learn or to be under training for any work and skill (a position as an apprentice)

Shipowners: (Noun): a person or persons owning a ship or ships

Lavish: (Adjective): rich, extravagant, luxurious

Circumstance: (Noun): the conditions, facts or events related to and affect some situation

Leisure: (Noun): Free time, when someone doesn’t have any work to do.

Determined: (Adjective): having firmly decided, and not to change

Experience: (Noun, Verb): the knowledge one gains through doing something for a period; the process of gaining this knowledge

Prosperous: (Adjective): successful, affluent, having earned lot of money

Decoration: (Noun): the act of decorating and beautifying something to make it look more attractive (on special occasions)

Deeply: (Adverb): Far down, intensely

Upbringing: (Noun): the way in which a child is brought up and nurtured, or taught how to behave during its growing stage

Destructive: (Adjective): causing great harm or irreparable damage.

Mistress: (Noun): a woman who has authority or control over, or responsibility for someone or something

Affective:(Adjective): relating to moods, feelings and attitudes; successful in producing a desired or intended result

Spiritual: (Adjective): connected with the human spirit or soul rather than the body or physical things something that relates to deep feelings and beliefs, especially religious beliefs; incorporeal

Summarised: (Verb: Past Tense of summarise): a statement of something in a brief manner

Devotion:(Noun): religious worship, love, or loyalty for someone or something

Avalanche: (Noun): a mass of snow, ice, and rocks falling rapidly down, a sudden arrival or occurrence of something.

6.5 Sample Questions

6.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Where and when was Henrik Ibsen born?
 - a) Norway, 16 May 1898
 - b) Skien March 20, 1828.
 - c) London June,1878
 - d) France May 1866
2. Which skill did Ibsen learn while working as an apprentice at Grimstad?
 - a) Gold smith
 - b) Apothecary's Apprentice
 - c) both a & b
 - d) none.
3. Where was Henrik Ibsen aspiring to get admission but failed to qualify the entrance examination?
 - a) At high school
 - b) at university for higher studies
 - c) at college for graduation
 - d) None.
4. Which class of society did Ibsen belong to?
 - a) Middle class
 - b) Business class
 - c) both
 - d) none
5. Where did Ibsen start writing plays?
 - a) at Grimstad
 - b) in Norway
 - c) in Italy
 - d) none of them
6. How did Henrik Ibsen die?

- a) because of cancer b) because of cardiac arrest c) because of brain stroke d) none
7. When was Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* published?
- a) 4 December 1879 b) 5 May 1877 c) 16 July 1867 d) 13 January 1877
8. Which among the following was the semi-dramatic poem of Ibsen?
- a) *The Peer Gynt* b) *Brand* c) both a and b d) None of them
9. Which of the following plays brought Henrik Ibsen financial stability?
- a) *The Peer Gynt* b) *A Doll's House* c) *Hedda Gabler* d) *The Wild Duck*
10. How many plays did Henrik Ibsen assist during his directorship?
- a) 133 b) 145 c) 165 d) 166

6.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Why did Henrik Ibsen join as apothecary's apprentice?
2. Where did Ibsen find time to write his initial plays? Explain briefly.
3. Why did Ibsen fail to become a successful director?
4. What made Ibsen to leave Norway?
5. Write a short note on Ibsen's death.

6.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Describe the literary influence on Ibsen as a child. How did that affect him to write plays?
2. Write a note on Henrik Ibsen as a theatre director.
3. Write a note on the development of Henrik Ibsen's career as a playwright.

6.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Egan, Michael, ed. *Ibsen; The Critical Heritage*. Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972.
- Boyesen, Hjalmar. *A Commentary on the Works of Henrik Ibsen*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1973.
- Rickert, Blandine M, ed. *Major Modern Dramatists*, Volume 2. New York: Ungar, 1986.
- Marker, Frederick. *Ibsen's Lively Art*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Gary, Ronald. *Ibsen, A Dissenting View*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Unit-7: *A Doll's House*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

7.0 Introduction

7.1 Objectives

7.2 *A Doll's House*: Background, Plot, Characters

7.2.1 Plot and Summary of *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen

7.2.2 Character Analysis of Nora Helmer

7.2.3 Character Analysis of Torvald Helmer

7.2.4 Character Analysis of Krogstad

7.2.5 Character Analysis of Kristine Linde

7.2.6 Character analysis of Dr Rank

7.2.7 Character Analysis of the Nursemaid

7.2.8 Let Us Sum Up

7.3 Learning Outcomes

7.4 Glossary

7.5 Sample Questions

7.6 Suggested Learning Resources

7.0 Introduction

A Doll's House is a three-act play written by Henrik Ibsen, he was a Norwegian playwright, and the play is set in the Norwegian town of Circa. It was published in 1879 and was premiered after a month of its publication in the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen, Denmark on 21-December 1879. *A Doll's House* is a realistic prose drama which significantly deals with the real-life situations and characters representing the common man facing challenges in day-to-day life. This play deals with the life of Nora Helmer and her fate as a woman in the male dominated society. As a woman, she faces the problems conventionally while playing her role as a wife, daughter and mother in the play. On the one hand, we see her struggling with the problems of day-to-day life for the prospects of her family as many women do, while on the other hand, we see the patriarchy of males throughout the play who always have upper hand, whether its Nora's husband Torvald or her father. In the play, she gets entrapped into an awkward situation because of the secret loan which she had borrowed from an ill-reputed man, Krogstad whom we will meet later in this

chapter. It is Krogstad who blackmails Nora for revealing the truth of her secret loan and becomes a cause of trouble and tension for her. Although Krogstad and Torvald Helmer, (husband of Nora) try to control Nora Helmer according to their demands which she could not admit and feels suffocation due to lack of opportunities for the self-fulfilment in the male dominated society and walks away for an independent and self-exploring life.

A Doll's House is the first realistic prose drama in the canon of English literature. The conversation between the characters appears in the form of sentences rather than in poetic or metered lines, which pervades the language of the play thoroughly different from the conventional style of drama generally written in the form of poetic dialogues.

Henrik Ibsen, who introduced *A Doll's House* as 'Prose Drama,' is also considered a father of modern prose drama. He was born in Skien, Norway on March 20, 1928. His father was a privileged merchant in his youth, but the misfortune befell upon his family,—when he lost his business and went bankrupt. At that time, Ibsen was just eight-year-old and much of his early childhood was spent in poverty. This impression finds reflection in some of his works as an experience of having nothing to survive under severe constraints. *A Doll's House* is a play having some similarities of his real life and deals with the group of middle-class Norwegians in the 1870s. It consists of themes like money, social and personal obligations, place of women in the patriarchal society, appearance etc. Although *A Doll's House* is a play which is centred on the themes of feminism, and the presentation of its protagonist is quite an open discourse of feminism revolving around the values and the issues of the late nineteenth century bourgeoisie, pertaining to the thematic aspect of it. Even though "Ibsen denied that it was his intention to write a feminist play," but his protagonist represents the life of an open feminist in carrying her role in the play. In fact, this play evoked great sensation after its publication and created a storm of outraged controversy which went beyond the theatre of the newspapers and society.

7.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- acquaint you with the concept of realistic prose drama
- enable you to understand its background and development
- familiarise you with the plot and the act-wise summary of the drama
- enable you to understand the role of protagonist

- make you know about the characters and their roles in the drama

7.2 *A Doll's House*: Background, Plot, Characters

7.2.1 Plot and Summary of *A Doll's House*:

A Doll's House is a prose drama written by Henrik Ibsen. It consists of three acts in which the whole course of action and events takes place. As the play opens, we see that it's a Christmas time and Nora Helmer enters her living room with many shopping bags. Nora's husband Torvald Helmer is working in his study, and when he hears the arrival of Nora, he comes out from his study and greets Nora affectionately. But having seen her shopping bags he playfully rebukes her for being spendthrift, calling her his "little squirrel," as she spends much money on Christmas gifts. He also teased Nora and reminded her how she handled to make the gifts by hand last year because of the scarcity of money. The conversation between the two also reveals that there was need to be careful with the money for some years. But Nora feels to have a little more space in requirement because of the due promotion in the position of Torvald Helmer at the bank where he works. In the meanwhile, Helene, the nanny, a nursemaid announces that a friend of family has arrived. Dr Rank and another visitor also arrive at the same time, Mrs Kristine Linde, a former school friend of Nora, also comes into the room, it was a surprise for Nora as both have not seen each other for years. She has come to seek employment and Dr Rank, introduced as a close friend of the family, is let into the study of Torvald.

Further, we come to know that Mrs Kristine Linde is suffering badly in her life because of the economic crisis and joblessness; her husband had passed away few years before about which Nora is already aware. She also tells Nora that when her husband passed away, she was left with no money and children. Later she added that, she had spent years to take care of her sick mother and her two brothers. She also told Nora that her mother had passed away, but her bothers needed her to be taken care of. Mrs Linde needs a job to get relief from the problems she is suffering from, and she asks a favour from Nora's husband to see a position for her. Nora assures that she will talk to Mr Torvald about finding her a job. Nora too mentions here that things haven't been easy for them also because of Mr Torvald's ill health; they travelled to Italy for the better medical treatment.

In her conversation with Mrs Linde, Nora mentioned that she had borrowed money from her father, whereas she had sought the money illegally by forging the signature of her father without his acknowledgement. Nora revealed this secret to Mrs Kristine Linde that one of her

admirers had helped her and lend them a loan, so they could afford the cost of Torvald's treatment in Italy. She said that she is working secretly to pay the debts.

Krogstad, a low-grade employee at Torvald's bank, appears in the scene and approached into Torvald's study. Nora feels uncomfortable with the arrival of Krogstad while Dr Rank leaves from the study and mentions that he feels wretched; he too wants to live as everyone, besides his complain about his physical illness. Dr Rank mentions that Krogstad is "morally sick". Mr Torvald comes out from his study after he concludes his meeting with Dr Rank. On his arrival in the living room, where both the ladies are having conversation, Nora asks him, if he can help Kristine in obtaining any position in his bank. Torvald replies that she is fortunate enough, as one of the vacancies has just become available.

Mr Torvald, Dr Rank and Mrs Kristine Linde depart from the living room of Nora, and now, we find Nora alone in her living room, until the nursemaid arrives back with the kids of Nora. She joyfully plays with her kids for some time, meanwhile Krogstad creeps into the living room and amuses her. Krogstad narrates to Nora that Mr Torvald wants to fire him from the job and wants Nora to mediate with her husband to retain his job in the bank. When Nora directly refuses, Krogstad tries to blackmail her by threatening her to reveal the secret of her loan, which she had got by forging the signature of her father after his death. Krogstad departs and we see that Mr Torvald appears in the scene, Nora thought to convince Torvald and tried her best to dissuade him from sacking Krogstad, but Torvald didn't listen to her and outrightly refused her plea. He said that he was fed up with Krogstad and mentioned that he felt physically ill in the presence of such people.

Act II opens on Christmas day. Nora makes her living room; she is filled with anxiety and depression. Kristine comes to help Nora in repairing her dress for a ball which she is going to attend the next day at her neighbours' home. Torvald returns from the bank, and Nora again starts asking Torvald about the Krogstad's employment; she says that if he fires Krogstad, he may ruin his reputation in the bank. He then dismisses her fears and tells that Krogstad is a good worker, but he has problem with his attitude and does not want to see him in the bank anymore; saying this he retires to his study for the work. Meanwhile, Torvalds sends nanny to deliver a letter of termination to Krogstad.

Nora reveals to Kristine that Dr Rank has a mortal illness which he has inherited from his father. Nora behaves in suspicious manner and feels trouble in handling the situation. This suspicious behaviour of Nora leads Mrs Linde to think that Dr Rank may be a source of Nora's

secret loan but Nora refuses to reveal the source of her distress. Dr Rank arrives and tells Nora that his illness has entered the last stage, and he may die at any time, Nora begins to cheer Dr Rank and thinks of asking a favour from him to talk to Torvald on behalf of her, for not firing Krogstad. Suddenly, Dr Rank said to Nora that he had been secretly in love with her. Nora tries to deny the revelation but was quite disturbed by his words. She delays asking any favour from Dr Rank.

In an outrage, Krogstad arrives and asks for the explanation of his dismissal. He changes the terms of his blackmail and demands not only his employment, but he tells Nora that he must be rehired in a higher position. He declares that he will not be responsible for keeping the secret of Nora's loan. Instead, he will use this bond to blackmail Torvald for rehiring him in the bank. Nora explains that she tried to convince her husband, but he didn't change his mind. Krogstad informs Nora that he has prepared a letter carrying the details of her crime, that she forged the signature of her father and used that to avail a loan falsely; he puts the letter in Helmer's mailbox which was locked. Nora narrates the whole situation to Mrs Kristine and gives her the address of Krogstad. She asks Kristine to convince Krogstad to take back his letters. Meanwhile, Torvald enters and tries to open his mailbox, but Nora hesitantly distracts him by telling him to assist her in the dance which she is rehearsing for the ball. She is mad with anxiety and stress, tries to dance but dances so awfully that Torvald agrees to spend the whole evening in assisting her. In the conclusion of this scene, we see her in the form of uncontrollable situation, Nora attempts to suicide but delays her action.

Act III opens with a conversation between Kristine and Krogstad, and in their conversation, we come to know that both were deeply in love with each other once, but Kristine left him for a wealthier man as Krogstad wasn't enough fortunate to have her at that time. She also reveals that she is free from the responsibilities of family and is ready to be with him. She believes that he behaves unethically with everyone because of her abandonment and because of his low economic status. She also mentions that now she wants to be with him. In the light of this revelation, Krogstad changes his behaviour and approaches Nora; he dismisses his own ideology, wants to take back his letters from the letterbox of Torvald. However, Kristine stops Krogstad saying, "things better be clear between Torvald and Nora".

Nora and Torvald return from the party, and Dr Rank too follows them. Torvald advances towards Nora in an effective manner and praises her for the dance she did in the party, but Dr Rank interrupted both by his arrival. He convinces Nora that it might be his final Goodbye, he ascertains that he shall die soon. He departs from the scene, leaves Torvald and Nora alone and this happens

to open Torvald his letterbox in which he retrieves the letters and becomes aware of the secret of Nora. She prepares to run away for good, but Torvald confronts her with the letters he retrieves from Krogstad. Torvald gets enraged and says that Krogstad can misuse him and can have him on his demand at any time. He berates Nora for being untruthful, calls her morally unsound and declares that he will never allow her to raise his children. He also mentions that they will never be like husband and wife, it would be a mere appearance for the sake of society.

Nanny, the maid, enters with another letter of Krogstad, and Torvald demands to read it, and takes it from Nora. Having read this letter Torvald feels exulted that he is saved, as Krogstad has returned the bond containing the documents of Nora's forgery. Torvald is overjoyed and immediately burns the bond along with the letter of Krogstad. He tries to console Nora and takes his harsh words back, but Nora realizes that Torvald is not strong enough to forgive her at the very first instance, as she is completely dependent on him. She also realizes that in eight years of marriage, they have not understood each other. She asserts that Torvald has treated her like a "doll" to be played with or admired and the same did her father; on this, Torvald comes to the point of resolution and insists that Nora fulfils her duty as a wife and mother. Nora's distress and fear come to an end with her own self-realisation that she needs to understand herself, and she has duties upon herself rather than being a good wife and mother. She reveals that to sacrifice his reputation for hers she had planned to kill herself, but all her efforts and sacrifices have gone waste. She realizes that Torvald is not the kind of person upon whom she would have her belief and their marriage was just based on the mutual fantasies and misunderstanding.

In the conclusion of the play, Nora leaves her keys and wedding ring on the table. Torvald breaks down and starts crying, he goes mad and gets confused for what has happened, after that she leaves the room slamming the door behind her. Although, "the critics have not agreed with the ending of *A Doll's House*, thought that copyright laws of the time in Germany had not preserved Ibsen's original work which forced Ibsen to write an alternative ending for the German Premiere."

In that ending, Nora is led to her children after the heated discussion with Torvald, she collapses, and as the curtain was brought down, it's hinted that she stays and happens to change her decision. Later, Ibsen "called the ending a disgrace to the original play and referred it to as a "Barbaric Outrage."

Check your Progress:

1. Why does Torvald rebuke Nora?

2. Why did Mrs Linde marry another man instead of Krogstad?

7.2.2 Character Analysis of Nora Helmer:

Nora, a central figure of the play, is the wife of Mr Torvald Helmer and the mother of his children. In the beginning of the play, we see that Nora is happy and responds to her husband usually as any other women does. She is childish in nature and responds affectionately to her husband's teasing and finds happiness in the small things of day-to-day life. Although Torvald rebukes her for being spendthrift, Nora instead of getting annoyed, loves to talk about Torvald's promotion and money. Nora doesn't assert that her existence is mere like a doll within the circle of patronised patriarchy of men. In the progress of the play, Nora's acts reveal that she is not unmindful women as her husband calls her. She is indeed responsible for tackling the awkward situation without letting her husband know about it, which is proved by her secret loan she took under the difficult circumstances to save her husband's life. She also understands the business details related to her debt. All this shows that she is not only intelligent and capable to leap beyond the confines of her role as wife and mother, but she is also determined and ambitious, as her secret work reveals which she was doing in order to save money to pay off her debts. Though her character shows that she is willing to break laws just to ensure the health of her husband, simultaneously, it shows her feministic wit.

Even Krogstad's blackmail and trauma, do not change her attitude towards life and fulfilment, and revealed fiercely to Torvald about her contribution which was never appreciated and during their climatic confrontation she says, "I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald." She realizes that in addition to her dancing and singing tricks, her marriage was just to get a 'doll' to be played with and admired. She, in fact, pretended someone instead of her own self. She should be someone other than the obliged property of her husband and father. Having heard about the truth, Torvald reacted in a selfish way which was a final call for the awakening of Nora. Though she has not been totally unaware of the odds of her life pertaining to her true self, she tries to maintain a balance between her personal life and society to keep on going. Time, people and her own relations do not allow her to be the same and she turns out to be a rebellious against the orthodox standards of society. As she grows more aware of her identity, she finds it more important to be her own self than a mere thing for others that culminates into her ultimate decision to walk away from her husband and children and set herself free from the familial obligations to find independence.

7.2.3 Character Analysis of Torvald Helmer:

After Nora, we have the introduction of Torvald Helmer, the husband of Nora, who may be seen as one of the antagonists of the story. He has been described as a dominating man in the life of Nora. Torvald's portrayal before the audience is as a man of superiority, who thinks that he is more superior to his wife. The level of intellectuality and his words are the generation of thoughts which clearly indicate his patriarchy. During his actions, he happens to call Nora "*little featherbrain*", "*little squirrel*", "*little skylark*" and the "*scatterbrain*". The repetition of such words shows that he treats Nora like a child and not as an equal, that is, wife. We see that Torvald enjoys his position greatly as guide and instructor to her, although it appears to the audience as if she likes to be in his control; the presentation of instructions for the Tarantella dance is such an example. In fact, Torvald was interfering in her every matter and instructs her in what she should do, eat and wear.

He considers his wife as an object of his desire and a rightful property which he can have as per his wish and will. He envisions himself as a protector to Nora, and says to her, "I've often wished that you could be threatened by some imminent danger so that I could risk everything, I had-even my life itself- to save you". Torvald is highly obsessed with his manliness, and he considers himself an idealist, and reasonable person in taking every decision of Nora's life. Torvald is overly concerned with his self and status in the society and thinks himself to be the most respected person in the society. He is anti-feminist in nature and believes that his statements do affect his wife more than her own importance, because he thinks that his wife would be pleased by whatsoever, he said. In all, he is represented as a man of pride and has been portrayed as chauvinist, who thinks that woman is a mere object to be played with and has her role within the limitations of the house only.

Check your Progress:

1. Why does Nora realize that she needs to find herself more than her family?

2. Why did Nora take a secret loan?

7.2.4 Character Analysis of Krogstad:

Krogstad's character in the play has been represented as an antagonist, who with his dishonesty creates a psychological trauma for the heroine of the play. He tries to use Nora through

blackmail, because she has borrowed money from him with the help of a false signature of her father. When Krogstad comes to know that Mr Torvald is going to fire him from the job in the bank, he tries to use Nora leaving her in a daunting situation and threatens her to reveal the secret of her loan to her husband, if she fails to convince her husband about retaining him in the job at the bank. He is an unscrupulous type of man, who has also committed the act of forgery for which he has not been imprisoned but has badly affected his reputation to earn a respectable job. In fact, during action, it was also revealed that he was once in love with Kristine Linde, who married another man because of his lesser fortune and to hold her family too. His separation from Kristine has left Krogstad embittered, and unsatisfied in his own marriage. This happens to be the cause of his moral degradation. Initially, he has been shown so rude in his approach towards Nora, but his behaviour automatically gets changed when Kristine tells him that she is free from the obligations of the family. He gets convinced and both decide to reunite. He decides to take over his letters back from the letter box of Mr Torvald. However, Kristine stops him as she wants that things should be clear between Nora and Mr Torvald. Kristine's arrival in his life makes him happier and he feels regretful for his earlier behaviour. Although his behaviour was questioned because of the unfavourable circumstances, he has been through in his life, his convenient display towards the end shows his internal gratitude and humanly concern after he changes his decision about not being rude to Nora.

7.2.5 Character Analysis of Kristine Linde:

Kristine Linde is another secondary character in the play. She has been addressed as comprehensive, mature and loyal figure in the play. She is a close friend of Nora, who knows her more than anyone else. She has been portrayed with an excellent sense of judgement. In the beginning, she is introduced with her problems of getting an economic relief from somewhere. She is a woman who experienced a difficult past and lost her mother and husband. She takes care of her brothers who are now young enough to be independent. She aspires to get a position of work in the bank of Mr Torvald. Although her past left her desperate and the death of her mother and husband left her "unspeakably empty," as she has no one to live for anymore. When Torvald comes to know that she is seeking a position in the bank, he gets overwhelmed and offered her a position which coincidentally belongs to Krogstad. She was highly supportive and got aware about the secret loan of Nora. She advises her to tell it to Torvald, as this is the most practical thing. She could have made efforts to strengthen her relationship with Torvald. She recognises the need of complete concealment of the relationship between Nora and her husband. But Nora gets afraid of

losing her relationship with Torvald. Although Kristine tries to convince Krogstad not to blackmail Nora, she ends up with the concealment of her own past relationship with Krogstad and decides to reunite with him. In this way, she finds her previous love and two children of him to live for. Thus, we see that Mrs Kristine Linde is an important character in the play, she is loyal, comprehensive, honest, practical and independent.

7.2.6 Character Analysis of Dr Rank:

Dr Rank is another character in the play with his own audacity to deal. We see Dr Rank completely different as compared to others in the story. He visits Torvalds's every day and happens to be their good friend. Dr Rank, in the play, suffers from spinal tuberculosis which, he believes is caused by his father's vices. He thinks that his disease is an inheritance of his father's luxurious lifestyle and drinking bouts. He is unmarried and lonely and feels desperate because of his disease. In one of the conversations, he reveals it to Nora that he has been secretly loving her. He was highly cynical about his life, and he rejoices when he becomes aware that he is going to die soon; he insists both Torvald and Nora not to visit his home in his dying days, so that he would probably think that he was not missed by other characters.

7.2.7 Character Analysis of the Nursemaid:

Another character in the play is also a woman. Anne Marie, a nursemaid to Nora and her children, is kind and forced to live in bad circumstance for her survival. She has been forced to give up her own child, who is believed to be born out of wedlock. She is an example of a woman, who can do any kind of job in order to support herself. During action, we see, that when Nora decides to leave Mr Torvald and family, she thinks that Anne can be a better mother remembering that she has been a good nurse mother to her, and the same way, she would raise her (Nora's) children well, more than her own. She is also one of the fine examples of feminism in the play, who does everything out of her own without the support of any male companion. She has been considered a sober and motherly figure in the whole drama.

7.2.8 Let Us Sum Up

This realistic prose drama *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen is a clear-cut picture of the Norwegian middle-class society and the time in which it has been written. It shows us the image of Torvald's family, their living, and their internal affairs which are like the society of its time. The struggle of Nora in the play makes us familiar with her feministic qualities. On another side, the role of Kristine and nursemaid made us understand that these women are forced to experience odd circumstances for their survival. The behaviour of Mr Torvald and Krogstad towards the

women presents an orthodox image of masculinity, their treatment of women in the play represents their sense of dominant patriarchy. In my opinion, *A Doll's House* is a play with themes and characters showing somewhere a sense of our own society, in which we happen to live and follow the normed regimes of tradition without understanding the need of making it more stable and comprehensive for the purpose of happy living with equal opportunities and place for both men and women.

7.3 Learning Outcomes

After reading this Unit, it is expected that you have learned about the structure and development of plot in the play. You should have been acquainted with the characterisation in the play.

7.4 Glossary

Premiered: past participle; give the first performance of

Norwegian: adjective; a person who lives in Norway and is related to Norway, its people or its language.

Conventionally: adverb; anything which is based on tradition, traditionally done or believed

Ill-repute: noun; the state of being held in low esteem by the public or is having a disrespected image among the people

Awkward: adjective; causing difficulty, hard to do or deal with; uncomfortable or abnormal

Protagonist: noun; a hero or a leading character or main character in a drama, novel and movie

Antagonist: noun; a villain, who actively opposes the hero and heroin or something in a play, novel and in any movie.

Affectionately: adverb; it's a word which implies tenderness or fondness for someone

Approached: verb; come near or nearer to something in distance or in time

Threatening: adjective; a deliberate frightening quality or behaviour of someone.

Termination: noun; the action of dismissing someone from employment, an ending or result of a specified kind

Suspiciously: adverb; with a cautious distrust or suspicion of someone

Dismissal: noun; the act of ordering or allowing someone to leave

Patriarchy: noun; it is a system of society in which the eldest male, a father or an eldest son or husband is considered head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line.

Culminates: verb; to reach a climax or point of highest development

7.5 Sample Questions

7.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Where does the conversation between Nora and Torvald take place?
(a) in her living room (b) at the market (c) in the kitchen (d) none of the above
2. Why does Torvald rebuke Nora?
(a) for misbehaving with him (b) for not giving him food
(c) for spending too much on gifts (d) for not taking care of his kids
3. Torvald and Nora travel to Italy because
(a) of some business purposes. (b) their kids were not feeling well.
(c) of Torvald's treatment. (d) they both fled away.
4. Who was secretly in love with Nora?
(a) Kristine's brother (b) Krogstad (c) her classmate (d) Dr Rank
5. The object of Nora's shutting the door behind Torvald, leaving him and her children to find herself is an example of:
(a) anti-socialism (b) cruelty (c) anarchy (d) feminism.
6. While departing from Helmer's home, Dr Rank expressed one of the hidden feelings to Nora, identify the feeling:
(a) hatred for Torvald (b) jealousy for Kristine
(c) love for Nora (d) none of the above
7. Identify the disease Dr Rank was suffering from.
(a) carcinoma (b) spinal Tuberculosis (c) brain disease (d) schizophrenia
8. Who decided to marry Krogstad at the end of the story?
(a) Kristine (b) Nora (c) Nora's friend (d) both a & c
9. Why does Torvald change his attitude after Nora decides to leave home and children?
(a) because he regrets upon his behaviour. (b) because Nora commits suicide.
(c) because he poisoned Nora. (d) none of the above.
10. In how many acts is the play *A Doll's House* written?

(a) 4 acts (b) 5 acts (c) 7 acts (d) 3 acts

7.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss briefly the role of Torvald as an anti-feminist.
2. Write a brief description of the conversation that took place in the first scene between Nora and Kristine.
3. Why was Dr Rank disappointed from his life? Discuss briefly.
4. Write the reason why Nora was struggling with the stress in the play.
5. Discuss the consequence Nora faced after the truth was revealed to Mr Torvald.

7.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss Nora as a feminist in the play *A Doll's House*.
2. 'Torvald is a man of dominant nature.' Discuss it in the light of his actions towards Nora in the play *A Doll's House*.
3. Write the detailed description of letters sent by Krogstad to Torvald with the help of textual examples.

7.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Egan, Michael, ed. *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.
- Gray, Ronald. *Ibsen: A Dissenting View*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
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Unit-8: *A Doll's House*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

8.0 Introduction

8.1 Objectives

8.2 *A Doll's House*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

8.2.1 Themes

8.2.1.1 Role and Sacrifice of a Woman

8.2.1.2 Theme of Feminism

8.2.1.3 Theme of Deceit

8.2.1.4 Theme of Parental and Family Obligations

8.2.1.5 Theme of Marriage

8.2.1.6 Theme of Reputation

8.2.1.7 Theme of Unreliability and Appearance

8.2.2 Narrative Technique and Point of View

8.2.3 Critical analysis and Appreciation of *A Doll's House*.

8.2.4 Let Us Sum Up

8.3 Learning Outcomes

8.4 Glossary

8.5 Sample Questions

8.6 Suggested Learning Resources

8.0 Introduction

In this Unit, you will learn about the themes of the play *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen apart from the narrative technique and a critical appreciation. The play deals with many themes. You have already read in the previous Unit that this is a realistic prose drama which deals with real-life situations. You may be able to understand the thematic aspect of the play while reading about the mentioned themes. It shall enhance the level of understanding of a student about the different literary aspects of the play. Besides its thematic aspects, this Unit shall describe the point of view to its reader and provide a thorough and detailed critical analysis by which a reader can be in a position to make his own judgement based on the analysis of the text.

8.1 Objectives

This unit has been prepared to fulfil the following objectives:

- to aware students about the themes of the play
- to make students aware about the various aspects of study
- to students about the comprehension of its critical aspect
- to make students able to understand the text with its thematic aspects

8.2 *A Doll's House*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

8.2.1 Themes

8.2.1.1 Role and Sacrifice of a Woman

Sacrificial Role of Women in the Play In the play, *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen depicts the role of women is quite sacrificial. The representation of her women is based upon the sacrifices. It showcases the sacrifice of women from all the economic classes of the society. The presentation of Nora, the protagonist of the play, painted to depict a canvas of sacrifices under which the women of any family live, passes through the stages of struggle, faces violence, and remains despotic somewhat at the hands of her husband Torvald and her father. We see Nora's assertion in all the female characters of the play. The objection of acceptance in the behaviour of Nora shows her inner self that she was just sacrificing her own happiness for the sake of her family and children. The depiction of them is quite strong, and the strength which Ibsen's female characters have reflected is outstanding. This exemplification of Nora as a female has kept the audience of Ibsen astonished while having the rigid and prolonged role of Torvald on one side, on the other side, we see Nora, who is completely submissive and has sacrificed her integrity for the fulfilment of her husband and children.

This sacrifice is seen in the struggle of Nora. In order to save the life of her husband Torvald, she borrows loan for Torvald's treatment without his knowledge. Later she works secretly to pay off her debts as it was illegal for a woman of that time to obtain a loan without the permission of husband or father. When her husband confronts her, he mistreats her and disgraces her for being disloyal. Nora realizes that the way she mistreats her own self was unjust, and finally walks away to find herself.

Moreover, there is representation of Mrs Kristine who sacrificed her love for Krogstad and took care of her brothers when her mother was ill. Later when her brothers grew up, she was left alone, penniless, jobless and desperate after the death of her husband. Instead of mourning over all these problems, she feels it is quite necessary to live with the circumstances and emerge as a winner at the end of the story. She reconciled with Krogstad and got ready to be with him and his children. Earlier, it is seen that she expresses her feelings for Krogstad because of the financial security. Kristine preferred to be more practical than emotional in the display of her feelings in the story. She emerges to be a strong figure to render the class of feminism in the play with a hold of qualities and confrontation to face. Thus, her representation is the same as that of Nora's in the story.

Moreover, we see Nanny, a maid figure in the story, who too has displayed a sense of sacrifice. She faces difficult circumstances to live in a society, where she is forced to abandon her newborn baby which is supposed to be born out of wedlock. Although she is also polished and sensible who entreats the mind of Nora that she can be a good mother to her children while remembering her role in grooming Nora in her childhood.

The object of sacrifice is one of the standing pillars of the story under which the women of Ibsen have been portrayed. This portrayal of them also depicts the orthodox middle-class Norwegian society and their treatment with the class of women in general.

8.2.1.2 Theme of Feminism:

Definition of Feminism: Feminism is defined as a range of socio-political movements and ideologies which aims to establish the political, economic, personal and social equality of the sexes. It seeks the position of male more equal than female and prioritises the viewpoint of males as more essential and authentic than the viewpoint of females. History has witnessed that women have been a typecast to socio-economic, personal and emotional depression. This depression has uprooted the level of thinking amongst women of many societies in the previous ages. But as the awareness grows among women about their rights and status in the society, feminism takes place and their "we voice" establishes them as a class of society with the pivotal role to deconstruct gender identity and its mistreatment in the society.

In this way, we see that "*A Doll's House has often been called a feminist play*". *A Doll's House* is a feminist play in its representation. It deals with the theme of feminism. The very title of the play symbolises the aspects of womanhood in the society of its time. As the story progresses the freedom of Nora is curtailed, she is merely a doll in the play. The sense of patriarchy which displays the depression of women and their constraints to play a part in the matters of family as

men want, is quite an obvious characteristic feature of the play. We see it as, a part of the genderism, where man tries to control woman and think himself to be more superior and mindful than his spouse. This feminism is openly seen in the actions of Nora, who decides to take loan without the acknowledgement of her husband in order to save his life, her secret work and her assertion at the end of the play. She thought to leave her husband and children just to find her own self and become independent from the suffocating and in comprehensive relationship. She was firm on her decision and desires whatever she made her audience feel in the play as typical feminist. Thus, we see her representing a panoramic role of a powerful women, who knows how to be a responsible wife, a caring, mother and a loving daughter, but suffered due to their inability to understand. She remained despotic at the hands of her father and husband, who thought of her just as a 'doll'. Her waggling struggle to make everything stable is quite a vanishing picture of masculinity, and on the revelation of it, the mistreatment of her husband becomes a mind changing event for Nora. Her later assertion doesn't allow her to be compromising. She went away from being a conventional woman, and to be a victim of her husband's dominancy. We, therefore, see a clear indication of feminism in the women characters of Ibsen, whose portrayal was to paint a bleak picture of women in the contemporary Norwegian society. Nora is an epitome of feminism in the play, whose role has provoked many contemporaries to write female characters with "power and will."

Moreover, the other female characters too have contributed through their role in making this play more feministic in its approach than in the presentation of characters only. Mrs Kristine, in this case, has also displayed a system of certain characteristics which show the audience that she is full of self-will and qualities to handle any odd situation without the support of any male member. After becoming a widow, her plight reflected an actual picture of Norwegian middle-class society, who would entertain the need of male at the time of their need and support, but once they are done with it, they become worthless. In this case, we see Mrs Kristine making herself another embodiment of powerful female, who is abandoned and left penniless, still she looks after her ailing mother and her siblings. The death of her mother and growth of her brothers set her free to live a life of her own. Eventually, she happens to meet her old love, Krogstad and both reconciled to live with each other. Though, she was seeking a position of job before to survive, the rebuttal of her actions, was to see a condition for living, not an option of support and luxury. But at the end, we find her actions more mature than those of anyone else in the play. On the other side, the role of Nanny rendered far more a picture of feminism through her actions, her forced

throw off from her own baby, supposed to be born out of wedlock, and her survival to do odd jobs was an actualisation of power and sacrifice, which, according to the presentation of Ibsen, can be done by a female, that's why this play is more often quoted as a play of feminism.

8.2.1.3 Theme of Deceit:

The theme of deceit and trust is one of the central themes of the play *A Doll's House*. The trust is shown in the form of deceptions which are presented as masks in the play. The object of mask-up was that a liar should wear it to keep the truth away. In this connection, we have an explanation of Mr Torvald about Krogstad that although, he is having a bad reputation, he will not take his punishment head-on, but out of the conundrum by a "cunning trick", he will make use of lies and will wear a mask before his near and dear ones. We, therefore, happen to see this deception in the actions of the characters, and it is clearly indicated that Nora too wears a mask to reach her desires, even though she is being called "little skylark", "squirrel", "little girl", and so on to get her things done. She, in fact, wears a mask to deceive her husband from the truth, she concealed her heart more with lies than truth to balance everything around. The ball also implies another instance that one must wear a mask to keep others away from the truth. Although, to distract Mr Torvald to open the letters of Krogstad, she dresses up as 'Neapolitan Fisher-Girl' and then danced wild Tarantella to keep him away from doing so; it was obviously as person for Nora to maintain this mask unwillingly to save her relationship with Torvald for which she was desperate. More likely, the object of mask pertains to a permanent role in the life of some central characters in the story. Therefore, deceit is one of the major aspects of all the events in the story, in which the portrayal of events has undergone the process of revealing the inner identity and true self of the characters.

8.2.1.4 Theme of Parental and Filial Obligations:

The theme of parental and filial obligations is another central theme of the play, where Ibsen's audience acknowledge, with a belief in the nature of the characters—Nora, Torvald and Dr Rank, that the parents must be honest and be obligated towards their role in the grooming of their kids, because parents' immorality can pass to their children like a disease. He implies that father's bad habits luxurious lifestyle and multiple affairs with women lead the child to contract the venereal disease. On the other side, Torvald is of the view that one's parents determine one's moral character when he tells Nora, "Nearly all young criminals had-lying mothers". Torvald also refuses Nora to interact with her children when the truth, about the loan she took falsely, is revealed. Because he fears that her deceit may affect his children also, or it may corrupt them in

future. The play also implies that the children must be obligated to protect their parents. We see the denial of it in the character of Nora, when she recognised it to be with her ailing husband instead of her sick father. Mrs Kristine Linde, on the other hand, sacrificed her hopes of being with Krogstad and undertook years of labour in order to attend her sick mother. In this theme, Ibsen doesn't remain confined to women, his judgement is not on women's decision only, but he uses his idea that the children must be obligated towards their parents and demonstrate the quality of their responsibilities in making familial obligation as children, and the same is applicable to the parents in reciprocity.

8.2.1.5 Theme of Marriage:

The theme of marriage is another standing pillar of the play *A Doll's House*. It shows a representation of completely conventional marriage of Nora and Torvald. As usual, Nora stays at home to see children and household while Torvald supports his family financially. Initially, she has been in the role of a conventional female figure in the play. Although we see that, to maintain a balance in her relationship, Nora often lies to Torvald, "she hasn't been dishonest about silly things like eating macaroons but about some enormous things as well." As we know, the rarest secret of loan, which she took without the acknowledgement of her husband to save his life, becomes a life changing event for Nora. When truth comes into the light, Torvald breaks down and drives Nora away from home, he even discards Nora from being a caretaker of her own children. Torvald conventionally thinks to be the most powerful man of his family and tries to control Nora in every aspect of the life. He feels that it is his right to control his wife; in turn, Torvald is astonished when Nora utters, "it's nice" for her to do what he wants." This perceived right to control is another reason that marriage of Nora and Torvald broke off. Torvald tries to control every aspect of Nora but fails to realise that this dominancy comes with a price. While he exerts control over Nora, their status cannot be equal and thus cannot be in true union and partnership.

The relationship of Nora and Torvald is completely opposite of the relationship of Mrs Kristine Linde and Krogstad. She took years of labour to see her mother and brothers while keeping herself away from being dependent. She is earning and, with this source of power, represents that a woman can be equal to men in the affairs of life. At the end, we see them enter wedlock. 'Mrs Linde and Krogstad' went unconventionally with a proper understanding and their exchange of ideas and conversation were filled with similarity which was impossible to find in the conversation of Nora and Torvald till their marriage broke off. But in the case of Mrs Linde and Krogstad, who

find themselves as equal “two shipwrecked people” joining force because they respect each other as equal human beings, their union allows them to grow, change and become better human beings.

8.2.1.6 Theme of Reputation:

The theme of reputation is an integral theme of the story which is co-related with the life of characters and their reputation. Ibsen has painted a bleak picture of men and their concern about the reputation. As we see, Nora, Dr Rank and Torvald, have their own individual opinion about reputation. The reputation acquired by Dr Rank, according to him, was his father’s inheritance which was bad. His father was a man of ill-repute and had simultaneously become his reputation. His father had enjoyed physical pleasures and was known for his drinking bouts which contracted him a venereal disease and had passed the same disease to his son. Moreover, the obligatory part of this reputation come on the shoulders of mothers as per the opinion of Mr Torvald, the way his wife Nora groomed his children and the reputation they acquired. But, while stating his idea about the reputation, he, as a father forgets that the moral upbringing of father in the life of children is significant too for the whole course of the life of any individual. In this case, Mr Torvald is quite against his own ideology when he says that Nora’s ability to wheedle money out of him is “in the blood,” and in the eyes of Torvald, this trait of Nora is the inheritance from her father. Further, we see that once the truth about Nora’s loan and forgery is revealed, Torvald advances his declaration that her “want of Principle” is the influence of her father.

In fact, initially Mr Torvald is of the opinion that whosoever has gone bad in his early life has had deceitful mother. According to him, a person’s reputation is the upbringing of his mother. In the story, there is a complete reciprocal of it. As we see, conventionally, a child begets the name of his father after his own name, and when it comes to his/ her traits, it seems that he/she inherits the reputation from the father only. As the reputation of Dr Rank’s father haunts him because it was bad (reputation), even though he has made a good reputation in the society. Ibsen subtly points out the poisonous influence of misogyny in this society.

8.2.1.7 Theme of Unreliability of Appearances:

The unreliability of appearances in the story proves to be too obscure to understand. We see that the half of the personality of the characters is hidden, as initially, Nora responds as a submissive responder without any acknowledgement about the views of her husband for her. She is being called as little squirrel, doll and whatever comes to her husband’s mind. But in her later part, she appears to be intelligent, mindful and courageous. She saves the life of her husband and understands her own importance as ‘self’. More importantly, her appearance comes in the fore

front for every other woman in the story. She does not confine herself to be a victim of selfishness and dominancy of her husband. Her final departure in the story reflects more about her as a changed woman than what she appears to be in the beginning. On the other side, the exalted and dominant nature of Mr Torvald seems to be more reasonable in the acts than that of Nora. His boasts about the authority of himself and his quality to lead a family as a head, turns out to be cowardice and petty; he is selfish in his approach while understanding the condition of Nora. He doesn't allow himself to submit whatever situations Nora had faced for him. Dr Rank, in its approach, is a man of many faces, as in the beginning, he seems to be a friend of Nora and Torvald, but in his later assertion, he seems to be lover and admirer of Nora, and passes a revelation of his feeling for her.

As the play progresses there is a misinterpretation of the characters which reveals different aspects of their personalities. As we see, initially the character of Krogstad has been portrayed as villainous one but seemingly his heart is filled with compassion and love, which is revealed when he happens to meet Mrs Linde and thinks to take back all the papers carrying the secret of Nora's forgery. This instability of characters in their representations in the story leads the situation to get improper for the comprehension of the audience and simultaneously the unreliable nature of characters nudging the situation over and over into new turn. The uncertainty in the nature of the characters brought unreliability in the outcome of the actions. We see the denial of submission in the foregrounding of a relationship. And the psyche of Mr Torvald can be seen in his obsession with his controlling nature which destroys the peace in the family as well as in his relationship. Besides the revelation of the internal observation of Nora, who didn't prefer to be the victim of her husband's dominant attitude, she finds it suitable to leave everything to find "self."

Check your Progress

1. Whose love did Mrs Kristine sacrifice and why?
2. Why is the play *A Doll's House* known as a feminist play?

8.2.2 Narrative Technique and Point of View in *A Doll's House*:

The narrative technique in the play is quite an obscure one, as Henrik Ibsen has employed an objective third-person point of view. The point of view doesn't belong to any one of the characters in the play. The process of storytelling belongs to many characters in the play and even the reader is at his will to come up with his/her own conclusion on the morality of the characters. We see, the whole play is told from the third person point of view. Nora, the protagonist of the play, narrates much of the part of the play. Her actions, situations, and experiences create half of the setting for the story. Moreover, there is use of the dramatic irony, where we see that the

audience know something which a character doesn't know. For instance, when Mr Torvald utters that he feels "physically ill," around dishonest people, ironically, the audience know about Nora's forgery and crime which Torvald does not know.

8.2.3 Critical Analysis and Appreciation of the Play *A Doll's House*:

A Doll's House is a play which portrays the men and women of the 19th century and their marital life. This play had been in the controversies mostly because of its innate reflection which criticised the institution of marriage. On the other side, *A Doll's House* is a play which explores the ways, in which many of the expectations of the society restrict the freedom of an individual. In this play, we see that the dominant race of men restricts the freedom and authority of women, especially the life of Nora reflects this which also makes the audience feel that one's realization is must to explore the "self." Nora realizes that even after eight years had passed since they got married, hadn't brought any understanding to their relationship. Nora thinks that all her life she has been pretending to be someone which her father and her husband Mr Torvald expect her to be.

The beginning of the story was a bit different than its climax and end. We see that initially Nora wants to be happy, and she is delineated as obedient and docile—the way she keeps her house and everything as her husband wants her to be. Her expression for the freedom was having more than enough money to be carefree about the life. We see her believing in "puffery and pomp", but on another side, her self-sacrifice to maintain the peace and happiness in her life reveals the depth of her personality, as how illegally she seeks to have a loan to save the life of Torvald. Thereafter, the placation of keeping the manliness of Torvald alive, she prefers to keep the loan secret which halts her freedom. Nora was of the view that her own deeds became the cause of her sorrow. She questions herself whether the life she is leading is worth to keep her happy or not.

In this regard, many critics enthroned their judgement by titling the play as "controversial one", to the social representation. The beginning of the story shows us Nora's sneer from the experience of Christmas shopping, and Torvalds's appearance as he emerges from his duty and creates an atmosphere of oppression, talks about the qualities of Nora as spendthrift, his all-diminutive titles under which he considers Nora which imply his control on her. He appears pompously responsible and dominant in the family and its day-to-day affairs. He mistreats Nora for how she spends on the food she consumes and on the Christmas gifts she bought, but Nora's cheerful response and enthusiasm about Torvald's reaction raise the awareness among audience that she is like any other woman in the world, who is responsive without any provocation. It was unbridled appearance of their relationship even before her childhood friend. But contrary to this,

before Mrs Linde who arrives for a visit, Nora discloses, although for her amusement, that she is not as childlike as she may appear, and that she arranged money for the treatment of her husband in Italy.

In the progression of the events, audience happen to know some of the interesting facts about Nora and her life, especially when Mr Krogstad, an employee in the bank of Mr Torvald, appears in the scene. The main action of the story begins here, Krogstad lent money to Nora and helped her in availing the money illegally after she signed for her dying father. In this instance, we find that the middle-class Norwegian society doesn't let the women be as equal as men. Women were forbidden to avail of any loan without the acknowledgement of any male member, and acknowledgment should be countersigned by either husband or father. Ibsen, was highly inspired by this belief that "a woman cannot be herself in modern society." He further mentions that "this society is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from their standpoint".

Further, the actions take place with an inclusion of the plot developed in the mind of Mr Krogstad about Nora, to blackmail her for her crime. We see Torvald's disappointment for Krogstad, as his behaviour and presence suffocate Torvald. His mention of him is quite a delinquency of his personal attribution of not being with a man, who is morally unsound. Torvald's decision provokes Krogstad to blackmail Nora, for he can expose her before her husband which can land her into prison and pillory. Nora haunts upon herself affected by that crime which she had done to save the life of her husband Torvald.

Although the climax comes into effect, when audience get to know that Krogstad has the document of Nora's forgery with him. On the arrival of the letters from Krogstad to Mr Torvald, Nora believes that the outcome of her sacrifice would melt the heart of Torvald towards her, and he will take the crime upon him instead of making her suffer for it. Krogstad changes his decision and decides to withdraw the idea of blackmailing Nora when he finally reconciles with the love of his youth, Mrs Kristine, who had left him for a richer man earlier. We see the denial of accepting the truth and making her responsible for all the faults and mistrust. Torvald, in his approach, seems to be cowardice, as he shatters the hopes of Nora, calls her a cheater and what not, and disables her to be the mother of her own children, thinking that she may inculcate the same values among his children. On the revelation of it, Nora's delusion about her marital relationship and her own life shatters, she realizes that her identity is no more than being a mere 'Doll' which can be used, admired and pleased for his own self- fulfilment. Nora realises that there is much more in knowing

oneself than being a dependent and disabled part of any relationship which won't consider the worth of her sacrifices, and rather make her feel worthless. She decides to leave the children and her absurd relationship to find her 'self' and to be independent.

Moreover, her departure makes her audience feel quite reasonable and self-decisive; her reason from detaching herself from the family obligations were hinted from time to time in the play. While in confrontation with Mr Torvald in the last scene, she says that she has been "greatly wrongly" mistreated by him. She further places herself as a "doll wife" and the children, in turn, become her "dolls" leading her to doubt her own qualification to raise them. In this context, George Bernard Shaw suggests "that she left to begin a journey in search of self-respect and apprenticeship to life," and that her revolt is "the end of a chapter to human history." Michael Meyer argues that the play's theme is not "women rights" but rather "the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person."

In a speech given to the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights in 1898, Henrik Ibsen insisted that he "must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement." Since he wrote "without any conscious intention of making it propaganda," his task has been "the description of Humanity."

8.2.4 Let Us Sum Up

The play *A Doll's House* is about the social presentation of the Norwegian middle-class society, their lifestyle and their appearance before their motives. The dramatization of the events is carried out to show the part of the characters played, while keeping their motifs for their interests and gains to a great extent. Thematically, the play is constructed to evoke the curiosity among the audience in the running sequence of the events. We have seen that the presentation and display of events have made it controversial for the whole scenario. Critics are of the view that Ibsen has directly portrayed the sufferings of women, which later Ibsen outrightly denied that neither he was intending to criticise the institution of marriage, nor raising the issues of women. But in all, throughout the play, we see that story, plot and themes are directly and indirectly addressing the issues of marriage and women.

8.3 Learning Outcomes

Dear Learners, after reading this Unit, you should be able to identify and understand the complexity of the events in the story. The reading of this Unit should lead you to comprehend the

play thematically. This Unit should have enabled you to make a critical analysis of the play. It will enlighten you about the insight of characters and their appearances in the story.

8.4 Glossary

Astonished: (Adjective), surprised or amazed at/by something/someone greatly.

Exemplification: (Noun), to illustrate or clarify something by providing references or examples.

Confrontation: (Noun), A hostile or argumentative situation or angry disagreement between two people, or groups, or opposite parties.

Disloyal: (Adjective), to fail to be loyal or faithful to someone or towards any organisation.

Reconciled: (verb: past tense of reconcile), to find way of dealing with two ideas, situations, statements, which seem to be opposite to each other.

Permissible: (Adjective), acceptable or allowed according to the law or a particular set of rules.

Ideologies: (Noun), a system of ideas or ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy.

Curtailed: (verb: past tense of curtail), to constrain someone to be free or to impose restrictions.

Panoramic: (Adjective); (of a view or picture) with a wide view surrounding the observer, all aspects of a subject, matter or any issue; wide ranging.

Dominancy: (Noun) power or influence over others.

Provoked: (verb: past tense of provoke), stimulate or give rise to a reaction or emotion, (typically a strong or unwelcome one) in someone.

Cunning-Trick: (Adjective), a trick having or showing skill in achieving one's ends by deceit or evasion.

Deceit: (Noun), the action or practice of deceiving someone by concealing or misrepresenting the truth.

Obligated: (Adjective), required, obliged or compelled (someone) to undertake or do a legal or moral duty

Puffery: (noun), exaggerated praising or to praise someone falsely.

Pomp: (noun), impressive and colourful ceremony, and splendid display.

Unconventionally: (adverb), not based on or conforming to what is generally done or believed.

Inheritance: (Noun), a thing that is inherited.

Foregrounding: (verb), make something the most prominent or important feature.

Pompously :(Adverb), pretentiously or affectively grand, solemn involving self-importance, especially by using long and formal words.

8.5 Sample Questions

8.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Who are mostly shown as an object of sacrifice in the play *A Doll's House*?
 - a) Women
 - b) Men
 - c) Both of them
 - d) none of the above.
2. Her freedom is curtailed and her existence before her husband is mere like a “doll.” Who is referred to in the statement?
 - a) Nanny, the maid
 - b) Mrs Kristine
 - c) Nora, the protagonist
 - d) Dr Rank's mother.
3. Mr Torvald utters about Krogstad, that although “he is having a bad _____”, but he will not take his punishment head-on. Fill in the blank by choosing the appropriate word to complete the sentence.
 - a) Ideology
 - b) Reputation
 - c) Character
 - d) All of the above.
4. Who fears that her wife's deceit may affect his children, or it may corrupt them in future?
 - a) Krogstad
 - b) Dr Rank
 - c) Mr Torvald
 - d) No one
5. Who utters these words to Torvald? “It's, ‘nice’ of her to do what he wants.”
 - a) Mrs Kristine
 - b) Nanny
 - c) Nora
 - d) His Girl friend
6. She doesn't confine herself to be a victim of _____ of her husband. Choose an appropriate word to complete the statement?
 - a) Aggression and suppression
 - b) Behaviour
 - c) Selfishness and Dominancy
 - d) All of the above
7. Which point of view did Henrik Ibsen employ for the narration of the events in the story?
 - a) “An objective Third-person point of view”.
 - b) An authorial I.
 - c) The story is singly narrated by a strange lady.
 - d) The story is narrated by three outsiders.
8. Who comments upon the story “that she (Nora) left to begin a journey in search of self-Respect and Apprentice to life”?
 - a) T.S Eliot
 - b) George Bernard Shaw
 - c) William James
 - d) None of the above

9. What, according to Ibsen's description, was in his tasks to write this play?
- The description of self-love
 - The description of women and her relations
 - The description of male dominance
 - The description of humanity.
10. Who argued that the play's theme is not "women's rights" but rather the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person?
- Virginia Woolf
 - Michael Meyer.
 - Both a and b
 - None of the Above.

8.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

- Write a brief description of Nora's sacrifice towards her family.
- Comment upon the role of parents in the life of their children's upbringing.
- Why did Dr Rank think that his reputation is the inheritance of his father?
- Why is Nora unreliable in her appearance? Comment briefly.
- Comment briefly upon the theme of marriage in the play.

8.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

- Discuss *A Doll's House* as a feminist play.
- Discuss the point of view in the play *A Doll's House*.
- Comment critically on the ending of the play with examples.

8.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Rickert, Blandine M, ed. *Major Modern Dramatists*, volume 2.
- Boyesen, Hjalmar. *A Commentary on the Works of Henrik Ibsen*. New York: Russel and Russel, 1973.
- Egan, Michael, ed. *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage*. Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972.
- Lebowitz, Naomi. *Ibsen and the Great World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1990.
- Lee, Jennette. *The Ibsen Secret*. Seattle: University Press of the Pacific, 2001.
- Marker, Frederick. *Ibsen's Lively Art*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989

Unit-9: American Drama: Origin and Development

Structure

9.0 Introduction

9.1 Objectives

9.2 American Drama: Origin and Development

9.2.1 Puritan's Disdain for the Theatrical Activity

9.2.2 Theatre in Colleges and Universities

9.2.3 Acting Groups and Colonial Drama

9.2.4 Drama of the American Revolution

9.2.5 Nationalistic Drama

9.2.6 Romantic and Popular Drama

9.2.7 American Melodrama

9.2.8 American Drama in the Twentieth Century

9.3 Learning Outcomes

9.4 Glossary

9.5 Sample Question

9.6 Suggested Learning Resources

9.0 Introduction

The plays of Eugene O' Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and several others of equal standing brought worldwide recognition to the American drama and contributed to its present-day glory. The genre, as it challenges the best of dramatic writings across the world today, is not a new phenomenon. It had struggled extensively for its recognition for more than two centuries and had failed to enjoy the reputation and prestige earned by the other literary genres. The initial attempts were either melodrama or farces of the crudest sort or crude imitation of European styles. There were theatre acts giving witness to British colonization and European immigration even before America became an independent republic in 1776. With the prevalence of English settlers and their fondness for dramatic performances, theatrical activities in America continued to thrive and flourish. Since the First World War, American drama has achieved such a tremendous upsurge of dramatic writing that it measures up to the demands of universal and

enduring literature. Thus the 20th century witnessed great masterpieces of modern American drama.

9.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- introduce the origin and development of American drama from its beginning to the growth and accomplishment (with the founding of the Theatre Guild in 1919) in the 20th century.
- present various aspects of national, social and cultural phenomena which have played a constructive role in the making of American dramatic literature.
- approach and understand American drama from the perspectives of dramatic history and thematic richness.

9.2 American Drama: Origin and Development

The domestic playwrights had produced only melodramas, unrealistic romantic adventures and sentimental tales for almost a century. But these attempts provided opportunities for histrionic performances by leading theatre artists. As these playwrights began to take creative responsibilities of playwrights and as an aspiring group of artists began to lend dignity into their stage productions, American dramatic tradition began to achieve social acceptance and honour. By 1700, conditions had improved for theatrical productions owing to the prosperity and stability given by coastal urbanization. Professional actors had arrived from Britain, a half-century later, bringing with them new plays and higher performance requirements. Permanent companies had established themselves in New York, Philadelphia, and other towns in another half-century, fostering native authorship among Anglo-Americans to some extent, with a considerable increase in theatrical production and publishing from 1787 to 1800. It was not until the latter half of the eighteenth century that American-authored dramas began to take on key regional characteristics and inventing characters. Thomas Godfrey's "*The Prince of Parthia*" was the first love drama and play written by an American and presented by a professional company. It was finished in 1759 and first performed in 1767 at Philadelphia's Southwark Theatre. Robert Rogers' "*Ponteach*," published in London in 1766, was the first drama based on native American material, and it was an unproduced

problem piece. Royall Tyler's "*The Contrast*," performed in 1787 at the John Street Theatre in New York, was the first professional American comedy. William Dunlap (1766–1839), an author and producer, was the first professional American playwright, writing, adapting, and translating over sixty plays, operas, skits, farces, and interludes. John Howard Payne (1791–1852) was the first actor and playwright to achieve national acclaim, with one or two major hits and eighteen published plays to his name.

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) and the American drama of the 1920s are considered the starting point for serious discussions of American theatre. The overwhelming presence of English immigrants, growing theatrical performances and writing in America succeeded to take American drama out from puritanical orthodoxy towards its new evolution.

9.2.1 Puritans' Disdain for the Theatrical Activity:

The English loved entertainment, but earliest immigrants in America preferred the puritan ethos of hard labour, frugality, and piety because they were anxious about their physical and spiritual survival in a new land. Theatrical activity was so repulsive to them that the performance of *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb* in 1665, the earliest documented play in America, ended in the performers being tried in court. Several American colonies enacted laws prohibiting the performance of plays. Puritan antipathy for theatre explains Massachusetts statutes such as the General Court's 1750 prohibition on stage and theatrical entertainment of any kind. Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island all passed laws outlawing the performance of plays in 1750, 1759, and 1761, respectively. "To indulge a passion for playgoing signifies nothing more or less than the loss of that most important treasure: the eternal soul," Timothy Dwight IV, President of Yale College, proclaimed in his *Essay on the Stage* in 1794.

9.2.2 Theatre in Colleges and Universities:

The Puritan disdain for theatrical activities could not exist for long. Passing through a new cultural transformation, the colonies developed theatrical activities with thematic and technical advancement. There is enough evidence that colleges and universities contributed, to a considerable extent, to the growth of American drama in the 17th and 18th century. In fact, amateur play acting in educational institutions was a frequent colonial diversion. Harvard and Yale produced undergraduate theatricals, although necessarily private. Benjamin Colman, a Harvard undergraduate, wrote the first play by an American to be acted. The scholars of William and Mary College in Virginia offered the recitation of a 'pastoral colloquy' in 1702 before the governor. During 1699 and 1702, Richard Hunter petitioned for a license to produce 'the acting of the plays.'

Though it is not known whether he succeeded or not, but early colleges gradually began to permit theatrical activities. The College of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania) presented *The Masque of Alfred*, the first production of native writing of which we have definite knowledge. In 1905, there was a remarkable development in the realm of college and university theatre with a serious academic effort to start some kind of guidance for theatre at Harvard University. Professor George Pierce Baker introduced a non-credit course called English 47, dramatic composition—a euphemism for playwriting. Eventually, Baker’s guidance resulted into the emergence of critics, designers and writers including Eugene O’Neill who became an important force in the contemporary American theatre. Thereafter in 1925, Baker headed a new department of drama at Yale which was completely equipped professional theatre. This evolved into a graduate professional school by the next decade—one of the leading institutions of its type.

9.2.3 Acting Groups and Colonial Drama:

Theatrical performances did not require much effort to face the common colonial experience. This was due to the growing quantity and quality of theatrical activities and in part English men’s attraction to American viewers. Philadelphia is reported of being the first city to have kept the record of a professional theatre group. In 1749, Joseph Addison's tragedy *Cato* was enacted providing literary inspiration to many American patriots. Murray and Kean’s ‘Company of Comedians’ performed in a 300-seat theatre in Nassau Street during 1750-51 and continued their performances for many years under the name ‘Virginia Company of Comedians’. The first acting group that brought good professional theatre to the colonies was a company of twelve adults and three children led by Lewis Hallam who had come from England in 1752.

Robert Hunter’s *Androboros* (1714), the first drama written by an English governor, illustrates the Americans' increasing feeling of liberty. This play, which is more sarcastic than dramatic, charts the trajectory of American theatre over the following two centuries. *The Prince of Parthia*, composed before 1763 and performed at Philadelphia's 'New Theatre' in 1767, makes extensive use of tradition. Several other popular plays of the time, such as *The Parton Boys* (1732), *The Trial of Atticus* (1771), whose authorship is unknown, and Robert Munford's *The Candidates: Or, The Humours of a Virginia Election* (1770), dealt with historical and national issues, frequently portraying America as a growing country trying to leave colonial restraints.

9.2.4 Drama of the American Revolution:

American drama from its very inception, until the Civil War days, was for the most part a derivative drama, that is, the greatest number of the plays which appeared in America during the

Revolutionary period were derived from English, French or German dramatic models. The British tendency to treat English settlers in America ignited the rebellious spirit of freedom. Patriotism for the United States of America erupted as a political force. Drama became a tool for pamphleteering, either for the cause of nationalism or for the sake of monarchical allegiance. Drama became a loyal and monologic servant of a political purpose, rather than being conflictual and dialogic in and of itself. *The Battle of Brooklyn* (1776), an anonymous drama, took up the cause of the loyalists and mocked leaders like George Washington. Mercy Otis Warren's plays *The Adulateur* (1772), *The Defeat* (1773), *The Group* (1776), *The Blockheads* (1776), and Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *The Battle of Bunkers Hill* (1776) portrayed revolutionary rhetoric. These plays do not boast of high literary quality, but they certainly establish the Revolutionary War as one of the significant factors behind the increasing interest in the native drama. Robert Munford's *The Patriot* (1779), which critically probes the arguments of opposing political factions, was the play with the most dramatic impact.

9.2.5 Nationalistic Drama:

Unquestionably, during this period the people of the United States went through a convulsion of nationalist cultural sentiment. Indeed, when Lewis Hallam Jr. and John Henry, the managers of the pre-Revolutionary American Company, brought their actors back to North America from a decade-long sojourn in the West Indies, they felt the need in 1785 to rename themselves as the Old American Company as a way of stressing their long-standing friendly ties with the new republic. Brackenridge's *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill* (1776) and *The Death of General Montgomery, in Storming the City of Quebec* (1777) both "attempt to transform, through an American dramatic art, Patriot military defeats into triumphant testimonials to a new national spirit and to translate colonial military heroes into martyrs to American liberty" (Richardson 1993, 36). The country's foundation signalled the start of a sustained struggle for cultural independence from the British. The fledgling republic's driving impulse was to distinguish itself from the British and to establish a vibrant Americanness. The Old American Company of Hallam and John Henry, who had reopened John Street in New York, offered the first professional production of a native American play, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*, in 1787 on an American subject marking the beginning of a real national stage. This play had elements of Goldsmith and Sheridan, but it also included a Yankee character who added something uniquely American to the stage. Tyler's contemporary William Dunlap, a painter by trade who had spent several years in England, also heard the siren call of the stage in the late 1780s. In his renowned drama *Andre* (1798), Dunlap

constructed a highly respectable British character, Major John Andre, who resisted early nationalist inclinations. The play featured a critical examination of George Washington's unremitting anti-British hostility, which included his reluctance to pardon John Andre, the conspirator who attempted to kill an American garrison, but also his great kindness in saving a young American captain. In James Nelson Baker, who predicted the prolonged grip of British aristocratic principles in the garb of chivalry, the object of attack switched from the British to degenerate British aristocratic ideals. His plays *Marmion* (1812) and *Superstition* (1824), both set in England, forewarned America about how the 16th century Scotland lost her independence to the British because of its allegiance to British aristocratic traditions.

9.2.6 Romantic and Popular Drama:

In the early nineteenth century, literary romanticism spread beyond national and continental lines, engulfing the nationalist struggle in America. American romantic tragedies such as *John Howard Payne's Brutus: The Fall of Tarquin* (1819), *Robert Montgomery Bird's The Gladiator* (1831), and *George Henry Baker's Francesca da Rimini* (1853) are outstanding examples of pure romantic tragedy. Though the genre was unable to address the concerns and wishes of a rapidly growing country, it did see its growth. Plays such as Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (1845) indicated a departure from both romantic and nationalist theatre. The protagonist, an American, began to become more ruralized and, in both person and disposition, became a Yankee. The 'Indian Plays,' such as James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess* (1808) and the Yankee, contributed to the American theatre by popularising a national historical medium.

9.2.7 American Melodrama:

Alexis de Tocqueville writes in the second volume of *Democracy in America* (1840), "Although spectators and spectacles have increased enormously in the United States in the last forty years, the population still indulges in this genre of amusement only with extreme restraint" (468). The remark implies that early nineteenth-century American theatre was hugely popular yet underappreciated. According to de Tocqueville, the theatre is both everywhere and nowhere at the same time; it is a popular form of entertainment that has vanished from national awareness. Melodrama is a theatrical genre that rose to popularity in the United States in the 1820s (primarily as a result of William Dunlap's moral mission colliding with his Gothic sensationalism experiments) and peaked between 1850 and 1870. Ackerman argues, "Most writing for the theatre until 1870, from romantic 'tragedy' to nationalistic comedy, manifested some aspects of melodrama." Melodrama represents a worldview in which the world is essentially moral, and the

individuals in the melodrama are archetypes who represent specific and easily recognised moral forces. Augustan Daly, Dion Boucicault, Bartley Campbell, Bronson Howard, and David Belasco all used this genre to show America on the stage at its most formative time. As melodramatic works, Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857), Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867), Howard's *Shenandoah* (1888), and Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West* and *The Heart of Maryland* (1895) depict a nation divided into two societies: one of aristocratic affluent, and the other of the poor.

9.2.8 American Drama in the Twentieth Century:

The advent of theatrical realism in the late nineteenth century did not imply the emergence of realistic drama. Since its origins in the 18th century, drama had never been a favoured factor in American theatre. It thrived during profound cultural transformation such as in ancient Greece, Rome, and 16th century Elizabethan England. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the advent of modern science and the accompanying industrial revolution in Europe and America generated a paradigm change in socio-economic status, demanding a major cultural upheaval.

William Dean Howells, known as the "Father of Literary Realism in America," is also credited with providing the theoretical foundation for realistic play. Howells recounts the development of realistic theatre in America in numerous of his publications, including his reviews of plays for journals such as *Harpers* and *Atlantic Monthly*. For him, the progress of realistic theatre, like that of the rest of literature, constitutes a step forward from romanticism. With their choice of subject matter and linear narrative structure, the French 'Well-Made' and English 'Problem-Plays' paved the way for realistic studies in theatre. However, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, American theatre underwent a long but steady move to realism, and it thrived in the twentieth. In terms of current societal themes, Benson Howard's *A Texas Steer* (1896), *The Bunker's Daughter* (1873), *Henrietta* (1887), *A Trip to China Town* (1891), Edward Harrigan's *Dans Tribulations* (1884), and Benman Thomson's *The Old Homestead* (1886) are notable. In his plays *Margaret Fleming* (1890), *Shore Acres* (1892), and *Griffith Devenport* (1893), James A. Herne sparked Howells' interest in creating Ibsenite theatre (1899). In dealing with adultery and double standards in marriage, Margaret Fleming takes a strong stance against society's patriarchal system. It smashes the melodramatic illusion of the ever-forgiving spouse in the well-drawn characterization of Margaret.

Even though throughout the twentieth century, innovation in both play content and production grew increasingly significant, realism remained the primary style of theatrical expression. Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, among others, pioneered new

levels of psychological realism by commenting on the status of American society via characters and their situations. As the century continued, the most compelling drama addressed big societal concerns like civil rights, the AIDS pandemic, as well as the individual's standing regarding such issues. Individual opinions became significantly more diversified in mainstream theatre which more closely mirrored America's growing complicated demographics.

In the years leading up to World War I (1914-1918), economic and social problems in the United States began to preoccupy dramatists. David Belasco and Clyde Fitch's pre-war work, both of which directed their own plays, elevated realism to new heights. *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905) by Belasco nostalgically reconstructed a rural California town during the mid-nineteenth-century Gold Rush, whereas *The City* (1909) by Fitch addressed the difficulties of unscrupulous business practices and drug addiction. Eugene Walter's play *The Easiest Way* (1909) depicted the dilemma of a kept woman whose acceptance of financial assistance from a man resulted in her rejection by the man she came to love. Rachel Crothers, the most prolific of pre-war playwrights, tackled problems such as society's hypocritical standard for men and women in *A Man's World* (1909). Langdon Mitchell's social satire *The New York Idea* (1906) succeeded to entertain while also making an important point about divorce. The American family, its growth and dissolution, was a common topic among writers at the period, and it overshadowed many American plays for the remainder of the century.

With the outbreak of World War I, a slew of European advancements in contemporary drama made their way to the American stage. Several of these American writers were eager to experiment with dramatic style and structure while simultaneously providing important sociopolitical critique. The Provincetown Players were the first to encourage modern American drama, having been founded in 1915 in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Eugene O'Neill, the most experimental of American playwrights in the 1920s, was the company's star. *The Hairy Ape* (1922) by Eugene O'Neill was one of the first plays to bring expressionism to America. In the early twentieth century, expressionism arose in Germany as a response to realism in the artistic, literary, and performing arts. It prioritised subjective emotions and sentiments above a thorough or objective description of reality. *The Hairy Ape* is about a rejected ship labourer who feels he doesn't belong anywhere until he encounters an ape in a zoo. He frees the imprisoned creature, only to have it destroy him. *The Adding Machine* (1923) by Elmer Rice is the most renowned example of American expressionism. The play focuses on the emotional journey of the principal character, Mr. Zero, when he is displaced at his work by an adding machine. Rice progressed from the

expressionistic visions of *The Adding Machine* and *The Subway* (1924), through his realistic depiction of New York slum life, *Street Scene* (1928), to *We the People* (1933), an enormous canvas of American life and corruption. By the mid-1930s, practically every facet of modern life had crowded onto the American stage. The 1920s were the busiest decade for professionally produced plays on New York City stages. Eugene O'Neill rose to prominence during this time period with five-hour plays. *Strange Interlude* (1928), a nine-act drama, investigated the way in which underlying inner processes influence external behaviours through its principal female character. In 1928, it received the Pulitzer Prize for drama. *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), a trilogy, was a stunning version of three ancient Greek tragedies by Aeschylus known as the Oresteia, which chronicled the narrative of Orestes. Both plays reflect O'Neill's lifelong study of the human condition and the causes that afflict humanity. In 1936, O'Neill became the first American dramatist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Many critics consider his tragic autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) to be his greatest. It was first performed in 1953, following the playwright's death.

African American characters in plays were increasingly visible during this time period. In Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* (1926), the protagonist, who has a white father and a black mother, tries to reform his black neighbourhood but is stymied by both white and black racial prejudice. During this time, white playwrights wrote the bulk of plays involving black characters, while black authors remained on the periphery of the theatre scene until the 1950s.

The 1930s saw a significant drop in American theatre, owing mostly to new sound technology that gave motion pictures a voice. Many theatres were permanently shuttered as a result of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Langston Hughes' popular play *Mulatto* (1935), depicting the complexities of racial relations, cleared the path for acceptance of African American theatre. The worldwide scope of worries in the 1930s was mirrored in Robert Sherwood's plays, whose scathing attack on armament makers in *Idiot's Delight* (1936) foreshadowed the approaching global disaster of World War II. It won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1936.

During World War II (1939-1945), there was very little noteworthy play that was neither escapist nor propagandist. However, once the war ended, two playwrights emerged: Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, who would dominate dramatic activity for the following few decades. Miller, famous for his play *Death of a Salesman* (1949), quite often mixed realistic people and a social objective with contemporary tragedy in his plays. *The Crucible* (1953), a tale about the Salem witch trials in the 17th century, was a metaphor for Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's anti-

communist witch hunt in the 1950s. Tennessee Williams, one of America's most poetic playwrights, wrote several plays on societal misfits and outcasts. When her sister's working-class husband forces her to confront the truth about her existence in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), a neurotic poor Southern woman strives to retain her delusions of gentility. Williams' Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) dealt with pretence and its destructiveness and devastation in an unhappy household.

Characterization of society's forgotten folk helped to keep realism alive in the 1950s. William Inge's *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950) depicted the unfulfilled lives of an alcoholic doctor and his wife. With the critically successful *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), the narrative of a black family dealing with a financial windfall, African American drama earned a huge boost in the late 1950s. The play, written by Lorraine Hansberry, was the first to be directed by an African American, Lloyd Richards. Edward Albee's semi-absurdist plays, beginning with *Zoo Story* (1959), captured the American imagination at the close of the 1950s with their psychological peril and intellectual conversations. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) by Edward Albee highlighted a married couple's deteriorating relationship mostly via verbal abuse.

The mid-1960s Civil Rights Movement and anti-war rallies sparked a boom in American drama, with regional and experimental theatres proliferating and many creative new dramatists emerging. The Living Theatre and the Open Theatre, for example, experimented with group dynamics by putting artists and audience members in the same physical location. *The Serpent* (1968) by Jean-Claude Van Italie, which employed the removal of physical boundaries between performers and audience, reproduced biblical stories via depictions of current events such as John F. Kennedy's assassination. Megan Terry's plays, such as *Calm Down Mother* (1965), pushed the boundaries of traditional theatrical structure by utilising actor changes. Political upheaval and social transformation in America throughout the 1960s influenced the drama of the time and the decades that followed. In their portrayal of many points of view, several playwrights of the time questioned prevailing societal standards of behaviour, providing voice to historically disadvantaged elements of American culture. Many African American theatrical voices in the 1960s were combative. Amiri Baraka's violent drama *Dutchman* (1964) depicted white society's dread and hate of an educated black protagonist. Adrienne Kennedy's autobiographical *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962) explored the hardships of being an American of mixed racial background.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Sam Shepard and David Mamet loomed large in American drama. *Buried Child* (1978) and *True West* (1979) were the most incisive examples of Shepard's hard-edged drama, which probed the American family and the often-devastating mythology of the *American West* (1980). Mamet developed a darkly comic style that emulated the inarticulate fragmentary speech and used profanity as practically every aspect of speech. Mamet's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983) showed the moral deterioration caused by the American salesman's win-at-all-costs credo. Tony Kushner was another significant young writer during this time period. One of the most successful theatrical events of the 1990s was his *Angels in America*. Over a six-year period, the two-part tale documented the consequences of the AIDS pandemic on the lives of eight persons. *Angels in America* won Kushner the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. Revivals of older plays and blockbuster musicals dominated new commercial theatre in the United States in the mid-1990s and early 2000s.

9.3 Learning Outcomes

From the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, the history of American theatre elucidates the country's culture, art, literature, and intellect. With the influx of European immigrants, America evolved as a country, passing through British colonial authority, the fight for independence and its victory, civil war, and westward expansion. The country advanced from British noble ideas to a sort of existential capitalism as a culture. In art and literature, it supported romanticism, melodrama, and realism. In fact, American drama struggled to reach the proper platform from the frontier where it had lived too long, and eventually, achieved a new position as a respected art form. With a growing consciousness of the importance of indigenous talent in theatre accompanied by tremendous public and critical acclaim from abroad, the American drama has acquired the status of a thoroughly accredited medium for the original expression of thought on a plane with all other forms of written literature, the study of which cannot be ignored. It may be stated that American theatre originated as a quest for identity and has matured into a scientifically focused eclecticism.

9.4 Glossary

Anglo-American: An American, especially of the US, who has descended from an English family.

(2) A soldier who fought for the Union (= the northern states) in the American Civil War.

Expressionism: A style and movement in early twentieth-century art, theatre, cinema, and music that sought to express people's feelings and emotions rather than depicting events or objects realistically.

Histrionics: The deliberate and exaggerated display of emotions on stage in order to impress the audience.

Melodrama: A story, play, or novel that is full of exciting events and in which the characters and emotions appear to be exaggerated.

Puritan: A person who has very strict moral principles and believes that pleasure is bad.

Quaker: An organisation of the Society of Friends, a Christian religious society that gathers without a formal ceremony and is firmly opposed to violence and war.

Realism: A form of art or literature in which objects and people are shown as they are in actual life.

Romanticism: A literary movement that characterized the works of literature, music, painting, criticism from late 18th to the mid-19th century.

Theatre: A structure or an outdoor location where plays and other forms of entertainment are presented.

Urbanization: The process through which an increasing number of people begin to live and work in towns and cities rather than in rural areas.

Yankee: A person who comes from or lives in any of the northern states of the US, especially New England

9.5 Sample Questions

9.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. O'Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in:

- A. 1938
- B. 1931
- C. 1933
- D. 1940

2. Which among the following plays of O'Neill is a comedy?

- A. *Ah, Wilderness!*

- B. *Mourning Becomes Electra*
C. *The Hairy Ape*
D. *The Emperor Jones*
3. Which of the following plays is not written by Tennessee Williams?
- A. *A Memory of Two Mondays*
B. *Sweet Word of Youth*
C. *The Glass Menagerie*
D. *Period of Adjustment*
4. Which of Arthur Miller's plays is premised on the 1692 witchcraft trials in Salem?
- A. *The Crucible*
B. *The Man Who Had All the Luck*
C. *All My Sons*
D. *The Archbishop's Ceiling*
5. What distinguishes Yank, the central character in *The Hairy Ape*, from Aristotelian tragic heroes?
- A. Despite his flaws, he does not die in a tragic way.
B. He meets a tragic end despite the fact that he lacks any tragic flaw.
C. In contrast to Aristotelian tragedy, there is a sudden reversal of fate at the end.
D. None of the above
6. Which of the following plays won Edward Albee a Tony Award?
- A. *The American Dream*
B. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
C. *The Zoo Story*
D. *The Bald Soprano*
7. The stage version of *The Zoo Story*, Albee's breakthrough work, shared an invoice with:
- A. *The Bald Soprano*
B. *Krapp's Last Tape*
C. *The Homecoming*
D. *The Balcony*
8. Which of these plays by Eugene O'Neill is notable for its employment of expressionistic devices and the presence of an African American lead?
- A. *Desire Under the Elms*

- B. *The Iceman Cometh*
- C. *The Emperor Jones*
- D. *Mourning Becomes Electra*

9. Many of Arthur Miller's plays deal with the concept of disintegration of family values, family system, family relationships due to the decline in:

- A. Family fortunes.
- B. Religious values.
- C. Cultural values.
- D. Traditional values.

10. American literary tradition was heavily influenced during its initial years by:

- A. French literature.
- B. British literature.
- C. German literature.
- D. None of the above.

9.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write short notes on the following topics:
 - I. American Dream
 - II. Expressionism in American Drama
 - III. Broadway and Off-Broadway Theatre
2. Bring out the salient features of American Puritanism.
3. Write a note on the impact of realism in American Literature.
4. Write a short note on the characteristics of American Drama.
5. How did American Dramatists highlight the role of the Civil War?

9.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Investigate the development of American drama in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
2. Investigate in depth the reasons for the modest growth of the American in its early stages.
3. How has reality affected American drama? Explain how it sheds light on its main proponents.

9.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Anderson, John. *The American Theatre and the Motion Picture in America*. The Dial Press, Inc., New York, 1938.
- Blake, Ben. *The Awakening of the American Theatre*. Tomorrow Publishers, 1935. An account of the left-wing theatre of the 1930s.
- Engel, Edwin A. *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1953. A study of the problems of O'Neill's main characters. The plots of most of the plays are reviewed.
- Gascoigne, Bamber. *Twentieth Century Drama*. Hutchinson Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1974.
- Gagey, Edmond. *Revolution in the American Drama*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1947. The American Theatre's major changes after 1912.
- Goldberg, Isaac. *The Drama of Transition*. Stewart Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1922. One of the first books to discuss the new American realism of O'Neill and others.
- Mantle, Burns. *American Playwrights of Today*. Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., New York, 1938. A general review of leading writers of the 1930s.
- Miller, Jordan Y. *American Dramatic Literature: Ten Modern Plays in Historical Perspective*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961.

Unit-10: Life and Works of Tennessee Williams

Structure

10.0 Introduction

10.1 Objectives

10.2 Life and Works of Tennessee Williams

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10.2.2 Education

10.2.3 Important facts about Tennessee Williams

10.2.4 Tennessee Williams's transformation as a writer and Awards

10.2.5 Genre-Wise Works

10.2.5.1 Screenplays and Teleplays

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10.2.5.3 Tennessee Williams's Stories

10.2.5.4 Tennessee Williams's Novels

10.2.5.5 Tennessee Williams's Poems

10.2.5.6 Tennessee Williams's Memoirs and Selected Essays

10.2.5.7 Memoirs

10.2.5.8 New Selected Essays: Where I Live

10.2.6 Let Us Sum Up

10.3 Learning Outcomes

10.4 Glossary

10.5 Sample Questions

10.6 Suggested Learning Resources

10.0 Introduction

Tennessee Williams was a serious entertainer and artist known for laying out complex emotional nuances to his writings. For Tennessee Williams, writing was the only way to get away from the world of reality, which he found extremely unnerving. He is considered one of the greatest playwrights in American history, as well as one of the most powerful and revered playwrights of Modern American drama. Tennessee Williams, as a writer, was always willing to experiment. It is generally believed that his drama is as lyrical and dramatic as his poetry. He has gone to a great length to represent himself as an ardent writer who accurately depicted characters in his writings. Tennessee's reputation as a playwright was greater than that of any poet. Even though his theatrical

popularity led to a difficult and sometimes desperate life, it was a better life than that of his poetic model. Nearly four decades after his death as an artist and universally acknowledged as America's great theatre poet, his literary prowess continues to amaze people. He possessed such a different range of skills that his works throughout many genres demonstrate his all-rounder mastery. Considering these, this Unit deals with the most crucial components of his literary career.

10.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- provide a comprehensive overview of Tennessee Williams's life at various stages, including his literary focus, interests, and skills
- elucidate his significant contribution to the realm of literature through writing.

10.2 Life of Tennessee Williams

10.2.1 Childhood:

Cornelius Coffin William and Edwina Dakin William had three children, the second of whom was Tennessee Williams. Tennessee Williams was given the name Thomas Lanier William III, when he was born on March 26, 1911, in Columbus, Mississippi (USA). In his early life, he was known by his nickname 'Tom'. Since childhood, he was an undersized and introverted person. Tennessee Williams spent his first ten years of life with his maternal grandparents because his father had to work away from home as a travelling Salesman. Tennessee Williams almost died at the age of 5 from an upper respiratory tract infection. It not only weakened him, but also confined him to his home for a year to heal.

10.2.2 Education:

When he was 12 years old, his father became a branch manager at a shoe company in Missouri (A City in St. Louis). His family relocated there and enrolled him at Eugene Field Elementary School. Unfortunately, his educational journey did not begin well for him, as he was nastily mocked and teased for his southern accent mostly by teachers. As a result, he took a year off from school, which bothered him, before he could begin his formal education.

On March 31, 1924, he was registered at Ben Blewett Junior High School (BJHS). Upon his return, his mother gave him a typewriter worth \$10. In 1926, Tennessee Williams joined Soldan

High School but transferred to University City High School after only one semester. He enrolled in a journalism course at the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1929 but failed ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Course) in his junior year. He started working as a clerk and a shoemaker after discontinuing his course from the University of Missouri however he decided to study during off-hours. He took typing and shorthand courses classes at night. In 1936, Tennessee Williams enrolled in a college at Washington University but discontinued again. In 1937, Tennessee Williams got a bachelor's degree admission in English in the drama department at the University of Iowa & completed his BA in 1938.

10.2.3 Important Facts about Tennessee Williams:

He believes that we are products of our environment which influences our actions. His loneliness and ailment stalked him like a shadow, and it turned into a theme of his writings. His etiquettes and sense of loyalty can be observed in many recorded situations of his life, for example when he failed ROTC, his father pulled him out of school with anger and forced him to work as a clerk. He could have opted for something else, but deep respect for his father made him obey silently. Another reason for accepting that job was family financial troubles which Tennessee Williams thought could be eased by his work. He had to commute 12 kilometres each way on his bicycle. Tennessee Williams worked hard and learnt different skills side by side for his professional growth. He left this 8-hour-a-day stressful job at the age of 24. Once he observed that because of his older sister screaming due to schizophrenia, his mental health was affected too. It confirms his perseverance, gentleness, loyalty and sense of wellbeing as an individual.

Tennessee Williams could see no disrespect in any low-level job as he worked as an elevator operator and a hotel waiter. He did not stoop to low levels of decency whenever he ran out of money. Once he pawned his typewriter to get food. However, an exceptional case in his record shows a mistake by him during his childhood, when his father caught him stealing grapes from a fruit stand and spanked him. For this reason, Tennessee Williams always admired his father's adherence to "total honesty and total truth". Valuing the audience's time, he advised aspiring playwrights "Don't bore the audience!" Changing his name carries many speculations but the most acceptable one divulges that it was chosen by him so that his ancestors could be paid a tribute by him. During his first grade, his teachers would often comment on his incompetence.

His first professionally produced play, *Battle of Angels*, flopped in 1940 and it landed him in debt. In order to support his family, he was always on the go, working a variety of odd jobs and sometimes surviving on the kindness of relatives and strangers. During his frequent travels, he

realized that he was effeminate for he often got beaten up by a boy named Albert. Even his father was considering him weak, effeminate and cowardly. All his attempted relationships ended in grief, despair, loneliness, and unsuccessful search for love. He was in love with a young Mexican man namely Pancho Rodriguez Y González, however, he broke up & warned him, not to disclose their relationship secret. Tennessee Williams expired on February 25, 1983 and left most of his estate, estimated at about \$10 million, to the University of the South at Sewanee, with emphasis that it should be provided as an aid to creative writers.

10.2.4 Tennessee Williams's transformation as a writer and Awards:

In 1924, he wrote his first article, "Isolated," in *The Junior Life*, the bi-weekly newspaper of Ben Blewett Junior High School. After joining, University City High School in 1926, his work began to attract attention. For the school's newspaper, he published a collection of famous stories, and he was encouraged to keep writing stories even after graduation. His debut as a professional writer came in 1928 when his story titled "The Vengeance of Nitocris" was published in *Weird Tales* magazine (for which he was paid 35 dollars). Tennessee Williams was 16, when his first piece, "Can a Wife Be a Good Sport?" was published in *Smart Set* magazine. He could not stop his love for writing during employment. His passion to write even more than before made him set a target for himself of completing one story every week. It serves as an excellent example of a dedicated Quester. Like Walt Whitman, he used his own life as material for art. As a poet, Tennessee Williams's life became 'a useable past' and he had his own life as source material for his creative work.

During his work for over three years as a clerk, he published a lot of poetry in national magazines. His playwriting training under Edward Charles Mabie at the University of Iowa shaped him a lot. Producing "Fugitive Kind and Candles to the Sun" plays staged by mummers was an outcome of his hard work & learning dedication shown during his B. A. Program. "Fugitive Kind" was one of his early pieces containing the richest dramatic content. Under the influence of Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov and Swedish dramatist August Strindberg, he became more interested in writing short plays. In 1939, he won a group theatre award for his play 'American Blues' (Collection of Short Plays). He received two big awards for his writing talent: a \$100 prize from the Group Theatre and a \$1,000 Rockefeller grant. He moved to New Orleans with money in his pocket to start a new life.

The Group Theatre Prize was his first recognition when *American Blues* (1939), a collection of one-act plays, won a Group Theatre award, the Rockefeller Grant (1939) in

recognition of his play 'Battle of Angels'. It was *The Glass Menagerie* that handed him his big break like a yuletide present. With rave reviews in Chicago in 1944, it was quickly transferred to Broadway, where the opening night crowd greeted it with rapturous applause. Characters in *The Glass Menagerie* were based on his own disturbed family life. The New York Drama Critics Circle Award, Donaldson Award, the Sidney Howard Memorial Award, and the Donaldson Award were among the many honours bestowed upon him as a result of its success. In many respects, *The Glass Menagerie* was his first successful masterwork.

Additionally, he won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award four times for, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955, his favourite) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1962). Furthermore, he won four Tony Awards for *The Rose Tattoo* (1952) *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *The Night of the Iguana* (1961), and *Not About Nightingales* (1999). He received two Pulitzer Prizes for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). President Jimmy Carter honoured him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980, which is counted as his biggest achievement.

10.2.5 Genre-Wise Works:

Academic treasure flow from the pen of Tennessee Williams has been witnessed in different genres such as screenplays and teleplays, plays, articles, essays, and short stories. Let us have a look at the plays.

10.2.5.1 Screenplays and Teleplays:

- *The Glass Menagerie* (1950)

It's a memory play based on rework of one of Tennessee Williams' short stories, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," which was published in 1948 and narrates the story of a young ambitious working in a shoe warehouse to get her family out of dire financial situation. Memories and melancholy, family values and personal accountability, and gender roles are almost all major themes in *The Glass Menagerie*.

- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

The play is a scathing assessment of how Post-war America's institutions imposed constraints on women's lives. Its protagonist meets an unpleasant fate and is essentially ruined and lost at the conclusion of this tragic drama.

- *The Rose Tattoo* (1955)

The drama shows a widow whose life has been turned upside down by her husband's death. Subsequently, she is lured back into the recollections of her late husband's affairs. A new lodger, a handsome truck driver, offers up the possibility of new love for her.

- *Baby Doll* (1956)

The narrative hinges around a conflict between two competing cotton industry proprietors who get into a scenario where one sets fire to the other's mill, while the other (Sufferer) seeks vengeance by courting his rival's wife thinking to receive admission by her of her husband's culpability.

- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)

The play encompasses the emotional deceptions that pervade an affluent Southern planter's family.

- *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959)

The play serves to demonstrate the intrinsic and extrinsic strife of a psychologically indecipherable character who gets to choose between expressing the truth and lying, and between closure and family reputation/inheritance. The play was created to represent those times in life when things change, such as, signalling the end of summer.

- *The Fugitive Kind* (1959)

The play features an unbefriended clerk, who supervises a hotel that shelters a bunch of inebriated losers as well as an unruly college student. An on-the-run mobster befriends the clerk, claiming to be a victim of the corrupt social system. He signifies hope to the hotel clerk.

- *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* (1966)

The play proffers a variety of perspectives on love, death, and life's actions (the universal course of everyday affairs). The play witnessed an era of the emotional police state, evoking not just visible constraints but also deep-seated Puritanism.

- *Boom!* (1968)

Based on Tennessee Williams's own play "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore' The Boom! is a realistic representation of art replicating life.

- *Stopped Rocking and Other Screenplays* (1984)

This is a collection of screenplays that have stayed unproduced and unpublished for a long time. The collection features Tennessee Williams's realistic approach as well as his experimental dramatic techniques.

- *The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond* (2009; screenplay from 1957)

It describes the story of a brattish, self-obsessed daughter of an affluent plantation owner who is hated by the locals. Fisher dislikes the neighbourhood, but she throws parties whenever she can. She is looking for a new escort and gets one who belongs to a poor family (genuinely caring about his alcoholic father and ailing mother). Initially, it seems that both will form a relationship, yet it doesn't happen. The play tried to be significant, but it hardly managed to keep viewers seated until the end. Desolation, loss of affluence, fall from grace, perplexing and battling inner demons are all themes tackled in the play, like his earlier works.

10.2.5.2 Tennessee Williams's-One-act plays (list from 1930 to 1983):

- **'Beauty is the Word' (1930)**

It tells us a story of a missionary couple from the South Pacific. It was described as a drama with a unique and constructive theme by the campus newspaper.

- **'Why Do You Smoke So Much, Lily?'(1935)**

It is about a young, frustrated chain-smoking woman.

- **'Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!'** (1935)

The play is about two sailors who picked up a couple of girls.

- **'The Magic Tower'(1936)**

It tells us the story of a young artist and his ex-actress wife living in a slum that they refer to as their "magic tower."

- **'Summer at the Lake'(1937)**

It is about a sensitive teenager who feels trapped by his self-absorbed Southern mother and his shoe-company executive father, who wants him to abandon his plans for college.

- **'The Palooka'(1937)**

It shows us a story of a Kid and his Trainer.

- **'The Fat Man's Wife'(1938)**

It is about a sophisticated Manhattan society lady who is forced to choose between her boorish husband, a theatrical producer, and a young playwright who has become her admirer.

- **'Adam and Eve on a Ferry' (1939)**

The play shows the attitude of men toward physical sexuality.

- **'The Long Goodbye'(1940)**

This play describes both awful and magnificent episodes of the main character's past.

- **The Purification(1940)**

The sole verse play focusing on an incestuous brother-sister relationship as well as a murder prosecution.

- **‘The Parade, or Approaching the End of a Summer’(1941)**

This autobiographical play tells us about a young playwright who deals with his unrequited gay love for another man.

- **‘Auto Da Fé’ (1941)**

It is about a severely moralistic mother suppressing the sexuality of a young postal employee.

- **‘The Lady of Larkspur Lotion’(1941)**

It depicts a conflict between a beautiful, deluded protagonist and her harsh, sensible landlord, who wants to kick her out of her apartment.

- **‘At Liberty’ (1941)**

This play tells the story of a formerly successful actress returning to her childhood home in the hopes of reviving her career.

- **‘Portrait of a Madonna’ (1941)**

The play introduces a sexually frustrated and neurotic heroine, whose upbringing in a series of southern thatched cottages has left her totally unprepared for life and filled with insane ideas. She is a conventional unmarried daughter, bound by the obligation of caring for an ageing mother, feeling societal pressure to be sexual but not being allowed to follow through with her desires. Miss Collins is eventually driven insane by unreasonable expectations.

- **‘Moony's Kid Don't Cry’ (1941)**

It is a revised version of 'Hot Milk at Three in the Morning' written in 1930. It tells the story of an argument between young married couples over their child.

- **‘Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix’ (1941)**

This play was based on a fictitious rendition of English novelist D. H. Lawrence's death.

- **‘The Case of the Crushed Petunias’ (1941)**

The ‘Crushed Petunias’ is a humorous play. A young girl living a dull and gloomy existence feels immensely agitated when her petunias are stomped a night before her floral bed is trampled by an unknown intruder. The drama begins early in the morning when Miss Simple phones a cop and informs him that her petunias have been deliberately sabotaged. A young man, astonishingly huge and violent in appearance, enters the shop a short time later,

sits in a chair that collapses under him. It makes Miss Simple angrier. He admits that he trampled her petunias. She is taken aback when she hears this. He requests that she replace the petunias with wild roses. He urges her to examine her place on the world stage and the planet. She could have been a tiny speck of dust, yet she grew into a splendid human being with the ability to think, feel, and act. He then takes her on a ride in an open car to a cemetery near Cypress Hill, where he believes the best wisdom comes from the dead. She agrees to meet with him there again later. The drama ends when she asks the police officer for directions to Highway No. 77. Only the most irrational people go to such a perilous and deadly region that produces continual strong winds. She is overjoyed and enthusiastic, and ready to travel to that uncivilized location. As a result, the play comes to an end with a joyful ending.

- **‘The Strangest Kind of Romance’ (1942)**

The play is set in a boarding house where the Landlady welcomes a new tenant who develops a strange bond with the previous tenant's cat.

- **‘Ten Blocks on the Camino Real’ (1946)**

It presents a variety of perspectives on life, love, and death. It was later developed into a full play.

- **‘This Property is Condemned’ (1946)**

This play is focussed on depression, love, flirting & suffering.

- **‘Wagons Full of Cotton’ (1946)**

A fight between two rivals in the cotton business leads one to destruct the other's Cotton Mill & then the suffered one seeks revenge by raping the perpetrator's naïve wife. It was reproduced as *Baby Doll* in 1956.

- **‘The Long Stay Cut Short, or The Unsatisfactory Supper’ (1946)**

This play is a short family drama that begins when a character, Aunt Rose, who prepares an unsatisfactory supper and then brings the problem to a climax.

- **‘The Last of My Solid Gold Watches’ (1946)**

The play recounts the story of a shoe salesman who already has failed to maintain his value and pathetically echoes himself.

- **‘Hello from Bertha’ (1946)**

This play captures the tragic life and death of a low-class prostitute.

- **‘Lord Byron's Love Letter’ (1946)**

The play is all about a Spinster and an Old Woman who claims to get one of Lord Byron's love letters; nevertheless, it turns out to be a Publicity hoax.

A massive collection of Tennessee Williams's one-act plays, spanning from 1950 to his final year on this planet, offers the world with quite a breathtaking artwork of immense literary strength. The titles of those publications, including the dates on which they had been written, are listed below:

‘Something Unspoken,’ Written 1951; ‘Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen,’ Written 1953; ‘The Dark Room,’ Written 1939, Published, 1958; ‘A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot,’ Written 1958; ‘Suddenly Last Summer,’ Written 1957; ‘And Tell Sad Stories of the Deaths of Queens,’ Written 1957, Published 2005; ‘The Mutilated,’ Written 1966;

‘The Gnädiges Fräulein,’ Written 1966; ‘Confessional’ Written 1967; ‘Now the Cats with Jewelled Claws,’ Written 1969; ‘Can’t Imagine Tomorrow,’ Written 1970; ‘The Frosted Glass Coffin,’ Written 1970; ‘The Demolition Downtown,’ Written 1970; ‘A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur,’ Written 1976; ‘Kirche, Küche und Kinder,’ Written 1979; ‘Lifeboat Drill,’ Written 1979; ‘The Chalky White Substance,’ Written 1980, Published 1991; ‘This Is Peaceable Kingdom or Good Luck God,’ Written 1980; ‘Steps Must be Gentle,’ Written 1980 and ‘The One Exception,’ Written 1983.

10.2.5.3 Tennessee Williams’s Stories:

Tennessee Williams authored a collection of stories, which are shown here in chronological order.

‘The Vengeance of Nitocris,’ Written 1928; ‘A Lady’s Beaded Bag,’ Written 1930; ‘Something by Tolstoi,’ Written 1931; ‘Big Black: A Mississippi Idyll,’ Written 1930; ‘The Accent of a Coming Foot,’ Written 1935; ‘The Dark Room,’ Written 1935; ‘Sand,’ Written 1936; ‘Ten Minute Stop,’ Written 1936; ‘Gift of an Apple,’ Written 1936; ‘The Field of Blue Children,’ Published 1939; ‘In Memory of an Aristocrat,’ Written 1940; ‘The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,’ Written 1941; ‘Portrait of a Girl in Glass,’ Written 1943, Published 1948; ‘The Angel in the Alcove,’ Written 1948; ‘Oriflamme,’ Written 1974; ‘The Malediction,’ Published 1945; ‘The Important Thing,’ Published 1945; ‘One Arm,’ Published 1948; ‘The Interval,’ Written 1945; ‘Tent Worms,’ Written 1945; ‘Desire and the Black Masseur,’ Written 1946; ‘Something about Him,’ Written 1946; ‘The Yellow Bird,’ Published 1946; ‘The Night of the Iguana,’ Written 1948; ‘The Poet,’ Written 1948; Chronicle of a Demise, Written 1948; The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin, Written 1951; Three Players of a Summer Game, Published, 1952; Man Bring

This Up Road, Written 1953; The Vine, Published 1954; Rubio y Morena, Published 1954; Two on a Party, Published, 1954; The Coming of Something to the Widow Holly, Published 1954; Hard Candy, Published 1954; The Mattress by the Tomato Patch, Published 1954; The Kingdom of Earth, Published 1954; The Knightly Quest, Published 1959; Grand, Written 1964; Mama's Old Stucco House, Written 1965; Happy August the Tenth, Written 1970; The Inventory at Fontana Bella, Published 1973; Sabbath and Solitude, Written 1973; Miss Coynte of Greene, Published, 1982; A Recluse and His Guest, Published 1982; Das Wasser Ist Kalt, Written 1973; Mother Yaws, Written 1977; The Killer Chicken and the Closet Queen, Written 1977, Published 1978.

10.2.5.4 Tennessee Williams's Novels:

Tennessee Williams' first novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone*, was published in 1950, and his second, *Moise and the World of Reason*, was released in 1975.

- *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone:*

The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone centres around an aged American stage actress joining a trip alongside her millionaire husband who dies on board. Since Karen sees no need to go back home, she rents a nice apartment in Rome. A year later, a procurer namely, Magda introduces her to Paolo (an attractive, well-dressed, egotistical young Italian) from her pool of professional gigolos. Mrs. Stone has just recently begun to feel lonely; Magda tells Paolo. Magda schemes and plans, directing Paolo to approach her. Mrs Stone and Paolo go out for dinner and dancing, but that's it. She eventually starts the relationship. He acts as though he loves her, and she believes him and falls for him. However, it soon became clear that Paolo's only interest is in himself. Mrs. Stone's possessiveness gradually bores him, and he starts seeking out another USA based starlet.

- *Moise and the World of Reason:*

Moise and the World of Reason was Tennessee Williams's second novel. Moise, a penniless and intrepid young painter with a predilection for unfinished canvases, is the first of three key characters in the narrative who have a strong magnetic impact on one another. The anonymous homosexual teenage narrator, a fleeing writer from Alabama, and Lance keep them all together with his energy, power, and sensuality. He is a one-of-a-kind figure whose absence imbues the narrative with a sense of dread and sadness. Looking at the artistry of Moise and the World of Reason, it gives the impression that only Tennessee Williams had the best aptitude to portray transsexual characters in a naturalistic manner.

10.2.5.5 Tennessee Williams's Poems:

His first collected book of poems was published in 1956. *In the Winter of Cities* comprised of four parts namely, "In Jack-O'-Lantern's Weather," "The Summer Belvedere," "The Jockeys at Hialeah," and "Hoofprints of a Little Horse." Each part consists of multiple poems. Another, Collection of poems was published in 1977, "The Androgyne, Mon Amour". It includes a vast list of poems, such as "Old men go Mad at Night," "Winter Smoke is Blue & Bitter," "Dark Arm," "Hanging Over the Edge of Infinity," "Events Proceed," "Androgyne," "Mon Amour," "Speech from the Stairs," "Young Men Waking at Daybreak," "Apparition," "Counsel," "One Hand in Space," "Impressing through a Pennsy Window," "The Couple," "Evening," "The Brain Dissection," "Crepe-De-Chine," "Les Etoiles D'un Cirque," "The Wine Drinkers," "A Daybreak Thought for Maria," "A Liturgy of Roses," "Miss Puma," "Miss Who?," "A Mendicant Order," "Cinder Hill," "You & I," "Stones are Thrown," "The Harp of Wales," "The Diving Bell," "His Manner of Returning," "Night Visit," "One & Two," "Two Poems from The Two-Character Play," "The Lady with No One at All," "Wolf's Hour," "The Ice Blue Wind," "Turning Out the Bedside Lamp," "Tangier: The Speechless Summer."

To his credit, there is another list of uncollected and posthumously published poems, such as, "The Morgenlied," "Three," "The Stone Cutter's Angle," "The Goths," "I confess I cannot Guess," "I Am an Exile Here," "Tanor Sax Taking the Breaks," "I Think the Strange, the Crazy, the Queer," "Apostrophe to Myself," "Flash-back to Friggins," "Dedications and Mornings," "Now," "The Rented Room," "The Blond Mediterraneans," "The Colour of a House," "To Anna Jean," "Madrigal," "Tonight I Stay at the Summit Temple," "We have Not Long to Love," "Why do I Want to Go Away?," and "Your Blinded Hand."

10.2.5.6 Memoirs

Williams' literary work, *Memoirs*, published in 1975, is considered as a mirror that reflects his personal life. He claimed to be presenting his life story with the explicit understanding, instead of his conflicting views of sexuality.

10.2.5.7 New Selected Essays: *Where I Live*

Tennessee Williams' essays "A Streetcar Named Success" and "The Catastrophe of Success" had a significant impact on his readers. The goal of these pieces was to pique people's interest in the theatre. William's famous scholar John S. Bak enhanced the classification of *Where I Live* (collected just in the 1978 volume) and published it in 2009 by New Directions. These

essays, which had been originally released in The New York Times, comply with art and artists' societal obligations. Irrefutably, these essays will outlast the rest of his work.

10.2.6 Let Us Sum Up:

Dear Learners in this Unit, we have covered several aspects of Tennessee Williams's life, including his literary focus, interests, skills, and contributions. We also delved into his works from an intellectual standpoint.

10.3 Learning Outcomes

After studying the many facets of Tennessee Williams' life, you should be able to understand the different genres of literature. You should be able to understand Tennessee Williams as a playwright and understand the writer's contribution to American Drama.

10.4 Glossary

Asphyxia: The condition of not getting enough oxygen in the body, usually leading to unconsciousness or death.

Bind: A difficult or annoying situation in which you are prevented from acting as you might like

Cannibalism: The practice of a person who eats human flesh, or the behaviour of an animal that eats others of its own type.

Castration: the process of removing the testicles of a male animal or human.

Desolation: The state of a place that is empty or where everything has been destroyed.

Effeminate: An effeminate man behaves or looks similar to a woman in terms of qualities, manners, etc.

Expatiate: To speak or write about something in detail or for a long time.

Fetishism: Behaviour in which someone shows a sexual interest in an object

Genital mutilation: The practice of cutting away parts of a girl's or woman's outer sex organs for traditional or religious reasons.

Hypoxia: Same as Asphyxia.

Indecipherable: unable to be read or understood.

Inebriated: Having drunk too much alcohol.

Jiggle: Move about quickly from side to side or up and down.

Kvell: Feel happy and proud.

Licentious: (especially of a person or their behaviour) sexual in an uncontrolled and socially unacceptable way.

Mummer: An actor who communicates entirely by gesture and facial expression.

Nympho: A woman who likes to have sex very often, especially with a lot of different people.

Overabundance: A supply or amount that is greater than required.

Pawn: To leave a valuable possession with a pawnbroker (someone who lends money in exchange for possessions).

Quester: A search or pursuit made in order to obtain something, or a person engaged in a quest.

Rapturous: Showing extreme pleasure and happiness or excitement.

Schizophrenia: A mental illness in which a person's thoughts and feelings are not related to reality.

Sterility: The condition of being unable to produce children or young animals, or the condition of being unable to produce plants or crops.

Transsexual: Used to describe someone who feels that they are not the same gender/sex as the physical body they are born with, or who does not fit easily into being either a male or a female.

Unnerving: Making someone feel less confident and slightly frightened.

Vengeance: The punishing of someone for harming you or your friends or family, or the wish for such punishment to happen.

Whimsical: mood or actions that change suddenly and for no obvious reason.

Yuletide: A word used as a synonym for Christmas.

Zeal: Great enthusiasm or eagerness.

10.5 Sample Questions

10.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Why did Thomas Lanier Williams III change his name?
 - a) Because of his love of Tennessee whiskey
 - b) So that his ancestors could be paid a tribute by him.
2. Which of the following former US presidents honoured him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom?
 - a) President Jimmy Carter
 - b) George H. W. Bush

3. When was he awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom?
 - a) 1980 b) 1978
4. What was the job Williams performed at the factory where he worked as a clerk?
 - a) Making Shoes b) Accountant
5. When did he complete his B.A in English?
 - a) 1937 b) 1938
6. Which play landed him his big break?
 - a) The Glass Menagerie b) Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
7. Which Tennessee Williams play is generally thought to have been his favourite?
 - a) The Glass Menagerie b) Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
8. What is Tennessee Williams best known for?
 - a) Plays b) Poems
9. Why did Tennessee Williams' father pull him out of school to work in a shoe factory?
 - a) He failed ROTC b) His family planned to send him to India
10. Which play is based on the rework of Tennessee Williams' short stories?
 - a) The Glass Menagerie b) The Fugitive Kind

10.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Tennessee Williams had some advice for aspiring playwrights. What was that?
2. What is Tennessee Williams' contribution to society?
3. Who was Tom and why was he teased at his first school?
4. How many one-act plays have been written by Tennessee Williams? Write a few names of his plays with dates of publication.
5. Write the titles of two of Tennessee Williams' poems.

10.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the major themes of Tennessee Williams' plays?
2. How do Tennessee Williams' plays reflect his own life?
3. What relevance do Tennessee Williams' writings have as instances of contemporary meaningless romances?

10.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Albert J. Devlin, (1986). *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*. University Press of Mississippi.
- David Roessel and Nicholas Moschovakis, (2002). *The Collected Poems of Tennessee Williams*. New Directions Publishing.
- Stephen Bottoms, Philip Kolin, Michael Hooper, Katherine Weiss, (2014). *A Student Handbook to the Plays of Tennessee*. London: Bloomsbury.
- William Jay Smith, (2012). *My Friend Tom: The Poet-Playwright Tennessee*. University Press of Mississippi.

Unit-11: A Streetcar Named Desire: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

11.0 Introduction

11.1 Objectives

11.2 *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Background, Plot, Characters

11.2.1 Background

11.2.1.1 Local Code of Conduct

11.2.1.2 The Southern Region

11.2.1.3 Women and their Role

11.2.2 Plot

11.2.3 Characters

11.2.3.1 Major Characters

11.2.3.2 Minor Characters

11.2.3.3 Female Characters

11.3 Learning Outcomes

11.4 Glossary

11.5 Sample Questions

11.6 Suggested Learning Resources

11.0 Introduction

Tennessee Williams is regarded as one of the influential American dramatists of the twentieth century. His popularity rests largely on the success of four of his plays – *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Summer and Smoke* (1948) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Williams won a substantial measure of acceptance as a serious writer dealing with crucial issues. Williams’ contribution to the field of theatre is that he is recognized with the prestigious awards like Writers’ Guild of St. Louis, Missouri (1933), Group Theatre of New York (1930), Rockfeller Fellowship 1940, four Critics’ Circle Awards, 1945, 1947, 1955, and 1961 and two Pulitzer Prizes (1947, 1955), and membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is one of Williams’ masterpieces focusing on the theme of tragic incidents that Blanch DuBois had to go through resulting in her mental imbalance. Here, the background in

which Williams is compelled to write this play becomes more important. Along with the background, the plot and Williams' art of characterization will also be discussed.

11.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- study Tennessee Williams as a dramatist
- to consider the background for the creation of the play *a streetcar named desire*
- to discuss the plot of the play
- to evaluate minor and major characters in the play *a streetcar named desire*
- to focus on Tennessee Williams' art of characterization in the play

11.2 A Streetcar Named Desire: Background, Plot, Characters

11.2.1 Background

In his book, *Other People's Trades* (1989), the Italian author Primo Levi has mentioned, "all authors have had the opportunity of being astonished by the beautiful and awful things that the critics have found in their works and that they did not know they had put there." When an author writes something, we don't have any ideas about his intentions behind writing a certain piece of literature. There is some reason, idea or some important incident that becomes instrumental in the creation of a work. If an author has written explicitly about what he or she thinks as the important thematic content, it does not preclude other themes striking the minds of the readers, or, in drama, the audience. Tennessee Williams is not an exception to this idea. He cannot be kept aloof from the circumstances which took place in his life, or the values, gender, race, assumptions and class, that he lived with. It is because he is just the product of his own age, in the same manners as we are the product of our own.

A Streetcar Named Desire is embodied with the themes which have their origin in the history and culture of New Orleans. Williams has set the play in the French Quarter displaying its bars, streetcars, jazz and blues music which provides fertile background for the emotional events of the play. The setting draws attention of the audience in a symbolic manner to the changes which occur during the time in American society, particularly Southern America during the post-World War period.

11.2.1.1 The Local Code of Conduct:

Tennessee Williams has deployed the local code of conduct in his *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The local code of conduct is a set of laws devised by the French and implemented when they ruled the region known as Louisiana. Under this code, the state of Louisiana further continued to operate. The emphasis of the code had been on inheritance law. In the light of this code, any property belonging to a spouse prior to marriage becomes the property of both spouses once they get married. It is due to this reason that Stanley feels that he is being swindled by Blanche's loss of Belle Reve. Legally speaking, Stanley is correct in claiming his share of the family inheritance of which Stella is being deprived by Blanche and ultimately Stanley is also subject to deprivation.

11.2.1.2 The Southern Region:

On the general level, the play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a drama which deals with the decline of the aristocratic families traditionally living in the south. These aristocratic families, once very influential, had lost their importance and significance in the backdrop of the wave of industrialization. The economy based on the agricultural set of the south also had seen a decline since the First World War. There was a great shortage of working-class people when many male labourers were enrolled by either the army or defence-based industries. There was a great shortage of working-class people during the 1920s and 1940s. The structure of work also saw a great change in its pattern due to the inclusion of many women, immigrants and blacks in the labour category. In 1920, women gained the right to vote. It is the same time at which the agrarian family aristocracy of the men came to an end.

11.2.1.3 Women and their Role:

The women of the period experienced a limited scope of finding jobs. This limitedness is clearly visible through Blanche's difficulties in finding a job. Though Blanche is an educated woman who has worked as a teacher, she is constrained by the expectations of the Southern society. Blanche understands she needs men to depend on and for her protection as well. She has clearly known sexual freedom and does not fit the pattern of chaste behaviour to which a Southern woman would be expected to conform. She bears the fear of rejection when Mitch comes to know about her promiscuous past life. By rejecting Blanche, Mitch has proved that she does not fit into the ideal standard of woman in the southern part of America. Mitch's rejection of Blanche invites readers' attention to the fact how women behaved and what type of behaviour was expected from them by the society. Regarding the culture of the South, Williams has noted this while writing about the setting of the play: "I write out of love of the South ... (which) once had a way of life

that I am just old enough to remember – a culture that had grace, elegance, an inbred culture, not a society based on money.” It is through Blanche’s destruction that Williams has indirectly attempted to lament on the destruction of the South. He is of the opinion that such changes are unavoidable.

11.2.2 Plot

The plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a unified whole. It deals with the one and only story dealing with the sufferings of its protagonist, Blanche. As the play begins, one finds the exterior of a two-storeyed building situated in a corner on a New Orleans Street. In the first scene of the play itself, the audience are introduced to the protagonist of the play, Blanche DuBois who enters with the opening lines: “They told me to take a streetcar named *Desire*, and then transfer to one called *Cemetery* and ride six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields!” With this statement, Tennessee Williams has symbolically given the analogue of life itself. This statement of Blanche helps in the development of the plot further.

The play deals with the sufferings of a young woman, Blanche DuBois who has been bred and brought up in a rich Southern plantation known as Belle Reve which once held a high reputation and respect in the South. Now it is reduced financially due to the emergence of industries and the shortage of the labouring class on account of the First World War. She has come to a very disreputable quarter of New Orleans to live with her sister, Stella Kowalski and her husband Stanley Kowalski, a rough and brute Polish labourer. Blanche had worked as an English teacher in Laurel from where she had been removed from her job due to her involvement in a promiscuous relationship with her student. This is the reason that she had to abandon Laurel and taken shelter in Stella’s two-room apartment.

On arriving in New Orleans, Blanche comes to know about Stanley. She is shocked by the primitive, almost bear-like character of Stanley. She is a woman of high breeding and refinement. She tries to dictate the same to Stanley who resents everything she wants to change in him. Stanley is a man who loves to live on his own terms. He does not like anybody dictating him. He fears that Blanche’s excessive involvement in his family affairs would ruin his married life. He comes to know about Blanche’s life in Laurel through one of his friends. He gets the chance to bundle her away from his apartment. On her birthday, Stanley offers her the ticket to Laurel so that she can go away and the relationship between his wife and himself remains intact. He suspects Blanche of persuading Stella also.

In the meantime, Stanley's friend Harold Mitch gets attracted by the beauty of Blanche and falls in love with her. They share their past with each other. They plan a marriage very soon. It becomes their routine to go to amusement park in order to remain with each other. Blanche unfolds her partial past before Mitch. She only speaks of how she is moved with the death of her husband. One night when she finds her husband Allan Grey involved in a homosexual affair with one of his friends, she dissuades him resulting in Allan shooting himself in the head. After Allan's death Blanche laments too much and in order to kill her loneliness, she gets herself involved in a life of sexual promiscuity. This fact she does not reveal to Mitch.

On her birthday supper when Mitch does not attend the party, Blanche becomes angry with Mitch. On their meeting the same evening, Mitch discloses to her the fact which he comes to know from his friend, Stanley, about her past life in Laurel. To this Blanche whole-heartedly accepts all his charges and tries to assure him that the episodes of her promiscuous life in the past have been just to kill the loneliness caused by Allan's death. She still bears the love of Mitch in her heart. Mitch tries to exploit her sexually to which she resents saying that she will offer herself provided he should marry her. Mitch does not agree to her condition and says that she is not the ideal woman he thinks of marrying.

After the proposal of marriage with Mitch is broken, Blanche suspects Stanley for informing Mitch about her past life. When Stella is in hospital, Stanley in a drunk condition rapes Blanche and settles his past accounts with her. On her return from hospital, Stella comes to know about the incident of rape. She feels compelled to reject Blanche as the insane accuser of her husband otherwise Stella could not remain with Stanley, to whom she is bound by love, sexuality and financial necessity. In the last scene of the play, Stella consents to commit Blanche to an asylum. A doctor and a matron come from the asylum to take away Blanche. Blanche struggles with the matron and is knocked to the floor. The doctor intervenes and handles her gently. With the doctors' intervention, Blanche gets up and walks out with him displaying a gesture of high-born lady.

11.2.3 Characters

Tennessee Williams is known for his mastery in the art of characterization. His characters have life-like potential. They are powerful characters in all aspects irrespective of their sex. For the sake of convenience, they are divided as male and female and major and minor characters:

11.2.3.1 Major Characters:

Stanley Kowalski

Stanley Kowalski is the husband of Stella, Blanche's sister. He is between twenty-eight or thirty years of age. He appears for the first time on the stage roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes. He has been working in an automotive spare plant in New Orleans. During the Second World War, he had worked in the army as a master sergeant in the Engineers' Corps. He is a Polish American but claims himself to be a cent percent American. He considers the label "Polak" as applied to him as highly derogatory. He continues to lead a happy life on his own terms with her pretty wife Stella in a street called Elysian Fields in New Orleans.

In the stage direction to the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams has given much emphasis on Stanley's entrance on the stage. He is described as a "gaudy seed-bearer," a "richly feathered male bird." Stella uses his photo taken in richly decorated army uniform to introduce himself to Blanche before they meet. On their actual meeting, Stanley reveals himself as crude, vulgar, and ruthlessly prying. In the first scene of the play, he throws a parcel of meat to his wife cracking a vulgar joke by implication. This also provides a clue to his sheer animality and sexuality. Blanche also sees the glimpses of animality and savage behaviour in Stanley.

On the poker night, Stanley becomes easily provoked by Blanche and Mitch dancing to the music. He throws the gadget out unmindful of the insult that it would mean to Blanche. Afterwards, heavily drunk Stanley beats Stella for asking his poker mates to disband at once. Stella also mentions the incident of their wedding night when Stanley in a fit of anger smashed light bulbs with one of her shoes. During the birthday supper of Blanche, Stanley breaks all the tableware by throwing them down one after another. The reason behind such behaviour of Stanley are the comments of Stella that he looks like a pig followed by her order to clear the mess on the table. Stanley feels proud of his crude manners and violent temperament. He feels pride and delight in what he is.

There is a kind of antagonism in his approach towards Blanche. He bears the malignant feelings for her because he feels that Blanche has robbed Stella of her legitimate share of their ancestral plantation home, Belle Reve. He is personally hurt when Blanche denounces Stella about Stanley as an ape and a man of Stone Age. Stanley feels the security of his home is at risk when he senses that Blanche, who has come to their door seeking charity and favour, has started dictating and ordering her terms. He thinks that if Blanche is allowed to stay at their home, the harmony of the house would be reduced to ashes.

In order to remove Blanche from his home, Stanley very skilfully takes the account of her past life through his acquaintances (Mr. Shaw). He comes to know all the shady details regarding Blanche's past life – her promiscuous life in Laurel, her dismissal from the school for seducing a boy of her class. He shares this information with Stella first and then passes on the same to Mitch who has plans of marrying Blanche. When Blanche tries to strut about like a true virgin, he punctures her lies with a veiled reference to Hotel Flamingo and Mr. Shaw in Laurel. This is the first incident where Stanley has given the first jolt to Blanche. He has also prevented Mitch from attending Blanche's birthday supper by exposing her past life. It is an indirect indication to Blanche that she should think of abandoning the house of Stella and Stanley. Moreover, he presented her a bus ticket for Laurel as her birthday gift to go away from their home.

Stanley's act of raping Blanche is indicative of his mental condition. Even after alarming Blanche by offering her a ticket to go away from their two-room apartment, Blanche shows no sign of any change in her attitude. Stanley seems to have been bothered a lot about Blanche's presence in the house. He thinks that her presence would spoil the family harmony. He feels that Blanche will change Stella's mentality. His act of raping Blanche is simply to make her afraid and leave their place. He is not a confirmed rapist. The rape occurs by accident, due to proximity, drunkenness and moreover, Blanche is ripe and seductive, and Stanley is virile and lusty.

Despite his rash nature and the grudge against Blanche, Stanley has exceptional love for Stella. He has won her love by his manly personality. It true that Stanley's way of making love is somewhat crude and primitive. Stella is perfectly happy with him. Despite his frequent quarrels of violent nature with Stella, they use to make up fast. He is always the first to make it up with Stella. He is afraid of Blanche's presence in their house and suspects Blanche of attempting to alienate Stella from him.

Stanley is a mixture of good and bad. He is a good and loving husband to Stella. He is reliable friend too. He proves his friendship by saving Mitch from marrying an "immoral" woman like Blanche. At the same time, he is ill-tempered, crude, violent and lacks kindness. He is very crucial in the development of the plot of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Harold Mitch

Harold Mitch is a very close friend of Stanley Kowalski. He also has served in the army during the Second World War, like Stanley. Stanley and Mitch had been in the Two-forty-first Engineers outfit. Like Stanley, Mitch is now working at the same automotive plant but in the quality control section of the same establishment. He is very fond of playing poker and with

Stanley he used to play at Stanley's apartment late nights and enjoy rounds of beer on certain days. Among Stanley's friends, Mitch has some traces of kindness and consideration. He presents a total contrast to Stanley in nature. Mitch is timid and concerned very much about the health of his mother. On account of his timid nature, he becomes the target of his friends' ridicule. Mitch is worried about the loneliness he will have to face after the demise of his ailing mother.

Harold Mitch meets Blanche in Stanley's apartment and gets fascinated by her beautiful looks. It is Stella who introduces Mitch to her sister Blanche who in turn gets duly attracted by the manliness and youth of Mitch. Blanche considers him a suitable partner on knowing that he is still unmarried. Mitch looks at Blanche through the curtains and is charmed by her glamorous dress and arresting beauty. He leaves the game and comes to meet Blanche. They enter a long and delightful conversation. Mitch tells her of the sudden snapping off his love with a young girl who at the point of her death gifted him with a silver cigarette-case and hoped that they would meet in heaven. Mitch's reference to his past love encourages Blanche who also shares the episode of her husband's death with Mitch. Both succumb to loneliness which brings both closer. Mitch and Blanche think of marrying each other. Going to the amusement park, near the house and kissing each other becomes their daily routine. Blanche is doubtful about Stanley and informs Mitch that the latter bears grudges against her. For Mitch, Blanche is unnecessarily worried about Stanley who is not that bad and wicked as she thinks of him.

Stella has invited Mitch to attend the birthday supper she has arranged for Blanche to which Mitch promises to attend but Stanley, his friend discloses Blanche's past and has warned him not to keep any relation with a whore like Blanche. Mitch does not blindly believe in what Stanley has told him; he confirms the same with his friend named Kiefaber in Laurel who confirms the same as told by Stanley about Blanche. Mitch feels that he has been cheated by Blanche. This is the reason he skips her birthday supper.

Mitch meets Blanche in the evening. Seeing him, Blanche becomes happy that at last Mitch has come. She starts accusing him for having let her down by remaining absent for her birthday supper. She forgives him for the same and offers herself for Mitch to kiss her. She offers him whisky. On the contrary, Mitch offers making love to her. He is angry with her and asks the reason for cheating him with her pretentious posture. At this point Blanche confesses of having enjoyed a promiscuous life since the death of her husband. She further tells him that in her heart she has not lied anything to Mitch. She drives him away crying "Fire!" when he says that she is not clean

enough to live with his mother as his wife and now there is no sense in marrying her. Mitch walks out of her life forever.

Mitch becomes an instrument in destroying Blanche's life completely. He acted as a tool in the hands of Stanley and acts upon his suggestions. It is Stanley who uses Mitch as a feeler and even sends him to Blanche to rape her, but Mitch fails to do so. Stanley commits rape on Blanche for his devilish satisfaction. When Mitch comes to know that Stanley is behind the ruin of Blanche, his heart melts in pity for the helpless Blanche. Mitch proves himself to be a man of good heart. He wishes to teach Stanley a lesson for his wrong, but he lacks the strength to do it.

Allan Grey

Allan Grey is husband to Blanche DuBois. He is a gay and interested in men. One day Blanche catches him red-handed when he is involved in sex with his male friend. The same evening, Blanche comments satirically on Allan who does not tolerate Blanche's insulting comment and shoots himself in the head and dies. His death causes a great mental disturbance for Blanche.

Blanche DuBois

Blanche DuBois is the protagonist of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She is a very fascinating character who dominates the action of the play from the very beginning to the final scene. She is a very successful portrayal by Williams. She is a very complex character drawn with subtle psychological insight. Her pretentious postures of superiority despite her declining fortune; her love of exhibitionism and her vanity about her looks and appearance despite her fast fading beauty; her sense of guilt despite herself being the cause of her young husband's suicide; her promiscuities despite her claims to be a veritable Madonna; her frail efforts to call the tune at her brother-in-law and sister's home despite the fact she has come seeking charity; her shameless lies about her age; her moral superiority and the immoral act that drives her from her job as an English teacher at Laurel make her a character full of polarities.

Blanche DuBois is the elder sister of Stella Kowalski, the wife of Stanley Kowalski. She is thirty years old, the age at which one could see that the bloom of age has passed away already. Her name "Blanche DuBois" means "white woods" is within itself is ironical of her character. She is a cultured lady belonging to the family of the DuBois. She lives in their own plantation home called "Belle Reve" which means "sweet home" in Mississippi until the decline of fortune due to which she had to sell it out. She is a cultivated lady with added advantage of English and French. She takes up the job as an English teacher at a school in Laurel.

Blanche DuBois is described as an aging Southern belle. She is described as “mothlike” in the opening scene of the play. She is delicate, refined and fits in the tradition of the southern gentry. For the first time she appears wearing white dress which symbolizes her feigned purity and virtuous nature. Williams has crafted her character as a dreamer. She has a romantic approach to life. She is not at all concerned with truth, deliberately forfeiting reality. Rather she loved to live in a magical world of her own – far more distant from the factual world.

At a young age, she married Allan Gray, her true love. Allan was sensitive and tender to her. Moreover, he was altogether different from other men in her life although he was not “the least bit effeminate looking. She came to know about Allan’s homosexuality when she entered a room uninvited and found him having sex with an older male friend of his. Later in the same evening when the same three, including Blanche, attended a dance at Moon Lake Casino, Blanche, heavily drunk, confronted Allan about his act of being homosexual. Allan was devastated by Blanche’s disgusting attitude towards himself. He ran off the dance floor and near the lake he shot himself dead. It was an act of suicide on the part of Allan for which Blanche was forever haunted by the guilt of being responsible for the suicide of Allan. The cruelty which she had displayed towards Allan became one of the reasons that tormented her throughout her life. Her nerves shatter at these successive tribulations and she becomes addicted to drink and begins to lead a promiscuous life with young soldiers and others in Laurel to fill the void created by the death of Allan. Her intimacy with a student makes the school authorities dismiss her from the school. Her name becomes tainted in Laurel and the Mayor of the town expels her out of town on moral grounds. Consequently, she is forced to go and live with her younger sister, Stella who lives in New Orleans.

Blanche does not like the unrefined ways of life in which her sister, Stella has been leading her life with Stanley. She is shocked by the lack of refinement of her brother-in-law and his bestiality. She intends to save her sister Stella. She is not able to understand how Stella has gone to the extent of bearing a child for an ape like Stanley. The reason for such an attitude of Blanche is the great difference of culture which Stella and Stanley represent – animalism and delicacy or jungle culture and civilization or reality and illusion or flesh and spirit. The clash between them becomes inevitable. She refers to Stanley as “an animal with animal habits.”

On arriving at Stella’s place, DuBois indulges in a series of lies with her sister. For the first time she tells Stella that she has just come on a long leave due to her disturbed mental condition. She does not reveal to Stella about her promiscuous kind of life at Laurel until Stanley shows proof that he knows of her immoral life at Laurel. She becomes a victim of rape by Stanley

who has taken her as a woman of loose character. She even bluffs Mitch into believing that she is a virgin. Blanche presents a deep contrast to Stella though they are sisters. While Stella is very practical and down to earth, Blanche is highly idealistic and living in a world of illusion. Stella has chosen marriage as a source of fulfilling her desire and hence a secure life through marriage, Blanche seems to be a freelancer in the enjoyment of sexual life.

Tennessee Williams has presented the dilemma of Blanche's search for love and beauty in two diversifying places – Belle Reve and Elysian Fields. She obviously finds herself caught between the devil and the deep sea. At Elysian Fields, her search for beauty and love is taken as intrusion. She is taken as an unwanted guest who has entered the Elysian Fields in order to damage the Kowlaski home setup. She is sincere in her approach in trying to convert the hell (Elysian Fields) into heaven, on the lines of Belle Reve. This approach of Blanche is mistaken and viewed with suspicion. Due to this, she is insulted, deprived, raped and demonised by Stanley Kowalski for the alleged reasons of preserving the jungle life of Elysian Fields intact. Elia Kazan calls her a “poetic tragedy.” John T. Von Szeliski considers her tragic plight as “a tragedy of sensitivity.”

Stella Kowalski

Stella Kowalski is the wife of Stanley Kowalski. She belongs to the noble stock of the DuBois of the plantation district of the South. Stella is a well-refined and socially polished character. She is twenty-five years old and an attractive woman. She is married to a Polish American ex-serviceman, Stanley Kowalski who is now working in an automotive plant in New Orleans. She is totally in contrast to the upbringing of her husband. She has been a part of the genteel background whereas Stanley has come from a working class. Despite frequent episodes of domestic rumblings, Stella leads a happy life with Stanley. She is aware of his abiding love for her, Stella is quick enough to sink her differences with him and rushed into his arms.

As a wife, Stella is very proud of her husband and his manly prowess. She is aware of Stanley's rage and violent conduct. At the same time, she also knows that Stanley is the man who cools down himself quickly and becomes a lamb. Stella doesn't mind Stanley's temperamental sorties because she is sure of the silver linings behind those dark clouds. She tells Blanche that she cannot remain separated from Stanley even for a day. On the poker night when Blanche is surprised at the boorish conduct of Stanley and is afraid for Stella's safety, Stella cools down Blanche's fear, defending Stanley's violent attitude as “passing clouds.”

By nature, Stella is a very kind character. She is very amiable too. This nature of Stella is visible through her acceptance of Blanche for permanent stay in their two-room tenement. Stella

holds a high opinion of Blanche. She never blames Blanche for having sold away Belle Reve and deprived her of her share in the ancestral property. It is Stella who defends Blanche when Stanley suspects her of immoral living. Stella strongly defends Blanche saying that her sister is not so mean and petty as he would suppose her to be. Moreover, none of the members of their family (the DuBois) will ever stoop to do anything mean.

Stella listens carefully to Blanche's story of suffering and how in an unavoidable situation she has sustained Belle Reve. Stella does not mind Blanche's insulting comments about her husband. She is all the more carried away by Blanche's concerns for her. It is her good nature that does not permit her to pry unnecessarily into the past life of Blanche. Stella does not object to Blanche's sexual aberrations in the form of one night stand at Laurel. When Stanley exposes Blanche's past at Laurel with a revengeful motive, Stella pleads with him not to damage the delicate soul of her sister. She is shocked firstly to know that Stanley has ruined the chances of Blanche's marriage with Mitch. Secondly, she is shocked to know that Stanley presents Blanche a bus ticket to Laurel for her to leave them for good on that Tuesday. At this juncture, Stella breaks down. She is unable to tolerate the typical situation her husband has caused to Blanche.

Stella's character contrasts with her sister and that of her husband. Stella seems to have caught up between the mad fury of her husband Stanley and the impractical ways of Blanche which resulted into a headlong clash between her husband and her sister. Stella's attempts to iron out the differences between her tough husband and her fragile sister are in vain. Stella is caught up in a typical situation when she comes to know about Blanche's rape by her husband on her return from the hospital after delivering her baby. If she believes Blanche's story, she cannot continue to live with her husband. If she does not believe in it, she will be doing a great injustice to her sister, Blanche, who is being pushed away to the lunatic asylum by her husband. On the advice of her neighbour, Eunice Hubbel, Stella chooses not to believe in Blanche's story for she cannot afford to throw away her life. Under great mental stress, Stella gives her consent to Stanley's proposal to send Blanche to the asylum. In the violent world of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stella is the only character with tolerance, sympathy, love and understanding for other characters too.

11.2.3.2 Minor Characters:

Steve Hubbell

Steve Hubbell is the husband of Eunice Hubbell. He and Eunice are the neighbours of Stanley and Stella Kowalski. He is not an understanding husband and always keeps on quarrelling

with his wife. Both the husband and the wife are hospitable and neighbourly characters. They offer shelter to Stella when she seeks refuge from Stanley.

Pablo Gonzales

Pablo Gonzales is one of the friends of Stanley. He is the one among the other poker players along with Stanley, Mitch and Steve. He has a strong personality. He is coarse and loud in his behaviour. He speaks Spanish like Stanley. His physique is described in the stage direction as, 'at the peak of [his] physical manhood.'

The Doctor

The doctor is a calm person with a professional outlook. The doctor's role in the play is to escort Blanche to the mental hospital. He treats Blanche respectfully so that she could trust him.

Young Collector

The young collector is a polite and reserved kind of person. He calls to collect newspaper subscriptions. He is surprised by the unexpected sexual approach of Blanche.

11.2.3.3 Female Characters

Eunice

Eunice is the wife of Steve. She and Steve are the neighbours of Stella and Stanley. Eunice is a confident woman. She is overweight and has undergone many pregnancies. Despite their failings, however, they are not unlikeable characters. When Blanche accuses Stanley of rape, it is Eunice who tells Stella to disavow Blanche's claims for the sake of her marriage, her child and her own sanity.

Mexican Woman

The Mexican woman has a very brief role to play in the drama. She appears briefly and speaks Spanish. She is described as "An old Mexican crone."

Negro Woman

The Negro woman is a neighbour who reminds the audience of the cosmopolitan society in New Orleans. She is good-humoured, fun-loving and vulgar in her conversation.

Nurse

The Nurse is cold in approach. She is professional in her outlook and dresses severely. She speaks in a voice that is as "bold and toneless as a fire-bell."

11.3 Learning Outcomes

Dear Learners, at the end of this Unit, you should be familiar with the background in which Tennessee Williams wrote this play. Along with the background, you should have gained an understanding of the plot and characters.

11.4 Glossary

Astonished: surprised

Intention: the object toward which the thoughts are directed

Instrumental: of great importance; means

Explicitly: specific

Preclude: remove the possibility

Embodied: to represent in a concrete form

Swindled: to defraud; to obtain something fraudulently

Inheritance: that which a person is entitled to inherit

Deprive: to deny someone

Pretentious: marked by an unwarranted claim

Promiscuities: without careful choice

Veritable: true, genuine

Madonna: the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus

Frail: weak; infirm

Polarities: either of the two extremes

Torment: torture; any extreme pain

Freelancer: someone who sells their services to clients without a long-term employment contract

Demented: insane; or mentally ill

Rumblings: a muted sound of complaint or discontent

Prowess: skilfulness; manual ability

Sorties: attacking move

Boorish: behaving as a boor (peasant)

Tenement: a building that is rented to multiple tenants

Pry: to pay close attention to others' actions

Aberrations: the act of wandering from the normal or expected

Asylum: a place of protection, especially for the mentally ill

Malignant: harmful

Denounce: to make some mistake or weakness known in a formal manner; declare

Strut: move like a peacock or other fowl

Proximity: closeness

11.5 Sample Questions

11.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The name of Blanche's ancestral plantation in the South is known by the name _____.
A. **Belle Reve** B. Rell Beve C. Brave Dame D. Delle Reve
2. What is the local code of conduct regarding the law of inheritance in the South?
A. Only the woman is entitled for property B. the woman is not entitled
C. any property belonging to a spouse prior to marriage becomes the property of both spouses once they get married
D. none of these
3. In which period is *A Streetcar Named Desire* set?
A. During Second World War B. During First World War
C. During American Civil War D. None of these
4. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a discourse on the suffering of which of the following characters?
A. Stella B. Eunice C. Blanche D. May Price
5. What relationship prevails between Blanche and Stella?
A. sisters B. cousins C. neighbours D. enemies

Answer in One line or one word

1. Who was Blanche_____?
2. When did the American Civil War take place_____?
3. Where was William Tennyson born?
4. Name any two places by William Tennyson.
5. Who is the protagonist of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*

11.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Why did Allan Grey commit suicide?
2. Why did the prospect of marriage between Blanche and Mitch fail?
3. What kind of husband is Stanley Kowalski?
4. Why is the relationship between Blanche and Stanley not at ease?
5. Why is Blanche sent to the asylum?

11.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Draw a character sketch of Blanche Dubois.
2. Compare and contrast the character of Blanche and Stella.
3. Write a note on the plot of A Streetcar Named Desire.

11.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Arthur, Stanley Clisby. *Old New Orleans*. Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1990.
- Boxill, Roger. *Tennessee Williams*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987.
- Bloom, Harold (ed.). *Tennessee Williams*. New York: Chelsea House, 1987.
- Donhaue Francis. *The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams*. New York: Frederic Ungar, 1964.

Unit-12: *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

12.0 Introduction

12.1 Objectives

12.2 *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

12.2.1 Themes

12.2.2 Narrative Technique

12.2.3 Critical Appreciation

12.3 Learning Outcomes

12.4 Glossary

12.5 Sample Questions

12.6 Suggested Learning Resources

12.0 Introduction

Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is about the confrontation between two sets of characters – one representing the conventional value system of the American South while the other represents modernity and a rapidly changing America. Before reaching its final form, the play had undergone many changes although it started in 1945. Initially the scene of the play was concerned with an Italian family. Later, the playwright introduced an Irish brother-in-law. Thereafter, Tennessee Williams had purposefully modified the background of the characters to two Southern American belles and a Polish American man with a view to stress the class of cultures and class-conflict by introducing the episodes of sexual violence, alcoholism and madness. In 1947, the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was staged in Boston and New York simultaneously. The play was first published in the form of a book in 1947. It was republished with an introduction by Williams himself in 1951. The film version of the same appeared in 1951 under the direction of Elia Kazan. The Dramatists' Play Service brought out an edition for actors in 1953. In England, different editions of the same play appeared in 1949 and in 1956. Penguin Books published Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* along with two other plays

namely *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *The Glass Menagerie*, in one of the volumes of its Twentieth Century Classic Series.

12.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- study Tennessee Williams as a dramatist
- consider the background for the creation of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- discuss various themes in the play
- evaluate the narrative technique employed in *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- critically appreciate the play

12.2 *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

12.2.1 Themes

A Streetcar Named Desire begins with the appearance of Blanche DuBois, a woman from Southern America, who has lost her ancestral property, at the New Orleans home of Stella, Blanche's sister and Stanley, husband to Stella. After several secrets about her life are revealed, there arises a conflict between Stanley and Blanche. At a time when Stella is in hospital for delivering her child, Stanley molests his sister-in-law, Blanche. Stella refuses to believe in Blanche's accusations. Stella consents to sending Blanche to a mental hospital due to her increasing hysterical episodes.

Class Conflict:

Class conflict is the major theme presented in the play. The play symbolically explores the decline in the financial status of an old aristocratic family from Southern America. Due to increasing industrialization in the modern times, these families, associated with the agricultural base, could not keep pace and compete with this change, and had lost their historical importance. South America had faced a severe shortage of agricultural labour during the First World War. It is because of this reason that most of the men of the area were either employed in the military or defence associated industries. Due to shortage of farm labourers, many landowners had moved to the urban areas. They did not find anyone to work on their farmlands. The 1920s and 1940s had

seen a great increase in industrialization which had drastically changed the style of working. In other words, it had changed the working structure and further there was found a new emerging class of working people including women, immigrants and black as labourers. This newly emerging category of people had created a new group that came to be known as urban middle class. In 1920, women were given the right to vote and with this right the tradition of the old Southern America which depended on an agrarian aristocracy and had been controlled and ruled by men came to an end. Women's right to vote had finished off the supremacy of men and the agrarian aristocracy in Southern America.

In this changed economic and cultural set up, Blanche DuBois represents the female aristocratic tradition of the Old South. Because of the growing industrialization and urbanization, her family home, Belle Reve and its surrounding plantations were sold out giving way to a changed environment. In a sense tradition had surrendered before modernity. The fate of Blanche can be seen in the fall of the Old South which is replaced by the new South represented by the arrival of immigrants to the U. S. represented in the form of Stanley Kowalski. Stanley refers his relationship with Blanche and pointedly observes:

When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns [Belle Reve].

Stanley Kowalski has aggressively triumphed over the inherited family superiority of Blanche DuBois. At the time of her departure to the mental hospital, Blanche's old-fashioned manners were still apparently visible. She says to the men present there, "Please don't get up." When they stand up upon seeing Blanche their gesture is simple and small, nevertheless, they had a great share in the destruction of the Old South as well as that of Blanche.

Roles:

During the period in which the drama is set the roles for women were very limited and narrow. The same restricted roles are visible through Blanche DuBois' difficulties that she faces in her life due to the narrow roles left for the females to play in the society. Blanche is educated and worked as a teacher, but it does not make any difference in the outlook of the Southern society. The society looks towards her through the glass of narrow-mindedness. A woman in such a society needs men to depend on for protection, and Blanche depends on men throughout the play. The conversation between the doctor and herself in the asylum is a proof of her position in the Southern society. She remarks, "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

In the past, Blanche has uncontrolled sexual freedom. She also understands that sexual freedom is not suitable in a place and society that values chaste women. For her, sexual freedom and chaste behaviour are two different things. Both can't be attained at one time. The Southern society also expects the same from a woman. Blanche is afraid of rejection when Mitch comes to know about her love affairs back home. Mitch's rejection of Blanche proves that Blanche is not the ideal woman he is looking for. By doing so Mitch has drawn attention to the character of women and how they behaved in the past and what exactly was expected of them in general by society.

Violence and Cruelty (Barbarism and Savagery)

Barbarism and use of violence in the play is associated with sexual gratification. Stella convinces Blanche of her love for Stanley though Stanley makes use of violence against Stella, "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark – that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant." Here, for Stella, the act of brutality and violence is meaningless. For her, a woman must accept the mild episodes of violence and brutality for there are other things like sexual relationships which keep the relationship between a man and a woman alive. The relationship between Eunice and Steve Hubbell also has episodes of brutality and there comes the unnerving suggestion that cruelty is more common and willingly accepted by the male counterpart in a marriage than one would believe or like.

Stella favours sexual passions and their fulfilment. Blanche seems to agree with Stella. She attempts to convey Stella's comment in this context, "What you are talking about is brutal desire – just Desire! – the name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bans through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another." Stella also enquires, "Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?" Blanche responds, "It brought me here – Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be." Stella compares sexual passion to the streetcar and Blanche also endorses her point. Both have been the passengers to the streetcar. It seems that the connection between the episodes of violence in Blanche's life in the past have something to do with the time span of the play. It is not to mention that either Stanley's act of violence and brutality or Blanche's act of bringing the same on herself is justifiable. Tennessee Williams seems to suggest how cycles of violence and brutality, together with passion and desire co-exist and are difficult to break.

Insanity:

Tennessee Williams' sister, Rose, was subjected to lobotomy. Through Blanche's neurosis and self-delusion, Williams seems to go through the fear about the instability of his own mental health. Williams regrets and feels guilty about his sister's ailment and the pain can be seen in

Stella's painful cry when Blanche is taken away to mental hospital: "What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?"

Flesh versus Spirit:

While applying the concept of Elysian Fields to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams, until he allows her the shelter of insanity, denies Blanche the full power of the river Lethe. Here Elysian Fields represents a heavenly state whereas river Lethe represents the state of forgetfulness. Williams, on the other hand, portrays Stella's character as one of the happy-dead characters. Stella makes a fine balance between these two worlds in which Blanche is an unwelcome guest. It is very important to note this distinction between the world of Elysian Fields and that of Belle Reve because Williams has not set Blanche's pretentious life as a measuring scale. Williams stresses Blanche's inhabitability in these two worlds to the extent that she symbolizes the tortured soul.

According to Williams, Elysian Fields, the world that has replaced Belle Reve, will do for Stanley who is insensitive and Stella who is pragmatic just as it provides satisfaction for their upstairs neighbours, the Hubbells, whom he names Eunice (literally "good victory") and Steve (literally "crown"). The banging of the old streetcar commuting up and down the narrow streets stimulate Blanche's in the same way as in the first scene. Stella's breathless laughter in the first scene upon catching the blood-stained meat package which Stanley throws at her stimulates her.

Blanche talks of Desire, "It brought me here," One may take her to mean not only the streetcar that brought her to Elysian Fields, the land of the living dead but full of carnal desire which brought her into existence. She has abused the flesh as she has used the same for her own punishment. She has succumbed completely to the demands of the flesh. "A man like that is someone to go out with," she tells Stella, "- once - twice - three times when the devil is in you. But live with? Have a child by?" Blanche believes that the flesh must be used in the interest of culture and family at any cost.

12.2.2 Narrative Technique:

Point of view

Tennessee Williams employed the third person omniscient point of view in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The story is not told through any character, no individual narrates the developments of the plot. The readers and the audience see the action taking place at two different places simultaneously as in *Scenes Three* and *Eleven*, which juxtapose the poker game in one room of the flat of Kowalski and the women in another. At certain intervals, the play presents specific sounds

that only Blanche can hear, particularly, Varsouviana music and that of the gunshot. It is done whenever her marriage is mentioned.

Motifs:

Williams has provided dramatic motifs and details of setting in order to connect separate incidents of the play concerning the character of Blanche DuBois. Dramatic motifs and the details of the settings are significantly repeated at times during the action of the play. They signal changes that occur in mood and tone of the characters as well as that of the play. It also indicates and highlights the emergence of crucial themes.

The motifs employed in the play are crucial. It points to the growth of the suburbs and the emergence of the process of urbanization along with attempts to let life continue as it is. To reach Stella's apartment in New Orleans, Blanche transports herself from a streetcar known as Desire to one called Cemeteries to go to the slum known as Elysian Fields. These were actual names associated with New Orleans. The careful amalgamation of names introduces the themes of death and desire that can be repeatedly seen in the drama.

Setting:

The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is set in the late 1940s, the period of post-World War II. It is the same time in which the play was written. Tennessee Williams has taken every care of detailing the setting of the play. It was the time when ex-servicemen like Stanley Kowalski and his friend Harold Mitch were settling back into civilian life from the military after years of conflict. It was the time when opportunities were open for hard-working men, especially for those who were equipped with some technical skill like Mitch whose aspirations were modest and whose expectations were ordinary.

World War II totally transformed America. It was no more the America of the earlier times. So is the case with Williams' New Orleans. Williams has shown the conflict of transformation between a dying Southern aristocracy and the emerging labouring class. Many members of the old Southern aristocracy were compelled to sell their plantations in order to keep up with their previous lifestyles. They had been left with no other choice to deal with the emerging economy except abandoning their tradition. The women from the South were specially the worst sufferers since no place had been left for them in the emerging economy since in the traditional code of conduct the well-bred Southern women used to keep up their position by marrying a wealthy landowner. This scenario changed in the 1920s, and its effect was felt particularly by the 1940s. In such a setting, the social and moral code of conduct for women were very severe. A woman in such a setup was

expected to earn a husband while she was still young. She was to depend on him as bread-earner while she was expected to remain inside the boundaries of the house. A woman was expected to follow special rules for sexual conduct. She was living at the mercy of the world dominated by her male partner.

Style:

The most important feature of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is its structure. It is divided into scenes with no acts therein. It has eleven scenes which end in a climax. Each scene is so designed by Williams that the tension of each independent scene builds up to the tension of the climax. This structure of the play helps the audience to focus on the emotions and actions of Blanche as she is the only character who appears in each scene. The audience becomes more sympathetic towards her as they come to know more about her inner thoughts and motivations on the stage than that of other characters. For example, the audience even comes to know how much alcohol she has drunk.

Secondly, the dialogues in *A Streetcar Named Desire* have two diversifying styles – plain and natural, and poetic. The first type of dialogue is spoken by characters like Mitch and Stella while the poetic form of dialogue is used by Blanche DuBois. The first kind of dialogue consists of flat and simple statements, sometimes having grammatical errors and expressing the speaker's observations and feelings. For example, Mitch frequently says "don't" in place of "doesn't" as in, "She don't go to sleep until I come in."

On the other hand, dialogue spoken in poetic language has a lyrical quality. There is frequent repetition of certain words which creates a songlike rhythm and adds to the beauty of the language. For example, "You're going to reproach me. I know that you're bound to reproach me" is the best example of rhythmic language. This language is rich with figurative devices like the metaphor. One can find its example in Blanche's description of love-letters that are "yellowing with antiquity," she describes an hour as "a little piece of eternity dropped into your hands."

Tone:

So far as the tone of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is concerned, it is sympathetic and realistic. One doesn't find any kind of judgmental pronouncement about its characters in the play. Williams simply portrays his characters in a balanced manner. One is exposed to women like Eunice who is presented as a balanced character. She comes across angry and unpleasant men and at such times she berates her husband and Stanley but she also behaves as a friendly, maternal and thoughtful person. Williams is not blind to the faults of his characters. He lends every character a moment and a chance to open up his/her heart.

12.2.3 Critical Appreciation:

Its Theatrical History

Atkinson, making a review of the play, calls it “superb drama.”

The New Yorker describes *A Streetcar Named Desire* as “deeply disturbing – a brilliant, implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or, if you like, of a society.”

A Streetcar Named Desire was first directed by Elia Kazan, who holds high praise for the play. From his personal acquaintance with Tennessee Williams, Kazan has, for the first time, attempted to show the similarities on the psychological level between the protagonist, Blanche and the playwright, Tennessee Williams. He noted: “I keep linking Blanche and Tennessee ... Blanche is attracted to the man who is going to destroy her ... I also noticed that at the end of the play – was an author’s essential statement – Stella, having witnessed her sister being destroyed by her husband, then taken away to an institution with her mind split, felt grief and remorse but not an enduring alienation from her husband ... The implication at the end of the play is that Stella will very soon return to Stanley’s arms – to his bed. That night, in fact. Indifference? Callousness? No. Fidelity to life. Williams’ goal. We go on with life, he was saying, the best we can. People get hurt, but you can’t get through life without hurting people.”

Mary McCarthy, one of the distinguished American critics, analysed Blanche with less sympathy. He comments that in Blanche’s character Williams had “caught a flickering glimpse of the faded essence of the sister-in-law: thin, vapid, neurasthenic, romancing genteel, pathetic ... a refined pushover and perennial and frigid spinster.”

McCarthy criticized Williams for drawing Blanche’s character with the colours of “inconceivable” tragedy and melodrama and comments that Williams’ work “reeks of literary ambitions as the apartment reeks of cheap perfume: it is impossible to witness one of Mr. Williams’ plays without being aware of the pervading smell of careerism.”

Though *A Streetcar Named Desire* was performed for eight hundred fifty days on Broadway, the audience do not easily believe this fact. The play has claimed the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Critics’ Circle Film Award and the Donaldson Award.

The 1951 film adaptation of the play won the New York Critics’ Film Award and several Academy Awards.

Character Depiction:

Tennessee Williams is considered a master in depicting his characters. His characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire* have been drawn so artistically that the characters of Blanche DuBois and

Stanley Kowalski, haunt the minds of the audience long after they have left the theatre. It is a fact that the portrayal of the character of the protagonist, Blanche DuBois, is one of the successful and masterful attempts in the direction of character depiction. Though the character of Stanley Kowalski is not a complex character like that of Blanche DuBois, yet Williams has depicted him with great care in order to make the conflict between him and Blanche exciting and engaging through and through. The other characters like Stella Kowalski, Harold Mitch and the Hubbell have been depicted so well that they seem to have united with the major characters and help in the development of the plot of the play.

Williams has created excellent dramatic situations with the help of action in order to throw light on his characters. For example, with the introduction of the poker game, Williams gets ample opportunity to highlight the violent nature of Stanley's character. His bad luck at the game incites his violent nature and motivates him to throw out the radio in the street. He seems to have least bothered about the insult it would cause to Blanche and Mitch. He even doesn't refrain from manhandling Stella when the latter protests his drunken behaviour. His violent conduct reveals the fact that he lacks refinement. For the second time, he displays his unrefined conduct by throwing away the tableware when Stella criticizes his uncouth appearance. The reason behind such behaviour of Stanley is that he tries to indicate to Blanche and Stella that he will not break any commands and orders from others. In the same way, we get clues to the character of Blanche through her actions in the play. Her frequent consumption of whisky, her long sessions in the bathroom and illusions about her dream-vision of a lover in Shep Huntleigh are indicative of her neurasthenic condition leading to her final mental disturbance.

Williams has employed the effective use of dialogues which help in the understanding of the characters. It is through dialogue that we come to know the reasons for the psychological conflicts, fears, sense of guilt, merry-making in the character of Blanche DuBois. It is through dialogue that we come to know about the differences between Blanche and Stella. Despite their deep attachment to each other, temperamentally they are poles apart. Williams has employed the technique of balance and opposition in the play. Through this device, we can consider the characters of Blanche and Stella as dramatically opposed figures – either the fragile dreamer versus the natural brute or the dangerous fantasist versus the defensive realist.

Despite the use of effective dialogues, dramatic situations, and dramatic techniques – lighting, music, costume – myths and symbols, Williams has created memorable characters like

Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. If nothing else is memorable in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams' potential in portraying the characters is unforgettable.

Psychological Realism:

A Streetcar Named Desire is one of the greatest works of art by Tennessee Williams in which the playwright has unified reality with fantasy. Williams has created the character of Blanche Dubois in a fashion that reveals her suffering as she goes through severe personality disorders in the face of complex conflicts that occur in her life. The problems occurring in the drama display psychological conflict between characters and personal experiences that can have a reflection in real life. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the story of Blanche DuBois who is subject to mental disruption which she gets out of her bitter experience in life.

The play belongs to the category of psychological realism as it talks about the deep emotional problem of its character. Psychological realism focuses on realism and naturalism. Realism can be achieved when we keep ourselves open to reality while dealing with the contents in the text. Realism is associated with the individual who stands alone as a complex figure having psychological problems. It is in this light that Blanche's character can be evaluated. She has very complex psychiatric problems. Psychological disorder in her personality creates negative impact on the social environment as well as herself. By applying psychoanalytical theories, one can best analyse the play in the light of psychoanalysis.

Symbolism:

Symbols are objects, characters, figures or colours, actions or gestures used to represent ideas or concepts. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is full of symbolism which can be studied as under:

Shadows and Cries:

Various odd-shaped shadows begin to appear in *Scene Ten* of the play as Blanche and Stanley start quarrelling. As Blanche descends into madness various unmelodious noises and jungle cries also occur. The oddly shaped shadows and the discordant noises and the jungle cries are combined to represent Blanche's ultimate breakdown and departure from reality. She loses her sanity and enters her own world which she herself has created and coloured according to her perception of reality.

The Varsouviana Polka:

Various musical tones in the play act as motifs do in operas. They indicate the similarity of actions or interactions of the characters. For example, the 'polka' is associated with Stanley,

who is Polish. The Varsouviana' is a memory theme associated with Blanche's tragic romance with Allan. The Varsouviana Polka is the tune to which Blanche and Allan Grey, her husband, danced when she saw him alive for the last time. On the same day, sometime earlier, Blanche had walked in on him in bed with an older male friend. The three – Blanche, Allan and the older friend – went out and danced together as if nothing had happened. In the middle of the Varnouviana, Blanche told Allan that he had 'disgusted' her. Listening her comments, Allan ran away and shot himself in the head resulting in his death.

At various stages in the play, the Varsouviana Polka tune is played. In *Scene One* of the play, it is heard for the first time when Stanley meets Blanche and enquires about her husband. For the second time it heard when Blanche tells Mitch Allan Grey's story. Later it is played when Blanche feels remorse on the death of Allan. From this point onwards, the polka, music is heard increasingly often. Whenever it is played in the paly, it distracts Blanche.

The polka music and the moments it creates simply represent the loss of innocence of Blanche. Allan Grey's act of committing suicide is the point which accelerates the decline of her mental stability. Since the death of her husband, Blanche loves to listen to the polka music whenever she feels panic, or she feels herself losing grip of reality.

Meat:

In *Scene One*, Stanley throws a package of meat towards Stella. Eunice and the Black woman present there indulge in laughter. They have guessed the sexual urge through this act of Stanley. This gesture of hurling the meat is a sign of sexual proprietorship of Stanley over Stella.

As a Tragedy:

Williams has depicted the character of Blanche DuBois very close to the parameters of Aristotle's concept of tragic figure. She is dishonest, deceptive, a fraud, permanently flawed, and an escapist. She is thoroughly capable of inviting the sympathy and compassion of the audience. Her crushing defeat, her struggle and her power to endure everything brings the play near to the conception of a real tragedy. The very centre of the tragedy is the inescapability of her fate. She refuses to go back and surrender to whatever comes to her. She courageously faces the force of her fortune and her bold character. It does not make any difference that she might have committed some evil actions. Nor does it matter what kind of villainies she might have attempted. What matters much is that she is a human being caught in her fate. She fights back with dignity with her fate, which is itself difficult, in order to achieve recognition as a human being first and other things thereafter.

12.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should have become familiar with the various themes, narrative technique, and critical appreciation of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

12.4 Glossary

Confrontation: the act of confronting or challenging another, especially face-to-face

Alcoholism: a chronic disease caused by compulsive and uncontrollable consumption of alcoholic beverages

Inheritance: the passing of title to an estate upon death

Accusation: the act of blaming/naming someone for a mistake or crime

Agrarian: of or relating to cultivation of land

Aristocracy: the nobility, or the hereditary ruling class

Immigrants: a non-native person who comes to a country from another country in order to permanently settle there

Inherit: to take possession of as a right

Aggressively: in an aggressive manner

12.5 Sample Questions

12.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is about the _____.
 - A. clash between traditional value system and modernity
 - B. class between east and west
 - C. clash between beauty and ugliness
 - D. None of these
2. Who assaults Blanche DuBois?
 - A. Mitch
 - B. Stanley
 - C. Steve
 - D. Allan
3. Where is Blanche sent after increase in her hysterical episodes?
 - A. London
 - B. honeymoon
 - C. asylum
 - D. church
4. What does Elysian Fields stand for in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

- A. heavenly state B. field for elephants C. cricket ground D. None of these
5. What does the river Lethe represent in the play?
- A. football ground B. state of forgetfulness C. reservoir D. a river

True or False

1. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a play_____
2. *A Streetcar Named Desire* has three acts_____
3. *A Streetcar Named Desire* deals with clash between ugliness and beauty_____
4. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is written by O Henry_____
5. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was written in the year 1989_____

12.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What are the effects of the World Wars on American society?
2. What is psychological realism and how is it applied in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?
3. Bring out the element of tragedy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
4. Write a brief note on the autobiographical elements in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
5. What roles were designated to the women in the southern part of America as depicted by Williams in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

12.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Comment on Tennessee Williams' art of character depiction.
2. Write a detailed note on the theatrical history of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
3. Comment on Williams' use of symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

12.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Boxill, Roger. *Tennessee Williams*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987.
- Bloom, Harold (ed.). *Tennessee Williams*. New York: Chelsea House, 1987.
- Donhaue Francis. *The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams*. New York: Frederic Ungar, 1964.
- Leavitt, Richard F., (ed). *The Works of Tennessee Williams*. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1978.

Unit-13: Origin and Development of Indian Drama in English

Structure

13.0 Introduction

13.1 Objectives

13.2 Origin and Development of Indian Drama in English

13.2.1 The Pre-Independence Phase

13.2.2 The Post-Independence Phase to the Eighties

13.2.3 The Eighties to the Post- Millennium

13.2.4 Let Us Sum Up

13.3 Learning Outcomes

13.4 Glossary

13.5 Sample Questions

13.6 Suggested Learning Resources

13.0 Introduction

The history of Indian drama dates back around 5000 years and is literally steeped in the culture and traditions of the land. These performances were often recitation, singing and dancing narratives. Therefore, from Sanskrit drama to folklore, and then to western influences on contemporary writings, we will trace a journey through the origin and development of Indian drama in English.

At the outset, it is pertinent to mention that, although the writing of Indian drama in English is a recent phenomenon or, to be more precise, with the coming of the East India Company, many major dramatic texts written in Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, or other regional languages have now been translated into English. Therefore, in this journey of tracing the origin and development of Indian drama in English, the entire history of Indian drama from ancient times to the modern day will be briefly discussed.

13.1 Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to familiarise the learners with the origin and development of Indian English drama. Further, we will study some major Indian English dramatists and place them in the historical context.

13.2 Origin and Development of Indian Drama in English

Spanning over centuries, the history of Indian drama traces its roots back to the beginning of the classical dramatic tradition. Evidence of drama and dramatic performances are found in the *Epics*, the *Puranas* and all forms of cultures. The compendiums on drama: the *Natasutra*, which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharatamuni precedes, and the *Daśarūpa* by Dhananjaya, have been written between 2000 BCE and the 4th century CE, have helped in theorising, defining, and structuring the Sanskrit dramaturgy and poetics. The literary historians record the period between the first century and the tenth century as the glorious time of Sanskrit drama with vigorous dramatic creativity following the detailed theoretical prescription laid down by early theoreticians like Abhinavagupta and Dandin. Later centuries, culminating in the fifteenth century, record the stagnation, deterioration, and final decline of the Sanskrit drama. Among the reasons for the illustrious dramatic tradition to lose its positions are internal socio-cultural instability and foreign invasions. Kalidasa, Bhavabuti and Bhasa are a few of the classical period playwrights who survived the test of time. The gradual decline in the originality and creativity of Sanskrit drama, the rise and appealing nature of the folk theatre, the translations of Sanskrit plays into regional languages; and the colonial encounter that resulted in the influence of Western and European models on local theatrical traditions, have helped in the rise of Modern Indian Theatre and modern Indian dramaturgy.

13.2.1 Pre-Independence Phase

Perhaps the earliest Indian English play was written in 1831, when Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote *The Persecuted* or *Dramatic Scenes illustrative of the present state of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*. Banerjee's play is an attack on Hindu Brahmanical orthodoxy. The play is built upon the conflict primarily between tradition and Western imported modernity in India, delineated through the characters: the orthodox Brahmin father, Mohadeb; and his liberal-minded Western-influenced son, Banylal. After a gap of thirty years and more, in 1866, C.S. Nazir wrote

the verse play *The First Parsi Baronet*. In 1871, Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote, *Is This Civilisation?* a translation of *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata?* Like Banerjee, Dutt also looked at the influence of the West on Indian youth in a farcical way. The late nineteenth century saw a few more attempts in drama like D.M Wadia's *The Indian Heroine* (1877) and Ram Kinoo Dutt's *Manipur Tragedy* (1893).

In the following decades, there was a considerable absence of talent in Indian drama in English. After decades-old hiatus, plays modelling on Elizabethan, Indian classical, and folk tradition began to appear in the twentieth century. As a result, the number of playwrights and the number of plays had increased exponentially.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is one of the foremost Indian English writers. Influenced by Western dramatic tradition, especially the Elizabethan and the Shakespearean, Sri Aurobindo brings stylistic grandeur and thematic magnificence to his poetic plays. With five full-length five-act plays in blank verse, and many incomplete plays to his credit, Sri Aurobindo foregrounds life and love in its myriad shades. The complete plays are *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Rodogune*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Eric* and *Vasavadutta*. Out of the five, the only tragedy is *Rodogune*, and the rest four are comedies. Chronologically, the plays were written from 1905 to 1915, and the earliest complete play is *The Viziers of Bassora*; however, the only play published during his lifetime is *Perseus, the Deliverer*. The incomplete plays written during 1891-1915 include *The Witch of Ilni*, *The House of Brut*, *The Maid in the Mill*, *The Prince of Edur*, *The Prince of Mathura*, *The Birth of Sin* and *A Fragment of a Play*. *The Witch of Ilni* was Aurobindo's first attempt in drama, and *Vasavadutta* the final one.

Sri Aurobindo does a thematic cull out from the story "Nur al-Din Ali and the Damsel Anis al-Jalis" in *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* for his play *The Viziers of Bassora*. This romantic play deals with the love and hardship of the young lovers Anice-al-jalice, the slave girl and the excellent vizier Alfazzal's son, Nureddence face and the eventual trump of love. A tragedy in its thematic treatment *Rodogune*, set in imaginative Syria, revolves around the rivalry between the two sons of Cleopatra: Antiochus and Timocles. The playwright's obsession with foreign settings continues in *Perseus: the Deliverer*. In the dramatic romance, *Eric*, the playwright, reaffirms the supremacy of love. Sourcing from Somadeva Bhatta's *Kathasaritsagara*, the play *Vasavadutta* is fully Indian in setting and characterisation. In S.S. Kulkarni's opinion, the plays of Aurobindo are influenced by the English theatre of the late Victorian era, which Robert Bridges and Stephen Philips dominated. The influence of the Elizabethan model and the use of blank verse

have continued in Vasudeva Rao's *Nala and Damayanti* (1928) and in the post-independence play *The Flute of Krishna* (1980) by P.A. Krishnaswamy. The blending of Puranic themes and the intellectual idiom of the times makes Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam (1884-1946) one among the well-known dramatists of the late century. Episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* make a comeback through his plays. Ekalavya, Krishna, Kunti, Karna, Droupadi, Bharata, and many more characters from the epics become the centre of the dramatic action in the plays, *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *The Curse or Karna* (1946), and *Keechaka* (1949). The influence of Greek and Elizabethan forms of tragedy is evident in his plays.

Episodes from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bible* continued to get dramatised and modified in Nalini Mohan Chatterjee's *Krishna* (1937), Swami Sivananda's *Radha's Prem* (1945), K.S. Ramaswami Sastri's *Droupadi* (1939), T.K.N. Trivikaram's *Zero B.C. or Christophanishad* (1947). This imaginative and the mythical paved the way for the real in the plays of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1898-1990). As a socially committed playwright, he looks critically at the slum lives of workers, the psyche of people from different social backgrounds and questions the social evils of the times in his *Five Plays* (1937), i.e. *The Parrot*, *The Sentry's Lamb*, *The Window*, *The Coffin* and *The Evening Lamb*. Compared to these social plays, the apparent influence of Western Drama is less in Chattopadhyaya's hagiological plays, like *Jayadeva*, *Pundalik*, *Saku Bai*, *Mira Bai*, *Choka Mela*, *Eknath*, *Tukaram*, *Raidas*, *Kannappan*, and *Siddharta: Man of Peace*. An exception to Aurobindo's magnificence in style and theme with the metaphorically enriched poetic style, T.P. Kailasam's subversive treatment of the characters from the epics, and Chattopadhyaya's genuineness in depicting the social realities and the sainted is Bharati Sarabhai. While her contemporaries were imitating the West, she stood out with the subtlety in theme and craft. Dovetailing the public and the private life of women, Bharati Sarabhai in *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) brings alive the world of women. *The Well of the People* is about a Brahmin widow's desire to go on pilgrimage to Haridwar; when it is thwarted, she decides to build a well for the Harijans in her village with the money she saved. *Two Women: A Play in Three Acts* revolves around Anuradha and Urvashi, depicting the domestic life of a minority of rich people.

Comparatively, an apparent change in theme and style is observed in the plays of V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar. A master of social comedy, Aiyangar looks at the follies and idiosyncrasies of the "sophisticated middle-class people seen in the urban societies of Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. Apart from comedies, the two volumes of his plays *Dramatic Divertissements* (1921)

contain his attempts at historical drama and serious drama. Events from India's long history of invasion and struggle for independence set the plots of many plays such as *The Bride of God* (1931) by Annayya, *A Mother Sacrifice* (1941) by A.S. Panchapakesha Ayyar, *Captive Soil* (1945) by Mrinalini Sarabhai and *The Absconders* (1947) by N.R. Deobhankar.

Evils in society challenging the existence of the self, inequalities among people, corruption, the hypocrisy of social institutions and people, and revolt against conventions become the subjects for the development of dramatic action in the plays of A.C. Krishnaswami's *The Two Twice-Borns* (1914), Niranjan Pal's *The Goddess* (1924), V. Narayanan's *Where God Is Not and Other Playlets* (1933), D.M. Borgaonkar's *Image-Breakers* (1938), Balwant Gargi's *The Vulture and Other Plays* (1941), Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's *Invitation to Immortality* (1944), Ajoy Chunder Dutt's *Milly* (1945), Purushottam Tricumdas's *Sauce for the Goose* (1946), V. Rampall's *Almight Gold* (1947), and 'Ranganath's' *A Star is Born* (1947). Contemporary life and its complexities take the centre in the works of A.S.P. Ayyar's *Slaves of Ideas and Other Plays* and J.M. Lobo-Prabhu's *Collected Plays* wherein they voice and condemn the sophistication of contemporary lives. Ayyar uses prose effectively to convey the message, and Prabhu, a skilful maker of dialogues and situations, fails to bring life to characters and convincing climaxes.

Other allegorical plays of the pre-Independence phase include *Princess Kalayani* (1930) by Svarnakumari Devi Ghosal, *The Eastern Farce* (1931) by M.S. Gopal, *Kailash* (1944) by P.A. Krishnaswami, and *Deluge* (1944) by Shanti Jhaveri. Predominantly the good-evil binary is used in depicting the nation's struggle to liberate from the coloniser. *The Trial Celestial* (1940) by Suryadutt J. Bhatta has Almighty, Voltaire, Astral Spirit, and an Old Man as characters. S. Fyzee-Rahamin's *Daughter of Ind* (1940) is a discourse on love and its sentimentality. With a Prologue, an Epilogue and a Narrator, the play develops through the untouchable girl, Malti's love for her English master. Prabhu's *Mother of New India* (1944) calls on channelling one's inner strength to benefit all.

The pre-Independence phase of Indian drama in English will not be complete without mentioning Rabindranath Tagore's contribution. As is well known, Tagore was interested in the poetic presentation of his ideas than in considering the theatrical aspect of his plays. However, most of his plays come under Indian literature in translation, as Tagore himself translated most of his plays from Bengali to English. Some of his notable plays are: *The Genus of Valmiki* (1881), *The Fatal Hunt* (1882), *Nature's Revenge* (1884), *Chitrangda* (1892), *The Trial* (1897), *The Crown* (1908), *Penance* (1909), *The Post Office* (1912), *Red Oleanders* (1924). His dramatic pieces centre

on religion, spirituality, politics, and legends. The enormous number of plays, both recorded and unrecorded during the pre-Independence phase, reveal the interest of the playwrights in experimenting in the English language. In their obsession with the Western dramatic tradition, most of the playwrights of this phase failed to produce organic dialogues, relatable plots, the right audience, and achieve stage success. Compared to its unpromising status, the varieties in theme, style, characters and techniques give Indian Drama in English a promising future.

13.2.2 The Post-Independence Phase to the Eighties

The plays written and published during the post-independence period show greater influence of the West than the ones produced during pre-Independence phase. Playwrights like Bharati Sarabhai, D.M. Boragonakar, Lobo Prabhu, and V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar continued writing and publishing their works, mainly one or two in the early post-Independence phase as well. In the partitioned and spiritually barren India, the necessity to lean onto the cultural, mythological and religious antiquity was in vogue. Swami Avyaktananda in *India through the Ages* (1947) employs the dramatic medium to show some salient features of the religious and the cultures that met on the Indian soil. The verse-play *The Flute of Krishna* (1950) by P.A. Krishnaswami deals with the legend of a girl Murali and a young man Vidyaratna who, by their devotion to Lord Krishna, become respectively His flute and the bamboo stick used to tend cows. Dilip Kumar Roy's *Sri Chaitanya* (1950), and *The Beggar Princess* (1956), written with Indira Devi, deal with the life of the devotees of Lord Krishna. Episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have continued to make their presence felt and at times get contemporary treatment. Plays like V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar's *Ramarajya* (1952), Smt. K.B. Thakur's *Mother and the Child* (1960), Kamala Subramaniam's dramatic dialogue *Gandharee and Kaikeyee* (1962), D.A. Sadar Joshi's *Acharya Drona* (1963), Padmanabha Krishnamurthi's *Uttara Geetha or the Geetha Reminded* (1964), Mathuram Boothalingam's *Alone in Ayodhya* (1970), and Keshavadasi's *Geethacharya and Other Dramas* (1972) have stories and characters from the epics. K. Nagaraja's *Chidambaram* (1955) is a chronicle play in fourteen episodes. This flashback play has characters like Arjuna, Shiva, Madhavi, Kannagi, Patanjali and Vyagrapada. G.V. Desani's poetic play *Hali* (1950), is rich in symbolism and imagery. Praised for its originality, this play has Hali, Mira the mother, Maya the foster mother, Isha the Lord, Rahu the rival, Rooh Hali's beloved, the magician and the Narrator as its characters. The central character Hali undergoes a series of trials and tribulations before triumphing in love.

The ancient history, contemporary politics, and turmoil are discussed in many plays of the post-Independence phase. Events and episodes from the Mughal history form the crust of the dramatic action in S. Janaki's *The Siege of Chitor* (1960) and Dilip Hiro's *To Anchor a Cloud* (1972). Shivaji's controversial killing of Afzal Khan gets a dramatic rendering in verse by Lakhan Deb. Deb's *Tragic Claw* (1967) is successful in depicting the valour and heroic stature of Shivaji.

The life and career of Mahatma Gandhi is a subject which has naturally fascinated many post-independence playwrights. The many facets of Gandhi's life get detailed in K.S. Ranagappa's *Gandhiji Sadhana* (1969), Shivkumar Joshi's *He Never Slept So Long* (1972), K.A. Abbass' *Barrister at Law* (1977). Lakhan Deb deals with the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi in *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1974), wherein people of varied political ideologies become the visitors. The pre-Independence and post-Independence political scenarios, conflicts, and the urge for national integration become the subject matter for plot development in V.K. Gokaka's *The Goddess Speaks* (1948), R. Javanthinathan's *Guardianship* (1949), D.M. Borgaonkar's *One-Act Plays* (1957), Santha Rama Rau's *A Passage to India* (1960), Mrs J.M. Billimoria's *My Sons* (1963), Husenali Chagla's *The Mussalman* (1966), K. S. Rangappa's *They Live Again* (1969), Anil Saari's *Prefaces* (1969), Hushmat Sozrekashme's *Vikramjeet* (1970), and Manohar Malgonkar's *Line of Mars* (1978).

Asif Currimbhoy occupies a unique place in post-Independence dramatic literature by dint of his fecundity and versatility, and firm grasp of the varied facets of life. He debates and questions the overt unfairness that divides people. The hopelessness of the young generation, the predicaments, and the necessity to survive, riot, existential crisis, and revolution become the playwright's primary concern. His plays *The Tourist Mecca*, *The Clock*, *The Doldrums*, *The Dumb Dancer*, *OM*, *Thorns on a Canvas*, *The Restaurant*, *The Captives*, *Goa*, *Abbe Faria*, and *Monsoon, or a Noah' Ark* discuss issues on the emotional, the private, and the public realities of life. *Inquilab* (1970), a play in eight acts centres on the Bengal Naxalite movement; *The Refugee* (1971) depicts the Bangla migration to India in the same year. The plays like *Sonar Bangla* (1972), *Om Mane Padme Hum* (1972), *Angkor* (1973), *The Miracle Seed* (1973), *The Dissident MLA* (1974), *This Alien...Native Land* (1975) discuss socio-cultural issues about the citizens of the country and its neighbouring countries. Episodes from Gandhi's life form the input for the dramatic action in *An Experiment with Truth*. Currimbhoy has done his best to vocalise the political insecurities of the times.

Modernity, its clash with the tradition, the idiosyncratic nature of people, the cultural conflict people are caught in, and the consequent social problems become the centre of concern in plays like *The Jolly Club* by V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar and *One-Act Plays* (1957) by D.M. Borgaonkar. J.M. Lobo Prabhu's volume of six plays, *Collected Plays* (1955), is an exposition to the hypocrisies and double standards of the elites. The fragility of human nature gets ridiculed in the plays of Prabhu. Undoubtedly, the playwright is a skilful maker of dialogues and situations but fails to bring life to characters and convincing climaxes.

All facets of human character are cleverly exploited in the plays like *The Tool of the Gods* (1958) by V. Subha Rao, *The Carnival* (1960) by M.V. Rama Sarma, *The Accused* (1961) by Kaiwara Raja Rao, *The Point of Light and End of Hunger* (1967) by Satya Dev Jaggi and *The Director General* (1968) by Husenali Chagla. Nissim Ezekiel's volume of plays, *Three Plays* (1969), *Nalini: A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem: A Tragicomedy*, and *The Sleepwalkers*, a one-act farce, ridicules the gullibility, vulnerability, and hypocrisy of human nature. The first two plays show the contrast between dream and reality, between the fake and the genuine while the last one is a satire on excessive Indian fascination for everything that is American. The play *Nalini* displays considerable craftsmanship in the handling of realistic dialogues. *The Song of Deprivation* (1969) is a conversation between He and She, about hypocrisy and other drawbacks of contemporary society. Arati Nagarwalla's *The Bait* and Dina Mehta's *The Myth Makers* came out in the year 1960.

A play in three acts, Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1970) deals with the happenings after the death of Ranjith Singh, the Lion of Punjab. Henry Lawrence, the East India Company's Resident in the Court of Ranjith Singh's son Dalip Singh, fails miserably in his desire to become 'Angrez Badshah'. *Mira* (1971) focuses on Mira's love for God; *Jackhoo Villa* discusses the moral deterioration in a Hindu family in Simla. The decline of the aristocracy and its impact on familial relationships become the focus of action in Sri Devi Singh's *The Purple-Braided People* (1970).

Set in the semi-urban Parsi sub-culture of the Sanjan/Nargol area of South Gujarat, Gieve Patel's *Princes* (1970) discusses the ongoing conflict between two Parsi families over a male child whose father and dead mother belongs to the respective families in conflict. Patel's use of language, character, dialogue and situation makes the *Princes* one of the crucial plays of the time. *Savaksa* revolves around the sixty-year-old titular character's desire to marry the twenty-year-old Perin. Murali Das Melwani's *Deep Roots* (1970) delineates the clash between tradition and modernity. The conflict arises between the Westernized Arvind's and the traditionalist father's

notions on life. Rajinder Paul's *Ashes above the Fire* (1970) deals with love where it is conceived as a kind of killing. The theme of sex gets an overt treatment in *The Professor has a Warcry* (1970) and *A Touch of Brightness* (1970) by Pratap Sharma. A farce *Dr Lover* (1972) by S.A. Gaffoor delineates Dr Lover as a self-styled specialist in lovesickness and his way of dealing with clients; and in Shiv K. Kumar's *The Last Wedding Anniversary* (1975) discusses marital incompatibility and its consequences.

Girish Karnad is preoccupied with the retelling of Indian myth and history. Based on *Katha-Sarit-Sagara*, Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1975) depicts three characters Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini. He deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements. Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence*, *The Court is in Session* (1967), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), and *Mitrachi Ghosta* (1981) deal with gender issues, political violence, etc. M.V. Rama Sarma's *Collected Plays* (1982) contains playlets like "Youth and Crabbed Age", "Like to Like", and "This Busy World". The three-act play *Shakuntala* looks at the stages in the eponymous character's life as "The Maiden", "The Castaway" and "The Woman". "Marpessa", and "Urvashi" discusses the supremacy of human over the divine. *Towards Marriage* and *The Carnival* deals with life and the play *The Mahatma* (1979) concentrates on the martyrdom of Gandhi.

M. Krishnamurti's *The Cloth of Gold* is worth mentioning as it is the only philosophical dance-drama in verse found in the field so far. Other plays of notable merit during this phase include Narayan Prasad's *Battle for Light* (1964), the short plays: *The Way Up, A- Mourning Do We Go, Call It a Day* (1966), *Refineries Unlimited*, and *Indo- Anglians in Anglia* (1964) by Krishna Gorowara. P.S. Vasudev's *The Forbidden Fruit* (1967), Mrinalini Sarabhai's *Vichar* (1970), Som Benegal's *Caesarian* (1971), Madhu Rye's *Saral and Shampa* (1972), Lawrence Bantleman's *The Award* (1973), Ahmed Akhtar's *Anarkali* (1978), Masti Venkatesa Iyengar's *Kalidasa* (1980), K.S. Duggal's *To Each a Window: Six Radio Plays* (1981), Louella Lobo Prabhu's *Broken Melody* (1981), and *Image Breakers* by D.M. Borgaonkar.

In this period, initiatives in magazines, periodicals, and journals to promote Indian Drama in English by publishing play scripts, reviews, and discussions on drama were in vogue. Some of them were *Enact*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Carvan*, *Triveni: Journal of Indian Renaissance*, *Bhavan's Journal*, and *Modern Review*. The announcement in 1968 by The Theatre Group, Bombay, of the Sultan Padamsee Award for Indian plays in English gave much-needed

encouragement to a floundering genre. The award was won by Gurcharan Das for *Karin Sahib*, but also in the competition were Gieve Patel's *Princes* and Dina Mehta's *Myth Makers*.

The fascination with the Western dramatic tradition has continued in this phase, and playwrights failed to tap fully the rich sources of the ancient Indian literature and history for their themes. There are many three-act plays in the phase, the five-act structure of the Elizabethan Drama and the western one-act play form appears to have influenced some playwrights. Other reasons include the lack of a "living theatre", the failure to inculcate the theatrical practices of the Indian dramatic tradition, the apprehension to experiment with dramatic techniques and the inability to make the language organic and relatable for the audience. Overall the stagnation in dramatic art continued.

13.2.3 The Eighties to the Post- Millennium

In terms of quality, drama continued its slow pace but from 1831 to 1980, not less than 500 plays by Indian English Writers appeared: and during the short period of the last twenty years, about 75 have been published. One Critic avers that if Indian English drama wishes to go ahead, it must go back first, i.e. only a purposeful return to its roots in the rich tradition of the ancient Indian drama. From the eighties onwards, playwrights like Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Vera Sharma, with their ease in dialogue construction and experimentation with the techniques and themes, helped in breathing a new life into Indian Drama in English. Gieve Patel, Nissim Ezekiel, Dina Mehta, and Girish Karnad continued writing plays.

The poet Gieve Patel's *Mister Behram* (1988), the first Indian play to deal seriously with Parsi life and character got added to his two unpublished plays *Princes* and *Savaksha*. Appeared in 1991, Cyrus Mistry's play *Doongaji House* treats the Parsi community with seriousness. It discusses the common human desire for happiness, which is often thwarted by forces beyond the individual's comprehension, and the ultimate loneliness and vulnerability of all human beings. *The Legacy of Rage* is another play of Mistry. Dina Mehta's *Brides are not for Burning* (1993), discusses the social issue of dowry and its impact on young brides. Through the play, she reveals the social situation in its many-sidedness. *Getting Away with Murder* (1989) is Mehta's other play.

Some of the notable plays of the time are T.S. Gill's *Asoka* (1983), V.D. Trivedi's *Gandhi: A Play* (1983), Prema Sastri's *Gandhi: Man of the Millions* (1987), G. Prasant's *The Myth Resurrected* (1991) is a bold attempt to present Oedipus myth from an Indian point of view. Nissim Ezekiel's *Don't Call It Suicide* (1993), Madhuri Kamat's *Whose Father, What Goes*, Gopi Krishnan Kottoor's *The Mask of Death: The Final Days of John Keats* (1996). R. Raj Rao's *The*

Wisest Fool on Earth and Other Plays (1996) is a collection of three one-act plays and a monologue.

Girish Karnad continued writing plays, and he effectively demonstrated how Indian English drama could revitalise itself by employing experimental models through plays like *Naga-Mandala: Play with a Cobra* (1990), *Tale-Danda* (1993), *The Fires and the Rain* (1998), *Bali: The Sacrifice*, *Wedding Album* (2006), *Boiled Beans on Toast* (2014), and *Crossing to Talikota* (2019). Like Tagore, Karnad translated his plays from Kannada to English.

The first Indian English playwright to win the Sahitya Akademi Award, Mahesh Dattani is among the notable playwrights of contemporary times. His plays include *Final Solutions and Other Plays* (1994) and *Collected Plays* (2000). His plays draw our attention to the complex prejudices of class, gender, race and religion in a very subtle and effective manner. While mythology and history are Karnad's favourite subjects, Dattani remains preoccupied with social and political realities in India today.

Shashi Tharoor's *Twenty-two Months in the Life of a Dog: A Farce in Two Acts* is a diverting take-off on the Emergency of 1975. Khushwant Singh's *Tyger, Tyger, Burning Bright* presents a mixed group of tourists trapped in the guest house of a national game preserve for two days, with reports of a man-eater roaming around. The significant playwrights of contemporary times include Ramu Ramanathan, Kiran Nagarkar, Gautam Raja, Vikram Kapadia, Rahul da Cunha, and Zubin Driver. The centrality of women's world in Vera Sharma's *Life Is Like That* (1997) and *Reminiscences* (1997) bring out the life of widowed and aged women. *The Early Bird* (1983) is a collection of one-act plays, and *The Chameleon* (1997) is a collection of radio plays by the playwright. The presence of woman playwrights in this phase of Indian Drama in English is more palpable and includes Uma Parameswaran's *Sons Must Die* (1962), *Meera* (1971), *Sita's Promise* (1981), *Dear Deedi* (1989); Manjula Padmanabhan's *Light Out* (1984), *Consequences* (2014); Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam* (1993), *Good Heavens* (2006); Zahida Zaidi's *Burning Desert* (1998); Anupama Chandrasekhar's *Kabaddi-Kabaddi* (2004), *When the Cross Visit* (2019); and Prasanna Ramaswamy's *Karna* (2010).

13.2.4 Let Us Sum Up

In this age of technological and information revolution, English is no more an imported language. Now Indian Drama in English is vibrant with experiments in plot construction, theme, technique, and style. Further, looking at the remarkable increase in plays being written in India in English since the turn of the century, one can make out that the status of Indian Drama in English

in the twenty-first century is not that of the ‘sad Cinderella’. Accordingly, there is an exponential increase in the number of plays being published, performed and the number of theatre festivals, playwriting competitions and workshops on playwriting across India. To name a few, include Writers’ Bloc in partnership with the UK’s Royal Court Theatre, British Council, and the Jindal Group, Artists’ Repertory Theatre Royal Court Theatre workshop, Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards, The Hindu theatre festival, and *The Hindu’s* ‘MetroPlus Playwright Award’. Unquestionably, the history of Indian Drama in English has progressed gradually but immensely; and its future is bright.

13.5 Learning Outcomes

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

- trace the development of modern English drama
- critique varied dramatic texts based on their themes, techniques, and diction
- gain an understanding of modern dramatists

13.4 Glossary

Pantomime: Plays emphasizing on the moral dilemmas and victory of good over evil

Melodrama: A dramatic work in which a character experiences a lot of danger in order to appeal to the feelings.

Exposition: Refers to background information of the plot, characters and setting

Avant-garde: An experimental, **progressive and unconventional work with respect to art, culture, or society.**

Pathos: Qualities that evoke sorrow or pity

Soliloquy: When a character speaks his or her own thoughts loudly in a play.

13.5 Sample Questions

13.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which of the following got a Nobel Prize in Literature?
 - a. Antonin Artaud

- b. Henrik Ibsen
 - c. Eugene O'Neill
 - d. August Strindberg
2. Henrik Ibsen wrote _____.
- a. *When We Dead Awaken*
 - b. *Endgame*
 - c. *The Maid*
 - d. *The Trial*
3. Which of the following is not a playwright of the Modern period?
- a. G. B. Shaw
 - b. Henrik Ibsen
 - c. Ben Johnson
 - d. Eugen O'Neill
4. Which of the following is/are the playwright of the theatre of absurd?
- a. Samuel Beckett
 - b. Jean-Paul Sartre
 - c. Arthur Adamov
 - d. All the above
5. Who amongst the following wrote *The Iceman Cometh*?
- a. Neil Simon
 - b. Samuel Beckett
 - c. Eugene O'Neill
 - d. Eugene Ionesco

True or False

- 1. T.S Eliot belonged to modern period_____
- 2. Samuel Becket wrote *Endgame*_____
- 3. *The Harry Ape* is a modern play_____
- 4. Martin Eslin started theatre of Absurd_____
- 5. Waiting for Gadot is written by T.S Eliot_____

13.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

- 1. Mention the differences between classical and modern English plays.
- 2. Give a brief comparative analysis of modern and postmodern plays.

3. Discuss the position of modern English drama in English literature.
4. Write a short note on Ibsen.
5. Mention the contribution of G.B. Shaw.

13.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Elaborate on the origin and development of modern English drama. Examine how it is different from drama in the earlier periods.
2. Discuss varied techniques developed and used in modern English plays. Explain with examples.
3. Discuss some prominent playwrights of modern English period and their plays.

13.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Szondi, Peter. *Theory of the Modern Drama*. University of Minnesota, USA, 1987.
- Dryden, Alex. *Modern English Drama: Dryden, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Shelley, Browning, Byron*. Edited by Charles W. Eliot, Vol. 18, Harvard Classics, 1909.
- Chothia, Jean. *English Drama of the Early Modern Period 1890-1940*. Routledge, 2014.

Unit-14: Life and Works of Manjula Padmanabhan

Structure

14.0 Introduction

14.1 Objectives

14.2 Life and Works of Manjula Padmanabhan

14.2.1 Early Life and Influences

14.2.2 Major Themes and Concerns

14.2.3 Notable Works

14.2.3.1 *Lights Out*

14.2.3.2 *Harvest*

14.2.3.3 *Hidden Fires*

14.2.4 Padmanabhan's Literary Style

14.2.5 Padmanabhan's Contribution to Indian English Drama

14.2.6 Critical Reception

14.2.6.1 Social Commentary

14.2.6.2 Empowering Voices

14.2.6.3 Relevance and Influence

14.7 Let Us Sum Up

14.3 Learning Outcomes

14.4 Glossary

14.5 Sample Questions

14.6 Suggested Readings

14.0 Introduction

Manjula Padmanabhan, born in Delhi in 1953, is a celebrated Indian playwright, author and cartoonist. Her works are known for their incisive and thought-provoking nature. Her works challenge audiences to confront uncomfortable realities. Padmanabhan's writing sheds light on the complexities of urban India, exposing the underlying darkness that often lurks beneath modern life. Manjula Padmanabhan's creative work encompasses a diverse range of genres- from plays, novels, short stories to cartoons and journalism - establishing her as a prominent figure in the Indian literary landscape.

Padmanabhan's journey began with her comic strip, *Suki* (1992-1998), which appeared in Bombay's *Sunday Observer*, showcasing her talent for dialogue-driven storytelling. This

experience paved the way for her debut play, *Lights Out* (1984), a chilling exploration of urban apathy and violence against women that established her as a powerful voice in Indian theatre. Her plays, including the acclaimed *Harvest* (1997) which won the 1997 Onassis Prize for Theatre, often tackle complex social and political issues, particularly those relating to gender, class and power.

While her works frequently feature strong female characters navigating a patriarchal society, Padmanabhan resists being confined to a single label. She explores a wide range of human experiences in her diverse body of work, which includes novels like *Escape* (2008) and *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015); short story collections such as *Hot Death, Cold Soup: Twelve Short Stories* (1996) and *Kleptomania: Ten Stories* (2004), and her memoir *Getting There* (2002). In her plays, Padmanabhan dissects the self-centredness of characters and the anonymity of individual existence in the city. Through her impactful writings, Manjula Padmanabhan compels readers to confront uncomfortable truths and engage in critical reflection on the world around them.

Check Your Progress

Name two genres Manjula Padmanabhan has worked in besides plays:

14.0 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- To introduce students to the life and works of Manjula Padmanabhan.
- To examine Padmanabhan's contribution to Indian English drama.
- To analyse major themes and concerns in Padmanabhan's plays.
- To encourage critical appreciation and interpretation of her works.

14.2 Life and Works of Manjula Padmanabhan

14.2.1 Early Life and Influences

Manjula Padmanabhan's writing is deeply influenced by her diverse cultural experiences and keen understanding of societal dynamics. Born in India in 1953, she spent her formative years living in various countries, including Sweden, Pakistan, and Thailand. These cross-cultural experiences likely gave her a nuanced perspective on issues of cultural identity, belonging and the complexities of human nature, which are recurring themes in her work.

While details about her formal education are limited, her graduation from Bombay University and involvement in the world of publishing and media likely honed her writing skills and exposed her to a wide range of literary influences. This period may have also nurtured her sharp observation of social dynamics and her ability to craft dialogue-driven narratives, as seen in her early work on the comic strip *Suki*.

Padmanabhan's writing is further shaped by her engagement with Marxist thought and her concern for the oppressed and marginalised. This ideological foundation is evident in her play *Lights Out*, where she critiques the urban middle class's indifference towards violence and suffering. Her unflinching portrayal of social inequalities, particularly those faced by women in a patriarchal society, aligns her with the feminist perspectives of writers like Manju Kapur. However, as seen in the critical responses to *Lights Out*, Padmanabhan's work transcends simplistic labels as it explores the complexities of human nature and the ethical dilemmas that permeate contemporary urban existence.

Check Your Progress

Manjula Padmanabhan's writing is primarily influenced by her academic studies in literature and feminist theory. **True/False**

14.2.2 Major Themes and Concerns

Manjula Padmanabhan's writings offer a compelling and insightful exploration of the human experience, particularly within the evolving socio-political context of India. Her diverse body of work, encompassing plays, novels and short stories, is characterised by a deep concern for social justice and a keen focus on the struggles faced by the marginalised, especially women.

A dominant theme that permeates her writing is the pursuit of female autonomy within patriarchal structures. Padmanabhan fearlessly examines the ways in which women navigate oppressive societal norms and power dynamics, often confronting challenges related to bodily autonomy, objectification and the quest for self-determination. Her play *Harvest*, for instance, starkly portrays the exploitation of bodies within a system driven by economic disparity and unchecked technological advancement, raising critical questions about reproductive rights and the commodification of human life.

Outside the confines of gender, Padmanabhan explores the complexities of human relationships, probing into the joys, burdens and challenges of love, family and the search for a sense of belonging in a rapidly evolving world. Her characters, often caught between tradition and modernity, grapple with issues of cultural identity, displacement and the balance between individual desires and societal expectations. Padmanabhan's incisive humour and satirical approach compel readers to face harsh realities about power, privilege and human nature, inviting introspection and questioning of conventional beliefs.

14.2.3 Notable Works

Manjula Padmanabhan is a renowned Indian playwright whose works have garnered critical acclaim both nationally and internationally. Some of her most acclaimed plays include *Harvest* (1997), *Lights Out* (1984), *Hidden Fires* (2022), and *Double Talk* (2005). She has also published short story collections like *Hot Death, Cold Soup* (1996) and *Kleptomania* (2004), as well as the graphic novel *This is Suki!* (2000).

Harvest and *Lights Out* are particularly noteworthy for their thought-provoking exploration of social and political issues. *Harvest* presents a disturbing dystopian future where the organ trade has become a lucrative industry, leading to the exploitation of the economically disadvantaged. In *Lights Out*, Padmanabhan examines the complex power dynamics, gender roles and the impact of societal norms on individual freedom, encouraging the audience to critically reflect on these issues.

In addition to her acclaimed plays, Padmanabhan's literary repertoire extends beyond theatre showcasing her versatility as a writer. Her novels, such as *Escape* (2008) and *The Island*

of *Lost Girls* (2015), explore the emotional and psychological experiences of her protagonists as they navigate the complex issues of identity, displacement and the pursuit of purpose in an increasingly globalised world.

This section will analyse three of her plays, *Lights Out*, *Harvest* and *Hidden Fires*, as examples to explore further the thematic concerns and stylistic elements that define Manjula Padmanabhan's creative vision.

14.2.3.1 *Lights Out*

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* is a chilling one-act play that explores the disturbing issue of societal indifference to violence against women. Set in a middle-class apartment in Bombay, the play revolves around a group of friends and family who gather for an ordinary evening. As the night progresses, they become acutely aware of a woman being repeatedly raped in a nearby building. Despite the victim's desperate cries for help, the group remains passive, choosing to prioritise their own comfort and social standing over intervening to stop the heinous crime unfolding before them.

Padmanabhan presents a cast of characters that embody the various facets of this societal indifference. The hosts, Leela and Bhaskar, are more preoccupied with maintaining their image and avoiding any disruption to their social gathering than taking action to assist the victim. The other couple, Surinder and Naina, initially display a facade of concern, but Naina ultimately remains paralysed by inaction, unable to overcome her own fears and discomfort. Mohan, a cynical observer, further rationalises the group's inaction by callously questioning the authenticity of the victim's cries for help. Though the victim remains unseen, her presence looms large, symbolising the countless women who suffer in silence due to the pervasive societal apathy towards violence against them.

The play's plot unfolds in real-time, creating a palpable sense of tension and unease as the characters' thoughts, motivations and justifications for their inaction are gradually revealed through the dialogue. The climactic blackout and the projection of a stark, haunting message leave the audience with a lasting impression. It serves as a powerful reminder of the dire consequences that stem from a collective failure to uphold our shared responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

The setting of the play in a middle-class apartment underscores the fact that such horrific incidents are not confined to underprivileged areas, but can occur even in seemingly safe and civilised spaces. The apartment, intended to be a haven, becomes a cage of indifference, highlighting the pervasiveness of this societal issue. *Lights Out* grapples with poignant themes of

bystander apathy, gender inequality, and the urgent need for collective responsibility in addressing violence against women.

14.2.3.2 Harvest

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* presents a stark vision of the future where the line between human and commodity has blurred. Set in an impoverished India, the play follows Om, a young man desperate to support his family. He enters a contract with the powerful corporation

Check Your Progress:

In *Lights Out*, the characters respond actively and immediately to the violence they witness outside. **True/False**

InterPlanta Services, agreeing to 'donate' his organs one by one while still alive. As Om undergoes the organ harvesting process, his family grapples with the implications of his sacrifice, the allure of newfound wealth and the dehumanising control of InterPlanta.

The central character, Om, is a complex mix of love for his family and desperation. He decides to sell his organs to provide for them but at a great cost to his own humanity. His wife, Jaya, is initially against the contract but as their financial situation improves, she becomes complicit in the system. Her inability to resist material comforts highlights the seductive power of wealth. Om's mother, Ma, represents tradition and fierce love for her son. She is deeply troubled by the contract and questions the ethics of InterPlanta's actions but she is also the one who completely surrenders to the comforts it offers. Meanwhile, Om's brother, Jeetu, is initially envious of the benefits Om receives, underscoring the societal inequalities that drive people to make such desperate choices. The Guards and Agents of InterPlanta are cold, clinical and solely focused on profit, emphasising the corporation's disregard for human life.

The play is set in a future Bombay where poverty and technology collide. This highlights the gap between the rich and the poor, both in India and globally. *Harvest* explores complex themes like bioethics, questioning organ harvesting, consent and the commodification of the human body. It also critiques globalisation and the exploitative practices of multinational corporations in developing countries, as well as the growing divide between the wealthy and the poor. Additionally, the play examines family dynamics, the themes of love, sacrifice and betrayal. The

play explores ethical concerns arising from unchecked technological progress, which has the potential to dehumanise people.

Check Your Progress:

What is the primary theme explored in Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest*?

- A) Organ trade and exploitation
- B) Gender equality
- C) Environmental conservation
- D) Middle-class family dynamics

14.2.3.3 Hidden Fires

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Hidden Fires* is a collection of five monologues that serve as a scathing critique of communal violence, media distortion and the dehumanisation of victims in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat riots. Each monologue utilises a distinct narrative approach to explore the nuances of identity, violence and societal disintegration, employing irony, allegory and dark humour to convey the profound gravity of these themes.

The first monologue, "Hidden Fires", recounts the experience of an individual caught in the midst of communal violence. The speaker witnesses a mob brutally attack another person, which symbolises the unrestrained fury of the rioters, whom he compares to "red hot coals." The speaker reflects on the 'law of the jungle,' where predators and prey coexist, using this metaphor to emphasise the sense of superiority and inferiority driving the violence. This perceived hierarchy is shattered when the same mob invades the speaker's home, kills his family and destroys his life. The man's desperate plea, "Show me one sign that I am different from you!" reflects the absurdity of communal hatred, which operates without reason or justification, targeting people based solely on their perceived difference. The monologue concludes with the speaker's tormentors offering to spare his life in exchange for his total dispossession which illustrates the broader themes of injustice and the erosion of individual rights in the face of mob violence.

The second monologue, "Famous Last Words", employs a darkly satirical game show format to explore the arbitrary and senseless nature of communal violence. In this scenario, participants must guess letters to form a word, with each incorrect guess resulting in the random 'termination' of an audience member, as flames gradually consume the stage. This game serves as an allegory for the unpredictability of life in conflict zones, where survival is reduced to a matter of chance, and the randomness of death becomes a cruel spectacle. The monologue comments on

the lack of control people have over their fate in the face of such unrestrained and dehumanising acts of violence.

The third monologue, “Know the Truth”, takes the form of a satirical television program hosted by a woman named Pranam Shanti, who responds to viewers’ questions about ongoing conflicts in different regions of the country. Despite the program’s title, which suggests a focus on truth-telling, the monologue reveals how the media and politicians manipulate information. The anchor minimises the severity of violence, dismissing the concerns of a young girl named Khushboo as mere hallucinations, while simultaneously promoting a sanitised portrayal of events. This monologue serves as a critique of the media’s role in shaping public perception by concealing the realities of violence and trauma behind a veneer of positivity, thereby distorting the true nature of communal conflict.

The fourth monologue, “Points”, features a woman contemplating the multi-faceted nature of her country and the human experience. Through a series of abstract reflections, she contrasts the tangible, physical and political aspects of the nation with its more intangible elements, such as spirit and identity. The woman asserts a sense of belonging to her country, while simultaneously acknowledging that the country does not wholly belong to her. This highlights the dissonance between individual identity and collective national consciousness. She further examines the limitations of the physical realm, emphasising that the essence of human existence transcends mere materiality. This monologue questions the validity of national and communal divisions, suggesting that human beings are inherently interconnected, despite the artificial boundaries imposed by society.

The final monologue in the play “Invocation” is a poignant recitation of the names of victims of communal violence, intended to invoke the ‘gods of democracy,’ representing the people. By focusing on individual names rather than statistical data, the monologue protests the dehumanisation of the victims, whose identities are often erased in official reports that reduce them to mere numbers. The speaker emphasises the significance of names as markers of existence and identity, highlighting that they are one of the few elements that endure beyond an individual’s death. This monologue serves as both a remembrance of the deceased and a critique of how violence strips individuals of their humanity, transforming them into faceless casualties of political and communal conflict.

In *Hidden Fires*, Padmanabhan critiques the societal and political mechanisms that enable and perpetuate communal violence. The monologues reflect on the disintegration of social order,

the complicity of the media and the arbitrary nature of life and death during riots, all while challenging the audience to confront the realities of communal hatred and its devastating consequences. The play serves as a powerful indictment of the erosion of human dignity in the face of violence and the moral failures of society at large.

14.2.4 Padmanabhan's Literary Style

Manjula Padmanabhan's plays are renowned for their distinct literary style, which profoundly amplifies the emotional and psychological dimensions of her narratives. Her finely-crafted dialogues are sharp, incisive and often infused with a dark, thought-provoking humour that vividly reflects the inner turmoil of her characters as well as the broader societal tensions they navigate.

Padmanabhan's masterful use of dramatic irony, where the audience's understanding of a situation surpasses that of the characters, heightens the sense of unease and foreboding. This invites the audience to actively engage with the moral quandaries presented and grapple with their own complicity in such issues, challenging them to confront the hidden truths within themselves and the world around them.

One of the defining features of Padmanabhan's distinctive style is her virtuosic deployment of staging techniques to create an immersive and unsettling theatrical experience. In *Lights Out*, for instance, the play's reliance on a single, claustrophobic setting and the gradual, palpable escalation of tension through the characters' interactions heighten the audience's discomfort, mirroring the characters' own profound sense of helplessness and moral dilemma. Similarly, in *Harvest*, the playwright's strategic use of blackouts and the Guards' clinical, dehumanising presence create a palpable atmosphere of dread and unease, powerfully underscoring the play's exploration of the harrowing commodification of the human body.

Padmanabhan's precise and evocative language enables her to explore the complexities of human nature and the socio-political realities that shape her characters' experiences, lending her works a profound and lasting resonance that continues to captivate and challenge audiences.

14.2.5 Manjula Padmanabhan's Contribution to Indian English Drama

Manjula Padmanabhan's plays have made a significant and enduring contribution to the landscape of Indian English theatre. As a pioneering and visionary playwright, her work has expanded the thematic and stylistic boundaries of the medium, tackling a wide-ranging and ambitious array of pressing social, political and ethical issues with unflinching honesty, nuance and understanding.

One of Padmanabhan's key and defining contributions lies in her courageous willingness to grapple with contentious, difficult and often controversial topics that confront audiences with uncomfortable realities and truths. Her plays look into the disturbing and complex issues of gender-based violence, the harrowing commodification of the human body and the profound moral dilemmas that arise from the relentless march of technological change and the insatiable pursuit of profit at the expense of human dignity and wellbeing.

Through her masterful, psychologically-astute characterisations, Padmanabhan empowers the voices and experiences of marginalised individuals and communities, amplifying perspectives that have often been side-lined or suppressed within mainstream cultural discourses. Her work not only captivates and entertains audiences but also provokes deep introspection which challenges them to confront their own biases, complicity and moral culpability in perpetuating societal injustices and inequalities.

14.2.6 Critical Reception

Manjula Padmanabhan is a prominent voice in contemporary Indian theatre, renowned for her daring and thought-provoking works. Her plays have garnered widespread critical acclaim for their powerful social commentary, their amplification of marginalised voices, and their lasting impact on audiences. Critics and scholars have consistently recognized these core elements in Padmanabhan's writing, contributing to her enduring significance in both Indian and global theatre.

One of the most notable aspects of Padmanabhan's critical reception is her ability to subvert conventional narratives and challenge societal norms. Her plays often depict the lived experiences of the subaltern, giving voice to those who have historically been marginalised. This commitment to representing the underrepresented aligns her with a broader tradition of Indian writers who use literature as a tool for social transformation.

14.2.6.1 Social Commentary

Padmanabhan's works are celebrated for their fearless engagement with critical social issues. Plays like *Harvest* and *Hidden Fires* shed light on uncomfortable realities such as commodification of body, gender inequality and societal violence. *Harvest*, in particular, stands out for its futuristic exploration of how global inequalities manifest in disturbing ways, with the bodies of the poor being harvested for the benefit of the wealthy. Jodi Kim's analysis of *Harvest* emphasises how the play serves as an allegory for the exploitation of impoverished individuals,

addressing how economic systems dehumanise marginalised communities by turning them into commodities (Kim, 215-218).

While her works resonate deeply due to their intense focus on these harsh truths, some critics find her approach unsettling. The rawness of her depictions can be difficult for certain viewers, as her plays do not shy away from the violent and oppressive forces shaping society. Nevertheless, this unflinching approach is part of what makes her social commentary so impactful, pushing audiences to reflect on the realities of modern life.

14.2.6.2 Empowering Voices

A central aspect of Padmanabhan's theatre is her portrayal of women as strong, complex characters who resist patriarchal constraints. In *Harvest* and *Hot Death, Cold Soup*, she depicts women who navigate oppressive systems with determination and defiance. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan notes, Padmanabhan's female characters are not bound by traditional gender roles; instead, they challenge societal norms and assert their independence (Rajan, 232-233). This empowering portrayal of women has earned her recognition in feminist circles, where her work is appreciated for its bold exploration of women's agency and resistance in the face of restrictive social expectations.

Padmanabhan's female characters are able to overcome societal constraints and drive meaningful change in their lives and communities. Her works highlight the voices of marginalised individuals, offering a sense of hope and inspiration to those facing oppression.

14.2.6.3 Relevance and Influence

Manjula Padmanabhan's plays continue to be relevant and thought-provoking, even though they were written years ago. *Harvest*, in particular, is recognized for its ongoing significance. The play explores issues like technology, ethics and global inequality, which are still pressing concerns today. Padmanabhan's examination of the future serves as a strong warning about the consequences of unchecked exploitation. The sustained relevance of her work reflects her exceptional ability to address universal themes that transcend time (Kim, 220-222).

Furthermore, Padmanabhan's literary impact extends beyond her dramatic works. She has served as an inspirational figure for emerging writers and intellectuals who seek to emulate her approach of seamlessly integrating social commentary into their artistic creations. Padmanabhan's enduring presence and prominence within the Indian theatrical landscape is a testament to her exceptional talent, and her plays remain essential reading for those wishing to explore the intersection between the arts and societal issues.

Check your Progress:

What is a key characteristic of Manjula Padmanabhan's portrayal of women in her works like *Harvest* and *Hot Death, Cold Soup*?

- A) They conform to traditional gender roles.
- B) They are depicted as weak and submissive.
- C) They navigate oppressive systems with determination and defiance.

14.2.7 Let Us Sum Up

Manjula Padmanabhan's dramatic works have had a profound and lasting impact on the field of Indian English theatre. Through her bold, thought-provoking themes, Padmanabhan confronts her audience with the deeper, more unsettling aspects of the human condition. Her plays look into contentious societal issues, such as gender-based violence, the troubling commodification of the body and the complex moral dilemmas posed by rapid technological advancements.

Padmanabhan's fearless exploration of these pressing concerns has garnered her widespread critical acclaim, establishing her as a pioneering and influential voice in Indian theatre. By empowering the perspectives of marginalised individuals and communities, she has made a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogues surrounding social justice, human rights and the transformative potential of art.

14.3 Learning Outcomes

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

- Gain knowledge of Manjula Padmanabhan's life, works, and contributions to Indian English drama.
- Understand and critically analyse major themes and concerns in her plays.
- Develop skills to interpret and appreciate her dramatic techniques and language.
- Contextualize her works within Indian and global literary frameworks.
- Enhance research and presentation skills through textual analysis.

14.4 Glossary

Playwright - A person who writes plays, especially for the theatre.

Cartoonist - An artist who creates cartoons, typically for publications like newspapers or comic strips.

Apathy - A lack of interest, enthusiasm or concern, especially about societal issues.

Patriarchal - Relating to a male-dominated system of society or government where men hold primary power.

Commodification - The process of turning something into a commodity, treating it as a product to be bought or sold.

Dystopian - Describing an imagined, oppressive society marked by suffering or injustice.

Bystander Apathy - The tendency for individuals to be less likely to help someone in need when others are present.

Gender Inequality - The unequal treatment or perceptions of people based on gender, resulting in disparities in power, rights or opportunities.

Empowerment - The process of gaining confidence, strength and control over one's life and rights.

Feminist Theatre - A genre of theatre focused on advocating for women's rights, experiences and empowerment, often challenging traditional gender norms.

Marginalised - Describing individuals or groups that are excluded or have limited power within society.

Irony - A literary technique where the opposite of what is expected occurs, often to convey deeper meaning.

Monologue - A lengthy speech by one character in a play or story, expressing their inner thoughts.

Satirical - Using humour, irony or exaggeration to criticise or reveal flaws in society or institutions.

Social Justice - The principle of fair and equal treatment within society, especially in wealth, opportunities and privileges.

Psychological Depth - The portrayal of complex emotions and inner conflicts within a character.

Critical Reception - The evaluation and interpretation of a work by critics and scholars, assessing its significance.

Human Condition - The shared experiences and characteristics that define human life, like suffering, desire and social interactions.

Ethical Dilemmas - Situations requiring a choice between conflicting moral principles, often involving difficult consequences.

Cultural Identity - A sense of belonging to a specific culture, including shared customs, values and beliefs.

14.5 Sample Questions

14.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which of the following experiences likely contributed to Manjula Padmanabhan's understanding of diverse cultures?
 - A. Attending a boarding school in India.
 - B. Living in various countries during her childhood.
 - C. Working as a journalist for an Indian newspaper.
 - D. Studying literature at Bombay University.
2. Which of the following is a major theme consistently explored in Manjula Padmanabhan's works?
 - A. The glorification of traditional family values in modern India.
 - B. The rapid technological advancements and their positive impact on society.
 - C. The struggle for female autonomy and the challenges faced within patriarchal structures.
 - D. The celebration of urban life and the decline of rural traditions.
3. Which of the following plays by Manjula Padmanabhan explores the theme of organ trade in a dystopian future?
 - A. *Lights Out* B. *Hidden Fires*
 - C. *Harvest* D. *Double Talk*
4. What central social issue does Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* address?
 - A. Organ trade B. Bystander apathy towards violence against women
 - C. Economic inequality D. Environmental degradation
5. In *Lights Out*, which characters rationalise inaction by questioning the authenticity of the victim's cries?
 - A. Bhaskar B. Leela

- C. Mohan D. Surinder
6. What is the main reason Om enters into a contract with InterPlanta Services in *Harvest*?
A. To travel abroad B. To gain social status
C. To support his family financially D. To receive medical treatment
 7. What is the name of Padmanabhan's comic strip that appeared in the *Observer*?
A. *Sakhi* B. *Suki*
C. *Shakti* D. *Shanti*
 8. What is the name of the TV anchor in the monologue "Know the Truth"?
A. Pooja B. Khushboo
C. Pranam Shanti D. Roohi
 9. Which staging technique does Manjula Padmanabhan use in *Lights Out* to heighten the audience's discomfort?
A. Multiple elaborate settings B. Single, claustrophobic setting
C. Rapid scene changes D. Use of multimedia elements
 10. What is one of Manjula Padmanabhan's key contributions to Indian English drama?
A. Use of folklore B. Engagement with socially relevant issues
C. Romantic comedies D. Avoiding politics

Answer Key:

1. B. Living in various countries during her childhood.
2. C. The struggle for female autonomy and the challenges faced within patriarchal structures.
3. C. *Harvest*
4. B. Bystander apathy towards violence against women
5. C. Mohan
6. C. To support his family financially
7. B. *Suki*
8. C. Pranam Shanti
9. B. Single, claustrophobic setting
10. B. Socially relevant issues

14.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss how Manjula Padmanabhan's plays challenge traditional gender roles and explore the complexities of female empowerment in the Indian context.

2. Analyse the ways in which Padmanabhan's works engage with the intersection of caste, class and gender in the lived experiences of her characters.
3. Examine the role of technology and modernity in Padmanabhan's dramatic narratives and how they shape the characters' psychological and social well-being.
4. Explain how Padmanabhan uses dramatic irony, satire and other dramatic techniques to critique societal norms and power structures in her plays.
5. Discuss the significance of Padmanabhan's choice to set her plays in both urban and rural settings, and how this reflects her engagement with the diverse realities of contemporary India.

14.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Critically evaluate Manjula Padmanabhan's position as a feminist playwright in the Indian theatrical landscape.
2. Analyse the ways in which Padmanabhan's plays engage with the legacies of colonialism, patriarchy and social injustice in post-independence India.

14.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Kim, Jodi. "Debt, the Precarious Grammar of Life, and Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2014, pp. 215–32.
- Padmanabhan, Manjula. *Blood and Laughter: Plays*. Hachette UK, 2020.
- ---. *Getting There*. Hachette India, 2020.
- ---. *Harvest*. Aurora Metro Publications Ltd., 2018.
- ---. *Hidden Fires: Monologues*. Seagull Books, 2003.
- ---. *Laughter and Blood: Performance Pieces*. Hachette UK, 2020.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. "The Heroine's Progress in Recent Women's Fiction." *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3/4, 1996, pp. 222–38.
- Ray, Shubhra. "Manjula Padmanabhan and the Question of Problematizing Embodied Gender Identity." *Female Body Image and Beauty Politics in Contemporary Indian Literature and Culture*, edited by Srirupa Chatterjee and Garg Shweta Rao, Temple University Press, 2024.

Unit-15: *Lights Out*: Background, Plot, Characters

Structure

15.0 Introduction

15.1 Objectives

15.2 *Lights Out*: Background, Plot and Characters

15.2.1 Setting

15.2.2 Plot

15.2.2.1 Scene One

15.2.2.2 Scene Two

15.2.2.3 Scene Three

15.2.3 Characters

15.2.3.1 Leela

15.2.3.2 Bhasker

15.2.3.3 Mohan

15.2.3.4 Naina

15.2.3.5 Surinder

15.2.3.5 Frieda

15.3 Learning Outcomes

15.4 Glossary

15.5 Sample Questions

15.6 Suggested Learning Resources

15.0 Introduction

Dear Learners, we should understand that a play, unlike other literary genres, is primarily written to be performed. While reading a play attention should always be paid to its performative aspects as well. For instance, instead of just being aware of the year of publication of the play, try to find out the year of its first performance. Make yourselves aware of the production details. These details include knowledge of who produced the play, who directed it, who were the cast members etc. Details such as these are often given in the beginning of the play. One way to enjoy reading a play is to imagine yourself as a director. If you are to direct a play you will have to read the text very closely. Stage directions are of immense help to directors, actors and readers as it helps them by providing very specific, and often, crucial details. It also helps one to **visualize** the play.

Reading the play is crucial for understanding this unit. I hope you will try to visualize the play as you read.

In this unit, we will learn some important elements – such as **Setting, Plot and Character** – of Manjula Padmanabhan’s play, *Lights Out*. These elements are important and help to carry the dramatic action forward. While reading the play, learners are encouraged to pay attention to these elements.

Task 1

Read the play closely. Pay attention to the stage directions as it will help you visualize and understand the play better.

15.1 Objectives

This Unit will offer a close reading of the text analysing elements such as setting, plot and character. The objectives of this Unit are to:

- understand the use of dramatic elements such as setting, plot and character.
- examine the contemporary social relevance of the play.
- appreciate the dramatic aesthetics of the play.

15.2 *Lights Out*: Setting, Plot and Characters

Manjula Padmanabhan wrote her first play, *Lights Out*, in 1984. It was first performed in 1985 as a rehearsed reading in the Theatre Arts Workshop, Madras by Ranvir Shah. In 1986 and 1987 it was performed in Mumbai by Sol Theatre Company at Prithvi Theatre. Since then, the play has been staged at various theatres globally. The play is based on an eyewitness account of a gang-rape. As the incident left an **indelible** impression on the playwright, she wanted to write about it but in a medium other than fiction or journalism. It is on the suggestion of a friend that she decided to write a play about the shocking incident.

15.2.1 Setting

The locale or time and place in which a story is told are termed setting. In drama the term may even refer to the scenery or props. The play is set in the sixth floor of an upper middle-class apartment building in Bombay. The entire play takes place in the drawing cum dining area of the

apartment. The characters witness the gang-rapes which take place in the neighbouring building through a large window, which is important to the play. The **horrific** act of rape is never shown on stage; we neither see the victims nor the **assailants**. It is through the characters who are inside the apartment that we get to know what happens outside. Regarding this, Padmanabhan writes in her 'Introduction' to the play in the collected volume of her plays, *Blood and Laughter*, that:

One thing that was clear to me from the outset was that the audience must never see the "action". I have long believed that the depictions of rape are enormously titillating to viewers. I was determined not to offer up that form of entertainment. The spectacle of a woman pleading, attempting to resist, flailing about and eventually succumbing to her oppressor is, I believe, deeply satisfying to the audiences. (Padmanabhan 3-4)

By not showing the act of rape on stage, Padmanabhan focuses on the conversations inside the apartment. It is through these conversations that we get an **insight** not only into what is happening outside but also into the people who are inside the apartment. We see the characters discussing what happens outside at length – how to help, whether to help, if the victim deserves help etc. – without any **compassion** towards the victim. The discussion which takes place in the comfort of the apartment shows the apathy of upper middle-class society towards others.

Check your progress

1. Lights Out is Manjula Padmanabhan's first play. (True/False)
2. The play is set in a small town in Kerala. (True/ False)
3. The play is based on an eye-witness account of a gang rape. (Ture/False)

15.2.2 Plot

Plot is a literary term used to describe the sequence of events that make up a story. The play, *Lights Out*, is divided into three scenes. Following is a brief scene-wise plot summary of the play.

15.2.2.1 Scene One:

As we told you, the play is set in the sixth-floor apartment building in Bombay. When the play begins, we see Bhasker enter the apartment; he calls out to Frieda (the maid) to bring him tea and settles on the sofa with the newspaper. Bhasker doesn't pay much attention to Leela (his wife) when she comes from the bedroom. Leela is **anxious** and asks Bhasker if he had called the police. Bhasker says he forgot about it. He does not seem interested in engaging in the conversation. Leela accuses him of not caring about how she feels. She tells him that she is worried, tensed and

frightened whole day and has even stopped sending her children to play outside. Bhasker assures her that they cannot hurt her and asks her not to make too much of it. However, his assurance does little to calm Leela. In the first scene we are neither shown/told what is it that frightens Leela nor are we given any idea about who are the people they are referring as ‘they’. However, there are ample suggestions and references to a crime that seems to be happening there. From their conversations we get to know that “there’s a building under construction next door and that every night, in the compound... [they] can see a crime being committed.” (Scene i). The crime itself is only referred as ‘it’ and ‘that’ in the scene. This leaves the readers to wonder what the crime could be and thus invokes suspense in the play.

Bhasker, however, is not interested in reporting the crime to the police in spite of Leela’s repeated requests. He finds various excuses not to report the crime, such as: the police may enquire why they didn’t report it before, or may tell them what happens in neighbour’s compound is none of their business, police may not even turn up even if they report, they might say it is the responsibility of the owner of the building, etc. To which Leela responds, “But the owners aren’t there. The building’s just been built. Surely anyone can see that. It’s got all its rooms and its windows and its lights, but there’s no one living there yet, so there’s no one to watch what happens there. Except us.” (Scene i). Through Leela’s response we learn that it is their responsibility to report the crime as no one other than the residents of their building know about the crime. She insists that they call the police and that she cannot bear how this has affected their lives. She is anguished that she cannot even invite friends for dinner as that is the time when the crime occurs. However, to Leela’s great surprise Bhasker reveals that he has already invited his friend, Mohan Ram, for dinner. Leela isn’t sure what to do about it, but Bhasker assures her that everything will be alright; they will keep the window shut, draw the curtains and play some music.

Leela continues to complain how the noise from outside affects her. Bhasker tells her that she is playing into their hands by worrying about it. He insists that she should learn to ignore the noise. He suggests that she should do as her yoga teacher says and meditate. Leela says mediation does not work anymore. However, she decides to try harder and tries to meditate. Meanwhile, the doorbell rings and she gets agitated. Bhasker tries to calm her as it was only the milk boy who had come to collect money. Throughout Scene One a sense of suspense, fear and **foreboding** is **evoked** through the character of Leela. It is her fear and anxiety that makes the audience curious about the crime. The scene ends as they decide what to serve for dinner.

15.2.2.2 Scene Two:

Scene Two begins as Mohan arrives. After initial small talk they sit down with their drinks. However, any attempt at conversation seems to be in vain as they all seem very uncomfortable. Leela is tense and keeps constantly looking at the watch. She seems to be **apprehensive** that Mohan will find out about the crime that happens outside when the noise begins at its usual time. However, Leela is shocked when she finds out that Mohan knows about it when he bluntly asks when it is going to begin. Leela fails to understand why anyone would accept an invitation when they know that a crime occurs nearby. Mohan, to her shock, reveals that he insisted on coming as he wanted to witness it. Mohan tells her that one doesn't often get a chance to stand and watch a crime being committed. Bhasker and Mohan add that when a crime happens one is often too close for comfort or might even end up getting hurt. However, this is "just far enough not to get involved, just close enough to see everything clearly" (Scene ii), says Mohan. Bhasker and Mohan feel that there is no harm in watching a crime, whereas Leela is influenced by her friend Sushila's view that "we are a part of... of what happens outside. That by watching it, we're making ourselves responsible" (Scene i) and that "if you can stop a crime, you must – or else you're helping it happen..." (Scene ii). However, Bhasker and Mohan are quick to dismiss it by labelling her an intellectual. According to them intellectuals confuse simple things. They maintain that there is no harm in merely watching a crime. They argue that watching a crime doesn't necessarily mean that they are **obliged** to help the victim. Throughout the rest of the scene, we see Bhasker and Mohan coming up with excuses to avoid helping the victim. They discuss in detail whether the screaming that they hear is a cry for help, if the crying is actual crying and so on. When Leela says, "I think whenever someone really screams, it must be for help. Or else why scream?" (Scene ii), Mohan calls her naïve and says, "people scream for all sorts of reasons!" (Scene ii). Bhasker gives different reasons due to which a person might scream: if they are having a nightmare, due to domestic violence and that some may even scream for the mere pleasure of screaming. However, they rule out these reasons. According to them it cannot be a nightmare as they were not asleep; it doesn't look like domestic abuse as there were no parents or youngsters and all involved were of the same age; the screaming, Leela says, cannot be out of pleasure as there was lot of crying and gurgling which sounded frightening. Mohan says he doesn't like to get **entangled** in people's affairs unless it is a case of murder. Thus, they keep finding excuses to avoid helping. They also rule out the possibility that it could be torture as they feel it is too controlled and **exhibitionist** to be a torture.

When Leela and Bhasker inform Mohan that there has been talk in the building that the windows of the residents who keep their lights on have been smashed, a man's car was covered with filth and his family was threatened, Mohan suggests that they should be **persecuted**. The moment he suggests they should call the police, Bhasker immediately says that they had just heard the story and are not sure if it is true. However, Mohan also uses this as an excuse not to help. He says, "... if they are going to be aggressive, then where's the question of going to their help." (Scene ii). He conveniently clubs both the assailants and the victim together as "aggressive" and hence undeserving of their help. Bhasker argues that it cannot be the victim as they are usually held down by four assailants. From Bhasker's further descriptions it is evident that the crime that takes place is gang rape of different victims each night and both assailants and the victims are poor. Mohan is relieved hearing this, he feels they have no obligation to interfere "as long as it's poor attacking the poor ... you know how it is... they live their lives and we live ours." (Scene ii).

Mohan suddenly comes with the suggestion that it could be a religious ceremony or **sacred** ritual and eagerly asks if there were any objects around like carved stones or figurines. Bhasker immediately buys into the idea as that would mean they wouldn't have to do anything about it. They feel that explains why no one had come to their help and why police haven't come as no one can interfere when it is a religious matter. Leela, however, finds it difficult to believe that it is a religious ceremony as the victims appears to cry out in pain. Bhasker and Mohan give examples of things people do which are painful but are done willingly either by themselves or by others, such as, Sadhus sitting on nails or smouldering coal, self-flagellation, circumcision, ear and nose piercing etc. They explain the lack of religious objects, screaming and music by saying unlike the religions known to them, new religions might take time to evolve, and the initiation rites of these new faiths could be quite barbaric. As they continue to talk a faint indistinct sound begins. Leela immediately asks Frieda to bring candles and put out the lights. Scene Two ends as they move towards the dining table.

15.2.2.3 Scene Three:

When Scene Three begins Bhasker, Leela and Mohan are eating at the table. The lights are off and the table is lit by candles. The curtains on the windows are drawn. One can hear "unmistakable sounds of a woman screaming for help" (Scene iii) from outside the window. The cry for help is initially distinct with words such as "let me go", "help me" and so on but later the screaming sounds increasingly jagged and tired.

Leela is unable to eat and is worried. She says she hates the sound which comes from outside whether it is the sound of a religious ceremony or not. Mohan agrees that the sound indeed is unpleasant. Leela asks Frieda if the children had dinner and in doing so ends up revealing that the children were not asleep as she had told Mohan earlier. She says that she had been locking the children up in the guest room so that they don't see what happens outside. She admits that often they fall asleep without having dinner. Bhasker and Mohan suggests that she should let the children watch what goes outside but Leela is determined not to. As they discuss this, Leela's school friend, Naina, arrives. Since they were all eating by candlelight she wonders if it is someone's birthday. They try their best to distract Naina from the noise from outside by raising their own voice. When Naina asks about the sound, they pretend not to hear it. They try to convince her that it is a programme put up by the slum dwellers to celebrate a religious ceremony. Naina, however, is not fooled by their explanations and insists that she can clearly hear someone's cry for help. In spite of their best efforts to stop her from looking out, she looks out. She is extremely shocked and is unable to express what she witnesses.

Bhasker stops Naina from mentioning what she just witnessed saying that Leela is hypersensitive. Naina is horrified to know that it happens every day. Leela takes Naina to the bedroom as she starts retching upon hearing a fresh bout of screaming. Bhasker and Mohan, however, continue to watch from the window and wonder if it could be an act of **exorcism**. It is through their conversation that we learn that the victim is a woman and that four men are beating and kicking her around the stomach, chest and face. Her legs are held apart as she struggles. She bleeds profusely as she is dragged on the concrete. Even after witnessing all this, Bhasker and Mohan are not ready to accept what is really happening. It is Naina who makes them face the reality by asking "It's a rape, isn't it? (Scene iii). When Bhasker and Mohan try to dismiss it by saying that it is exorcism, Naina tells them:

You're ... you're mad! Both of you – you're talking nonsense! Just one look outside the window and you'll know it's rape! ... Three men holding down one woman, with her legs pulled apart, while the fourth thrusts his – organ – into her! What would *you* call that – a poetry reading? (Scene iii)

The onus of proving that it is rape falls on Naina as the two men continue to deny it. They ask her, if all that those men wanted was to have sex, then why would they resort to so much violence. Naina explains that "Most forms of rape, especially gang rape, are accompanied by extreme physical violence!" (Scene iii). The men, however, refuse to accept that and try to argue

that the woman must be a whore. Leela doesn't seem to care whether it is an exorcism or rape, she just wants to call the police and stop it. Her only concern is that it is happening in her neighbourhood and is disturbing her peace. She seems indifferent towards the plight of the woman who is being violently gang raped. Bhasker and Mohan argue that a decent woman would never submit to rape. They conveniently ignore the fact that she is being held against her wish by four men who are violently assaulting her. Ignoring the fact that the woman had been continuously calling for help, they proclaim that a **whore** is not a decent woman and, therefore, cannot be raped! Annoyed and frustrated by their absurd logic Naina asks them what the point is of being decent if it is only decent woman who gets raped! As they continue to argue if she is a prostitute and whether prostitutes deserve to be rescued, Leela, unable to take it anymore, becomes hysterical and screams.

Leela, not ready to hear any more excuses, insists that they call police immediately. As Bhasker tries to call the police, Surinder, Naina's husband, arrives. They inform him about Leela's condition and that it is caused due to the sounds coming from outside. Surinder looks out from the window and realizes what is going on outside. He becomes very angry; wants to go out and "wipe them out!" (Padmanabhan 51). Others try to **dissuade** him in vain. He feels that the assailants are doing it in open to disturb and frighten them as they know everyone can see the rape from the window and that no one will do anything about it. He also points out that there is no point in calling police as they won't do anything. Eventually, all of them start discussing the best way to confront them. Surinder suggests that they should attack them with knives, but they decide against it as that would require them to overpower the assailants which they feel is too risky. Mohan, however, feels that it would be better to take petrol and set them on fire. Bhasker suggests they should instead throw acid on them. As they discuss the merits and demerits of these ideas, Mohan comes up with the idea that it would be better to take pictures and publish them in newspapers. He feels they could even make lot of money out of it. He argues that there will be high demand for the pictures as people hardly get to see pictures of a gangrape. Everyone ignores Naina when she says such photographs are rare only because "most people don't just stand around taking pictures" (Padmanabhan 58) hinting that they should try to stop the violence rather than find excuses not to. Surinder, however, continues to insist that they should beat them up. While they continue to discuss, Naina looks outside the window and tells them that they need not bother to do anything anymore as there is no one out there.

The play ends as the cast moves aside so that the audience can have a clear view of the brief messages projected on the curtains. Following messages appears on the curtains, each slide stays on for about 5 seconds:

“This play is based on an eyewitness account. The incident took place in Santa Cruz, Bombay, 1982.”

“The characters are fictional. The incident is a fact”.

“In the real life, as in the play, a group of ordinary middle-class people chose to stand and watch while a woman was being brutalized in a neighbouring compound.”

“In real life, as in the play, the incident took place over a period of weeks.”

“And in real life, as in the play, no one went to the aid of the victims.” (Padmanabhan 59).

The note by the playwright at the end of the play offers an alternative to projecting messages on the curtains. She suggests that if it is difficult to arrange a projector, the theatre lights can be dimmed and the texts of the slides can be read in a “quiet, unemotional tone, with distinct pauses between each message” (Padmanabhan 59).

15.2.3 Characters

Character is one the most important elements of a play. A character is a person, being, creature, thing or an animal that drives the story forward. It is almost impossible to stage a play without characters in it. Characters, along with other elements such as plot and dialogues, carry the play forward. In the play, *Lights Out*, the characters such as Bhasker, Leela and Frieda are introduced in the first scene itself; Mohan is introduced in the second scene; and Naina and Surinder are introduced in the third scene. Leela and Bhasker’s children, Leela’s friend Sushila, assailants and the victims are only mentioned but never appear on stage. Nevertheless, unlike the rest, the victim’s cry for help can be heard even though what happens to her is not shown.

Task 2: Read the stage directions about the characters given at the beginning of the play. Make note of how each character is described: their physical appearance, their temperament, etc. Read the playwright’s note on the character Frieda carefully.

15.2.3.1 Leela:

Leela is one of the central characters of the play. Throughout the play she is depicted as disturbed and anxious. Leela, unlike her husband, Bhasker, is unable to ignore the sound that comes through her window. The sound, which we later discover in the play is a woman’s cry for help, has affected her life badly. She says it has affected her so much so that she cannot get it out of her mind. She tells Bhasker that she is nervous and anxious all the time and insists that he calls

police. She locks her children in the guest room and does not even allow them to go and play outside as she is constantly worried about them. Till the very end of the play, we find her repeatedly insisting that they call the police.

Leela never looks outside the window although the crime has been taking place for some time now. She does not seem to care about the victim, her only concern seems to be that the sound disturbs her. She tells Bhasker:

But their sounds come inside, inside my nice clean house, and I can't push them out!... If only they didn't make such racket, I wouldn't mind so much!... Why do they have to do it here? Why can't they go somewhere else? (Scene i)

Leela is indifferent to the crime being committed in her neighbourhood. She is only troubled due to the close proximity of the crime. If it were to happen elsewhere it wouldn't affect her at all. She wants the police to intervene only so that her neighbourhood can be free of them and their "dirty, ugly sounds".

Leela tells her husband that her friend Sushila had said that, "we are part of ... what happens outside. That by watching it, we're making ourselves responsible" (Scene i). However, she **absolves** her of all responsibility because she has never watched the crime happening. Throughout we find that Leela never does anything to stop the crime, she only keeps asking others to call police but never tries to do so herself. Later in the play, when Naina reveals that it is a gang rape that is taking place outside, Leela after her initial shock says, "I don't care what it is. I want to call the police and have this horrible nuisance stopped" (Padmanabhan 45). She is indifferent to the plight of the victim.

Leela, like most of the other characters in the play, represents the apathy of middle-class society towards the poor. Her indifference towards the victim is evidence of the same. When Bhasker and Mohan start victim-blaming by saying that "a decent woman would never submit to this sort of thing" or suggest that she must be a whore and, hence, doesn't deserve help, Leela never questions them and easily agrees with their absurd patriarchal reasoning.

15.2.3.2 Bhasker

Bhasker, Leela's husband, is a "middle-income-level government officer" in his late thirties. The play is set in Bhasker and Leela's apartment. From their building they can see the crime happening in the compound of the neighbouring building which is under construction. Bhasker, unlike Leela is completely unaffected by what happens outside. He firmly believes that they have no business in interfering in what happens outside. In spite of Leela's repeated pleas to

call the police, Bhasker never does. Instead, he finds various excuses to absolve himself from any responsibility and asks Leela to pretend they are not there.

Bhasker, like Leela, is unsympathetic to the victim's plight. However, he takes **voyeuristic** pleasure in watching what goes outside. He even invites his friend, Mohan, for dinner so that he can also witness the gang rape. Leela is not only surprised that Bhasker invited Mohan knowing very well what will happen outside at the designated hour but also shocked that Mohan agreed to come, eager to witness the crime. Though both Bhasker and Mohan are eager to watch and deliberate on the crime but they don't want to have anything to do with it. Throughout the play, they try to dissuade Leela who insists on calling police.

The indifference of Bhasker and Mohan is symbolic of the indifference and apathy of the society towards the suffering of the poor. Bhasker, including all other characters in the play, see the poor distinctly different from themselves. This difference is heightened in the play using dialogues such as:

Bhasker: Who can tell! With *these people outside*, no one can say why *they* do what *they* do!
(Scene ii, Emphasis added)

Bhasker: You know how it is – all of them out there look exactly alike. (Scene ii)

Bhasker: *They're like animals*, really. Decent people like us, we can't understand their lives at all. (Scene iii, Emphasis added)

The above statements clearly show that he looks down upon the poor. Due to this class difference, he feels immune to such crimes and is unable to understand his wife's fear. His apathy comes from his inability to see the poor as human beings. Though the gang rape happens in public view, Bhasker is eager to maintain that it is a private matter so that he does not have to interfere. Both Bhasker and Mohan hide the nature of the crime from Leela as Bhasker claims that she is "over-sensitive" and would get upset. Bhasker's refusal to acknowledge the rape, by using Leela as an excuse, reflects how patriarchal society likes to brush uncomfortable truths under the carpet especially when the victim is a woman. Instead of helping both Bhasker and Mohan try to shift the blame to the victim. Conveniently ignoring the woman's cry for help, they claim that a decent woman would never go out with four men. Even though it is evident that the woman is being brutalized against her wish, they continue to find fault with the victim. They even argue that the woman must be a whore and that a whore does not deserve any help. Thus, they absolve themselves of all responsibility.

It is interesting to note that, though Bhasker thinks that he is better than the people who are outside, but his treatment of women is no better. He dismisses Leela's genuine anxiety and concern saying that she is being "over-sensitive" and calls Sushila a fool as she has told Leela that if one watches a crime and does nothing then one is culpable. Both Bhasker and Mohan do not listen to any of the woman in the play. They are, in many ways, as helpless as the woman outside. Bhasker represents urban middle-class self-centered individualistic patriarchal society.

15.2.3.3 Mohan

Mohan is Bhasker's "suave and affluent" friend who is in his late thirties. Mohan is introduced in the second scene in the play. Bhasker invites him to dinner and he comes in the hope that he will get to see the gang rape. Leela is shocked and fails to understand why anyone would want to see such a gruesome crime. Mohan, however, asks her, "how often can you stand and watch... a crime being committed right in front of you?" (Scene ii). Both Bhasker and Mohan take voyeuristic pleasure in watching the horrific crime. It is interesting to note the stage directions which tells us how Mohan reacts to the violent gang rape. The stage directions read, "*MOHAN remains at the window mesmerized*" (Scene iii) and "*mildly exhilarated, turns from the window to speak to BHASKER, who has come up to stand next to him*" (Scene iii). Words such as "**mesmerized**" and "**exhilarated**" show the voyeuristic pleasure he gets by watching the rape. However, the playwright, knowing the possibility of voyeuristic pleasure that a crime like rape might offer to some viewers, refrains from showing rape on stage. It is mainly through the dialogues of Bhasker and Mohan that we get to know the details of the crime being committed outside.

Being eloquent, Mohan can influence the way other characters think and act. Even though he is witnessing the crime for the first time, he speaks more authoritatively than Bhasker. Bhasker eagerly agrees to Mohan's views as it is in his best interest. Both of them are self-centered and do not feel any sense of civic responsibility. While they were discussing whether they should or should not offer help to the victim, Mohan asks:

Unless they actually call for help, is it our business to go? *That's* the question!... After all, it may be something private, a domestic fight, how can we intervene?... Personally, I'm against becoming entangled in other people's private lives. Outsiders can never really be the judge of who is right and who is wrong. (Scene ii)

Like Bhasker, he is content to be a passive observer. Both symbolize patriarchal indifference and apathy towards the plight of the victim.

As they are completely unaffected by what goes outside, they are unable to understand Leela's fear and worries and dismiss it as her over-sensitivity. Though they are aware of the rape, by not naming the act they refuse to acknowledge it. They try their best to give it other names – that it could be a ceremony celebrating some religious festival, a case of domestic violence, an act of exorcism etc., – instead of acknowledging the violent rape of the woman. Their refusal to acknowledge the crime is in a way their refusal to acknowledge their own civic responsibility. Like Bhasker, he too dismisses Sushila's views by sarcastically calling her an intellectual. Their patriarchal attitude is evident from the extent they go to blame the victim. Ironically, their absurd reasoning, as they try to prove that the woman is an indecent woman and a whore, ends up revealing more about their own selfishness than about the woman.

Despite his best efforts to portray himself as different from the violent men outside, in the third scene we see that given a chance he himself behaves as violently as them. The eagerness to address the problem through violence is in deep contrast with his hesitation to offer any help to the victim. The playwright shows that the men inside the apartment are no less violent than the assailants in the neighbouring compound. One of the important messages that the play tries to put across is that violence is not limited to the people of a particular class. The play not only portrays the apathy of urban middle-class but also the violence that they are capable of. They do not have any problem with Surinder's call for violent attack on the assailants if they are not caught committing the crime. Their skewed sense of morality is brought out in the play through dialogues which borders towards absurdity. Through characters such as the men in the play, the playwright raises vital questions regarding civic responsibility and morality. The play shows selfish and violent nature of men like Mohan.

15.2.3.4 Naina

Naina is Leela's friend who unexpectedly visits her one evening. Naina is introduced in the third scene of the play. Naina stiffens when she hears the scream which Bhasker and Leela try to mask by raising their voice. All of them try to hide the crime being committed in the neighbouring compound in vain. Naina looks from the window in spite of their warnings only to be deeply shaken by what she witnesses. The gruesome violence makes her retch as she struggles to speak. Even before she could say anything Bhasker and Mohan stop her as they do not want Leela to get agitated. However, it is through Leela that we get to know of the actual crime of a violent gang rape that was being committed outside. Though the others are in denial, she is the only one to acknowledge the rape in the play. It is her acknowledgement of the crime that opens

up a discussion on the issue of rape which brings out the deep-seated biases and prejudices of other characters. Unlike Leela, whose class consciousness stops her from completely empathizing with the victim, Naina is genuinely horrified and concerned.

Naina is the only character who advocates on behalf of the victim. She is the only one who does not blame her. Naina is shocked by Bhasker and Mohan's absurd reasoning. Initially, they refuse to accept that the men are raping the woman, then they try to shift the blame to the victim by suggesting that she must be an indecent woman or a whore. They argue that a whore does not deserve to be helped. Their arguments represent societal prejudice towards woman and reluctance to acknowledge sexual violence. Naina raises very important concerns in the play such as: Isn't a whore also a woman? Can't a whore be raped? Shouldn't a whore have the right to choose the clients? While the men categorize women into decent and indecent, it is Naina who addresses the importance of consent in any sort of intimacy. Exasperated by their absurd reasoning she asks them, "But then, if only decent women can be raped, what is the point of being decent" (Scene iii). They, however, dismiss her question by saying that she is getting all confused.

The men in the play never listen to women. Though Naina is the most sensible of all characters, she is silenced by men. The playwright effectively shows the plight of women in the society regardless of their class by showing the helplessness of the victim alongside the helplessness of the women inside the apartment. All the women are relegated to passive roles either through coercion or through violence. When Naina tries to dissuade Surinder from his violent plans, he verbally abuses her saying, "Shut up or I'll kick your teeth in!" (Scene iii). Ironically, Surinder who is outraged by the assailant's violent abuse of the women, is blind to his own violence and treatment of women.

In the play, Naina is the only character who exhibits a sense of civic responsibility and sound morality. While others excitedly plot an attack on the assailants, she moves away from them and doesn't participate in it. She is the only one who wants to stop the violence rather than perpetuate it in the name of upholding women's virtue. It is she who notices when the screams from outside stop and tells others that they are too late. She seems to be only person who feels that they should have prioritized saving the woman than punishing the men.

15.2.3.5 Surinder

Naina's husband, Surinder is introduced in the third scene of the play. He arrives little later than Naina as he had to go and get fuel. He gets furious when he sees the woman being raped and

immediately decides to attack and “wipe them out!” (Scene iii). He believes that people who rape must be killed. When others try to dissuade him, he says:

What do you think those turds are doing? Just screwing one woman, is it? And they have nowhere else to go so they come and do it here, is it? After putting on the spotlights, so that all you nice people can watch?... They’re screwing this whole bloody colony dammit! They know that we’re all standing here! Shitting in our pants, too scared to do anything but watch! They’re making jackasses of us!... Don’t you see that? (Scene iii)

He is **affronted** by the spectacle and wants to act immediately, without even thinking about the consequences. He feels that there is no use in going to the police as they are not going to do anything concrete. He believes that the issue will be solved at once if they were to handle it by themselves and accuses others of being cowards when they hesitate. Eventually, he is able to persuade everyone other than his wife, Naina, who does not approve of violence. They animatedly discuss pros and cons of different methods – whether to use knives, petrol, acid or to take pictures and published it – to confront the assailants. All their focus is on punishing the culprit rather than rescuing the victim. They hardly give her any thought.

Ironically, Surinder who finds violence against women abhorrent is blind to his own violence. He doesn’t allow his wife to voice her opinion and when she does speak, he verbally abuses and threatens her. He finds the violence of the poor criminal but does not think of himself as violent or abusive. By using the character of Surinder, the playwright tries to show that the urban middle-class men can also be equally violent and abusive. He silences Naina and renders her passive. There is hardly any difference between the men outside and inside the apartment when it comes to the treatment of women. All of them try to subjugate woman either through coercion or violence.

15.2.3.5 Frieda

Frieda, the cook, is not given any dialogue in the play though she is on stage throughout the play. As you read the play it is important to pay attention to the stage directions which is about Frieda. Since she does not talk in the play, we get to know her only through stage directions and dialogues of other characters. Playwright’s note on Frieda’s role in the beginning of the play reads: *She remains constantly in sight, performing her duties in a mute, undemanding way. The other characters pay no attention to her except to give her orders. When she has no specific task at hand, she can be seen moving about in the kitchen. The audience should be allowed to wonder what she thinks.* (Padmanabhan 5)

As mentioned above, no one notices or acknowledges her presence unless it is to give her orders. We need to ask ourselves what purpose does Frieda's character serve in the play and why is it that she doesn't say anything in the play. More importantly, we need to ask if Frieda will be heard if she were to speak. In the play, we see how Leela and Naina are relegated to passive roles. Despite Leela repeatedly asking to call the police no one listens to her. Naina is threatened and silenced by her husband when she disagrees with his plan. In a patriarchal space such as the one portrayed in the play; Frieda's voice won't be heard. Perhaps the only way for her to exist in such a space is through self-effacement. We do not get to know what Frieda thinks of the rape that happens outside. Though she is present throughout, she is denied personhood by others. While Leela and Naina's opinions are disregarded by others, Frieda does not even have space to voice her opinion let alone her being heard. The play shows how each of the women suffer in different ways in a patriarchal society irrespective of their social class. However, Frieda's subjugation is extreme, she is almost treated as non-human. This shows how even women of one class can completely be blind to the existence and concerns of women from another class.

15.3 Learning Outcomes

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

- appreciate the play and understand its social relevance.
- develop an understanding of dramatic elements, such as setting, plot and character.
- have a deep understanding of each of the characters in the play.
- offer a gendered reading of the play.
- critically think about the play and the concerns that it raises.

15.4 Glossary

Visualize: to form a picture of someone or something in your mind, in order to imagine or remember them.

Setting: The time and place in which a story is told.

Plot: the sequence of events in a play, story, novel or film.

Character: A character is a person, animal, being, creature, or thing in a story.

Indelible: Impossible to remove or forget

Horrific: Causing horror; dreadful.

Assailant: A person who physically attacks another.

Insight: An accurate and deep understanding of someone or something.

Compassion: A strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them.

Anxious: Feeling or showing worry, nervousness, or unease about something.

Foreboding: A feeling that something bad will happen; fearful apprehension.

Evoke: To cause something to be remembered or expressed.

Apprehensive: Anxious or fearful that something bad or unpleasant will happen.

Obligated: Legally or morally bound to do something.

Entangled: To become twisted together with or caught in.

Exhibitionist: Someone who tries to attract attention to themselves by their behaviour.

Persecute: To punish in a manner designed to injure or grieve.

Sacred: Considered to be holy and deserving respect, especially because of a connection with a god or religion.

Exorcism: The process of forcing an evil spirit to leave a person or place by using prayers or magic.

Whore: A female prostitute. The term is used derogatively.

Dissuade: To persuade someone not to do something.

Absolve: To free from guilt or blame.

Voyeuristic: Getting pleasure from secretly watching other people in sexual situations or naked.

Suave: Having a pleasant and charming manner that may not be sincere.

Mesmerize: To capture the complete attention of someone.

Exhilarated: To feel very happy, excited and elated.

Affront: To offend or insult.

15.5 Sample Questions

15.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. When was the play *Lights Out* published?
 - a. 1918 b. 1981
 - c. 1919 d. 1990

2. Name the character who is only mentioned but never appears in the play.
 - a. Kanika b. Susmita
 - c. Sushila d. Naina
3. The play *Lights Out* is about _____.
 - a. A violent gang rape b. Patriarchy
 - c. Social apathy d. All the above
4. Name the character who is silent throughout the play.
 - a. Frieda b. Naina
 - c. Leela d. Surinder
5. Who asks, “if only decent women can be raped, what is the point of being decent?”
 - a. Leela b. Sushila
 - c. Naina d. None of the above
6. The play, *Lights Out*, is based on _____.
 - a. An eye-witness account b. A documentary film
 - c. A book d. A movie
7. Stage directions help _____.
 - a. Readers b. Actors
 - c. Directors d. All the above
8. Leela locks her children inside the room _____.
 - a. So that they can finish the homework. b. So that they don’t disturb her.
 - c. So that they do not see the crime outside d. None of the above.
9. In the play _____.
 - a. The victim never appears on stage
 - b. The assailants never appear on stage
 - c. Both the victim and assailants appear on stage
 - d. Neither the victim nor the assailants appear on stage.
10. _____ refuses to take part in the plan to attack the assailants.
 - a. Naina b. Leela c. Bhasker d. Mohan

15.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Analyse the importance of Frieda’s character to the play.
2. Examine the ways in which social apathy is portrayed in the play *Lights Out*.
3. Discuss the relevance of stage directions in a play.

4. Examine gender and class as central thematic concerns in the play *Lights Out*.
5. Analyse aspects of realism in Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out*.

15.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. How does the play critique urban middle-class in the play?
2. Examine how the playwright brings out patriarchal prejudices in the play?
3. Is there any difference in the way male and female characters react to the gang rape in the neighbouring compound? Discuss.

15.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Karnad, Girish, "Theatre in India". *Daedalus*. Vol. 118, No. 4, pp. 330-352
- Padmanabhan, Manjula. *Lights Out in Blood and Laughter*. Hachette India, 2020, pp. 3-60.
- Shepherd, Simon and Mick Wallis. *Drama/Theatre/Performance*. Routledge, 2004.

Unit-16: *Lights Out*: Themes, Narrative Technique, Critical Appreciation

Structure

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16.0 Introduction

Manjula Padmanabhan is a celebrated Indian playwright, author and artist known for her significant contributions to Indian literature and art. Her works explore complex themes like gender dynamics, identity, and human existence. As a playwright, Padmanabhan's impact is notable for her bold and unconventional narratives that challenge societal norms and spark critical discussion. For example, her play *Harvest* looks into the ethical dilemmas surrounding organ harvesting and globalisation, while *Lights Out* confronts the pervasive issue of violence against women in India. Through her thought-provoking works, Padmanabhan has established herself as a prominent voice in contemporary Indian theatre.

16.1 Objectives

Upon completion of this Unit, learners will be able to:

- Analyse the major themes of *Lights Out* and how these themes are developed through the play's narrative.
- Evaluate Padmanabhan's use of dramatic techniques and their effectiveness in conveying the play's message.
- Develop a nuanced critical appreciation of the play *Lights Out*, articulating how its themes, characters and dramatic techniques contribute to its overall impact.
- Connect the play to contemporary social issues, personal experiences and broader literary contexts, engaging in discussions about its relevance.

16.2 *Lights Out*: Themes, Dramatic Techniques and Critical Appreciation

16.2.1 Themes:

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* depicts a dystopian reality in India where darkness represents the pervasive threat of violence against women. The play explores the fear, vulnerability and societal complicity that enable such violence. Through her characters, Padmanabhan forces audiences to confront the normalization of sexual assault and the constant threat to women's safety. Furthermore, *Lights Out* examines complex themes of gender, violence, voyeurism and the silence that allows injustice to persist. By illuminating these dark societal issues, Padmanabhan compels viewers to question their perceptions and acknowledge the urgent need for change. In this section we will be looking into these thematic concerns raised in the play.

16.2.1.1 Social Apathy:

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* paints a chilling picture of societal apathy and complicity through the residents' response to the escalating violence against women in the nearby building. The play masterfully uses the symbolic act of switching off the lights – not as a response to a power outage but as a deliberate act of self-preservation – highlighting the characters' moral bankruptcy. This act of retreating into darkness becomes a potent metaphor for their willful ignorance and refusal to acknowledge the suffering unfolding just outside their windows.

The play further underscores the residents' apathy by constantly reminding the audience of the characters' self-proclaimed superiority. They believe themselves to be different from the poor

and feel they have no obligation to intervene. They try to dismiss it as a domestic dispute conveniently ignoring the fact that it is a crime which is taking place very publicly. Bhasker rationalises their own inaction by saying, “Who can tell! With these people outside, no one can say why they do what they do!” (Padmanabhan, 96). This calculated indifference exposes a disturbing truth about how patriarchal structures breed apathy towards violence against women.

Through the chilling symbolism of *Lights Out*, Padmanabhan forces us to confront the bitter reality of a society that chooses to switch off its empathy, retreating into the darkness of indifference. The fact that the violence occurs in a nearby building, not within their own walls, heightens their apathy, revealing a disturbing lack of human connection and responsibility for their fellow human beings. They differentiate themselves from ‘those people’(perpetuating and experiencing violence) absolving themselves of any civic responsibility to intervene. At one point Mohan, Bhasker’s friend, says “ Well, as long as it’s poor attacking the poor... you know how it is... they live their lives and we live ours” (Padmanabhan, 103). They feel that as long as it doesn’t affect them directly, they need not intervene. This deliberate distancing is evident in their language, often referring to the assailants and victims as ‘they’ or ‘them,’ creating a chasm between ‘us’ (the characters who witness the violence from the comfort of their apartment), forcing us to confront the ugliness of their indifference.

Leela, though visibly disturbed by the commotion and violence, embodies a more insidious form of apathy. Her concern stems not from a place of genuine empathy for the victim, but rather from the discomfort of having such brutality occur within her neighbourhood. She is more troubled by the proximity of the violence than the violence itself, for instance she once exclaims, “... how terrible it all is, how it’s invaded our lives, our homes, how we can’t have guests for dinner-” (Padmanabhan, 90).

Adding another layer to this chilling portrayal of societal apathy is the reaction of the male characters. Instead of displaying even a modicum of concern or a desire to help the victim, they are preoccupied with finding justifications for inaction. Their dialogue is littered with excuses, shifting blame, and minimising the severity of the situation. Mohan remarks, “Personally, I’m against becoming entangled in other people’s private lives. Outsiders can never really be the judge of who is right and who is wrong,” (Padmanabhan, 99).

16.2.1.2 Gender roles and patriarchy

Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out* is a powerful critique of a patriarchal society that normalises and perpetuates violence against women. The play exposes the deep-rooted misogyny

that allows men to view women as objects, with their safety and well-being secondary to male comfort and convenience. This patriarchal framework is evident in the male characters' dismissive and indifferent reactions to the violence unfolding around them, as they prioritise their own sense of order and security over that of the others.

The play highlights how patriarchy thrives on silence and complicity. Bhasker actively silences Leela's concerns, dismissing her fears as 'hysteria' and 'overreacting.' This silencing tactic is a common tool used to undermine women's voices and invalidate their experiences, perpetuating a culture where violence against women can continue unchecked.

Furthermore, *Lights Out* exposes how patriarchy conditions women to internalise their own oppression. The female characters, despite their fear and vulnerability, often engage in self-blame and rationalise the violence they witness. This internalized misogyny is evident in Leela and also to an extent in Naina, who appears to be the sanest of them all, gives up advocating for the woman who was being raped and finally remarks, "It's an assault on all of us, to be able to see them and hear them like this-" (Padmanabhan, 121). This equation of themselves with the victims erases the extreme violence that the victims undergo. The assault that the victims suffer cannot be compared to that of their own because, unlike the victims, they are privileged. However, in spite of their privilege Leela and Naina undergo suppression within their families. This reveals how deeply ingrained patriarchal norms can lead women to question themselves rather than challenge the systems that perpetuate their oppression.

The symbolic act of switching off the lights represents a collective surrender to fear and apathy, a choice to remain blind to the realities of gender-based violence. This act of self-preservation through deliberate ignorance is a powerful indictment of a society that prioritises male comfort over female safety. By choosing darkness, the residents become complicit in the violence, their inaction reflecting the deeply ingrained patriarchal values that govern their lives.

Manjula Padmanabhan skillfully dismantles the notion that gender inequality is confined to a particular social stratum. We see that it is not just the poor victims but Leela and Naina also suffer due to patriarchy. Leela, a seemingly independent woman, endures her husband Bhaskar's dismissive and condescending remarks. Naina faces a different, yet equally potent form of silencing from her husband Surinder. Bhaskar silences Leela through patronising explanations and by trivialising her concerns, often framing her anxieties as irrational. On the other hand, Surinder employs a strategy of overt dismissal, labelling Naina's observations as 'nonsense' and refusing to engage with her anxieties. Surinder tells Naina, when she tries to dissuade them from the plan

to attack, “Shut up- or I’ll kick your teeth in!”(Padmanabhan, 125). By not giving any dialogue to Frieda in the play, Padmanabhan makes us think whether a woman who doesn’t belong to the class of people who are in the apartment can have a say at all in what is being discussed when both Leela and Naina are silenced so violently. By portraying these distinct methods of silencing women, either through physical violence or constant dismissal, Padmanabhan exposes the pervasive nature of gender inequality that transcends class distinctions.

Through its portrayal of gender dynamics and the insidious nature of patriarchy, *Lights Out* serves as a powerful call to action. The play challenges the audience to confront their own biases and actively dismantle the systems of oppression that allow violence against women to persist. It is a stark reminder that true equality can only be achieved when we collectively refuse to turn a blind eye to gender-based violence.

16.2.1.3 Violence and Voyeurism

Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out* presents a chilling exploration of violence against women as a stark reality woven into everyday life. The play uses unseen violence in a nearby building to highlight the voyeuristic tendencies of a society that fears and is entertained by female suffering. The audience becomes complicit in this voyeurism and is also forced to confront their role in perpetuating a culture of violence.

The unseen nature of the violence is central to the play’s exploration of voyeurism. The audience, like the characters, only hears the woman’s screams and sounds of struggle, never witnessing the brutality firsthand. This choice forces the audience to confront their own desire to watch and satisfy a morbid curiosity about violence against a female body. The play subtly indicts the audience, implicating them in the voyeuristic act of bearing witness to another’s suffering for their own entertainment.

The characters’ indifference to the violence further heightens the theme of voyeurism. Their conversations reveal a perverse curiosity and desire to be privy to the unfolding horror. This voyeuristic tendency is particularly evident in the character of Mohan, who visits Bhasker only with the intention of watching the crime being committed. He feels the apartment offers perfect vantage point to witness the rape, “... just far enough not to get involved, just close enough to see everything clearly.” (Padmanabhan, 95). His behaviour exemplifies the way in which violence against women has become a form of entertainment, a spectacle to be consumed rather than a tragedy to be condemned. The play’s refusal to show the violence directly forces the audience to confront the ways in which they, like the characters, have become desensitised to female suffering.

Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* exposes the disturbing reality that violence against women has become an inextricable part of the social fabric, a normalised occurrence that is often met with indifference or even morbid fascination.

The play also explores the gendered nature of voyeurism, highlighting how patriarchal structures position men as spectators and women as objects of their gaze. The male characters exhibit a lack of empathy, viewing the victim's suffering as entertainment or a spectacle to be analysed, which underscores how patriarchy normalises and encourages male voyeurism.

The act of switching off the lights can be interpreted as a way of maintaining voyeuristic pleasure. By plunging their apartment into darkness, the residents can convince themselves that they are not participating in the spectacle of violence. However, this darkness becomes a metaphor for their willful ignorance and complicity, as they choose to remain blind to the consequences of their inaction, perpetuating a cycle of violence.

16.2.2 Dramatic Techniques in *Lights Out*

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* is a masterfully crafted theatrical experience that employs a range of dramatic techniques to engage the audience, challenge their perceptions and provoke critical reflection on the pressing issues of societal apathy and the pervasive nature of violence against women. Through her skilful use of various dramatic elements, Padmanabhan creates a chilling and thought-provoking production that resonates deeply with the audience, urging them to confront the uncomfortable realities of this widespread problem.

16.2.2.1 Offstage Violence and Sound Design:

One of the most powerful techniques employed by Padmanabhan in *Lights Out* is the use of offstage violence. The brutal acts at the heart of the play are never shown onstage, but rather conveyed through chilling screams, unsettling thuds, and the characters' varied reactions. This deliberate choice heightens the tension and suspense, forcing the audience to imagine the horrors occurring just beyond their sight. By refusing to visually depict the violence, Padmanabhan avoids desensitising the audience, ensuring that the brutality remains impactful and disturbing throughout the play.

Furthermore, the use of offstage violence compels the audience to confront their own complicity. Like voyeurs, though they are privy to the sounds of suffering, they choose not to take any action. Therefore, the play forces them to question their roles as passive observers. This technique also universalizes the experience of violence against women. The stage directions in the beginning of scene three reads, " From outside the window can also be heard the unmistakable

sounds of a woman screaming for help. Just as in the account made of it, the sound is truly ragged and unpleasant. Initially, it should be vigorous and determined, with distinct words- ‘let me go’, ‘help me!’ and so on- but as the evening progresses it degenerates into a general screaming, sobbing, with a jagged, tired edge to it...” (Padmanabhan, 107). The lack of visual representation allows the unseen acts to represent countless other acts of violence, often hidden from public view, emphasising the pervasiveness of such brutality.

The sound design in *Lights Out* is crucial to creating this unsettling atmosphere. The carefully crafted soundscape, punctuated by screams, silences and the mundane noises of the apartment building, draws the audience into the characters’ world and amplifies the play’s central themes of fear, apathy and complicity.

16.2.2.2 Minimalist Setting and Symbolic Props:

Padmanabhan employs a minimalist setting in *Lights Out*, purposefully focusing the audience’s attention on the characters and their intricate interactions. The play primarily takes place within the confines of a single apartment, a seemingly safe and familiar domestic space that gradually becomes increasingly claustrophobic as the characters’ true, flawed natures are progressively revealed.

The play also utilises a range of symbolic props to enhance its thematic resonance. The most prominent example is the light, which takes on a multi-layered significance. The act of switching off the lights represents not merely a physical gesture of seeking darkness, but also a metaphorical representation of the characters’ willful ignorance and their collective desire to shield themselves from the uncomfortable realities and harsh truths of the outside world. This symbolic use of the light echoes the characters’ attempts to ignore the disturbing violence occurring just beyond their door.

The window in *Lights Out* serves as a powerful symbol. It represents the characters’ conflicted relationship with the violence unfolding outside. The window provides a visual link to the horrific events, drawing the characters in. Yet, they remain passive observers, isolated within their apartment. The window, meant to be a source of light and air, instead becomes a source of fear and anxiety. The characters are compelled to witness the violence, but also terrified of doing so. Their fear leads them to cover the window, cutting off their connection to the outside world. In this way, the window symbolises the characters’ moral paralysis and unwillingness to confront the violence, highlighting their complicity.

Through these minimalist yet evocative theatrical choices, Padmanabhan creates an environment that feels both intimate and oppressive, mirroring the characters' own internal turmoil and the suffocating societal norms that constrain their actions.

16.2.2.3 Realistic Dialogue and Character Development:

Padmanabhan employs realistic dialogue to create believable characters and explore the complexities of human interaction. The characters' conversations, often mundane and laced with humour, stand in stark contrast to the horrific events unfolding offstage, highlighting the characters' capacity for denial and their disturbing ability to compartmentalise violence. For instance:

Bhasker: Listen, knives are not the way. They're too direct.

Mohan: What d'you mean, 'direct'?

Bhasker: With knives, we'll have to overpower them, struggle with them, catch them by surprise- and supposing they turn on us, by chance?

Leela: Oh! It'll be so dangerous!

Surinder: So what do you suggest?

Mohan: How about petrol? We could go and throw some petrol on them-

Bhasker: No, no! Supposing we blow up as well? (Padmanabhan, 125).

The characters in *Lights Out* are not simply one-dimensional representations of good and evil; they are complex individuals grappling with fear, apathy and their own internalised prejudices. Through their interactions and reactions to the violence, Padmanabhan reveals the insidious ways in which societal norms can shape individual behaviour and perpetuate cycles of violence.

16.2.2.4 Open Ending and Audience Interpretation

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* does not provide a satisfying conclusion; instead, it simply ends, leaving the audience in a state of uneasy uncertainty, with the echoes of the violence lingering long after the stage lights have been extinguished.

The final moments of *Lights Out* are often shrouded in darkness, both literally and metaphorically. The violence, always lurking just offstage, threatens to consume the characters and the audience alike. The characters, trapped in their cycles of denial and complicity, offer no solutions, no hope for redemption. They are left to face the consequences of their inaction, their silence a deafening indictment of their collective failure to act.

The open ending is a deliberate artistic choice designed to provoke thought, to challenge the audience to engage with the play's themes on a deeper level. By refusing to provide easy answers, Padmanabhan forces us to confront our own complicity, to ask ourselves uncomfortable questions about our own roles in perpetuating the systems that allow violence to flourish.

What happens after the lights go out? Does the violence end, or does it simply fade back into the shadows, waiting for the next opportunity to erupt? Do the characters learn from their mistakes, or are they doomed to repeat the same patterns of denial and inaction? These are not questions that Padmanabhan answers for us. Instead, she leaves us to grapple with them on our own, to confront the uncomfortable truth that there are no easy solutions, no magical resolutions.

The open ending of *Lights Out* is a call to action, a challenge to break the cycle of violence. It is a reminder that silence is not neutrality; it is complicity. By leaving the audience with more questions than answers, Padmanabhan forces us to confront our own responsibility to challenge injustice, to speak out against violence, and to create a world where the lights never have to go out again.

16.2.3 Critical Appreciation

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* is not a comfortable play. It is a scathing indictment of societal indifference, a chilling examination of violence against women, and a stark reminder of the darkness that can lurk beneath the surface of normality. The play's power lies in its unflinching gaze, its refusal to offer easy answers, and its ability to implicate the audience in the very acts it condemns.

The play's most striking feature is its masterful use of offstage violence. By relegating the brutal acts to the realm of sound, Padmanabhan achieves a chilling effect. The audience is spared graphic imagery, yet the screams, the thuds, the desperate pleas for help, all weave a tapestry of horror far more potent than any visual depiction could achieve. This technique serves a dual purpose: it compels us to confront the violence through our own imaginations, making us complicit in the act of bearing witness, while simultaneously highlighting the ways in which society often turns a blind eye to such atrocities.

The claustrophobic setting of an apartment building becomes a microcosm of a society on the brink of collapse. The characters, far from being heroic figures, are deeply flawed individuals struggling to reconcile their own fears and prejudices with the escalating chaos around them. Their reactions, ranging from denial and apathy to outright complicity, expose the insidious ways in which societal norms can perpetuate cycles of violence.

Padmanabhan masterfully employs black comedy and satire to underscore the play's central themes. The characters' often ludicrous attempts to maintain a semblance of normalcy amidst the unfolding horror serve as a biting commentary on the human capacity for self-deception and denial. This humour, however, never detracts from the gravity of the situation. Instead, it serves to highlight the absurdity of a society that allows such violence to fester in its midst.

Lights Out is not a play that offers easy answers or comforting resolutions. It is a stark reminder of the darkness that exists not just on stage, but in our own lives and communities. The play's enduring power lies in its ability to spark uncomfortable conversations, challenge our assumptions and leave us deeply unsettled, grappling with the implications of what we have witnessed long after the curtain has fallen.

16.6 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this unit on *Lights Out*, learners will be able to:

- Identify and explain the major themes explored in *Lights Out*, providing textual evidence to demonstrate how Padmanabhan develops these themes through plot, character, dialogue and symbolism.
- Critically assess the effectiveness of Padmanabhan's dramatic techniques analysing how these techniques contribute to the play's overall impact and message.
- Construct and articulate a nuanced interpretation of *Lights Out*, clearly explaining how its themes, characters and dramatic techniques work together to create a powerful and thought-provoking theatrical experience.
- Engage in informed discussions about the play's relevance to contemporary social issues, drawing connections between the play's themes and real-world events, personal experiences and broader literary contexts.

16.4 Glossary

Apathy: Lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern, particularly towards issues that generally evoke strong feelings or require action.

Black Comedy: A type of comedy that uses dark, cynical humour to discuss serious, often taboo subjects.

Claustrophobic: Feeling uncomfortable or anxious in small, enclosed spaces; in literature, it refers to creating a tense and oppressive atmosphere.

Complicity: The state of being involved with others in an illegal activity or wrongdoing.

Dramatic Irony: A situation in which the audience knows more about the events of a story than the characters within it.

Gender Roles: Socially constructed roles, behaviours, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women.

Internalised Misogyny: When women unconsciously adopt sexist attitudes and beliefs that **demean** their own gender.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

Minimalist Setting: A style of stage design that uses the bare minimum of scenery and props to convey the environment, often focusing more on the actors and dialogue.

Misogyny: Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.

Open Ending: A narrative that concludes without resolving the main conflicts, leaving the outcome uncertain.

Patriarchy: A social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property.

Satire: The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.

Symbolism: The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.

Thematic Resonance: The way in which themes in a work of art evoke a powerful emotional or intellectual response, often connecting deeply with the audience.

Voyeurism: The practice of gaining sexual pleasure from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity; in a broader sense, it refers to deriving pleasure from observing others in distressing situations.

Willful ignorance: The decision to ignore unpleasant or inconvenient information deliberately.

16.5 Sample Questions

16.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The primary setting of *Lights Out* is _____.

- a) A bustling marketplace
 - b) A rural village
 - c) An urban apartment building
 - d) A war-torn city
2. Which dramatic technique is MOST prominently used by Padmanabhan to depict the central act of violence in the play?
- a) Vivid stage combat
 - b) Graphic visual projections
 - c) Offstage sound effects
 - d) Monologues delivered by victims
3. The characters in *Lights Out* represent:
- a) Heroic figures who fight against injustice
 - b) Ordinary individuals struggling with their own complicity
 - c) Idealised versions of everyday people
 - d) One-dimensional stereotypes with no depth
4. The genre of *Lights Out* can be best described as a:
- a) Romantic comedy
 - b) Historical drama
 - c) Social satire
 - d) Psychological thriller
5. The open ending of *Lights Out* is designed to:
- a) Provide a sense of closure and resolution
 - b) Offer easy answers to complex social problems
 - c) Provoke reflection and challenge the audience's assumptions
 - d) Leave the audience feeling hopeless and despairing
6. How do most characters in *Lights Out* react to the violence happening around them?
- a) They try to help the victim and stop the violence
 - b) They call the police and report the crime immediately
 - c) They pretend nothing is happening and avoid getting involved
 - d) They organise a neighbourhood watch group to increase safety
7. The open ending of *Lights Out* is designed to:
- a) Provide a sense of closure and resolution

- b) Offer easy solutions to complex social problems
 - c) Provoke reflection and challenge the audience's assumptions
 - d) Leave the audience feeling hopeless and despairing
8. The characters in *Lights Out* primarily represent:
- a) Social activists.
 - b) Bystanders to injustice.
 - c) Perpetrators of violence.
 - d) Law enforcement officials.
9. What is the MOST likely effect of the play's minimalist stage directions on the audience?
- a) Confusion and disorientation.
 - b) Increased focus on the characters' words and actions.
 - c) A sense of detachment from the play's emotional core.
 - d) A belief that the play is unfinished or incomplete.
10. How does Padmanabhan portray the theme of patriarchy in *Lights Out*?
- a) Through the characters' unquestioning obedience to religious leaders.
 - b) Through the depiction of women as passive victims with no agency.
 - c) Through the subtle ways in which male characters control the narrative and silence women.
 - d) Through the use of an all-male cast of characters.

16.5.2 Short Answer Questions

1. How does *Lights Out* use offstage violence and dialogue to depict the impact of the male gaze?
2. How does Padmanabhan use the reactions (or lack thereof) of the characters in *Lights Out* to explore the theme of silence as a form of complicity in the face of violence?
3. Analyse the symbolism of light and darkness in *Lights Out* and its connection to the play's themes.
4. How does *Lights Out* achieve a sense of realism, and why is this realism still relevant today?
5. Discuss the significance of the play's title, *Lights Out*, in relation to its themes and characters.

16.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. How does *Lights Out* explore the complex interplay of gender, power and silence in perpetuating violence against women?
2. How does Padmanabhan use dramatic techniques in *Lights Out* to explore the consequences of inaction in the face of violence? What does this reveal about social responsibility?

16.6 Suggested Learning Resources

- Chanda, Lakshmi, ed. *Lights On: Indian Plays in English*. Vol 2. India. Orient BlackSwan, 2013.
- Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava. *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India Since 1947*. University of Iowa Press, 2009.
- ---. "Locating the Political in Contemporary Indian English Theatre: A Perspective." *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, vol. 29-30, 1996, pp. 1-18.
- Jaidka, Manju, and Tej N. Dhar. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Indian Writing English*. Routledge, 2024.
- Padmanabhan, Manjula. *Laughter and Blood: Performance Pieces*. Hachette India, 2020.
- ---. *Blood and Laughter: Plays*. Hachette UK, 2020.

MODEL QUESTION PAPER

MAULANA AZAD NATIONAL URDU UNIVERSITY

Master of Arts (English)

II SEMESTER EXAMINATION, August 2021

Paper : MAEN202CCT : Drama in English

Time: 3 hours

Max. Marks 70 marks

Note : This question paper consists of two parts : Part – A and Part-B. Number of words to answers each question is only indicative. Attempt all parts.

Part-A contains **10** questions of which students are supposed to answer **08** questions. Answer each question in approximately 100 words. Each question carries **05** marks. **(8x5=40 marks)**

Part-B contains **05** questions of which students are supposed to answer **03** questions. Answer each question in approximately 250 words. Each question carries **10** marks. **(10x3=30 marks)**

Part-A

1. Write a note on the symbolic significance of the Storm Scene in *King Lear*.
2. In the light of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, comment upon the term, 'the New Woman'.
3. Write a short note on the rise of Elizabethan drama.
4. What is problem play? Discuss with reference to the play, *A Doll's House*.
5. Write a note on the symbols of light and water in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
6. Comment upon divine dispensation in *King Lear*.
7. Write a note on the portrayal of female characters in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*.
8. Justify the title of the play, *A Doll's House*.
9. Write a note on modern American drama.
10. Discuss the significance of the title of the play, *Lights Out*.

Part-A

11. Discuss the idea of service in the play, *King Lear*, and how does it examine 'the distinction between virtuous disobedience and improper loyalty'?
12. How does Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* criticize the institution of marriage and morality? Discuss with appropriate illustrations from the text.
13. Write an essay on the theme of desire and death in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Substantiate your answer with suitable illustrations from the text.
14. Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* reflects upon the harsh realities of gender violence and inequality in the Indian society. Explain with reference to the play.
15. Write an essay on the theme of blindness and insight in *King Lear*.
