

DSC-1

Introduction to Literary Genres

4YUG

Under NEP 2020

Discipline Specific Course (DSC)

For

B.A. English
(First Semester)

Centre for Distance and Online Education

Maulana Azad National Urdu University

Hyderabad-32, Telangana- India

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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, Hyderabad

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, Nuh, Varanasi, and Amravati) was established to facilitate the students. Apart from this, an extension center 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

In a constantly changing environment, having employability skills is an essential part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. The technology revolution has coincided with the tremendous shifts in world economies over the years, and these developments have an impact on home life, the workplace, and education. Students require new life skills, such as the capacity to deal with stress and frustration, in order to cope with the escalating pace and change of modern life. They also require IT skills, communication skills, and professional skills to be better equipped for job prospects along with their academic degree.

In the light of this, the BA 4YUG is an attempt in the direction to enable students/learners to cope with growing challenges and tests in their lives. The diploma programme is designed to give a sound knowledge of various skills so as to empower the prospective students for employment, apart from helping them prepare for competitive exams. It is spread over one year (two semesters) minimum duration. The objectives of the programme are as follows:

- a. to improve one's capability to be fully self-aware by helping oneself to overcome all fears and insecurities for holistic development
- b. to increase one's knowledge and responsiveness of emotional competency and emotional intelligence at place of study/work
- c. to provide opportunity for realizing one's potential through practical experience
- d. to develop interpersonal skills and adopt good leadership behaviour for empowerment of self and others
- e. to set appropriate goals, manage stress and time effectively
- f. to manage competency- mix at all levels for achieving excellence with ethics
- g. to increase employability skills

At the end of the four-year programme, the learner would have mastered the skills for professional life. The learners would be able to appreciate communication and IT skills, understand the role of life skills and professional skills for entry into a job and for career growth. The one-year programme will prepare the learner for employment and career growth by developing their skills, apart from leading to refinement.

The “**BA 4YUG**” course is designed to equip you with the essential skills needed to enhance your career prospects and succeed in the workplace. After gaining knowledge of a few essential skills in *Employability Skills I* course in previous semester, you will learn about various self-awareness skills, interpersonal skills, thinking skills and universal human values. By the end of the course, you will be equipped with the confidence to explore more skills or use the skills learned at the workplace. This course is divided into four blocks, containing 4 units each.

This SLM is supplemented by audio-video lessons. You may visit MANUU's YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@IMCMANUU> for the complete list of AV lessons. With you in your journey through CDOE, MANUU!

Prof. Gulfishaan Habeeb

Course Coordinator

Introduction to Literary Genres

Unit-1: Literary Genres – An Introduction

Structure

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1.0 Introduction

Literature is a term used to describe written works that express ideas, emotions, and stories in creative and meaningful ways. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, literature refers to “written works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit.” It includes both imaginative writing and works that reflect human experience through language.

M.H. Abrams, in his influential book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, defines literature as writing that uses language in distinctive ways to give pleasure, provoke thought, or convey deep meaning. Literature helps us understand different cultures, human emotions, and ideas across time and space.

Major Categories of Literature

Literature is generally divided into three major categories or genres: prose, poetry, and drama.

- Poetry is a form of literature that uses rhythmic and metaphorical language. It often follows specific structures such as rhyme and meter. Poets like William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson used poetry to explore nature, emotion, and human experience.

- Drama refers to plays written to be performed by actors. It combines dialogue and action to tell a story. Classical dramas include the works of William Shakespeare, such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.
- Prose is the most common form of writing. It uses natural language and sentence structure, without a fixed rhythm or meter. Prose includes novels, short stories, essays, and biographies. For example, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* is a well-known prose novel.

Philosophers like Aristotle, in his work *Poetics*, also contributed to the understanding of literary genres, explaining how literature imitates life and teaches through pleasure. Overall, literature is a powerful tool for exploring the human condition, sharing stories and shaping culture. In this Unit, we will explore various genres of literature, and take suitable examples to understand them clearly.

1.1 Objectives

By the end of this Unit, learners will be able to:

- Define literature using authoritative sources and in their own words.
- Identify major genres of literature, including prose, poetry and drama.
- Recognize examples of each literary genre.
- Develop a simple classification system for literary works based on their genre characteristics.
- Reflect on their own experiences with literature, especially different genres.

1.2 Literary Genres – An Introduction

1.2.1 Poetry

Poetry is a special form of writing that expresses feelings, thoughts, and ideas in a creative and powerful way. Unlike prose, which follows regular sentence structure, poetry often uses rhythm, rhyme, and vivid imagery to communicate meaning. According to M.H. Abrams, poetry is “language used in a special way to evoke strong emotion and imaginative response.” Poetry can be short or long, simple or complex, and it often reflects deep emotions, nature, love,

struggle, or even everyday life. Poetry comes in many forms. Some of the most common subgenres, each with its own style and purpose, are explained below:

A. Lyric Poetry

Lyric poems express personal emotions or thoughts of the speaker. They are often short and musical. “Daffodils” by William Wordsworth is an example of lyrical poetry. The poem starts with “I wandered lonely as a cloud...”, and shows the speaker’s joyful feelings as he describes a field of golden daffodils.

B. Narrative Poetry

Narrative poems tell a story with characters, a plot and a setting. “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe is an example of a narrative poetry. In this poem, the story of a man haunted by a mysterious bird saying “Nevermore” is told. Another famous narrative poem is “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

C. Epic Poetry

Epic poems are long and tell heroic stories, often involving gods or supernatural events. Ancient Greek poet Homer’s “The Iliad” and English poet Milton’s “The Paradise Lost” are examples epic poems. Homer’s epic poem narrates the events of the Trojan War and the bravery of Greek warriors. Similarly, “The Ramayana” and “The Mahabharata” are also epic poems in Indian literature.

D. Dramatic Poetry

Dramaic poetry is written to be spoken or performed, like a play in verse. William Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” is an example of this type of poetry. Though a play, it is written in poetic form, using blank verse.

E. Haiku

Haiku is a traditional Japanese form of poetry with three lines: the first line has 5 syllables, the second has 7, and the third has 5. Haikus often focus on nature or a moment of beauty. “The Old Pond” by Matsuo Bashō is an example of Haiku.

“An old silent pond...

A frog jumps into the pond—

Splash! Silence again.”

F. Sonnet

A sonnet is a 14-line poem, often about love, with a specific rhyme scheme. There are different types of sonnets, such as the Shakespearean sonnet and the Petrarchan/Italian sonnet.

“Sonnet 18” by William Shakespeare and “How Do I Love Thee?” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning are examples of sonnets.

G. Free Verse

Free verse poems do not follow regular patterns of rhyme or rhythm. They are free in form but rich in meaning. It captures a simple image in a deep and meaningful way. “The Red Wheelbarrow” by William Carlos Williams is an example of free verse poem.

In a nutshell, poetry is a powerful way to express emotions, tell stories and reflect on life. Its many subgenres, from lyric to free verse, offer different styles for different messages.

1.2.2 Drama

Drama is a type of literature that is written to be performed by actors on a stage. It includes dialogue (what characters say) and stage directions (instructions for action and movement). The word drama comes from a Greek word meaning “action.” According to M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, drama is “a work designed to be presented by actors on a stage.”

Drama brings stories to life and allows the audience to see events, emotions and conflicts unfold in real-time. It can be serious, funny, tragic, or a mix of emotions. Drama includes several subgenres, each with its own purpose, tone, and style. Below are the most common types:

i. Tragedy

A tragedy is a serious play that ends in sorrow or disaster, usually because of a character’s flaw or fate. It deals with deep emotions like loss, guilt, or ambition. William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is an example of a tragedy. Hamlet, the prince of Denmark, faces internal struggles and a tragic end while trying to avenge his father’s murder. Another famous classical tragedy is *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles.

ii. Comedy

A comedy is a light-hearted play with humorous situations. It often ends happily and may include love stories, misunderstandings and clever wordplay. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare is an example of a comedy. This play uses magic, love and confusion to create laughter and joy.

iii. Tragicomedy

Tragicomedy is a blend of both tragedy and comedy. It may start seriously but ends happily, or mix emotional and humorous moments throughout. Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*

is an example of tragicomedy. The play includes both sadness and joy, and ends with forgiveness and reunion.

iv. Melodrama

Melodrama is a dramatic play with exaggerated emotions and clear moral differences between good and evil. It often uses music and suspense. The 19th-century plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by George Aiken are example of melodrama. These plays highlight strong emotions and moral lessons.

v. Farce

Farce is a type of comedy that uses silly, exaggerated actions and situations to make people laugh. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is an example of a farce. This play uses mistaken identities and witty dialogue for comic effect.

vi. Historical Drama

Historical drama is based on real events or figures from history. It blends fact with fiction to explore important times and people. William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is an example of a historical drama. It dramatizes the political events around the assassination of the Roman leader.

vii. Musical Drama

Musical dramas include songs and dances as part of the storytelling. Music adds emotion and energy to the plot. Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (adapted into a musical) is an example of a musical drama. It tells the story of struggle and hope through powerful songs.

In short, drama is a lively and emotional form of literature meant to be seen and heard. Through various subgenres like tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, and more, drama captures human experiences and emotions in powerful ways. Whether it's a sad tale or a funny scene, drama helps audiences understand life from different angles and connect with others.

1.2.3 Prose

Prose is the most common and natural form of written or spoken language. It follows the regular flow of speech and does not have the special structure of poetry, such as rhyme or meter. Prose is used in everyday communication, newspapers, novels, and even textbooks. M.H. Abrams describes prose as "the ordinary use of language without metrical structure." It is clear, straightforward, and meant to inform, entertain, or express thoughts.

Prose can be divided into several subgenres based on purpose and style. The most common ones are: fiction, non-fiction, journalistic prose, travel writing, epistolary writing, etc.

1.2.3.1 Fiction

Fiction is one of the major genres of literature. It is imaginative writing created from the author's mind, rather than factual events. It tells stories that may or may not be based on real life. These stories may be inspired by real life, but the characters, plots and settings are created or shaped creatively. The purpose of fiction is not about reporting facts—it is about exploring human experiences, emotions and ideas through invented situations. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, fiction is “literature in the form of prose, especially novels, that describes imaginary events and people.”

Fiction allows readers to travel to different worlds, feel the emotions of characters, and understand different points of view. It can entertain, teach moral lessons, reflect society, or challenge beliefs. Fiction comes in many forms, but the most popular are: Novel and Short Story. Others forms of fiction include: novellas, flash fiction, fables and allegories. In this section, we will focus on the novel and short story.

(i) The Novel

A novel is a long work of fiction, usually written in prose, that tells a story about characters and their thoughts, actions, emotions and experiences over a period of time. Novels often take the reader on a journey through detailed plots and lifelike characters, helping us understand the world through different perspectives and situations.

Well-known English novelist E.M. Forster defined the novel in his book *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) as “any fictitious prose work over 50,000 words.” He explained that a novel explores “characters in time,” meaning it shows how people grow, change, and interact with their surroundings as events unfold. This focus on development and time makes the novel unique among literary forms.

Another great writer, Henry James, described the novel as “a personal impression of life.” In other words, the novel shows how the writer sees the world by expressing life through the characters and the events they go through. It is not just a story, but a reflection of human experience.

Characteristics of the Novel:

The novel has certain key features that make it different from other forms of fiction:

- *Length and Complexity:* Novels are usually long, allowing for complex plots with many events and subplots. This gives the writer space to develop ideas in depth.

- *Character Development*: Novels often explore how characters grow, learn, or struggle over time. Readers become closely involved with the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the characters.
- *Setting*: A novel typically provides a strong sense of place and time. This helps the reader imagine where and when the story takes place, whether it's a real city, a small village, or an imaginary world.
- *Themes*: Novels often deal with big ideas like love, freedom, justice, identity, war, family, and society. Through the story, writers explore these themes in ways that can make readers think deeply.
- *Narrative Voice*: A novel can be told from different points of view. It might be in the first person, where the main character tells the story using "I," or in the third person, where a narrator tells the story about the characters.

Types of Novels:

Novels can be grouped into different types based on their themes, settings, or style. Some of the main types include:

- (a) *Realistic Novel*: These novels reflect everyday life and have believable characters and situations. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen is an example of a realistic novel. It is a story about love, class and manners in 19th-century England.
- (b) *Historical Novel*: Set in the past, these novels include real historical events or people, often mixed with fictional characters. *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy is an example of a historical novel. It is set during the Napoleonic Wars in Russia.
- (c) *Science Fiction*: These novels explore the future or imagined worlds using science, technology, or space exploration. George Orwell's *1984* is an example of a science fiction. It is a novel about a dystopian future controlled by a totalitarian government.
- (d) *Fantasy*: Involving magic, mythical creatures, or imaginary worlds, fantasy novels take readers beyond reality. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is an example of a fantasy novel. This novel is about a boy who discovers that he is a wizard.
- (e) *Mystery/Crime*: These novels focus on solving a crime or uncovering a hidden truth. They often include suspense and clever plot twists. Arthur Conan Doyle's

The Hound of the Baskervilles is an example of a mystery/crime or detective novel. This novel is a Sherlock Holmes mystery about a ghostly hound.

- (f) *Romance*: Centered around love and relationships, romance novels explore emotional connections between characters. *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks is an example of a romance. This novel is a touching story about love over time.

In fact, many novels have become timeless classics and are widely studied and read for their powerful stories and important messages. Some the famous novels are given below:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee: It is a novel about racism, justice, and childhood in the American South.
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald: It is a tale of dreams, wealth and identity in 1920s America.
- *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe: It is a story that reveals African traditions and the impact of British colonialism on a Nigerian village.

In conclusion, it may be argued that the novel is one of the richest and most flexible forms of fiction. It allows writers to build complex plots, explore deep emotions, and present ideas in powerful ways. Writers like E.M. Forster and Henry James have helped shape our understanding of the novel, and its importance continues today. Whether it is a love story, a mystery, or a tale of magical adventures, a novel has the power to move readers, make them think and open new worlds.

(ii) Short Story

A short story is a brief work of fiction that usually centers around one main event, character, or idea. Unlike novels, which are longer and often include multiple characters and complex plots, short stories are focused and concise. They can often be read in one sitting, making them ideal for delivering a powerful message or emotional experience in a short amount of time.

One of the earliest and most influential voices in defining the short story was Edgar Allan Poe. In his 1846 essay “The Philosophy of Composition”, Poe emphasized that a true short story should be designed to be read in a single sitting and should aim to create a single emotional effect on the reader. This focus on emotional impact remains one of the defining features of short stories even today. Another famous writer, H.G. Wells, described the short story as “a form that should be simple, clearly told, and sharply focused.” According to Wells, the strength of a short

story lies in its clarity and precision. There is no space for long descriptions or unnecessary details; every word must serve a purpose.

Key Characteristics of the Short Story:

Short stories are different from other types of literature in several ways. Some of their main characteristics include:

- *Brevity*: Most short stories are between 1,000 to 7,500 words. This limited length encourages tight storytelling and immediate impact.
- *Single Focus*: A short story usually explores one central idea, theme, or event. This gives the reader a concentrated experience.
- *Limited Setting*: The action typically takes place in one location or over a short period of time. There is little room for elaborate world-building.
- *Few Characters*: Short stories generally feature one or two main characters. This allows for a close look at a specific personality or relationship.
- *Theme*: Many short stories end with a twist, moral lesson, or emotional reflection. The theme is often suggested rather than explained.
- *Economy of Language*: Every word matters. Writers must be precise and careful with their language to make the most of the limited space.

Types of Short Stories:

Short stories come in many forms, each with its own unique structure, purpose, and literary style. Whether meant to entertain, illustrate a moral, or explore a fleeting moment, short stories vary widely in tone and technique. Below is an exploration of some of the most recognized types of short stories, from the humorous to the reflective.

Anecdote: An anecdote is a brief, amusing, or interesting account of a real incident or person. Typically used to illustrate a point in essays, speeches, or articles, anecdotes are often concise yet rich in personality. Though they are real or based on real events, their main function is to entertain or humanize a subject. A classic example involves Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose declining memory led him to describe a plow as “the implement that cultivates the soil” and an umbrella as “the thing that strangers take away.” This light-hearted reflection reveals both Emerson’s wit and the charm of an anecdotal story.

Drabble: A drabble is an extremely short work of fiction, exactly 100 words long, not including the title. The purpose of this precise format is to challenge a writer to create a complete and meaningful story within strict limits. Despite its brevity, a successful drabble still contains a

narrative arc, character, or twist. Writers use drabbles to hone their craft, focusing on clarity, conciseness, and impact.

Fable: Fables are short narratives that convey a moral lesson, typically through stories involving anthropomorphized animals or objects. These stories are timeless, often passed down orally, and are especially effective in teaching ethical lessons to children. Aesop's fables, such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, remain some of the most enduring examples of this form. The clear moral at the end of a fable distinguishes it from other story types.

Feghoot: A feghoot is a pun-driven story that sets up a humorous or groan-worthy punchline. Also called a story pun, the feghoot relies on wordplay and builds its entire structure around a final pun. Although brief, it requires clever writing and timing to successfully land its comedic twist. The enjoyment comes as much from the absurdity of the conclusion as from the journey to get there.

Flash Fiction: Flash fiction is an umbrella term for very short stories, typically between 300 and 1,000 words. These stories aim to deliver a complete narrative with emotional or thematic impact in a condensed format. While flash fiction doesn't adhere to a strict word count like a drabble or mini-saga, it values tight prose and efficient storytelling. It is particularly popular in online literary magazines and workshops.

Frame Story:

A frame story is a narrative technique where a main story is introduced through another story, often serving as a preface or context. Also called a nested narrative, this structure allows for stories within stories, adding layers of meaning or linking multiple tales. For instance, a modern novel might open with a character recalling past events, thus framing the main narrative as a memory.

Mini-saga: A mini-saga is a story told in exactly 50 words. Like drabbles, mini-sagas are exercises in brevity and creativity. Despite their extremely short length, they still follow a traditional story format, often containing a setup, conflict, and resolution. Writers must choose their words wisely, conveying as much as possible with as little as possible.

Story Sequence: A story sequence, or composite novel, consists of multiple short stories that are connected by theme, character, or setting, forming a cohesive whole. Each story stands alone but contributes to a larger narrative arc. Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* and the *Foundation* series are well-known examples of story sequences, where individual tales contribute to a broader vision of the future.

Sketch Story: A sketch story offers a snapshot rather than a full narrative. These pieces often emphasize description over plot and are commonly used to explore a character, setting, or mood. A character sketch, for example, may delve into a person's habits, appearance, or thoughts without placing them within a traditional storyline. Sketch stories are valuable tools in character development and world-building.

Vignette: A vignette is a short, impressionistic piece that focuses on a single moment, scene, or detail. Unlike traditional stories, vignettes often lack a plot and instead highlight mood, tone, or atmosphere. They may stand alone or be used as part of a larger work, adding texture and emotional depth.

In a nutshell, the short story is a unique and powerful form of fiction. Though short in length, it can carry deep meanings, strong emotions and unforgettable characters. From classics like *The Gift of the Magi* to modern flash fiction, short stories continue to be an important and loved part of literature.

(iii) Novel vs. Short Story

Features	Novel	Short Story
Length	Long (usually over 50,000 words)	Short (under 7,500 words)
Focus	Multiple events, subplots	Single event or idea
Characters	Many characters, detailed development	Few characters, limited development
Time Span	Covers weeks, months, or years	Often covers a few hours or days
Reading Time	Takes several hours or days to read	Can be read in one sitting

In addition to novel and short story, there is novella. A novella is a story longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is an example of a novella.

Fiction, through novels and short stories, opens a window into the human imagination. It allows us to explore different lives, cultures, and emotions through storytelling. The novel gives space for deep character development and complex plots, while the short story delivers quick, sharp insights and emotions. Both forms have been defined and shaped by great writers, and they continue to be powerful tools for sharing ideas, expressing feelings, and understanding the world around us.

1.2.3.2 Non-fiction

Non-fiction deals with real people, facts and events. It aims to inform, explain, or persuade. Some of the subgenres of non-fiction are as follows:

- a. *Biography*: It is a life story of a person written by someone else. For example, *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela.
- b. *Autobiography*: It is a person's life story written by themselves. For example, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by Mahatma Gandhi.
- c. *Essay*: It is a short piece of writing on a particular subject. "Self-Reliance" by Ralph Waldo Emerson or "Of Studies" by Francis Bacon is an example of an essay.
- d. *Memoir*: It is a personal account of specific experiences or periods in someone's life. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelo or *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai are examples of memoirs.

1.2.3.3 Other forms of prose

- *Travel Writing*: Travel writing describes places and experiences in different parts of the world. It can be both informative and personal. Example: *In Patagonia* by Bruce Chatwin.
- *Epistolary Writing*: This type of prose is written in the form of letters, emails, or diary entries. Sometimes novels use this style. *Ghubar e Khatir* by Maulana Azad, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and is written in letters and journal entries.
- *Journalistic Prose*: This includes articles, news reports, and opinion pieces found in newspapers and magazines. It aims to inform the public clearly and quickly. Example: News reports in The New York Times or editorials in The Guardian.

In short, prose is a flexible and powerful form of writing that serves many purposes—from storytelling and sharing personal experiences to informing and educating. Whether you're reading a novel, a news article, or a personal essay, you are engaging with prose. Understanding its subgenres helps us appreciate the different ways writers communicate with us through the written word.

1.3 Learning Outcomes

- Define literature and its major categories.
- Identify key characteristics of prose, poetry, and drama.
- Distinguish between subgenres like novel, short story, lyric, and tragedy.
- Recall definitions by notable authors (e.g., Poe, Forster, James).
- Match literary works to their correct genres.
- Compare features of different literary genres.
- Analyze texts using knowledge of genre conventions.

1.4 Glossary

Literature – Written works valued for artistic expression, including fiction, poetry, and drama.

Genre – A category or type of literature based on style, form, or content.

Blank Verse – unrhymed iambic pentameter

Prose – Ordinary written or spoken language without metrical structure (e.g., novels, short stories).

Poetry – A form of literature that uses rhythm, imagery, and figurative language to evoke emotions.

Drama – A literary form intended for performance, involving dialogue and stage directions.

Fiction – Imaginative writing that is not based entirely on fact.

Novel – A long fictional narrative with complex characters and plots.

Short Story – A brief fictional narrative focused on a single event or character.

Narrator – The voice that tells the story in prose or fiction.

Theme – The central idea or message in a literary work.

Characterization – The process by which an author reveals a character's personality.

Setting – The time and place in which a story occurs.

Plot – The sequence of events in a story.

Subgenre – A more specific category within a larger genre (e.g., fantasy, science fiction).

Mood – The emotional atmosphere created by a text.

1.5 Sample Questions

1.5.1 Objective Questions

1. Which of the following best defines lyric poetry?
 - a. A poem that tells a long heroic story
 - b. A play written in poetic form
 - c. A short poem expressing personal emotions**
 - d. A poem without rhyme or rhythm
2. “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe is an example of which type of poetry?
 - a. Lyric
 - b. Narrative**
 - c. Epic
 - d. Dramatic
3. Which of the following is a characteristic of a haiku?
 - a. Written in 14 lines
 - b. Written in blank verse
 - c. Composed of 3 lines with 5-7-5 syllables**
 - d. Tells a long heroic tale
4. Who wrote “The Iliad,” a famous epic poem?
 - a. Shakespeare
 - b. Milton
 - c. Homer**
 - d. Poe
5. Which subgenre of drama combines both serious and humorous elements?
 - a. Tragedy
 - b. Farce
 - c. Tragicomedy**
 - d. Melodrama
6. “The Importance of Being Earnest” is best categorized as a:
 - a. Tragedy
 - b. Tragicomedy
 - c. Farce**
 - d. Historical Drama
7. Which of the following best describes prose?
 - a. Has a rhythmic and rhyming structure

- b. Is a type of musical performance
 - c. Is ordinary language without metrical structure**
 - d. Is a short poetic form
8. Who defined the novel as “characters in time”?
- a. Henry James
 - b. M.H. Abrams
 - c. E.M. Forster**
 - d. George Orwell
9. Which type of novel features magical elements and imaginary worlds?
- a. Realistic novel
 - b. Mystery novel
 - c. Historical novel
 - d. Fantasy novel**
10. Which form of short story is exactly 100 words long?
- a. Mini-saga
 - b. Drabble**
 - c. Flash Fiction
 - d. Vignette

Short Answer Questions

1. Define drama and give five examples.
2. Define fiction and give five examples.
3. Define poetry and give five examples.
4. Distinguish between a novel and a short story.
5. Write a short note on Non-fiction and its subgenres.

Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the key differences between poetry, drama, and prose using suitable examples.
2. Discuss the characteristics and types of lyric, narrative and epic poetry with relevant examples.
3. Describe the different types of novels with suitable examples.

1.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Routledge, 2016.
2. Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*. Harper Perennial, 2014.
3. Mays, Kelly J., editor. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.
4. Kennedy, X. J., and Dana Gioia. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*. Pearson, 2016.
5. Scholes, Robert, Carl H. Klaus, and Nancy R. Comley. *The Elements of Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
6. Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2015.
7. Davis, Philip. *Reading Literature Today*. Routledge, 2011.
8. Rainsford, Dominic. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literary Studies*. 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Unit-2: Ambai - *Yellow Fish*

Structure

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Objectives

2.2 *Yellow Fish*

2.2.1 Background

2.2.2 Gender

2.2.3 Unique Style of Narration

2.2.4 Themes

2.2.5 Language

2.2.6 Critical Analysis

2.2.7 Summary

2.3 Learning Outcomes

2.4 Glossary

2.5 Sample Questions

2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

2.0 Introduction

‘Yellow Fish’ is a short story written in Tamil by Ambai and translated by Lakshmi Holmstorm. It is a very simple, touching story which deals with an aspect of woman’s experience, a fisherwoman whose baby died sometime in her past, also accompanied by a vivid description of the lives of fishermen and their wives. Her fiction is known for its emphasis on issues concerning women and innovative narrative techniques experiments. The story ‘Yellow Fish’ is described as one of her most passionate feminine works, which leaves an impression of the story as a collage of images.

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are to:

- understand the term ‘Fiction’.
- appreciate Ambai’s contribution to English Literature.

- realize the issues concerning with women.
- form an in-depth understanding of the narrative techniques of Ambai.
- derive pleasure from the style and language of the author.
- comprehend the varied themes used by the author in her short stories.

2.2 *Yellow Fish*

Ambai is one of the most prominent modern Indian writers. In fact, Ambai is the pen-name of C. S. Lakshmi, a Tamil writer. She made a special recognition for herself in the world literature, as a whole. She was born in 1944 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, but grew up in Mumbai and Bangalore. She did her MA in Bangalore and Doctorate from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in the 1970's.

Ambai was greatly influenced by her grandmother who was a self-taught Tamil scholar and cultivated an interest in the young girl for Tamil literature. In addition to her grandmother, Ambai's own mother too was another constructive influence on her. Ambai read fervently all the Tamil magazines and journals her mother subscribed to and grew up on the conservative, tradition bound often-romantic writings that these magazines encouraged and perpetuated. She began writing at the age of sixteen, and she comments on her early writings as: 'Most of my initial stories had very rigid and orthodox views of sexuality, femininity and life in general. The widows in my stories, offer a speech full of symbolic metaphors always refused to remarry and my heroines married idealists who were combinations of Tagore, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.' Thus, as early as the 1960s, she received critical acclaim and awards with a novel and a short story.

Nandi Malai Charalile (At Nandi Hills Falls), a novel and *Gnanam (Knowledge)* and a few other short stories were some of her early writings, which were modelled on traditional concepts of womanhood and chastity. She took up the name of 'Ambai', the pseudonym for all her creative writing. Her first collection of short stories was published in 1976. Later, she continued to publish in 1988 too, which established her reputation as a major short story writer.

Women centred stories questioning the paradoxes of their suppressed existence, experimenting with new forms; new themes and a new language became the crux of her ideas in her writings. She is hailed as one of the most important Tamil writers today. In 2008, she was awarded the Lifetime Literary Achievement Award of Tamil Literary Garden, University of

Toronto, Canada, for her contribution to Tamil literature and she became the only Tamil writer to have been included in the recently published *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* edited by Amit Chaudhuri. She has also written scripts for her husband, film maker Vishu Mathur's movies.

She is the founder and Director of Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW) in Mumbai. She is a recipient of Narayanaswamy Aiyar Prize for her fiction. *Sirakukal muriyum*, *Vittin mulaiyil oru camaiyalarai* and *The Face behind the mask: Women in Tamil literature* are some of her notable works. Many of her stories have been translated into English. The Library of Congress holds five of her writings in its collection.

Check your progress:

1. Who is Ambai?
2. What does she feel about her early writings?
3. What became the crux of her writings later?
4. Name some of her works.

2.2.1 Background:

The story takes us to the tropical seashore on a hot summer day. The lives of fishermen and their families are portrayed realistically by the author. Their day schedule is vividly described. As the boats come in the fishermen's wives gather at the seashore to get the nets in and sort the fish into those that can be sold or used and those with no value. We see a great mixture of colours and sensations as the fish are sorted out. The ones with no value are just thrown on the shore to die. The woman sees a yellow fish in the sand, gasping for water. It is told in the first person by the woman and she begins to see in the dying fish her daughter that died many years ago, right after she was born. The baby opened and closed her mouth as if she was trying to suck in air. The yellow fish forces these images back on her mind. She dies and her ashes are placed in a small urn. When her husband brings the urn home the woman demands that the lid be opened and she places the ashes of the baby into the sea from where the yellow fish came. The yellow fish seems to struggle to get back into the sea. The woman tells a fisher boy to throw the yellow fish back in the sea. He laughs at the feeling he cannot understand. The last lines of the story catch up the emotion. "You can see its clear yellow for a very long time then it merges into the blue-grey-white of the sea".

Check your progress:

1. What does the story portray?
2. Who does the woman see in the dying Yellow fish?

2.2.2 Gender:

Ambai's short story 'The Yellow Fish' predominantly speaks about an aspect of a woman's experience. Her fiction is known for its emphasis on issues concerning women and in the Tamil literary scene Ambai's voice is heard with the feminist consciousness and hence it contributes to our understanding of gender.

The two events that take place in the story reveal a thematic connection between them and make us understand that Ambai is here dealing with larger issues at a micro level like life and death, one's struggle to survive, etc. Though these issues are common to all living beings, the woman's point of view is portrayed clearly and they become the issues that are close to a woman's heart because they form an integral part of her struggle to survive in a hostile world. The story is told only from Anu's point of view and not from that of Arun's because the experiences form only the part of Anu's emotional makeup. Towards the end of the story, when Anu asks Arun to keep the lid of the urn open Arun could not understand the reason behind Anu's strange behaviour but it is Anu's emotional temperament that makes her feel as if her daughter is still gasping for breath though it's just the ashes in the urn.

When Anu asks the fisher boy to throw the yellow fish into the sea, he snorts at her and then grabs the fish by the tail firmly and runs towards the sea. This incident shows that though the boy helps the yellow fish to survive by throwing it into the sea, he seems to be very insensitive thus projecting the same quality in the male outlook itself by the characters of Arun and the fisher boy. Thus the gender differences are seen.

Check your progress:

1. In whose point of view is the story narrated?
2. Who are the male and female characters in the story?
3. What are the two events that take place in the story?

2.2.3 Unique Style of Narration:

Ambai is known for her innovative narrative techniques experiments. The “Yellow Fish” gives us an impression of the story made of a collage of images. The narrative content is not much and can be distinctly divided into three parts.

The first part gives a description of the fishing boats returning ashore and the division of work between the men and women once the ships are ashore. There is also a discarded fish and its struggle to survive reminding the narrator of a similar struggle she witnessed some time back is presented in the first part.

The second part takes us into the recent past through the eyes of Anu who remembers the incident of her new-born daughter, named Jalaja, how she died and her husband Arun brings the child’s ashes in an urn and are immersed in the sea later, as she looks at the discarded yellow fish, struggling to survive.

The third part is the climax of the story where Anu, though sad and depressed, helps the discarded yellow fish to survive and returns it to the sea. Thus, the two events of the story, though not connected in any way, form the experiences of the first person narrator Anu.

The author presents “an extraordinary collage of colours, on the shores of the wind-swept sea. A composition that imprints itself on the mind and memory”, in such a way as if she is painting a colourful yet a realistic painting. ‘Faded blue and ash-grey sea’ is juxtaposed with the bright colours of the fisherwomen’s clothes, the white boats, the darkened bodies and hands of men by the salt wind; the dry sand, the brown wood of the boats, and the white bellied fish. Images of the sea and water play dominantly throughout the story.

Check your progress:

1. List out the colourful images that are used in the story.
2. What do you understand by the word collage?
3. What is the name of the new born baby and guess the meaning and its connection to the story?
4. Do the colours used in the story enhance the meaning of the story?

2.2.4 Themes:

Most of Ambai’s stories are about relationships. All of them contain brilliant observations about contemporary life. Exploration of space, silence, coming to terms with one’s body or sexuality, and the importance of communication are some of the recurring themes in her works. Thus, one main theme that is evident is ‘struggle for survival’ which pervades through the

present story, “Yellow Fish”. The two aspects of the narrative – yellow fish and the infant Jalaja, show the struggle for survival. Both of them are thematically linked with skilful use of images and metaphors. The image of the tiny mouth gasping to breathe forges a link between both the events. Jalaja loses the struggle while the yellow fish survives with the help from the narrator.

Another theme that runs in the background is the way the male and female characters react to the incidents that take place in the story and it becomes pivotal in understanding the gender differences. The degree of insensitivity in the male outlook and the helplessness and grief in Anu, the only female character is portrayed very vividly.

It is Jalaja’s memory that makes Anu decide to help and save the yellow fish by throwing it back into the sea, where the ashes of Jalaja lie. She does this by asking for the help of a fisher-boy. Thus, Anu manages to save the fish and return it to the sea. The arrogant leap of the fish once it reaches the sea at the end of the story can be metaphorically interpreted and can have a variety of meanings.

Firstly it could mean that there are endless possibilities if opportunities to thrive are provided. Secondly and more importantly it could point towards the overriding theme of self-liberation in all of Ambai’s writings. It is almost as though Anu too has leapt towards freedom along with the yellow fish. Anu’s freedom is freedom from the bondage of ideologies. It is a freedom from grief; a liberating move that takes her towards self-realization. Ultimately this emerges to be the theme of the story and links up the narrator’s life with the two instances narrated by her.

Check your progress:

1. List the themes in the story.
2. What are the two aspects of Ambai’s story, “Yellow Fish”?
3. What is the main theme in all of Ambai’s writings?

2.2.5 Language:

It is a very simple story, translated from Tamil, with some good imagery and emotions. The language used is simple and direct making it into a crisp piece of writing but hitting at the universal themes such as the struggle of survival and self-liberation. The story is narrated through a first-person perspective, though the narrator enters the narrative as the ‘I’ in the later half of the story, not revealing the name of the narrator at the very first instance. The events are seen through the eyes of this character. Sea and water are life-giving forces in this story. The

livelihood of the fisherfolk depends on them. The sentences, ‘A yellow fish is thrown away on the sand’, ‘Like Jalaja’s mouth’, capture the attention of the reader as Ambai makes them stand by themselves. The infant, Jalaja is presented to the reader as ‘too hasty infant’ telling that she was probably born premature and had to be kept in the incubator. Thus, the story is presented in the form of images rather than telling the sequence of events as they occurred. Further, the images of ‘the narrator standing outside Jalaja’s room constantly watching her struggle to survive’, ‘of ashes being brought home in a small urn’ and the narrator’s insistence that the mouth of the urn be opened and then the somberline that the ashes were immersed in this very sea presents the collage of images through which the story is unfolded.

Similarly the emotions are packed in the small phrases such as the “loud racking sobs” which hint at the intense grief that was buried till then in the narrator’s heart. Her helplessness as she stands outside her child’s room, watching her struggling to survive, and finally, urging her husband to open the urn’s mouth as though she is trying to help her child to breathe now as she couldn’t earlier.

Check your progress:

1. What are the universal themes that the story speaks of?
2. What do you understand by the term ‘imagery’?
3. What are the life giving forces in the story?
4. Why did Anu urge her husband to open the urn’s mouth?
5. Attempt a note on the emotional scenes of the story.

2.2.6 Critical Analysis:

The characteristic feature of the story is the use of colourful imagery. The scene of fishing boats returning of the sea, the high summer and the heated sand, the images of sea and water predominate throughout the story. The other images, we see, are of the fish being unloaded, the ‘good’ fish is splashed on the troughs, and the rest, that is the ‘bad’ ones are thrown away. All these images are filled with colours – the colours are also painted in juxtaposition, for instance, faded blue and the ash grey sea with the bright colours of the fisherwomen’s clothes: demonic red, blinding indigo, profound green and assaulting blue. These stand vibrant against the white boats and the bodies of the men, darkened by the saltwater, the black hands of the fishermen and the brown of the wood and the white bellied fish. Ambai, then

shifts our attention from the din of the fisher-folk to a little yellow fish thrown away on the sand of the shore. The first person narrative fixes the perspective and point of view of the story.

The excellent use of imagery by *Ambai* thoroughly captivates the readers as they find their emotions' stirring too as the story comes to an end. All the colours used, give a symbolic character to the story. It is as though Ambai wants to add more material to the images by the use of colours, depicting the characteristics of the objects, like a real life image to give her audience the feel of their own experiences.

2.2.7 Summary:

“*Yellow Fish*” is a simple, very moving story about fishermen and their wives and a woman whose baby died long ago translated from Tamil. The story opens with the description of the setting as the typical tropical seashore. The wives of the fisherman are all gathered at the shore as the boats arrive to get the nets in and sort the fish into those that can be sold or used and those with no value. Different colours are projected as the sorting of fish is done. Then the story starts in the first person by a woman who sees a yellow fish in the sand, gasping for water. As she looks at the dying fish she sees in it her daughter who died some years ago, soon after her birth. The baby also opened and closed her mouth as if trying to suck in air, the yellow fish forces these images back on her mind. She dies and her ashes are placed in a small urn. When her husband brings the urn home the woman demands that the lid be opened and she places the ashes of the baby into the sea from where the yellow fish came. The yellow fish seems to struggle to get back to the sea. The woman tells a fisher boy to throw the yellow fish back in the sea. He laughs at the feeling he cannot understand. The story ends with these lines: “You can see its clear yellow for a very long time. Then it merges into the blue-grey-white of the sea”.

2.3 Learning Outcomes

After completing the Unit, the learner should be able to:

- Differentiate between fiction and nonfiction and cite examples of some literary texts in each category.
- Appreciate Ambai's contribution to English Literature as many of her works are translated into English.

- Realize the issues concerning women – the role of women in Yellow Fish and the role of the main protagonist, Anu and her emotional stand.
- Form an in-depth understanding of the narrative technique, the style and language used by the author and appreciate the unique features of the story.
- Comprehend the varied themes used by the author in the story – Life and death, struggle for survival, self-realization, freedom, etc.

2.4 Glossary

Compelled: to force someone to do something

Assaulting: to attack someone violently

Collage: a piece of art made by sticking various different materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric on to a backing

Withering: to cause to wilt, fade, or lose vitality

Shudders: shake, shiver, tremble

Incubator: an enclosed apparatus in which premature or unusually small babies are placed and which provides a controlled and protective environment for their care

Crematorium: a building where dead bodies are burned, usually as part of a funeral ceremony

Miniature: a representation or image of something on a small or reduced scale

Racking: very bad and very painful

Heaving: extremely crowded

Tossing: move or cause to move from side to side or back and forth

Snort: to make an explosive sound by forcing air quickly up or down the nose

Sputters: make a series of short explosive spitting or choking sounds

Swish: move with a hissing or rushing sound

2.5 Sample Questions

2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. C. S. Lakshmi (Ambai), born in 1944 in Tamil Nadu, is a distinguished

(a) Fiction Writer in Tamil

(b) Fiction Writer in Telugu

- (c) Nonfiction writer in Tamil
 - (d) Nonfiction writer in Telugu
2. Her works are characterized by her passionate espousal of the cause of women, humour, a lucid and profound style, and a touch of _____
- (a) Humanism**
 - (b) Realism
 - (c) Romanticism
 - (d) Idealism
3. She is the only Tamil writer to have been included in the recently published
- (a) Picador Book of Modern Indian Writing
 - (b) Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature
 - (c) Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature**
 - (d) Picador Book of Indian Literature
4. The themes projected in *Yellow Fish* are:
- (a) Self-liberation
 - (b) Struggle for survival
 - (c) Gender
 - (d) All the above**
5. Identify the work of Ambai
- (a) *A Purple Sea* (1992)
 - (b) *In a Forest, a Deer* (2006)
 - (c) *Fish in a Dwindling Lake* (2012)
 - (d) All the above**
6. What is the story of *Yellow Fish* about?
- (a) Fish
 - (b) Fishermen
 - (c) Anu
 - (d) All the above**
7. Her first collection of short stories was published in _____
- (a) 1966**
 - (b) 1986
 - (c) 1976

(d) None of the above

8. Which colour is not mentioned in the story?

(a) Red

(b) Ash

(c) Yellow

(d) Violet

9. What is the season mentioned in which the story takes place?

(a) Winter

(b) Summer

(c) Autumn

(d) Monsoon

10. What is the image, the woman sees on seeing the yellow fish?

(a) Her dying daughter

(b) The high spirited life of marine life

(c) The risky lives of fishermen

(d) All of the above

2.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Describe the setting of the story.
2. Describe the struggle of yellow fish.
3. Why does Anu feel for yellow fish?
4. Who is Jalaja and what happened to her?
5. Describe the role played by the fisher boy.

2.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. What is the impact of the colour employed in the story?
2. What is the significance of sea and water in the story?
3. What is the theme of the story? Explain.

2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. *In A Forest, A Deer: Stories By Ambai* (Translated by Lakshmi Holmstorm), Katha (2006) “Profiles : Ambai (C. S. Lakshmi)”. www.womenswriting.com.
2. C. S. Lakshmi (Ambai), 1944–”. *The South Asian Literary Recording Project*.
3. C.S. Lakshmi: Women. Author Meetings: Modern Society in Indian Literature. 7th Nov 2013. Web. https://ghum.kuleuven.be/ggs/research/india_focus/europalia_lectures/overview/c.s.-lakshmi
4. C. S. Lakshmi (Ambai), 1944– *The South Asian Literary Recording Project*. 11th Jan 2016. Web. <https://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/cslakshmi.html>
5. Impact of Use of Color in Yellow Fish by Ambai. 23 Jun 2020. Web. <https://phdessay.com/impact-of-use-of-color-in-yellow-fish-by-ambai/>
6. Yellow Fish by Ambai. Web. [Yellow Fish by Ambai Essay - 305 Words \(studymode.com\)](https://studymode.com/essay/Yellow-Fish-by-Ambai-Essay-305-Words/305)

Unit-3: Saadat Hasan Manto - *The Dog of Tetwal*

Structure

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Objectives

3.2 *The Dog of Tetwal*

3.2.1 About the Author

3.2.2 Partition Literature

3.2.3 Major Characters

3.2.4 Summary

3.2.5 Themes and Issues

3.2.5.1 Partition and the Loss of Humanity

3.2.5.2 Identity and Conflict

3.3 Learning Outcomes

3.4 Glossary

3.5 Sample Questions

3.6 Suggested Learning Resources

3.0 Introduction

Saadat Hasan Manto, one of the greatest short story writers of Urdu literature, was born during the colonial times more specifically at a time when India was fighting for its freedom from British rule. He is one of the writers who not only saw the Independence and partition of India but also happened to see the hard realities of it. However, he died at a very young age due to his addiction to alcohol. He was associated with the Progressive Writers Movement but later on this association turned bitter.

Manto is mostly remembered for his partition stories. The short story *The Dog of Tetwal* is one such story that reflects on the issue of partition in a novel and distinct manner. It was through this story Manto tries to show that how the people of both the countries responded to each other and during the partition they did not even want to leave the animals behind. Manto tries to show the absurdities of partition that took many lives and is still taking a toll on lives of the innocent people.

3.1 Objectives

The objective of this Unit is to introduce the readers to one of the greatest writers of Urdu literature, Saadat Hasan Manto and simultaneously to his prime area of writing, partition literature. Partition literature broadly deals with the issues and themes of partition of India into two countries: India and Pakistan. It portrays how the humanity suffered due to this divide which took place on the religious grounds. More importantly the objective of this unit is to introduce Saadat Hasan Manto's short story *The Dog of Tetwal* which is based on the theme of partition.

3.2 The Dog of Tetwal

3.2.1 About the Author

Saadat Hasan Manto, fondly remembered as Manto, was a short story writer who wrote in Urdu. He worked as a journalist and screenplay writer in Bombay before the partition of India. He is known for writing bold and provocative short stories without any fear or hesitation. This often landed him into many court cases but he was never proven guilty. The most important thing that played a crucial role in the life of Manto is the Partition of India. The partition of India devastated him in such a way that he could not come out of it. He wrote much on the subject of partition. Most of his writings are inspired from real life situations and his characters also very much resemble with real people and are not merely fictitious. In other words he portrayed what he saw around him or the characters the writer met or saw in his daily life.

During his lifetime Manto was not appreciated much for his writing skills and he did not live very long to enjoy the fame and respect that he received posthumously. He passed away at the age of forty-three. He was addicted to alcohol which took a heavy toll on his life. During this short span of time, Manto wrote twenty collections of short stories. Apart from this, he also wrote a novel, three essays, two sketches, five collections of dramas for radio and so on. However, he is mostly remembered for his short stories. His stories predominantly deal with the issue of partition. Recently in India a biopic entitled *Manto* was made on his life and work by a noted actor and director Nandita Das.

Saadat Hasan Manto was born on 11th May 1912 in Ludhiana, in the undivided colonial India. His ancestors were from Kashmir. His grandfather was Khawaja Jamal Uddin whose

youngest son Maulvi Ghulam Hasan was Manto's father. He was a very strict disciplinarian. His relationship with Manto was not very cordial. Manto was the child of his second wife. Nevertheless, unlike his father Manto had a very comforting relationship with his mother. Similarly, Manto had a very good relationship with his wife too who stood by his side in his difficult times as well. Manto was unconventional and stubborn, for which his father and brothers are often blamed as they did not treat him well.

Manto was never an outstanding student, he cleared his matriculation in third attempt. He had great difficulty in passing the exam of the Urdu language, the language which he mastered and came to be known as the greatest short story writer of Urdu literature. Soon after leaving Aligarh Muslim University, Manto fell sick and suffered from tuberculosis. He went to Delhi for the treatment. To recover from it he went to Kashmir where he fell in love with a Kashmiri shepherd girl. Nevertheless, once he returned from Kashmir and started working for All India Radio in 1941 to earn a livelihood. Here he wrote more than hundred plays for radio. In September 1942, he left for Bombay to join the film industry. He worked with many film companies and studios like the Imperial Film Company, Film City, Saroj Movietone, Hindustan Cinetone, etc.

The art of story writing came to him through translation. In his early twenties, he used to translate the works of western writers from different languages like English, French and Russian into Urdu. From those writers he learned the art of story-telling or narration. He mastered the art of short story so much that he used to complete a story in one go with some minor corrections. In general, his stories did not deal with aristocratic characters or subjects rather they were about the common folks. His stories always shock its readers specifically the conclusions which haunt the readers. The titles of his short stories seem related to very common things or words that one uses frequently in the day-to-day life like *Bu*, *Khol Do*, *Kali Shalwar* and *Thanda Gosht*. These stories always remain with the readers and they haunt them until one learns to ignore them. Each story is unique in its own way and never fails to impress the readers that these characters who in their day-to-day life appear as normal human beings are the ones who partake in heinous crimes. This is what Manto tries to make his readers understand that his characters are like other individuals. They are around us and we see and meet them in our day-to-day life. Further, some of Manto's stories deal with sex workers; a subject which was considered a taboo to talk about in those days. He wanted to draw our attention towards them and make us understand that they too are human beings like us.

Manto never supported the partition of India which was based on the religious grounds. However, soon after the Partition of India he migrated to the newly created country, Pakistan. It is very strange for his young readers to understand this brutal reality. There are different narratives regarding his migration to Pakistan. According to one of the narratives, it was his impulsive decision to migrate to Pakistan. During the time, when the partition was announced, his wife was in the region which fell under Pakistan. At that time Manto was in Bombay. One evening he was drinking with his friends and one of his friends who happened to be Hindu said that if they were not friends, he would have killed Manto. This was enough for Manto. The very next day he packed his bag and moved to Pakistan. In another narrative it is said that he felt insulted because the stories of Ismat Chughtai and Nazir Ajmeri were selected for a film and not his. So, he felt humiliated and decided to migrate to Pakistan in anticipation of a new world.

However, this turned out to be a nightmare for him. When he came to Pakistan the scenario was different than what he expected but still he did not lose hope and continued to write. Things did not go according to his plan and instead of better opportunities he was boycotted and labelled with names both by the government and the people. He lost his friends from Bombay. He felt dejected and found solace in alcohol. However, he began to worry for the future of his children and wife. He tried to leave alcohol and focus once again on his writing, so he made a serious attempt but could not succeed.

Manto's life as a creative writer can be divided into three phases. The first phase is from 1934 to 1937. This phase comprises of stories which were written during his stay in various cities like Amritsar, Lahore and Aligarh. They were published as a collection under the name of *Atish Pare* in 1936, in different magazines like *Khalq*, *Saqi* etc. In these stories Manto's special attention was given to the art of narration. When it comes to his art of story-telling there are specific points like shocking endings, lucid and concise stories. However, these stories like his any other writings were criticised for narration, scenic effects and assimilation. The stories of this period were not based on the subject of sex which is majorly seen in his later stories.

The second phase of writing is from 1937 to 1948 January that is before his migration to Pakistan. These stories and articles brought his name along with the names of other luminaries like Krishan Chander, Upendar Nath Ashk and N. M. Rashid. The stories are: "*Na Mokammal Tehrir*", "*Laltein*", "*Misri Ki Dali*", "*Mausam Ki Shararat*", "*Bhanjh*", "*Shy Shum Chuhedan*", "*Ghusulkhana*", "*Shannahe*" and "*Us Ka Pati*". During this period one finds the influence of Progressive Writers Movement in his writings like "*Naya Qanoon*", "*Shughul*" and "*Naara*".

During this time he also had to visit court on the charges of obscenity in his stories like “*Kali Shalwar*”, “*Dhuan*” and “*Bu*”. Some works which were considered as his masterpieces of this period are, “*Hatak*” and “*Khushiya*”. He also wrote “*Darpok*”, “*Tarraqi Pasand*”, “*Padhe Kalima*”, “*Sooraj Kay Liye*”, “*Das Rupaye*”, and “*Mantar*”. These stories were published in various collections during this time like *Manto Ke Afsane* (1940), *Dhuan* (1941), *Afsane Aur Drame* (1943), *Lazzat-e-Sang* (1947), *Aao* (1940), *Janazey* (1942), *Teen Aurtein*, *Manto kay Mazameen*, *Afsane aur Drame* (1942).

The third and the last phase of his writing begins from migration until the time of his demise that is from 1948 to 1955. During this time he wrote unforgettable short stories on the subject of partition like “*1919 Ki Ek Baat*”, “*Ram Khilawan*”, “*Sahai*”, “*Mozail*”, “*Akhri Salute*” and “*Tetwal Ka Kutta*.” The collection of stories that were published during this time are: *Chughad* (1948), *Khali Botlen*, *Khali Dabbey* (1950), *Badshahat Ka Khatma* (1954), *Beghar Ijazat* (1955), *Burque* (1955) and *Ratti, Masha, Tola* (1956). The stories that were published after his demise include *Namrood Ki Khudai*, *Sarkandon Ke Peechey*, *Phunde*, *Thanda Gosht*, *Chashme Rozan*, *Gulab Ke Phool*, and *Majzoob Ke Bar*.

Apart from these short stories, Manto has also written sketches, essays and articles on numerous subjects. It is said that if Manto had not written short stories then his prose writings would have been enough to remember him. They are considered to be his greatest contribution to Urdu literature which includes “*Mera Saheb*”, “*Murli Ki Dhun*”, “*Bari Saheb*”, “*Babu Rao Patel*”, and “*Nargis*.”

Check your progress:

1. Manto’s short stories such *Khol Do*, *Thanda Gosht* and *Toba Tek Singh* are related to Partition literature. (True / False)

3.2.2 Partition Literature:

Before reading the short story “*The Dog of Tetwal*” it is pertinent to understand in this context what does partition and partition literature mean.

India was divided on 14th August 1947 into two parts that is India and Pakistan. Once again it was torn into another piece in 1971 and Bangladesh was created. The story to divide the country was initiated in the 1940’s. During this time the idea of the Two Nation Theory was

injected in the minds of the masses. This is a political ideology that provides the reasons for separating the country into two parts on religious grounds.

This historical incident that turned the life of the millions into a tragedy also shook the lives of the writers. They could not resist themselves from representing those harsh realities of the greatest tragedy of Indian history. All the writers of different Indian languages irrespective of the genres wrote about the experiences of the masses and the tragedy they faced for the coming generations to remember.

The realities of the partition of India were written by many writers but in Urdu literature it is Manto who will be remembered for writing on this subject. His most significant contributions to this are *Toba Tek Singh*, *Khol Do*, *Thanda Gosht*, *Siyah Hashiye* and so on. In *Siyah Hashiye*, Manto has managed to shock his readers by writing in very few lines. For instance, see (i) Ungrateful Lot and (ii) Losing Proposition¹.

Ungrateful Lot

“What an ungrateful nation! After all the trouble I went to, slaughtering fifty pigs in this mosque and what happens?

Not one bloody customer! And now do you know, on the other side there are people queuing outside every temple to buy beef?”

Losing Proposition

The two friends finally picked out a girl from the dozen or so they had been shown. She cost fort two rupees and they brought her to their place.

One of them spent the night with her. “What is your name?” he asked

When she told him, he was taken aback. “But we were told you are the other religion.”

“They lied,” she replied “The bastards cheated us!” he screamed, “selling us a girl who is one of us. I want my money refunded.”

¹“Black Borders Siyah Hashiye”.Urduwallahs.<https://urduwallahs.wordpress.com/2012/05/23/black-borderssiyah-hashie/>.

Manto has managed to present various aspects of the tragedy. There is hardly any aspect of partition that Manto did not touch upon. He always leaves us shocked and provides a chance to think and ponder. In his short story *The Tetwal's Dog* or *The Dog of Tetwal* it is difficult to imagine the fate of the animal that was killed in the name of a country. Here is the summary of the short story *The Dog of Tetwal*.

3.2.3 Major Characters:

Captain Harnam Singh: Captain Harman Singh is a complex character at one moment he shows sympathy, care, concern and love by singing love song, feeding a biscuit to the dog and in the next moment he asks the dog to prove his identity. Ultimately, he is the one who kills the innocent dog.

Captain Himmat Khan: He belongs to the Pakistani camp. He also shows inhumanity towards the dog and plays a major role in killing the dog.

Dog of Tetwal: The innocent dog, which was roaming here and there in search of food, gets killed at the hands of human beings who happened to be on the two different sides of the border due to their religion and choice of migration. An innocent animal which does not understand the concept of partition had to bear the brunt of it.

Bashir: He is a Pakistani soldier. He does not treat the dog well. He gives the name Sapad Sunsun to the dog and also ties a piece of paper around his neck labelling him as a Pakistani dog. He does that on the behest of Captain Himmat Khan.

Banta Singh: Banta Singh belongs to the Indian camp. Along with others he also hears the barking sound of the dog and goes into the direction of its sound inside the bushes and brings him to the camp. He is the one who gives the dog its name, chapad jhun jhun.

Check your progress:

1. Harman Singh and Himmat Khan are characters in short story *The Dog of Tetwal*.
(True / False)

3.2.4 Summary:

The story begins at the border site where soldiers of India and Pakistan are at their respective camps. Readers are first introduced to the Indian camp where Captain Harnam Singh is on night guard/watch. He wakes Ganda Singh up to take over the guard. He lies down and begins to hum a song whose lines are:

“Bring me a pair of shoes studded with stars

Studded with stars

O!’ Harnam Singh

O Yaara

Even if you have to sell your buffalo”

It is a romantic song where his beloved is asking him to buy her a pair of shoes with stars on them. In the subsequent lines, he agrees to buy her the shoe even if he has to sell his buffalo. Banta Singh also begins to hum a Heer song, a very famous Punjabi folk song, which is a romantic-tragedy. The way Banta Singh suddenly began to hum the song, in the same way he became silent. It seemed as if sadness was creeping over the mountains too. Suddenly they heard barking of a dog. Banta Singh went inside the bushes and came along with a dog. He brought the dog to the camp and announced his name as *chapad jhun jhun*. Hearing his name all the soldiers laughed. Captain Harnam Singh gestured towards the dog and called him towards him and the dog perhaps thinking that some food is being offered began to sniff the floor. Seeing this, Captain Harnam Singh threw a biscuit at him and the dog began to sniff it and opened his mouth to enjoy it but then Captain Harman Singh picked the biscuit up and exclaimed that the dog cannot eat the biscuit if it is a Pakistani. Listening to this all the other soldiers began to laugh. Sardar Banta Singh comes to the dog’s rescue and tells Captain Harnam Singh that the dog is an Indian. Captain Harnam Singh laughed and addressed the dog and asked him to prove his identity to which the dog responded by wagging his tail. After observing the scenario, Captain Harnam Singh said this is not the proof to which Banta Singh replied that it is a refugee. A soldier responded by saying now dogs also have to be either Pakistani or Hindustani. Captain Harnam Singh said like the Pakistanis, Pakistani dogs will also be shot dead. On hearing this a soldier exclaimed “Hindustan Zindabad!” Hearing this, the dog got scared and when. Captain Harnam Singh notices this, he was pleased and said to the dog, “Why are you scared of our slogan *Chapad Jhun Jhun?*” and offered him one more biscuit. Banta Singh writes a name plate which also states that this is an Indian dog and hangs it around the dog’s neck.

After describing the early morning scene/scenario and how the Indian soldiers were trying to enjoy the company of the dog now the story moves to the Pakistani camp. It seems the dog stayed with the Pakistani soldiers some days before it went to the Indian camp. Now in the Pakistani camp, Captain Himmat Khan was looking at the map of Tetwal. Along with him was sitting the wireless operator who was receiving the messages of the Commander. A few meters away Bashir was sitting - reclining his back to a stone – and humming a song whose lines are:

‘Where, darling, did you pass the night ... darling, where?’² Bashir began to sing loudly. Now in the loud and strict sound of Captain Himmat Khan also said where did you spend the night? Bashir with the shocking expression began to see Captain Himmat Khan who was asking this question to the dog. They now see the name plate around the dog’s neck. Someone read it. They come to know that the dog has spent the night in the Indian camp. After some time Captain Himmat Khan asked Bashir to write on a lid of a cigarette box *Sapad Sunsun*, the reply to *chapad Jhun Jhun*, and he also asked him to write that it is a Pakistani dog. Captain Himmat Khan tied the rope around the dog’s neck and said to the dog not to betray them. He also said to the dog that the punishment for such crime is only death. The dog throughout this conversation wagged its tail. After saying all this to the dog, he led the dog towards the direction of Indian camp and asked the dog to deliver their letter to them. He called himself its officer and asked the dog to follow his order and after delivering the letter he asked the dog to return to them. The dog was moving slowly in the direction of the Indian camp. Suddenly “Himmat Khan raised his gun and fired a shot into the air.”³ The sound of the shot echoed and it was heard in the Indian camp as well but why it was shot, that remained elusive. Captain Harnam Singh asked the whereabouts of *Chapad jhun jhun* to Banta Singh. When Captain Harman Singh saw him coming from the enemy side, he also fired a shot aiming at the dog but he missed it. The dog was shocked and alarmed. When it heard another sound, it ran into the direction of Captain Himmat Khan’s camp. When Captain Himmat Khan saw this, he said to the dog loudly that the brave are not afraid. To turn the dog once again towards the Indian camp, Captain Himmat Khan shot a fire. Now Captain Harman Singh shot a fire and it just sang past the dog’s ear. The dog began to shake its head. Now Captain Himmat Khan fired a shot that just missed the dog’s foreleg. The dog did not understand where to go. At one moment it was going in one direction, the next moment in other direction. This brought a smile on the faces of Captain Himmat Khan and Captain Harman Singh. When the dog finally took the direction of Captain Harman Singh’s camp, then Captain Harman Singh took a serious aim at the dog and shot it. It injured the dog’s leg and a shrieking sound was heard in the air. In this condition the dog decided to take the direction of Captain Himmat Khan’s camp. Captain Himmat Khan shouted and asked the dog to go ahead as the brave do not bother about their wounds and they do not care about their lives and gamble theirs. He asked the dog to keep moving towards the Indian camp. The moment it took the direction of

² Aatish Taseer. (trns). “The Dog of Tetwal” by Saadat Hasan Manto. <https://granta.com/the-dog-of-Tetwal/>
³ *Ibid*

the Indian camp, Captain Harman Singh aimed at the dog and shot it. The dog collapsed on the spot. Captain Himmat Khan called it martyrdom. Captain Harman Singh while “running his hands over the still warm barrel of his gun, said: ‘He died that death that is a dog’s alone.’”⁴

3.2.5 Themes and Issues:

3.2.5.1 Partition and the Loss of Humanity:

All the people of the country of different religious backgrounds and sects were living in the same country until the time of Partition. Suddenly partition has brought the identity consciousness among the people and they began to fight in the name of the country even the animals were not left in this political war. Apart from this the people who are shown to be sympathetic and caring and loving towards their fellow countrymen and their own family members, suddenly became hostile towards the people who live on the other side of the border who until then were their friends or neighbours. They have shown their cruelty and inhuman behaviour by involving every single thing or by dividing everything in the name of religion and country.

Manto has very beautifully presented all these issues in his short stories like when the dog begins to sniff the biscuit thrown by Captain Harman Singh but before it enjoys the biscuit it was picked up by Captain Harman Singh. He said that the dog cannot eat the biscuit if it is from Pakistan. Apart from that he asked the dog to prove its identity. Manto, perhaps, wants to say that a dog who is a simple creature and who was in search of food, wandering here and there, is asked to prove its identity. Dog, a creature that does not speak and say anything in his own defence and support is asked very meaningless questions. The food is denied to him. It is so meaningless and utter stupidity of the people that they do every untoward thing in the name of the country.

In other words, perhaps, Manto also wants to suggest that the condition of the common man is like the dog who does not know anything and who does not understand the distinction between India and Pakistan. For him the matter of concern is his survival. He sees humans on both the sides of the. But the people like Captain Harman Singh and Captain Himmat Khan are everywhere who kill innocent people in the name of religion and country. Further, to show the animosity and hatred towards each other, the soldiers on both the sides of the border fire at each other without any reason. Apart from that, one can also observe the calm and peaceful

⁴*Ibid*

atmosphere Manto has projected in the story in contrast to the killing and inhuman acts on part of the humans.

3.2.5.2. Identity and Conflict:

The story also reflects on the identity and conflict issues like the moment they came to know that the dog might be from the other side of the border they began to ask several questions even the dog was asked to prove his identity. Once the dog goes to Pakistani camp, the soldiers like Captain Himmat Khan question the dog about his absence.

“Bashir softly sang:

‘Where, darling, did you pass the night ... darling, where?’

No sooner had Bashir, in jest, let his voice rise, than he heard Captain Himmat Khan thunder: ‘Oye! Where the hell have you been all night?’

Bashir gazed questioningly at Himmat Khan, but saw that he was addressing somebody else.

‘Oye, spit it out!’

Then Bashir saw.

Sitting some distance away was the stray dog, who only a few days ago had come like an uninvited guest into their midst and proceeded to remain there among them.

Bashir smiled, and addressing the dog, said: ‘Where, darling, did you pass the night ... darling, where?’

The dog energetically wagged its tail, sweeping it like a broom over the stony ground.

Captain Himmat Khan picked up a small stone and threw it at the dog.

‘Bastard, can’t do anything but wag his tail.’”⁵

This shows that on the one hand they care for the dog. On the other side, the moment they come to know that it belongs to India, they become suspicious and begin to think that the name of the dog must be some code from the other side of the border. Thus, in this act of suspicion and animosity the life of the dog is taken away.

⁵*Ibid.*

3.3 Learning Outcomes

In this Unit, students have been introduced to one of the greatest writers of Urdu literature Saadat Hasan Manto, who has written extensively on the issue of partition. The students have also been familiarized with the concept of partition and partition literature. Apart from this, students have studied the story “The Dog of Tetwal” in detail like its major characters, themes and issues and so on. They have also learnt some meanings of the words in the glossary and so far whatever they have read in this unit is being tested through objectives, short and long questions. Some works are also suggested to them for further reading and deeper understanding of the subject.

3.4 Glossary

Elusive: Difficult to find or achieve.

Energetically: In a manner showing or involving great activity or vitality.

Gaze: To look at something intently.

Innocent: Not responsible for or directly involved in an event yet suffering its consequences not guilty of a crime or offence.

Proposition: A statement or assertion that expresses a judgement or opinion.

Proceed: Begin a course of action or move forward.

Refugee: A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Rise: Move from a lower position to a higher one; come or go up or get up from lying, sitting, or kneeling.

Shrieking: Making a high-pitched piercing cry or sound.

Slogan: A short, easily remembered phrase used by an organization so that people will recognize it or its products.

Softly: In a careful and gentle manner or with a quiet and gentle voice or sound.

Sweep: Clean (an area) by brushing away dirt or litter.

Ungrateful: Not feeling or showing gratitude.

Uninvited: (of a person) Arriving somewhere or acting without having been asked.

Wag: With reference to an animal’s tail, move or cause to move rapidly to and fro.

3.5 Sample Questions

3.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. When was Manto born?
(a) **11 May 1912** (b) 14th August 1947
(c) 26th January 1950 (d) None of these
2. What was Manto's full Name?
(a) Manto (b) **Saadat Hasan Manto**
(c) Saadat Hasan (d) None of these
3. Identify the two works of Manto.
(a) **I. Bu II. Khol Do**
(b) I. *Jadien/Roots* II. *Ek Shauhar Ki Khatir (All for a Husband)*
(c) I. *Do Haath (A Pair of Hands)* II. *Aag Ka Darya (River of Fire)*
(d) None of these
4. How many countries were created at the time of partition of India in 1947?
(a) One (b) **Two**
(c) Three (d) Four
5. The dog belongs to which region?
(a) Nainital (b) Hartaal
(c) **Tetwal/Tethwal** (d) Mysore
6. What name is given by the Indian soldiers to the dog in the story?
(a) Chapad Jhun Jhun (b) Thapad sun sun
(c) **Jhapat Jhun Jhun** (d) None of these
7. Which song Banta Singh was singing?
(a) Mir song (b) **Heer song**
(c) Tasveer song (d) None of these
8. Who brought the dog to the Indian camp?
(a) **Banta Singh** (b) Captain Harman Singh Singh
(c) Charan Singh (d) None of these
9. Who gave the dog biscuits and asked about its identity?
(a) Captain Harman Singh Singh (b) Charan Singh

(c) Banta Singh

(d) None of these

10. Where did Manto go to recuperate from Tuberculosis?

(a) Himachal Pradesh

(b) Kashmir

(c) Punjab

(d) Ludhiyana

3.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Who was Saadat Hasan Manto?
2. When did the partition of India take place?
3. Which two countries were divided on the religious lines in 1947?
4. Name two works of Saadat Hasan Manto.
5. Apart from Short stories, what is Manto's greatest contribution to Urdu literature?

3.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Explain the term partition literature in detail and discuss any one work of your choice on the issue of partition.
2. Explain the character of dog and how partition has affected the dog.
3. Discuss the two sides of human nature that is cruelty and kindness with reference to the story 'The Dog of Tetwal.'

3.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Ali, Ahmad. "The Progressive Writers Movement and Creative Writers in Urdu." *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*. Ed. Carlo Coppola. East Lansing: Michigan State University 1974. Print.
2. Alvi, Varis, *Saadat Hasan Manto*. Trans. Jai Ratan. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. Print.
3. Begum, Safia. "Partition and New Literatures in English" (Module No. 26) for "'New' Literatures in English", (Paper No 08) of MHRD UGC ePG Pathshala, Subject: English; Principal Investigator: Prof. Tutun Mukherjee (University of Hyderabad); Paper Coordinator, Content Reviewer and Language Editor: Prof. Ipshita Chanda (ELF University, Hyderabad).
4. Flemming, Leslie, eds. *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan*.
5. Jalal, Ayesha. *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Time, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide*. USA: Princeton University Press, 2013.

6. Manto, Saadat Hasan. “Tethwal ka Kutta”. <https://www.rekhta.org/stories/tetwaal-ka-kutta-saadat-hasan-manto-stories?lang=ur>
7. -----, “The Dog of Tetwal” Translated by Aatish Taseer <https://granta.com/the-dog-of-Tetwal/>
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9. Wadhawan, J. Chander. *Manto Naama: The Life of Sadat Hasan Manto*. Trans. Jai Ratan. New Delhi: Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., 1998. Print

Unit-4: V.M. Basheer - *The Card Sharper's Daughter*

Structure

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Objectives

4.2 *The Card Sharper's Daughter*

4.2.1 A Critical Analysis

4.2.2 Narrative Technique

4.2.3 Major Influences on Basheer

4.2.4 Language and Humour

4.2.5 Basheer's Representation of Muslim Community and its Linguistic Forms

4.2.6 The Setting of Basheer's Stories

4.2.7 Basheer's Humanism and Characterization

4.2.8 Basheer's Social Context

4.2.9 Basheer's Use of Nickname and its Cultural Significance

4.2.10 Basheer and Ecology

4.3 Learning Outcomes

4.4 Glossary

4.5 Sample Questions

4.6 Suggested Learning Resources

4.0 Introduction

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994) is one of the literary giants of Indian Literature. He is one of the world's greatest storytellers. He has originally written in the Malayalam language. His works have been translated into many other languages. Basheer is a novelist, short story writer, and journalist. He was also a freedom fighter and a humanist. Born on 20 January 1908, Basheer was the eldest of six children of a devout Muslim couple, Kayi Abdu Rahman and Kunjachumma. His father was a timber merchant from Thalayolaparambu, a village in Vaikom, Kottayam District, Kerala. Young Basheer grew up with a deep sense of social and political commitments. When Basheer was in school, he had a deep admiration for Mahatma Gandhi and his political ideologies.

Basheer altered the nature of Malayalam fiction. He turned his back on the use of mainstream standard literary Malayalam, its literary vocabulary, and its grammatical and structural patterns. Thus, Basheer's narratives revolutionized the art of storytelling in Malayalam Literature. His well-received novels are *The Love Letter* (1943), *Childhood Companion* (1944), *The Voices* (1951), *My Grandad Had an Elephant* (1951), *In the Shadow of Death* (1951), *The Principal Divine of the Place* (1953), *Elephant Scooper and Golden Cross* (1954), *The Shadows of Life* (1954), *Pathumma's Goat* (1959), *Walls* (1965), *The Magic Cat* (1968), and *The Loving Cockroach* (Published posthumously) (2006) and his well-recognized short stories are *The Birthday* (1945), *Jottings from Memory* (1946), *Invaluable Moment* (1946), *Fools' Paradise* (1948), *The Prostitute of the Poor* (1952), *The Card Sharper's Daughter* (1951), *The World-renowned Nose* (1954), *The Hunger* (1954), *A Bhagavadgeetha and Some Breasts* (1967), *Elephant-hair* (1975), *The Laughing Wooden Doll* (1975), *The Inheritors of the Earth* (1977), *The Fools' God-Man* (1991), and *The Snake Ritu* (1946).

Basheer has been affectionately called as 'Bey pore Sultan' by his people and admirers. He received the Padma Shri award in 1982. Under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, Basheer went to fight for the cause of Indian Independence. He joined the Indian National Congress, and even left for Kozhikode (Calicut) to take part in Salt Satyagraha in 1930. He was sentenced to imprisonment for three months for his involvement in the freedom struggle. Deeply inspired by the other revolutionary leaders of India such as Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru, Basheer always fought for fundamental right to freedom. Basheer had a great nationalistic and patriotic spirit.

Basheer's works are woven out of his varied experiences. Born in a middle-class family which had fallen from affluence Basheer moved from his central Travancore home to the Malabar region of Kerala to take part in the freedom struggle. The police arrested him for his participation in the freedom struggle and imprisoned him. His prison life and experiences inspired many great stories which depicted prison life with stark realism.

Basheer's vast experiences, particularly from his travels within India, had a great impact upon him as a man and as a writer. During his travels, from one place to the other he had to work for existence. He undertook many works at that time as a cook, a fortune teller, a fruit seller, an accountant, and a watchman. He lived with Sufi mystics in the hermitages of the Himalayas for more than five years. He began writing stories when he was in jail. After his release from prison, Basheer organized a revolutionary journal titled 'Ujjivanam' (Uprising) with an intention to

contribute to the liberation of his homeland, India. He also ran bookstalls. Later in his forties, he married Fabi Basheer who was much younger than him, and moved to Beypore, south of Calicut, and lived there till his demise on 5th July 1994.

The present unit briefly covers his life, major works, and the significant features of his works with a special reference to his famous short story *The Cardsharpener's Daughter* (1951). Critical scrutiny of the work will enhance the readers' understanding of the author's social context, and a unique writing style.

4.1 Objectives

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

- Understand Vaikom Muhammed Basheer as an Indian Writer.
- Introduce the author's major literary contribution.
- Examine Basheer's socio-cultural and political milieu.
- Critically evaluate the various aspect of Basheer's *The Cardsharpener's Daughter*.
- Understand the author's choice of characters.
- Analyze Basheer's realism.
- Understand the central thematic concerns of the text.
- Explore Basheer's deep Humanism.
- Understand Basheer's unconventional style of writing.
- Examine Basheer's literary representation of the Muslim community of Kerala.
- Learn Basheer's use of nicknames, a unique feature of his culture and language.

4.2 *The Card Sharpener's Daughter*

4.2.1 A Critical Analysis:

The Cardsharpener's Daughter (1951) is one of Basheer's remarkable short stories. It belongs to particularly two typical genres of stories: one is called 'Long Story' and the other is 'Sthalam Stories.' From the beginning to the end, the story abounds in laughter. Sarcastic, subversive, and mocking verbal exchanges of the characters, who inhabit the story, make it uniquely humorous. The protagonists of the story are two comic characters, Mandan Muthapa

and Ottakkannan Poker. Mandan Muthapa is a pickpocket. He is tall and of a black complexion. Ottakkannan Poker calls Muthapa a fool. Throughout the story, Muthapa entertains the readers through his foolish and laughter-provoking gestures. Ottakkannan Poker is a cunning one-eyed cardsharper of the place. His behaviour also enhances the element of laughter in the story. Zainaba is an important female character in the story. She is the one and only daughter of the cardsharper.

The narrator of the story, who introduces himself as a 'humble historian', appears before the story begins and states that he is going to inform us how Ottakkannan Poker, the cardsharper lost his game to the foolish and slow-witted pickpocket Mandan Muthapa and how Muthapa succeeded in winning the hands of Poker's daughter Zainaba.

Mandan Muthapa's love affair with Ottakannan Pokker's daughter Zainaba is central to the plot of the story. Muthapa is passionately in love with Zainaba, and he is dreaming of his marriage to her. But Pokker does not like Muthapa and considers him a fool. He strongly opposed to their marriage. Eventually, public interference takes the matter up and supports Muthapa. One day, Mandan Muthapa comes to play the card game with Pokker. He loses to Muthapa this time. This infuriates Poker because for the last Twenty years Pokker himself has been the winner. No one in the locality could beat him ever. The whole scene is highly humorous with its crowds gathered to participate and watch the game. For Muthapa, this card game is a game of life and his victory gives him a new status, the status of a wise man. In fact, it was Zainaba who revealed the trick to Muthapa for winning the game. She knew that her father Ottakkannan was doing some malpractice to win the game all the time befooling the crowd and participants. Zainaba disclosed this secret trick to Mandan Muthapa. After Muthapa won the game, Pokker's attitude to him gradually begins to change. Pokker lost his authority and dominance over both the game as well as poor and ordinary people like Muthapa. As a result, the marriage between Muthapa and Zainaba becomes a reality. Thus, the story closes with the description of their marriage festivities.

The lives of the marginalized, the power politics of the privileged, and social discriminations based on profession, social status, and money are Basheer's unwavering concerns in the work. The collective power of the common people to bring about changes in relationships and societies are also pointed out by Basheer through a seemingly simple and humorous short story. In the case of Muthapa, who belongs to the lower section of society, it is people's will also that wins upon Pokker's stubbornness and authority. The small village,

mentioned as ‘the Sthalam’, is where the incidents of the story occur. The tone and terminology of the story is in a fashion of a parody of historical fiction, conventions of the romantic genre, and is also a mockery of the serious traditions of literary writing. The story is also a satire on the power politics of all cultures, people, and political parties. A reader can find several instances for establishing this point from the text.

Check your progress:

1. What is the central idea of the novel?
2. Who wins the game at the end of the story?
3. Who is Mandan Muthapa?

4.2.2 Narrative Technique:

The narrator of the story takes an objective tone but becomes an omniscient participant in the events of the story. He makes his appearance at the very outset of the story and introduces himself as the narrator-historian who very well knows the events of the place. He announces that he is going to tell us the historical event in which the slow-witted Muthapa came victorious in the card game and let the authoritarian Pokker loses his card game. The narrator-historian employs a mock-serious tone whenever he makes his comments as the story progresses. He exaggerates trivial events to mock at the traditional grandiloquent style conventionally employed for narrating fiction and history. The narrator-historian of the story is also a participant who observed and was amused at the events that happened in his locality. It is the narrator who tells us that the love and marriage between Muthapa and Zainaba are in a sense a people’s movement. It debunks the norms and notions of arranged marriage, patriarchy, and paternal authority.

Check your progress:

1. Comment on the narrator of the story
2. Which narrative method is employed in the story?
3. What is the narrator’s comment on the marriage between Muthapa and Zainaba?

4.2.3 Major Influences on Basheer:

As has already been mentioned, Basheer’s simple and vagabond lifestyle, his social contacts, friends and family, his travels, his participation in India’s freedom movement and prison life had a profound impact on his personality. It is quite evident that the images, sounds,

setting, characters, themes, and everything else he writes comes from his experiences, observations, and cultural and political context. Though noticeably short in size, his works are pithy and packed with his philosophies and perceptions about all the living and non-living organisms of the entire universe. His works have a great universal appeal. Basheer's picaresque sojourn to the various regions of human experiences, his involvement in freedom struggle, his prison life, his nervous breakdown, and life in the mental asylum were all grist to his mill. Basheer transformed these experiences into literary wonders. He adopted his own idiosyncratic style of writing subverting literary conventions.

Basheer was a contemporary of renowned Malayalam writers such as Karur Nilakandan Pillai (1858-1975), Kesav Dev (1904-83), Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909-87), Ponkunnam Varki (1908- 2004), PC Kuttikrishnan (1915-79) and S.K Pottakkat (1913-82). Basheer, like Pottakkat, travelled extensively. But surprisingly enough Basheer transformed each of his travel experiences into excellent stories challenging prevalent standardized norms of Malayalam. With these writers Basheer only shares a social consciousness. Basheer never imitated and employed the existing literary style and conventions of his contemporary writers.

Each work of Basheer has been a uniquely crafted microcosm of the world we live in. His awareness of the Second World War, British colonialism, India's freedom struggle and the problems of refugees found voices in his works. Issues like freedom, right to life, poverty, unemployment, gender, power, war, destruction, and death were crucial concerns in his works. His seminal work *The Voices* (1947) raises the fundamental questions of human rights and freedom.

Check your progress:

1. How did Basheer's travels shape his writings?
2. Write a brief note on Basheer's social and political consciousness.
3. Mention some of the crucial issues discussed by Basheer in his works.

4.2.4 Language and Humour:

Revolutionizing the conventions of the literary Malayalam language Basheer invented his writing style. Embracing the unconventional and non-literary mode of writing, Basheer celebrates realistic, polyphonic, and colloquial linguistic patterns of the people around him. Basheer's extraordinary use of humour in his works is a significant aspect of his writings. The humorous interaction of the people who inhabit his works creates a kind of frankness, freedom,

equality, and intimacy. Humour also functions as Basheer's strategy to dig at the norms, etiquettes, and formality of language. In other words, Basheer uses humour as an expression that comes honestly and spontaneously from the human heart. Basheer's use of colloquial Malayalam in his works is socially and politically relevant. The odd expressions, usages, jokes of his characters are designed to oppose and subvert notions of good language and bad language, the language of the high, and language of the low. There are plenty of excellent humorous scenes and conversations in *The Cardsharp's Daughter*. Mandan Muthapa's stealing scenes are instances. Basheer is here laughing at our exaggerated notions of good language and bad language. Basheer's style of narrative, which detailed daily incidents with a great sense of humour, has been a striking aspect that made his works extremely popular. No one of his contemporaries could surpass his extraordinary storytelling skills.

In Kerala notions of standard- Malayalam and bad Malayalam existed for a long time. Such distinctions also added to the hierarchical and feudalistic social structure of Kerala. In his works, Basheer has succeeded in expressing his broad vision of life that in a society with different communities and castes, the use of a language will have its variations. This is inevitable. As such, it is not fair enough to categorize language into high and low, and its speakers into inferior and superior.

Check your progress:

1. What is the peculiarity of Basheer's use of the Malayalam language?
2. How Basheer exploited humour as a strategy to interrogate the good/bad binary of language?
3. Mention an instance of humour in the story?

4.2.5 Basheer's Representation of Muslim Community and its Linguistic Forms:

Speech forms and patterns considered to be peculiar to a community, especially Basheer's Muslim community in Kerala have also been used in many of his work. *The Card Sharp's Daughter* also employs the uneducated, informal, regional linguistic expressions of Basheer's community. As a major writer to emerge from the minority Muslim community in Kerala, Basheer introduced Muslim background, household, characters, imagery, religious lore, expressions peculiar to the community. These elements, typical of his community, dominate some of his works. His trilogy *Childhood Friend* (1943), *My Granddad had an Elephant* (1951),

and *Pathumma's Goat* (1959). Basheer brilliantly captured the community's sense of humour customs, manners, lifestyle, illiteracy, and gender inequality.

The community to which Basheer belonged is noted for its humour sense and capacity to crack jokes. And, in the socio-political landscape of Kerala, the Muslim community has for ages been a minority community, deprived, dispossessed, powerless, and marginalized. It has also been a culturally and educationally backward community. It is this predicament of the community and the overall socio-cultural structure of Kerala that produced Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, the novelist.

Check your progress:

1. How does Basheer depict the Muslim community of Kerala in his works?
2. Name Basheer's Trilogy.
3. What is the source of Basheer's humour in most of his works?

4.2.6 The Setting of Basheer's Stories:

In many of Basheer's works, the vivid strain of realism has been a conspicuous element. The marketplaces, teashops, and fairs during Basheer's times were the ideal locations where the collective life of ordinary people was enacted. Such marketplaces were quite common all over Kerala until very recently. They constituted a prominent site of Kerala's popular culture. The marketplace and teashops were not just venues for buying and selling goods for the local people. Instead, those venues function as sites of collective life and social interaction. *The Cardsharpener's Daughter* is set in a marketplace with its noisy crowd who gather the marketplace for socialization and entertainment. The cardsharper and pickpockets were all inevitable parts of a marketplace.

4.2.7 Basheer's Humanism and Characterization:

The weak, the excluded, the dispossessed, the deprived, and the marginalized dominate the character list of Basheer's worlds. Thieves, pickpockets, women, prostitutes, differently abled, children, animals are all lavishly portrayed by him. He foregrounded these people who belonged to the lower social rank and section of society. Their freedom, right to life, and right to equality are repeatedly asserted by Basheer in almost all his works.

In *The Cardsharpener's Daughter*, Ottakkannan Pokker is a one-eyed, stubborn man. He is a typical patriarchal father. Though authoritative, he is much concerned about the welfare of his daughter, Zainaba. The Patriarchal power structures and conventionalities are subverted in the

story, through his final acceptance of Zainab's and Muthapa's union. It is the father's right and privilege to give consent when his children get married, which prompts Ottakkannan Pokker to be so aggressive and authoritative. When Muthapa's love affair becomes a public issue in which the local people become mediators, Pokker gives up. Basheer's women are modest, witty, and subservient to Patriarchal norms. For example, in another famous work of Basheer titled, *Pathummas's Goat*, the women of the household eat only after the men folk have eaten, and the result, at times, is that they have not enough to appease their hunger. Such images of female submissiveness recur in Basheer's novels. Basheer's view, when it comes to issues concerning women, Basheer takes a feminist stance. Through several humorous incidents Basheer shows his concern for unequal treatment of women, the frustrations of women in a patriarchal social set-up, and social injustices toward the poor. Basheer's works are all multi-voiced, the voices of the marginalized are made dominant and visible.

Check your progress:

1. Examine Basheer's portrayal of women.
2. Comment on Basheer's satire on patriarchy in the story.
3. Analyse the character of Ottakkannan Pokker.

4.2.8 Basheer's Social Context:

Basheer's works were produced during times when revolutionary changes had taken place in the socio-cultural sphere of Kerala. Yet, society was still conventional. People were generally poor and were largely unfamiliar with the innovative and modern lifestyles and culture of the West. As for the familial set-up, it was the extended family form that prevailed in society. Basheer's female characters always played conventional roles, subordinate and subservient to men. Society, particularly Basheer's Muslim community, was predominantly patriarchal. The dominance of male characters in Basheer's novels may be said to be in tune with this socio-cultural condition.

From a sociological point of view Basheer acquires a special significance. He was the first major Muslim writer to emerge as the prominent writer of Malayalam literature. He revolutionized the Malayalam literary frame and contributed significantly to the evolution of Malayalam literary writing. His fictional and non-fictional writings were quite genre blurring and unconventional in style, language, and thematic concerns. He was the first writer to introduce Muslim background, religious lore, imagery, dialect, lifestyle into Malayalam literary

mainstream. Expressions and phrases peculiar to the community gave an all-new aspect to Malayalam language itself when he captured them with clinical precision in his writings. His Muslim background gave him authentic topics to be a master in the art of storytelling. His body of works was deeply rooted in his Muslim background, its customs, and manners. His novels *Balyakalasakhi* (1943), and *Pathumma's Goat* (1959) are classic examples.

Check your progress:

1. How did Basheer revolutionised Malayalam literary writer?
2. Discuss Basheer's Muslim context and its contribution to Malayalam literature.

4.2.9 Basheer's Use of Nickname and its Cultural Significance:

Basheer's use of the names in most of his stories has intricately linked to the cultural context of Kerala. The major characters of the story Mandan Muthapa and Ottakkannan Pokker and other minor characters of the story are all having their nicknames. 'Mandan' is a nickname and a colloquialism, generally used by the uneducated people of Kerala. The usage was quite common during the time in which the novel was written and published. The term 'Mandan' means 'idiot' 'fool' 'dunce' 'blockhead'. 'Mandan' does not refer to Muthapa's family name or surname. In Kerala, nicknames are sometimes attributed to a person referring to the person's gestures, behaviour, and even physiology. Nicknames also add to the humorous quality of Basheer's works. Even the name Muthapa is a funny distortion of the Arabic term 'Mustafa.' However, such distortions of proper names, and putting nicknames are all one unique cultural segment of the uneducated community of Basheer and other communities in Kerala, such as Hindus and Christians as well. As such, Basheer's choice of nicknames for his characters generates laughter.

4.2.10 Basheer and Ecology:

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer was so fond of Nature, earth, and all its inheritors. He was a champion of Animal Rights. He always maintained a deep dialogue with his environment, surroundings, and the innumerable creatures of the earth. In most of his works he celebrated the power and beauty of nature. The peaceful coexistence of humans, animals and nature has been deeply promoted by him throughout his fictional and non-fictional works. Nature vocabulary domineered his use of language, names of trees, flowers, fruits added colour to his works. Sitting under his mangosteen trees, Basheer reflected on the nature of the relationship between man and

nature. Basheer's literary characters embraced the bounty of our ecosystem. In the work *Inheritors of the Earth* (1977), Basheer spoke for the entire ecosystem and its inhabitants. Basheer's emphasis on Nature is to be understood as his interrogation of anthropocentrism. Idea that humans are at the centre of the universe is subverted. Nature preservation, deep ecology, and eco-consciousness are some of the universal concerns in Basheer's literary works.

4.3 Learning Outcomes

At the end of the Unit, students will be able to:

- Briefly understand Basheer's oeuvre.
- Understand the social background that shaped Basheer's literary world.
- Explain some of the elements of Basheer's distinctive writing style.
- Identify the culturally unique elements of the story.
- Understand Basheer as a satirist.
- Understand Basheer as an unconventional writer.
- Recognize various aspects of Basheer's writing style.
- Know Basheer's use of humour.
- Understand the social criticism in the story.
- Identify Basheer's uniquely different use of language, particularly his use of colloquial Malayalam.

4.4 Glossary

Long stories: In Malayalam Literature 'Neenda Katha' (Long story) refers to the short stories of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer. A Long story is quite a bit longer than a short story and not as lengthy as a novella

Mandan: This Malayalam term is the nickname of Muthapa in the story. He was called 'Mandan' which means stupid or fool

Nickname: A nickname or a Sobriquet is a substitute for the proper name of a familiar person, place, or thing. It is commonly used affectionately or mockingly. Nickname is an aspect of Basheer's use of colloquial Malayalam. Nicknames can generate laughter

Ottakkannan: A Malayalam term meaning ‘one-eyed’. It is also a nickname given to Pokker (Zainaba’s father) referring to his physiology

Polyphony: A term coined by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. It refers to the presence of heterogeneous voices, dialects, slang, multiple perspectives in a literary text. Polyphony is a linguistic quality of a narrative. Basheer’s works are excellent examples of polyphony

Satire: Satire is a genre of literature aimed at social criticism. The dominant feature of satire is humour. Satire achieves its purpose by exploiting the devices of parody, irony, laughter, exaggeration, and by laughing at the follies and foibles of human societies

Sthalam Stories: In Kerala, ‘Sthalam’ refers to a rustic, rural village. Three of Basheer’s works are set in such rural villages. *The Cardsharpener’s Daughter*, *The Principal Divine of the Place*, and *The Elephant Scooper and the Golden Cross* belong to Sthalam stories

4.5 Sample Questions

4.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which one these does not belong to Basheer’s *Sthalam Stories*?
 - (a) The Cardsharpener’s Daughter
 - (b) Pathumma’s Goat**
 - (c) The Principal Divine of the Place.
2. What is the profession of Ottakkannan Pokker?
 - (a) Card sharper**
 - (b) Pickpocket
 - (c) Shopkeeper
3. Who coined the term Polyphony?
 - (a) Vaikom Muhammed Basheer
 - (b) Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin**
 - (c) Greek thinkers
4. What is satire?
 - (a) A form of story
 - (b) A mode of social criticism**
 - (c) A figure of speech
5. Who wins the card game at the end of the story?

(a) Zainaba

(b) Mandan Muthapa

(c) Ottakkannan Pokker

6. What is a Long story?

(a) Refers to Basheer's stories

(b) A genre in Malayalam Literature

(c) A lengthy story

7. In which year *The Cardsharpener's Daughter* was published?

(a) 1956

(b) 1957

(c) 1951

8. Basheer was affectionately called ----- by his people.

(a) The king of Beypore

(b) Beypore Raja

(c) Beypore Sultan

9. Give an example of a nickname in the story.

(a) Ottakkannan

(b) Muthapa

(c) Pokker

10. Who calls Mandan Muthapa a fool?

(a) The people

(b) Zainaba

(c) Ottakkannan Pokker

4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the setting of the novel.
2. Realism in the portrayal of Mandan Muthapa.
3. Discuss the theme of marriage in the story.
4. Examine Basheer's social consciousness.
5. Examine Basheer's treatment of gender with a special reference to Zainaba.

4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss the various aspects of Basheer's narrative techniques through an analysis of the story *The Cardsharpener's Daughter*.
2. Critically evaluate Basheer's use of language and humour.
3. What are the socio-cultural and political contexts of Basheer's works? Discuss with special attention to *The Cardsharpener's Daughter*?

4.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Basheer, Vaikom Muhammad. *Poovan Banana and the Other Stories*. Translated by Abdulla V, Orient Longman, 1994.
2. ---. *Basheer Fictions*. Edited by Vanajam Ravindran, Katha Books, 1996.
3. ---. *Me Grandad Ad an Elephant! Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India*. Translated by Ronald E. Asher and Achamma Coilparampil Chandersekaran.
4. Hasan, Mushirul, and M. Asaduddin. *Image and Representation: Stories of Muslim Lives in India*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
5. Sherif, K.M. *Kunhupaathamma's Tryst with Destiny*. Kannur University, Thalassery Campus, 2005.

Unit-5: Eunice De Souza - *Marriages Are Made*

Structure

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Marriages Are Made

5.2.1 Summary

5.2.2 Critical Appreciation

5.3 Learning Outcomes

5.4 Glossary

5.5 Sample Questions

5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

5.0 Introduction

Indian English women's poetry is seen as revolutionary and confessional in its form. The women poets have carved poems out of their familial spaces. These writers have condemned and dismantled the patriarchal structures that keep women in shackles. Through their writings, they have voiced the sufferings of females that remain subdued due to the patriarchal structures. Eunice de Souza is one of the famous confessional female poets from India who is often compared to Sylvia Plath in her style of writing. Eunice de Souza through her writing pictures the alienation that a woman suffers when she is clutched in socially imposed identity. She is asked to behave in accordance with such identity throughout her life without any dissatisfaction and bitterness. She has written about the complexity of the female psyche, love, sexuality, and the dilemma that a female suffers in society. This chapter will discuss in detail one of Eunice de Souza's famous poems "*Marriages are Made*" which talks about how marriages are executed in Indian society.

5.1 Objectives

The following objectives will be achieved in this Unit:

- Introduction to Eunice de Souza as an important Indian female writer in English.
- Introduction to the poem, “Marriages are made” by Eunice de Souza.
- Explain the outlook of the poetess on marriage.
- Analysis, summary and explanation of the poem.
- Attempt examination based questions without any difficulty.

5.2 *Marriages Are Made*

Eunice de Souza is widely regarded as one of the best female Indian poets writing in English. She was born on August 1, 1940, in a Goan Catholic family and took heavenly abode on July 29, 2017. Her father died when she was three years old and was raised without a father in Pune. She started her early education in the same place. She pursued her master’s in English Literature from Marquette University in Wisconsin. She finished her Ph.D. at the University of Bombay. She is a renowned poet, novelist, and literary critic who carved her space in Indian Writing in English. She started her teaching career at St. Xavier’s College, Mumbai, and served the institution for around three decades until her retirement.

Eunice de Souza started her literary career as a writer by publishing a variety of writings including poems, novels, articles, etc. She engaged herself as an actor and a director in the theatre. She was also associated with a famous literary festival called *Ithaka* organized in St. Xavier College, Mumbai. She started her career as a poet and published.

- *Fix* (1979)
- *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988)
- *Ways of Belonging* (1990)
- *Selected and New Poems* (1994)
- *A Necklace of Skulls* (2009)
- *Learn from the Almond Leaf* (2016)

Eunice de Souza experimented with novel writing after two decades of poetry writing with *Dangerlok* (2001) as her first published novel. It was followed by *Dev & Simran* (2003),

and four children books. She contributed extensively as a columnist on a variety of topics from history, art, literature, politics, and she drew a number of issues from her personal life as well for the *Mumbai Mirror*. She has edited many anthologies and collections for *Mumbai Mirror*. *Dangerlok* turned out to be a big success and the book follows the story of Rina Ferreira a middle-aged woman who is a lecturer in English literature and a poet. It gives insight into her life as the survival of a single woman in Mumbai. The second novel, *Dev & Simran* is a story about a young couple living in Bombay, coping up with the conditions in the city and everyday married life followed by the loss of a child. After sometime Dev also dies and Simran is left alone in the vastness of the city. With the help of few close-knit friends, she tries to come out of her suffering. It is a magnificent novel that celebrates agonies and ordinary moments in life. Her work speaks volumes about her writing as she became the only woman to be included in the *Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992). She edited a number of books, including the anthology, *Nine India Woman Poets*, which is actually a history of poems of Indian women writing in English. Through her writing, she gives a profound understanding of contemporary society and various extensive relationships in urban Indian societies. She has dealt extensively with the plight of women in urban contemporary India who work hard for their daily needs and the alienation, rebellion, agony, and isolation that accompanies womanhood in such a challenging environment. Her poems commonly explore the theme of loss, alienation, and isolation that accompany womanhood. In her writings especially poetry she used everyday English and draws from her experiences of the Goan Community. She has enthusiastically questioned the patriarchal structures in the society in all the religions followed in India especially the rigid structures in Christian society.

Eunice De Souza remained single throughout her life and cared for her mother until her death. Ranjit Hoskote upon the death of Eunice de Souza in 2017 said that she had a liberating approach for young women poets. He says that her poetic style is one where there is wisdom in her poetry wrapped with a voice, with a dry humour that has taken a minimalist form in her last collection of poems with a clear representation of thoughts. Eunice de Souza, through her work has left a mark on the generations to come.

Themes in the poetry of Eunice de Souza

1) Sexuality

The theme of female sexuality reverberates throughout Eunice de Souza's poetry. The contemporary women poets have unabashedly spoken their minds out while dealing with anger,

agonies, pain, anxieties that a woman undergoes at some point in her life, sometimes during her adolescence, marriage, sexual relationships, motherhood, etc. they celebrate their sexual identity and female body. These writers deal with the theme of changes happening in the female body during pregnancy. They have carved their way to speak about sexual freedom and they have voiced themselves as a living entity that was earlier considered dead or muted in male writings. These contemporary Indian women writers have embraced their bodily existence themselves and have inspired many other Indian women, overturning the male domination through their writings. The frankness with which they write about male-female sexual relationship sets a strong voice against the patriarchy. K.D. Singh comments on the post-independence contemporary female writers, “The post-Independence, post-colonial era in India has been a phase of intense introspection, search for roots and identity.” (*Feminism and Post-feminism: The Context of Modern Indian Women Poets* 58). In Eunice de Souza’s poem *Fix* (1979), she writes about the adolescent experience of a girl growing up in her fifties in a Goan- Catholic male-dominated society. The poem is a response to the expression of the female body which has a ‘performative’ voice in it as suggested by Eunice de Souza. She gives significant importance to the female body and sexuality in her poetry. She portrays a combative picture of the female body, ‘sense of touch’, ‘flow of blood’, ‘speech of sex’ etc. In her another poem, (*A Necklace of Skulls* 24), she writes about female sexuality explicitly,

The blood congeals at lover’s touch

The guts dissolve in shit. (A Necklace of Skulls 24)

In her works, there is a constant sadness about the situation of women in the patriarchal society and she tries to free women from the chains of male-dominated traditions through the explicit use of sexual language. The poem, *Marriages Are Made* by Eunice de Souza engages the reader with the same question of female desire and sexuality which society tries to curb through traditions. It is through their writings Eunice and her contemporaries posit how patriarchy had restrained them within the four walls and had stopped them to speak out their minds. She as a writer writes from the female perspective and envisages her needs and desires of the female body. She openly talks about various dimensions of sex and man-woman sexual relationship. Her writing is an act of ‘feminist resistance.’ She uses the language as a tool of resistance against male-domination and patriarchal enforcement. She articulates a powerful voice against patriarchy in her writing as done in *Marriages are Made*, she confronts and critiques the

old rules, established notions. Eunice de Souza in *A Necklace of Skull* talks about universal female sexual desires and the affliction that surrounds them, she writes:

*The skin tight
Over my bones
I thought the whole world
Was trying to rip me up.
Cut me down go through me
With a razor blade. (28-29)*

Eunice de Souza in the following lines talks about sexual fulfilment by a female in a patriarchal society,

*'Marie, my frequent sexual encounters
represent more than an attempt
to find mere physical fulfillment.
They are a poet's struggle to
transcend the self/and enter into
communion/With the world.
Write a poem about women flesh.
Watch her become oh womanly and grateful. (18-19)*

It can be concluded that Eunice de Souza in her poems celebrates the female body, female sexuality, and female pregnancy. The female body is a site of resistance against the patriarchy. It is full of "biological sexual" function, needs, and desires. The expression and vocabulary used by Eunice are seen as nasty and unpleasant by the male-dominated society but she daringly expresses her thoughts and feelings in her work. In her poetry, the body is considered the central focus that makes her poetry interesting. As a contemporary poem it focuses on the relationships devoid of emotional interaction that most females suffer in the lifetime at one point or another. Her approach to love, sex, and the female body is not only unconventional but also revolutionary. In their poetry body loses all its relevance in that love-relationship which is devoid of emotional interaction. Thus, the representation of the sexuality of females has carved out a space for contemporary female poets to articulate the subjugation as universal.

2) Confessional Poetry

Writing in a confessional mode, Eunice de Souza is often compared to Sylvia Plath. In her poems, she reflects upon the harsh realities of the Goan male-dominated catholic community. The treatment of women and injustice done at the hands of the male is clearly portrayed in her writing. In addition to this, she describes the state of affairs and interdictions which tells us about her education as a young girl in a male-dominated society. She is agitated over the loss of female dignity in society as a result of decreasing human values which are deep-rooted in patriarchy that the poet brings forth in her work. Her work is a socio-cultural document of the Goan Catholic community where she yearns for dignity and equality.

In one of her poems, *Forgive Me Mother*, she writes about the death of her father and de Souza taking place of her father. It is often seen in parallel to Sylvia Plath's poems about her father, *Daddy*. She chooses a confessional mode in *A Necklace of Skulls* where girls are taught to use "bracelet" for "brassieres" etc. the preachers did not allow boys and girls to be together at a young age,

*The preacher thundered:
Never go with a man alone
Never alone
And even if you're engaged
Only passionless kisses. (6)*

Due to such a strict, restricted and conservative society, many girls remain ignorant about their sexuality. Thus in the poem *Fix*, she writes about a young girl asking about pregnancy, "Can it happen when you're in a dance hall I mean, you know what, getting preggers and all that, when You're dancing?" In Eunice de Souza's poem *Catholic Mother* her tone is resentful and defiant and it depicts her loss of faith in God:

*We're One Big Happy Family,
God Always provides
India will suffer for
her Wicked Ways*

(These Hindu buggers got no ethics).

De Souza represents the position of the mother in a Goan Catholic family as she enjoys a place of superiority in the family. Adil Jussawalla mentions significantly that: "Those readers who prefer a softer or more lyrical line around its edge may find it extremely unpleasant." (90) De

Souza's poetry is often seen as "a betrayal" by her community for unabashedly portraying a disparaging picture of her community.

To conclude, Eunice de Souza uses the confessional mode of writing as an instrument to exploit and break open the chains of patriarchy. She cries out for the lost dignity of the females in Indian society which is predominantly a male-dominated society. Along with other contemporary female poets, they celebrate the existence of being a female, her body, her needs, sexuality, and desires. They have overturned the image of females as voiceless and fragile. These poets have presented females in decorated *avatars* as they hurl themselves from the shackles of patriarchy. In this respect, Amrita Raj Gargey opines, "The Contemporary Indian Women writers have taken utmost care in expressing their identity and sentiments effectively". (209)

Marriages are Made

*My cousin Elena
is to be married
The formalities
have been completed:
her family history examined
for T.B. and madness
her father declared solvent
her eyes examined for squints
her teeth for cavities
her stools for the possible
non-Brahmin worm.
She's not quite tall enough
and not quite full enough
(children will take care of that)
Her complexion it was decided
would compensate, being just about
the right shade
of rightness
to do justice to
Francisco X. Noronha Prabhu
good son of Mother Church.*

-by Eunice De Souza

5.2.1 Summary:

Marriages are made is a beautiful poem written by Eunice de Souza. In the poem, Eunice de Souza describes that her cousin is going to get married and how she has been selected to get married after fulfilling different criteria set by our society. She writes that how her cousin, a young girl, is made to suffer at the hand of society when it comes to choosing her as a bride. She is objectified and muted at the same time where she is not allowed to voice her opinion. She tells the reader that a girl has to go through various criteria set for her and once she fulfils those only then she is liable to marry or chosen to be a bride for the groom. These tests include examining her physical attributes such as: looks, height, weight, complexion, etc. She is judged for her character in addition to this; her family history is also checked. The whole process is carried out by the family members from the groom's side, not the bride. The boy and girl going to marry are not allowed to see each other before marriage. She writes that the physical attributes of a girl decide whether she qualifies as a bride or not. Such traditions are blindly followed by people while making the important decision of someone else's life.

Elena's family is examined, to know if they have any family medical history related to TB and madness. Many people check about these things to avoid springing of such diseases in generations to follow. After completely examining the formalities related to family background, now she will be examined as if by a physician. No discrepancy of any sort is entertained therefore, to begin with, her eyes are checked properly to ensure if they are alright without any uneven and should be attractive enough to catch hold of an onlooker. Next, her teeth are examined for cavities so that she has a beautiful smile on her face. Her stool is metaphorically checked to possibly see the non-Brahmin worm which indicates she should belong to the same community as that of the groom i.e., she should be a Christian. Further, she writes that her height is examined as she is not that tall and her weight is also fine. Her skin complexion is regarded as just fine to compensate which is a satire on how Indian society prefers a girl with a fair complexion. She writes her complexion will do justice to her to be husband Francisco X which also shows that if a man has darker skin it is accepted by society.

The whole procedure of approving a girl for marriage is based on certain criteria that a girl should be fair, beautiful, good-natured, tall, and slim. If she satisfies all such needs then she is selected as a good match. While selecting a girl, no importance given to the understanding between boy and girl or qualities of her as a human being rather selection process is completely based on the outer appearance of a girl than her inner beauty. The girl who is getting married, is

made artificial and distant as is restricted to an object or present to be taken for the groom. She is muted as she cannot have any say in anything related to the process and marriage.

Eunice de Souza brings forth the patriarchal set up that governs a woman to perform various roles and duties assigned to her.

5.2.2 Critical Appreciation:

This poem by Eunice de Souza is a critical commentary on the institution of marriage in our society. It explains to us about how women are the sufferers of a patriarchal institution as it does not allow women to voice their choices and hence, they feel alienated from society. Marriage is an important institution/ custom that governs our life. It is supposed to be the harbinger of peace, prosperity, and happiness in the life of people getting married. In many cases, it has been observed the way this institution works in our society bounds women to perform their duties as a wife irrespective of their happiness.

Through her work, Eunice de Souza, attacks the emptiness of a common saying in our society that ‘marriages are made in heaven’. In her title of the poem which is a reduced version of the above saying “Marriages are Made”, she leaves an open-ended question for the reader to interpret. The reader is to decide whether Marriages are made in heaven or is it the society that makes it happen. The critical reading of Eunice’s poem reflects that the institution of marriage is socially constructed. It takes a dig on society; the way people invoke to humiliate a woman to undergo preparations of marriage. The society makes her undergo all sorts of physical and family background examinations. The process of a woman’s examination reflects the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society where the match-maker or family of the boy are no less than vultures hovering above her.

A woman has to prove herself worthy of the prospective bridegroom. Her family history is thoroughly scrutinized to know if any disease that prevails in the family like TB or madness. Her eyes are checked for squints and her teeth are checked for cavities, other than this her family background is also checked to confirm if she belongs to the same community and is a non-Brahmin. It also highlights the fact that the male dominated society leaves no space for women who are average looking, who have a physical ailment or if any disease runs in their blood line. She is looked down upon by the prospective groom’s family and the society as well. Here, another important fact that no one asks about the physical attributes of the groom if he compliments the girl or if he has any disease history in his family.

While all these formalities are being carried out there is no one thinks about her feeling if she is happy with the match and if she really wants this marriage. The patriarchal institution of marriage does not give any value to her emotions. The process of approval tears apart her body and soul as two different entities. It is evident from her writing that preference is given to the physical appearance of a woman than her feelings. Eunice overturns the romantic notion of marriage which involves the union of man and woman. She has made use of litotes to portray an image of Elena based on negation. She has not used similes, metaphors. It is evident that even though the poem is about Elena's marriage but she is a subdued figure in the poem and a streak of male domination is clearly seen. There is an effect of understatement that is present throughout the poem. Just like a woman is secondary for society, her feelings are secondary and no preference is given to her feelings, almost like a doll without any emotions. The same effect is given by Eunice in her poem 'Marriages are Made' with the use of litotes. The poem is almost like a monologue by a third person i.e., the poet who is also the narrator of the poem. The poem is written in free verse.

At the end of the poem, the name of the prospective bridegroom is mentioned i.e., Franciso X, who is portrayed as a lord/ master to Elena which highlights the fact that Elena is bound to serve her master throughout her life. It is a satire on the bond of marriage which demands equal love and respect is put at a toss as the man in the bond automatically acquires a higher status before marriage due to a patriarchal setup in our society.

5.3 Learning Outcomes

The learner is expected to get acquainted with Indian writing in English. The learner will learn about the contribution of female writers in Indian Writing in English with a special focus on Eunice de Souza's writings as she is the only female writer to be included in the *Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992). The learner by now must have got a good hold on the poem *Marriages are Made* discussed in detail. The problem of marriage as a socially constructed institution is discussed through the reading of the poem. The plight of a woman and the humiliation she has to undergo before she gets approved for the prospective bridegroom. The learner must have also learned about the patriarchal structure that has marginalized women as objects who do not have a voice and are rendered mute. Further, the learner can read the books provided in the Suggested Learning Resources to read more about the contribution of female

writers and Eunice de Souza's writings in detail. After the detailed study of the poem, the learner will be able to write questions in the examination without any difficulty.

5.4 Glossary

Alienation: a state of disassociating with something that you do not feel.

Confessional: something in the manner or style of a confession.

Condemned: express one's disapproval over something.

Colloquial: pertaining to everyday language use, not formal.

Clutched: to grasp or hold something tightly

Dig: in a mocking and insulting manner.

Dismantled: take to pieces.

Enthusiastically: said in a loud and forceful manner.

Humiliation: the state of being humbled or reduced to submission.

Invoke: to implore someone to do something.

Litotes: it is an understatement which is expressed with use of a negative.

Patriarchal: a society in which male holds an upper position to that of a female.

Prospective: something that is expected to happen in future.

Reduced: to shorten something.

Rendered: to cause, to become

Shackles: a pair of fetters connected by a chain that restricts the movement.

Suffering: a painful prolonged experience.

Sprawling: spreading and expanding at a faster pace.

Subjugation: to bring someone under one's domination.

Understatement: to present something small or less important than it really is.

5.5 Sample Questions

5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. In the poem, more emphasis is given to
 - (a) worth of the female
 - (b) physical attributes**

- (c) education
- (d) material possession
- 2. Elena is a victim of the society's
 - (a) Patriarchal set up
 - (b) Male domination
 - (c) Rules and customs set forth by the society
 - (d) All of the above**
- 3. Marriages in society are the consequence of
 - (a) Heaven
 - (b) Society**
 - (c) Females
 - (d) One's own will
- 4. Eunice de Souza was born in a
 - (a) Parsi Community
 - (b) Goan Hindu Community
 - (c) Goan Catholic Community**
 - (d) Jewish Community
- 5. The poem, "Marriages are Made" talks about
 - (a) Women empowerment
 - (b) Victimization of women**
 - (c) Self-love of women
 - (d) Independence of women
- 6. The contemporary female poets talk about
 - (a) Sexuality
 - (b) Agonies and sufferings of females.
 - (c) Female psychology
 - (d) All of the above**
- 7. The voice of Elena is rendered mute as
 - (a) She chooses not to speak
 - (b) She is physically disabled
 - (c) She is not allowed to voice herself**
 - (d) None of the above

8. Which of the following is not written by Eunice de Souza
- (a) *Fix*
 - (b) *Women in Dutch Painting*
 - (c) *The Stinking Rose*
 - (d) *Ways of Belonging***
9. What is the name of Elena's prospective husband?
- (a) Frazer
 - (b) Francisco X**
 - (c) Franklin
 - (d) Peter
10. Elena is checked for which of the following things to become a bride
- (a) Teeth
 - (b) Eyes
 - (c) Complexion
 - (d) All of the above**

5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Why does the poet say 'Marriages are Made'?
2. Explain the poet's view on how marriages are executed in Indian society.
3. Give a critical appreciation of the poem 'Marriages are Made'.
4. Give the sum and substance of the poem 'Marriages are Made'.
5. How oppression against women is reflected in Eunice de Souza's poetry?

5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Discuss Eunice de Souza's poem 'Marriages are Made' as a comment on the way society treats a woman.
2. Comment on the title of the poem by Eunice de Souza, 'Marriages are Made'.
3. Discuss how Elena is marginalised during the process of selection as a bride for prospective groom with special reference to the poem, 'Marriages are Made'.

5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Acharya, Shanta. "On poetry and the creative process". *Indian English Women Poets*. Ed. Anisur Rahman and Ameena Kazi Ansari. Creative Books, 2009.
2. Albertazzi, Silvia. "The Indian Women, the Body and the Flesh: Re-reading Some Poems by Kamala Das, de Souza and Bhatt". *Discussing Indian Women Writers Some Feminist Issues*. Ed. Alessandro Monti and R.K. Dhawan. Prestige Books, 2002.
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5. Bishop and Marjorie Weinzieg. Wordsworth, 1979.
6. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge Classics, 2013.
7. Chaudhuri, Sutapa. "Sutapa Chaudhuri: The Poems of Sujata Bhatt". 3-4. Web. 28 Jan. 2014. < <http://www.museindia.com/regularcontent.asp?issid=47&id=3924>
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9. Das, Kamala. *The Old Playhouse and Other poems*. Orient Longman Ltd, 1973.
10. De Souza, Eunice. ed. *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*. Oxford University Press, 1977.
11. De Souza, Eunice. *Ways of Belonging: Selected Poems*. Paperback, 1990.
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14. King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Oxford University Press, 1987.
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---. *Women's Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Early- Twentieth Century Indian Writing in English: Selections From 19th and Early 20th Century Indian Writing in English*. Paperback, 2003.

Unit-6: Wole Soyinka - *Telephone Conversation*

Structure

6.0 Introduction

6.1 Objectives

6.2 *Telephone Conversation*

6.2.1 About the Author

6.2.2 Themes

6.2.3 Explanation

6.2.3.1 Lines 1–10

6.2.3.2 Lines 11–20

6.2.3.3 Lines 21–30

6.2.3.4 Lines 31–35

6.2.4 Summary

6.2.5 Analysis

6.3 Learning Outcomes

6.4 Glossary

6.5 Sample Questions

6.6 Suggested Learning Resources

6.0 Introduction

The Unit presents a critical study and analysis of ‘Telephone Conversation’, a poem by Wole Soyinka. The cultural and artistic aspects in the poem will be discussed from various perspectives. Along with the explanation and summary of the poem, the biography of the poet and his important books will also be discussed in this unit. After the analysis of the poem, learning outcomes will be given in which important points discussed in the unit will be mentioned to provide a better understanding of the poem. It will be followed by sample questions which will include ten objective questions, five short answer questions and three long answer questions to assess your understanding of the text. Some books will be suggested at the end. You can enhance your understanding of the poem, know about the poet, his important themes and writing style by going through the suggested books.

‘Telephone Conversation’ is a poem in which a black man is trying to confirm the details about the housing with a white landlady over the phone and begins after the two have discussed the location and the price. The speaker informs the landlady that he is an African. The landlady enquires him regarding his skin colour. The poet responds with sarcasm and humor to the landlady’s insulting questions. The poem speaks about racial discrimination. It also focuses on the lack of proper communication between the different races.

6.1 Objectives

The poem ‘Telephone Conversation’ by Wole Soyinka is based on racial discrimination against black people by white race. It is in conversation mode between an African and a white landlady. While going through the poem one can feel the stench in the words of white landlady and humour of the black man. The objectives of this unit are:

- To provide information about the poet and his works.
- To show how racial discrimination exists even in the 21st century though several laws are introduced against it.
- To make learners understand and appreciate the poems through various perspectives across cultures.
- To enable the readers to interpret biographical, linguistic and contextual meaning of a literary text, specifically a poem.
- To enlighten the readers about the issues faced by coloured people in the present time.

6.2 Telephone Conversation

6.2.1 About the Author:

Wole Soyinka was born on 13th July 1934 in Abeokuta, Nigeria. His full name is Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka. After his studies in Nigeria and the UK, he worked with the Royal Court Theatre in London. He is a Poet, playwright and an essayist. He is the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986. He played an important role in Nigerian politics and in the struggle for independence from the Great Britain.

Soyinka attended St. Peter’s Primary School in Abeokuta and went to Abeokuta Grammar School where he received several prizes for literary compositions. In 1946, he was

accepted by the Government College of Ibadan which was an elite secondary school in Nigeria. He worked as a Professor of Comparative Literature in Nigeria from 1975 to 1999. He served as Goldwin Smith Professor for African Studies and Theatre Arts from 1988-1991. He also worked as a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nevada, La Vegas and at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. He has also worked at Oxford, Harvard and Yale universities. He was awarded the Europe Theatre Prize in December 2017 for his contribution to the realization of cultural events that promote understanding and the exchange of knowledge between peoples.

The Lion and The Jewel performed in 1959 at Ibadan Arts Theatre was the first play by Soyinka. The play *The Trials of Brother Jero* was first produced in 1960. He produced a memoir entitled *Ake: The Years of Childhood* in 1981. *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Strong Breed*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi's Harvest*, *The Beatification of Area Boy* and *King Baabu* are few of his popular plays.

Check your progress:

1. Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka wrote *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*.
(True / False)

6.2.2 Themes:

The theme revolves around the incident which happens when a person telephones to rent a house. The questions asked to him are not about the usual things like facilities provided and other basic requirements/amenities but about the skin colour of the caller. The landlady is sarcastic and discriminates the caller and he feels sorry for something which he was born with. The conversation goes on about how dark the caller is and asking him to describe himself. Poem depicts the stereotypical images infected in the imagination of both the races. The speaker harbours the idea that the white lady is 'lipstick coated' and 'long gold-rolled/ Cigarette-holder pipped' when he listens her voice. He imagines that being a white she has good-breeding and very cautious utterance. In the same way the lady thinks being an African the speaker must be 'Light Or Very Dark?' or 'Dark? Or Very Light?' The poem ends with a humourous note when speaker says he is not completely black as the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet are peroxide blond and his bottom turned raven black due to sitting foolishly.

6.2.3 Explanation:

6.2.3.1 Lines 1 - 10

*The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. "Madam," I warned,
"I hate a wasted journey--I am African."*

*Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was foully.
"HOW DARK?" . . . I had not misheard . . . "ARE YOU LIGHT*

Explanation:

The poem begins with a conversation between two people, a black man trying to rent a house and a white lady, the owner who swears that she lives away from the premises. The price is reasonable and the location seems alright for the speaker who confesses that he is an African and he hates a wasted journey. He wanted to confirm whether, being an African, he would be rented the house. From this point onwards, the conversation takes a different turn. There is a silence from owner's side. Although the lady has had a good breeding, this comes as a contrast since she expresses her displeasure by remaining silent. After a moment the silence is broken by the lady who asks him how dark he is. The speaker thinks he misheard but when the white lady repeats if he is light or very dark, he understands that it is important for her to know that he is an African.

Check your Progress

1. What are the three things the poet likes about the flat in the first three lines of the poem?
2. What did poet tell the lady about himself? Why didn't he want to visit the flat?
3. Why was there silence? What did the land lady ask the poet?

6.2.3.2 Lines 11 – 20

OR VERY DARK?" Button B, Button A. Stench

*Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender*

*Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis--
"ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?" Revelation came.
"You mean--like plain or milk chocolate?"
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light*

Explanation:

After being asked from the lady about his colour, the speaker feels disgusted. He feels as if he is reduced to telephone buttons. As if he is being asked whether he is button A or button B. He becomes angry and his surroundings seems red to him. Here red is the symbol of anger. He compares his community and white people with black tar and a huge bus. Black people are being crushed by white as the tar by bus. He could smell the stench of hypocrisy from her words. In public white people show off as educated, well mannered and respectful for blacks but they practice discrimination in their private life. When the speaker requests for more simplification he is surprised as she asks him with emphasis again if he is dark or very light. Now the speaker asks the lady that whether she wants to know that his colour is like plain or milk chocolate?

Check your Progress

1. What did the lady compare the poet with?
2. How was the poet shamed?
3. How could the author smell the stench from the lady's words?

6.2.3.3 Lines 21 - 30

*Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. "West African sepia"--and as afterthought,
"Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding*

"DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like brunette."

"THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?" "Not altogether."

Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see

The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet

Are a peroxide blond. Friction, caused—

Explanation:

While responding the question of white lady regarding his skin colour the speaker confesses that he is 'West African sepia.' He is assertive in saying that it's according to what his passport says. The lady speaks right into the receiver and asks him to explain what he means. The black man says it's like brunette. The lady asks it's 'Dark' only. Isn't it? The poet/speaker opens up with humour that not very dark but facially he is brunette in colour and goes on to say that the lady should see the rest of him. He says the palm of his hands and soles of his feet are bleached peroxide blond that means they aren't black but light as peroxide blond. At this point, the poet expresses his anger and tells the lady loudly that he is not completely black.

Check your Progress

1. What does the poet's passport say about the colour of the poet?
2. How does the poet describe his face?
3. What is peroxide blond?

6.2.3.4 Lines 31 - 35

Foolishly, madam--by sitting down, has turned

My bottom raven black--One moment, madam!"--sensing

Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap

About my ears--"Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather

See for yourself?"

Explanation:

The speaker continues to explain mockingly about his colour that he is not completely dark. He continues by saying that he foolishly sat on his back which has turned it into raven black due to friction. Sensing that she might slam the receiver any time, he pleads the white lady

to see for herself. The poem ends with this request and eventually she slams the receiver on his face.

Check your Progress

1. Why has the black man's bottom turned black? To which bird does he compare the colour of the bottom?
2. What did the poet sense at the end of the conversation?
3. What was the lady's reply to the poet?

6.2.4 Summary:

The "Telephone Conversation", a poem by an illustrious Nigerian African poet Wole Soyinka, is meant to highlight the impact and presence of racial discrimination still prevalent in the society despite the fact that a law is passed against such an inhuman act. The poem is written in a conversational tone/style wherein a conversation is being carried out on a telephone between a black man and a white woman. The man is looking for a room, advertised by white woman for rent. The racism and hypocritical nature of the white lady is amply brought to light by the poet through the conversation. Though it was advertised in newspaper that there is no issue of race and anyone can take a room for rent but the man, keeping in view his previous experiences, calls to confirm about the veracity of this information. When he tells that he is an African, she asks if he is very dark or light. When he informs her that he is half black, she remains silent and doesn't respond. The man requests her to meet him and verify the fact that he is only half-black but she hangs the phone and does not pay heed to him.

It is brought to the limelight, through their discourse, that how racial menace lies latent in the heart of an individual. Laws are there against such discrimination but these are of no value because an individual cannot be forced or moved to alter his thinking. In addition, the poem has highlighted the concept of dual nature of human beings as well. As per the advertisement given in the newspaper and the initial conversation on telephone, it is made clear that the lady has no issues as far as the race is concerned but later she acted otherwise. On the other hand, dwindling nature of human beings is also shown through the black man. He was shown as angry at the question of his colour at the very first stage, later on he seems to be requesting and justifying the fact that he is not totally black rather his soles and palms are of yellowish colour. In addition, he puts himself for display when he tells the lady to come for verification and see the exact colour

of his skin. It has significantly pinned down the discourse across the racial boundaries among human beings.

It is brought to light by the poet that we still judge people by their colour and race in spite of the fact that we are living in the 20th century. We deem each other superior and inferior on the basis of the colour of the skin rather than the character and the level of humanity and compensation. Colour is being utilized as a tool for identification that shows the mockery of humanity and how pseudo the concept of modernism is. The poem on a broader canvas wants to pinpoint the fact that judging people on the basis of colour and race is very inhuman, irrational and dehumanizing. The lady was nice until she comes across the fact that the speaker is of black colour. After that abrupt change of tone, language is noticed.

6.2.5 Analysis:

In the poem “Telephone Conversation”, the poet has highlighted the very pathetic and inhuman act on the part of white people who deem humans inferior and superior and good or bad on the basis of colour and race rather than their character and humanity. The poet has incorporated satire, irony and imagery in abundance in order to highlight this very complex fact. Simple and civilized tone of the speaker is contracted with the rude, arrogant and hypocritical facet of landlady, as both are representing their class and their thinking pattern. Those who are deemed and projected as polite and sophisticated are black at heart and those who are having black colour and are deemed as savage and bad are practicing the other way round.

Both white and black people are stereotypes having typical mentality that represents their inner disliking for each other. Both of them do not publicly admit it but their actions display their inner self. Despite all the conscious attempts they make to hide their inner prejudices they are unable to do so. The lady in spite of terming him black uses the term light and dark which is significant with regard to the study of inner self and pretentious nature of whites towards blacks. Despite all the gentleness of tone and concealing fact, the speaker deems it as oppressing and discriminating which is a stain on the face of humanity.

Underlying Theme

The theme of racialism is not merely limited to an individual rather the White people deem that the blacks or African people as a whole are inferior and bad in nature and character. In addition, the discrimination does not merely hamper and limit the resources of housing for the black but affect them in every walk of life in general. An abrupt change in the conversational tone of the landlady also indicates the hasty and inconsistent nature of human beings as well. It is

also supplemented by the attitude of the black speaker. He too is not consistent as he initially mocks the lady for asking the colour of his skin for renting a room but later seems to be beseeching her to verify that he is not totally black rather similar to a “West African sepia.” He tempts the lady, by saying that there are few parts of his body that are white in colour, to get a house on rent.

The speaker deems that colour and race are very simple facets that cannot be dealt with in such a light tone but in fact race and identity are very complex in nature and very difficult to resolve in such a simple fashion. But the very word ‘African’ changes the entire fabric and tone which does not remain confined merely to the colour of skin rather it has a background and a much deeper connotation as well. The silence of the landlady on the phone after getting to know the race of the speaker indicates that on the one hand she does want to show her dislike for him on the basis of his colour and on the other hand she does not want to lend him the room merely because he is an African and black in colour.

The colour forms an integral theme of this poem. The denial of rented accommodation to the blackman is basically due to his colour. The poet is from a black race and the landlady who is a white woman, is prejudiced against the blacks, so she refuses to give the flat on rent.

The words which are used to describe the blacks are:

Dark
Very Dark
Plain chocolate
West African sepia
Brunette
Raven black
Tar

The words used for describing the whites are:

Light
Very light
Long gold rolled
Pressurized good breeding
Milk chocolate
Peroxide blond

There are few intervals of silence in the poem between the landlady and the Blackman which have significant meaning and importance. When the landlady becomes silent for the first time, the poet knows for sure that she is unwilling to rent the flat. He feels disgusted. There is an uneasy silence right after when the poet says he is an African. The silence is broken by the landlady herself when she continues the conversation to ask how dark he is. During the conversation the landlady becomes silent for a few times specifically, when the poet tells that his colour is like “West African sepia” as is given in his passport. The landlady becomes silent again because she doesn’t understand what it means and asks the poet to explain it. The capitalised letters in the line “WHAT’S THAT?”, “DON’T KNOW WHAT THAT IS” indicate the loudness in the lady’s tone. It also indicates the racist mentality of the whites dominating the blacks. By using the capital letters, the poet distinguishes the attitude of the whites from the blacks.

Form and Structure:

The poem is written in free verse, casual in tone and manner with lines of various lengths. The poet has not maintained any sort of regular rhyme or meter pattern rather it has been written in a casual conversational style. However, the poem has a lyrical effect based on dialogues of two persons having a telephonic conversation. It follows the pattern of questions and answers. The use of present tense in the poem is also in line with the present need and desperate condition of the speaker who is looking for a room on rent. Although, the poem is short and seems simple but in reality, the meanings that it conveys are multilayered touching upon complex facets and ideas. It is written in the form of first-person narrative.

Through simple language and conversational tone, the poem conveys its message with greater clarity leaving no place for ambiguity as far as the relation between language, tone and subject matter of the poem is concerned. The technique of repetition is being utilized by Soyinka to highlight the attitude of white elites towards the black on one hand, and their dual nature, hypocrisy and narrow mindedness on the other hand. The words “black”, “red” and “light” are the instances of the repetitive nature that the poet wants to put emphasis on during the narration of the poem. The very colour is also symbolic of the fact that in a white and elite society, white is deemed as the colour of superiority while as the black becomes an emblem of inferiority.

The tone of the poem is light, comic and casual but the message it has conveyed is deep and broad. The style is free but it is full of passive sarcasm as far the prevailing discrimination in the society is concerned. The poet might be speaking on the basis of his personal experiences but

he is speaking for entire humanity, not merely for himself. The poem is enriched because of its enriched language and the timeless idea that is meant to project.

Literary Devices:

Imagery:

The poet has made a vivid use of imagery. The speaker (black man) forms a mental image of the white woman as someone who is “lipstick coated” with a “long gold rolled cigarette-holder” in her mouth, by merely hearing her words on the telephone and her conversational tone.

The poet has further utilized the image in which a huge bus is shown squashing the black tar as in a symbolic way. It is symbolic of the fact that how white intelligentsia is maltreating and behaving with the blacks and how black Africans are being undermined, marginalized and trampled in a white society of elites in a similar way the “red double-tiered omnibus” is “squelching tar”. The attitude of the speaker in the poem is the representation of the anger and frustration that black people have against whites because of their own wrong doings.

As the very tone and text of the poem suggests that the poet has written it in a satirical manner. He is satirizing the hypocrisy and racist behavior of a white landlady on one hand and the dual and dwindling nature of black man, speaker of the poem, on the other. To him, human beings are not what they seem to be. Their attitude in the public and private is different. In addition, the nature and behavior of human beings are also not consistent rather it changes with the need and time in accordance with the situation they are in. In addition to this, the speaker of the poem is shown mocking the lady that prejudice and discrimination is a blot on the face of humanity. It does not signify the status of human beings rather it diminishes their character and dignity in the eyes of others.

Irony:

Irony is yet another literary device that the poet has used effectively in the poem. Keeping in view the advertisement displayed in the newspaper, it seems the landlady is indifference as far as the race of the tenant is concerned. But during the conversation with the speaker who is seeking the very room for rent she remains silent and does not respond positively merely because the speaker himself confesses that he is African, means that he is black in colour. She deems his colour as a means to determine his identity which is against what she has stated in paper. So, difference between her words and actions has been brought to light by the poet.

The poet has used irony to highlight the very complex and hypocritical nature of whites who show pretentiousness in actions and words. Their words represent something else to what their actions show. Another facet of the irony is also evident when the black man was aware of the fact that there is discrimination and prejudice that does exist in society then why does he himself makes a confession that he is an African. It indicates the fact that he himself has no confidence in himself or is not satisfied with his colour, otherwise there was no need of mentioning it by himself. In addition, when he mocks her for her very question of light and dark colour then why does he devalues himself towards the end of the poem by requesting her to let her see and then decide the colour of his skin that it is not totally black.

6.3 Learning Outcomes

After going through the Unit, the readers are expected to know:

- The racial discrimination faced by Black people in America and other European countries.
- How the Black people, after enduring a greater suffering, are able to express through humour what they have underwent.
- To appreciate a literary text in different contexts.
- The literary devices used in the poem “Telephone Conversation”.
- That Wole Soyinka is the first African writer to receive Nobel Prize for literature.
- That Wole Soyinka is a champion who represented the predicament of Black people.

6.4 Glossary

Indifferent: Not interested, apathy

Transmission: Process of broadcasting something by Radio or TV

Good-breeding: A person who has good breeding has been trained in childhood to be polite and behave correctly

Foully: Extremely unpleasant.

Stench: Strong unpleasant smell.

Rancid breath: Tasting or smelling unpleasant; unpleasant breath.

Squelching tar: Squelch is to make cracking sound and tar is a black thick sticky hot substance used for making roads.

Ill-mannered: Rude and unpleasant.

Dumbfounded: Shocked, surprised.

Assent: Agreement or approval.

Clinical: Showing no emotions or feelings, character or warmth

Impersonality: Unfriendly.

Sepia: Having reddish brown colour, like that of an old photograph.

Spectroscopic flight of fancy: Spectroscope is dispersion of light into seven different colours, similarly the word means the thoughts of the lady which are dispersed.

Accent: The way in which the people in a particular area pronounce a particular word.

Conceding: To admit defeat

Brunette: Dark hair, dark eyes and dark skin.

Peroxide blond: Is a woman who has used peroxide to bleach her hair.

Raven black: Refers to the kind of black colour, raven is a very black bird and this comparison is used to describe black people.

6.5 Sample Questions

6.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Wole Soyinka was a writer from-
(a) India (b) Australia
(c) **Nigeria** (d) Canada
2. Who is the first African Nobel laureate in English literature?
(a) Nadine Gordimer (b) Chinua Achebe
(c) Ama Ata Aidoo (d) **Wole Soyinka**
3. Is the poem relevant today?
(a) No (b) **Yes**
4. The poem "Telephone Conversation" is composed by
(a) Amitav Ghosh (b) John Donne
(c) **Wole Soyinka** (d) None of these
5. The poem "Telephone Conversation" is a conversation between

3. Discuss the experience of the speaker with the landlady in the poem “Telephone Conversation” by Soyinka.

6.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. “*To Sir, With Love*” Mr. E.R. Braithwaite
2. Soyinka, Wole. “Telephone Conversation by Wole Soyinka: Summary and Analysis.” *Bachelorandmaster.com*, 12 Dec. 2020, www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/telephone-conversation-summary-analysis.html#.YAfAwl4za1s.
3. Soyinka, Wole. “Telephone Conversation.” *LitCharts*, 20 Dec. 2020, 9 pm, www.litcharts.com/poetry/wole-soyinka/telephone-conversation.

Unit-7: Muktibodh - *So Very Far*

Structure

7.0 Introduction

7.1 Objectives

7.2 *So Very Far*

7.2.1 Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh - The Poet

7.2.2 Summary of the Poem

7.2.3 Stanza 1

7.2.4 Stanza 2

7.2.5 Stanza 3

7.2.6 Stanzas 4, 5 and 6

7.3 Learning Outcomes

7.4 Glossary

7.5 Sample Questions

7.6 Suggested Learning Resources

7.0 Introduction

“So Very Far” is a poem originally written in Hindi by Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917—64) and was later translated by Vishnu Khare and Adil Jussawalla into English. The translated work is taken from his poetry anthology named *Muktibodh* (2016). Muktibodh belongs to modern Hindi literature. Like other writers of his age, Muktibodh protested against many social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities which are deep-rooted in Indian society. In his poem “So Very Far”, he raises his voice against class struggle, capitalism, corruption, economic inequality and particularly against bourgeois intelligentsia. Through this poem, one can understand the miserable living conditions of downtrodden and oppressed people. This poem clearly describes the supremacy of the bourgeois over the dejected working class. The poet’s heart is overwhelmed by the pathetic conditions faced by the suppressed and downtrodden labourers. The poem “So Very Far” is filled with the poet’s grim verbal arguments about the differences between the rich, privileged class and the poor unprivileged class. Thus, it is a

revolutionary and thought-provoking poem in nature. Though he was criticized by his contemporaries, he became famous for his sincere portrayal and honest versification.

“So Very Far” has 41 lines (this is probably because it is a translated version of Hindi) and is divided into 6 stanzas. This poem is not written in a conventional structure. Each stanza has a different number of lines. For example, the first stanza has 3 lines and the third one has 17 lines. The rhyme scheme is also differing from phrase to phrase and line to line. The language used in the poem is simple yet profound. Each word and phrase in the poem is loaded with great expression and demands explanation. The poem “So Very Far” is written from the first-person point of view and in free verse.

7.1 Objectives

After going through the Unit, the students shall be able:

- To familiarize the students with English Indian poetry and its form in general.
- To understanding of the fundamentals of modern Indian literature and its significant role in influencing society.
- To analyse and appreciate the poem “So Very Far” in the context of the societal norms and forms of Indian society in specific.

7.2 *So Very Far*

7.2.1 Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh - The Poet:

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh was born on 13 November 1917 in Sheopur district, Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh. His father Madhav Rao Muktibodh was a sub-inspector of police. His mother’s name was Parvathi Bai. Saratchandra Muktibodh, a popular Marathi poet, was his younger brother. Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh received his preliminary education at Ujjain and Indore and graduated from the University of Agra in 1938. He worked as a teacher at different places and then he completed his M.A. from Nagpur University in 1953. In 1958, he successfully secured the position of lectureship at Digvijay College, Rajnandgaon.

Muktibodh was a renowned Hindi poet, literary and political critic, and fiction writer of the 20th century. His writings mark the beginning of the experimental poetry of the Modern Age. He was a communist for some time but a majority of his works represent his Marxist views. He

founded the 'Madhya Bharat Pragatishil Lekhak Sangh'. He encouraged and ran study circles for teachers, writers, and women workers. He served as assistant editor of journals like *Nayak* and *Vasudha*. He worked as a journalist in the department of Information and Publication of the government of Madhya Pradesh for some time and then as editor in the regional News Services Division of All India Radio. As his Marxist ideology continued to influence him profoundly, he wrote several literary pieces on literary, political and economic affairs while working as an editor of the radical paper *Naya Khoon*.

Madhya Pradesh Government imposed a ban in 1962 on one of Muktibodh's great writings '*Bharat Itihaas aur Sanskriti*' (*India History and Culture*) which was prescribed as a textbook for higher secondary schools. He was criticized for some of the sensitive elements like Hinduism and Jainism from a Marxist point of view. This was a terrible experience for Muktibodh. However, Muktibodh was a courageous writer and a poet of commitment. He desired an egalitarian society and opted to write to change the social structure of society. Middle-class society and their struggle for existence is his main concern. His poems and writings directly criticize and pose questions, the ruling class: politicians, businessmen, and aristocrats. He raised his voice against social and economic inequality which is prevalent in society. Muktibodh truly has an international spirit in this sense. His writings directly question the social problems and indirectly inquire about the root cause of such problems.

The personae in his poems bring awareness and offer conversion of the attitudes towards the fears, illusions, and hypocrisy of the common man to social evils and to the people who are in power and position. The people who have the power to rule can never accept any kind of rejection, objection, or reform when they are challenged; as a result, the poor and the oppressed have to suffer. Muktibodh had to face many traumatic and horrible experiences because of his free expression of thoughts through his writings.

Muktibodh writes in his masterpiece *Andhere Mein*, "Hi, maine unko nanga dekh liya hai, is ki saza mujhe milegi, zarur milegi (Oh, I have seen him naked, I will be punished for this, surely will be punished for this)". Critics opine that Muktibodh's personae often conjecture and are complex. His characters, themes, and images mainly project a quest for identity in search of the truth. Journey, quest, search, suffering, grief, inequality, corruption, politics, solitude, darkness, identity crisis, self-introspection, and surrealism are some of the common themes of his poems.

Muktibodh often portrays his characters in such a way that their inner conflicts represent the microcosm of the macrocosmic conflicts in society and are hence symptomatic. Muktibodh was influenced by many writers and great personalities such as Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, French philosopher Henri Bergson, the psychologist Sigmund Freud, and French and Russian literature especially the humanism of Leo Tolstoy.

Muktibodh breathed his last on 11 September 1964 at the age of 47. He didn't see any of his books published during his lifetime. He was never recognized or appreciated for his writings during his life span. In 2017 which is his birth centenary year, he became the most celebrated poet of Hindi. Many of his works were translated; seminars and conferences were held across India, paying tribute to the great poet. The news channels NDTV India and Aaj Tak telecasted programmes on his birthday and spoke about his literary legacy as a poet. TV shows acknowledged his enduring contribution to Indian society.

Muktibodh was certainly ahead of his times. His writings were indigestible and incomprehensible to his contemporaries. He anticipated the future consequences and impact of the political, economic, technological and social policies in their budding stage in his times. He envisaged our present society and suggested retrospection. He further rediscovered the times, events, and situations which were largely neglected by both past and present times.

Works:

Anthologies of poems

- *Chand ka Muh Tedha Hai* (The Face of the Moon is Crooked), 1964.
- *Bhuri Khak Dhul* (Brown Dust), 1980.
- *Andhere Mein* (In the Dark), translated by Krishna Baldev Vaid.
- *Pratinidhi Kavitayein* (Representative Poems), edited by Ashoka Vajapeyi, 1984.
- *Muktibodh Ki Kavitayen* (An Anthology of Poems by Muktibodh), 2004.
- *Dabre Par Sooraj ka Bimb*, 2002.

Essays

- *Nayi Kavita ka Atmasangharsh tatha Anya Nibandha* (Self-conflict in New Poetry and other Essays), 1964.
- *Ek Sahityik ki Diary* (The Diary of a Litterateur), 1964.
- *Naye Sahitya ka Saundarya-Shastra* (The Science of Beauty in New Literature), 1971.
- *Samiksha ki Samasyain* (The Problems of Commentary), 1982.

Criticism

- *Sahitya Bharti Kamayani: Ek Punarvichar* (Kamayani: A Reconsideration), 1973.

History

- *Bharat ka Itihaas aur Sanskriti* (History and Culture of India)

Short Stories

- *Kath Ka Sapna* (Dreams of Wood: An Anthology), 1967.
- *Satah Se Uthta Admi* (Man Arising from the Surface – An Anthology), 1971.

Novel

- *Vipatra* (1970)

Muktibodh Rachnavali edited by Nemichandra Jain features the complete works of Muktibodh. It is in 6 volumes and published in 1980 by Rajkamal Publications, New Delhi. The veteran film director, Mani Kaul directed the Hindi feature film, *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* (Man Arising from the Surface) based on the writings of Muktibodh. The film was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1981. In 2004, “Brahmarakshas ka Shishya”, a dramatization of Muktibodh’s story was presented in New Delhi by Soumyabrata Choudhury. The novel, *Vipatra* has also been made into an audio-book for the blind. While writing about Muktibodh, Ashok Vajpeyi utters that he, “had not made a success of anything in life; he wrote long poems in the days of short poems; he questioned his Marxist fellow writers; he was carving out a new aesthetics for Hindi poetry which had few admirers and his physical and economic circumstances were wholly inadequate. He was not drawn to success though he never wallowed in his failures. Endowed with a deeply interrogative mind, a robust critique of the civilization in which he was born and placed, he saw with great agitation in his mind and fury in his soul the freezing of conscience in the independent democratic republic of India and decided to be the witness, candid and unforgiving.” (Ashok Vajpeyi, Updated: 27 Nov 2017, 4:42 PM, Engagement: 593, National Herald)

Check your progress

1. In which year was Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh born?
2. Who was the editor of the radical paper *Naya Khoon*?
3. Who is the author of *Ek Sahityik Ki Diary*?

7.2.2 Summary of the Poem:

The Poem “So Very Far” was published in an anthology of poems *Chand Ka Munh Tedha Hai (Crooked is the Face of the Moon)* in 1964. The poem, entitled in Hindi ‘Main Tum Logon Se Door Hoon’ means ‘I am far from you People’, focuses on the class struggle between the rich and poor, working-class and aristocrats. Poet expresses his frustration and dissatisfaction towards his incompetence and calls people to eradicate and bridge such gaps. This poem is a denunciation of the richer and influential sections of our society who are infused with corruption and steeped with greed. Poet is annoyed at the scantiness of the common or poor man and the exuberant lifestyle of the rich. This poem expresses the poet’s anguish towards the corrupted and money-grubbed people and at his inability to change this situation.

“So Very Far” is written in free verse. The translated English poem is divided into six stanzas. The first stanza talks about the narrator’s aloofness and his indifference to society. The second stanza depicts the narrator’s struggle, grief, and troubles experienced by him because of the discrimination from others. The third stanza describes the narrator’s failures because of his honesty, and the success of unworthy people. He declares his incapacity to correct the malice of the people who have power. In the fourth stanza, he distinguishes rich from poor, and their pathetic conditions. The last two stanzas speak about what is real and what is unreal, concluding that only grief and pain are real and true, as the vitality of the richer class always subjugates the working class. We shall read critical analysis of the poem in the sections below:

7.2.3 Stanza 1:

The very first line of the poem is linked to the title of the poem. “I am so very far from you people”. The reference of “you people” is not mentioned in this stanza but the latter part of the poem answers this (the corrupted and the powerful). The narrator is very far, which means he is different from other people. The term ‘far’ signifies the poet’s aloofness from society. The term ‘Fire’ in the second line is used as a metaphor. ‘Fire’ can be interpreted as one’s zeal, desire and it can also be suffering and struggles. The narrator’s desires and thoughts are different from others. His sufferings are in alienation with others which he mentions in a later part of the poem. He says ‘That what’s poison for you is food for me’. ‘Poison’ is used as a metaphor, here his dislikes and prejudices. ‘Poison’ here is used as the juxtaposition to food which may be referred to as something that is extremely bad for a person and therefore generally unacceptable as food. Down the ages, there had existed a wide range of disparities between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. The proletariat is the working class or wage-earning class that does not enjoy any

social amenities but offers its services. The bourgeoisie is the people who believe in materialistic values or conventional values and give importance to money, comfort, and fame. So, proletarian ideology is good food for the working or poor class, whereas it is a poison for the bourgeoisie or business class (referred by Chanchal Chauhan, JSTOR, vol 44).

Check your progress:

1. In which language the poem 'So Very Far' was originally written?
2. Name the anthology in which the poem 'So Very Far' was published.
3. What is the metaphor of term 'Fire', used in the second line of the poem?

7.2.4 Stanza 2:

The second stanza starts with a contradictory statement: "Multitudes walk with me in my isolation". Even though there are many people in his vicinity, the narrator feels abandoned because he is not dear to any of them and he is deeply hurt by their deeds. Some people who are also suffering like the narrator are described as "friendly hands". For this reason, even his soul was troubled? The narrator considers this state of aloofness and loneliness as precious because he is offered help from few people despite being disliked by many. He states that he is physically abused by these people both in public and private places. He says, 'you rain your blows on me' which means he has been attacked several times. He says 'Leaves of our blood-stained epics fly in our fight'; leaves here may represent rags or clothes which are stained with blood during the fight. This clearly states that he was severely beaten or hurt until his clothes were torn and were flying on his body. This series of attacks are described as 'epics'. An epic is a long narrative poem especially of the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary or mythological figures in wars with mighty personalities or with superhumans. The narrator can be considered a heroic figure as he is fighting against mighty people.

7.2.5 Stanza 3:

In the third stanza, the narrator talks about his failure. He says that he is covered in the trash of heaps. The word 'Trash' can be interpreted as waste material or it can be bitter criticism of the society. 'Spiral' is the age-old symbol of intuition. Here it symbolizes an inward journey in realizing one's own identity.

"Finding heaps on the spiral staircase
Of corruption and cash"

The above line is an instance of a metaphor. The staircase connects two different levels of floors, up and down. Metaphorically, they can connect individuals of different layers. As the narrator is passing through the spiral staircase of corruption and cash that is built upon greed, he is finding only failure, heaps of trash. His intuition says the material things which are earned out of corruption are waste.

“And though I’ve gone straight.
I’m still bitter in what I do, hate
the poison.”

And if he goes straight also, that is, if he works genuinely or honestly, the result is not pleasing or satisfying to the narrator. He says human beings are greedy by nature. People are not satisfied with what they have. The narrator wants to clean the world, just like a scavenger collects all the waste and discarded things. ‘Scavengers’ are animals who feed on corpses. They play an important role in balancing the eco-system by consuming dead animals. The narrator wants to correct all the troubles, odds, and inequalities but he is conscious of his inability to do so. He says that there is someone inside him who is roaring every day. The conscience of the narrator is making him restless. If a person has a moral sense, then he will be true to himself/herself and that inner voice is crying inside the narrator. Even though he works justly and sincerely, the end product is unpleasant and thus is a sort of poison. Despite working hard and with honesty, the final output or product of his work is not satisfactory.

7.2.6 Stanzas 4, 5 and 6:

In this last section of the poem, the narrator talks about modern technological innovations which can be enjoyed only by the richer sections. Class struggle and economic and social inequality are also described here. ‘Refrigerators’ are a symbol of keeping with care or shelter. ‘Vitamins’ signify necessary nutrients and radiogram represents communication. [Asian Literature (LIT 203) November 27, 2014 Response Essay: Modern Indian Literature: *So Very Far* by Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917—64) translated from Hindi by Vishnu Khare and Adil Jussawalla]. His famished daughter represents the poor economical class that is deprived of facilities. The narrator and his daughter are unable to communicate. The daughter’s intestines suffer from the pain of hunger and her lungs are only filled with humility of having nothing that conveys her dire poverty. Only suffering is true and all else is false and unreal. The narrator has used many terms like delusion and deceit to express the notion that ultimate reality is nothing but a sequence of grief and the rest is just a delusion and unreal to the narrator. The pain and grief

that emerged from having nothing out of struggle are real and all the factors and reasons are unreal. The narrator describes the pain, hunger, oppression, disparity, dire poverty, and subjugation of the poor who have nothing but suffering and grief. The profound meaning of grief is not just emotional loss but also indicates physical, economic, social, and cultural loss.

In the line “I am the split-eared, the underground wretch”, *split* or *split-eared* may represent a particular sect of yogis. A yogi is a person who practices the principles of an austere life. Thus, the narrator is living like a yogi who has renounced physical comforts to correct the disorders of the upper-class society or materialist way of living.

“Under your Chevrolets and Dodges I stretch,
Oil-covered black, Bowed by your orders.”

This represents the dominance of the rich over the poor or working class. Here *oil-covered black* signifies the work of a mechanic who repairs the cars of the rich by obeying their orders. The narrator is working as a mechanic to correct the mistakes and disorders of the upper class, and like a yogi, he is trying to wipe off the burden of bad deeds of the rich class.

Check your progress:

1. How many stanzas does the English translation of the poem contain?
2. Who are the ‘friendly hands’ in the poem?
3. What does the phrase ‘oil-covered black’ in the poem signify?

7.3 Learning Outcomes

After going through the Unit, the students are expected to:

- Appreciate the diction and syntax of the poem.
- Analyse the background of the author, style, and literary setting of the poem and are expected to apply it in real-life situations.
- Generalize the concepts of literary devices like similes, metaphors, symbols, etc.
- Comprehend the struggle for survival of an individual in social, political and economic inequalities, class struggle, dominance of influential sections, the social setting of Indian society in the 20th century.

7.4 Glossary

Persona: A role or a character adopted by an author or an actor (personae is plural)

Multitudes: A large number of people or things

Epic: A long narrative poem

Egalitarian: Believing in or based on the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities

Scavenger: Someone who collects things that have been discarded by others; Any animal that feeds on refuse and other decaying organic matter

End-product: Final result of an activity or process

Famished: Extremely hungry, starving

Radiogram: A combined radio and record player built into a cabinet with a speaker. Or a telegram sent by radio

Gnawing: Bite or chew on with the teeth; Cause lingering anxiety, torment, etc

Delusion: A mistaken or unfounded opinion or idea

Split-eared: This should probably be ‘slit-eared’. The Hindi word in the original is ‘kanphata’, which is a designation for a sect of yogis. It is possibly used here to emphasize the persona’s sense of his difference from the rest of society. (From the textbook)

Austere: Practising great self-denial (leaving all the comforts of the world)

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not denote to suggest a similarity. For example, the snow is a white blanket

Intuition: Instinctive (natural, innate, by birth) knowing, the ability to understand something without the need for conscious reasoning

Symbolism: Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Symbolism can take different forms. Generally, it is an object representing another, to give an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant

Conscience: A person’s moral sense of right and wrong viewed as acting as a guide to one’s behaviour

Signifies: The meaning or idea expressed by a sign, as distinct from the physical form in which it is expressed

Poetic diction: Poetic diction is the term used to refer to the linguistic style, the vocabulary, and the metaphors used in the writing of poetry

Syntax: Syntax is basically about what word comes before and after another word. Syntax is often used in poetry, and it's usually discussed in connection with diction—that is, the poet's choice of words

Legendary: Remarkable enough to be famous; very well known

Mythology: A set of stories or beliefs about a particular person, institution, or situation, especially when exaggerated or fictitious

Super humans: Having or showing exceptional ability or powers

Revolutionary: Producing great changes, very new and different

Bourgeois: Dominated by commercial and industrial interests; of, relating to, or characteristic of the social middle class; marked by a concern for material interests and respectability and a tendency toward mediocrity (low quality, ordinary)

Intelligentsia: Intellectuals who form an artistic, social, or political vanguard or elite

Vanguard: The group of people who are the leaders of an action or movement in society, politics, art, etc

Capitalism: An economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market

Dejected: Lowered in rank or condition

Overwhelmed: Completely overcome or overpowered by thought or feeling

Downtrodden: Suffering oppression

Privileged: Not subject to the usual rules or penalties because of some special circumstance

Versification: The making of verses

Conventional: Of traditional design, formed by agreement or compact

Rhyme scheme: The arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or a poem

Profound: Having intellectual depth and insight

Literary devices: A literary device is a tool used by writers to hint at larger themes, ideas, and meaning in a story or piece of writing. There are many styles of literary devices, each serving a different purpose. For example, metaphor, simile, etc.

7.5 Sample Questions

7.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Synonym of precious is _____.
(a) Shining **(b) Valuable**
(c) Heavy (d) Light
2. Opposite of grim _____.
(a) Benign (b) Hard
(c) Conflict (d) Horrible
3. Where was G. M. Muktibodh born?
(a) Assam (b) Gujarat
(c) Madhya Pradesh (d) Odhisa
4. Meaning of delusion _____.
(a) Correct (b) Understand
(c) Misconception (d) Anticipate
5. “So Very Far” was published in the anthology of _____.
(a) *Dabre Par Sooraj ka Bimb*
(b) *Muktibodh Ki Kavitayen*
(c) Chand ka Muh Tedha Hai
(d) *Bhuri Khak Dhul*
6. What does ‘friendly hands’ refer to in “in my loneliness, friendly hands”?
7. What is the Hindi title of the poem “So Very Far”?
8. Who translated the poem “So Very Far” into English?
9. Which book features Muktibodh’s complete works?
10. Who is ‘someone’ referred to in “someone inside me roars each day”?

7.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Why is the narrator far from other people?
2. Explain “multitudes walk with me”.
3. Why does the narrator want a scavenger?
4. Write a note on “correcting disorders”.
5. Briefly discuss the title of the poem “So Very Far”.

7.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Write a note on the literary devices used in the poem “So Very Far”.
2. How does the poet criticize the implications of modern technology on society?
3. Summarise and criticize the poem “So Very Far” from your point of view.

7.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Asian Literature (LIT 203). Response Essay, Modern Indian Literature. So Very Far by Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh.
2. Celebrating Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, a Marxist Poet Who Understood Both Darkness and Hope. By Priyadarshan, a Hindi novelist, critic, and journalist.
3. G.M.Muktibodh, “The Void”, “So Very Far” by Tasneem Shanaaz, Sri Aurobindo College, University of Delhi.
4. Indian Express “Poet Of Dark Hope”, written by Apoorvanand.
5. Modern Indian Literature, Poems, and Short Stories, Department of English, University of Delhi.
6. Muktibodh - the voice of courage and commitment, Vishnu Khare, National Herald Updated: 28 Nov 2017.
7. The ideological content of Muktibodh’s poetry. By Chanchal Chauhan JSTOR(vol 44, no.4)

Unit-8: W B Yeats – *A Prayer for My Daughter*

Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 *A Prayer for My Daughter*
 - 8.2.1 Irish Sensibility in W. B. Yeats
 - 8.2.2 The Use of Myth and Symbolism by Yeats
 - 8.2.3 *A Prayer for My Daughter*—Text
 - 8.2.4 Summary
 - 8.2.5 Analysis
 - 8.2.6 Theme
 - 8.2.7 Structure
 - 8.2.8 Figures of Speech Used in the Poem
- 8.3 Learning Outcomes
- 8.4 Glossary
- 8.5 Sample Questions
- 8.6 Suggested Readings

8.0 Introduction

W. B. Yeats was one of the most renowned poets of the twentieth century and won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923. He was a connecting link between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century English literature, writing in both the pre-modern and the modern poetic styles. Besides being a poet of great distinction, he was also a mystic, mythologist, and a romantic with deep prophetic vision. He had a profound interest in magic and occult and challenged the mechanistic ideas of the universe through his use of Celtic mythology and symbolism. In *A Prayer for My Daughter*, Yeats expresses his concern and anxiety over the prosperity and future wellbeing of his daughter, Anne. He is worried about how she will survive under the turbulent and tough times brought by First World War. Yeats exhibits his helplessness as a father and wishes his daughter a life of safety, security, peace, innocence, and beauty. He wants her to become civilised and wishes her to get married into a spiritually and traditionally well-knit aristocratic family. Yeats wrote the poem when Anne was an infant and expressed his

deep love and concern for her. He was aware of death, decay, and destruction brought by the war. In Ireland, Irish nationalism and the rise of Catholicism were on the peak, making the life of people very hard, filling it with upheaval, unrest, fear, frustration, despondency, and desolation. Yeats wrote the poem in this backdrop.

8.1 Objectives:

The Unit shall cover the following objectives:

- To provide you knowledge about the biographical and literary background of W. B. Yeats
- To deepen your understanding of the poet's idea of and support to the Irish nationalism
- To familiarise you with the elements of his poetry and the issues / themes that he deals with in his poetry
- To give you a general analysis and the critical summary of "A Prayer for My Daughter"
- To make you analyse the theme, structure, and the literary devices used by the poet in the poem

8.2 *A Prayer for My Daughter*

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Dublin to John Butler Yeats and Susan Pollexfen who moved to London soon after his birth. It was through his father and his literary friend circle that Yeats was exposed to the intellectual ambience in Dublin and London. John Butler Yeats introduced Yeats to the English Pre-Raphaelite and aesthetic traditions. Yeats stands out as an outstanding, dominant, and illustrious writer of the Modern age and is also recognised as the last greatest poet belonging to the English romantic tradition. He was a noted Irish poet, dramatist, and ardent Irish nationalist. At the age of 24, he met another staunch Irish nationalist, Maud Gonne, and was fascinated by her beauty and dedication to the Irish cause. He loved her deeply, but she remained aloof and never responded his feelings despite his four continuous proposals. Maud Gonne married John MacBride, another revolutionary in 1903. Her marriage shattered Yeats in pieces and left him completely dejected. Later, Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lees in 1917 after having her known for some years. This marriage made his life serene and Georgie Hyde-Lees bore him two children. However, he could never forget Maud

Gonne and her memory remained etched in his mind. She served as a literary muse in many of his literary works. The one-sided love resulted in his searching for refuge in esotericism and Eastern wisdom. Consequently, Yeats came under the influence of Madame Blavatsky, a great occultist. He wrote the preface for Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* (English translation) in 1913 and the work made Tagore receive the Nobel Prize for literature.

Yeats's poetry was published in 1885 for the first time in the *Dublin University Review*. In the same year, he met the noted patriot, John O'Leary who was imprisoned for twenty years for his revolutionary nationalist ideas. O'Leary advised young writers to read and write about Irish themes and issues and Yeats came under his influence within no time and produced poems pregnant with themes and elements of Irish legends, ballads, songs, and folklore. He explored the mythology and folklore of Ireland in works like, *Representative Irish Tales*, *The Countess Cathleen*, *Irish Fairy Tales*, *The Celtic Twilight*, etc. Moving to London in 1886, he wrote openly about Irish issues in his poems and other works. It was in London that he met Maud Gonne who was passionately devoted to Irish nationalism. He also befriended Lionel Johnson and both of them (along with many others) founded the Rhymers' Club in 1890. It was a group of London poets who met to discuss their poems, preferring aestheticism to nationalism and focussing on subjectivity and craftsmanship. Yeats wrote *Wind among the Reeds* (1899) under the influence of the group. Despite his religious temperament, Yeats imbibed from his father a lack of interest for Christianity which arose from dogmatic rationalism of the Protestant tradition. He replaced Christianity with his interest in magic and mythology. He was involved in the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural impact of English rule in Ireland in the Victorian period, aiming to promote the cultural heritage of Ireland. After 1910, his work was largely influenced by Ezra Pound and he turned to modernism especially, in his use of imagery. His health started deteriorating and made Maud Gonne visit him in 1938, and he breathed his last on 28 January, 1939. He had written three lines for his epitaph which read, "Cast a cold eye / On life, on death / Horseman, pass by!"

Generally, Yeats's poems are categorised into two phases or periods—the early period and the later period. He started his career as a romantic and a predominance of dreaminess and mythology is seen in his early poems such as *To an Island in the Water*, *The Madness of King Goll*, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, *The Sorrow of Love*, and others. His early poems were strongly influenced by William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites. *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1888), *The Rose* and *The Countess Cathleen* (1893) come under this category. As he grew up, he began to

shift his attention to realism. His early poetry was escapist and he started writing about his failure in love and Irish political turmoil. The tone of his poems in the last phase is more tragic. He wrote his best poetry after he had crossed the age of fifty. Such works include *The Wild Swans at Coolie* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair* (1933).

8.2.1 Irish Sensibility in W. B. Yeats:

The Irish Renaissance, also known as the Celtic Revival represents the creative period in Irish literature nearly from 1880 to 1939, the year of Yeats's death. Yeats was greatly influenced by John O'Leary and became interested in Irish nationalism. He read Irish patriotic literature intensively and joined the Young Ireland Society. Along with other leaders, he aimed at creating distinctive national literature of Ireland by going back to the roots of Irish history, legends, and folklore. Yeats belonged to the Anglo Irish minority (the Protestant sect) that had been in power in Ireland for many centuries. Most of the members of this community held themselves to be of English origin, but Yeats was a staunch follower of Irish nationality. He maintained his Irish cultural roots despite having lived in London for pretty much time. Irish heroes and legends feature in many of his poems and plays. He was accused of elitism which, ironically, contributed to his greatness and popularity.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Yeats shifted his interest to theatre and with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn decided to promote native Irish drama. Three dramas were staged in 1899 in Dublin including Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*. The immense success of these productions culminated in establishing the Irish National Theatre Society presided over by Yeats. Abbey theatre was renovated and reopened in December 1904 featuring plays by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge. Lady Gregory provided enough support for Yeats's writing, particularly at her Coole Park estate. Yeats devoted much time and energy writing plays and collaborated with Lady Gregory for *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. After becoming a public and political figure in Ireland, he served as the Irish senator for two years. Ironically, his greatest works such as *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1929) were published after he received the Nobel Prize.

8.2.2 The Use of Myth and Symbolism by Yeats:

One of the reasons for Yeats's popularity rests in his use of myth and symbolism. He borrowed myths from religion, Greek and Irish mythologies, and primitive folklore. He uses illusive imagery and symbolic structures in his poetry. His choice of words is symbolic and

metaphorical, suggesting significant abstract thoughts. He was attracted widely to Hinduism, occult and theosophical beliefs. Unlike the other modernist poets who preferred writing in free verse, he employed traditional forms of writing. In his later works, Yeats was engaged with contemporary issues and themes with his style undergoing a wonderful transformation. In English literature, Yeats is considered one of the greatest symbolists, making use of innumerable symbols in his poetry. Arthur Symons dedicated his book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to Yeats. Yeats believes that the value of a symbol lies in its richness or indefiniteness of meaning or reference. Several meanings can be given to a single symbol. His symbols and images are often related to nature, religion, birds, animals, historical events, mysticism, and other kinds of phenomena. The symbols that he draws from occult studies are quite obscure and unintelligible. Some of the occult symbols used by him are “rose,” “cross,” “lily,” “water,” “tree,” “bird,” “moon,” “sun,” etc. The “rose” is a significant symbol in Yeats and is in particular found in his poetry volume, *The Rose*. To him, it is a symbol of both earthly as well as eternal love. For Yeats, the symbol of Byzantium stands for unity and perfection. He was taken in by the beauty, art, architect, and artifices of Byzantium. In his later poetry, the important symbols are the “spinning tops,” “winding stairs,” “gyres,” “spirals,” and many more. For him, the “tower” is a symbol of isolation and seclusion.

8.2.3 A Prayer for My Daughter—Text:

*ONCE more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack—and roof—levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.
I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,*

*Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.
May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.
Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of plenty is undone.
In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise.
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.
May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.*

*O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.
My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.
An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?
Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.
And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?*

*Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.*

8.2.4 Summary:

Anne, a little infant is fast asleep in a cradle and a furious storm is whistling outside, battering everything. The intensity of the storm is very high. The hill and the woods can hardly bear the brunt of the storm. Also, the haystack and the roof cannot withstand the raging winds. The atmosphere creates a sense of panic in the poet. Unaware of everything, Anne is sleeping calmly but Yeats is deeply worried about her safety and nagging thoughts grip his mind. He gets apprehensive about Anne's future life. By keeping the baby in the cradle, Yeats feels that he is providing limited security to his daughter. In gloom and despair, he walks and prays for his daughter and wishes her safety and protection from the storm raging outside and the political turmoil brewing across Ireland. He wishes that the social conditions prevailing outside do not affect her innocence and simplicity.

Yeats walks in restlessness for an hour and his gloom deepens. The winds are so destructive that even the strong elm trees are tossed around by them. The poet hears the screaming of the sea upon the tower. The "flooded stream" can wash away everything that comes in the way and symbolises the poet's anxiety for his daughter. The wildness and destructiveness of the storm compel him to think about the future of his child. After some time, the poet happens to see some light and gets a respite from the traumatic storm, giving him a ray of hope and optimism. Yeats writes, "That the future years had come, Dancing to a frenzied drum" and he seeks a permanent solution to the turmoil in Ireland.

Yeats believes that Anne would grow up to be a beautiful girl, but he never wishes her to be a paragon of physical beauty. He opines that beauty does have hazardous effects and can be destructive for a woman. He warns against beauty that can breed hatred and obsession. It can spoil the life and career of the lover and make him vengeful towards the beloved. Beauty should not inspire wild passions in others and it, at times, misleads the beholders into a false sense of hope. Beauty instils arrogance in a woman which often robs her of her kindness. Yeats wants her daughter to save herself from being proud and vain and wishes her to be beautiful enough to secure a good husband.

Yeats cites examples from myth and recounts the sad fate of Helen of Troy. Helen's excessive beauty brought her trouble and destruction. The most beautiful girl ever lived brought doom upon her and others. Likewise, Maud chose a foolish man as her husband and the episode

taught the poet some bitter lessons. Yeats also brings the image of the queen Aphrodite, who rose out of the spray. She was fatherless and nobody was there to guide her. Yeats pledges to guide his daughter properly in every matter. He wants his daughter to be kind, courteous, and an agreeable young woman as he believes that it is better for a woman to be modest and compassionate than being beautiful and arrogant. He views that men who love women for their physical beauty receive nothing but disappointment. He gives great importance to the qualities of kindness, courtesy, and civility and writes, “In courtesy I’d have her chiefly learned; / Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned / By those that are not entirely beautiful.”

Yeats wants his daughter to imbibe wisdom, happiness, and reticence and wishes her to live in protection, away from the turmoil and danger. He brings the image of a big deep-rooted tree to ensure the safety and security of his daughter. Yeats prays, “O May she live like some green laurel / Rooted in one dear perpetual place.” He wants her to be as satisfied as a linnet and wishes her to be deep rooted in tradition. Time and again, he highlights the importance of self-contentment for women and argues that kind and contented women are incorruptible. He believes that hatred is the root cause of all evils and wishes his daughter’s soul to be entirely free from it. He argues that a soul which is afflicted by hate is doomed and consumes the creativity.

The poet once again talks about Maud Gonne who rejected him and married MacBride. He praises her for being highly gifted, but views that it was her “opinionated mind” which forced her to reject him. Yeats does not want his daughter to be opinionated and implores her to leave wild feelings and passions. He wishes her to be of a temperate nature. According to him, women should possess innocence and make everyone feel happy and comfortable. He wants his daughter to be free of arrogance and haughtiness and submit to God’s will. Towards the end of the poem, Yeats expresses his final wish and imagines the marriage of his daughter. He wishes her daughter to be married to a good man possessing aristocratic values and traditions, custom and ceremony. He finally enjoys her safety and security in his home in contrast to the outside ambience and ends his prayer by going back to the images of “horn” and “tree.” The poem ends on a note of optimism.

8.2.5 Analysis:

The poem was written in 1919 and published in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* in 1921. Yeats addresses the poem to Anne, his daughter. The poem was written two days after Anne’s birth while Yeats stayed in a tower at Thoor Ballylee during the Anglo-Irish war. The poem explores the themes of Irish nationalism, turmoil, sexuality, etc. Feminist critics have

questioned Yeats's approach to women in the poem. Yeats introspects and ponders over what best he can do to raise his daughter. He wants her to grow into a kind lady with moderate beauty. A furious storm is raging outside and Yeats is highly anxious as to how his daughter may be saved from the tough times ahead. The storm can be taken as the symbol of Irish War of Independence, thus giving the poem a historical touch. Owing to his experience of unrequited love with Maud Gonne, he concludes that beautiful hearts are more important than beautiful faces. Although the poem is mostly about the poet's prayers for his daughter, he indirectly expresses his views on femininity and his failure in love. In this regard, Harold Bloom remarks, "Its actual subject is not the new born Anne Butler Yeats but Maud Gonne, and the bridegroom who ends the poem in so movingly archaic fashion is Yeats himself, making in a phantasmagoria marriage he was denied in life, yet ironically marrying only his own soul."

Yeats married late, at the age of 52. After his daughter's birth, he changed altogether and became a responsible man of the family. The fear of the protection of his child haunted him due to the political uncertainty going on in Ireland and the First World War. He had the fear and anxiety of losing his child because the son of his best friend, Lady Gregory, whom Yeats dedicated an elegy, was killed in the war. The poem is personal in tone as it depicts a father's fear and hopes for the future of his daughter. Yeats exhibits his disapproval of the self-centered love which can spoil the life of a lover. He does not want his daughter to be beautiful like Helen or Maud Gonne. The poem portrays how, in the modern world, reason has overshadowed passions. Some threatening forces surround the poet's daughter like a "flooded stream," yet the father is hopeful for her better future despite being in the turbulent world. Yeats argues that beauty in women can, at times, bring destruction and he prays for her daughter, "May she be granted beauty and yet not." He focuses on feminine innocence and describes how Helen's beauty caused the Trojan War. He urges his daughter to be courteous and earn love with sincerity and good efforts as "Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned." He implores her to inculcate qualities which may help her become confident and independent.

8.2.6 Theme:

The poem explores the theme of concern and love of a father for his new born daughter. Yeats asserts that a father's love can never be selfish. He presents his hopes in his daughter and wishes her to become a beautiful and virtuous soul. The poem is beset with didactic tones and exhibits feelings of uncertainty, gloom, fear, and hope. Yeats openly affirms the superiority of courtesy, contentment and wisdom of women to their physical beauty and charms.

8.2.7 Structure:

A Prayer for My Daughter is a lyric poem consisting of ten stanzas of eight lines each with two rhymed couplets followed by a quatrain. The poem follows the rhyme scheme, “AABBCDDC.” The stanzas are written with some variation on *ottava rima* (eight-lined stanza) which Yeats used in other poems, “Among School Children” and “Sailing to Byzantium.” The poem uses iambic pentameter and trochaic pentameter alternatively. As an example, the two meters can be seen in these lines, “I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour / And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower.” The poem is highly applauded for its structure.

8.2.8 Figures of Speech Used in the Poem:

Yeats has employed and exploited numerous literary devices in the poem such as paradox, personification, symbolism, sibilance, alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia. He uses paradox in the line “murderous innocence of the sea” and sibilance in the words “sea-wind scream.” “Scream” is an example of onomatopoeia also. Other examples of onomatopoeia are “howling,” “spray,” “choke,” “scowl,” and “howl.” The examples of personification presented in the poem are “dancing” of the future years (implying transience of life), “sea wind scream,” “frenzied drum,” “angry wind,” etc. Some examples of alliteration are “be granted beauty,” “howling and half-hid,” “cradle-hood and coverlid,” “great gloom,” “being made beautiful,” “like the linnet,” “hatred driven hence,” “find a friend,” etc. Some of the symbols used in the poem are “flooded stream” and “sea wind,” denoting turbulence. Out of the many other symbols used in the poem, the “tower” represents Yeats’s vision of the dark and gloomy future of mankind.

8.3 Learning Outcomes

In this Unit, we have learnt that W. B. Yeats was a great Modern writer and a dominant literary figure of his times. He was a dreamer and visionary and felt strange in a world of scientific developments. His poetry is full of myths, imagery, and symbolism. He borrows his mythology from Gaelic heroic legends and has had a close association with Irish methodological tradition and folklore. He had a profound interest in Irish Nationalism, magic and occult. “A Prayer for My Daughter” is a prayer-like poem in which Yeats seeks a better and prosperous future for his daughter. Yeats prays that his daughter is not like Maud Gonne or Helen, but possess modesty and kindness instead of physical beauty. The poem reflects how anxious and

gloomy the poet is about his daughter's adjustment with the hard times in future. Innocence, custom, ceremony, wisdom, courtesy, and kindness are highly valued by the poet.

8.4 Glossary

Renowned: Someone who is famous or known about by many people

Nobel Prize: It is the most prestigious award of the world given annually for outstanding work in six subjects—physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, economics, and peace. It is named after Alfred Nobel and was first awarded in 1901.

Mythology: It is a study or collection of myths, especially belonging to a particular religion or cultural tradition

Symbolism: It is the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities

Occult: It refers to mystical, supernatural, or magical powers, practices, or phenomena

Turbulence: Great commotion or agitation. It also refers to instability or disturbance

Upheaval: A violent or sudden change or disruption to something

Despondency: A state of being extremely low in spirits, the quality of being unhappy

Aestheticism: An intellectual and art movement supporting the emphasis of aesthetic values more than the socio-political themes for literature and other arts

Ardent: Very enthusiastic or passionate

Revolutionary: Engaged in or promoting revolution

Esotericism: A state or quality of being obscure and only understood by a very small number of people with special knowledge

Protestant: A member or follower of any of the Western Christian Churches that are separated from the Roman Catholic Church in accordance with the principles of the reformation

Sensibility: The quality of being able to appreciate and respond to complex emotional or aesthetic influences

Folklore: The traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations orally

Theosophy: Teaching about God and the world based on mystical insight

Oblivious: Not aware of or concerned about what is happening around

Turmoil: A state of great disturbance, confusion, or uncertainty

Ferocity: The state of being frightened and violent

Obsession: An idea or thought that continually preoccupies or intrudes on a person's mind

Reticence: The quality or state of being reserved and restrained

Haughtiness: The appearance or quality of being arrogantly superior and disdainful

Optimism: It means hopefulness and confidence about the future or the success of something

Methodological: Relating to the system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity

8.5 Sample Questions

8.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. When was the poem written?

(a) 1919

(b) 1920

(c) 1921

(d) 1922

2. Where did W. B. Yeats belong to?

(a) England

(b) Ireland

(c) Scotland

(d) New Zealand

3. What is the name of the woman Yeats loved deeply?

(a) Lady Gregory

(b) Maud Gonne

(c) Katherine

(d) Elizabeth

4. What is the poet's mood in the poem?

(a) Anxious

(b) Happy

(c) Jubilant

(d) Serious

5. At what age was Yeats married?

(a) 51

(b) 52

(c) 53

(d) 54

6. Yeats compares Maud Gonne to?

(a) Venus

(b) Zeus

(c) Helen

(d) Mary

7. How is Anne sleeping?

(a) Anxiously

(b) Calmly

(c) Restlessly

(d) Happily

8. Does Yeats approve of physical beauty in the poem?

(a) Yes

(b) No

(c) Can't say

(d) May be

9. Whom did Maud Gonne marry?

(a) J. M. Synge

(b) McBride

(c) Seamus Heaney

(d) W. B. Yeats

10. Towards the end of the poem, what does Yeats imagine?

(a) His daughter's marriage

(b) Her Death

(c) Her Education

(d) Her Career

8.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What does Yeats wish for her daughter?
2. What lessons does Yeats learn from his experiences of love with Maud Gonne?
3. Discuss the poet's concern for his daughter as revealed in the poem?
4. What according to you is the message that the poet wants to convey?
5. Why is Yeats so much worried about the future of his daughter?

8.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. In what respects can the poem be called a "modernist" poem? Elaborate.
2. Why is the speaker's tone so melancholic? Explain.
3. Give a critical appreciation of the poem. Can it be studied under feminist studies? Discuss.

8.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Adams, Hazard. *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision*. Cornell U. P., 1955.
2. Bhargava, Ashok. *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats: Myth and Metaphor*. Arnold Heinemann, 1979.
3. Bornstein, George. *Yeats and Shelley*. U of Chicago P, 1970.
4. Dougherty, Adelyn. *A Study of Rhythmic Structure in the Verse of William Butler Yeats*. Mouton, 1973.
5. Hone, Joseph. *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939*. Macmillan, 1962.
6. Stead, C.K. *Pound, Yeats, Eliot, and the Modernist Movement*. Macmillan, 1986.
7. Stock, A. G. *W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought*. Cambridge U. P., 1961.
8. Symons, Arthur. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Heinemann, 1899.
9. Yeats, W. B. *Autobiographies*. Macmillan Rpt., 1966.

---. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Gill and Macmillan, 1933.

10. Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation*. Edited by Joseph Cambell. Bollinger Series VI, 1972.

Unit-9: Amitav Ghosh - *Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi*

Structure

9.0 Introduction

9.1 Objectives

9.2 *The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi*

9.2.1 About the Author

9.2.2 Discussion

9.2.2.1 Section – 1

9.2.2.2 Section – 2

9.2.2.3 Section – 3

9.2.2.4 Section – 4

9.2.2.5 Section – 5

9.2.2.6 Section – 6

9.2.2.7 Section – 7

9.2.2.8 Summary

9.3 Learning Outcomes

9.4 Glossary

9.5 Sample Questions

9.6 Suggested Learning Resources

9.0 Introduction

The essay, *The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi* by Amitav Ghosh, is an extract from the longer version under the same title which forms a part of the anthology *The Imam and the Indian* published in 2002. It records the events as seen and experienced by the writer himself. It refers to the aftermath of a momentous event which took place in New Delhi on October 31, 1984. The author records his experiences in a very objective manner; but the sensibility of the author is very subjective. The piece is a good example of autobiographical prose. Amitav Ghosh uses memory and imagination and combines them with facts to create this beautiful sample of creative/literary non-fiction. It has been written in the first-person narrative form; and it is very subjective because it involves the reader in an intense response to the events being described. The author's participation in the action is narrated with a modest reserve. The author gives center stage to the

common people, and their humanity and courage. Without over-dramatizing the narrative, Ghosh conveys the bleak prospect of violence, mistrust and hatred that threatens to divide society and people sharply. At such times, as the essay will show you, it is the common man and his inherent goodness and sensitivity to the others' pain that saves the situation.

One unusual feature of the essay is the seeming dis-connect between the title and the content of the essay. There are no ghosts in the essay; and, more importantly there is no role of Mrs Gandhi in the narrative of events. At the end of our detailed reading of the essay, we shall try to analyze the significance of the title.

9.1 Objectives

The prescribed essay “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” is a non-fiction prose piece. Such prose writings include historical writings, memoirs, journalistic essays, biographies etc. The creative non-fiction writer describes a real event or events but employs a number of literary techniques, and adds a dramatic flavor to his writing. The objective of this unit is to acquaint the readers with a piece of prose writing of the same kind. During the detailed discussion we shall be touching upon the many techniques that have been used by Amitav Ghosh to enhance the effectiveness of the essay. Apart from this, the content of the piece makes it an eye-witness record of history.

9.2 *The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi*

9.2.1 About the Author:

Amitav Ghosh is a prominent and an established Indian writer known for his non-fictional approach to creative writing. He is a novelist, historian and anthropologist. He is well known for bringing to light the characters, traditions, norms and dichotomies prevailing within India. His works also explore the crosscultural ties of India with its colonist background. He was born in 1956 in Kolkata, India, after formal education, he received a Ph.D. in social anthropology from Oxford in 1982 and worked at Delhi University till 1986. He has also served as a visiting professor at Virginia University, Columbia University, and American University in Cairo and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, he contributed regularly to The Indian Express, New

Republic and Granta. His major focus of attention is to explore the social and geographical identities.

Due to his original tone and capturing language he is deemed as one of the most renowned Indian writers of his time. There is a strong bond that co-exists between his writing and the people and places for which he is writing. His first novel the *Circle of Reason* was published in 1986 which won “one of the France’s top literary awards, Prix Medici étrangère. In addition, in 1990 he won Annual Prize from Indian Academy of letter. His major works include *Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *In An Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *Dancing in Cambodia & other Essays* (1998), *Countdown* (1999), *The Glass Palace* (2001), *The Imam & the Indian* (2002), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Incendiary Circumstances* (2005), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), *Flood of Fire* (2015) and *The Great Derangement* (2016).

9.2.2 Discussion:

For our reading convenience, and to facilitate comprehension, the essay has been divided into seven sub-units. We’ll round up the discussion and summarize the whole essay at the end.

9.2.2.1 Section – 1:

“The first reliable report” ... “Nobody said a word as we sped away down the Ring Road”.

The essay begins on a note of proper reportage. The writer’s journalistic precision is obvious in the way he records the time of the first information of the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi. The rest of the section in this sub unit is devoted to the description of the journey of Ghosh by bus to his friend Hari Sen’s house in the “other end of the city.” The journey by bus is used to build the atmosphere of growing panic, mounting unrest, and chaos ending in violence on the streets, as the news of Mrs Indira Gandhi’s assassination by her Sikh bodyguards’ spreads. The news provokes sudden reaction and the Hindus resort to violence to take revenge upon the Sikhs.

Amitav Ghosh describes what he sees en route to his friend’s house in a very factual manner. The author leaves out some details like the name of the hospital where the crowd was gathering, or the name of Hari Sen’s neighborhood. [This reminds us of the journalistic style used in newspapers or on electronic media, when a calamitous event is described involving different sections of society in an impersonal, objective manner, omitting the factual details like the names of people, their religion etc.] The first phase of the bus journey is quite uneventful,

except that Ghosh notices that shops, stalls and eateries were closing down at an unusually early hour. The second bus gets a last-minute passenger. Ghosh does not notice particularly that he is a Sikh. [Why? That's quite common, isn't it? You just see someone get into your bus. You don't look at them or notice everything about them. Moreover, Sikhs traveling in a Delhi bus is quite a common sight].

As the bus moves and passes by the hospital, the trouble has started brewing and becoming quite violent. As the bus drew near to the hospital, they see a huge crowd. There were many young people, disheveled and restive "red-eyed young men in half-unbuttoned shirts." Many of them were armed; and some of them were stopping cars and buses. They were looking for Sikhs. The Sikh passenger in the bus was restless and panic-stricken. Then, two extraordinary things happened. A sari-clad woman spoke to the Sikh in a loud whisper and warned him to be quiet and hide under the seat. The man was startled but had sense enough to follow her advice and hid between seats. Ghosh here wishes us to see an example of humanity of the sari-clad lady, most probably a Hindu, gauging the situation and helping to save the man. Minutes later, the bus was intercepted by armed young men. They came up to enquire if there was any Sikh aboard the bus. The driver promptly said no, there was no such person on the bus. His voice was followed by a chorus of voices from the bus saying, "no, let us go now, we have to get home". The bus was allowed to move on. All were silent. [What does this imply? The Sikh had been saved by all of them. But there was no talk of how good they had been, or how heroic their act was in saving the Sikh gentleman]. The author uses the word "thugs" twice to describe the "menacing bands of young men", "dressed in bright sharp synthetics."

Check your progress:

1. The starting point of the essay is an event reported on the media, the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi.
2. The author is able to witness the different events because he travels by the bus across the city (Delhi). He encounters incidents which make him [and through him, us too] aware of the humanity and sense of responsibility of common people.

9.2.2.2 Section – 2:

“Hari Sen lived in one of New Delhi’s recently developed residential colonies”...”the violence had reached the same level of intensity”.

The passage begins with a mention of the type of locality where Ghosh goes with his friend Hari Sen. It is a middle class residential colony, with a mixed population. Hari Sen’s family lives in the colony in a big one-storey bungalow. Their neighbor is a Sikh gentleman named Mr Bawa. Mr Bawa’s house is a grand house. Ghosh spends a few lines in describing the bungalow and its “uncharacteristically daring” design. In the next paragraph, Ghosh talks of Hari Sen’s family as a large household full of eccentric people. The author makes a literary reference to the house called Macondo which is named after the magical village in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s works. These two paragraphs appear as diversions from the main theme of the novel. This is where the author’s literary sensibilities become evident. When he describes Mr Bawa, he focuses on his eccentricities, though not in a critical manner. [One is reminded of Charles Dickens’s style of description].

In the morning, Ghosh learns about the selective violence of mobs on prowl, targeting the homes and business places of Sikhs. People were getting killed, and houses were being looted and set on fire. Non-Sikhs who protected the Sikhs were also not spared. The paragraph starting with the line “It was still and quiet, eerily so” brings out another aspect of mob violence, which had only been hinted at earlier. The mobsters and looters were helped by organized terror-mongers. The violent mob was given directions and provided weapons as well as transport. They were given information and directions about where to attack. This is the frightening truth that Ghosh wishes us to focus on. The author authenticates this idea by quoting a Civil Rights Report (which was published later). The report talks about how the carnage, and the incidents of “burning alive the Sikhs on public roads” were calculated moves to “terrorize the people.” The sentence “Fire was everywhere; it was the day’s motif” is very effective in conveying the day-long violence and the enormity of loss of human lives.

Another very chilling report is presented as an extreme example of human depravity and ruthlessness of the mobs on that day. The description of how a father and his three sons were burnt alive becomes more shocking, when we are told, in the very words of the surviving lady of the family, that the hiding place of the father and sons was perhaps revealed to the mob by someone. The mob was driven by a frenzy of revengefulness.

We agree with the author when he says that one would have thought that man-slaughter and violence at the time of the Partition of India was a one-time happening; and would not ever be repeated. But the happenings on that day in October in Delhi, human nature showed its hateful, evil side yet again and “the violence had reached the same kind of intensity.”

Check your progress:

1. Ghosh stays back at Hari Sen’s house that night. The next morning seems quite peaceful, but soon the incidents of violence take over and the bloodshed is all around.
2. The targets of all this violence are Sikhs.
3. News, interviews and reports are used by the author to authenticate the descriptions of the horrible events.

9.2.2.3 Section – 3:

“As Hari and I stood staring into the smoke-streaked sky” ... “I was awed by their courage.”

The next morning Hari’s mother, who is concerned about her neighbor’s safety, rang up Mrs Bawa to invite her and her husband to shift into the safety of her house. Mrs Bawa’s response was typical of any innocent person who can never believe that any one could harm them in their own home. She refused the offer gracefully. Around noontime, news came that the violent mobs had entered the colony. Hari and Amitav Ghosh go to persuade the Bawa couple to leave their house and come along. Mr Bawa was a thin, small man. He was very puzzled as to why he and his wife should be affected by what had happened. “He had no more sympathy for the Sikh terrorists than we did; his revulsion at the assassination was, if anything, even greater than ours.” He was a true nationalist and was proud to be an Indian. He did not at all think that he could be attacked by any mob. It was difficult to convince him.

Everyone waited in the hope that curfew would be imposed to control the situation; and that Paramilitary forces would be deployed to control the spate of violence. According to the reports in other cities like Calcutta, the situation had been brought under control. But in Delhi it appeared that the only important thing to be done was for the dignitaries to pay respects to the assassinated leader.

Meanwhile, the violent mob had reached the alley next to Hari Sen's. This time when he was contacted, Mr Bawa agreed to come. But the difficulty was that there was a shoulder high wall separating the two houses. The Bawas were somehow persuaded to climb the wall. They took a long time to come. Their cook, a Hindu, assisted them to climb over the wall and then returned to guard the house. As they are brought in and welcomed into the house by Mrs Sen, Ghosh notices how warm and welcoming the house was; but this only accentuated the fact that there was only a small distance between the safe comfort of the house and the imminent danger outside.

Soon some 'thugs' reached Mr Bawa's house and started harassing the cook brandishing knives to frighten him. Hari and Ghosh listens to the interrogation from behind the wall in panic, lest the cook should reveal the whereabouts of Mr and Mrs Bawa. If he did that, surely both the houses would be burned down. The cook succeeded in warding off the thugs. Some of them continued to rattle the bars of the gates of Hari's house. The friends, Hari and Ghosh confront the thugs, and told them that there was no one in the house in bold loud voices, though they were feeling petrified inside. Surprisingly this had an effect and the thugs moved away.

Inside Mrs Sen's house Mr and Mrs Bawa sat as though everything was alright, having tea and indulging in small talk with Mrs Sen. Ghosh feels awed by the courage and trust of this elderly Sikh couple.

Check your progress:

1. This passage highlights three important characters, viz., Hari Sen's mother Mrs Sen, Mr Bawa and Mrs Bawa, the elderly Sikh couple. All of them are old-worldly, graceful and innocent in their outlooks. But each of them is different from the other.
2. Amitav Ghosh comments upon the inaction of the Government. While people wait anxiously for some help, the violence continues unabated.
3. Amitav Ghosh and HariSen succeed in warding off the thugs by boldly facing them and asking them to leave.

9.2.2.4 Section – 4:

“The next morning, I heard about a protest” ... “without a second thought, I joined”.

The next morning, Amitav Ghosh attended a meeting which was held to protest the rioting and violence. He came to know many details of the chaotic day and night that had passed.

“The violence” Ghosh says, “was worse than I had imagined.” All neighborhoods, institutions and business houses of the Sikhs had been looted and burned down. There were countless brutal murders. After some speeches, it was decided that the group of protestors would go into the worst hit neighborhood and confront the rioters. Here Ghosh mentions some of the people who joined the protest. The names are as follows: Swami Agnivesh the Hindu ascetic, Chandra Shekhar who became India’s PM years later, Ravi Chopra scientist and environmentalist, and a few politicians. Amitav Ghosh admits that by nature he is not prone to joining any crowd activity. But the attempts of this very small group of positive minded people affected him, and he joined without thinking any more about it.

As he examines his own ambivalent mood regarding joining the protest march, Ghosh remembers an essay written by V.S. Naipaul who had always been the role model for literary style of Ghosh. At the time of joining the protest march, Ghosh says that something he had read by Naipaul came to mind at that juncture. Ghosh calls Naipaul’s prose “incomparable.” In the essay [the details of which have been forgotten by Ghosh] Naipaul talks of how he looks down from his hotel window at a crowd of protestors marching in the streets. The sight “fills him with an obscure longing,” and he wishes very much to join the protestors in the street; yet he does not go down for the only reason that he was not inclined to join crowds. Ghosh likes to think that his nature in this regard was much like Naipaul’s.

As the meeting concludes and the handful of protestors against violence rise to their given task [that of putting an end to the flagrant violence], Ghosh finds himself freed from this thrall in which his readings and his understanding of himself held him. As the marchers move out of the compound, Ghosh joins them without any further misgivings or doubts.

Check your progress:

1. This passage shows two important actions performed by the writer. One is to help offered in saving Mr and Mrs Bawa and warding off the ‘thugs.’ The second action, which is quite unusual kind of thing for him to be doing, is to join the crowd of protestors and move for the cause of peace.
2. The writer mentions V.S. Naipaul admiringly. He refers to an essay written by Naipaul, in order to describe his own initial reluctance to join any public sort of protest, or any sort of crowd activity.

9.2.2.5 Section – 5:

“The march headed first for Lajpat Nagar...” ... “A moment later, they were gone”.

Lajpat Nagar is in New Delhi, but, as the author says, its ambience is like that of Old Delhi. It is a crowded place. Since there had been rioting and looting in that area, the protest march first decided to go to Lajpat Nagar. As they emerged in the locality, the scenes of the chaos of the previous day and night were in front of their eyes in the form of burned down cars, ransacked homes, gutted cinema halls, etc. The sight was much too gory to be borne easily. The scenes stuck in the mind and refused to be forgotten. Ghosh says that the feelings of disgust and revulsion were not in any way unique to him; almost everyone had the same panic rising in the heart.

Later in life also, it is traumatic to remember the scenes he witnessed that day. Above all, the most terrifying moment of that day of the protest march was when the peace rally members were facing a violent attack by the rioters. They had marched into many localities earlier in the day. They used to march straight into the middle of the crowd of thugs and talk to them. Often there would be heated verbal exchanges; but soon the thugs would back down. In this one instance which is indelibly marked in Ghosh’s mind, the mob was very determined and angry, “intent on confrontation.” They rushed towards the peace rally members, with knives and steel rods. The Peace March members stopped; but continued to raise slogans. They were filled with a “kind of rapture”, and felt a complete commitment to their cause for peace. They were prepared to be attacked, but never let go of their protest against violence.

Suddenly something extraordinary happened. While the slogans continued to be raised without a break, with no warning or rehearsal, the women in the rally stepped out and formed a circle around the men. They then turned to the attackers as though challenging them to attack.

The thugs were astounded and confused. Soon they dispersed. Ghosh says that the event is unforgettable but also unique. The fact that the women exhibited such extraordinary courage was great indeed. Its effect on the wrong-doers was also very extraordinary.

Check your progress:

1. The Peace rally marched into many riot-ridden areas.
2. The rally adopted Gandhian methods. Even the slogans being raised were what Gandhi had taught the Indians during the Freedom struggle. Ghosh calls these methods “Gandhian staples of peace.”
3. The Peace March in Lajpat Nagar proved to be a memorable one.

9.2.2.6 Section – 6:

“The march ended at the walled compound”... “become characteristic of the contemporary world.”

The march ended, followed by the setup of an organization named Citizen’s Unity Front in a short time with an objective to support the victims who are in need of all sort of relief i.e. something to eat and drink and shelter to live. The movement received an enormous response with respect to goods such as clothing, blankets and food items. The large compound was thronged with trucks full of goods. The clothing and food items were received in abundance that there was no place to keep them. Front volunteers like the author returned to their routine affairs after serving the afflicted for few days but the amount of work other volunteers did especially women, for Sikh children and women, continued for years in camps to repair the damage that was done in mere three days.

The author deemed the investigation to find out the guilty as mere waste of time as nothing will come out of it. But a pamphlet “Who are the Guilty” highlighted the role of politicians for inciting the riots and the police who let them do the way they like. These survivors are compensated to some extent by the government in spite of the fact that some of these homeless have been settled by government yet none of the rioter has been brought to justice till date. According to the author, sanity is just as far as Punjab region is concerned and rest of the country is at the beck and call of instigators of violence. He has quoted the notion of Bosnian author Dzevad Karahasan who pinpointed the notion that co-exists between modern aesthetic notion and the unresponsive attitude of the world with regard to violence prevailing around the globe.

Check your progress:

1. An organization named Citizen's Unity Front was set up to support the victims who were in need of all sorts of relief.
2. Front volunteers including the author returned to their daily routine after few days after serving the afflicted but few of the women volunteers continued to repair the damages for years.

9.2.2.7 Section – 7:

“When I went back to my desk”... “remembering the stories we have not written.”

To Ghosh, his next novel was sure to be under the influence of the past events but in the veil of “an aesthetic phenomenon.” Even the name of his next book *The Shadow Lines* is based on these events. But the real events in plain words were consciously not narrated by numerous writers including Amitav Ghosh due to the fact that it may instigate the riots or may result in terrorist activities. But Ghosh has also to make a distinction between being an author and being a citizen and has to act rationally rather than mere an author in depicting the violence as to him “writers don't join crowds.” But when authorities fail to act the way they are expected to then writers have to join the club with all the obligations and guilt that are attached to it. And Ghosh has witnessed both the terror of violence and infirmity of humanity projected at the same time. The terror of violence resulted in hopelessness and makes people homeless but heaps of essential goods in Hari's home testify the infirmity of humanity. Whenever Ghosh witnessed such events anywhere, he questioned the civilized response that was required to tackle violence. Ghosh has ended the essay on the note that aesthetic of indifference might prompt the exigency of recalling those events we have not inscribed yet.

Check your progress:

1. As a novelist Amitav Ghosh wanted to depict these events of violence in his next novel but couldn't lest it instigates riots and terrorist activities.
2. Ghosh remembers the quotation ‘writers don't join crowd’ by V. S. Naipaul but he had to when authorities failed to act as expected.
3. The writer suggests that civilized response is required to tackle such violence which may occur anywhere.

9.2.2.8 Summary:

The essay is an extract from a longer piece by Amitav Ghosh under the title “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi.” The event that forms the basis of this essay is the assassination of the then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1984 on the 31st of October, by her Sikh bodyguards. The event was shocking in itself. But more shocking were the incidents of violence and unrest that followed, as the supporters of Mrs Gandhi went on a rampage. There was blood-curdling cruelty, and the revengefulness crossed the borders of humanity in its utter ruthlessness. Sikhs were singled out and killed, their properties were looted, and their public institutions, like Gurudwaras and schools, were gutted.

Ghosh gives an eye-witness narration of what he saw that day and after. He also takes help from official records and media reports. Ghosh’s piece may be described as creative or literary non-fiction. He writes in a personal, impressionistic manner. He also refers to some literary figures in order to explain his point of view. He goes back and forth in time while narrating the incidents of 1984. The essay was published in 1995.

The title of the essay is intriguing. The word ‘ghosts’ has been used by Ghosh in the sense of ‘after-effects’ or aftermath. Mrs Gandhi was no more, but it was as though her ghost(s) walked the streets of Delhi on that fateful day.

9.3 Learning Outcomes

After going through the unit, it is expected that the readers:

- Know Amitav Ghosh and his contribution to English literature.
- Realize the reality of 1984 riots.
- Know the role of unscrupulous politicians in instigating the riots.
- Understand that the targets of 1984 riots were Sikhs.
- Know the role of Citizen’s Unity Front to support the afflicted.
- Realize the role of women in saving the lives of people and helping the affected of the 1984 Sikh riots.
- Know the importance of a slim pamphlet ‘Who are the Guilty’ to mount pressure on government to compensate the afflicted.

9.4 Glossary

Long-Distance Phone Call: Remember those were the days when mobile phones were not so much in use in India. People had to book Trunk Calls, or Lightning Calls through the Telephone Exchange.

Connaught Place: This area in Delhi, so well-described by Ghosh is formed by outer and inner circular roads, neatly planned and beautifully designed. The area is also referred to as Connaught Circle.

Macondo: This is a fictional town described in the famous Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez's (1927-2014) novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

VS Naipaul (1932-2018): A renowned writer of Fiction and non-Fiction from Trinidad. His famous works include *A House for Mr Biswas* and *In a Free State*.

9.5 Sample Questions

9.5.1 Objective Questions:

- The name of the organization was
 - Citizen's Front
 - Citizen's Unity**
 - Citizen's Unity Front
 - Citizen's Front Unity
- The organization was set up after.....once the events took place.
 - Few days
 - Few hours
 - Few months**
 - Few years
- The author worked with the team ofUniversity as a volunteer
 - Bombay
 - Delhi**
 - Calcutta
 - None of these
-women and children were rendered homeless.
 - Sikh**
 - Muslims
 - Hindu
 - Christian
- Violence took place in
 - 1980
 - 1982
 - 1984**
 - 1986
- The name of the novel under the shadow of this violence is

- (a) *In An Antique Land* (b) *Circle of Reason*
 (c) ***The Shadow Lines*** (d) *Calcutta Chromosome*
7. Amitav Ghosh was born in 1956 in
 (a) Delhi (b) Hyderabad
 (c) **Kolkata** (d) Mumbai
8. “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” by Amitav Ghosh is a/an
 (a) Novel (b) Short Story
 (c) **Essay** (d) Drama
9. Amitav Ghosh received Jnanpith Award in
 (a) 2015 (b) 1999
 (c) **2018** (d) 2020
10. “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” was published in the collection entitled
 (a) *The Common Reader* (b) *Essays of Elia*
 (c) *Interpreter of Maladies* (d) *The Imam and the Indian*

9.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. With what objectives Citizen’s Unity Front was formed?
2. Describe the role of women on various occasions in the light of essay you studied.
3. What was the purpose of the pamphlet “Who are the Guilty”? Did it serve its purpose completely?
4. What correlation does exist between aesthetic phenomenon and world indifference towards violence?
5. Amitav Ghosh uses many phrases by hyphenating words. Some of them are quite commonly used. One example is ‘middle-aged’ [often without the hyphen]. Can you find some more examples from the text?

9.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Ghosh is very good at presenting different types of characters. He does this in a manner which is close to caricature. Try to describe Mr Bawa’s personality and appearance in your own words. Do you think Ghosh is making fun of the Bawas?
2. There is a mismatch between the first description of the household of Hari Sen, and what is described later about Sen’s mother. Can you comment on it?

3. Why have we called the essay creative/literary non-fiction? Can you identify the features of fiction, journalism, and history in the piece you have studied?

9.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. In Memory and Imagination – Personal Essays and Stories on the 1984 Anti Sikh Riots. Editor: Vikram Kapur. 2016.
2. *A Room of One's Own*. Author: Virginia Woolf. 1929.
3. *In Cold Blood*. Author: Truman Capote. 1965.

Unit-10: Virginia Woolf - *Shakespeare's Sister*

Structure

10.0 Introduction

10.1 Objectives

10.2 *Shakespeare's Sister*

10.2.1 *A Room of One's Own*

10.2.2 Significance of *A Room of One's Own*

10.2.3 Financial Independence of Women

10.2.4 The Unnamed Narrator

10.2.5 Critical Responses to *A Room of One's Own*

10.2.6 *Shakespeare's Sister*

10.2.7 Women in the Elizabethan Age

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10.2.9 Condition of Women in a Male-dominated Society

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10.4 Glossary

10.5 Sample Questions

10.6 Suggested Reading

10.0 Introduction

Virginia Woolf is one of the pioneering feminist writers an influential novelist and noted intellectual of Modern age. As a feminist writer, she wondered how men had always enjoyed power, fame, wealth, or influence and women had been deprived of all these things and assigned only the job of childbearing. She believes that women had never been given due credit and status which they deserved. *A Room of One's Own* is the revolutionary and seminal text where Woolf explores the inseparable relation between money and creativity. It is a book-length philosophical essay that exerts an immense influence on feminist writing and literature. Woolf talks about the limitations and problems that women have been facing in a literary tradition dominated by men. Men writers were considered more creative and intelligent than their female counterparts at the time of Woolf. The position of a female writer can be improved if she is guaranteed, privacy, freedom, and intellectual emancipation. Woolf asserts that material conditions had never been

available to women writers whenever they attempted to write. She opines that women should have private space, financial independence, and free time, which she believes are the requirements for writing.

In the book, Woolf speculates about the fate of a woman with Shakespeare's genius in the Elizabethan age. By inventing an imaginary character as Shakespeare's sister named Judith, she illustrates that even being as gifted as Shakespeare, Judith would be denied the opportunity to make her career. Judith, like Woolf herself, is trapped at home and is not allowed to attend school. She, unlike her brother, gets no chance to establish her legacy. Woolf also reasons that in future, a female Shakespeare would be born if women are given private space and independent income. Basically, she wrote *A Room of One's Own* to expose the marginalization of women and simultaneously to elevate their status.

10.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Unit are:

- To deepen your understanding and knowledge of Virginia Woolf's works and ideas.
- To examine the importance of economic independence and private space in the lives of women writers.
- To give you an idea of what educational, psychological, financial, and other barriers women have to face if they tried to express or shape their talents.
- To familiarise you with the kind of hardships that Judith Shakespeare faced in the pursuit of her career in theatre and the simultaneous rejection, discouragement and indifference she received.
- To know about the kind of fate that women artists would meet if they tried to disobey their parents or spoil their chastity.
- To tell you how anonymity became a norm with women writers in the past, forcing them to adopt pseudonyms.

10.2 Shakespeare's Sister

Born Adeline Virginia Stephen (1882-1941), Virginia Woolf was one of the pioneers of the modernist movement and took numerous positions of a feminist writer, essayist, critic, and

publisher. Born to the eminent Victorian parents Leslie Stephen and Julia Jackson Duckworth, Woolf suffered from depression since her childhood. Her traumatised youth was shaken many emotional shocks that came with the death of many of her family members. Also, she was deeply tormented after seeing the effects of the two world wars which prompted her to write *Three Guineas*. The incident of her mother's death triggered the first mental breakdown in her. She met and married Leonard Woolf, the critic, political philosopher, and writer in 1912 and he supported her throughout her mental illness. The couple joined the Bloomsbury group and in 1917, founded the Hogarth Press and started publishing their own stories. Later on, they began to publish the writings of outstanding writers including T. S. Eliot, Sigmund Freud, and Katherine Mansfield among many others. After suffering a series of breakdowns, she loaded her pockets with stones and committed suicide by drowning herself in the River Ouse. Fortunately, she had left a note for her husband stating:

I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that—everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. (120)

Virginia Woolf received no formal education like most of the women of her age. However, the books of her father surrounded her every time and she was allowed to spend much time in his library. It was here that she developed a love for literature and thus laying a firm basis for her writing. After having exerted a strong influence on other women novelists, she candidly believed that a writer should be of the neutral nature and her novels exhibit, as Ian Mackean writes, "feminine sensitivity and masculine rigour." Unlike her contemporary novelists—John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett who wrote from masculine viewpoints, Woolf provided full autonomy to her characters. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915. The novel

appeared to be the product of a young intellectually matured writer where her imagination is seen in full bloom. In her conventional novel, *Night and Day*, she writes about the role of women in modern society. In her experimental novel, *Jacob's Room*, she employed the technique of stream of consciousness and the novel is based on her brother Thoby. Woolf shared an intimate relationship with her literary muse, Vita Sackville-West who became the reason behind writing her novel, *Orlando* (1928). The novel was ground breaking and proved to be a breakthrough for Woolf and received critical praise in the large amount.

Woolf's most experimental novel, *The Waves* (1931) traces the stories of six different characters. It is a classic example of the stream of consciousness technique. She also wrote *The Years*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Flush*, and *Between the Acts*. She worked as a reviewer with the *Times Literary Supplement*. *A Room of One's Own*, major work in the twentieth-century feminist criticism was published in 1929. As Harold Bloom remarks, "Woolf is now more often discussed as the author of *A Room of One's Own* than as the novelist who wrote *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. . . I cannot think of another strong novelist who centres everything upon her extraordinary love of reading as Woolf does."

Woolf is rightly regarded as one of the best literary essayists and the greatest feminists of the twentieth century. She was an innovator and formulated unique ideas about the modern novel. After the end of World War II, her reputation had declined. However, within no time she regained her reputation. Scholars and academicians worldwide give her a high place of being an eminent feminist. M. H. Abrams remarks, "An important precursor in feminist criticism was Virginia Woolf, who, in addition to her fiction, wrote *A Room of One's Own* and numerous other essays on women authors and on the cultural, economic and educational disabilities within what she called a "patriarchal" society that has hindered or prevented women from realising their creative and productive possibilities" (110). She believes that women are never safe in a male-dominated society and are exposed to all kinds of difficulties and risks. Women suffer both mentally and emotionally and do not get, like their male siblings, a congenial atmosphere at home. Woolf herself was a victim of this marginalisation. Her own emotional and mental crisis convinced her about the problems faced by womenfolk.

After Mary Wollstonecraft, Woolf is most probably the first feminist critic who wrote on the female plight and inspired later feminist critics to protest against male hegemony by all possible means. Like her, Woolf stressed the equality of men and women in the fields of

education, dignity, and the economy. Both the writers were against male superiority and ego. Shormnishtha Panja compares the two writers in *Critical Theory: Textual Application* and writes:

Like Wollstonecraft Woolf felt the anger and vituperation of men against women and patriarchal notion of female inferiority were a result of a fragile masculine ego and its need to feel superior. She inaugurated the notions of women's canon being an alternative to the walk of the dead while male authors by unearthing important female writers like lady Winchilsea or Margaret of New Castle who would otherwise have been lost in obscurity. (59)

Woolf criticizes the majority of male writers for promoting patriarchal notions in their works and demands that women should be given equality in all spheres of life. To demonstrate how women have been discriminated, she speaks of English women and their treatment in English society. She uncovers how the financial dependence of women has contributed to their marginalization. She believes in the idea that women to put forward their notions and ideas confidently and freely unless they are given economic independence. She argues since women depend on their fathers and husbands for money to buy pen and paper, they cannot narrate stories or write fiction the way they wish to. In the nineteenth century, women writers like Jane Austen had to write fiction in the drawing room or some common rooms where anybody could come and disturb them, breaking the flow of their ideas.

According to Woolf, the “creative power of women” differs “greatly from the creative power of men.” Being one of the foremost feminist writers, she has been praised for her theoretical and fictional work. She alludes to the stream of consciousness technique and adopts a peculiar style of writing. She brings technical innovations in her novels and is acclaimed for her narrative subjectivity. A towering female writer, her writing is lyrical in nature and her works are greatly experimental. She exposes the oppressive and authoritative nature of society and its treatment of women.

Check your progress:

1. *The Voyage Out, Night and Day* and *Jacob's Room* are novels written by Virginia Woolf

10.2.1 *A Room of One's Own*:

Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* on 24th October, 1929 in the Hogarth Press. It is based on the lectures that she was invited to deliver on the topic “Women and Fiction” at

Cambridge University in October 1928. The lectures were later revised and compiled into a full length book. Woolf writes:

This essay, which is largely fictitious, is based upon the visit of an outsider to a university and expresses the thoughts suggested by a comparison between the different standards of luxury at a man's college and at a woman's. This leads to a sketch of women's circumstances in the past, and the effects of those circumstances upon their writing. The conditions that are favorable to imaginative work are discussed, including the right relation of the sexes. Finally, an attempt is made to outline the present state of affairs and to forecast what effect comparative freedom and independence will have upon women's artistic work in the future.

The book consisting of six chapters, at many places, can be read like a novel, transcending boundaries between fiction and criticism. It is regarded as the first major work in feminist criticism and is immensely important not only in the critical debates on feminism, but also on gender studies, sexuality, and modernity. It is quite readable and accessible with a unique fictional style and it introduces certain theoretical and critical issues, influencing many works in criticism and theory. Jane Marcus views it as the first "modern text of feminist criticism, the model in both theory and practically a specifically socialist feminist criticism." Woolf cites Bronte sisters and Jane Austen to analyze the struggle of women as artists and their position in literary history. Despite its huge reception, *A Room of One's Own* is a bit confusing, putting forward a set of contradictory arguments. Woolf expresses her views on androgyny and writes that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly."

Woolf exposes the patriarchal ideology that stops women from getting most opportunities to live their lives freely and independently. She uncovers how women have been excluded from the social, cultural, and economic mainstream of life. *A Room of One's Own* is a commentary on the issues and torments that women face in finding creative possibilities. Woolf reveals that women could not spend their own money without taking consent from her father or husband. It is the male members who decide where her money should be spent. Woolf makes a long list of services that women render in their homes. The restricted world imposed upon them by their society makes them poorer day by day. Woolf tried to muse why men were so angry with women and jealous of them and learnt that it was their insecurity of losing authority and power, hence,

men suppressed them and maintained their superiority. She reveals that power is vested in men and women should stop to be “protected sex” as protection restricts their world.

10.2.2 Significance of *A Room of One's Own*:

A Room of One's Own is a path breaking feminist text where the author employs different methodologies, analysis, hypothesis, and philosophical ideas to get a clear idea of why there has always been a scarcity of female writers. The title indicates and stresses on privacy which women must have to be free and independent. Woolf deliberately uses the word “room” in the title to explain that privacy lends independence to women. In their journey of writing, women have to fight many obstacles and they must receive education, space, and possess money. The book has become a house providing shelter to a large number of women writers and helping them to express their suffering and issues. Woolf writes that a woman writer has always been an “inheritor as well as an originator.” The Marxist-feminist critic, Michele Barrett praises Woolf's book and notes that “the conditions under which men and women produce literature are materially different.” Men controlled women at that time as women had no work or money of their own. Even if they attempted to write, they could not dare to sign their own work.

10.2.3 Financial Independence of Women:

Woolf, at the outset of the essay, boldly asserts that “a woman must have a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” The statement depicts that women were not financially independent those days and had no opportunity to express their abilities and potential. Woolf stresses the importance of having financial independence for women because they have been forced to suppress their creativity in its absence throughout the ages. Women must have inheritance and privacy of their room to promote their creative genius. To justify her view, Woolf provides historical arguments to unveil that privacy and lack of money in the past barred brilliant women from writing effectively and blocked their creativity. She argues, “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things” and proposes that women should be considered a separate class. Money plays a pivotal role in the life of women as it ends their slavish dependence on men. Woolf believes in the material basis of literary production and affirms that writing is neither a divine gift, nor unearthly or transcendent, it is physically made.

10.2.4 The Unnamed Narrator:

Woolf fictionalizes an unnamed woman character and tells readers to name her “Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any other name you please . . .” She is the only major character in the book and gives a story like taste to the text. Woolf brings the narrator

purposefully and makes her a universal voice by providing her with a shifting identity. She makes her a blend fiction and fact to make her point. She is an erudite storyteller who examines the multifaceted and complicated history of literature. She questions the existing assumption that women cannot be good writers. She feels the dearth of data of the literature written by women writers. The shifting identity of the narrator depicts the different identities that women adopt at home and in society. The narrator speaks in a tone filled with dissatisfaction, bitterness, and worry. Woolf argues that even modern women writers feel insecurity and write in anger and may be in future, their writings will bloom as they will be having money and privacy.

10.2.5 Critical Responses to *A Room of One's Own*:

Woolf's book attracted an ample amount of criticism after it was published. Most of the reviews the book received were favorable. The *Times Literary Supplement* called it a "delightfully peripatetic essay that glances in a spirited and good tempered way over conflicts old and new." Arnold Bennett both praised and criticized her. He wrote about Woolf that "she can write" but criticized her for her use of grammar. He attacked her and said that "she talks about everything but the thesis. . . . She is not consciously guilty of padding. She is merely the victim of her extraordinary gift of fancy (not imagination)." However, the book was highly praised by J. C. Squire in the review which he published in the *Observer* and he stated that it was "written with great grace and an unobtrusive imagery and its prime merit is its utterly candid statement of an intellectual woman's point of view." The *Empire Review* lauded the book for its admirable humor and stressing the independence of women. Another review appeared in the *Spectator* and praised its wide reputation, writing, "Future historians will place Mrs. Woolf's little book beside Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Women* and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. It does for the intellectual and spiritual liberation of women what those works did for their political emancipation. But *A Room of One's Own* outshines them both in genius." Hermione Lee criticizes the book for being an essay and writes that the book has "emerged from a story which is itself an exploratory refusal to choose between different species fantasy or fact, realism or romance, essay or fiction."

Check your progress:

1. Woolf writes that a woman writer has always been an "inheritor as well as an originator." (True / False)

2. Woolf fictionalizes an unnamed woman character in *A Room of One's Own*. (True / False)

10.2.6 Shakespeare's Sister:

"Shakespeare's Sister" comprises the third chapter of *A Room of One's Own*. In this chapter, Woolf examines the facts, taking recourse to history to explore the relationship between "women and literature." She comments on the portrayal of "women in fiction" and their actual depiction in history. Woolf hypothesises the existence of Shakespeare's talented sister, Judith who receives no formal education like her brother. In seeking the possibility that there would be a woman who would match the status or genius of Shakespeare, Judith represents the silenced women artists and writers. Through her character, Woolf clarifies that women need good material and social conditions in order to express their talent and capabilities. Due to lack of money and appropriate social conditions, Judith lost both her creativity as well as wealth. Material income could have gained her popularity. The narrator concludes, "It would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare." Woolf brings Judith to illustrate this point.

After reaching home disappointed at not having arrived at some truth even after extensive research on the statement why women are poorer than men, the narrator in *A Room of One's Own* turns to history which she opines, "records not opinions but facts." She seeks to learn about English women living in the Elizabethan age, producing productive male writers. Woolf examines the effects of the misogynistic world on women artists. Women did not get any opportunity to develop their talents and creativity.

10.2.7 Women in the Elizabethan Age:

The book informs the readers about Shakespeare's sister and her fate if she ever lived. Woolf, at the beginning of the chapter, examines the status of women in the Elizabethan age. Regarded as the golden era in the history of English literature, Elizabethan age produced several notable men poets, dramatists, prose writers, and sonneteers but did not produce any single female writer. Deeply moved by it, Woolf started analyzing the history of the age. She opened historian Trevelyan's book, *History of England* and was astonished to know the reality of the predicament of women in the age. She learns that wife beating was a norm prevalent in that society and men irrespective of their social status exercised it. If girls refused to marry the person of their parents' choice, they were badly beaten and locked up in rooms. Daughters were married

to uphold the family honour and were mere puppets in the hands of men. Child marriages were very common. Woolf writes, “Marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice, particularly in the ‘chivalrous’ upper classes . . .” However, in literature unlike history, the things were quite contradictory. Women characters such as Clytemnestra, Antigone, Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, Desdemona, etc were depicted as women of character with upright personalities. She is given a high stature in imagination as she features in literature particularly poetry, but is in reality given no importance at all. Quoting Trevelyan, Woolf writes:

Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant; she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact, she was the slave of anybody whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life, she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (36)

Woolf suggests readers to think imaginatively and poetically. She learns from Professor’s Trevelyan’s book that history comprises of many movements and wars where men took central place. Even women of the highest rank such as Elizabeth or Mary are occasionally mentioned. Middle class women, despite having high intelligence and character, were excluded. The women of the age did not own money and were betrothed at a very young age. They did not record their work and Woolf tells the students of the two colleges to compile a history, recording the role of women. Woolf asks a number of questions related to the women of the Elizabethan age. She asks-- why didn’t any woman from Elizabethan period produce poems? How did Elizabethan women’s days pass by? Were Elizabethan women educated? Did an Elizabethan woman own a room of her own?

10.2.8 The Tragedy of Judith Shakespeare:

Woolf talks about a bishop who had once announced that no woman in the “past, present, or future” could possess the “genius of Shakespeare” and declares, “Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare.” The book deals with the tragic fate of a highly intelligent girl. Woolf imaginatively creates Shakespeare’s sister and imagines what would happen if Shakespeare had a sister who was equally as intelligent, gifted, and talented as he was. Woolf writes that Shakespeare attended Grammar School and studied Latin, grammar, and logic there. Shakespeare as a wild boy did many odd activities which include poaching rabbits, shooting a deer, or

marrying a woman in the neighbourhood at a very tender age. Soon, he left for London, found a job in the theatre, and became a successful actor, making performances everywhere even at the palace of the queen. Woolf mentions that his sister was as exceptionally gifted as her brother but was supposed to stay at home. She uncovers the double standards of the Elizabethan society and reflects on the discrimination and treatment meted out to the women living in the Elizabethan age. As she writes:

She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. (39)

Judith's parents did not encourage her talent because they were well aware of the life which women were supposed to live. She scribbled some pages up but had to hide or set them on fire. Woolf states that the family locked the women up and restricted their activities in the public domain. Judith soon came to know about her being betrothed to a neighbour's son. She cried loudly, but of no use and was beaten by her father and emotionally blackmailed by him. In order to save herself from all this and hide her disobedience from her father, she packed her belongings in a small bag and left for London to fulfil her dream. Like her brother, she was crazy and had a taste for theatre. Standing at the door, she expressed her desire to act and men sitting at the stage laughed at her and the theatre manager told her that no woman could become an actress. She faced utter rejection and ridicule. Finally, the theatre manager pitied her and Judith soon found herself pregnant by him. She could not bear all this and "killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle." No monuments were erected for her no matter how exceptionally talented she was. In the end, Woolf agrees with the bishop that no woman could possess the "genius of Shakespeare" because genius people are not born among downtrodden, uneducated, or working class. So there is no question of a woman who is forced into homely responsibilities being genius.

10.2.9 Condition of Women in a Male-dominated Society:

Woolf affirms that some kind of genius must have existed in women and working classes, but women did hardly get any opportunity to express themselves. She reasons that the writing labelled as anonymous might have been written by some unknown women. Women despite

having genius would have gone mad and killed themselves because the patriarchal society would concentrate on their body and molest them instead of accepting their worth. Chastity was considered vital for them and they needed courage of the highest form to cut from it. It had religious importance in their lives. The writings of women writers in the past must have gone unsigned and unrecognised. The sense of chastity made them adopt male pseudonyms and women writers such as “Bronte sisters, George Eliot, and George Sand” were some victims who had to succumb to the male-dominated literary traditions and become anonymous as “anonymity runs in their blood.” In this way, they veiled their identity.

The attitude of the world towards writing capability in terms of gender differed entirely as Woolf writes, “The world did not say to her as it said to them; write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, write? What’s the good of your writing?” Mr. Oscar Browning once remarked that even the best of women were “intellectually inferior” to even the “worst men.” Men believed that women were incapable of possessing intellect which affected them negatively. However, women novelists have passed through all these issues and turned triumphant in producing works of merit. Woolf writes that women were not encouraged to become artists even in the nineteenth century. Men questioned their creativity and never accepted them and this discouragement instilled a sense of inferiority among them. Woolf writes that ‘genius’ is unfortunately measured by the opinions held by other people and opines that like Shakespeare, the mind of the artist should have to be “incandescent.” She states that the reason of having a little knowledge about Shakespeare’s mind is due to the filtering out his personal “grudges and spites and antipathies” in his works and the absence of this personal protest lends his works a “free and unimpeded” tone.

10.3 Learning Outcomes

Novelist par excellence and an influential theorist, Virginia Woolf lived through the time when women in England got the right to vote and began taking admission in colleges and universities. Women started different professions and tried their hands in various fields. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf details about the women writers living from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century and the problems and hardships they were made to face in the patriarchal society where women were confined to homes only and considered as mere sex objects. They were banned from cultural spheres and educational institutions and lacked financial

opportunities. Woolf elaborates on the loss or suppression of women's talents by some unjust social and cultural practices which marginalise women. Through Judith, Woolf underscores the problems faced by women over centuries. Woolf argues that women should be given economic independence and privacy. Woolf's contemporary writers criticised her views and ideas, but they were widely praised by the later theorists and examined across cultures. Woolf asserts that women writers should write incandescent poetry like Shakespeare did. She speculated on numerous issues and problems concerning women. She looked beyond the time that she lived in and anticipated many other problems women had to face in future. Later feminists grounded their works and notions on Woolf's ideas.

10.4 Glossary

Feminist: One who believes in feminism and seeks equal opportunities and treatment of women with men.

Intellectual: A person who thinks deeply and comprehensively about things.

Seminal: Containing new and important ideas and having a great influence on later works

Legacy: Something that is a part of history and remains there since earlier time

Political Theorist: A person who is involved in constructing or evaluating political theory and philosophy.

Sigmund Freud: The Austrian psychiatrist and founder of psychoanalysis who influenced almost all the domains of the twentieth century.

Katherine Mansfield: A prominent modernist writer

Androgynous: The state of having the physical characteristics of both the sexes

Hogarth Press: A British publishing house founded by Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf

Hypothesis: A supposition or proposition made on the basis of limited evidence without any assumption of its truth

Inheritance: Something that is inherited; legacy

Transcendent: relating to a spiritual realm, superior, surpassing

Queen Elizabeth: Queen who reigned England from 1558-1603

Bishop: A senior member of the Christian clergy

Logic: Reasonable thinking

Anonymity: A state of namelessness or impersonality

Chastity: The state of never having had sex

Incandescent: Passionate or full of strong emotion

Newnham: Women's college affiliated to the University of Cambridge.

Girton: College affiliated to the University of Cambridge.

George Eliot: Mary Ann Evans' pen name

Critique: A comprehensive analysis and assessment of a literary, political, or philosophical work

Peripatetic: An Aristotelian philosopher

10.5 Sample Questions

10.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Stereotyping or prejudice against women based on their gender is called:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| (a) Feminism | (b) Racism |
| (c) Sexism | (d) Discrimination |

2. When we support women's rights to make them on par with men politically, socially, or economically, it is known as:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| (a) Sexuality | (b) Feminism |
| (c) Discrimination | (d) Sexism |

3. Who is the most notable modernist writer?

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| (a) Jane Austen | (b) Virginia Woolf |
| (c) William Shakespeare | (d) Emily Dickinson |

4. Where was Shakespeare born?

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------|
| (a) Germany | (b) America |
| (c) Ireland | (d) England |

5. Judith Shakespeare was:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| (a) Gregarious | (b) Talented |
| (c) Loyal | (c) Quarrelsome |

6. What, according to Woolf, is the reason behind the statement that in Shakespeare's time, no woman could have written plays like him?

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) Lack of genius | (b) Lack of ambition |
| (c) Financial Problems | (c) Lack of Experience |

7. How, in Shakespeare's time, did parents treat the literary ambitions of their daughters?

- (a) Encourage them
- (b) **Stop their ambitions**
- (c) Feel happy at them
- (d) Help them

8. What makes Judith set off for London?

- (a) After feeling angry
- (b) To become famous
- (c) **Her creative genius motivates her**
- (c) To avoid marriage

9. When was *A Room of One's Own* published?

- (a) 1927
- (b) 1928
- (c) **1929**
- (d) 1930

10. Virginia Woolf died of:

- (a) Cancer
- (b) Tuberculosis
- (c) Was killed
- (d) **Suicide**

10.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a short note on Judith Shakespeare and the problems she faced at her home.
2. What, according to Woolf, is the narrative of history on the position of women?
3. What do you think of the purpose of Virginia Woolf to create the fictional character of Judith Shakespeare in her book?
4. Why did women writers have to opt for anonymity?
5. What prevented Judith Shakespeare from achieving literary success?

10.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Explain why does Virginia Woolf state that Elizabethan women did not write poetry?
2. How does Woolf explore the significance of the social and material conditions in writing literature?
3. Write a detailed note on Virginia Woolf and her works. Describe her as a noted modernist writer dealing with feminist themes.

10.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Alexander, Jean. *The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. Gateway Faculty Press, 1974.

2. Anthony, Susan B. *The History of Woman Suffrage*. Rochester, 1881.
3. Apter, T. E. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of Her Novels*. Macmillan, 1979.
4. Barrett, M. *Women's Oppression Today*. Verso, 1980.
5. Blackstone, Bernard. *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary*. The Hogarth Press, 1972.
6. Bowlby, Rachel. *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*. Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1988.
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Unit-11: Jyotirao Phule - *Caste Laws*

Structure

11.0 Introduction

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11.2.1 Birth as the Sole Criteria of Caste

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11.0 Introduction

The caste system in India is religiously motivated social system in which Indian people are differentiated socially in terms of language, gender, tribe, religion, region, class etc. Although there are similar kinds of distinctions in all societies across the world, it becomes problematic when such differentiations are considered as the defining factors for systematic social ranking and means to gain access to valuable assets such as wealth, income, prestige, and power. The caste system in India is regarded as a restrained stratification structure, implying that a person's social rank or position is assigned to him considering the caste in he or she was born. The birth limits that person's social behavior and social communication. Historically, it has roots in Hinduism, India's most popular religion, which has been updated both under British reign and Buddhist revolution. This unit would bring to light the different aspects of the caste system in India such as social stratification, hierarchy and its impact on modern India.

The Hindu society is organized on the basis of the caste system. The caste system maintains a social hierarchy. The hierarchy has inherent idea of purity and impurity. The higher caste people are considered pure and the lower caste people are considered impure

Broadly, there are five major divisions or castes: 1) the Brahmins, 2) the Kshatriyas, 3) the Vaishyas, 4) the Shudras 5) the Untouchable who are into menial jobs). Actually, the caste system is more complex than this five-fold division. There are smaller groups or jatis within each of the five major castes. These groups are endogamous; they have a traditional occupation; they have a certain degree of autonomy in matters of culture, ritual, and law. The lower groups attempt to raise their status by adopting the customs and rituals of the higher jatis.

Check your Progress

1. Which are the five major castes of Hindu society?
2. What determines purity and impurity in a caste system?

This Unit is based on M.N. Srinivas “The Caste System in India” in *Social Inequality: Selected Readings* (ed.) Andre Beteille. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969. Pp. 265-279.

11.1 Objectives

This Unit aims to give you an idea about:

- the caste system in Hindu society,
- the laws (or rules) which govern the various castes and sub-castes,
- “Caste Laws” by Jhotiba Phule
- the basis, structure, and features of the caste system

11.2 Caste Laws

Jyotirao Phule is regarded as a predominant social reformer of the 19th century. But, thanks to his far-fetched interpretation of Indian history and ancient texts, he was accused of fermenting animosity among the non-Brahmins during his lifetime. His opponents ridiculed his lack of control over philosophy and grammar. For obvious reasons, Jyotirao’s severe critique of

the Brahmins backfired as it didn't yield him many supporters in the higher sections of society or governance. But it undoubtedly resulted in protest to society's upper caste dominance.

In this unit, we will look into the excerpts from Phule's *Caste Rules* and try to understand the relevance of his social reform initiative. We will address the ideas Phule deploys and attempt to understand the unorthodox opinion and belief that he assigns to the caste system.

All of us agree with the fact that the caste system has existed for centuries in India. Even now, it is there in towns and villages, but not in the same form and shape of the ancient caste system. The rigidity of the caste practices differs from region to region and state to state. Yet, the caste system exists indisputably across the country in mild and severe forms. The easiest way to feel the caste in the present day is going to the matrimonial columns of Indian newspapers. News hour debates in the wake of backward class reservations in higher education are yet another instance that we can feel the caste discrimination. Now let's step forward and discuss Phule's 'Caste Laws'.

Caste Laws by Jyotirao Phule

Caste laws is an excerpt from the Preface to the book *Slavery (Gulamgiri)* published in 1873. This book is the most influential publication by Jyotiba Phule. The very title shows Phule's attitude to the issue of Caste. Phule perceived caste and caste rules a form of slavery. The essay has been sub-title as "In the civilized British Govt. under the Cloak of Brahminism."

The subtitle brings following two points to the forefront.

- a. Caste was viewed by Phule as a kind of slavery supported by the Brahmins which flourished under the British reign.
- b. Only people's social movement will bring the liberation of the Sudras and the AtiSudras. Therefore, there is a need to get up and call the people against the Brahmins' social dominance.

Beisdes, this specific essay starts with three quotes that clarify and add up to the ideas emphasized in the title and the dedication. The former quote, from Homer, highlights the brutal or inhuman dimension of slavery. As slavery robs a man of his virtue and integrity, nothing can be worse than slavery.

The second quote attracts our attention towards the fact that, since time immemorial, Indian education has been used not to uplift people's status, but to 'over-educate' a small group to keep the majority at the mercy of the few who have learned. By denying the educational rights of the lower castes as well as of women, the Brahmins perfected this practice with the support of

British administration, which did no better by supplying only a few with education so that they could use those few to exploit lower caste people. It in turn helped to perpetuate the Brahminic tradition under the guise of civilized management.

The third quotation attracts our attention to the wickedness of Brahminic superiority and the inconsistencies of this structure. Although the Brahmins boast immense expertise, they uphold superstitious practices jealously, undermining human dignity. Furthermore, the author suggests that the only way out of this system is to attack Brahminical structure and reduce their dominance.

Check your progress:

1. Why do you think the essay starts with quotes?

The crux of the Essay by Phule

The Caste Laws by Phule can be broken up into three parts:

- a. Brahminism has been presented in terms of its historical evolution.
- b. The second part of the essay portrays the firm establishment of Brahminism through the Caste construction while appropriating unparalleled powers and privileges to themselves.
- c. The third section analyses the Brahmins' continuing supremacy and the government's inability to get rid of the offensive tradition of caste. It also proposes different ways to provide Sudras with the country's rightful due.

Let us explore the historical context introduced in the first part of the essay by Phule. In this section, the key arguments raised are:

- A. Brahmins are remnants of Aryan raiders who, after a prolonged war, replaced and suppressed the original residents of India.
- B. As is clear from the names they called themselves, the Brahmins maintain the disposition of the Aryans who were tricky and egoistic.
- C. Due to the strong resistance that aborigines put up, the Aryans despised them and started name calling. This is clear from the names (such as Chandala, Sudra, Mahar) the Brahmins used to address the lower caste community.
- D. In the Brahmin myths and legends, the battle is chronicled in such a manner that belittles Aborigines by portraying them as barbaric, unfair, ugly, etc.

- E. In the Brahmin literature, *Rakshas* are depicted as evil, but the word *Rakshas* denotes land security. Therefore, the exaggerated accounts about *Rakshas* are indicative of the depth of their hate.
- F. The Aryans subjected aborigines to inhuman brutality after subjugating them. This has similarity with American Indians who were subjugated by the New Settlers in America.

Now if we pay attention to this part, we'll find that Jyotirao produces a substitute picture of the past. The opponents also constructed a counter history to Phule's narratives. They accused him of imprecision. But Phule was quite aware that the Brahminic version of the past and the Brahminic philosophy had to be questioned to crack their supremacy. Therefore, he tried to view the past from the viewpoint of Sudra. His language is very emotional and sharp. He questions the binaries of good and evil, stabled on the framework of Devas and Daity's. By classifying almost all other castes under a large caption of "Kshetrias," he attempts to pitch Brahmins against everyone else.

He also offers a different view of the Devas by posing Parasuram as a demon. His point revolves around the notion that the Aryans were simply barbarous and vengeful and greedy for blood. So he argues that the Brahmin God is desperate, greedy, revengeful and blood thirsty. On parallel, he portrays the Aborigines as courageous and simple citizens who were victimized by the cruel and unjust invaders.

In the second section, Jyotirao describes the strategies of the Brahmins to polarize their aboriginal people and to appropriate all privileges and powers to themselves. The key points discussed in this section are as follows:

- a. In the Institution of Caste, the profound cunning of the Brahmins is evident. The Brahmins availed all privileges through this institution, whereas the Sudra's and Ati-Sudras were deprived of even fundamental rights.
- b. Sudras were reduced to the status of animals under Brahminism. Their lives were worth no more than that of a cat, or a dog. For example, if a Brahmin kills either a Sudra or an animal, he can be religiously apologized from the sin by fasting. At the same time, if a Sudra killed a Brahmin, the expiation is to put his/her life to an end.
- c. Brahminic rules and regulations available in "*Manava Dharma Shastra*" empower the Brahmins to put the rest of people to slavery. This religious text is

full of insensitive instances in which the Brahmins have developed their supremacy over the downtrodden Sudras.

- d. This slavery system was so deeply ingrained and so rigid during the Peshwas time that it persisted unchallenged. This was done by deceiving people and keeping them permanently uneducated.

In the third segment, he points to a potential and possible solution to the problem. In the section, the key points discussed are:

- a. Certainly, the influx of Western civilization has undermined the supremacy of the Brahmin. While under the Peshwa, the Brahmins of Phule's time did not have the same authority, they nevertheless refused to discard the invalid ideas of Brahminic dominance. Phule argued that as long as these ideas prevailed in society, Sudra will continue to struggle.
- b. He partially blames the government for the situation. He argues that the government has concentrated its time and money on educating higher class people spending the resources grossly collected from the lower castes. He points to the irony that the major part of the 'Indian Empire's revenue comes from the working or middle classes, while the higher classes contribute almost nothing.
- c. He contests that the civil services in the country have been mismanaged. The Brahmins monopolized the higher offices in the government. The wellbeing of 'Ryot' is possible only if the government allows the other castes in the civil services, and breaks the Brahminic monopoly.
- d. However, to make the education accessible to the common people, it is necessary to make sure that the 'Ryot' get a fair chance. Since higher education can take care of, the government must focus more on mass education.
- e. Lastly, he urges that every educated Sudra must take the responsibility of working for the elevation of his fellow Sudra. They must strive to show the real image of Sudra's social status to the government and try to free themselves from the exploitation and domination of the Brahmins. Sudras should have their schools in every village, which are staffed by Sudra community. The country can expect to advance and thrive only by emancipating Sudra, because they are the country's 'life and sinews'.

Summing Up:

As you know the essay 'Caste Laws' is extracted from the prologue to his novel, *Gulamgiri*. The purpose of the essay is to make people conscious of the caste system's crippling impact on society. The book was intended to raise the masses' consciousness and incite them to work in opposition to the continued presence of caste rules. Therefore, the tone and tenor of the essay are being charged and impassioned. For these purposes, a reasonable style was not suitable. A pitched high style, as we discover in this piece of writing, works well to stimulate individuals to action.

The next thing that Jhotirao wanted to bring out is the image of misery and hardships of the people under the caste system. Therefore, he relates the caste system to slavery. We are all aware that slavery is an incredibly inhumane system. A slave is robbed of all humanity and integrity. He sent a strong message by comparing hardships of slavery with Sudra's misery. At the same time, Phule was mindful of the fact that freeing people from mental slavery was much more complicated than physical slavery. By denying the education to them, Sudras were kept ignorant. They had accepted what Brahmins had taught them. And the Brahmins told them about a divine scheme that ordered the Brahmins to be the favourites of God and that the Sudra had a responsibility to serve up the Brahmins.

Only by presenting an alternative image of the past such a system of values could be countered. Thus, Jhotirao writes an alternative description of the past and seeks to overthrow the chain of command of Daivya/Daitya. He attempts to prove that neither Devas were the Brahmins nor Daityas were the Sudras. Thus he seeks to change the narrative altogether. He is trying to show that not only are these Brahmin tales implausible, but also are evidence of their cunningness. The Brahmin tried to persuade Sudras to believe that since the Sudra are uneducated, they are inferior. The Sudra, Phule says, must not be taught by the Brahmins since the Brahmins were not willing to deny the ideas of their dominance. The Sudra must be trained and taught by the Sudra's so that he can consider himself as a Brahmin counterpart. This is however, only feasible if the administration has altered its approach towards mass education. The government must invest time and money on the basic education of the common masses instead of spending time and resources on higher education, which mostly profits the Brahmins. Society would be free from the offensive caste rules if the masses are educated and there will be more peace and harmony in society. That is the only way for the nation to prosper and progress.

Check your progress:

1. What are the key arguments raised in the first part of the essay?
2. The Caste Laws of Phule can be broken up into _____ parts.

11.2.1 Birth as the sole Criteria of Caste:

A person's caste is determined by his or her birth. But there is a traditional view which holds that birth in a particular caste is not accidental. The Hindu notion of karma and dharma decide the birth of a person in a particular caste. According to this belief, the actions of a person during his life decide to which caste or sub-caste he should be assigned in his next life. If a man does good deeds, he qualifies to be born in a higher caste. But if a man indulges in evil deeds, he will be born in a lower caste in his next life. Similarly, if a person follows the rules of his caste or sub-caste in his present life, he is observing the dharma. Hence, he is eligible to be born in a higher caste in his next birth.

Check your progress:

1. What is the role of karma and dharma in the determination of the caste of a person?

11.2.2 Pollution:

Pollution is an important factor which defines relations among various castes. A higher caste gets polluted by contact with a lower caste. This contact includes physical touch, eating and sex. When pollution occurs due to inter-caste dining, inter-caste marriage, etc., the polluted person has to undergo a purification ceremony. Then he regains his previous status. There is a scale of punishment depending on the severity of the offence. The process of purification can be drastic if a person of high caste eats food cooked by an Untouchable. The punishment for such an offence could be excommunication.

Physical contact between a Brahmin and an Untouchable is forbidden. In addition, the distance between any two castes is prescribed. The required distance varies depending on the castes concerned.

Check your progress:

1. When does pollution occur?
2. What is the remedy for a polluted person?
3. What is the maximum punishment for a person who is polluted?

11.2.3 Laws on Food:

Because contact between castes is not allowed, castes and sub-castes live separately in a village. There is solidarity (or unity) in the sub-castes because of their segregation. Thus the Untouchables live on the outskirts of the village. The other sub-castes have certain areas or streets designated for their residence. The caste rules permit a man taking cooked food from a person of the same or superior caste. However, food cooked by a lower caste person should not be consumed by a higher caste person. Such food is supposed to pollute a person of the higher caste. Two persons who give and take food should be of equal status in the caste system. If a person cannot accept cooked food from another, it means that the giver belongs to a lower caste.

The acceptance of cooked meals also depends on various other factors such as the kind of food, the medium of cooking (water or fat), the caste of the cook, and the place of cooking (temple or home). Another important feature of the caste system is the connection between food and social status. Most Brahmins are vegetarians; some avoid even eggs. The fourth caste, the Shudras, eat meat. There is a gradation in the varieties of meat also. Thus, pork is deemed to be inferior to mutton. Hence those who eat pork are considered lower in status than those who eat mutton. In this scale of values, beef and beef-eaters are at the lowest level.

The Hindus regard vegetarianism as morally superior to meat-eating. This is derived from the belief that it is a sin to kill living creatures for feeding oneself. Similarly, alcohol is forbidden for the higher castes. As stated earlier, Brahmin eating food cooked by an Untouchable violates the laws of his caste. In the same way, sex relations between the higher castes and the Untouchables are forbidden. Such offences are punished by the caste courts. Excommunication is the usual punishment for both the offences. Even the Untouchables are careful in accepting food and water from sub-castes other than their own. Such intra-sub-caste eating and drinking are believed to pollute the taker. For instance, a washerman will not dine with a barber.

Check your Progress:

1. Explain the laws governing the giving and taking of cooked food among the castes.
2. What is the connection between food and status in Hindu society?

11.2.4 Caste and Occupation:

A significant feature of the caste system is that each caste or sub-caste has a traditional occupation. Even now, in the villages, the castes and sub-castes engage themselves in occupations handed down from generation to generation. One exception to this is agriculture which is practised by all castes irrespective of their social standing.

The logic behind the segregation of some castes is that their occupations involve contact with unsanitary things. Raising pigs and handling hides are defiling jobs. These are the occupations of the Untouchables. Some occupations may not be actually polluting, but traditionally they are considered inferior and hence assigned to the inferior castes. Toddy-tapping is an example of this. The higher castes are forbidden from killing any animal or catching fish or raising animals and birds. These are all old taboos which are broken now with the rapid growth of urbanization.

The division of labour implied in the distribution of occupations among different castes and sub-castes is so entrenched in the caste system that members of a sub-caste believe that their traditional occupation is their natural one. It is not right for them to choose some other profession. People stick to their occupations and guard their skills as their secret. Each sub-caste considers its particular occupation as its monopoly. If there is an encroachment on the monopoly, the village court or the village elders settle the matter.

Check your Progress:

1. What is the reason behind the segregation of some sub-castes?
2. What is meant by labour monopoly?

11.2.5 Symbols of Status:

The possession of the higher castes, their houses, customs, dresses and religious ceremonies are considered status symbols by the lower castes. The lower castes are prohibited from taking over any such item of the higher castes. This practice was upheld by the authorities of the day. For instance, the lowest castes were not permitted to build houses with tiled roofs.

11.2.6 Segregation of the Sub-castes:

The rigid practice of the caste laws stated above force each sub-caste to live in a world of their own. The members of a given sub-caste reside in a particular area. Many of them are related by marriage or otherwise. They share a culture and follow the rules regarding food and drink. They celebrate festivals which are special to their sub-caste. They have a common traditional occupation. They refuse to reveal the secret skills of their occupation to outsiders to a large extent. The caste courts and the assemblies consisting of elders in the villages dispense justice. Each sub-caste has a system of values and it tries to avoid conflicts with other sub-castes on this score. Each sub-caste is autonomous to a large extent. But, at the same time, it is also dependent on other sub-castes. Thus the castes in a village are interdependent. They give and take.

11.2.7 Endogamy:

Endogamy is a remarkable feature of each sub-caste. This means people generally marry within their own sub-caste. Educated persons of the higher castes in recent times are marrying outside their sub-caste provided the same culture and values are shared by both the sub-castes.

The other kinds of alliance, hypergamous marriages, take place every now and then. A man of a higher caste marries a girl from a lower caste. But a lower caste man marrying a higher caste woman does not happen. This is strictly forbidden.

Check your Progress

1. What is meant by “endogamy?”

11.2.8 Upward Movement:

An upward movement of a sub-caste to a higher caste is possible over a period of time by adopting the practices and customs of the higher caste. These include vegetarianism, teetotalism, and worship according to Brahminic customs. By adopting the Brahminic ways of life, a lower caste attempts to raise its status in the caste hierarchy.

The caste system, despite its rigid structure and strict laws, has evolved in such a manner that the lower castes try to raise their status by following the higher castes in ritual and customs. This has given rise to a degree of uniformity in the culture of the Hindu society.

The hierarchy implicit in the caste system is criticized by Buddhism and Jainism. Lingayats in Karnataka also attack it. These attempts to break the caste system have not succeeded. Ironically, the dissenting (or reformist) group became a caste and gave rise to its own caste system. Under British rule, the caste system was somewhat weakened. The rulers gave up their support to the caste system. The British government allowed a person punished by a caste court to seek justice in a court established by it and file cases against the village elders for defamation. Before the British came on the scene, a person violating a caste law was punished by fine or excommunication from the caste. A person's conduct was controlled by the caste and village councils.

A community enjoys autonomy under the caste system. It is brought into contact with other communities which together form a hierarchy. It is amazing that the culture, customs and rituals of topmost caste, the Brahmins, have been imitated and cherished by the other castes. This tendency has spread even to the tribes in remote areas. Caste brought together autonomous groups all over. It also gave a framework for relations with non-Hindu groups like Muslims and Christians. Attempts to break the caste system by revolutionary movements have failed. The promoters of such movements ended up as another caste.

Check your progress:

1. How can a person from a caste achieve a higher status?
2. Name the groups which criticized the caste system.
3. What change did the British government bring about in the working of the caste system?

11. 3 Learning Outcomes

Dear students, this unit furnished us with information about the caste system prevalent in Hindu Society. We also got familiar with Jyotirao Phule's preface to his *magnum opus Gulamgiri*, which largely propounds the annihilation of caste system in India. We also got to know the caste system's crippling impact on society, the laws which govern the various castes and sub-castes and the features of the caste system.

11. 4 Glossary

Hierarchy: an organization with grades of authority from the lowest to the highest.

Pollution: the destruction of purity.

Endogamy: the practice of marrying within a specific social group or caste.

Autonomy: self-government.

Ritual: the rites and forms connected with a ceremony.

Criterion: standard of judgment.

Karma: the spiritual principle of cause and effect.

Dharma: morally upright behaviour

Excommunication: exclusion (as a punishment) from the privileges of a member of a caste.

Segregation: isolation.

Class: a number of things or persons regarded as forming a group by the reason of some common traits, qualities, characteristics or attributes.

11.5 Sample Questions

11.5.1 Objective Questions

1. Hindu society is organized on the basis of the caste system. It is divided into groups which are arranged in a:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| (a) Diarchy | (b) Anarchy |
| (c) Hierarchy | (d) Monarchy |

2. The possessions of the higher castes, dresses, customs and religious ceremonies are considered status symbols by the:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) Higher castes | (b) Middle class |
| (c) Lower class | (d) Lower middle class |

3. The Indian is a religiously motivated social system in which people in India are differentiated socially in terms of language, gender, religion etc.

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| (a) Sati system | (b) Caste system |
| (c) Value system | (d) Pagans system |

4. How many divisions or castes are there in Hindu Society?

- (a) Eight (b) Seven
(c) Six (d) **Five**
5. The '*Manava Dharma Shasta*' depicts the cruelty of:
(a) **Brahmins** (b) Vaishyas
(c) Shudras (d) Kshatriyas
6. The caste laws of Phule can be broken up in how many parts:
(a) One (b) **Two**
(c) Three (d) Four
7. Caste Laws is an excerpt from the preface to the 1873 book:
(a) *Slavery* (b) *Brahmanism*
(c) *Caste system* (d) *Praja*
8. _____ Movement of a sub-caste to a higher caste is possible over a period of time by adopting the practices and customs of the higher caste:
(a) Lower (b) Middle
(c) **Upward** (d) Downward
9. Which is an important factor that defines relations among various castes:
(a) Spirituality (b) Stratification
(c) **Pollution** (d) Communication
10. Jhotiba Phule is:
(a) **Social reformer** (b) Politician
(c) Philosopher (d) Teacher

11.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

- Write a short note on
 - Pollution
 - Excommunication.
- Comment on factors responsible for the division into castes and sub-castes?
- Write a note on the laws relating to food in the caste system?
- How does Phule present history of Brahminism?
- Explain the relationship between caste and occupation.

11.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

- Discuss the structure of the caste system?
- Explain the caste laws given by Jotirao Phule?

3. Write short notes on the following:

- (a) Status Symbol
- (b) Segregation
- (c) Endogamy

11.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Ghurye, Govind Sadashiv. *Caste and Race in India*. Popular Prakashan, 1969.
2. Hutton, John Henry. *Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins*, 1969.
3. Ostor, Akos, Lina Fruzzetti, and Steve Barnett, eds. *Concepts of a Person: Kinship, Caste, and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1992.

Unit-12: Roland Barthes – *Toys*

Structure

12.0 Introduction

12.1 Objectives

12.2 Toys

12.2.1 Roland Barthes – Introduction

12.2.2 Life and Achievements

12.2.3 Key Ideas

12.2.4 Mythologies

12.2.5 Toys

12.2.6 Toys and Gender

12.2.7 Toys and Childhood

12.3 Learning Outcomes

12.4 Glossary

12.5 Sample Questions

12.6 Suggested Learning Resources

12.0 Introduction

This Unit is an attempt to explore and evaluate how Roland Barthes uses toys and other objects to analyze how myths are created and reinforced by traditions and media in any society. Though he wrote about the French society, his ideas can be applied to other states and societies also to understand how myths are created through what he calls, Metalanguage.

The study of myths will help us shed light on how status quo is maintained by the bourgeoisie class in any society. It will also help in understanding textuality. It is from his ideas on gender and childhood that a comprehensive understanding can be made about the role of toys in creating and reinforcing gender roles and gender performance. His arguments are critical in evaluating gender, childhood and the role of toys in society.

12.1 Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able:

- To help students in learning to apply the idea of metalanguage and textuality operating in society.
- To aid students in comprehending the notion of myth making.
- To ensure that they will be able to identify the major arguments that Barthes makes about toys after reading this unit.
- To guide students while they analyze the gender roles and gender performance that is promulgated by toys in childhood.
- To make students aware about the linkages between objects, meaning and roles that the bourgeois class uses to maintain their status quo.

12.2 Toys

12.2.1 Roland Barthes - Introduction:

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) is a towering figure in field of literary and cultural theory. He was a French essayist, theorist, philosopher and critic. He was also known for his seminal work on semiotics. He had interest in diverse subjects and wrote extensively. He influenced many schools of thought including structuralism, semiotics, social theory, anthropology and post-structuralism.

12.2.2 Life and Achievements:

Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg, France on November 12, 1915. He took his initial education in a secondary school in Paris and studied classical letters, grammar and philology. He was highly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's theory on semiology. He spent his career working and developing a complex understanding of signs, symbols and significations in modern, bourgeois society. He himself was from a middle-class family. His works include *Writing Degree Zero*, *Elements of Semiology*, *Mythologies*, *The Pleasure of the Text*, *S/Z: An Essay* among others.

12.2.3 Key Ideas:

Barthes opposed power, establishment, conventional ideologies and traditional values totally. For Barthes, whenever a theoretical line of thinking became accepted and garnered

stability in societal reception, he moved his discourse and his practice to something new. It has been said of Barthes that he was a rebel with, and sometimes, without a cause. He, as a thinker, theorist and an intellectual, always functioned outside the institutionalized and accepted norms of knowledge. He was always writing outside the positions of power.

Barthes became famous for many things. He declared *The Death of the Author*, focused greatly on the theory and practice of inter-textuality and endorsed the study of signs in the establishment and regulation of society. His ultimate emphasis has always been on the nature of theory: he believed that “the discursive practice of theory must be one which challenges received ideas, and questions the orthodoxies which inevitably dominate any language” (Allen 4).

Barthes focus was always leaning towards the demolition of customary ideas of knowledge and well-recognized forms of knowledge creation. These could either be part of the academic culture or popular culture. His books *Mythologies*, *A Lover's Discourse* and *Camera Lucida* became quite famous not just in academic circles but also in popular culture. In Graham Allen's introduction to Barthes, he succinctly sums up Barthes' intellectual presence in the 20th century: “A theorist who directed his attention to all facets of cultural and intellectual life, Barthes' work has an immediacy and a relevance that is rarely attained by other theorists” (4).

There are two major aspects in theoretical thinking that Barthes has influenced considerably that will be discussed in this section. They are –

1. *The Death of the Author* and
2. Textuality.

The text, *The Death of the Author* was written in the year 1967. This essay marks the starting point in understanding Barthes' turn towards post-structuralism. In this essay, he comments on the relationship between signs and the art of writing and reading. This text should be read within the context of the capitalist society in which Barthes was writing. He argues that the author of a text is presented as if s/he is a “transcendental signified, standing behind the work” much like God stands “behind the material universe.” It is in this regard that the author is in charge of giving structure to and making sense of the world that s/he creates. And because it is a world that is thoroughly explained, it can also be tamed. In Barthes' words as quoted by Graham Allen, “the Author is supposed to *feed* the book, i.e., he lives before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it; he has the same relation of antecedence with his work that a father sustains with his child” (74). In the Western male dominated world, God, Father and the Author play similar roles – of making sense of the world and therefore defining the limits of the knowledge that is

produced. This makes it easier for the capitalist world where the works, because they are defined, structured and interpreted in a certain fashion, can also be cultivated and domesticated in a certain way that serves the status quo. This figure of the Author, thus limits and controls the various meanings that are produced in society. This kind of writing directly questioned the Western need for having a single narrative, a unified, singular, stable and irrefutable Meaning and Truth. This was the essential point that post-structuralists were trying to make.

The idea of textuality in Barthes' writing deals with the relation between texts – this is referred to, in theoretical terms, as intertextuality. This is discussed largely in the seminal work *S/Z* by Roland Barthes that also marks the shift from structuralist to post-structuralist thinking. The word 'text' shares its origins with the word textiles or the manufacturing of cloth – Barthes argues that this is significant. He points out that the word 'text' is an ancient one that involves "notions of spinning and weaving." He further argues that similar to the act of weaving and spinning, a text is made up of "quotations, references and echoes." For example, to understand a love poem, one is already familiar with the signs and language associated with romance. The text is thus a "quotation without quotation marks." It goes back to the cultural signatures and discourses on love that has already been established. When one poem accepted as being "relatable" it is because this trope/ sign/ commonplace knowledge that has already been established through cultural signification. The more the text is relatable, the more it is potent in its meaning. This allows for the argument that there is no unified, single, stable truth that is unshaken and original in nature. The shift towards post-structuralist way of thinking marks the questioning of Singular Meaning and Singular Truth. It moves towards understanding and acknowledging the intermingled relation between texts that makes the singularity (and authoritative knowledge) of an author suspect.

The next section deals with Barthes' famous work, *Mythologies*. But before that, one needs to understand the idea behind the book which will be dealt with in the next section.

Check your progress:

1. *The Death of the Author* and *Mythologies* are works by Roland Barthes. (True / False)

12.2.4 Mythologies:

Barthes wrote the text *Mythologies* in the year 1957. In this text, Barthes argues about the presence of "mythologies" and the process of myth making in present-day society. It is a series of short essays (54) followed by an essay titled "Myth Today." Some of the short essays include

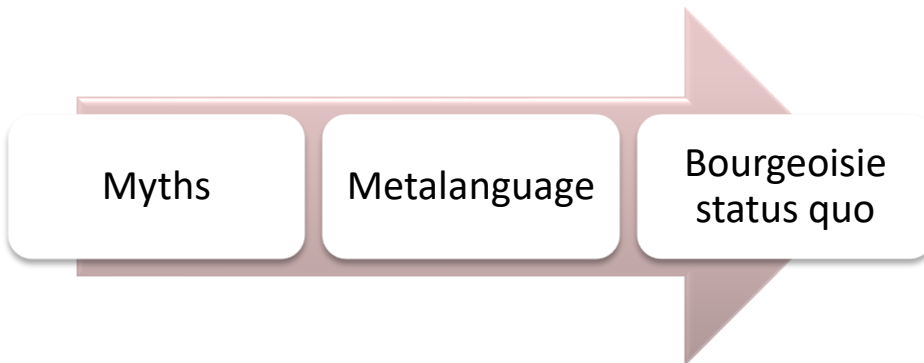
“The Brain of Einstein”, “Novels and Children”, “Wine and Milk”, “Striptease”, “Plastic” among others. It is in these essays that Barthes talks about the myths that modern society continuously builds through popular culture. It is through the analysis of everyday objects and items of daily life that Barthes tries to establish the significance of signs in modern life. He also tries to establish the various cultural implications of everyday objects that we do not necessarily consider as part of a cultural statement or the establishment and sustenance of bourgeois society.

Barthes closely examined and interpreted various cultural materials that established, sustained and helped flourish bourgeois society and its culture. For example, Barthes talks of how wine is produced in French society as a healthy habit though it can actually have unhealthy consequences. Another example could be the use of toys to explain how society teaches young children to “play” with miniature adult materials so as to prepare them to use the world that they will inhabit once they grow old. Yet another example is the myth revolving around the brain of Einstein. It has now come to represent intelligence so much so that the picture of the brain of Einstein on a box of toy is more likely to be bought by parents in the hoping that, by playing this game, their child would also become as intelligent as Einstein.

Barthes is trying to explain the concept of how signs function in a society. He argues that language functions at two levels – the first is the “language-object” that refers to the actual physical object and is the first linguistic order system. The second system of language is the “metalanguage.” This is where a myth is really created in a bourgeois society and thereafter transferred and communicated. These are connotations of already-established cultural ideas or concepts that help convey meaning through ‘an already accepted form of knowledge.’ This can be explained through one of the essays mentioned earlier – “Wine and”. In this essay, he argues that the first “language-object” refers to the beverage but the “metalanguage” refers to the myriad of accepted cultural ideas surrounding wine – Church, Christmas (malt wine), robustness, health (drinking a glass of wine a day helps in maintaining health). It can even bring to mind the idea that a glass of wine at the end of the day relaxes the person. Wine (expensive ones) could also suggest a person’s status in society. Wine is the drink of the rich or the middle-class bourgeois. Therefore, he traces and highlights the “myth” that is created around wine that came to be accepted and something that should be pursued and is desirable. This can and has been applied to many other objects, that seem to be inconsequential, and natural order of things when in fact, it is the metalanguage that is in play and colours the perception of the society. For the purpose of illustration, this idea can also be applied to toys. Plastic toys have come to be

recognized as the toys of the bourgeois class that are more expensive. From this follows the assumption that the children whose parents cannot afford expensive toys are not really enjoying their childhood. And when it is applied to the notion of gender roles and performance, “dolls” are seen as symbols that actually help little girls to learn the lessons of domesticity without having to teach it to them through other direct means.

The myths that are created in a bourgeois society serve only one purpose – to maintain the status quo. The constant reproduction of a mythological idea - constantly fed through media representations - eventually leads that concept to be considered the Truth. For example, people with tattoos are hardcore criminals or on the road to becoming them. Another example could be that shalwar-kameez clad women are considered softer, more domesticated, and respectable; they belong to “good households.” Questioning traditions and arguing does not suit “women” of reputable families. Similarly, boys who do not play with cars and prefer playing with dolls are not “men enough” and need to be coerced into showing “more masculine” traits. “Crying” is a sign of weakness that a man or a boy at any point cannot express or experience. “Smoking” is a taboo for women but a sign of maturity in a man in spite of the established scientific fact that it is injurious to health.



1. Illustration - Myth making in Society

12.2.5 Toys:

In this section of *Mythologies*, Barthes deals with the idea of toys in French society. It is a short essay of one page. It crisply argues that all the toys that are produced in French society see the child as “another self.” Toys, therefore, are a “microcosm of the adult world” where toys are miniature versions of the adult world. Toys in French society look upon the child as a “smaller man” who uses smaller versions of instruments, objects and other materials from the adult world.

Barthes argues that toys, when created for the smaller man, do not have the element of creation to them. Toys are meant to be used; the child is meant to be the owner but never the creator. He goes on to argue that French toys “*always mean something*” (emphasis, not mine) and they constitute the “techniques of modern adult life” including objects and toys related to the Army, Broadcasting, the Post Office, Medicine, School, hair styling, Air Force, transport etc. It is in this fashion that children are socialized and prepared for the adult life that they have to lead when they grow older. The child is thus socialized to the ‘natural’ order of things that the society of the adults has decided are essential for a ‘comfortable’ and a ‘convenient’ living. It is through toys that children get accustomed to the unusual aspects of life (the man-made ones) that include war, bureaucracy, ugliness etc.

Barthes makes note of the socialization of small girls into the future roles of mothers through toys that prepare them for this role. He talks of dolls that urinate that are “meant to prepare the little girl for the causality of house-keeping, to ‘condition’ her for the future role as mother” (Barthes 53). This will be dealt further in the next section.

Barthes points out that toys are therefore created in such a manner that it helps children grow into a world which they *use* rather than *create*. Barthes argues that this allows children to grow up into individuals that perform “actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy” (Barthes 54). This makes sure that, in the adult society, the child will grow up to have everything supplied to him/her ready-made; s/he will never be allowed to “discover anything from start to finish” (Barthes 54).

Barthes then makes mention of a set of blocks; he argues that a set of blocks allows children to *create* meaningful objects that can move, walk or roll. This allows children to “create life, not property.” He also mentions that such toys are rather rare.

Barthes then moves on to draw attention to the aspect of capitalism and bourgeois element in these toys by concentrating on the material of the toys – the toys are made up of “graceless material, the product of chemistry, not of nature.” He is trying to argue that toys are made of plastic material which “destroys all the pleasure, the sweetness, the humanity of touch.” He compares them to the toys made of wood where he argues that wood is a material that is at once firm and soft, as it has the “natural warmth” and it removes the “chemical coldness of metal” (54). The child is able to connect wooden toys with other objects – the tree, the table, the floor thereby helping create relations with the child. Toys made of wood do not break easily;

they wear out but still remain true to their nature. When they do grow old, they tend to dwindle rather than swell “like those mechanical toys” (54).

Barthes ends his note on toys, with a crisp and comparative note on wooden and plastic toys: he argues that wooden toys allow children to build relations with them, they mean something to the child even after they have faded away. Toys that have chemical substances tend to break easily and quickly and “once dead, they have no posthumous life for the child” (55).

12.2.6 Toys and Gender:

Barthes makes a strong argument about gender roles and the function that toys play in the reinforcing of what constitutes gender and the roles women are expected to play in society once they grow up. Children are taught some roles as children that they are supposed to conform to as adults. Toys segregate genders in society and decide for the children what role they will be expected to play not only as children but also as grown ups.

There are many examples of how toys reinforce the roles little girls are supposed to emulate and later on reproduce as adult women. A classic example of this would be the Barbie doll or even the doll houses. A doll house prepares little girls in the establishment and the maintenance of houses.

Similarly, boys are given toys that reinforce the ideas of accepted masculinity in society. The toys related to mechanics, the Army, cars, trucks etc., are expected to reinforce in the minds of small boys that they are expected to show certain traits of masculinity in order to be accepted as boys in the world they live in. Most toys that boys play with are related to a profession, thereby inculcating in them the idea that they will, when they grow up, be the primary bread-winners for the families.

“play is really a form of work, one that poses as an alternative to the adult world, yet which habituates children to their future labor in it, of which consumption is a significant part” (Kuenz 61).

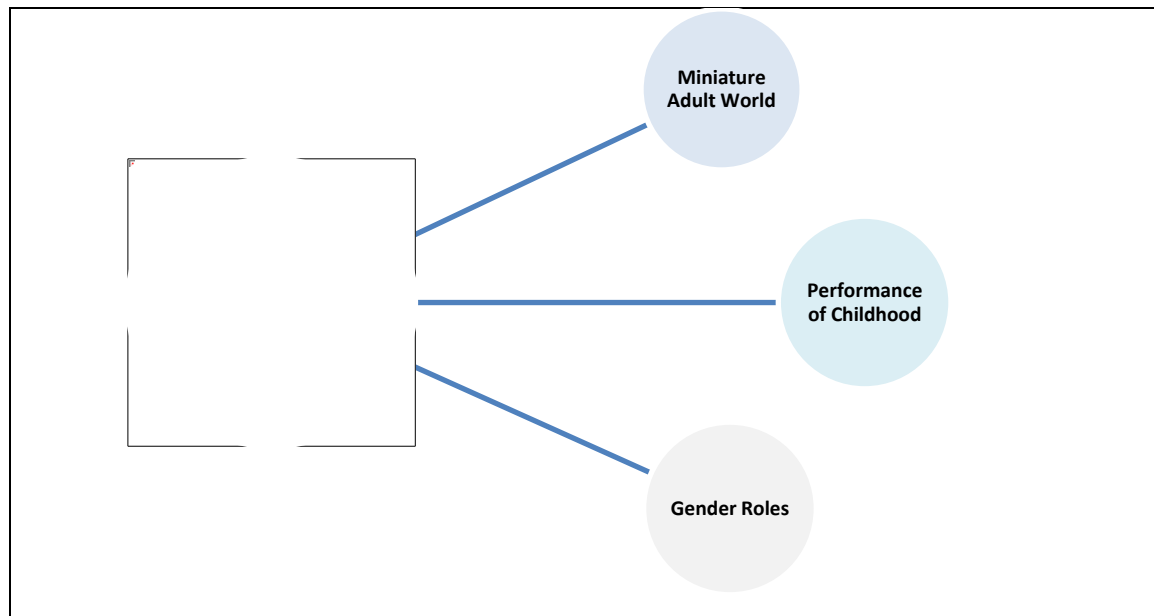
12.2.7 Toys and Childhood:

Jane Kuenz, in her article, “Playtime: Toys and the Labor of Childhood” extends the arguments put forth by Barthes. She points out that for children, given that they are expected to

emulate the adult world in miniature, “play is really a form of work, one that poses as an alternative to the adult world, yet which habituates children to their future labor in it, of which consumption is a significant part” (61).

Kuenz argues that childhood as a distinctive stage in the life of a person is established through the consumption of specific commodities. There is a certain amount of work that children are supposed to put into their “play” for them to consume toys and the other forms of mass culture.

Tables for Illustration



1. Illustration – Toys

Quick Recap

Toys are made of plastic material which “destroys all the pleasure, the sweetness, the humanity of touch.” Barthes prefers toys made of wood which is a material that is at once firm and soft, as it has the “natural warmth” and it removes the “chemical coldness of metal” (54).

Barthes points out that toys are created in a manner that helps children to grow into a world which they “use” rather than “create.” He argues that this allows children to grow up into individuals that perform “actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy” (Barthes 54). This makes sure that, in the adult society, the child will grow up to have everything supplied to him/her ready-made; s/he will never be allowed to “discover anything from start to finish” (Barthes 54).

2. Understanding Toys and Childhood

Barthes argues that French toys “*always mean something*” (emphasis, not mine) and they constitute the “techniques of modern adult life” including objects and toys related to the Army, Broadcasting, the Post Office, Medicine, School, hair styling, Air Force, transport etc.

3. Toys always have Meaning

Barthes makes mention of a set of blocks; he argues that a set of blocks allows children to *create* meaningful objects that can either move, walk or roll. This allows children to “create life, not property.” He also mentions that such toys are rather rare.

4. Toys and Creativity

12.3 Learning Outcomes

There are many learning outcomes from this text. They are listed as follows:

- The students will learn to apply the idea of metalanguage operating in society
- They will comprehend the notion of myth making.
- They will be able to identify the major arguments that Barthes makes about toys.
- They will be able to analyse gender roles and gender performance that is promulgated by toys.
- They will be able to evaluate linkages between objects, meaning and roles that the bourgeois class uses to maintain their status quo.

12.4 Glossary

Mythologies: A collection of myths derived from Greek words, mythos (story of the people) and logos (word or speech)

Myths: A symbolic narrative

Metalanguage: A Language that describes language; a form of language or set of terms used for description or analysis of another language

Textuality: In linguistics, textuality is the property by which successive sentences form a coherent text in contrast to a random sequence

12.5 Sample Questions

12.5.1 Objective Questions:

True or False

1. Barthes believes that toys made of chemicals should be an essential part of a child's upbringing.
2. Toys today are made to bring up children that will *use* rather than *create* a world.
3. Barbie dolls strengthen gender roles.
4. Barthes opposes the idea of children playing with toys.
5. Barthes was a proponent of established norms in society and supported traditional values.
6. Barthes wrote the essay "The Death of the Author" in the year _____.
(a) 1968 (b) 1971
(c) **1967** (d) 1969
7. Barthes' text *Mythologies* has an essay at the end. What is its title?
(a) Myth Tomorrow (b) Myth Yesterday
(c) Myth Now (d) **Myth Today**
8. There are many short pieces in the text *Mythologies*. Which one of the following is a title that is present in the text?
(a) Barbie Dolls (b) French Army
(c) **Einstein's Brain** (d) Childhood and Play
9. Death of an Author means –
(a) Author dies after s/he writes a text
(b) Authors don't own copyrights to their works
(c) **There is no original, unified Truth**
(d) Authors don't actually write their work
10. The word 'text' is an ancient word. It is related to

(a) spinning and weaving

(b) clothes

(c) knitting and sewing

(d) kneading

12.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Write a short essay on Barthes' comments on the Death of the Author.
2. Write a short estimation of Barthes' main ideas.
3. How does Barthes describe and talk about wooden toys?
4. What kind of relation do children build with plastic toys and other toys made of chemicals?
5. Why does Jane Kuenz call "play a form of work?"

12.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. How do you relate Barthes' ideas of textuality with his commentary on the French toys in Modern society?
2. Write an essay on the relation of gender roles and toys in society as explained by Barthes.
3. Relate Barthes' ideas on myths that are created today with the ideas of toys, adulthood and the creation of childhood.

12.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1991. (trans. Annette Lavers)
2. Kuenz, Jane. *Playtime: Toys and the Labor of Childhood*. *Colby Quarterly*, Volume 36, no. 1, March 2000, p. 60-76.
3. Mccallum, P. *Desire and History in Roland Barthes*. 1982. (Semantic Scholar online)
4. Newton K.M. (eds.) *Roland Barthes: 'Science versus Literature' in Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, Palgrave: London 1997.

Unit-13: Barbara Kramer - *Toni Morrison: A Biography of a Nobel Prize-Winning Writer*

Structure

13.0 Introduction

13.1 Objectives

13.2 Toni Morrison: A Biography of Nobel Prize-winning Writers

13.2.1 About the Author

13.2.2 Thematic Highlights

13.2.3 Strategies for Reading and Analyzing Biographical Texts

13.3 Learning Outcomes

13.4 Glossary

13.5 Sample Questions

13.6 Suggested Learning Resources

13.0 Introduction

Toni Morrison is one of the most influential Black American writers. Her stories make people think deeply about history, identity, and culture. But before she became a celebrated author, she was a little girl named Chloe Wofford, growing up in a small town in Ohio. Her family was not wealthy, but they were rich in traditions, love, and storytelling. They passed down stories, sang songs, and believed in dreams, shaping Morrison's imagination from an early age.

Morrison's childhood was filled with books, music, and history. Her parents and grandparents shared stories about their past—some were ghost stories meant to entertain, while others were real accounts of struggle and resilience. She also faced racism as a child, experiencing unfair treatment because of her skin color. Instead of letting discrimination define her, she grew stronger and prouder of her identity.

In this unit, we will read Chapter 2: Stories, Ghosts, and Dreams from Morrison's biography. This chapter is part of Barbara Kramer's "Toni Morrison: A Biography of a Nobel Prize-Winning Writer". This chapter explores Morrison's early life, the influence of her family,

and the experiences that shaped her as a writer. Through this reading, you will see how her childhood, culture, and history influenced her books. As you read, think about your own life—how do family stories and dreams shape who you are? Morrison’s journey shows us how personal experiences can be transformed into powerful storytelling.

13.1 Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

- Comprehend key aspects of Toni Morrison’s childhood and their influence on her writing.
- Identify the significance of storytelling, ghosts, and dreams in shaping her literary imagination.
- Analyze themes of racial identity, resilience, and cultural memory in Morrison’s life.
- Develop critical reading strategies to understand biographical texts effectively.

13.2 Toni Morrison: A Biography of a Nobel Prize-Winning Writer

13.2.1 About the Author

Toni Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931. She grew up in a working-class Black family that valued hard work, storytelling, and resilience. Her parents, George and Ramah Wofford, had Southern roots, having moved north to escape racial discrimination and seek better opportunities. Despite their struggles, Morrison’s family instilled in her a love for education, music, and African-American cultural traditions.

Morrison’s father worked multiple jobs to support the family, sometimes as a steel mill welder or a shipyard worker. He took great pride in his work, once telling Morrison that whenever he welded a perfect seam on a ship, he would sign his name on it—even though no one else would see it. This lesson in self-worth and dedication influenced Morrison’s later approach to writing. Her mother was a strong-willed woman who stood up against injustice. When the family received government-issued flour infested with bugs, she wrote directly to President Franklin Roosevelt to demand better treatment. Her mother also defied segregation by sitting in areas reserved for white people.

Morrison's home was filled with music and stories. Her grandfather played the violin, and her parents shared ghost stories that fascinated and terrified her. Storytelling was an essential part of her upbringing, shaping her future as a writer. She also learned about African-American folklore and myths from her grandparents, helping her connect to her ancestral history.

Despite growing up in a racially mixed neighborhood, Morrison still faced discrimination. White boys threw rocks at her and her friends, and Black children were not allowed in certain public spaces. These experiences shaped her awareness of racial injustice, which later became a central theme in her novels. However, Morrison developed a strong sense of self-worth and resilience. She learned that racism was a reflection of the people who practiced it, not of those who experienced it.

Morrison was an exceptional student. She was the only child in her first-grade class who could already read at the beginning of the school year. Her mother, despite financial hardships, encouraged her love for books by joining a book club. Morrison read widely, including Russian, French, and American classics. By the time she reached high school, she was inducted into the National Honor Society and read works by Jane Austen, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. Although these books did not reflect her own experiences as a Black girl, she admired their storytelling and writing styles.

At home, Morrison was taught responsibility and discipline. Everyone in the family had tasks to do, and there was no room for neglecting duties. When her grandfather wandered off due to old age, Morrison had to go find him and bring him back home. She also cared for her dying grandmother, reading the Bible to her in her final days. These experiences instilled in her a deep sense of duty, care, and connection to family and history.

At the age of twelve, Morrison began working to contribute to the family's finances. At thirteen, she worked as a house cleaner for a white family. When she complained about the harsh treatment she received, her father reminded her that her identity was not defined by that job. She learned to separate her self-worth from how others treated her, a lesson that would influence her portrayal of strong Black characters in her novels.

Morrison was deeply influenced by the African-American cultural traditions she grew up with, particularly the importance of dreams and supernatural beliefs. Her grandmother believed that dreams carried meanings and used dream books to gamble on lucky numbers. Morrison grew up in a home where dreams were discussed as seriously as real-life events. This belief in the power

of dreams later appeared in her novels, where characters often experience visions or supernatural encounters that reveal deeper truths.

After finishing high school, Morrison became the first woman in her family to attend college. She was accepted at Howard University in Washington, D.C., a historically Black university. Her mother took a job as a restroom attendant to help pay for her education. At Howard, Morrison was exposed to a broader intellectual world and became more aware of African-American literature and cultural history. This marked the beginning of her formal literary journey.

Check your progress:

1. Morrison's family instilled in her a love for education, music, and African-American cultural traditions. (True / False)

13.2.2 Thematic Highlights

The Power of Storytelling in Morrison's Life

Storytelling played a crucial role in shaping Toni Morrison's imagination and literary career. From an early age, she was immersed in the rich oral traditions of African-American culture. Her parents, especially her father, told stories that were passed down through generations. These stories were not just entertainment; they carried deep meanings, historical lessons, and moral values. Morrison often recalled how her father's ghost stories were both thrilling and terrifying. These narratives built a foundation for her understanding of the power of language and storytelling.

In African-American culture, oral storytelling has historically been an essential way to preserve history, share knowledge, and keep traditions alive. Since many African-American families were historically denied formal education, storytelling became a tool for survival. Stories about ancestors, struggles, and victories were passed down by word of mouth, ensuring that their history would not be forgotten. Morrison absorbed this tradition and later incorporated it into her novels, particularly *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*.

The novel *Beloved* is an excellent example of how Morrison used storytelling to capture the voices of those who had been silenced by history. The story revolves around a formerly enslaved woman haunted by the ghost of her daughter. The novel explores the trauma of slavery through personal stories that blend reality with supernatural elements. This reflects the way Morrison's childhood was filled with ghost stories that conveyed deeper truths.

Similarly, *Song of Solomon* is another novel that heavily relies on oral traditions. The novel follows the journey of a young African-American man, Milkman, who searches for his family's lost history. Along the way, he hears folktales and songs that provide clues about his ancestors. This mirrors the way stories in Morrison's own family helped her understand where she came from.

Beyond preserving history, storytelling also serves as a way to express identity. For African-Americans, who have often been marginalized in mainstream history, telling their own stories is an act of resistance and empowerment. Morrison recognized this and dedicated her career to telling stories that highlighted Black experiences and voices.

Morrison's ability to transform oral traditions into literature shows how storytelling bridges generations. Her childhood experiences of listening to her father's ghost stories and her mother's singing contributed to her unique style of writing. She wove history, folklore, and personal memory into powerful narratives that resonate with readers across the world.

Check your progress:

1. How does storytelling help preserve history and culture?

The Role of Ghosts: Memory and Trauma

Ghosts play an essential role in Toni Morrison's novels, symbolizing history, memory, and trauma. Growing up, Morrison was surrounded by stories of ancestors and supernatural elements. These were not just ghost stories meant to scare children but were deeply rooted in African-American traditions and beliefs. Her family, especially her grandmother, believed in interpreting dreams and signs as a way of understanding the world. These experiences stayed with Morrison and became a major theme in her writing.

For Morrison, ghosts are not just spirits of the dead. They are the memories of people who lived before, particularly those who suffered under slavery and racial oppression. They remind the living of past injustices and demand that history is not forgotten. In African-American culture, where much of history was erased or ignored, ghosts serve as a way to reclaim lost narratives and ensure that the past is remembered.

One of the best examples of this theme in Morrison's work is her novel *Beloved*. The story is about Sethe, a woman who was formerly enslaved, and her daughter, Beloved, who returns as a ghost. Sethe's past is filled with trauma, and Beloved represents the painful history she cannot escape. Through the ghost of Beloved, Morrison shows how the past haunts the

present. Sethe cannot simply forget what happened to her and move on. Instead, she must confront her memories and deal with the emotional pain they bring.

Ghosts in Morrison's fiction also symbolize collective trauma. The history of slavery in America left deep scars on generations of African-Americans. The pain did not disappear when slavery was abolished. It continued in different forms, such as segregation, racism, and economic hardship. Morrison's ghosts are not just personal—they represent the struggles of an entire community. In *Beloved*, the ghost forces the characters to remember the pain of slavery. Morrison uses this supernatural element to remind readers that history cannot be ignored.

Another novel that features ghosts and memory is *Song of Solomon*. In this book, the protagonist, Milkman, embarks on a journey to discover his family's history. Along the way, he hears stories of his ancestors, some of whom seem almost like ghosts themselves. Through these stories, he learns about his heritage and gains a deeper understanding of who he is. Morrison uses folklore and oral tradition to show how the past is passed down through generations. The stories in *Song of Solomon* function like ghosts—they bring history to life and make sure it is not forgotten.

Morrison's use of ghosts is also linked to the idea of trauma. Trauma is an emotional response to a deeply disturbing experience. When people go through something extremely painful, such as violence or loss, the memories of that event can stay with them for a long time. Sometimes, these memories feel as real as the event itself. This is why ghosts appear so often in Morrison's novels—they represent memories that refuse to fade away.

For example, in *Beloved*, Sethe's trauma is so strong that it takes on a physical form in the ghost of her daughter. The supernatural becomes a way to express the emotional and psychological pain of slavery. Instead of writing a simple historical novel, Morrison uses ghosts to show the lasting effects of trauma. This makes her stories more powerful and emotional, allowing readers to connect with history on a deeper level.

Another important aspect of Morrison's ghosts is their demand for acknowledgment. In many cultures, ghosts appear when they have unfinished business. They haunt the living because they want to be remembered or because they have a story that needs to be told. In Morrison's fiction, ghosts serve a similar purpose. They force characters—and readers—to confront painful histories.

For example, in *Beloved*, Sethe and her community must recognize the horrors of slavery and how it continues to affect them. The ghost will not leave until the truth is faced. This is a

powerful message: ignoring history does not make it go away. Instead, people must confront the past, understand its impact, and find ways to heal.

Morrison's ghosts are also tied to African spirituality. In many African and African-American traditions, the line between the living and the dead is not always clear. Ancestors are believed to watch over their descendants, offering guidance and wisdom. Dreams, visions, and supernatural encounters are seen as ways of communicating with the past. Morrison incorporates these beliefs into her novels, blending realism with the supernatural. This creates a unique storytelling style that reflects African-American culture and history.

For example, in *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's journey to learn about his ancestors is filled with mystical experiences. He discovers that his great-grandfather could fly, a story that connects him to African folklore. The supernatural elements in the novel are not just fantasy—they carry deep cultural meaning. They show how history, memory, and identity are intertwined.

Morrison's work teaches us that ghosts are more than just scary figures in stories. They are symbols of memory, trauma, and history. They remind us of the past and demand that we pay attention to it. Through her use of ghosts, Morrison shows that history is not just something we read in books—it is something that continues to shape our lives.

By including supernatural elements in her novels, Morrison makes history feel immediate and personal. Readers do not just learn about the past; they feel its presence in the lives of her characters. This makes her storytelling powerful and unique.

In conclusion, ghosts in Morrison's work represent much more than the supernatural. They are reminders of history, carriers of memory, and symbols of trauma. They force characters to confront the past and help readers understand the long-lasting effects of slavery and racism. Morrison uses ghosts to ensure that history is not forgotten and that the voices of the past continue to be heard.

Check your progress:

1. How do ghosts function as symbols of memory and trauma in literature?

Dreams as a Connection to the Past and Future

Dreams played an important role in Toni Morrison's life and writing. She grew up in a family that believed dreams were more than just thoughts in the mind; they were messages, symbols, and even warnings. Morrison's grandmother, in particular, believed that dreams could

predict the future and reveal hidden truths. She even used dream books—manuals that assigned numbers to dreams—to help her with gambling. This idea of dreams being linked to fate and decision-making had a lasting impact on Morrison.

In Morrison's novels, dreams often act as bridges between the past and the future. They allow characters to reconnect with their ancestors, understand their history, and make sense of their present lives. Dreams in her works are not just random events; they hold meaning, carry history, and guide characters toward self-discovery. They also reflect deep fears and hopes, sometimes showing characters the things they try to forget or ignore.

One of the best examples of dreams in Morrison's fiction is *Beloved*. In this novel, dreams connect the characters to the painful past of slavery. The protagonist, Sethe, experiences visions and memories that feel as real as the present. These dreams blur the line between the living and the dead, showing how history haunts those who try to escape it. For Sethe, dreams are not just dreams—they are experiences that remind her of what she has lost and what she cannot forget.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison uses dreams to show the importance of heritage and self-discovery. The main character, Milkman, embarks on a journey to learn about his ancestors. Along the way, he has dreams and visions that guide him. These dreams help him understand who he is and where he comes from. For Milkman, dreams become a way of traveling back in time and discovering truths that were hidden from him.

Dreams in Morrison's work often serve as a way for characters to process trauma. Many of her characters have suffered from loss, racism, and violence. They carry these experiences deep within them, and their dreams bring those buried emotions to the surface. In *Beloved*, Sethe's dreams remind her of the baby she lost, forcing her to relive her pain. In *Jazz*, another novel by Morrison, dreams are connected to guilt and regret, showing how the past continues to affect the present.

Morrison's use of dreams also connects to African traditions. In many African and African-American cultures, dreams are seen as important messages from ancestors. People believe that the spirits of the dead can visit through dreams to offer guidance, warnings, or wisdom. Morrison brings this belief into her novels, making dreams a key part of how characters communicate with the past.

Dreams in Morrison's novels also highlight the subconscious mind. Psychologists believe that dreams reflect our deepest thoughts and emotions—our fears, desires, and unresolved

conflicts. Morrison uses dreams to show what her characters might not say out loud. In *Beloved*, Sethe tries to suppress her guilt and pain, but her dreams bring them back to her in powerful ways. Through dreams, Morrison reveals emotions that characters may not fully understand while awake.

Another important theme in Morrison's use of dreams is fate and choice. Her characters often face difficult decisions, and dreams sometimes act as a warning or a guide. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's dreams push him toward uncovering the truth about his family. In *Tar Baby*, another of Morrison's novels, dreams reflect the characters' inner conflicts about identity and belonging. By using dreams, Morrison shows that the past and future are connected, and understanding one's history can help in making decisions about the future.

Morrison's use of dreams is also related to storytelling. Many of her characters share dreams with others, turning them into oral stories. Just like folk tales and ghost stories, dreams are passed down as a way to share knowledge and wisdom. This reflects Morrison's own childhood, where storytelling and dream interpretation were part of daily life.

Dreams in Morrison's novels often challenge the idea of time. In many Western traditions, time is seen as moving in a straight line—from past to present to future. But in Morrison's storytelling, time is fluid. Dreams allow the past to enter the present, showing how history continues to shape people's lives. This idea is especially strong in *Beloved*, where Sethe's memories and dreams bring the past into her current reality.

The way Morrison blends dreams, memory, and reality in her novels makes her storytelling unique. Instead of simply describing events, she allows readers to experience the emotions and histories of her characters in deep and complex ways. Her use of dreams makes history feel alive and personal, rather than just something to be studied in books.

In conclusion, dreams in Morrison's life and work serve as powerful tools for understanding history, processing trauma, and making decisions. They act as bridges between generations, connecting characters to their ancestors and helping them find their place in the world. By using dreams in her novels, Morrison honors the African-American tradition of dream interpretation and storytelling, while also exploring deep human emotions. Her use of dreams reminds us that the past is never really gone—it continues to live within us, shaping our fears, hopes, and futures.

Check your progress:

1. In what ways do dreams reflect subconscious fears and hopes?

Racial Discrimination and Resilience

Toni Morrison's experiences with racial discrimination shaped both her identity and her literary career. From an early age, she witnessed the injustices that African Americans faced in the United States. These experiences made her deeply aware of systemic racism and inspired her to write stories that reflected the struggles and resilience of Black communities. Morrison's novels do not just tell stories; they give a voice to those who were often ignored or forgotten by mainstream history.

Morrison's father, George Wofford, experienced severe racism in the South. As a young man, he moved north in search of better opportunities, hoping to escape the violent discrimination that Black people faced in the Southern states. However, racism was not just a Southern problem. Even in the North, Black families like Morrison's struggled to find stable jobs, decent housing, and equal opportunities. Her father took on multiple jobs, working tirelessly to provide for his family. Despite his hard work, the Woffords still faced economic hardship. This taught Morrison that racism was not just about individual prejudice—it was built into society's structures, affecting every aspect of life for Black Americans.

Morrison's own experiences with racism began in childhood. She grew up in an integrated neighborhood in Lorain, Ohio, where children from different ethnic backgrounds attended the same schools. However, racial divisions still existed. African Americans were not allowed in certain public places, and Morrison witnessed the exclusion of Black families from spaces that were reserved for white people. She also experienced racial slurs and insults, particularly from older white boys who threw rocks at her and her friends. These early experiences helped shape her understanding of race and power. Instead of feeling ashamed or afraid, Morrison saw racism as a sign of weakness in those who practiced it. This perspective later became an important theme in her novels, where she portrayed racism as a force that damaged both its victims and its perpetrators.

Morrison's mother, Ramah Wofford, was an outspoken woman who did not tolerate injustice. She actively resisted discrimination and believed in standing up for what was right. Once, when the family received government-issued flour during the Great Depression, they found it was infested with bugs. Instead of accepting this mistreatment, Ramah wrote a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt, demanding better conditions for Black families. She also defied

segregation by sitting in sections of theaters that were reserved for white people. These acts of resistance showed Morrison that fighting against injustice was not only possible but necessary. This belief became a central idea in her literary work, where many of her characters struggle against racial oppression in their own ways.

One of the most powerful themes in Morrison's work is the psychological impact of racism. Her novels explore how racism affects the minds and spirits of Black individuals and communities. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison tells the story of a young Black girl named Pecola Breedlove, who internalizes society's racist beauty standards. She believes that she is ugly because she does not have blue eyes and white skin. This tragic belief leads to deep emotional suffering, showing how racism can make people feel unworthy and invisible. Through Pecola's story, Morrison critiques the ways in which racism shapes self-perception and mental health.

In *Beloved*, Morrison explores how racism and slavery create lasting trauma. The novel's protagonist, Sethe, is haunted by the past, both metaphorically and literally. She carries the emotional weight of having been enslaved, and the ghost of her deceased daughter symbolizes the horrors that slavery inflicted on families. Through Sethe's story, Morrison highlights how the trauma of racism does not simply disappear; it is passed down through generations. This idea reflects real historical experiences, as African Americans have had to carry the pain of slavery, segregation, and discrimination for centuries.

Morrison's novels also focus on the resilience of Black communities. Her characters often find strength in their cultural heritage, family bonds, and collective struggles. In *Song of Solomon*, the protagonist, Milkman, embarks on a journey to reconnect with his ancestors and understand his identity. Through storytelling and oral traditions, he learns about the history of his people, gaining a sense of pride and belonging. This reflects Morrison's belief that knowing one's history is a powerful tool for survival and resistance.

Another important aspect of Morrison's work is her focus on Black women's experiences. Throughout history, Black women have faced both racism and sexism, making their struggles unique. Morrison gave voice to these experiences, showing the strength and complexity of Black female characters. In *Sula*, she portrays two women who challenge traditional expectations and refuse to be confined by society's rules. In *Beloved*, she presents a mother's painful choices in the face of oppression. By focusing on Black women's lives, Morrison challenged dominant narratives that often ignored or misrepresented them.

Morrison's work also shows how racism is not just a personal experience but a structural issue. Her novels reveal how laws, institutions, and economic systems have been designed to disadvantage Black people. She exposes the hidden ways in which racism operates, encouraging readers to think critically about history and society. For example, in *Jazz*, she explores the racial violence that shaped early 20th-century America. By weaving historical events into her fiction, Morrison ensures that these realities are not forgotten.

Despite the harsh realities she portrays, Morrison's novels are not just about suffering. They are also about survival, resistance, and hope. She shows how Black communities create beauty, love, and strength in the face of oppression. Music, storytelling, and spirituality all play vital roles in her characters' lives, providing them with a sense of connection and resilience. Morrison believed that even in the darkest times, there is the possibility of healing and empowerment.

In conclusion, Morrison's early experiences with racism deeply influenced her writing. She witnessed both injustice and resistance, and these themes became central to her literary work. Her novels explore the psychological effects of racism, the strength of Black communities, and the importance of history and self-knowledge. Through her powerful storytelling, Morrison not only highlighted the struggles of African Americans but also celebrated their resilience and cultural richness. Her work continues to inspire readers to think critically about race, identity, and justice.

Check your progress:

1. How do early experiences with racism shape a person's identity and artistic expression?

The Importance of Education and Literature

Toni Morrison's passion for literature and education shaped her into one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. From a young age, she excelled academically, demonstrating an exceptional ability to read and comprehend complex texts. Her love for books was encouraged by her family, particularly her mother, who valued reading as a way to learn and grow. This early exposure to literature became the foundation of her storytelling skills and her deep understanding of human emotions, culture, and history.

As a child, Morrison was an avid reader. She consumed books far beyond what was typical for her age. While other children were just beginning to explore simple stories, Morrison

was already engaging with complex narratives. This early connection to literature gave her a strong command over language and storytelling. Her reading habits were not limited to any one genre or culture; she read a wide range of books, including Russian, French, and American classics. These different literary traditions exposed her to various storytelling techniques, themes, and character developments that later influenced her own writing style.

Morrison's exposure to Russian literature, particularly authors like Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, introduced her to deep explorations of human psychology, morality, and suffering. Dostoevsky's novels often dealt with guilt, redemption, and the human struggle with identity—ideas that Morrison would later incorporate into her own works, such as *Beloved*. Similarly, Tolstoy's ability to weave history and personal narratives together influenced Morrison's approach to storytelling, where history is not just a backdrop but an active force shaping her characters' lives.

French literature also played a role in shaping Morrison's perspective. Writers like Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac were known for their detailed character studies and social critiques. Morrison learned how to construct complex, realistic characters who struggle with their environments. In many of her novels, her characters are shaped by the historical and social conditions surrounding them, much like the figures in Flaubert's and Balzac's works. This is evident in *The Bluest Eye*, where Morrison explores the impact of racial and societal expectations on a young Black girl's self-image.

American literature, particularly the works of William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, also influenced Morrison's writing. Faulkner's use of stream-of-consciousness narration and non-linear storytelling can be seen in Morrison's novels, where time is often fluid, and memories shape the present. In *Beloved*, for example, the story moves between past and present, showing how trauma and memory are deeply connected. Hemingway's concise and impactful writing style also influenced Morrison, though she added her own lyrical and poetic quality to her prose.

Morrison's academic journey took her to Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, D.C. At Howard, she majored in English and was exposed to a broader intellectual world. She studied works from different literary traditions, refining her critical thinking and analytical skills. It was at Howard that she became more deeply aware of African-American literature and its importance in shaping cultural identity. She was introduced to writers such as Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston—authors who wrote about the Black experience in America.

During her time at Howard, Morrison also became interested in the idea of reclaiming Black history and stories that had been overlooked or misrepresented. She saw how mainstream literature often ignored or distorted African-American voices. This realization influenced her later mission as a writer: to tell the untold stories of Black people and to give them a voice in literature.

Morrison continued her education at Cornell University, where she earned a master's degree in English. Her academic training at Cornell deepened her literary analysis skills, allowing her to study literature at an advanced level. She wrote her thesis on the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, further solidifying her understanding of modernist literature. Woolf's exploration of gender and identity, combined with Faulkner's innovative narrative techniques, influenced Morrison's approach to writing. She saw how literature could challenge conventional storytelling and offer new ways of understanding identity, memory, and history.

After completing her education, Morrison became an editor at Random House, where she played a crucial role in bringing African-American literature to a wider audience. She worked with Black authors to ensure that their stories were published and recognized. Her editorial work allowed her to engage deeply with contemporary Black literature, further shaping her ideas about storytelling and representation.

When Morrison began writing her own novels, she combined everything she had learned from her literary influences and academic training. Her writing was deeply intellectual yet emotionally powerful. She used innovative narrative structures, shifting timelines, and poetic language to tell stories that had been historically marginalized. In *Beloved*, for example, she blends history, memory, and the supernatural to explore the lasting trauma of slavery. In *Song of Solomon*, she uses myth and folklore to examine the search for identity and belonging.

Morrison's ability to weave historical, cultural, and psychological themes into her novels made her work unique. She did not just tell stories—she created literary experiences that made readers think and feel deeply. Her use of language was rich and symbolic, reflecting both the beauty and the pain of the African-American experience.

In conclusion, Morrison's lifelong dedication to education and literature shaped her into a groundbreaking writer. Her early love for reading, exposure to diverse literary traditions, and academic journey all contributed to her distinctive narrative style. She was not just a storyteller; she was a scholar who understood the power of literature to challenge, educate, and inspire. By

drawing from different literary influences and combining them with her own cultural background, Morrison created works that continue to be celebrated for their depth, complexity, and significance.

Check your progress:

1. How did Morrison's early exposure to different literary traditions influence her unique narrative style?

13.2.3 Strategies for Reading and Analyzing Biographical Texts

Reading and analyzing a biographical text requires more than just understanding the events of a person's life. It involves identifying key themes, making connections to broader contexts, and thinking critically about how personal experiences shape creative expression. Below are some strategies to help students engage deeply with Toni Morrison's biography and understand how her life influenced her writing.

Identifying Key Themes:

One of the most important steps in analyzing a biography is recognizing recurring themes. In Morrison's life, several themes appear consistently, including:

a. Memory: Many of her novels, such as *Beloved*, explore how the past continues to shape the present. Looking at her childhood and family history helps us understand why memory was such a central theme in her work.

b. Storytelling: Morrison grew up in a family that valued oral storytelling. Her father told ghost stories, and her mother sang. These experiences influenced her unique narrative style, which often blends reality with folklore and historical accounts.

c. Racial Identity: Morrison's early experiences with racism and segregation deeply shaped her understanding of race and injustice. These issues appear throughout her novels, making her work a powerful reflection of the African-American experience.

To better analyze these themes, students should take notes while reading. Identify passages that connect Morrison's life events to her writing. Ask questions such as: How does her childhood environment influence the settings in her novels? How do her personal experiences with racism shape the struggles of her characters? Taking structured notes will help draw meaningful connections between Morrison's biography and her literature.

Making Connections:

A strong biographical analysis also involves relating Morrison's life to broader historical and literary contexts. Consider the following ways to make connections:

Link Morrison's experiences to contemporary issues. The racial discrimination she faced as a child still resonates in modern discussions about systemic racism and identity. Reflect on how the themes in her novels are relevant to today's social issues.

Compare Morrison's influences with other writers. She was inspired by Russian, French, and American literary traditions, but she also built on the works of African-American authors like Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston. How does her storytelling style compare with theirs? How does her focus on Black identity distinguish her work?

Drawing these connections allows readers to appreciate Morrison's writing not just as personal stories but as part of a larger conversation about race, history, and literature.

Critical Thinking and Reflection:

Finally, a biographical analysis should involve deep reflection. Ask yourself:

How does Morrison's personal history influence her artistic expression? She transformed painful experiences into stories that resonate with readers worldwide. For example, *The Bluest Eye* was inspired by a childhood conversation with a friend who wished for blue eyes. Morrison took that moment and turned it into a powerful exploration of race and self-worth.

How do themes of resilience and resistance appear in her works? Morrison's characters often struggle against oppression but find strength in community and history. Reflecting on these patterns helps us understand the deeper messages in her books.

Students can learn more about Toni Morrison if they look for themes, connect ideas, and think critically. These skills also apply to reading other biographical texts, helping readers engage with literature on a deeper level.

13.3 Learning Outcomes

After completing this Unit, students should be able to:

- Explain how Morrison's childhood influenced her literary themes.
- Analyze the symbolic role of storytelling, ghosts, and dreams in shaping her worldview.
- Apply critical reading strategies to biographical and literary texts.

- Reflect on the significance of race, memory, and cultural heritage in Morrison's works.

13.4 Glossary

Oral Tradition: A method of preserving history and culture through spoken stories.

Racial Discrimination: Unfair treatment based on race or ethnicity.

Symbolism: The use of symbols to represent ideas or concepts in literature.

Autobiographical Influence: How an author's life experiences shape their writing.

Cultural Memory: The shared history and traditions passed down through generations.

13.5 Sample Questions

13.5.1 Objective Questions:

- What did Morrison's father do when he welded a perfect seam on a ship?
 - a) He signed his name on it.**
 - b) He painted it gold.
 - c) He took a picture of it.
 - d) He showed it to his friends.
- How did Morrison's grandmother use dreams?
 - a) She ignored them.
 - b) She used them to play the numbers (gambling).**
 - c) She believed they had no significance.
 - d) She told them only to children.
- What was Morrison's birth name?
 - a) Chloe Anthony Wofford**
 - b) Toni Marie Morrison
 - c) Ramah Wofford
 - d) Sethe Chloe Morrison
- Where did Morrison attend university for her undergraduate studies?
 - a) Howard University**
 - b) Harvard University
 - c) Cornell University
 - d) Yale University
- Which of the following is NOT a theme in Morrison's early life?
 - a) Racial discrimination
 - b) Wealth and privilege**
 - c) Storytelling traditions
 - d) Family resilience
- How did Morrison's mother resist racial discrimination?

- a) **She refused to let her children attend segregated schools.**
 - b) She wrote a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt.
 - c) She moved her family back to the South.
 - d) She encouraged Morrison to stop reading books.
7. Which of the following best describes Morrison's childhood neighborhood?
- a) Entirely African American
 - b) Entirely white
 - c) **Racially mixed with various ethnic groups**
 - d) A wealthy suburban area
8. What genre best describes Morrison's novels?
- a) Science fiction
 - b) **Historical fiction with magical realism**
 - c) Detective mystery
 - d) Romantic fiction
9. How did Morrison's experiences with oral storytelling influence her writing?
- a) **She incorporated ghost stories and folklore into her novels.**
 - b) She focused exclusively on writing poetry.
 - c) She rejected oral storytelling and preferred only written texts.
 - d) She wrote only historical non-fiction.
10. Why did Morrison's father move north from Georgia?
- a) **To escape racial violence and find better job opportunities.**
 - b) To pursue a college education.
 - c) To become a writer.
 - d) To work on a cotton plantation.

13.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. Describe how Morrison's childhood experiences with racial discrimination influenced her later themes in literature.
2. Explain the significance of oral storytelling in Morrison's upbringing and how it is reflected in her novels.
3. How does Morrison's novel *Beloved* explore themes of memory, trauma, and history?
4. Discuss the impact of Morrison's university education on her literary career.
5. Compare Morrison's writing style to another African-American author you have studied.
6. How did Morrison use the concept of ghosts as a metaphor for history and trauma?
7. What role does the theme of resilience play in Morrison's personal life and her novels?

8. How did Morrison's upbringing in an integrated neighborhood influence her perspective on race?

13.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Analyze the role of ghosts and dreams in Morrison's early life and how they influenced her writing.
2. Discuss the significance of cultural memory in Morrison's works, using examples from the chapter.
3. How did Morrison's education and exposure to diverse literary traditions shape her unique narrative style?
4. In what ways did Morrison use literature as a means of resistance against racial oppression?
5. How does Morrison's personal history connect to the broader history of African Americans in the 20th century?

13.6 Suggested Learning Resources

1. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved* (for understanding her use of ghosts and memory in fiction).
2. Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon* (for understanding her use of ghosts and memory and other thematic connections in fiction).
3. Seward, Adrienne Lanier. *Toni Morrison: Memory and Meaning*.
4. Harding, Wendy. *A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels*.

Unit-14: Siddalingaiah - *Ooru Keri*

Structure

14.0 Introduction

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14.0 Introduction

This Unit introduces students to Dalit autobiography through *Ooru Keri*, the life narrative of Sidda Lingaiah, a renowned Kannada poet, intellectual, and activist. As one of the foundational texts in Kannada Dalit literature, *Ooru Keri* offers a powerful and unflinching portrayal of life on the margins of caste society. The first part of the text, prescribed for this course, centers on Lingaiah's childhood experiences and the socio-cultural environment of his village. It captures the intersection of caste, poverty, memory, and resistance, making it a key entry point into understanding how personal narratives function as political and literary tools in Dalit writing. In this context, *Ooru Keri* is not merely an autobiography in the conventional sense—it is a testimony to injustice, a critique of caste society, and an assertion of Dalit identity.

In Part 1, Lingaiah narrates his early life in a segregated Dalit colony on the fringes of a village in Karnataka. Through a series of vivid, episodic recollections, he documents the social geography of exclusion, the emotional trauma of being branded untouchable, and the ritual

humiliations inflicted on Dalit children. His observations are direct and unsentimental, offering a window into how caste discrimination is internalized from a young age. The narrative challenges students to think critically about the construction of identity, the role of memory, and the use of literature as resistance.

This Unit invites students to engage with *Ooru Keri* through the lenses of Dalit studies, autobiographical writing, and postcolonial theory. It emphasizes the importance of locating literary texts within their social and historical contexts, particularly those involving caste, language, and cultural marginalization. Students will explore how Lingaiah's experiences are shaped not only by his personal circumstances but also by the larger structures of caste oppression that govern rural Indian society.

The study of *Ooru Keri* encourages students to reflect on the power of storytelling in confronting injustice and reclaiming agency. As a text that straddles the boundaries between poetry, memory, and politics, it provides fertile ground for critical thinking and comparative analysis with other autobiographical and resistance literatures from marginalized communities.

14.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- Understand the socio-cultural context of Dalit life as presented in *Ooru Keri*.
- Analyze the role of caste in shaping personal identity and collective experience.
- Evaluate the narrative strategies used by Sidda Lingaiah to convey oppression and resilience.
- Engage with Dalit autobiography as a form of resistance literature.

14.2 *Ooru Keri*

14.2.1 An Overview

Ooru Keri (meaning “village street” in Kannada) is a powerful and deeply personal Dalit autobiography that recounts the life of Sidda Lingaiah, a poet, activist, and intellectual from Karnataka. Written in a lucid, earthy style, the narrative reflects on his experiences growing up in the Madiga community, a Dalit caste historically subjected to severe social discrimination and untouchability.

Lingaiah vividly portrays his childhood in a small village, marked by grinding poverty, caste humiliation, and social exclusion. The Madigas lived in segregated areas—“*Ooru Keri*”—away from the upper castes. Lingaiah recounts how his community was denied access to clean water, schools, temples, and even public roads. Everyday life was shaped by systemic oppression, where physical labor and ritual pollution defined their social value.

Despite overwhelming obstacles, Lingaiah manages to pursue an education. His entry into the school system is a critical moment—fraught with alienation and discrimination, but also representing a step toward emancipation. He begins to engage with the written word, eventually discovering the power of poetry and political expression. His educational journey becomes not just a personal triumph, but a means of resisting caste boundaries.

As he matures, Lingaiah becomes actively involved in Dalit movements, drawing inspiration from B.R. Ambedkar’s ideas. He finds his voice through poetry, which becomes both a form of protest and self-expression. His writing criticizes caste oppression, challenges Hindu orthodoxy, and gives voice to the marginalized. He aligns himself with progressive, leftist ideologies, emphasizing social justice, class consciousness, and collective struggle.

The narrative is non-linear and episodic, capturing the raw, lived experiences of a Dalit man navigating a deeply stratified society. Themes include:

- Poverty and dignity
- Resistance through education and art
- The politics of language and identity
- Memory as a form of protest

The tone is often biting and ironic, yet also introspective and lyrical, especially when Lingaiah speaks about nature, language, or his people’s struggles.

14.2.2 Thematic Analysis – Part 1 of *Ooru Keri*

Part 1 of *Ooru Keri* sets the tone for the autobiographical narrative by plunging the reader into the material and psychological realities of caste. Through vivid recollections of his childhood and the social structures of his village, Sidda Lingaiah introduces several key themes:

1. Caste-Based Segregation and Spatial Marginality: At the heart of Part 1 is the lived experience of geographical and social exclusion. “*Ooru Keri*” is not just a place but a symbol of systematic marginalization. The Dalit community is literally placed on the fringes of the village, outside the limits of ‘civilized’ society. The spatial marginality reflects institutionalized untouchability. The Madiga colony is shown as deprived of basic necessities: clean water,

sanitation and public infrastructure. On the other hand, the upper-caste areas flourish. This geography becomes a metaphor for structural oppression, showing how caste is not only a cultural identity but a spatial reality.

2. Childhood and Loss of Innocence: Lingaiah recalls his early years with a mix of nostalgia and pain. His narrative shows how Dalit children are denied the innocence typically associated with childhood. From a young age, he is made aware of his “impurity” through ritual exclusions; being denied access to temples, wells and even touch. He experiences public humiliation that shapes his early consciousness: from being called by caste names and insulted by teachers to kept at a physical distance. Yet, there is resilience in the play, language, and daily life of the community, which offers a counterpoint to this loss of innocence.

3. Language, Voice, and Silencing: Part 1 also deals with the politics of language and speech. Lingaiah reflects on how the dialect spoken by his community is devalued and mocked, while upper-caste Kannada is seen as “pure.” This linguistic discrimination mirrors social exclusion and contributes to internalized inferiority. His eventual discovery of the power of poetry hints at a growing consciousness of reclaiming voice through language.

4. Poverty and Labour: Lingaiah describes grinding poverty as a daily fact of life. Dalit families survive through unclean, menial jobs imposed by caste-based occupational hierarchies, right from leatherwork, drum-beating to manual scavenging. In their life, hunger and malnutrition are not exceptions but constants, and poverty is both an economic and cultural marker of their Dalitness, reinforcing their social invisibility.

5. Community and Cultural Resilience: Despite suffering and deprivation, there is a strong sense of collective life and cultural identity in *Ooru Keri*. Their shared rituals, folk songs and communal storytelling bind the community together. The Madiga community is shown to possess its own values, aesthetics and moral codes, even as they are devalued by the dominant castes. This theme complicates any reading that portrays Dalits purely as victims. Instead, Lingaiah shows resistance, humor and solidarity within the community.

The Part 1 of the story is not only autobiographical but also political ground zero of the text. It lays bare the foundational experiences that shape Lingaiah’s later evolution as a poet and activist.

Check your progress:

1. The Madigas lived in segregated areas—“*Ooru Keri*”—away from the upper castes. (True / False)

14.2.3 The Village and Its Boundaries: *Ooru Keri* as Space

In Part 1 of *Ooru Keri*, Sidda Lingaiah introduces readers to a village that is as much socially structured as it is physically divided. The narrative focuses on space, where people live, how they move, what places are accessible to whom. The narrative uses this spatial arrangement to mirror the caste-based social hierarchy that governs rural Indian life. The term “keri,” meaning street, refers specifically to the Dalit hamlet where the Madiga community resides, located at the margins of the village. It is a space of both physical exclusion and cultural resistance, making it a rich site for thematic and symbolic exploration.

In *Ooru Keri*, spatial segregation is one of the most powerful motifs. It is the literal division of the village into zones based on caste. As Lingaiah recounts his childhood experiences, it becomes clear that the arrangement of the village landscape enforces untouchability in a visible and enduring way. The Madigas live in a separate area i.e., “keri”, on the outskirts of the main village, physically distanced from the upper-caste residents. This is not an accidental or natural arrangement but a deliberate act of social architecture, designed to mark and maintain caste boundaries.

Every aspect of daily life is mediated by this spatial division. The Dalit children must take alternate paths to school to avoid the main roads used by upper-caste villagers. They must drink water from separate sources or wait for someone from the upper castes to pour water from a distance. They are not allowed to enter temples, public wells, or the homes of caste Hindus. Even public gatherings and festivals are organized in such a way as to remind Dalits of their “place” in society. The geography of the village, therefore, reflects a segregated moral and social order, where space operates as an instrument of control.

This spatial logic of exclusion does not merely restrict movement; it imposes a psychological barrier that shapes how Dalits perceive themselves and their relationship to society. The physical margins of the village mirror the symbolic marginalization of Dalits in the caste system. Their placement outside the main village signifies their ritual impurity and social inferiority in the Brahmanical worldview. In this way, space becomes a tool for caste hegemony.

Symbolism of the Keri: Beyond its function as a living space, the keri takes on a deep symbolic meaning in the narrative. It is not just a street; it is a microcosm of Dalit life, where pain, community, struggle and culture intersect. In Lingaiah’s narrative, the space becomes a site of survival, resistance, and cultural richness. The keri is also a place where oral traditions thrive—songs, folk tales and shared histories. Even amid deprivation and indignity, the keri is

filled with moments of laughter, solidarity and human connection. In this way, Lingaiah turns the symbolic meaning of the keri on its head: from a space of exclusion to a space of cultural affirmation. It is where he discovers his roots, his language, and eventually, his voice as a poet.

14.2.4 Caste and Everyday Humiliation

In *Ooru Keri*, Sidda Lingaiah exposes how caste operates not through overt laws but through everyday rituals, behaviors, and language that dehumanize Dalits. From early childhood, Dalits are segregated—made to sit separately in schools, denied access to wells and temples, and subjected to verbal abuse and linguistic mockery. Even celebrations and religious spaces become sites of exclusion. More insidiously, caste becomes internalized, conditioning Dalits to feel shame and accept inferiority as natural. Lingaiah's narrative also reveals the psychological violence of untouchability—marked not just by physical exclusion but by emotional erasure, social invisibility, and the withholding of basic dignity. Yet, amidst this, he highlights moments of community resilience. His act of writing is itself a powerful resistance—transforming personal trauma into a collective demand for justice and recognition. *Ooru Keri* compels readers to confront caste not as a relic of the past but as a living, everyday system of oppression.

14.2.5 Childhood under Caste Oppression

Sidda Lingaiah in his autobiographical work *Ooru Keri* presents a childhood shaped not by innocence or freedom, but by the quiet violence of caste. For Dalit children, early life is not a time of discovery but a period marked by humiliation, exclusion, and the constant reminder of inferiority. Lingaiah recalls how he and other children from the Madiga community were treated differently from a young age. They sat separately in school, drank water from separate vessels, and were spoken to with contempt. These daily acts, though small, taught them that their bodies were seen as impure and their presence as unwelcome.

This sense of difference was not introduced all at once, but slowly absorbed through repeated moments of social rejection. Food, speech, and even the space in which one played were controlled by caste boundaries. Children learned early on to feel ashamed of their dialect, their clothes, and even their names. Laughter and joy, often natural to childhood, became rare, replaced by self-consciousness and fear of ridicule. The very idea of childhood as a protected stage of life did not apply to them.

School, often viewed as a path to opportunity, became another arena where caste was enforced. Teachers treated Dalit children with visible bias, refusing to touch their notebooks or

punishing them more harshly. Classrooms became places of silent instruction in inequality. The dominant language was used to belittle, and textbooks ignored Dalit voices altogether. Students were taught not only math and history but also their supposed place in society. Many children began to withdraw or drop out, not from lack of ability, but from the deep wounds caused by constant exclusion.

Yet, Lingaiah does not offer a story only of suffering. Within the pain, he finds strength. The community life of the *keri* gave moments of warmth and shared resilience. More importantly, his act of remembering, writing, and reflecting becomes a form of resistance. Through language and memory, he challenges the systems that once tried to silence him. The very experiences that once denied him dignity become the foundation for his identity as a poet and activist.

Lingaiah's account in Part 1 of *Ooru Keri* invites readers to see caste not as a distant injustice, but as a daily, living reality that begins in childhood and seeps into every corner of life. His words demand that we recognize the cost of a society that denies some children the right to simply be children. His story is both a personal testimony and a collective call for justice, memory, and transformation.

14.2.6 The Politics of Language and Silence

In *Ooru Keri*, Sidda Lingaiah explores how language becomes a powerful site of both oppression and resistance in a caste-driven society. He shows how the dialect spoken by the Madiga community, rich in metaphor and rooted in oral tradition, is dismissed and devalued when compared to standardized Kannada. This linguistic hierarchy mirrors the social order, where the upper-caste elite define what is legitimate and what is not. In school, Lingaiah and his peers are mocked for their speech, made to feel ashamed of the very language that ties them to their community and culture. Through such experiences, language becomes a source of exclusion rather than expression.

However, Lingaiah refuses to accept this marginalization. By writing in a voice that reflects his dialect and by preserving the cadence of his people's speech, he reclaims language as a means of dignity and self-definition. His narrative challenges the idea that power resides only in standard forms of communication. Instead, he shows how the so-called impure dialect can carry beauty, depth, and emotional truth. This act of writing affirms the value of a voice long silenced.

Just as important as the politics of language is Lingaiah's insistence on self-representation. For centuries, Dalit lives have been spoken about by others; academics, reformers and religious authorities who often reduce them to problems or objects of pity. This external narration strips Dalits of the ability to define themselves. Lingaiah breaks this cycle. He speaks not as a subject of someone else's story but as the author of his own. Through personal memory and unfiltered reflection, he writes his community into visibility, refusing the distortions imposed by outsiders.

The psychological cost of being constantly misrepresented is immense. Lingaiah shows how internalized inferiority begins in childhood when Dalit children start to view themselves through the lens of upper-caste judgment. By telling his own story, he disrupts this imposed identity and reclaims the power to name his world. His words speak not only for himself but for a collective experience of marginalization and resilience.

Check your progress:

1. In school, Lingaiah and his peers are mocked for their speech. (True / False)

14.2.7 Labour, Poverty, and Survival in a Caste Society

Sidda Lingaiah presents a stark account of how caste determines not only social standing but also the kind of labour one is expected to perform. Focusing on the Madiga community, he shows how manual work is never just about survival in a caste society. It becomes a marker of identity, a means of control, and a source of humiliation. From childhood, Dalits are conditioned to accept work like leather processing and carcass disposal as their fate. These tasks are essential to village life, yet those who perform them are denied dignity and treated as untouchables.

The work, though skilled and deeply rooted in tradition, is devalued because it is caste-assigned. Children grow up knowing that their hands, their homes, and even their voices bear the mark of this labour. They are mocked not just for their caste but for what that caste requires them to do. Their poverty is not accidental but structural, a direct outcome of caste-based exclusion from education, land, and fair wages. Often, their labour is repaid not with money but with scraps—leftover food, old clothes, or empty promises.

Lingaiah shows how caste and class are deeply intertwined. Poverty among Dalits is not just economic lack but a mechanism of subjugation. It keeps them dependent on those who exploit them, too exhausted to resist. Attempts to escape this cycle are blocked by

discrimination, violence, and a lack of access to opportunity. Even education, which promises mobility, often ends in further humiliation and exclusion.

What sets *Ooru Keri* apart is its attention to the emotional and psychological cost of this system. The narrative is filled with silences, stares, and withheld kindnesses that cut deeper than overt cruelty. Yet, there are also glimpses of resilience. The Madiga community finds strength in shared labour, storytelling, and cultural practices that affirm their humanity. Lingaiah's act of writing becomes a form of protest, a way to reclaim the dignity that caste society has denied.

In fact, Lingaiah exposes us to confront the brutality of a system that demands labour while denying recognition. He refuses to treat caste as mere tradition. Instead, he exposes it as a structure of exploitation, one that must be dismantled if justice and human dignity are ever to be realized.

14.2.8 Memory as Resistance

In *Ooru Keri*, Sidda Lingaiah turns memory into resistance. His autobiographical writing is not about personal triumph but about giving voice to collective pain that history often silences. Instead of celebrating progress or introspection, he writes to remember humiliation, exclusion, and the quiet violence of caste. These memories are not isolated incidents. They represent a larger social pattern where Dalits are segregated, mocked, denied dignity, and made to feel ashamed for existing. Lingaiah refuses to let these memories be erased. By recalling how Dalit children were made to sit outside classrooms or eat separately, he forces the reader to confront caste not as an abstract idea but as a daily reality, deeply embedded in Indian society.

Lingaiah's act of remembering is political. It resists the demand that the oppressed forget and move on. His memories challenge the narratives of reformers and outsiders who spoke about Dalits without letting them speak for themselves. Through his voice, Dalits reclaim the right to be the authors of their own histories. He uses everyday experiences to reveal how caste operates not just through formal rules but through routine actions that go unquestioned. Remembering becomes a way of de-normalizing this injustice.

His writing also counters the internalized shame that caste produces. By remembering his community's songs, language, and traditions, Lingaiah affirms their value and asserts that there is pride in survival. These recollections are not just painful—they are powerful. They serve as a moral challenge to those who benefit from silence and a source of strength to those who have endured it.

In *Ooru Keri*, memory is not nostalgic or passive. It becomes a force that critiques the present and imagines a more just future. Lingaiah's testimony transforms invisibility into visibility, silence into speech. He gives the unspeakable a voice and ensures that the everyday humiliations of caste are not forgotten. Through his writing, pain becomes history, and remembering becomes an act of justice.

14.3 Learning Outcomes

After completing this Unit, students will be able to:

- Explain how *Ooru Keri* functions as both personal narrative and political testimony.
- Recognize the importance of lived experience and collective memory in shaping Dalit writing.
- Identify how caste is embedded in everyday behaviors, rituals, spatial arrangements, and language.
- Discuss the social geography of the village as presented in *Ooru Keri*, with particular focus on the symbolic role of the keri (street).
- Evaluate the impact of caste-based exclusion on Dalit childhood experiences.
- Critically engage with the politics of language
- Understand the significance of self-representation and narrative voice in Dalit literature.
- Analyze how caste determines occupational roles and reinforces economic inequality.
- Appreciate the role of memory as resistance

14.4 Glossary

Dalit: Originally meaning “broken” or “oppressed,” the term refers to communities formerly considered “untouchable” in the Hindu caste system. Dalit is both a political identity and a collective term for those marginalized by caste hierarchy.

Dalit Literature: A body of literary works created by Dalit writers that centers the lived experiences, resistance, and histories of oppressed castes. It is marked by themes of caste violence, dignity, social justice, and self-representation.

Madiga: A Dalit caste in Karnataka and parts of South India traditionally associated with leatherwork, drum-beating, and disposing of animal carcasses. The community has historically been subjected to intense social stigma and exclusion.

Untouchability: A practice in caste-based societies where certain groups, especially Dalits, are deemed “impure” and are socially ostracized. It manifests in restrictions on touch, access to water, food, temples, and public spaces.

Spatial Marginalization: The physical separation or exclusion of a community within a village, town, or city. In *Ooru Keri*, the Dalit colony (keri) is placed on the outskirts of the village, symbolizing social exclusion.

Keri: A Kannada word meaning “street” or “lane.” In the context of the text, *Ooru Keri* refers to the street where the Dalit (Madiga) community lives—geographically and symbolically placed at the margins of society.

Caste: A hierarchical system of social stratification rooted in Hindu religious ideology. It assigns individuals and groups to fixed occupational and social roles, often leading to discrimination and social immobility.

Language Hierarchy: The privileging of one form or dialect of language over others. In *Ooru Keri*, standard Kannada is valued, while the Madiga dialect is mocked and marginalized, reflecting broader social power dynamics.

Subaltern: A term used in postcolonial studies to describe populations that are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hegemonic power structure. Dalits are considered subalterns in the Indian context.

Testimony: A literary or oral account given by someone who has witnessed or experienced marginalization or violence. In Dalit literature, testimony challenges silence and insists on recognition.

Internalized Oppression: When members of marginalized communities come to believe and accept the negative stereotypes imposed upon them by dominant groups. This is explored in *Ooru Keri* through shame, silence, and acceptance of caste roles.

Structural Violence: A form of violence wherein social structures or institutions harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Caste-based exclusion from education, water, and housing in the text is an example.

Orality: A mode of storytelling that is spoken rather than written, often passed down through generations. *Ooru Keri* reflects oral traditions in its style and rhythm, preserving the cultural memory of the Madiga community.

Resistance Literature: Writings that challenge systems of oppression, inequality, and marginalization. *Ooru Keri* exemplifies this through its critique of caste and its assertion of Dalit identity.

Memory as Resistance: The act of recalling and narrating personal and communal experiences of oppression as a form of protest and empowerment. Lingaiah's autobiography is a key example of this practice.

14.5 Sample Questions

14.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. What is the primary occupation traditionally associated with the Madiga community in *Ooru Keri*?
 - a) Farming
 - b) Pottery
 - c) Leatherwork and carcass disposal**
 - d) Teaching
2. What does the term “*Ooru Keri*” refer to in the text?
 - a) A river
 - b) A religious festival
 - c) A school for Dalits
 - d) A street or lane where the Madiga community lives**
3. Which literary genre best describes *Ooru Keri*?
 - a) Historical fiction
 - b) Dalit autobiography**
 - c) Magical realism
 - d) Epic poetry
4. In *Ooru Keri*, how is language used to marginalize the Madiga community?
 - a) Their dialect is celebrated in schools
 - b) Their language is equated with high literature
 - c) Their dialect is mocked and devalued**
 - d) They are taught in their mother tongue
5. What role does memory play in Sidda Lingaiah's narrative?
 - a) It helps him forget trauma
 - b) It is a neutral recollection of events
 - c) It functions as a form of resistance and testimony**

- d) It glorifies the caste system
6. Which of the following best defines ‘spatial marginalization’ as seen in *Ooru Keri*?
- a) Segregation based on wealth
- b) Urban planning in cities
- c) Physical and social separation of Dalits from the rest of the village**
- d) Migration from one village to another
7. What is the significance of standard Kannada in the text?
- a) It bridges caste differences
- b) It symbolizes educational equality
- c) It is a tool of inclusion
- d) It is used to enforce linguistic hierarchy and caste bias**
8. Which of the following terms refers to writing or speech by those who are socially and politically marginalized?
- a) Canonical literature
- b) Subaltern literature**
- c) Romantic literature
- d) Science fiction
9. What is meant by ‘internalized oppression’ in the context of the text?
- a) Resistance to caste
- b) Acceptance of negative stereotypes by marginalized people**
- c) Government-imposed laws
- d) Religious conversion
10. How does the act of writing function for Sidda Lingaiah in *Ooru Keri*?
- a) As a private diary
- b) As a literary exercise only
- c) As an act of reclaiming voice and resisting caste silencing**
- d) As a way to teach grammar

14.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What is the symbolic and social significance of the ‘keri’ in *Ooru Keri*?
2. How does Sidda Lingaiah describe the role of school and education in the lives of Dalit children in his village?
3. In what ways is the Madiga community’s labour both essential and stigmatized in the village?
4. Explain how memory functions as a political act in *Ooru Keri*.

5. What is the role of language hierarchy in reinforcing caste-based oppression in *Ooru Keri*?

14.5.3 Long Answer Questions:

1. Critically analyze how *Ooru Keri* challenges the dominant narrative of Indian village life through the lens of caste, spatial segregation, and everyday humiliation.
2. Discuss the significance of language in *Ooru Keri* with reference to the contrast between the Madiga dialect and standard Kannada. How does linguistic hierarchy reinforce caste oppression, and in what ways does Lingaiah reclaim voice and agency through his narrative?
3. Examine the role of memory as resistance in *Ooru Keri*. How does Lingaiah's recollection of childhood, poverty, and caste-based labour function as a political act? What does the act of remembering accomplish in terms of identity, history, and community solidarity?

14.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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